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# south african Jewish Report

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## Chief justice under fire for speaking out about Israel

JORDAN MOSHE  
AND TALI FEINBERG

The head of the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC) believes that South Africa's Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng may need to recuse himself from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) hate-speech case that is before the Constitutional Court.

CASAC head Lawson Naidoo made this comment after Mogoeng this week came under fire from political parties and watchdog groups after comments made in support of Israel.

"We are denying ourselves the opportunity of being a game changer in the Israeli-Palestinian situation," the chief justice said during a webinar discussion between him and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein hosted by the *Jerusalem Post*. "The forgiveness that was displayed by President Mandela is an asset that we must use around the world."

Mogoeng expressed support for Israel and the Palestinians, saying, "I'm under an obligation as a Christian to love Israel, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and I cannot as a Christian do anything other than love Israel because I know hatred for Israel will attract unprecedented curses."

The judge also stressed that he was bound by the policy of the South African government, and didn't reject it.

The department of international relations and cooperation (DIRCO) said

on 29 January, "South Africa continues to support international efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian state existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognised borders."

In spite of this, the African National Congress (ANC) this week reprimanded Mogoeng, expressing concern about his "apparent support for apartheid Israel".

"The chief justice has sought to turn the matter of the rights of the people of Palestine into a religious argument, which

a complaint with South Africa's Judicial Service Commission (JSC).

The ANC's reaction has drawn criticism from Jewish and Christian communities, especially in regard to the rights to freedom of speech and religion.

"The chief justice's heartfelt sentiment exposed the boundaries of the ANC's support for the constitutional right of freedom of religion, thought, and opinion," said Rowan Polovin, the national director of the South African Zionist Federation.

Similarly, Christian leaders Reverend Reuben Chapasuka, Pastor Barry Isaacs, and Apostle Mpho Mosoeu criticised the ANC for targeting believing Christians like Mogoeng.

However, legal and political commentators have expressed doubt about the claim that Mogoeng has full freedom of expression.

Political analyst Brooks Spector said that the South African Constitution guaranteed the right to freedom of

speech, but stressed it wasn't necessarily the province of government officials or public servants, nor the judiciary.

"Wise jurists try not to speak about the specifics of policies and public issues as a matter of principle because it may have implications for their opinions."

"Mogoeng let his personal feelings get in front of his judicial responsibility. Suppose he was strongly opposed to Israel and its legitimacy, that would have been equally controversial. This is something of a self-inflicted wound on Mogoeng's part."

Spector said, however, that it wasn't necessarily

incumbent on a chief justice or the courts to agree with government policy.

"That's not his job," he said. "He's not a loyal supporter of the government position. His role is to judge independently various matters when they come before him. Government can't have it both ways."

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer said the conduct of judges was subject to the rules found in the Code of Judicial Conduct

of 2012 containing a section listing potentially problematic behaviour which judges have to avoid.

"One of these involves constraints on free association, like avoiding being aligned with a particular political party and not getting involved in political activity or controversy," he said. "The question is whether Mogoeng's comments fall under this section."

"They are controversial in a certain sense. If we focus on the wording of the code, he hasn't engaged in party politics. His behaviour is considered controversial only because Africa4Palestine has made it so. Any statement it takes issue with is going to be branded controversial, but the statement must be viewed on its own terms."

We need to bear in mind that while the code talks about judges having rights as citizens, some of them are curtailed because they are judges, Oppenheimer said. These potentially include rights like freedom of speech. "For example, a judge wouldn't have the freedom to speak publicly about a case that was still being heard by him," he said.

Regarding Mogoeng's involvement in the case against Bongani Masuku, a hate-speech matter involving the SAJBD, he said, "We could ask if his involvement creates a bias problem. However, none of the parties in the case were involved in the talk, so Mogoeng has not engaged with the case outside of court."

"His talk had no bearing on the facts before the court, and there is no reasonable apprehension that the chief justice has a bias in that case."

"The complaint brought by Africa4Palestine smacks of political opportunism. By attacking the chief justice, it aims to get press attention for

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South Africa's Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and *Jerusalem Post* editor Yaakov Katz during the webinar last Wednesday

it isn't," reads the ANC statement. "We respect his religious choices, but South Africa is a secular state, and its judiciary must be secular."

"The chief justice is entitled to his personal views, however when echoed in public, such views should never be at the centre of societal polarisation."

The Economic Freedom Fighters called on the judge to retract his comments, while #Africa4Palestine plans to submit

"This assault isn't simply on the chief justice, but on the rights of many millions of South Africans."

"Even office bearers like himself have the right to express themselves freely, and to be treated equally," Polovin said. "The bullying response of the ruling party is a device employed by the antisemitic BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement when any public figure expresses support of Israel."



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# In the wake of the pandemic, antisemitism goes viral

TALI FEINBERG

The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a unique global wave of antisemitism, according to a special report released by the Kantor Center at Tel Aviv University in June. And, while limited, this has also been observed in South Africa.

"In South Africa, antisemitic messaging blaming Jews [and in some cases, Israel] for COVID-19 has been limited to sporadic tweets and Facebook posts," says David Saks, the associate director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

"These mainly target Israel, where it has been asserted, inter alia, that just as whites deliberately spread AIDS in black populations, Israel is doing likewise for Arabs/Iran/Palestinians. Also, there is the idea that Israel introduced the disease so that it could 'cure' it later and thereby benefit. Then, there is the accusation that Palestinians are being denied COVID-19 treatment, [that Israel/the US] is engaging in 'medical terrorism' against Iran through sanctions, and is behind the outbreak in order to enrich its pharmaceutical companies," says Saks.

"One of the only relatively high-profile perpetrators has been one Sebastian Sebbi Petersen, the leader of the fringe political party, the African Progressive Movement, and the former deputy director of the department of correctional services. His online comments allege that COVID-19 was concocted by Israeli and US pharmaceutical companies."

Says local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, Milton Shain, "It doesn't come as a surprise that old hatreds have surfaced at this time of crisis. And it's hardly surprising that

Jews are identified by some – too many in fact – as the villains in an as yet unfinished pandemic drama."

"It needs to be said, however, that other minorities have also felt the wrath of hatred. Here, for example, Chinese South Africans have been stigmatised," says Shain.

According to the Tel Aviv University report, released on 24 June, "The new wave of antisemitism includes a range of libels that have one common element: the Jews, the Zionists, and/or the state of Israel are to blame for the pandemic and/or stand to gain from it.

"The antisemitism generated by the coronavirus is intensive and fierce, has continued unremittingly for several months, and reflects a high level of anxiety and fear in many populations," says Professor Dina Porat, the head of the Kantor Center.

The report shows that coronavirus-related antisemitism is manifested throughout Europe, in the Americas, and in the Muslim world. This new type of antisemitism, which partly reiterates classic antisemitic themes, includes conspiracy theories alongside medieval blood libels, now renewed in a 21st century format.

"Coronavirus-related antisemitism is propagated mostly by right-wing extremists, ultra-conservative Christians, and Islamists through their own media in various languages. The phenomenon is reported by many central media channels: social media, television, radio, and the printed press," says Porat.

According to the report, "Islamists describe Israel as the COVID-1948 virus, after the year in which the Jewish state was established, declaring that this is the most dangerous virus of all. Activists in movements for delegitimising Israel use the same argument. In addition, they accuse Israel of using the coronavirus as ammunition against the Palestinians. An Oxford University study revealed that 19.1% of the British public believe that the Jews caused the pandemic."

Porat points out that this antisemitism should be seen in the context of others also being blamed for spreading the virus – "the Chinese, 5G antennas, and the authorities who allegedly are not doing enough to stop the epidemic".

"Universal disasters have been attributed to the Jews and Israel before, giving rise to antisemitic discourse," says Dr Giovanni Quer, the director of the Kantor Center. "The current wave of antisemitism is unprecedented, however, because, spreading very swiftly through social media, it focused at first on the COVID-19 crisis, and then quickly

moved on because of social and political changes. Just a few days passed between the coronavirus crisis and the racism-related social crisis in the United States, but antisemitic discourse remained just as fierce, with its proponents simply adapting their antisemitic narratives to changing social contexts."

Even though the antisemitic material comes from different directions and entities, it contains many common themes, including classic antisemitism, such as a return to the well-poisoning libel from the time of the black plague. An example is a French caricature of Agnès Buzyn, the former French health minister, who is Jewish, pouring poison into a well and smiling.

Then there is antisemitism toward Haredim, who are seen as "spreaders" of the virus, particularly in the US. In what has been described as a modern-day version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, another antisemitic accusation is that "Jews always seek to rule the world, and this time they will do so by spreading a virus that undermines economies and societies, and by preparing a vaccine and a drug that will be sold worldwide at an enormous profit," according to the report.

It shows a picture of a man in the US protesting at a rally with a sign saying "the real plague" in the colours of the Israeli flag, with a rat and a Magen David.

There are also claims propagated in Iran and Turkey asserting that, "The Zionists, together with the US, are the source of the pandemic, and will gain from it when thousands of Muslims die in the Middle East, particularly in Iran."

The virus has also been described as a "G-d-sent punishment to the

Continued on page 3>>



An image from Tel Aviv University's report on COVID-related antisemitism

## Torah Thought

### Two coronas, poles apart

Rabbi Ari Kievman,  
Sandton Central Shul



COVID-19 has hit our community hard. Too many have felt its impact, and are suffering. The effects of this pandemic aren't only physiological, but also emotional, financial, and psychological.

When faced with life's plagues, we seek direction. Although we can't control the conditions and severity of the pandemic itself and its side effects, we can choose our response. Even in challenging circumstances we can find opportunity. Let's engage in some *parsha* "in-look" to adjust our outlook.

During their journey wandering through the wilderness, our ancestors were attacked by poisonous snakes. In their search for a cure, G-d directed Moshe to sculpt a bronze snake and place it on top of a pole. From then on, anyone who was afflicted by a snake-bite would gaze heavenward upon the serpentine image, and was cured. This was the precursor of the

medical profession's famous logo of the caduceus. (Perhaps it's a doctor's hope that their treatment will work as efficiently as the biblical snake-on-the-pole.)

Herein lies a powerful lesson for our bizarre times. The key to healing is to confront suffering. Moshe instructed them to look up to the snake; to see the reality of the snake above, on top of the elevated pole, not the serpent crawling below. In this way, the source of the affliction can become the remedy when we transform dark into light, just as some vaccines are manufactured from minute quantities of the very infectious virus, stimulating the production of antibodies in the blood.

When attacked by "snakes" or any of life's challenges, we need to look upwards. See it from a higher perspective, and we might find a new sense of healing. The questions can become the answers, the problems may become the solutions, and the venom might contain the cure.

Every experience in life can be seen from a simple earthly perspective, or from a higher, more sublime vantage point, appreciating a much deeper reality. There's the "snake" down here,

and there's the very same "snake" up there.

Within every crisis lies the possibility of deeper discovery to transcend the challenging reality. When we look back at some of life's toughest setbacks, in hindsight, we can see how they were a springboard for unforeseen opportunities of growth that moved us from the surface to the depths, discovering strengths we didn't even know we had.

We can experience the pandemic in terms of its devastation and shattering of so many lives. But we can also perceive it from a more elevated point-of-view. The circumstances may not change, but its meaning and significance does. The "downer" perspective can throw us into despair, yet from the "higher" angle, every challenge contains seeds for rebirth if we infuse them with a higher purpose.

While we take every necessary precaution to mitigate any further transmission of the disease, we pray for the well-being of everyone who needs a *refuah sheleima*. At the same time, let's seize the moment, and discover the potential of transforming the serpent below into the copper snake above.

