



south african Jewish Report

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Decision to spend lockdown in SA was fatal

NICOLA MILTZ

During the early days of the pandemic, Gillian Kay chose to spend lockdown in her beloved childhood home in South Africa instead of being alone in her apartment in Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv.

She needed to find new tenants for her house across the road from the Sydenham-Highlands North Shul in the neighbourhood of Rouxville while she stayed in the cottage on the property and tended to the little garden.

This proved to be a fatal decision.

Somewhere around 10 or 11 July, she was brutally murdered and robbed of her small possessions allegedly by a gardener, someone she knew and had helped look after.

Sadly, the colourful, feisty, accomplished tennis player, psychologist, healer, and teacher never got to find new tenants, and her childhood home now lies empty and forlorn.

Her savage death came during the week of mayhem as the country was gripped by looting and riots.

For those who knew her, her untimely death came as a shock.

"It was so utterly senseless and tragic," said her cousin Louis Sweidan this week, "This is what you get for helping someone."

"The murderer took her old 1989 Toyota Corolla, her laptop, and a moon bag which contained her passport and some cash," he said.

It's unsure exactly when her attacker entered her cottage. An estate agent, wanting to show a would-be tenant the property on Sunday, 11 July at 10:00, became worried when Kay didn't answer the door or her phone. Later, she alerted neighbours and security when further calls to Kay went unanswered.

It was on the afternoon of 11 July that her listless body was found. She had been strangled and choked.

Kay's cousin in Israel, Michael Sweidan, told the *SA Jewish Report* that she passed away three months shy of her 80th birthday.

"She never married or had children of her own, but she made it her life's ambition to connect with family around the world."

Joining the dots of the family tree was very important to her, he said.

"When we made aliyah three years ago, she became our adopted grandmother – our only family away from South Africa. She loved my children as if they were her grandchildren."

He said family members had often tried to get Kay to sell the house in Rouxville, but she couldn't part with it.

"She had a strong emotional attachment to the house having grown up there, and she simply didn't want to let it go," said Louis.

It also gave her an excuse to visit South Africa,

which she loved very much even though she left the country as a young woman in the 1970s, he said.

"Her father built the house and left it to her when he passed. She later built a cottage on the property where she would stay on her regular visits. She refused to get rid of the place."

Two childhood school friends, who also live in Israel, Ingrid Messika and Fay Morris, posted a tribute to Kay on the Waverley Girls High School Facebook page. They said they were "horrified and heartbroken" to hear what happened to Gillian, who they described as a true friend.



Gillian Kay

"She will be sorely missed because she was the sort of friend who really cared about others and freely gave of her huge knowledge of medical and other general subjects. Together with her advice and empathy, we always felt that she was almost a family member who knew and cared about all our children and grandchildren and never forgot them even in the most recent phone conversations from Johannesburg."

They said Kay was one of five girls in their matric year who made aliyah.

Shedding light on a life well lived, they said Kay wasn't just a talented sportswomen, she had a gift for understanding people.

"Through her studies at university – with a Masters in psychology from Tel Aviv University – she helped many people, but she also used all sorts of alternative medicine, particularly Chinese medicine, which she studied all the time."

They said she recently visited Lithuania on a roots trip and discovered her grandparents' property in Birzai.

Norwood police confirmed that three suspects were arrested 48 hours after the murder, house robbery, and theft of a motor vehicle on 12 July.

Spokesperson for the Norwood Police Station, Sergeant Eric Masotsha, said that a multidisciplinary team including the Serious and Violent Crimes Unit, SAPS Gauteng Highway Patrol, SAPS Lyttelton, SAPS Airwing, CAP Security, and Fidelity Specialised Services received information regarding a house robbery where Kay was robbed, tortured, and murdered. Her car and household goods were taken during the violent robbery.

According to reports, her car was located at a shopping mall in Centurion and shortly afterwards, the team effected an arrest and seizure. The driver of Kay's car was found in possession of her documents

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Daily wake-up call



Hearing the shofar blown every day (except Shabbat) during the month of Elul until the day before erev Rosh Hashanah is a wake-up call to begin the process of introspection that leads to the high holy days. Yeshiva College's Rabbi Zevi Wineberg, Alon Goldstein, Yona Treger, Eitan Henen, and Jacob Hoffman take part in a shofar blowing lesson.

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2 SA JEWISH REPORT

French police detain woman for antisemitic poster

Police in France detained a woman for carrying a sign widely deemed antisemitic at a demonstration against COVID-19 emergency measures.

Cassandre Fristot, an activist for the far-right National Rally party, held up a brown cardboard poster at the rally on Saturday, 7 August, in Metz condemning President Emmanuel Macron and several well-known Jewish people as “traitors”.

Advocate for interfaith-dialogue says Jews should be killed

A Muslim imam in Norway who has led interfaith-dialogue projects has made antisemitic statements on Facebook, including that Jews are dangerous and “should be killed”, for years.

The Norway branch of Minhaj-ul-Quran, an international Muslim organisation considered moderate and geared toward outreach, suspended Noor Ahmad Noor indefinitely on Monday, 9 August, following an expose published last week by the *Vartland* newspaper on his antisemitic statements. Noor served for years as the branch’s director.

In a short statement to

Norwegian media, Noor said, “My posts were published in frustration over attacks in Gaza. Innocent children and women were killed. My criticism and frustration should have been directed at the regime and not against a group of people. I apologise.”

Scientist beaten by assailant seeking to ‘finish Hitler’s job’

An 82-year-old prominent scientist was assaulted on a bus in Moscow by a much younger assailant who shouted that “Hitler should have finished the job, so I’ll do it for him.”

The assailant began hitting Vladimir Tselin, a researcher of radiation who has worked on the Russian space programme, soon after Tselin boarded a bus on his way to work on 6 August, the news site MK reported. Shouting about Jews and Hitler, the man followed Tselin out of the bus after he got off to escape.

Holtz quits as Team Israel’s baseball manager



Eric Holtz, the manager of Israel’s national baseball team over the past four years, has stepped down from his post.

Team Israel failed to medal in the recently concluded Tokyo Olympics, finishing fifth with a squad of nearly all Americans, including former major league all-star Ian Kinsler. Some predicted that Israel, making its Olympics

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debut, would finish in the top three of the six-team field.

Team Israel was also forced to apologise after a video of its players breaking a bed at the Olympics went viral on TikTok.

Podcaster gets almost three years for antisemitic remarks

A British podcaster who made antisemitic statements was sentenced to 32 months in prison.

The Truro Magistrates’ Court on Friday handed down the sentence to Graham Hart, 69, two months after he pleaded guilty to a charge that he “insulted Jewish people with antisemitic language with the aim of inciting racial hatred”, the Crown Prosecution Service reported on its website.

Separately, talkSPORT, a popular radio station in the United Kingdom, apologised for airing and not immediately confronting a statement by a caller on 3 August who repeated an antisemitic trope.