## South African Jewish Report

ceo@sajewishreport.co.za • **Advertising** Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – [britt@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:britt@sajewishreport.co.za)  
**Design and layout** Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – [bryan@designbandits.co.za](mailto:bryan@designbandits.co.za) • **Distribution** Sandy Furman • **Subscriptions** Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd.  
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**Editor** Peta Krost Maunders – [editor@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:editor@sajewishreport.co.za) • **Sub-editor** Julie Leibowitz  
**Journalists** Nicola Miltz • Tali Feinberg • Jordan Moshe • **Editorial co-ordinator** Martine Bass  
[editorial@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:editorial@sajewishreport.co.za) • **Proofreader** Kim Hatchuel CEO Dani Kedar



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# Double murder shocks community

NICOLA MILTZ

Nothing could have prepared Johannesburg fitness trainer Lisa Gekis for the phone call she received early last Wednesday morning from her brother in London informing her that their parents had been brutally murdered in their home. The bodies of much-loved garden landscaper William Giessing, 81, and his wife of 58 years, Hilary, 78, were discovered early on 24 June, in their Nursery Road, The Gardens, Johannesburg home. They had been killed in cold blood. The news sent shock waves of fear through the community. A frantic, Gary Giessing, whose name and number appeared first on the couple's list of numbers to dial in case of an emergency, received the dreaded call from CAP Security, a call that is everyone's worst nightmare come true. He then broke the news to his sister in Johannesburg.

"I felt like I had been punched in the face," said Gekis, saying that it's a moment she doesn't "want to relive." The minutes and hours that followed were a blur, she said. Gekis is struggling to make sense of this heinous crime which has shattered her family's life. The gruesome discovery was made during a routine patrol of the area, when security officers of a CAP tactical unit became suspicious after seeing the gate to the couple's home left open. Their fears were realised following the discovery of the couple's lifeless bodies inside. Police this week arrested four men in connection with the killings. Following round-the-clock investigations, members of the Provincial Investigating Unit of the South African Police Service (SAPS) traced and apprehended the suspects in Alexandra. Brigadier Mathapelo Peters, Gauteng provincial head of corporate communication and liaison of the SAPS, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the four suspects had appeared in the Johannesburg Magistrate's

Court on Tuesday, 30 June, on charges of murder, house robbery, and possession of suspected stolen property. "This follows an incident on 24 June, 2020, where an elderly couple was found murdered in their house. The house had allegedly been ransacked and the couple's Chevrolet Sonic stolen," Peters said. Meanwhile, the arrests are cold comfort for the heartbroken family

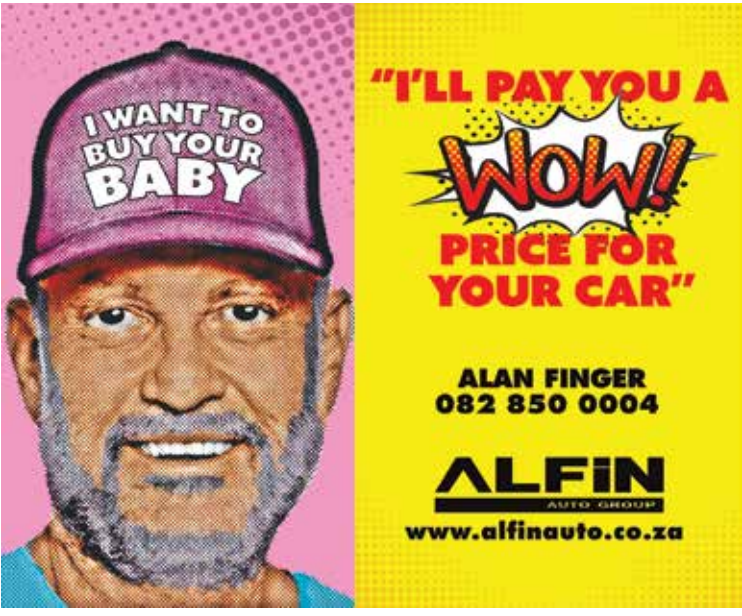


Hilary and William Giessing

still reeling from the heinous and savage attack on the unsuspecting couple, described by family and friends as "doting, loving, and kind". "Why would anyone do this, and how can people be so cruel?" asked Gekis. News of the murders rippled through the community, reaching loved ones far and wide, coupled with speculation and rumour as to the motive. Gekis asked that people let the investigation run its course before making any assumptions. "We honestly do not know why this happened. We have no answers, and police are still investigating. I wish I knew. It would help me in some way," she said. A tearful Gekis said her life would never be the same. She described her parents as "loving and inseparable". William and Hilary were young sweethearts when they met in their early twenties at Emmarentia Dam. "They lived the purest life. They did everything together from banking to shopping. They were devoted to each other, and to their children and grandchildren," she said. The artistic and nature-loving William was a well-known hairdresser

for many years before taking up his passion for garden landscaping starting his own business, Gaia Landscape Creations. "My parents were like chalk and cheese," said Gekis with affection. "My dad was a vegan and loved to meditate and do yoga. He was so kind, he wouldn't hurt an insect, and would always carry it outside. He was more of an angel than a human. He would be standing on his head doing yoga, and my mom would walk past and pull up his trousers." She said her mom loved to cook, and would do anything for her children and nine grandchildren. "She was hilariously funny, and she loved her dogs with all her heart."

The couple's two Shih Tzus, Blue and Jude, were thankfully found unharmed albeit hungry and thirsty. It's understood that the incident happened on Monday night. "My mom loved her dogs. They were like children – they wore little jerseys, slept on their bed, and were given chicken soup. Once my parents were going to a movie but decided to stay home because the dogs looked sad that they were leaving. That's the kind of people they were – homebound, loving, caring parents who never left us alone as children," she said. In a Facebook post following the funeral she said, "Today I bury both my parents. We have had our hearts and souls ripped from us. Death is something we all face and can get through, being the natural cycle of life. The brutality of this has left us broken. These two people gave me life. Not any life, a life filled with love, support, nurture, care, I can go on and on. More than anything, these two people taught me how to be humble, empathetic, compassionate. My dad couldn't kill an ant. My mom, the lioness, would do anything for us." The investigation was escalated to the Provincial Investigating Unit, which traced and apprehended the suspects, said Peters.



Sean Jammy, chief operating officer of CAP Security, said, "CAP is working extremely closely with the SAPS investigation team who are of the highest standard and are hopeful that justice will prevail on this case. Due to the sensitivity and stage of the investigation, we aren't able to comment further. No stone will be left unturned in finding those responsible. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family." Expressing its gratitude for the love and support from friends, family, and the community, the family says it wants answers. "I can't focus on their last

moments. I have to believe they are with my late brother Steven in heaven, all of them together at peace. If I focus on what happened to them, I'll be a basket case. We need answers, of course, for closure, and to know why this happened. "I'm fortunate to be surrounded by the most amazing community, my husband, children, and friends. Assistance from [Jewish rescue and recovery unit] Zaka, the Community Security Organisation, CAP Security, and the police has been overwhelming." The couple's vehicle is yet to be found.

## In the wake of the pandemic, antisemitism goes viral

>>>Continued from page 2 enemies of Islam, which include many different nations", according to the report. "Iran's anti-Israeli and antisemitic propaganda is also disseminated in South America via Spanish-speaking television channels," it says. "Israel and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are constantly accused of spreading the virus by force among Palestinians, especially inmates in Israeli prisons. This claim completely ignores the facts. So far, only one person has died of coronavirus in the Palestinian Authority and Gaza. The accusation is especially rife in networks that regularly promote the vilification of Israel," the report says. As some of us have seen on social media, lockdown restrictions are sometimes compared to the Holocaust. "Lockdown is likened to the ghettos and release from it to the German slogan, 'Arbeit macht frei' (work liberates) which appeared at the entrance to Auschwitz. The term 'Holocough', combining Holocaust with

cough, is widespread in social media, especially among neo-Nazis and white supremacists. "Some arguments claim that coughing is a means employed by Jews to harm the white race. In addition, sceptics argue that there actually is no epidemic, and that current events are all part of a Jewish-Zionist plot to take over the world. "There are calls to attack Jews by spreading the virus among them [for instance the rhyme, 'spread the flu to every Jew']. This trend reached a peak in a sign raised in a demonstration in the US, saying, 'Synagogues are closed – the gas chambers are open.'" Shain says it's a combination of new technology and old prejudice. "It's evident how easily ideas are circulated in an Internet age, and how they continue to resonate," he explains. "One would have thought this madness would have disappeared after the Black Death in the fourteenth century, but, regrettably, our species appears hot-wired to seek scapegoats."



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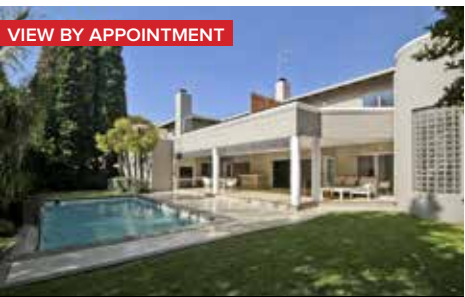
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# Jewish aged homes reel from outbreaks

TALI FEINBERG

COVID-19 is hitting hard at Jewish care facilities across the country. Three residents of the Jaffa Home for Jewish Aged in Pretoria who tested positive for COVID-19 have since died, and nine are in hospital, of which three are on ventilators.

In Cape Town, Highlands House Home for the Jewish Aged has a new outbreak of nine COVID-19 positive residents, and is again on strict room lockdown. Twenty-seven people of the almost

1 000 Jews living in Chevrah Kadisha care facilities in Johannesburg have tested positive for COVID-19. In Durban, Beth Shalom had a single case who made a full recovery. The other residents and staff have all been tested and the results are negative.

The Jaffa residents who passed away are Shirley Vardi (aged 92), who died on Friday, 26 June, in hospital, Eddie Karp (aged 87), passed away on Saturday, 27 June, in hospital, and Selma Abro (aged 93) who passed away at the home on Monday, 29 June.

They were three of 26 Jaffa residents who tested positive two weeks ago out of a total of 79 residents. Eleven out of 88 staff members have also tested positive. “Eddie, your memory lives on in our beautiful gardens at Jaffa that you so generously tended to, created, and loved. You have given us a gift that will keep on giving,” wrote the home’s management on Facebook. Others called him an “icon”, and “a true mensch”.

“Shirley was the most wonderful woman. Nothing got her down, and she never complained. Selma had an amazing sense of humour, and was so proud of her family,” says the home’s director, Mark Isaacs.

He says the past few days have been “extremely difficult. Staff and residents have all had counselling, including me.

“It has been hard on staff, who know we tried our best to prevent the virus entering the home. The residents are anxious and fearful, and it has been tough for them to be confined to their rooms.”

Their spirits have been kept up by care packages and books delivered by the Chevrah Kadisha, and daily visits by an occupational therapist.

Jaffa President Lesley Beckbessinger wrote in a letter to residents’ families, “Nursing staff are continually checking the residents to see if all are okay. They are taking their vital signs twice daily. Only designated nursing staff, attired in full PPE [personal protective equipment] are visiting those who

tested positive. Only designated cleaning staff enter the rooms of those who tested positive, and are also fully clothed in PPE.

“Access to the frail-care department has been restricted to authorised nursing staff. We no longer allow family members and friends to visit residents at the gate, [but] parcels can still be dropped off

for distribution, and these are thoroughly sanitised inside and out before being passed on.

“Meals are delivered three times daily to their rooms in disposable containers. The menus are currently limited, but will be revisited in due course. Delivery of food is set up to get the food to residents as hot as possible.

“Our residents are anxious at this time. We welcome communication from family and friends by way of a chat on the phone and receipt of pictures of family and friends. Please keep in touch, it’s a great morale booster for them. We continue to take every precaution.”

For those with family members in hospital, it has been a difficult time. “It’s surreal,” said Kim Abrahams, speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Melbourne on Sunday, 28 June. Her mother, who is COVID-19 positive, is in an intensive care unit (ICU), sedated and on a ventilator. While it’s difficult being so far away, she knows that even if she was in South Africa, she wouldn’t be allowed to visit. “I feel so helpless ... we just wait every few hours for an update.”

Describing the events of the past week, Abrahams said her 82-year-old mother, residing at Jaffa, was feeling sick, with body aches. She has been asthmatic in the past, and her private general practitioner came to see her. It was around this time that the home tested all residents for the virus, and she tested positive.

Nurses checked on her day and night, and when her oxygen levels dropped, she was sent to Zuid Afrikaans Hospital. There was no space there, so she was transferred to Life Groenkloof Hospital and placed in high care.