The caller suggested that the Tottenham Hotspurs, a London soccer team that is often associated with Jewish people, won’t let a soccer player, Harry Kane, out of his contract with the team because the team’s chairperson, Daniel Levy, “is a Jew, he’s not going to let him [Kane] go for nothing, is he?”

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:29	18:20	Johannesburg
17:58	18:51	Cape Town
17:13	18:05	Durban
17:33	18:24	Bloemfontein
17:29	18:22	Port Elizabeth
17:21	18:14	East London

Torah Thought

Equal before the law

The great historian, Paul Johnson, in his introduction to *A History of the Jews*, lists several key concepts and institutions which originated completely within the Torah and Jewish thinking.

He writes in his introduction to the book, “All the great conceptual discoveries of the human intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they had been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal, and love as the foundation of justice; and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind.”

The first one Johnson lists is equality before the law.

Westerners, pre and post-modernists, with typical arrogance, assume that this

principle is a given and that all civilisations accept it.

But the truth is, it isn’t a given. Equality before the law is a Torah concept which most ancient civilisations rejected and many current civilisations do too. The behaviour of our ex-president Jacob Zuma and his cronies puts the lie to the blind belief that “people” believe and accept this concept.

Many societies preferred and still prefer the back-door horse trading of the powerful as the best path to social balance. But that’s not the Torah approach. The Torah teaches us that the best path to social stability is where all are subject equally to a law which is blind to our social standing.

This week’s parsha demonstrates the Torah’s take in practise – no-one is above the law. Even a king or president is subject to the law.

But when you ask, “Why should we be equal before the law?” and “Why is this the best path?” it isn’t so simple to answer from a secular legal standpoint. But from a Torah standpoint, the reason is simple: it’s based on Jewish theology. We believe that:

- G-d is the creator and law giver – He creates the physical world and its physical laws. And He also creates the moral world and moral laws.
- Every human being is created in G-d’s image – we are all equal in this regard, and equally subject to G-d’s moral laws. So, no matter who you are, you are as bound to and by G-d as anybody else. This is why equality before the law makes sense. In a society with in-built hierarchies, like Egypt (or perhaps certain modern tribes), the head of that society is closer to G-d, perhaps even an incarnation of a g-d, and therefore is qualitatively different from his or her subjects. But the Torah’s view is far flatter – from the king to the water drawer, all are equal before G-d, and all are equally subject to His law.

This idea – that the law (Torah) is supreme, along with the Torah’s moral framework for instilling fear of G-d and honesty – are key ingredients for equity, prosperity, and hope.

South African Jewish Report

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AU not budging on Israel observer status

NICOLA MILTZ

The African Union (AU) Commission has defended the continental body’s decision to grant Israel observer member status, saying it was at the “express demand of many member states”.

In spite of objections to the move by countries like South Africa, the organisation has remained firm about its decision.

In a statement last week, chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat said the move was made on the basis of “the restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel by more than two thirds of AU member states”.

This comes after South Africa, Algeria, Botswana, Namibia, and Lesotho among a handful of others vehemently rejected the rights bestowed on Israel.

South Africa went as far as describing the move as “unjust, unwarranted, and inexplicable”.

The move has been criticised by anti-Israel lobbyists as having been taken unilaterally and without proper consultation with member states.

The countries objecting to the observer status expressed solidarity with Palestine and reiterated that the people of Palestine were still suffering because of Israel. There have been further rumblings of a jointly signed letter of opposition by a few other Arab member states.

Local pro-Palestinian groups have continued to bemoan the decision by the AU, and staged a protest on 11 August at the offices of the Pan African Parliament in Midrand.

Meanwhile, the African Diaspora for Development (ADD) this week praised the move.

The ADD’s international executive director, Jean-Pierre Alumba Lukamba, said “As Africans, we welcome and celebrate the recent decision by the AU to further our historical ties with the state of Israel by giving Israel observer status in the AU.”

He said the ADD was a platform that aimed to empower Africans in the diaspora and migrants to prosper and achieve their dreams wherever they were in the world.

“Our aim is to create a continent that’s always home regardless of the distance and is always eager to welcome home its sons and daughters,” he said.

He described the decision to officially reignite the formal relationship between the African continent and Israel as “a wise one”.

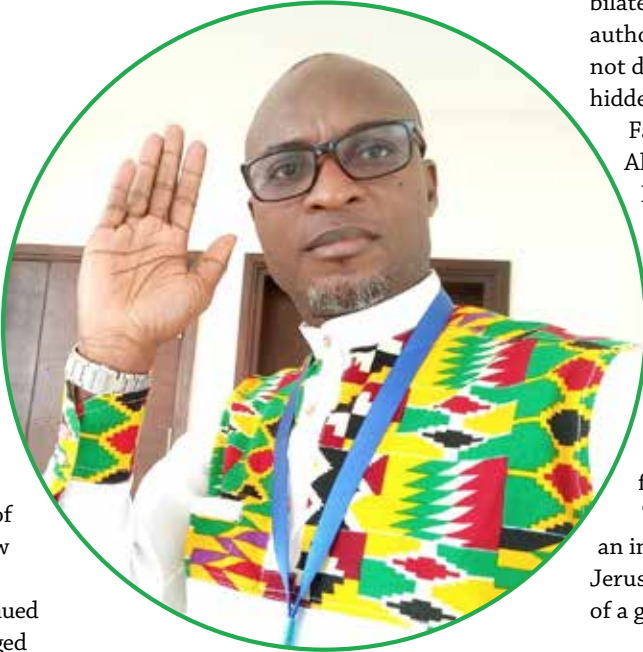
“Progressive Africans are hoping that this will further help African NGOs [nongovernmental organisations] engage with the success of Israeli ones in bettering the lives of people across the

continent,” the organisation’s statement read.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Lukamba, described it as a “positive development”.

“It’s a corrective step to the anomaly that has prevailed for two decades in preventing Israel entry status. Today, Israel has relations with 46 of the 55 African member states,” he said.