“In the middle of the night, her oxygen levels crashed, and she was put in ICU and on a ventilator. Since then, her oxygen levels have slowly been improving. Apparently she is one of the better patients in ICU, but we don’t know if she can breathe on her own,” Abrahams said. On Wednesday, she reported that her mother is breathing better and may be taken off the ventilator – a true miracle.

Being so far away, her brothers are updating her on her mother’s condition. The weekend is hardest, as there is only one doctor on call, and he is too busy to phone.

She has also found communication from the home to be sporadic at best.

“The home didn’t give my mother her coronavirus test results. My brother had to phone Jaffa to find out. Staff at Jaffa didn’t tell us that my mom was going to hospital, or inquire about her condition with us once she was there. Via Facebook, I contacted the committee, and it has since been in contact with me and my brothers every day.”

In response, Isaacs says that he is deeply sorry about this miscommunication, and that he is trying his best to communicate daily with all family members all over the world, at all hours of the day and night. Committee members are now assisting him with this.

“I have no complaints about the care she has been given at Jaffa,” says Abrahams. “The staff have been amazing, and did everything they could to stop the virus coming into the home.”

At Highlands House, nine residents and one staff member

tested positive over the past week. Eight of these residents are in the special care unit. At the moment, all positive residents are stable. Each positive resident is seen daily by a doctor, and symptoms are being monitored.

It’s a glimpse into what could happen in the months ahead as the virus enters care facilities multiple times. Highlands House had 14 residents and 32 staff members test positive in May, all of whom have since fully recovered. The initial outbreak was followed by weeks of no new identified cases, and the home slowly started to loosen its lockdown. However, as of Monday, 29 June, the entire home is in full lockdown once more.

At Beth Shalom in Durban, which has around 75 residents and 60 staff, workers are either living at the home or in quarantine sites it has provided. Its one COVID-positive case was picked up when a resident was in

hospital, but she has since returned to the home and fully recovered.

Meanwhile, of the 27 people who tested positive in Chevrah Kadisha’s care facilities, the vast majority are asymptomatic. The group’s homes include Sandringham Gardens, Our Parents’ Home, Selwyn Segal, Arcadia, Sandringham Lodge, and Golden Acres.

“The Chevrah Kadisha Group has experienced an incremental increase in positive cases over the past week,” says Group Chief Executive Saul Tomson. “It’s extremely difficult to manage, particularly the combination of asymptomatic staff and our frail and vulnerable residents. Our medical and care teams are working tirelessly. Unfortunately, in spite of all our efforts, circumstances are beyond our control. We will continue to do everything we can, and we pray fervently for divine intervention and the protection of our community.”

## There are no beds left, warn doctors at the coalface

TALI FEINBERG

“ICUs in PRIVATE [private hospitals] are FULL. In the past week, young [and I mean 30 to 40-year-old] patients who were intubated could not get a bed in ICU. THEY DIED,” wrote Dr David Morris Rose in a Facebook post that has since gone viral.

Rose, a doctor working at a state hospital, is just one of a number of people at the coalface of COVID-19 who have taken to social media to paint the real picture of the horror of the virus. They are doing so to warn people to stop taking risks.

In some cases, family members have written about what those closest to them are experiencing. In a post that has also gone viral, Aharon Chemel described how his wife Talya (Tali) Chemel, a Hatzolah dispatcher this past Saturday, 27 June, “spent her whole Shabbat dealing with emergencies and COVID-19 related issues”.

It’s clear that the virus has entered the homes of the community, and that emergency care is needed around the clock. “They are out there taking care of the elderly and the sick,” said Chemel. “They do it at 02:00, 03:00, 04:00, 05:00 while travelling around Joburg in the freezing cold. At 08:00, after no sleep, they continue. They spent their entire Shabbat treating patients and saving lives.

“Not to mention the endless hours they put in, every single day, phoning everyone in the community to make sure their fevers aren’t too high and their breaths aren’t too short.”

Meanwhile, in a post on 28 June that has also gone viral, Rabbi Yossi Chaikin described the heart wrenching moment of losing a congregant. “Last night, I cried. Right after Shabbat, when I heard the devastating news that Oxford [Shul] had lost a beloved congregant to COVID-19.

“There was the huge loss of a very dear person, a regular Shabbat congregant at the shul, and a personal friend. M. was regal, and she commanded the weekly brocha from her corner table like a queen. She is going to be so sorely missed.

“Until a week ago, COVID-19 seemed far away. Over the past week, I started hearing the names of people I knew, and at least one person I work with [remotely]. But it still felt remote and surreal. Nobody I knew of in my congregation had succumbed to the dreaded disease, or even tested positive. Last night, it hit at the heart of the Oxford synagogue community.”

Rose said that if any of these community members landed up in hospital, they might find that there isn’t be a bed, even if they are on medical aid.

“There are no ICU beds left. Medical aid payments don’t equate to a reserved bed for you or your dependents. There are NO beds left,” he wrote on 28 June.

“We have a waiting list for patients who qualify and need ICU care – there aren’t enough beds, or ICU trained staff [doctors or nursing staff] which means there are NO BEDS LEFT. People are DYING on our waiting list,” he wrote.

He said his message was from “a concerned healthcare worker who is literally begging you to minimise your risk of infection”.

He described what happens when a person gets the virus, and has to go to hospital. “You’ll be put on oxygen, [given]

now intubated. We ram air into your lungs at pressures so high it could cause a pneumothorax [collapsed lung]. We then place a tube in your nose and try and feed it into your stomach so we can feed you. Often it fails, we inadvertently cause trauma to your nasal passages, and we have to try the other nostril.

“Now we try and ventilate you while you are on your back. When that all fails, we prone you – six people have to disconnect everything but your ventilator, and turn you onto your stomach with pillows under your chest and pelvis and try to ventilate. Now on your stomach, you develop pressure sores. Your face and your eyes swell. And this is all in an attempt to save your life.

“We are not treating COVID-19. There is no treatment. We are at best modulating the immune response. We are literally supporting organs. We are trying to stop your body from attacking itself,” he said.

“These messages serve to inform you all of the possible outcome of infection, so that every choice you make from here on out is an informed one. We need you to help us, help your family. Because as it stands, we have no space to help, and this is only the beginning.”



Este Coetzee and Dikeledi Madisha delivering goodies to residents at Jaffa Home for Jewish Aged





# Crossing a line: annexation debate rages

STEVEN GRUZD

If the entire West Bank were annexed, “Israel would cease to be a Jewish democratic state. Or, we continue to have a special regime for Palestinians. That was called apartheid in South Africa. This would be very negative for Zionism.”

So said Major General Yair Golan, a former deputy chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Forces and member of Knesset for the Meretz Party. His views were the polar opposite of those of Nir Barkat, a Likud member of Knesset, and the former mayor of Jerusalem, who denied any comparisons with apartheid South Africa.

Both were part of a Sunday night Zoom webinar on the impending annexation, co-hosted by the *SA Jewish Report*, the South African Zionist Federation, and the Israel Centre. Journalist Paula Slier moderated the event, while the scene was set by educationalist Noam Weissman.

According to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s recent election promises, he was due to announce plans to annex parts or all of the West Bank from 1 July. While he hadn’t yet made an announcement by the time of going to press on Wednesday, opinions remain polarised on the wisdom of any such move.

Weissman noted that the terms people employ signal where they

stand. Are the eastern lands captured in the 1967 Six-Day War referred to as the “West Bank”, “Judea and Samaria”, “occupied territories”, or “disputed territories”? Is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposing “annexation” or the “extension of sovereignty”, or “extending the application of Israeli civilian law” to

Palestinians forever. This is totally unacceptable.”

In 1967, the main threat to Israel came from a united front of Syria, Jordan, and Iraq from the east,” Golan said. “This is not the situation today. There is no threat from Syria for the next 10 years. There is no need to annex the Jordan Valley.”

Asked whether there was a rush

Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States, moderate Sunni states. Our main common threat is Iran.”

Palestinian leaders have turned down many opportunities to accept a state in the past, “so to put all the blame on the settlements is wrong. But I do support separation from the Palestinians,” said Golan.

Likud’s Nir Barkat, provided a

thing to do. “We have no interest in expanding sovereignty to many Palestinian villages, towns, and cities. Even if we did, they would have full civil rights [except citizenship]. We don’t want to annex Arabs. Civil separation is well accepted.

“I have done a lot of work on developing a joint economy,” Barkat said, describing proposed industrial parks, support for labour-intensive technology companies, and the development of new biblical history sites.

“I agree with the settlers. A Palestinian state isn’t the right thing to do. We have been stuck for years with zero progress, we need to move. We are here to stay, and need to talk about a better economy as the first step to real peace.”

When asked what lessons were learnt from Israel’s 2005 unilateral exit from Gaza, Barkat said, “We will never, ever withdraw again. A power vacuum was filled with terror, and that’s the last thing we would like. But we must take steps with courage, not in fear of terror and war.”

Opinion polls taken at the start and end of the webinar showed that the audience was evenly split. By the end, there were fewer “don’t knows”, and more support for both sides. It indicated that the politicians had convinced some fence-sitters, and increased awareness of what’s at stake.



Journalist Paula Slier with Major General Yair Golan, former deputy chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Forces and member of Knesset

Jewish settlements across the Green Line (demarcating the pre-1967 boundary)?

Slier remarked that the debate has lacked specifics about what, exactly, might change, and has been overshadowed by a resurgence of COVID-19 in Israel.

Golan staunchly opposed annexation. “Why now?” he asked. “If you annex Judea and Samaria, you could bring in three million more Palestinians. It’s crazy. We shouldn’t take this risk. There’s no reason to do it. The problem isn’t the land; it’s the people.

“The diaspora [and many in Israel] can’t identify with a state suppressing a population of

to annex based on a calculation that United States President Donald Trump might not be re-elected in November, Golan said, “We should wait and see who the next president is. It’s not wise to risk it on the first of July. The next US administration could be against annexation. But the US isn’t the main consideration; it’s about the security and economics of Israel.”

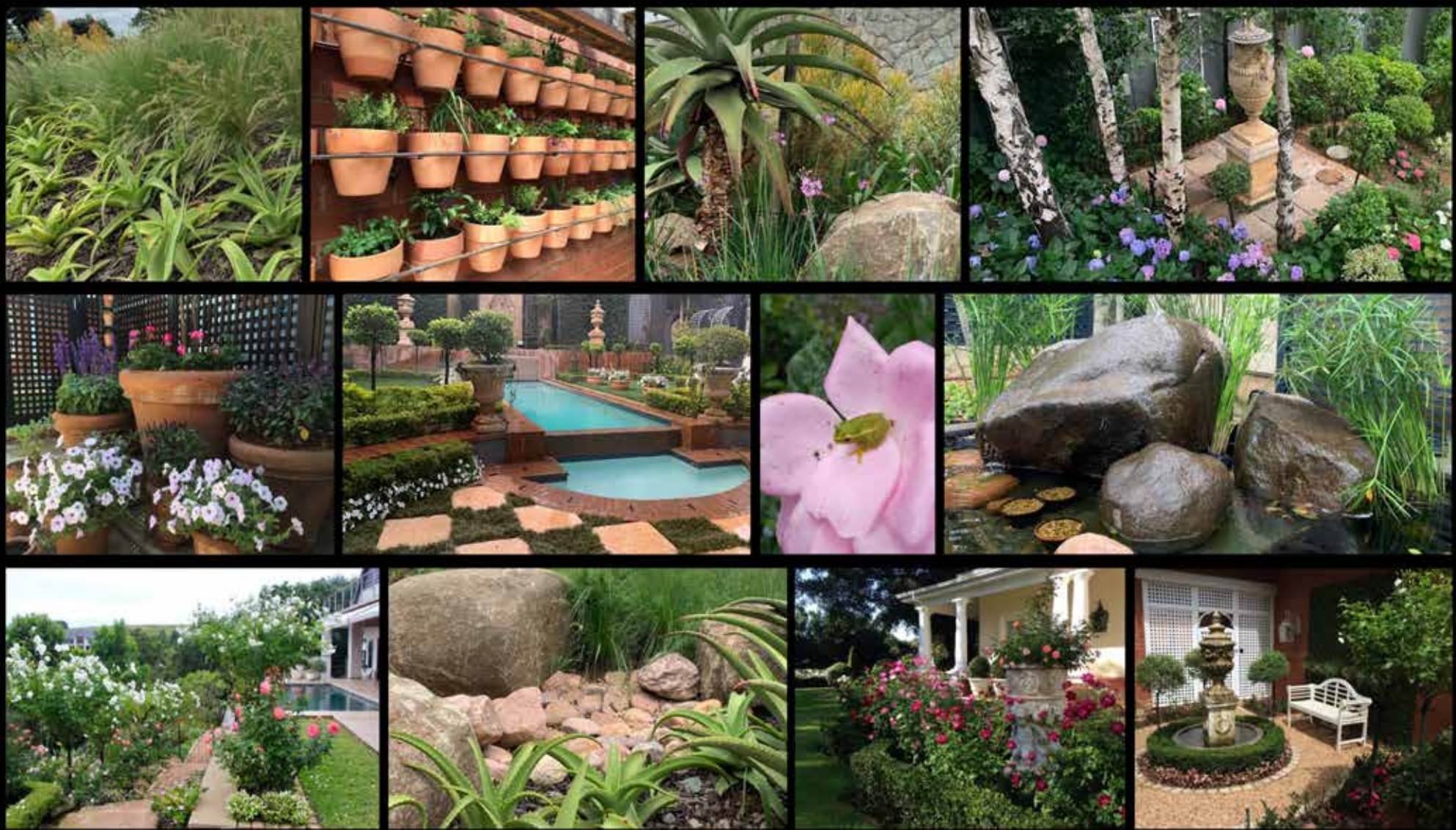
When asked how the Arab world might react, Golan said, “Relations with Jordan and Egypt are tense. Why bring in more tension? We have very important peace agreements with both, which we must support in any manner. [Annexation] won’t improve the relationship, or with

very different voice.

“We need to look at the wider context,” Barkat said. “We have three objectives. One, civil separation with full civil rights. Two, the Palestinians will never have an army. And three, development of a joint economy.

“This is about applying Israeli law to the settlements, who are now under military law. We will not evict any Jews [or Palestinians] from their homes.” He stressed Jewish ties to the land from biblical times.

“We must take care of Israeli interests. There are 430 000 Jews in Judea and Samaria. Unfortunately, we have no partner for peace, and this unilateral step is the right



  
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# The charter that became the bedrock of South Africa’s democracy

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

It was a dusty open field, with little around it, except for a few warehouses and some trees along the perimeter. But upon that hallowed ground in Kliptown, Soweto, 65 years ago, history revealed itself.

The 65th anniversary of the signing of the Freedom Charter passed almost unnoticed in South Africa, a victim of the overwhelming crush of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The events, at the time, were recorded by famed anti-apartheid photographer Eli Weinberg.

In the coal yard adjacent to the desolate field stood the warehouse of Epstein & Klein. Klein had gifted the African National Congress the use of his property for the event.

Three thousand people arrived from all over South Africa for the gathering of the Congress of the People.

“It was terrifying” says Joy Coplan, who at the time was a 17-year-old student at the University of Cape Town. “We took the train from Cape Town. I told my parents I was going to a NUSAS [National Union of South African Students] conference. I travelled with Albie Sachs and Mervyn Bunnun. I don’t even remember how we got from Fordsburg to Kliptown, but when we arrived, there were police everywhere”.

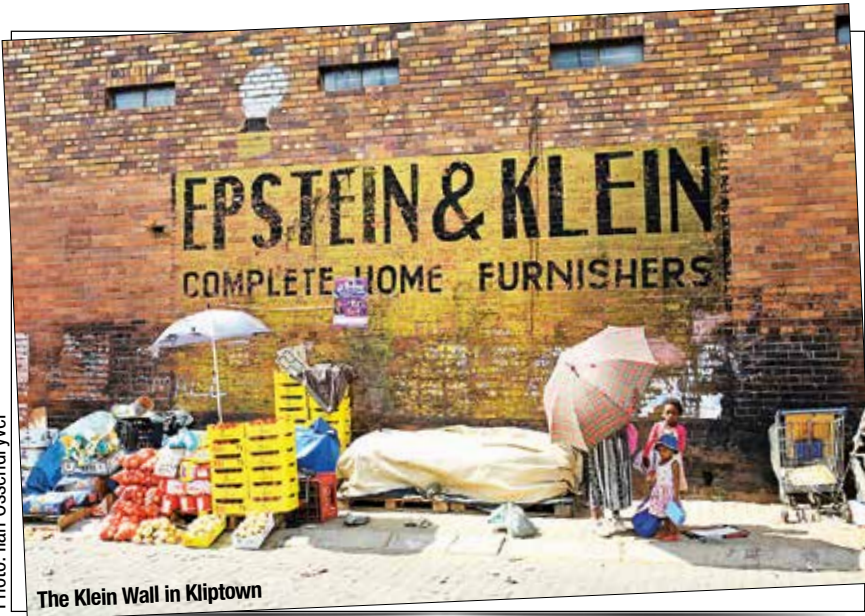
Coplan reminisces that, “It was a bright clear day. We were a couple of white students from Cape Town. It was completely overwhelming. Sachs was on the stage, he was older than me and quite important. I was accepted because my father had been taking me to Communist Party meetings since I was 14 years old. We used to meet weekly with Ben Turok’s parents, the Buntings,

and Denis Goldberg’s parents as well”.

Rusty Bernstein was the driving force behind the drafting of the Freedom Charter. The poetry of its opening paragraph, “We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the

period of two years in different places all over South Africa.” He recalled “the discussion lasted from early morning until late into the afternoon”.

Each clause of the charter was read to the crowd, who responded with cries



world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people,” is attributed to him.

Alan Lipman, who died in his Johannesburg home in 2013, contributed to the writing of the charter, and his wife, Beata, hand wrote the original document. Goldberg, who passed away in April, was responsible for codifying the demands of the people into the final form of the charter, and Ruth First was also accountable for much of the draft.

Leon Levy, one of the charter’s signatories, remembers the day vividly. “The meeting centred on many of the issues that were discussed over a

of “Afrika!” and “Mayibuye!”. “You had a real sense that history was being made,” says Coplan.

On the second day, 27 June 1955, at about 16:00 in the afternoon, hundreds of mounted police stormed the gathering.

Esther Barsel and her friend, Anne Heymann, ran for their lives as the police approached. Esther’s husband, Hymie, wasn’t so lucky, neither was Coplan. “They lined us up in queues,” Coplan says. “They took our names, and photographed us. It was very scary”.

Mere presence at the signing of the Freedom Charter became a reason for arrest. “In December 1955, my father, Hymie, was arrested, and together with about 155 other people, including

[Nelson] Mandela, [Walter] Sisulu, and Joe and Ruth Slovo, were charged with high treason”, says Merle Basel Ruff. “Eventually, after a four-year trial, all were acquitted. The state had failed to prove its case.”

On 3 July 1964, the security police swooped on the Barsel home in Yeoville in a big round-up of activists. They drove Esther and Hymie away in separate cars, leaving their three small children alone in the house.

Although acquitted, Hymie was served with a five-year order of house arrest, allowed out only between 07:00 and 19:00, Monday to Friday.

“My mother, Esther, later stood trial at what was known as the Bram Fischer trial. She was sentenced to three years’ hard labour,” says Linda Shapiro (née Barsel). Esther served her sentence at the Barberton women’s prison with Violet Weinberg. “My father was allowed to visit her every six months, together with one child. Her hands would be bleeding from physical labour.

“Later, visits were allowed every three months. Rabbi Aloy was permitted to see my mother on Rosh

Hashanah and Pesach, and to take her food parcels. My mother would share the parcels with other prisoners, and they would ferment the dried fruit to make alcohol. When both my parents were in prison at the same time, my aunt, Chana [Ann] Price, and her husband, Jules, looked after us.”

The Freedom Charter set down the seminal principles that would guide the liberation struggle and lead to a free and democratic South Africa. Many of the principles enshrined in it are today contained in the Bill of Rights of South Africa’s Constitution.

After liberation in 1994, the government built a monument to the Freedom Charter in Kliptown. It paved the square where the coal depot and open field once stood, and built a fancy three-star hotel. But across the railway tracks, where the people live, there are no tarred roads, no water in people’s houses, no public schools, only communal toilets, and the Johannesburg municipality doesn’t even collect the refuse. Sewage often seeps down the dusty roads of Kliptown, a place where the history of South Africa was written, today a blot on the hard-wrought freedom of South Africa.

## Cape Town may have Rosh Hashanah in shul

JORDAN MOSHE

Will our shuls be open by the high holy days in September?

That’s one of the main questions being asked by members of the community who are grappling with the chief rabbi’s decision to keep shuls closed until further notice to avoid spreading the coronavirus.

On Sunday night, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein; virologist Professor Barry Schoub; Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare; and Professor Efraim Kramer, an expert in emergency medicine, addressed questions from the community about the situation.

Friedland couldn’t say whether shuls would be open for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but said decisions would probably be made on a case-by-case basis.

“One has to look at this on a provincial basis,” he said.

“If you look at Cape Town, the way the curve is developing shows that recoveries are actually exceeding the number of active cases. It was the first to experience the pandemic, and it should come out of it in July with a good recovery in August.

“By 19 September [Rosh Hashanah], it should be in a position to get back to services.

“Our biggest caveat is the concern about interprovincial travel. Once reintroduced, we may see the virus inadvertently spreading between provinces, a grave concern for the Western Cape.”

As for the other provinces, Friedland believes that the Eastern Cape will recover in late July or August, whereas Gauteng may

have to wait a little longer.

“The next seven days in Gauteng will determine when we will be able to look at recovery,” he said. “It depends on whether we’re peaking now, or whether we will see more cases in coming days.”

Said Schoub, “There’s a dangerous misperception that the disease is coming under control because restrictions are being lifted. As restrictions are easing, you can see that people believe that things are back to normal. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Jewish communities across the globe have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, Schoub said. In the United Kingdom, where Jews comprise 0.3% of the population, they account for 1.7% of the mortality rate. In France, Jews account for 0.8% of the population but make up 5.0% of virus-related deaths.

Although we can speculate about the reasons for this, one of the factors which contributes to the rate of infection among Jews is our religious way of life and practices, especially where shuls are concerned. Schoub said many outbreaks occurred across the world in houses of worship, with people coming into a confined space and rapidly spreading the virus.

The frequency with which we visit shul, the social element of shul attendance, even the singing which typifies a shul service are among the possible reasons for greater risk of spreading the virus, said Schoub. “There’s no proof for any of them as such, but based on data from Israel, it’s clear that shuls are a hub for transmission,” he said.

Continued on page 11>>



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# Recovered patients – a lifeline for the sick

JORDAN MOSHE

The only person who really understands what you go through when you contract COVID-19 is someone who has already had it.

The anxiety, fear, and loneliness can be as devastating as any of the medical symptoms experienced, so too can the stigma that isolates you from friends and your community.

Someone who has experienced what you are going through can coach you through this horror no matter how badly or lightly you are impacted.

Understanding this, Dr Daniel Israel, a general practitioner operating in Athol Oaklands, has piloted a unique COVID-19 mentorship programme that partners people with the virus with those who have already recovered from it, matching them based on certain commonalities.

“When people got the virus in the early stages of the pandemic, there was huge fear. This continues to persist, especially because of the media hype,” says Israel. “The fear of diagnosis is often greater than the symptoms, and anxiety is compounded by the immediate isolation

of those who test positive. Patients feel very alone.

“After taking so many precautions to prevent themselves from getting ill, patients are thrust into sudden solitude and told to handle the condition alone. Those recovering at home have no physical contact with their families, no doctor able to see them in person, and almost no one they can relate to about the experience.”

After mentoring an initial group of patients himself in the early days of the pandemic, Israel invited these individuals to become part of a support system for subsequent patients.

“As we know from many other medical conditions, support from a person who has gone through the same thing speaks loudly. I wanted to link people with others like them to tell them that they weren’t alone, and give them hope that if someone else managed to get through the virus, they would as well.”