The ADD said, “The African diaspora was inspired by the idea to learn from the success of the Israeli diaspora by engaging in a transfer of skills, diasporic investments, and the foundational growth and connection of Jews to their holy land. This decision will enable Africans across the board to learn about Israel,



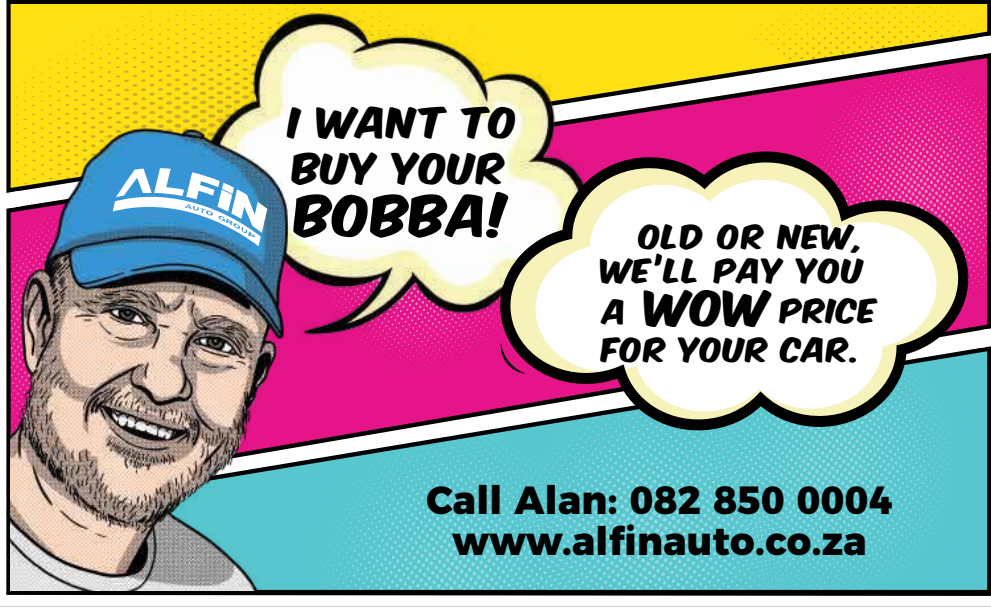
Jean-Pierre Alumba Lukamba, International Executive Director of the African Diaspora for Development

and will enable strong co-operation between the two parties on various aspects, including food security, technological innovation, property development, and a fight against rising extremist entities on our continent.

“We are hopeful that Israel will align its African policies according to the current situations and challenges facing the people of Africa, such as climate change, corruption, xenophobia, the protection of African refugees, food security, access to water and renewable energy, online quality education, effective institutions, infrastructure development, peace, and stability.”

Lukamba said there were more than 70 non-African embassies and NGOs which were part of the AU, and the accreditation of Israel “shouldn’t be seen as an issue” especially after engaging with decades of Israeli aid and developments in helping countries such as Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, and Nigeria, to name but a few.

“If certain African countries have



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issues with Israel, we urge you to use this opportunity to address them directly in bilateral discussions with the relevant authorities, and ask that these governments not discredit this relationship in order to push hidden political agendas,” the statement said.

Faki Mahamat accepted the credentials of Aleligne Admasu, Israel’s ambassador to Ethiopia, on 22 July.

He said last week that he hoped the move would contribute to the “intensification of the advocacy of the AU for the fulfilment of the principle of two states and the restoration of peace between Israel and Palestine” and reiterated the “unflinching commitment” of the AU to the fundamental rights of the Palestinians. This included their “right to establish an independent national state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the framework of a global, fair, and definitive peace between

Israel and Palestine.”

Faki Mahamat said the reservations expressed by “a few members” about this decision justified his intention to include it in the agenda of the forthcoming session of the executive council.

Israel obtained AU observer status last week after 20 years of diplomatic efforts. It had previously held the role at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but was long thwarted in its attempts to regain it after the OAU was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by the AU.

According to Israel’s foreign ministry, the new status could enable the country and the AU to forge stronger co-operation on various aspects, including the fight against coronavirus and the prevention of the spread of extremist terrorism on the African continent.

The matter is to be placed on the agenda of the next AU executive council meeting in October.

Decision to spend lockdown in SA was fatal

>>>Continued from page 1

which she carried around with her in a little basket. Further investigation led to the house of the suspect in Olievenhoutbosch, where further items were found belonging to Kay including her cell phone.

Her funeral at Westpark Cemetery may have been very small, but the lives she touched throughout the world were many.

Rabbi Alexander Carlebach read a moving eulogy written by her younger cousin, Gareth Sweidan, who was very close to her. In it he said, “Gillian had every intention of living life for many years to come. Sadly, her aspiration to live a long life was cut short by a reprehensible and viciously callous act. Such a bright light for those around her, it’s a truly tragic loss that such a light has been extinguished.”

Gareth used words such as “formidable”, “honest”, “intellectually curious”, and “very bright” to describe Kay.

Holding a string of degrees, she was an avid reader and was deeply spiritual.

“One cannot talk about the life of Gillian without mentioning her love of sport. In her lifetime, she

would play as many sports as she was able to: hockey, swimming, and tennis. But it was the latter that hooked her. Tennis shaped Gillian’s life for many years, and it allowed her to travel the world and meet many interesting characters. She even had the honour of playing tennis for her country, Israel. She could still play a mean game right into her late sixties,” said Gareth.

He described her as a truly altruistic person, forever helping those that came across her path in any way she could.

“Gillian was passionate about our family and its history. She was forever connecting us and developing our family tree – always on the hunt for more information about our ancestors and how our family has managed to span the globe.”

He said Kay lived life fully, and lived with love.

Kay is survived by her sister, Lorna, and brother, Eliezer, and countless family members scattered around the world who she managed to connect with given her passion for genealogy.

The suspects are due to appear in court later this month.



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Cape braces for COVID-19 storm

SAUL KAMIONSKY

As Cape Town braces for the peak of the third COVID-19 wave, three generations in one family all become infected with the virus.

Giuliana Levetan of Highlands Estate as well as her Fresnaye-based daughter, Candice, and grandson, who attends Alon Ashel Pre-Primary, came out of isolation on 9 August. “Thank G-d, I had it mildly and so did my daughter and my grandson of three,” says Levitan. “I have had both my vaccines and so has my daughter.”

Communal experts who spoke to the SA Jewish Report urged the Western Cape Jewish community to observe strict COVID-19 protocols and get vaccinated.

“It’s the youngsters that are paying

the price this time around,” said Dr Solly Lison, a Cape Town-based family physician. “Many of the older individuals have had the vaccine and we have a lot of people that are anti-vaxxers – they don’t believe in science, and they will pay the penalty. None of us, whether they are in the Western Cape or not, will escape COVID-19 because it’s so very infectious.”

Throughout the province, schools have been shut due to contamination scares, businesses have closed down permanently, places of worship are remaining closed, and hospitals are running out of space.

Not only did the Community Service Organisation Cape Town Wellness Programme report 70 new cases for the week on 10 August 2021, but the Western Cape recorded the most COVID-19 cases in South Africa between 4 and 10 August.

There could be several reasons why an average of 22 412 Capetonians tested positive every day during that period. Lison cites “COVID-19 fatigue”, resistance towards being tested for the virus, and headaches or running noses being disregarded due to Cape Town entering the allergy season.

On the other hand, Professor Jeffrey Dorfman, associate professor in medical virology at Stellenbosch University, said the waves may have been triggered by events, with raves and parties in November and December contributing towards the second wave and Easter contributing towards the third wave.

“However, working out their precise contribution to the wave with any certainty is hard,” Dorfman said. “Both waves also matched the appearance in South Africa of new variants.”