Israel has been partnering willing COVID-19-positive patients with recovered patients for almost two months, setting up an initial Zoom meeting, and subsequently putting the two in touch via WhatsApp. Both newly diagnosed and

recovered patients have eagerly taken up the opportunity, and the support system has flourished.

“My COVID-19 diagnosis came as no real surprise, but I did get shock when the results came through,” says Choli Feinblum, one of the first patients on the programme, who was diagnosed in April. “Friends around the world had had it, and had mild symptoms, so I thought I’d get ill at some point, carry on, and get better.”

Feinblum consulted Israel, and because his initial symptoms were mild, he was treated for bronchitis before testing positive. However, when his initial extreme headaches and cough worsened, Feinblum began to experience tremendous anxiety.

“My symptoms aligned with the severe cases I read about in the news, which ultimately resulted in death,” he says. “I really thought my time was coming. I couldn’t string a sentence together without having to catch breath, and basic things like going to the bathroom required strenuous effort.

“It was horrific. I couldn’t breathe properly, I had extreme chest pains, and couldn’t sleep or eat. Hatzolah checked in



Dr Daniel Israel (below) with mentor, Choli Feinblum, and Jason Joffa in a Zoom mentoring session

with me daily to monitor my progress, and Dr Daniel checked in over the phone. It

was an awful time.”

Israel observed the toll anxiety was having on Feinblum, and arranged for two recovered patients to engage with him via Zoom. They shared their experience, and showed Feinblum that recovery was possible.

“That was when things really turned around,” says Feinblum. “It was reassuring to know that they had had the same symptoms, and had survived the ordeal. My mind was at rest at last, and my wife and I were reassured.”

Feinblum recovered, and was offered the opportunity to become a mentor himself. He began engaging this week with Jason Joffa, another of Israel’s patients, who was diagnosed with the virus last week after feeling consistently exhausted.

“I knew something wasn’t right,” says Joffa. “Dr Daniel sent me for a test on Wednesday, and I got confirmation that I was positive on Sunday. The simplest tasks became a mission overnight, and the pains in my chest were like a vice squeezing me. Googling my symptoms drove me insane, and my energy levels were non-existent.”

Although he began the support programme only on Monday, Joffa says its effect was almost immediate.

“It was amazing to talk to someone who had gone through it,” he says. “I could ask questions, relieve my anxiety, and find out what to expect.

“I felt ostracised at first. I had been so careful to avoid contracting it, and I’m an anxious person by nature. I know I just have to ride it out, but the frustration of not knowing when it will end is awful. Having someone to talk to makes all the difference.”

Fellow patient Joshua Alter has had a similar experience. Thinking little of initial mild symptoms, he tested positive on Friday, 19 June, after his symptoms worsened.

“I’m a 34-year-old man, and given what patients my age typically experience, I should have got over it in four days,” he says. “That was 16 days ago. When I passed five days, things got worse, and I couldn’t understand why I wasn’t recovering. It was very difficult.”

Israel partnered Alter with a mentor who had also suffered a prolonged bout of the virus before recovering, giving him considerable hope for his own recovery.

“Only people who have gone through COVID-19 can understand and relate to you,” he says. “When you’re coughing your lungs out, your doctor and family can only do so much to help you through it. You feel alone, and that’s damaging.

“This virus is unlike anything I’ve ever had, but knowing that someone else had gone through it, survived, and was helping me, changed things. I realised I was normal. My mentor gave me hope that this would all end.”

As soon as he recovers, Alter intends to become a mentor for other patients. He, Feinblum, and Joffa agree that alongside medical intervention, breaking the stigma and self-imposed silence surrounding the virus is key to recovery.

“There can be no taboo attached to the subject,” Alter says. “Support and openness are two of the biggest tools in recovery. We need to speak candidly. A programme like this helps us overcome stigma and reach out to people who need the support most.”

# Schools open doors a crack for now

JORDAN MOSHE

After months of confinement and online classes, most of our children really want to be back at school for face-to-face lessons with their classmates.

But the threat of COVID-19 looms larger than ever right now, and many schools that have resumed have had to deal with scholars, teachers, or parents testing positive for coronavirus.

So, while some of our community’s schools have opened their doors, they have applied strict rules for doing so.

“The procedures we follow had to be comprehensively outlined from the start,” says Rabbi Craig Kacev, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education. “The safety of teachers and students is vital, and the environment has to be properly controlled.”

Different grades have been phased in at King David schools, while the hygiene and safety protocols are stringent and uniform across the board.

“We’re taking it slowly, keeping capacity limited and manageable,” says Kacev. “We’re sometimes put under pressure to bring more students back, and we will with time.

“More students require more staff, more screening, and a flexible schedule, managing breaks and the like. We’re keeping it small for now, and while the government has permitted certain activities like sport, we’re avoiding them for the time being. Education is the priority.”

The number of students currently on campus depends on the size of the school, he says. “Each school has to ensure the maintenance of physical distancing. For example, at King David Linksfeld, all primary school grades have returned, but different students come on different days.”

Kacev says that most students have returned to King David Victory Park Primary, whereas at Sandton, each grade has come in for a few days

only thus far to learn the protocols before the next arrives.

“As for the high schools, only matrics and Grade 11s have returned for now, but plans are in place to bring in other grades in coming weeks,” says Kacev.

“The government initially said that no more than 50% of the student body may return, but it was subsequently announced that each school could bring students back based on individual facilities and abilities. We can bring back as many as we want as long as the protocols are adhered to properly at all times.”

Students have also been phased into Yeshiva College gradually over the past few weeks.

“Yeshiva has welcomed six grades back to our campus,” says Natalie Altman, the director of Yeshiva College. “Each returning class is considered a ‘capsule’, meaning that students interact only with fellow students in their own classes, and only with their own teachers, including at break.”

She says the concept of capsules limits interactions with large numbers, and assists in tracking in the case of a positive COVID-19 test.

“If a student or teacher tests positive for COVID-19, they are required to report it to the school immediately, and self-isolate at home for 14 days and until they are well,” says Altman. “The individual class and close contacts of that student or teacher will also return home for remote learning.”

If a teacher who teaches numerous classes tests positive for COVID-19, all students who have come into close contact with that teacher (within 1.5m while not wearing a mask) will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

Says Altman: “Our strict protocols ensure that there is no close contact between students, fellow students, and teachers, and as such we avoid having to send home full classes when we have a case. In terms of a threshold of positive cases within the school, this will be assessed



Grade 7s go back to school at King David Linksfeld

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

based on the individual case as well as the total number of positive cases in the school, and how many people are involved.”

The protocol is similar at King David. Kacev says that the general principle is that if anyone at a school tests positive, neither they nor anyone with whom they have been in contact with can be on campus.

“We’ve mostly had cases of parents testing positive, in which case their children stay away from school for 14 days,” he says. “The class continues, as we consider that a contact of a contact, and too far removed.”

If, however, a teacher tests positive after having taught in class, the entire class will be sent home and lessons will continue online. The same is true if a student in the class tests positive.

“All students in that immediate environment would be considered direct contacts, and would all have to go into quarantine and continue online,” says Kacev. “Even now, there are parents who choose to keep their children at home. They can continue their studies online while the class continues at school.”

Kacev is confident that the schools are being cautious and wise about dealing with this situation. “If they are opening, schools are making every effort to ensure that they are compliant and offer students a safe space for learning,” he says.

Other schools, however, are being even more cautious. Hirsch Lyons High School principal, Rabbi Steven Krawitz, says the school has decided not to allow students to return this term, and has not decided when classes will resume.

“We are watching a situation which is very dynamic,” says Krawitz. “We are guided by the Torah principles of *pikuach nefesh*, the sanctity of life, and the importance of protecting the lives of the school community.”

He says the school is fortunate to have dedicated and passionate staff who enthusiastically embraced Zoom and Google Classrooms, and who have been teaching Torah and academics online since 23 March.

“Our students and parents have been fantastic too, and we have been able to deliver our hallmark high standards in Torah and academics through this difficult time,” says Krawitz.

The other Jewish schools did not respond in time for publication.



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
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# First full-time rabbi at Muizenberg shul in decades

TALI FEINBERG

Muizenberg has a special place in the hearts, minds, and memories of South African Jews around the world. Now, for the first time in many years, the community is being revived by a new full-time rabbi, community builder, and spiritual leader.

The last full-time rabbi in Muizenberg was Rabbi Gerald Rockman, who served the community until he retired at age 89 in 1999. Just more than two decades later, 40-year-old Rabbi Ryan Newfield and his family arrived in March 2020 to fulfil that role.

Newfield’s arrival to these shores is a rare case of coming full circle. “I grew up in Johannesburg and attended King David Schools, where I developed an interest and connection to our heritage at a young age,” he says. His earliest role in Jewish education was working for the DIJE, the division of informal Jewish education at King David, at age 19. “While everyone was going to university, I still had a passion for Judaism and learning, so I helped at the schools and continued my Yeshiva studies in the afternoons after work.

After graduating from rabbinical school in Jerusalem, he went to the United States, where he worked in marketing, business development, and Jewish community-building for almost 12 years. “I then travelled the world for four years, while working online, teaching Hebrew and Jewish Studies to public-school kids in the United States. During these years, I also returned to South Africa and helped the Plettenberg Bay community for a few seasons as well as spending time in Israel.”

He also met and married his wife, Andrea Rivkah, and they have two young children. “I decided to come back to South Africa now – when many others are leaving South Africa – as I still think it’s wonderful to be here. I wanted to be closer to my parents, and I want my kids to know their cousins. Plane rides with babies aren’t so much fun, so it made sense to be closer!”

Newfield sees himself as “more of a community builder than rabbi, and that’s what I was brought in to do in Muizenberg – strengthen the *minyán* and get Jews from the southern suburbs more interested in their heritage, whether in synagogue or outside”.

He has had an affinity to Muizenberg for a long time, as his

close friend, Farrel Strul, has been helping the community for over 20 years. “When I visited Cape Town, I would come to Muizenberg and help him with Shabbat services,” Newfield says. “I loved not only the beautiful building with its perfect sound and stained-glass windows,



The surfing rabbi, Ryan Newfield, on Muizenberg beach

but also the community’s warmth. It was also the only shul I’ve ever visited that sings *Hatikvah* at the end of kiddush every week, which made a good impression.

“I had been asked for a few years to come and help out in ‘Muizies’ and eventually after my second child was born, we looked for a place to settle,” he says. “Muizenberg was still looking for help, so we came to help last November as a trial, and I was sold. I chose Muizenberg over Hawaii, which says a lot! I love Cape Town, surfing, people, hiking, natural beauty, and helping people. It seemed like a natural choice.”

Neill Selipsky has been a committee member of the Muizenberg Hebrew Congregation for the past five years since moving there to be near his children. “My connection to Muizenberg, however, goes back many years, since my parents retired here and my late father is buried in the Muizenberg Jewish Cemetery. The shul has been well maintained by the present community,” he says.

He says there are about 30-40 congregants, with an average age in the high 60s to low 70s. “In addition, there are a large number of members, primarily from Gauteng, who have holiday apartments in the area and who swell the size of the community during the summer holiday season three to four fold, at which time there are daily services with *minyanim*. Furthermore, Camp Keshet, where a large number of underprivileged Jewish children from around the country enjoy a lovely holiday during the summer, owns a campsite in the area. The children walk to shul every Shabbat.”

Before the coronavirus pandemic, “We had shul services every Friday evening and Shabbat morning, and

over *chaggim*. This was followed by a splendid *brocha*. We get a *minyán* about 80% to 90% of the time.

“We had been managing reasonably well until Rabbi Newfield’s arrival, usually bringing in a different local rabbi or spiritual leader to run services every weekend.

“Muizenberg itself has undergone somewhat of a revitalisation over the past five to 10 years. Many years ago, Muizenberg was the premier Jewish holiday resort in South Africa, but in addition, there was a large and vibrant permanent Jewish community here. Obviously, it’s unlikely that that sort of past could be recreated, but it’s a pity not to make a positive attempt while it’s

still possible, especially in light of the general rejuvenation of the area,” he says.

“We are aware that there is a fairly large number of Jews living in the southern peninsula who are, in the main, unaffiliated,” Selipsky says. “We believe it would be worthwhile to reach out to them to re-establish a vibrant and connected Southern Peninsula Jewish community.”

“A lot of people mention their own history in Muizenberg when I meet them,” Newfield says. “I don’t think

you can take away the majesty of Muizenberg. It’s beautiful everywhere you look, and one can see the history here by looking at the buildings and homes.

“The shul building itself is almost 100 years old, and it is iconic to the neighbourhood. I can only imagine how awesome it must have been to live here or visit when it was ‘Jewsenberg’ at its peak. I plan to create more memories for those who are still here, and invite those with memories to revisit us and create more magic in this corner of the world. You owe it to yourself to enjoy this Garden of Eden.”

On safeguarding this past, the rabbi says, “First, we need to strengthen the Jewish community, making sure services continue and making them vibrant. Second, we need to reach out to the greater South African and overseas communities, and let them know that there is still magic

to be found at the bottom of Africa in this little beach town. Once word gets around, people can relive their childhood by visiting and enjoying seeing life continue here.”

Having arrived just before lockdown began, the rabbi has had to prioritise services online. “We have three to four Zoom lectures a week including a pre-Shabbat service. People join from all over the world. We have had topics ranging from ‘Jewish humour stories from shuls’, to ‘mystical insights for life’, ‘travel stories to warm the heart’, ‘conversational Hebrew’, and ‘where Torah meets biology’.

“I always took a piece of South African Jewish community with me wherever I went in the world, which is 50 countries,” Newfield says. “It’s nice to be home, and feel the love and warmth of a small but strong community. Please come and visit us when shul opens.”



## Sweeping changes ahead to keep Herzlia viable

TALI FEINBERG

United Herzlia School’s (UHS’s) sudden announcement on 19 June that it plans to close its primary and pre-primary school in Constantia, Cape Town, appears to be part of much larger institutional changes in store.

In a webinar for parents, stakeholders, and staff on Thursday, 25 June, to explain the reasoning for the decision, UHS Chief Executive Andries van Renssen said, “This isn’t only a Constantia problem, it’s a whole-of-Herzlia problem.”

He said the main drivers behind the Constantia decision and other possible changes were “dropping enrolment numbers and making the school sustainable”.

“With the number of pupils we have, we have too many staff members. For every child, there are 10 teachers. Furthermore, more than 80% of fees are going towards salaries.

“We needed to do something drastic so that we have enough resources to run the school. Our response is restructuring and consolidation. We are concerned about the high cost of school fees and the increasing number of parents battling to pay, as well as the increase in bursaries.”

He pointed to the Jews of South Africa in 2019 survey conducted by the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town, which asked parents if they were choosing to have fewer children because of high school fees. Many said yes.

“This made me really worried. We have inefficiencies in our system, and I can’t look you in the eye and say that our school fees are high, but we have no wastage. We need to look carefully and respond with responsibility,” he said. “The biggest question is how to make Herzlia a modern, relevant, world-class school for the 21st century that’s also financially sustainable.”

UHS treasurer Leor Atie painted a dramatic picture. “The numbers don’t tell a pretty story, but they’re numbers that we need to react to,” he said.

He explained that at the annual general meeting in December 2019, the numbers looked positive. “However, any well-run organisation looks forward and makes adjustments. We looked at the budget for 2021 early because of COVID-19, and we see its

massive impact.

“There is a projected deficit of R39 million, but with grants and allocations received, this reduces to just more than R20 million. About R9.5 million of these grants comes from the United Jewish Campaign, which is itself under enormous pressure, as are its donors. We want the school to be self-sustaining, so this reliance is dangerous in the long term.”

Atie showed that the school operated at a surplus, after grants and allocations, of R3.1 million in 2019, and the projected deficit for 2021 was R20.2 million – a difference of R23.4 million. These changes for 2021 are based on the assumption that school fees would increase by 5%, and expenses would increase by 4% due to inflation. There would be a R7 million increase in bursaries granted, and pupil numbers would drop from 1 753 to 1 652.

The forecast shows that over the past four years, there has been a 23% drop in pupil enrolment, but only a 10% drop in staff members.

Atie said salaries across the UHS system in 2021 would cost R125.8 million, which is 83.7% of gross fee income. “As a community school, we aren’t for profit, but we need to be sustainable. Eighty three percent of fees spent on salaries isn’t a sustainable situation.”

It shows that UHS has to address capacity requirements across all schools. This process has now begun in consultation with unions and the CCMA (the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration). Van Renssen promised that every staff member would be evaluated carefully on the basis of what they could offer. “It’s not a case of ‘last in, first out,’” he said.

A parent suggested that just the Constantia Kerem pre-primary campus could stay open in the area, which management agreed was a possibility. It continues to consult a group representing parents of the Constantia primary and pre-primary schools.

Another parent suggested merging the middle school (a separate campus for Grades 7-9) with the primary and high schools, and van Renssen said that this was, indeed, a possibility.

Education Director Geoff Cohen said that while it was “devastating” to see the school go through these changes, they were needed. “My wish is that every child stays within the UHS system,” he said. “Herzlia isn’t closing. It will become a stronger, greater school.”



The Muizenberg Shul



# How the Rebbe saved South African Jewry

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN

My wife, Rochel, and I arrived in South Africa in March 1976, three short months before the Soweto Uprising. The country was in turmoil.

People told us they couldn't understand how a young couple with two small children would move to South Africa when everyone else was leaving.

But we were here on a mission. We were *shluchim*, emissaries of our mentor and teacher, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, who sent us here to do the work of spreading Judaism in Johannesburg. When an old boarding house in Yeoville, the major Jewish neighbourhood at the time, was purchased to serve as this country's first Chabad House, I was invited to take the position of founding director.

At the time, apartheid was in full force. The park benches had signs stating, "whites only". There were separate buses, separate waiting lines at the post office, separate counters in liquor stores. And there was palpable anxiety in the heart of virtually every white South African.

Many of those moving to other shores said it was on moral grounds. I suspect most were leaving out of fear. In the 70s and 80s, so many families were emigrating, our community was being decimated.

During this period of uncertainty, the Rebbe sent his rabbinical students to serve this community, giving South Africa a massive vote of confidence.

But his direct response to the questions so many South African Jews were putting to him was even more encouraging. The Rebbe was completely dismissive of the perceived need to emigrate. He said that we shouldn't be afraid, and we should carry on with our good work. Some people were even advised to return!

In 1979, with its small school in Yeoville now bursting at the seams, the Lubavitch Foundation purchased a large tract of land in the prime northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Property prices were down, and it was an unbelievably good deal. The Torah Academy would now be able to expand.

But the lay leaders of this community, namely the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Zionist Federation, Board of Jewish Education, Israel United Appeal and United Communal Fund all attempted to persuade us that we should abandon our "reckless empire building".

Cape Town may have Rosh Hashanah in shul

>>Continued from page 7

Community members questioned the sense of opening Jewish schools but not shuls.

"Classroom transmission actually accounts for a very small proportion of overall transmission," said Schoub. "Studies in many countries have shown that during the epidemic, whether schools opened or not, there was no case increase or decrease either way."

There were many possible reasons for this.

"Children don't get the infection seriously or at all in most cases," said Schoub. "From an epidemic perspective, they are poor transmitters of the virus, for a number of physiological reasons."

He explained that where children are concerned, the safest place for them is school.

"When holidays occur, the infection in children increases. This is mostly not from school, but from a household or non-school context. We may feel concern for adult teachers and staff, but their risk is no more than adults going to workplaces, and is perhaps even less because they're amongst children."

Community members also expressed concern about a second wave of infections, a threat which Friedland believes we should take seriously.

"It's very worrying if we lessen our guard," he said. "The United States celebrated success over the first wave, but is seeing large second waves far worse than the initial one. In our post-lockdown euphoria, we lessen our guard, but we need to be as vigilant in post-lockdown as we were at the start."

"People are asking why we will still peak after having been in lockdown. We are in a paradoxical situation where our government was forced to



Rabbi Yossy Goldman receives a dollar and a blessing from the Rebbe on a visit to New York

South African Jewry was "in decline", they stressed. There wouldn't be enough children or sufficient financial resources in the community to support another stream of Jewish education, they argued. When we respectfully disagreed, they wrote a letter to the Rebbe, signed by the chairpersons of the board and the federation, asking him to curb his errant emissaries.

The Rebbe responded with a long letter encouraging those lay leaders to do their utmost to reverse the very decline they had referred to. He praised our strong, warmly traditional Jewish community, and pointed out that Jewish communities the world over played an important partnership role in influencing their governments to maintain positive international relations with the Jewish state.

On three separate occasions, Chabad leaders here were under pressure from a very nervous community clamouring to know if the Rebbe was still confident about our future.

One of these was in August 1985, when former President PW Botha delivered his infamous Rubicon speech in Durban. I will never forget how on each occasion, the Rebbe reiterated his position, stating the same two word Hebrew answer: "*l'peleh hashaalah!*" (It's astounding that you even ask the question!)

There were sanctions, global pressure, civil violence, and eventually, on 11 February 1990, South African President FW de Klerk announced the release of the world's most famous political prisoner, Nelson Mandela. But as historic and heady as the moment was, it created new apprehension.

On the very day of Mandela's release from prison, Rabbi Koppel Bacher, a prominent local Chabad leader, was in New York. He stood in line to receive a dollar for charity and a blessing from the Rebbe. After giving him the dollar for *zedakah*, the Rebbe called him back and gave him this message for our community. "Tell them they have nothing to fear, and that South Africa will be good for Jews until the coming of *moshiach!*"

But then, the burgeoning crime rate became a

new cause of emigration. Not only were many of my congregants becoming victims of crime, I too was hijacked – ironically, while going to visit the *shiva* house of a man who had been murdered.

Rochel's hijacking story was far more dramatic. The would-be hijacker actually pulled the trigger twice at point-blank range. Miraculously, nothing happened – twice!

Many wondered how any human could confidently tell people not to leave such a danger zone. I said that for any man sitting on the other side of the world to answer questions of such magnitude, he either had to be a prophet or a fool. Well, one thing's for sure. This giant of a man, this extraordinary Torah sage and saintly luminary was certainly no fool.

In the end, the Rebbe's unequivocal assurances were, indeed, vindicated. Looking back, they were, in fact, quite prophetic. And that contentious Chabad school, The Torah Academy? Today it boasts more than 600 students.

Eventually, emigration would lead to the loss of about half our population.

Apparently, the Rebbe commented that while he hadn't been as successful as he would have liked in stemming emigration altogether, he was gratified that he had succeeded sufficiently for the community to survive with stability and vibrancy.

As I look back on 26 years of democracy, the third of Tammuz this year (25 June 2020) marks the 26th yahrtzeit of this colossal Jewish leader. Looking at our community today and imagining how different it might have been, don't we owe him a huge hakarat hatov, an eternal debt of gratitude? I think it's long overdue.

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is the senior rabbi of Sydenham Shul, and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

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# Theatre on the precipice

OPINION

DAPHNE KUHN



My heart bleeds for the suffering, death, poverty, hunger, unemployment, and loss of business at this time. It’s devastating.

It’s our responsibility to adhere to lockdown regulations, but I miss the times with my children and grandchildren; visits to my dear mother in an aged home in Cape Town; and social contact and interaction with my patrons.

In spite of amazing technology to keep us in touch including Zoom calls, webinars, and streamed entertainment, I’m uncomfortable with the “new normal”.

Most of all, I sorely miss not being able to operate my business – the beloved Theatre on the Square on Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton.

This is Sandton’s first and only theatre, acknowledged for the role it has played on the South African theatre scene for more than 25 years, generating endless work opportunities, and an outlet for the country’s creative minds.

It’s inconceivable to think that it’s now closed temporarily, a status that could become permanent due to financial restraints, health restrictions, and various digital choices. All our productions have been cancelled for the moment. While we were expecting to open our doors again at Level 1 in a few months’ time, it was unexpectedly announced last week that theatres may open their doors.

This would come into effect with limited audience numbers, social distancing, and strict sanitising to adhere to the health regulations. With the current spiralling COVID-19 figures, health experts have concurred that it isn’t advisable to open now, and the theatre industry is unanimous that it’s premature, irresponsible, and not viable. So, of course, we will play it safe, and wait for a more appropriate time to re-open.