“The Delta variant that we have now is a thousand times more able to transmit virus than the original COVID-19,” Lison said. “People who know they have COVID-19 in the family say, ‘That doesn’t matter, my son’s well, he can go to school’. He goes, and contaminates everyone else, or one of the partners disregards the instruction to stay home and goes back to work even though they have been in contact with a person who had COVID-19. People don’t adhere to the instructions of their doctors even though every

doctor in this town is actually up to date with COVID-19.”

The City of Cape Town has been testing the sewage outfalls regularly in different parts of the city and can tell where heavy concentration of virus particles is located. For a long time, it was Sea Point and Green Point before spreading throughout the city.

Dr Orit Laskov, a GP in Sea Point, is dealing with many cases of COVID-19 and many of her older patients have been vaccinated, or partially vaccinated, which improved their outcomes. Over the past few weeks, several of Laskov’s unvaccinated elderly and frail patients elected to avoid admission to hospital before succumbing to what she describes as “sad and lonely deaths”.

By contrast, one of Laskov’s fully vaccinated older patients recently contracted COVID-19 and was successfully managed at home with a relatively mild and uncomplicated course, especially given their advanced age. A fully vaccinated family member, who lives with and actively looked after that patient, didn’t contract the virus. “I put this down to them both having been vaccinated,” Laskov said. “It’s clear that vaccination isn’t preventing COVID-19 completely but is definitely reducing severe illness, hospitalisation, and death.”

Dorfman said four real-world studies show that many of the currently used vaccines prevent COVID-19 hospitalisation more efficiently than they prevent infection.

“Just within my own family circle and close relatives, I’m aware of three deaths within the past week,” he said. “It’s here, and any worry about the safety of the vaccine [there should be little – it’s more dangerous to drive your car than to be immunised] should be replaced by worry about dying or becoming severely ill from COVID-19.”

Not only did the Community Service Organisation Cape Town Wellness Programme report 70 new cases for the week on 10 August 2021, but the Western Cape recorded the most COVID-19 cases in South Africa between 4 and 10 August.

To tackle the increase in COVID-19 cases in the Western Cape, the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is continually engaging with religious and institutional leaders. It’s also engaging with the community directly via social media, and has implored the community to continue to stay home, cancel all social events and travel plans, and keep Shabbos tables exclusively for immediate family.

Tzvi Brivik, the chairperson of the Cape SAJBD, said, “Over the past 20 months, the Board has met representatives of the principal organisations in our community including education, outreach, and welfare. At these meetings, updated information is exchanged about COVID-19 infections, new regulations issued under the Disaster Management Act, and the level of infection in our community. Proposed steps which



The CSO alert sent out on Friday 6 August 2021

we as communal leaders can take to safeguard our community are also debated. We have an unprecedented level of unanimity within our communal structures, of which we are proud. This synchronisation has meant that we could – as far as possible – keep the infection numbers low. In spite of this incredible teamwork, we are still experiencing unprecedented levels of infection during this third wave.”

Some vaccination sites are struggling to attract people. “As the vaccine supply in South Africa is stabilising, not enough people are coming to get vaccinated,” says Dorfman. “The minimum age for access may be dropped sooner than planned. We cannot yet see the effect of vaccines because only 21% of the adult population has received at least one dose of a vaccine, and there is a delay from the time of vaccination until it is protective. There is a further delay between when people become unwell and when they die, so it will take even longer before we see the death rate drop.”

All the residents at Highlands House have been fully vaccinated. The Cape Town-based Jewish Old Age Home is allowing controlled visits by appointment, as permitted by COVID-19 regulations. “Our people are allowed to come out,” says the home’s communications administrator, Mathilde Myburgh. “We aren’t enforcing isolation after they come back from going out in the world, which is something we have done historically. Highlands House’s outreach work, partnering with the health department, is helping other care homes to administer vaccinations.”

Lison said COVID-19 would be with us for two generations at least, and would be dealt with only when there is greater immunisation and levels of vaccination.

“Don’t take the chance to get COVID-19,” he says. “The after effects are really a problem. In spite of the fact that you have got through your 14 days and are now feeling well, we have people that are dying from day 14 to day 30. Sudden deaths, strokes, and cardiac arrhythmias without warning and later on, we find a lot of COVID-19 survivors developing diabetes, so it’s a disease you don’t want to meet.”

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Green light for Israel travel as SA goes from red to orange

TALI FEINBERG

A week ago, South African *olim* and their families told the *SA Jewish Report* about their despair in dealing with Israel’s extreme COVID-19 travel restrictions. But a lot can change in a week, and late on Sunday, 8 August, Israel suddenly dropped South Africa from its “red list” of countries. Updated travel guidelines published by the health ministry now put South Africa on the “orange” list of countries from 16 August.

“The drop in the status for South Africa from red to orange is dramatic,” says former MK (Minister of the Knesset) Dov Lipman. “Until this point, for a really long time, officially the rule was that travel from South Africa to Israel was banned, and travel from Israel to South Africa was banned.

“Now, with the change to orange, any Israeli who wants to get on a plane and go to South Africa can do so. No approvals necessary, no process, just go. When they come back to Israel, they’ll have to quarantine for seven days. But this has freed people to visit their families, and there’s tremendous happiness about that,” says Lipman.

If there’s one person who has been there for *olim* and their families during these long months of travel restrictions, it’s him. His organisation, Yad L’Olim, is “an address that English-speaking *olim* can turn to, to help them with anything they need once they make aliyah.” Lipman realised this was needed during his time in the Knesset. But the trickle of queries he used to receive turned into a flood when travel restrictions came into effect.



Looking back on the travel-related difficulties facing *olim* and their families over the past 18 months, Lipman says, “The hardest part for me has been hearing the pain and anguish amongst *olim* about separation from their families and the inability to have happy times with each other, especially when you start talking about red countries like South Africa. It’s been emotionally hard. I can hear the collective sigh and happiness that the status has been changed.”

Being on the orange list still has its complications. It means that travellers to Israel from South Africa must apply for an entry permit at least 30 days before their trip. They need to quarantine for 14 days on arrival (with the ability to reduce it to seven days by having a negative test on day one and day seven).