How will I be able to support the running costs, rent/lease, utilities, and permanent staff salaries for possibly close to a year without income from ticket sales and events?

My naming rights sponsorship has ended, and a significant sponsorship prospect sadly reconsidered, citing unprecedented times. As a privately-owned theatre, financial support is essential, as we don’t receive a government subsidy.

Globally, theatres and their artists are struggling financially and emotionally. They will be the last to re-open because of social distancing and the limits on gatherings. The premise of theatre as an art form is to gather people together in a shared space for a collective experience.

Theatre has a tradition from time immemorial. The ancient theatres of Greece go back 2 500 years, presenting exactly what’s on stage today – stories of our lives, a mirror of society. A study recently undertaken revealed that all patrons’ hearts beat in the same rhythm during a theatrical performance. There is a tangible synchronicity that is exciting and

immediate.

We all need a place where we can go to be entertained, uplifted, educated, and challenged, a place to honour our diversity. We need to celebrate our common humanity.

This time is a playwright’s dream, stimulating creative juices to pen new ideas, stories, and plays.

I have had to cancel an itinerary meticulously planned a year in advance. These include new plays by leading South African dramatists like Paul Slabolepszy, Mike van Graan, and Daniel Mpilo Richards, in addition to comedy with Loyiso Madinga, and a London drama hit, *A German Life*.

We have also cancelled a visit by Israeli pianist



Daphne Kuhn with her stage manager, Regina Dube, and marketing manager, Mika Stefano, in the Theatre on the Square

playwrights, musicians, designers, and technicians.

Taking a break from my 24/7 workload, I value this time at home with my husband, but I’m also taking advantage of this period to research our productions and documenting the Theatre on the Square’s legacy for theatrical archives.

Looking back, we have produced more than 2 500 local and international plays, musicals, comedies, weekly classical and jazz concerts, as well

Amit Yahav, a play with Israeli actor Roy Horowitz, and five fundraising sold-out houses for the latest Nik Rabinowitz comedy. The loss of work is a huge blow to scores of freelance actors, directors,

as children’s theatre, school play festivals and showcases, industrial theatre, and corporate events. We have nurtured talent and been the launchpad for the work of aspiring playwrights and artists.

We appeal to our patrons and particularly to corporate visionaries to help us to keep the theatre’s lights on. Theatre has an incredible future. It has survived by constantly resurrecting itself. We can’t diminish the cultural tradition that theatre has built in our country, and the relevant new work and voices that form part of our cultural tapestry.

With the profound uncertainty and lack of relief, it’s our fervent hope that an appropriate sponsor will materialise so that we all can look forward to audiences returning to our intimate space and witness their enjoyment.

Finally, our theatre is committed to take all standard precautions to ensure that audiences are safe and ready to experience a plethora of amazing and relevant plays for their entertainment and delight.

• Daphne Kuhn is theatre producer, owner, and artistic director of Sandton’s Theatre on the Square.

## What it’s like to be home alone under lockdown

TALI FEINBERG

We’re all struggling with the restrictions that the coronavirus is imposing on our lives, but most of us have families around us. What about those who have spent the past three months completely alone? How are they coping?

“Pesach seders were hard and sad, being alone. Shabbos is also hard. Lighting candles and eating alone isn’t easy, but I get through them,” says Hazel Lerman. “I used to lead a frenetic life. Slowing down took a while, but I’m really enjoying less ‘noise’ and chaos. I miss face-to-face interaction terribly, but my friends have been amazing, and check in regularly.”

Lerman is 58, and has lived alone in Sandton since the lockdown began. She has high blood pressure and a history of seasonal asthma. If she had known how long we would have been in lockdown, she might have had her mother move in with her. However, she is soldiering on as a party of one.

“I’m coping far better than I expected as an extrovert and ‘busy bee’. I have been working from home, so I’m busy all day,” Lerman says. She is divisional executive of customer relations for Liberty. “I have had to be intentional about my mindset, accepting that I can’t control everything, but I can control the way I react and act. I have made an extra effort to check in on friends and family as well as my team.”

She believes that “resilience is in all of us, but we have different coping abilities. The early days of lockdown were hard as I wasn’t well. I also went into lockdown really disappointed as I was supposed to participate in the Jerusalem Marathon as part of team DL Link on 20 March. When that was cancelled, I felt deflated, and that I had let all my donors down. However, DL Link still benefited and please G-d, we’ll do the marathon when

we’re able to.”

To keep even busier, Lerman registered for a course through the University of Cape Town, which she has just completed. “I also participate in many more *shiurim* than previously. My mom is up the road, and I miss spending time with her. I see her from the bottom of the stairs once a week when I drop off supplies. I spend so much time online that I find my eyes are strained so I listen to audio books and podcasts.”

She realised early on that she had to have a routine. “I get up as normal,



get dressed, and work. Later, I have dinner. Afterwards, I spent time on my studies when I was doing the UCT course. I haven’t been good about breaks, as most meetings start and end at the same time. I make sure that I prepare three healthy meals a day. My kitchen has never been used this much!”

She goes out only once a week. “When Builders Warehouse opened, I went there to get all the things I needed after noticing how much had to be fixed while spending so much time at home! I also went wool shopping for my mom, who is knitting hundreds of beanies for the Angel Network.”

“Of course I have some down days,” she says. But she also sees lockdown as a blessing. “I’ve connected with people on a different level, slowed down, dealt with the guilt of not being all things to all people, been able to do good for others, read books, enjoyed lazy Sundays on the

couch, and completed a course and did really well. I have learnt so much about myself, life, and Judaism, as well as which mop works best, how to vacuum a stairwell, and how to mow the lawn!”

She feels supported by the community. “I’m incredibly privileged to be a part of the South African Jewish community. The rabbis have gone above and beyond to ensure we all have so much to be part of, and organisations have cared for us in spite of difficult times.”

Tracey-Lee Dogon is 60, and lives in a flat in Cape Town. She has lived alone for the past 14 years. She has no co-morbidities, but has chosen to isolate herself since lockdown began.

An extramural music teacher at Herzlia Highlands Primary, she receives no salary other than what she can generate through these lessons. Thankfully, many parents have chosen to continue during lockdown.

“My work keeps me sane. I’m blessed to be able to continue



giving singing and recorder lessons online, and to have created a musical programme for the children I teach. It adds value to their day, and huge value to mine.”

Routine also helps: “I wake early, do household chores, and care for my cat. I chat to friends, have breakfast, and prepare my teaching, which starts after 12:30 when the kids are finished their schoolwork.

“Before I teach, I make sure I’ve

created new musical exercises for the kids to sing. I WhatsApp reminders to my pupils’ parents, most of whom are under immense pressure. I then send the exercises to the pupils or parents. I also research new songs, downloading and printing lyrics for songs that the kids have asked to learn.”

She hardly goes out. “I sometimes fetch a box of fresh vegetables and Shabbos food from my daughter, who lives down the road. She is as strict as I am regarding the COVID-19 protocol – if not more so. My groceries are delivered from the local Spar. On Sundays, I drive up the West Coast to exercise my horse. Horses are a lifelong passion, and I have a permit to do so. It’s the highlight of my week!”

“I miss family gatherings with my daughter and her husband, three granddaughters, and my daughters-in-law, with whom I am very close. We use to spend every Shabbos together. I miss my daughter dreadfully. Sometimes, when I’m fetching food, we chat by her door, three metres apart, in masks.

“I speak to my older sister almost every night, and we prepare supper ‘together’, chatting, peeling vegetables, exchanging recipes, and doing the washing up. She’s in Ireland with her husband, and her support has been invaluable. I think the closeness to my siblings has been incredibly comforting and a major blessing.”

She feels supported by those who continue to send their children to her for lessons, and asks that parents “keep up extra-mural school activities if you possibly can, and encourage your kids to participate in pre-lockdown activities. Without the faith of these many wonderful parents, I would have had absolutely no income at all. I’m deeply grateful to them as well as to their kids.”





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# ‘Jaws’ moment puts teen in spotlight

TALI FEINBERG

A 14-year-old boy from Cape Town with a drone, a passion for wildlife, and an incredible lockdown location has been thrust onto the world stage after his video of a shark circling surfers in Plettenberg Bay went viral.

The clip, shot at Robberg Beach in Plettenberg Bay, shows a massive great white shark swimming below surfers in crystal-clear waters. The people seem oblivious, although at one point, a paddle skier sees the predator and moves away. The shark never attacks, and eventually swims in the opposite

direction. It’s a breathtaking recording of man at the mercy of the natural world. The video, which Zachary Berman took on 23 June, appeared on BBC News and hundreds of other news outlets, and has had at least 80 000 views on Instagram and 65 000 views on YouTube. Between interviews with

news networks CNN and ABC, Berman made time to talk to the *SA Jewish Report*. He attends Bishops Diocesan College and lives in Cape Town, but has been staying at his family’s holiday home on Robberg Beach since March, just before the lockdown began.

“I’ve been coming here my since I was born, and I’m inspired by my cousin Robbie Berman, who has flown

drones over this beach for many years. My parents have taught me a lot about the wildlife in the area, and I’ve always loved filming dolphins, whales, and sharks,” he says. He decided to post some of his videos on Instagram under the profile @crazy\_nature2.0, which includes beautiful footage of whales and dolphins. But it was the video of the shark that grabbed the world’s attention.

“There are a lot of sharks along this beach as there is a large seal

the area. Berman is glad it has done so, “as the sharks are often near the surfers, who don’t listen to the warnings”. He says that a shark has never attacked a surfer at Robberg before, but thinks it may happen if people continue to take risks. He has swum in these waters, but usually in summer, when the sharks aren’t as active. “This is their feeding time,” he says.

“The behaviour seen in this drone footage shows that the shark is aware of the surfers and is



A still from Zach Berman's original video

# Racism education ‘starts with parents’

JORDAN MOSHE

When Johannesburg marketing consultant Jade Kinkel’s seven-year-old daughter asked her who George Floyd was, she was confronted with a dilemma: should she spare her child’s innocence, or tackle the heavy issue of racism?

After choosing to broach the subject, Kinkel decided to share her experience with other parents grappling with the question of whether to discuss racism with their young children.

“White people in South Africa are scared to talk about racism, especially with our children,” she said in a webinar on Thursday last week. “It’s difficult, uncomfortable, and actually often deemed unnecessary. But we all know racism is very much alive in our country today, we’re just afraid to discuss it.”

Psychologists, authors, and academics were among those who weighed in on the panel discussion chaired by Kinkel and Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*.



“We’re coming to understand that it’s not enough to say that we don’t have a racist home, we actually have to teach our children consciously to be non-racist and to recognise the importance of race,” said Pierre Brouard, clinical psychologist and professor at the University of Pretoria.

“Race isn’t a biological truth but a sociological truth. However, to say to people of colour that race isn’t biological can be a form of gaslighting because we’re saying that their experiences aren’t real, when of course they are. It’s a real tension.”

Brouard believes that no one is born racist, that we learn about race through what we observe and what’s going on around us.

“As a species, we are wired to notice difference, and many parents will say that their kids talk about how other people look,” he said. “It’s what we do with that information about difference that makes a difference.”

Educational psychologist Sheryl Cohen agrees. “Children are born with a capacity to see difference, and this is absolutely normal,” she said. “In fact, it’s desirable. Talking about difference and race is as tricky for parents as not talking about it, but we need to raise the issue.”

Cohen said that the job of parents, adults, and educators was to help children to develop an integrated sense of self. “As children grow, they integrate an experience of good and bad,” she said. “We see children learn that people can be good and bad, and we aim to help them to develop an integrated sense of other and thereby develop an integrated sense of self. When they do that, they are developing a good model for growing up outside a racist perspective.”

Brouard said that key to addressing racism in children is to address racist attitudes in their parents, unconscious though they may be.

“I’m a product of apartheid, and though I consider myself ‘woke’ and I’m doing my own work around race, I can’t say I believe I don’t have a racist bone in my body,” he said. “It’s more important for me to say that because

I was steeped in that system, I’m unconsciously racist at certain times, and my work is to undo that.