“To come from South Africa to Israel, one has to go through an approval process,” says Lipman. “Officially, you’re allowed to do so only if you’re coming to visit a first-degree relative. It’s critical that people follow the documentation required exactly. They won’t even answer people if you don’t have the right documentation. That’s a big part of what Yad L’Olim is doing today – reviewing people’s documents to help make sure that they’re ready. One of the pitfalls we’ve seen is people who apply just a few days before a flight. It’s very difficult to get them on in that



situation. We try only in extreme situations.” He says travel to Israel from South Africa is “for people who are vaccinated or have recovered from corona[virus], with medical documentation of that. No other people are allowed to come, except for children under the age of one, who can travel with their parents if their parents get approval.” Even with these regulations in place, being downgraded to orange is still good news for many *olim* and their families. When *oleh* Josh Sher

described the frustration that he and others were feeling to the *SA Jewish Report* last week, he never imagined that things could shift so soon. “I hope in some small way the frustration of a lot of people – which I just articulated into words – helped to drive change,” he says. “I am, of course, beaming with excitement and today I have an extra bounce in my step

knowing that I’ll be seeing my parents soon.” Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* last week, local virology expert Professor Barry Schoub said the travel restrictions on South Africa were “unnecessary” and “the prolonging of the restrictive blacklist of travel to and from South Africa by Israeli authorities is difficult to understand from a public-health point of view”. This was because “the highly contagious Delta variant has changed the picture significantly. The Beta variant has almost disappeared from South Africa, and has now been replaced by Delta, similarly dominant in Israel.

“There’s no evidence that the circulation of the virus is more extensive in South Africa,” Schoub said. “It therefore makes little epidemiological sense to fear importation of this variant virus into Israel and to continue this unnecessary blacklisting of travel from South Africa.”

He chose not to comment further after the regulations were changed, except to say that he had met Israeli authorities in the past week.

Looking back on the travel-related difficulties facing *olim* and their families over the past 18 months, Lipman says, “The first challenge has been just having the information to know what the rules are. I’ve used my Facebook platform to get the word out about exactly what the rules are. The next challenge has

been the number of requests that Israel has received, trying to keep up with them, and making sure that people who deserve approval get it.” He has worked with his many connections to try and

ensure that cases like weddings receive approval. “There have also been last-minute issues that have come up with funerals,” he says. “Certainly, when the Meron tragedy happened, that was a critical time in making sure that families were able to get here quickly. Keeping up with the amount of requests that we [Yad L’Olim] get has been a challenge, and that’s why we’re expanding our staff.” The organisation is “funded by private donors, and by the day, it feels like we need to expand. We are certainly seeking people to help us succeed.” They have witnessed people stuck in airports, and they have had to reach out to members of parliament in other countries to get involved in certain cases. “A lot of people have suffered tremendously throughout the year, and we’ve tried to do our part to alleviate that suffering and make things easier for people,” says Lipman. As for why this change has happened now, “the [Israeli] health ministry is monitoring other countries on a daily basis”, he says. “It has decided that since people are going to be coming, they’ll be doing a full quarantine, and they’re vaccinated, so they’ve loosened things up. And I guess there must be something about what’s happening on the ground in South Africa which took it out of the category of red countries. I don’t have those facts and figures, but they’re monitoring them on a regular basis.”

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As Delta wreaks havoc, vaccination still our best hope

OPINION PROFESSOR LUCILLE BLUMBERG AND DR MELINDA SUCHARD



The third COVID-19 wave is ongoing, driven by the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In spite of decreasing case numbers in Gauteng, the national test positivity rate is still 21% and not all centres are past the peak of their third wave.

Of all diagnosed COVID-19 cases in the country by the end of July 2021, 3.1% had died (National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) weekly epidemiology, 31 July 2021). Of those cases who were hospitalised, the proportion that died was 23% (Jassat et al, *Lancet HIV* 2021).

Persons above 60 years of age, those with co-morbidities such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cancers, and other chronic illnesses have been especially affected with severe illness.

Let's not forget those who died at home from COVID-19 disease and other medical problems due to their inability to access medical care during the height of the COVID-19 waves when hospitals were overwhelmed.

Both the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) and Pfizer vaccine used in the South African rollout are highly effective, especially against severe COVID-19, including variants of concern such as the currently circulating Delta variant.

Results of the Sisonke trial, which targeted almost 500 000 health workers with a single dose of the J&J vaccine, were released last week and are very reassuring, showing 91% to 96% protection against COVID-19-related death, and 65% to 66% protection against hospitalisation.

The vaccine cannot protect against all infections, but importantly prevents progression to severe illness. There are, however, vaccinated persons who do experience these "breakthrough infections".

Breakthrough infections are less likely to progress to severe illness and may be less likely to transmit virus to others. We're still learning about the transmission dynamics and duration of vaccine-induced or infection-induced immunity.

Some individuals are concerned about what happens if they are vaccinated during asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection. There's no documented harm in being vaccinated during asymptomatic infection.

We recognise that at the time of vaccination, it's possible to be asymptomatically infected and incubating the virus. This is a particular issue when rolling out a vaccine programme during COVID-19 waves.

It's also common to let your guard down after vaccination, to stop practising social distancing, masking, and frequent handwashing, and therefore increase your chance of exposure to the virus. None of the vaccines contain replicating live virus, and COVID-19 infection cannot be caused by vaccine administration.

Immunity takes time to build up. Most vaccines will provide protection from severe illness from two to three weeks post vaccination. Protection after only one dose of the Pfizer vaccine is reasonably good, but the second jab is required to ensure maximal protection. It is essential to continue to take all precautions even after being fully vaccinated (mask when indoors with people and keep windows and doors open).

Antibody levels decrease over time, but protection against severe disease or death lasts longer than high antibody levels, probably due to other features of the immune system such as protective T cells which are more difficult to measure. Antibodies don't perfectly represent protection and aren't helpful in monitoring the response of an individual to a vaccine.

Some countries may choose to use booster doses. A country's decision should be based on factors such as global vaccine availability and vaccination coverage of the most at-risk population to determine whether to offer boosters to those already fully vaccinated.

In South Africa, boosters aren't currently recommended, as the country is still rolling out vaccines to those that require their first dose. Studies are taking place to assess various "mix and match" vaccine combinations, and the results seem promising that many different schedules will eventually become available.

For individuals who experience COVID-19 infection, the recommended interval before receiving a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine is at least 30 days to allow the body time to recover and so that the vaccine dose is a "boost" rather than a "first exposure".

If you catch COVID-19 between the times of the two Pfizer doses, you should delay your second dose until at least 30 days from when you recover.

These timespans are guidelines and not cast in stone. Generally with vaccines, a longer interval is better at boosting immune responses than a shorter interval. Some individuals are concerned about what happens if they are vaccinated during asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 infection. There's no documented harm in being vaccinated during asymptomatic infection.

There are very few contraindications to SARS-CoV-2 vaccination. Individuals with a history of life-threatening anaphylaxis to any medication or vaccine (in which symptoms are sudden closing of the throat, swelling of lips or tongue, and difficulty breathing) or the rare neurological condition Guillain-Barre syndrome should discuss the issue with their doctor as a precaution.

SARS-CoV-2 vaccination can be administered to individuals on anticoagulants and with a history of blood clots such as previous strokes or heart attacks. Patients with malignancies should be vaccinated as they are at higher risk of complications from COVID-19 infection.

Patients on immune suppressants or chemotherapy can be vaccinated. People living with HIV can be vaccinated. In these groups, the vaccine may not work as well as in healthy individuals, but some protection will likely occur.

Patients with most autoimmune conditions and allergies can generally be vaccinated, although they should do so in consultation with their doctors.

For pregnant women who have completed the first trimester, an increasing number of experts are recommending vaccination against SARS-CoV-2. Circulating SARS-CoV-2 virus poses a risk to pregnant women particularly if acquired close to the time of delivery.

Complications can include preterm birth, more severe respiratory disease than in non-pregnant women, and other complications. The SARS-CoV-2 vaccines are non-replicating and don't cross into the foetus. Animal studies of SARS-CoV-2 vaccination in pregnancy have shown no safety concerns.

In an analysis published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* of more than 800 women who received the Pfizer SARS-CoV-2 vaccine during pregnancy, there was no difference in pregnancy complications in vaccinated compared with unvaccinated women. There was also no difference in rates of complication in their infants.

It's therefore the mother's choice as to whether she wishes to get the vaccine during pregnancy. Ideally vaccination should be postponed until after the first trimester (14 weeks), as with most medications or vaccines administered during pregnancy. Examples of other vaccines routinely given during pregnancy include tetanus and influenza vaccines. For breastfeeding mothers, SARS-CoV-2 vaccination is considered safe, as with most other vaccines.

Mild adverse reactions following SARS-CoV-2 vaccination are common and include fever, chills, fatigue, or a mild headache. These usually resolve within a day or two.

Paracetamol can be taken to alleviate the symptoms, but shouldn't be taken before vaccination just "in case" of symptoms. If you are concerned about any symptom that seems severe or unusual, first seek medical attention.

Vaccines are more closely studied for safety than any other medication. Information on reporting adverse events is available from the NICD website at www.nicd.ac.za.

While we are in the thick of the pandemic, we should remember that respiratory symptoms or systemic symptoms that last several days or worsen could be indicative of COVID-19 infection, unrelated to vaccination, and warrant COVID-19 testing in the usual way.

By August 2021, the World Health Organization had approved a number of vaccines. There are about 19 different SARS-CoV-2 vaccines being used around the world, and more are in human or preclinical trials.

Vaccine research is continuing at speed to deliver

Continued on page 13>>

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Strange but familiar – first days as a SA oleh

Two weeks ago, one of the biggest groups of olim left South Africa to live in Israel. We caught up with a few of them.

Hymie Ehrlich

Leaving South Africa and coming to Israel on aliyah was the next step in my life. I have no regrets. I spent many happy years living and working in South Africa as a doctor until the age of 90. As my daughter and son-in-law prepared for their aliyah, they encouraged me to join them and the rest of my family, relatives, and friends in Israel.

The seven days of *bidud* (isolation) were no hardship for me, as being over 70, I was able to go directly to my children in Modi'in, and quickly fell into the routine of helping with daily chores. I received a warm welcome from many friends as well.

The fact that our baggage was delayed didn't bother me, as I had sufficient clothes in Modi'in from previous visits here.

When the first of my children left South Africa on aliyah in 1987, my wife and I

promised to visit them every year, and I've been here about 40 times since then.

As soon as the quarantine period was over, the family arranged a few days away together at a moshav near Tiberius, where I swam in the Kinneret and spent three days with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

At this early stage of aliyah, I approach every day with the excitement of a new day in a new country, and reconnecting with so many friends and relatives.

New *olim* have unique fears and anxieties, but I know that my children are there to ease the transition for me, and I'm very comfortable with the care and concern they've shown me.

Although I'm living with my son and daughter-in-law in Modi'in, I look forward to spending time also in Kfar Adumim with my daughter and son-in-law, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, and extended family.



Samuel Hyde

For many, the onset of COVID-19 enabled a reset of sorts. As people spent more time at home surrounded by family or discovered newfound independence, there began to be a recalibration and introspection about what's important to them.

For me, the idea of making a life in Israel became more realistic than I may have initially thought. I suppose you could say my life took a radical shift in every way, from leaving the music industry for journalism, to making aliyah and claiming my indigenous rights under the Law of Return.

My aliyah process begun with a simple email to the South African Zionist Federation just less than a year ago, but truly, it began two years prior to that on a tour to Poland, where I set out to discover my roots and engage with the Holocaust at an academic level.

With the mandatory free time the initial 21-day lockdown brought us, I felt myself reflecting on my experience in Poland, searching for the sequel to the Jewish story. I watched endless hours of speeches and debates, read dozens of articles and books, listened to Jewish and Israel rights activists, and became hooked on engaging at a deeper level with Jewish liberation through Zionism.

I suppose the strangest part of the aliyah process, besides the obvious feeling of leaving a country you've grown up in and family behind, was the bonds you make with those embarking on the same journey as you.

You form an instant connection with these people, most of whom you've never met before. You share arguably the most important experience of your life



with strangers. You get to know them instantly, as if you've been friends for years, and when quarantine is over, you disperse to opposite ends of the country. For a week, I stood on my balcony watching passers by – the mother pushing her child in a pram at midnight, the suited businessman riding a bicycle to

the next door high-rise finance centre, and the ultimate joy and freedom as children, teenagers, and the elderly walked the promenade lit by the blazing middle eastern sun and engulfed in euphoric freedom.

As I took my first steps onto the streets of Tel Aviv, I felt as if the moment was transformed into an expertly edited film. With every step, I was struck by a flashback of walking the gravelled soil of Auschwitz-Birkenau. I was in two places at once – tragedy and liberation.

Now, a political journalist, proud Zionist, and Jewish activist, all the concepts, articles, talks, and ideas I held so close to my heart had become reality. I had become part of those who are the realisation of our ancestors' dreams. Already, being in Israel is more than just existing here – it's a home for the homeless; freedom for those previously shackled; Jewish liberation; it's historic; but most importantly, we are all here knowingly or sub-consciously to better the Jewish destiny for future generations. If not now, then when?

(Samuel Hyde is a political journalist and Jewish and Israel rights activist based in Tel Aviv, Israel. He studied antisemitism and the Holocaust at academic level, and aims to redefine the way in which the non-Jewish world interacts with Zionism.)

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Daniel and Lolly Onay

Our aliyah is something we planned and thought through for the past two years. As much as we planned, we eventually realised that aliyah is something that requires you to let go of your emotions, uncertainties, and the unknown. It requires a lot of faith, positivity, determination, and focus.

Though we started the process two years ago, our plans were halted by COVID-19. We opened our aliyah file with the Jewish Global Centre, and after many attempts, finally submitted all our documentation. Once we were approved, the Jewish Agency were a pleasure to deal with. They swiftly got our aliyah approved, and before we knew it, we were given our date.

The past few months were a roller coaster of emotions, between selling our house, packing up our lives, and saying goodbye to our families and friends. Other than uprooting our lives and leaving everything familiar, saying goodbye to family was the hardest. With this in mind, we kept focusing on the decision that we believed to be correct for our family's future.