“Children learn racist ideas from their parents. People might think they aren’t racist, but if you participated in racial ideas in a particular way then I’d say you might be racist. Admitting it is the first step towards changing it.”

In his work, Brouard has often heard white people say that they are proudly colour-blind, and raise their children to be that way.

“My response to that is that you aren’t recognising the histories that people of different colours bring to their own story, histories of hurt, and histories of harm,” he said. “When you talk about colour blindness, what you’re saying is, ‘I don’t recognise those histories of discrimination that you or your people have experienced.’

“Colour is a reality. It’s a part of all our lives. It’s much more important to be colour sensitive in noticing difference without attributing negativity to those differences but seeing them as important.”

Admission by parents that they are slightly racist is an encouraging and important step, said Brouard.

“You can’t change something you can’t acknowledge,” he said. “That’s a lot of the work we have to do as white people: being able to say ‘yes, I have racism in me, and it’s something I’m working on’. We need to find opportunities

where it can come to our awareness, and only then can we start to change.”

Jelani Memory, an American author of a children’s book about racism, and the founder of the *A Kid’s Book About* series, said his own experience with his children informed his approach to the subject.

The best advice he can give parents is to take the decision to talk about racism with their children.

“Just do it,” said Memory. “I can promise you that you won’t get everything right, you won’t cover everything, and won’t get it all done in one conversation. But the acknowledgement for all parents is to realise the likelihood that the biggest barrier between them and the kids’ learning is actually themselves.

“Muster up the courage to dive into the conversation, and know it’s just the first of many. Go on the journey with your kids, and learn with them. Plant the seed, and don’t wait until you are ‘graduate level’ to do it, because it may be too late.

“Decide to have the conversation, and find the tools along the way to do that.”

Memory said parents are afraid that opening the discussion will have an adverse effect on their children, encouraging racist attitudes.

“There’s an inherent fear that we will sully our kids, put them on the wrong track, or somehow teach them how to be racist. You’re not going to injure or derail your kid’s development when they’re five years old.

He concluded, “Be appropriate, pay attention to their developmental level, but don’t be afraid of breaking their innocence. We teach them not to hit, to share. Why not teach them another fundamental thing?”



Jade Kinkel



Zach Berman

population. The sharks live here, and swim up and down the bay. This one was massive, more than four metres long. I’ve never seen one so big before,” he says. “I think it was looking to attack, but didn’t have enough depth in the sea to get power. As soon as we saw it, we called the National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI), and I ran down to the beach to try to get the surfers’ attention.

“When they came out of the water, they were absolutely shocked and flabbergasted. They had no idea the shark was so close to them or had stayed near them for so long. However, soon after, they got back in the water!” And the next day, Berman caught another breathtaking video of a great white shark swimming near surfers.

The NSRI has since used the video to raise awareness of the danger of great white sharks in

inquisitive predators, and that although shark bites are rare, water users must understand the inherent risk associated with sharing the ocean with these animals and change their behaviour accordingly to avoid encountering sharks.”

Berman says the water isn’t usually so clear – it often depends on the weather. However the wildlife is always abundant, and he has also filmed birds. “We see blackbirds migrating over the sea, but you can’t get too close with the drone, or they will attack it!”

He has been flying a drone for a year and a half, and says he has much more footage that he will soon post on Instagram. At the moment, it’s still a hobby, but the future looks bright. He’s taking the attention in his stride, although it can be overwhelming at times. However, he’s happy that “so many people care about wildlife”.

investigating them,” Sarah Waries, of the City of Cape Town Shark Spotters programme, said in a statement, quoted by CNN. “It’s important for people to remember that great white sharks are naturally



# Pretoria’s oldest Barmitzvah boy cancels celebration

SUZANNE BELLING

Probably the only member of the Pretoria Jewish community ever to have planned his third Barmitzvah, Jaffa Jewish Aged Home resident Wilfred (Willie) Pokroy (Ze’ev ben Yehuda HaLevi) turns 96 on 3 August.

He had booked the shul, the hall, and a *brocha* for 19 July, the Hebrew date of his Barmitzvah, and was expecting family and friends from all over the world. Then COVID-19 hit and, much to Willie’s disappointment, everything had to be cancelled.

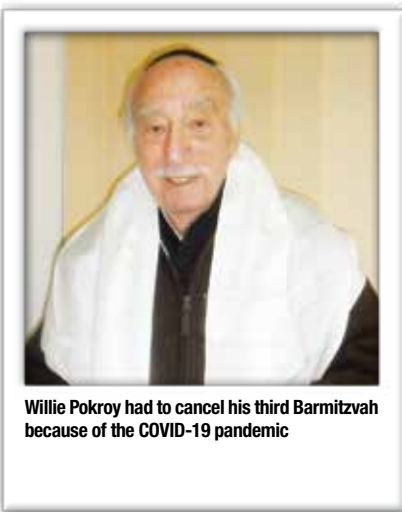
“I was in the process of re-learning my portion, Masei, for the third time, and had remembered most of it,” said this upright, dapper, groomed gentleman, with a sense of humour and a friendly word for everyone.

Why have a third Barmitzvah? Willie explains that life expectancy is supposed to

be 70, therefore a second Barmitzvah is celebrated at the age of 83, and a third at 96. “As far as I know, I’m the only Pretorian who has reached this stage,” he says.

The word Masei (his original Barmitzvah *parsha*) means journeys, or stages of a journey, reminiscent of the stages and stopovers of the 40-year journey of the Children of Israel to the Promised Land. “I have had a memorable journey through life,” is Willie’s interpretation of his *parsha*.

Born in Claremont, Cape Town, he came up to the then Transvaal at the age of two. He



Willie Pokroy had to cancel his third Barmitzvah because of the COVID-19 pandemic

attended Doornfontein Primary School and Athlone Boys’ High. “It wasn’t a very happy childhood for me. My father, who ran Boston Dry Cleaners, was very ill, and died from consumption at the age of 45.”

Willie married Rhona in 1950, and they settled in Pretoria, where he had been in the South African Air Force during World War II, and had lived since 1946. “I couldn’t fly as I

had an impediment – a birthmark in the pupil of my eye – and one needed 20-20 vision to be a pilot. I landed up being an instructor.”

After the war, he worked for L. Feldman Tobacconists, and, “in my time, I was a heavy smoker until a four-way bypass and then an aorta bypass put paid to that. Now I walk about

two kilometres a day to keep going.”

Rhona and Willie have four children: Julian; Pamela Witz; Darryl, who lives in Belgium; and Michael, who lives in Dubai. “I’m blessed with seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. I have lived in Jaffa for six-and-a-half years. Rhona died five years ago after suffering the effects of being attacked in their home. She survived the attack, but was in poor health thereafter.”

Willie has made lots of friends at Jaffa, and plays CDs of “golden oldies” for the residents every week. He says that he met “special friend” Sonia Gordon at a New Year’s Eve party at the home shortly after moving in there.

But he’s adamant about cancelling his Barmitzvah: “I’m not even scaling down a celebration. I don’t want to put people at risk.”

Brought up in an Orthodox home, Willie says he tries to abide by the rules of the home, and “be a good boy”. But, having been in the tobacco trade, he thinks banning cigarette sales during the COVID-19 lockdown is “a load of [expletive]”.

## Would a Sunday COVID podcast work?

OPINION

HOWARD FELDMAN

Sometime back in early March, when we were young, I had the idea of asking my friend, Dr Anton Meyberg, to record a podcast with me. He is a pulmonologist physician, and I could already see that he was displaying an uncomfortable obsession with this COVID-19 thing that was having an impact on countries around the world.

He reluctantly agreed to give an overview on what he knew back then (when we were children), and so, we met in studio one Sunday morning to get a sense of it would be any good.

Still uncertain as to whether it would work, I approached Synthesis Technologies and asked if it would have any interest in sponsoring the series. I wasn’t convinced (back then, in my youth), that it would be a good idea for any company to brand alongside a virus, but its response was that it was about information and education. Not branding. That was good enough for it, and just like that, the Sunday Podcast was born.

About 16 weeks later (or 17), close to 60 000 people have watched the podcasts. The format is simple: introduction and overview of the current status, followed by the questions that we are sent. We invite viewers to send in their COVID-19 queries the evening before, and we do what we can to answer them.

This, I believe, is part of the success, in that the interview addresses the challenges that people are facing that week. They are also a brilliant measure of where we are at in our understanding of the

pandemic and the disease, as well as the social aspect and impact that it has on our lives.

It’s also interesting to note the number of times questions are repeated by different viewers, indicating when a challenge is widespread.

It’s fascinating to see how information is shared in this pandemic. A recent study in the United Kingdom showed a distinction between people who received knowledge through social media and those who relied on mainstream or conventional publications.

Those who relied on social media as their news source were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories and fantastical thinking. One of the challenges with the podcast has been to debunk the nonsense, even when someone heard it from their aunt who knows a doctor in Italy.

The Synthesis Sunday Podcast is now viewed throughout the world. We receive messages of support from all continents, and questions from a broad range of countries. The focus, however, is to provide information that’s reliable, not hysterical, and up-to-date, in an informative and palatable way.

Back in March, when I was a child, I had no idea that the Synthesis Sunday Podcast would have had the impact that it has. But I’m grateful and blessed that it has done.

See you Sunday.

- Howard Feldman is a keynote speaker and analyst. He is the author of three books and is the morning talk show host on ChaiFM.

Letters

MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS SUPPORT SOVEREIGNTY OVER OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

I wish to reply to Zvika Arran and Warren Lewis (*SA Jewish Report*, 19 June 2020).

I implore the South African Jewish community not to get involved in Israeli politics. I would remind Arran and Lewis that according to the latest poll, 57% of Israelis support sovereignty over 30% of Judah and Samaria, and the Jordan Valley. Arran and Lewis call it “annexation”, 57% of us call it sovereignty over what belongs to Israel historically.

As usual, the Palestinians are missing an opportunity. The two-state “solution” has been suggested since 1967, but it’s dead in the water.

Warren, while living in South Africa, I was actively involved in the campaign against apartheid, stomping the streets in all types of weather. – **Bennie Katzman, Israel**

PAY ATTENTION TO OUR TEACHERS – THEY’RE CRITICAL

Education is highly regarded in Jewish culture, and Jews invented the first school. (It can’t therefore be easy for those who suffer from learning disabilities. Fortunately those of us with attention deficit disorder and other learning disabilities are no longer considered stupid and discouraged from achieving success.)

We have all been profoundly influenced by our teachers. It’s arguably the most important profession, and has a direct influence on the world.

Japan, where teachers are considered an elite and are well paid, sets a good example.

In a perfect world, those who are accepted into this vital profession would be carefully screened, as is the case with psychologists. Only those who love children, are positive and well balanced, should be accepted.

As with psychologists, they should have to undergo ongoing self-improvement courses. However, existing teachers mustn’t be made to feel that they are being harshly judged.

In Grade One, we had a teacher who positively glowed with love towards us children. She was an old Dutch woman who had saved Jews from the Nazis during World War II.

– **Martin Zagnoev, Johannesburg**

ORT Jet helps businesses survive lockdown

ORT Jet’s monthly business induction is helping businesses to survive the lockdown. The induction, now held online, introduces businesses to ORT Jet’s COVID-19 rescue initiative, which offers exceptional resources, mentorship, and world-class tools to help them with the effects of the lockdown on their livelihood. The induction’s expert panel is an uplifting support structure for businesses, start-ups, and entrepreneurs who have nowhere else to turn.

“ORT Jet’s promise to our community of businesses is to keep the training we offer relevant and to make certain that they receive a mentor best suited to their needs,” says ORT Jet manager Helene Itzkin. ORT Jet has assisted 85 businesses since the lockdown began.

ORT Jet has been collaborating with the Gesher Relief Fund to attract businesses to join its programme. “We are encouraging our applicants to engage with ORT Jet for mentoring on an ongoing basis to help them remain viable and sustainable” says Gesher chairperson Martin Sacks.

All businesses in the community are welcome to join ORT Jet’s mentorship programme and receive support. Email lauri@ortjet.org.za for more information.

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

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