We boarded a flight to Ethiopia that we were told was the largest aliyah flight since 1994. Seeing such a huge number of South Africans making aliyah was inspirational, and it was a *brocha* to be a part of this historic flight. Our children, many of whom had not been on an aeroplane before, embraced it, and faced the flight with courage and commitment.

Upon arrival in Israel, we were all ushered into a hall for COVID-19 testing and to receive our aliyah documentation and some aliyah benefits. It took hours to be processed, but we were all still full of adrenaline and you could feel the excitement in the air.

Much to our dismay, the majority of the *olim's* luggage didn't arrive at

the airport, and we had to document it with the airline. Although there were difficulties, we were amazed at the effort that the Jewish Agency and Telfed put in and how they managed to arrange for all the luggage to be delivered to us in our *bidud* (quarantine) hotel.

We were put up in the beautiful Dan Panorama Tel Aviv Hotel for isolation over the next eight days. Of course, this could change if any of the two COVID-19 tests came back positive, but fortunately, that didn't happen. The food was plentiful, and somehow the days flew by. We took it as an opportunity to catch our breath after a chaotic couple of months, and before we knew it, we were on the way to our new home.

Arriving at our new home in Even Shmuel, a small religious *yishuv* in the south, felt like a dream come true. Being reunited with family who had made aliyah more than four years ago was beyond special – in fact it felt strangely like we were home!

We know it will take time to settle in properly, learn the language, and integrate. It's a journey we will embrace completely and look for all the good that our beautiful country has to offer.

The Onay family. Lolly, Shai, Ashira in the back, Rephael, Yonatan, Dan front

Media consultant Janine Lazarus has just published a book that was inspired by her experience as a Sunday Times journalist covering a serial killer who operated in Norwood, the suburb in which she lived. The SA Jewish Report speaks to her.

The thread throughout the book is my 27-year link with Norwood serial killer Kobus Geldenhuys. But it's much more than that. It deals with a volatile South Africa in transition, the hot metal newsrooms of yore, and the inevitable racism in news reportage. A central theme is also my dance with the dark, and some of the sinister and sensational stories I covered during the heydays of the early 1990s.

It was without doubt this story that made my name as a crime reporter. To get this close to a serial killer was the stuff of Hollywood blockbusters. Are people born to become killers, or does their environment mould them into the monsters they become? But what I grapple with most of all is that I believe we're all capable of going over the edge. Ordinary people can commit extraordinary acts of violence.

Everyone has a book within them. I've wanted to try my hand at writing a book for a long time. Without giving the game away, an approach by a television production company on the back of the killer's parole application gave me pause for thought. My head is still spinning around the fact that a television series is in preproduction on my first book, or even that a radio station wants to do a serial podcast on it. It feels surreal.

You were a crime reporter, so this was one of many crime stories you told. Why does it still haunt you?



looked into his eyes just after he was sentenced to death. I crossed the line. I had broken a quintessential credo of journalism to stay out of the story. But in those days, the story was everything. Each investigation devoured me and spat me out, and I just rolled onto the next one. Landing headlines is what defined me.

Vanilla plain and awkwardly ordinary. But then, serial killers are never the vengeful behemoths we conjure up in our nightmares. He seemed tired. In fact, when the police finally arrested him, he said as much. But what shook me to the core was that I unearthed a tarnished shard of humanity in his twisted soul. No-one in my newsroom could ever understand how this could be possible. After all, the rapist/killer had cut a swathe of terror through my neighbourhood and destroyed families.

That would be giving the game away. It's central to my book. What I can say is that as much as I've borne witness to man's inhumanity to man, I still believe intrinsically that there's good even in the worst of people. I'm a deep empath, which for a crime reporter is an obvious flaw.

It was where I lived and loved. Restaurant owners knew my name and what my favourite meal was. Coffee shops knew how I liked my fix, and many first dates were shared over a glass or

FACE TO FACE WITH A BEAST

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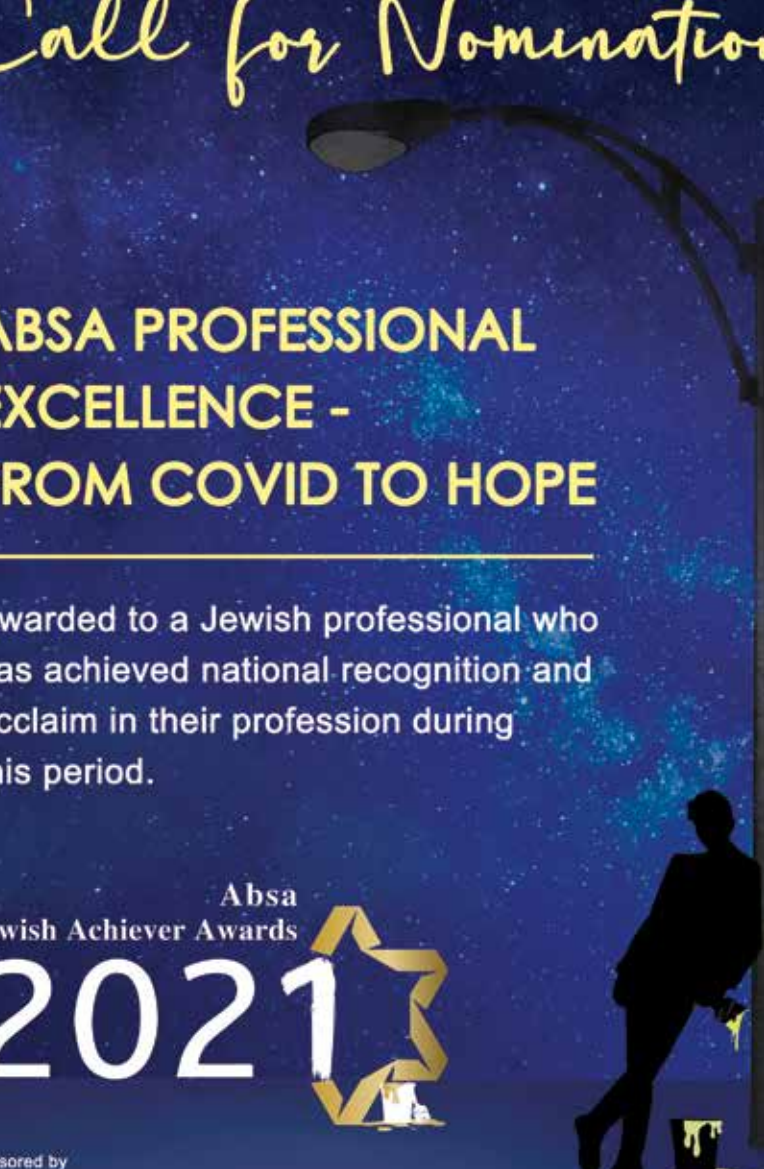
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Debating life’s meaning at a time of existential crisis

OPINION

MARK OPPENHEIMER

If you’ve been wondering about the meaning of life, you’re not alone. Mark Oppenheimer and co.’s new book, *Conversations about the Meaning of Life*, has some answers from world-renowned experts. Asking “What do Mother Teresa, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and the exploration of Mars teach us about the meaning of life?” they discover the answer isn’t 42. The SA Jewish Report asked him more questions.



What inspired you to bring out this book?

Now is a pivotal moment to engage with life’s biggest question: what’s the meaning of life? So, we approached Professors David Benatar and Thaddeus Metz, world experts in the field. Benatar is professor of philosophy at the University of Cape Town. His books include *Better Never to Have Been* and *The Human Predicament*. Metz is professor of philosophy at the University of Pretoria. He has often been credited for having helped develop life’s meaning as a distinct field in Anglo-American philosophy over the past 20 years. They have very different views on what makes life meaningful.

Benatar is sceptical. He thinks that if you zoom out and consider each of us as a speck on a pale blue dot in a cold universe, our lives have truly little meaning. Metz takes quite a different view, which is that we can each pursue truth, beauty, and goodness in our lives and find meaning in these.

Why is this book necessary right now?

Now more than any time in the past few decades, humans have had to isolate. With isolation comes reflection about the nature of our existence, and questions about whether this new isolated existence is meaningful at all. Asking what we need to lead meaningful lives is particularly important at a time when we are struggling to find any meaning at all.

This book is a group effort. Explain how it came about and why these particular people are involved.



Thaddeus Metz

We (Jason Werbeloff and Mark Oppenheimer), the interviewers in this book, have long-standing friendships with Metz and Benatar, the experts in this field. Jason studied under Metz and Mark under Benatar. We felt that Metz and Benatar were obvious choices for the book because of our personal connections to them, but also because they are so widely published and recognised for their work on meaning.

What did you hope to achieve?

We wanted to write an accessible guide to life’s most important question. And we think that the authors are perhaps the most knowledgeable on earth about this topic.

Who do you wish to appeal to?

Readers of the *SA Jewish Report* – all four of the authors are Jewish – and Jews have a long history of thinking about life’s deepest questions. More broadly, the book is designed for anyone who has a yearning to know more about what life is about.

At this moment in South Africa, what are the challenges to leading a meaningful life?

Because South Africa was late with its COVID-19 vaccines, we’ve had to suffer a long series of waves that have shut down our lives.

On the one hand, we try to find personal meaning at a time when we’re having to choose between isolation and risking our health. On the other, we also live in a country with enormous political and socioeconomic volatility. So, we’re trying to find meaning in this embroiled landscape.

What do you hope your readers will take home from this book?

The underlying idea of the book is to inspire people to reflect on their lives and take action to lead a meaningful existence. Part of that exercise is to think about the kind of person that you can be and the kinds of activities you can engage in to find meaning: the search for truth, beauty, and goodness. We explore these in some detail so that people can walk away ultimately leading better, richer, more

meaningful lives.

The style of the book (interview format) is unusual. Why did you choose it?

Dialogue is helpful because it doesn’t present just one position. Each of the individuals involved in this discussion has a different position on the meaning of life. So it seems more likely that the reader will resonate with at least one of us. The four authors had a chance to argue and respond to one another, and you can really get into the nuts and bolts of each person’s position and stand behind at least one of the speakers. Who knows, perhaps after reading this book, you’ll change your mind.

• *Conversations about the Meaning of Life* is available on Amazon: <http://smarturl.it/MeaningOfLife>

As Delta wreaks havoc, vaccination still our best hope

>>>Continued from page 7

new modes of administration such as via the oral route, as well as second-generation vaccines. The choice between vaccine preparations is based on availability, cost, storage requirements, the dose regimen, and target population.

Differences in the magnitudes of effect reported from phase 3 clinical trials might be related to factors other than effectiveness, including differences in trial populations and locations, the timing of the trials during the pandemic, and study design. The key aim of vaccination is to reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalisation, and death due to COVID 19.

Hopefully, by September, the number of persons vaccinated against COVID-19 will have increased

significantly, and the number of new cases will decrease. We need to continue to apply all COVID-19 prevention measures at home and in the community.

Without these factors, the Rosh Hashanah period may herald an increase in cases and hospital admissions and deaths. Vaccines are our most promising intervention for curbing the pandemic. They save lives, livelihoods, and healthcare systems, even as we get hit by further waves and inevitable new variants.

• *Professor Lucille Blumberg is a clinical microbiologist, infectious diseases specialist, and deputy director at the NICD.*
• *Dr Melinda Suchard is the head of the Centre for Vaccines and Immunology at the NICD.*

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TALI FEINBERG

Though it's an exciting new career option, Blecher warns that training for it is critical. "There's nothing worse than an untrained intimacy co-ordinator – the damage they can do is almost worse than not having one. Just like someone trying to co-ordinate stunts without training, it can hurt people. We need more trained intimacy co-ordinators, especially in this country." She encourages anyone interested in pursuing this career path to contact Safe Sets.

Why letting off steam about SA is bad for your kids

NICOLA MILTZ

Have you ever considered the effects of your words on little ears?

Children, big and small, have been severely impacted by a continuous daily diet of doom and gloom and negative news. They are a generation born with the spectre of unprecedented crime levels and omnipresent poverty-stricken images on street corners and television sets. They are being raised during an economic recession amidst unacceptable corruption, inept leaders, and political upheaval, despicable looting, and despair.

This doesn't include the main trauma of their lives right now – a devastating pandemic which has upended all of our worlds. They are seeing the people they love literally dying or making aliyah; and some parents are openly insisting that somewhere over the rainbow, the grass will be greener.

It's been tough. Do we make it rougher for them to navigate this never-ending patch of fear and FOMO (fear of missing out) by the very words we utter in front of them?

Experts in the field of child psychology say we do. All of these environmental factors have, no doubt, led to an increase in anxiety among our young people, and what we say in front of them adds fuel to the fire.

Johannesburg child psychotherapist, Sheryl Cohen, has noticed what she terms "an interesting shift" in how children relate to the world around them since the start of the pandemic.

"I have noticed that children feel more vulnerable, helpless, afraid, and frustrated than ever before," she said.

Cohen, who has been practicing for more than two decades, said it would be a mistake to assume that only children are affected in this way, because as adults, we have had the same experience.

"However, as adults, we have more emotional resources to deal with distress. We have more

information at our fingertips; we have more comprehension of the facts and less magical thinking about the consequences," she said. "Children, therefore, depend on us as adults to feel safe and contained."

Experts agree that the way in which children deal with environmental stressors is strongly dependent on the way their parents or significant others deal with it.

"Children absorb every little thing their parents are saying and not saying," said social worker Stephanie Urdang, who works with children.

"The walls have ears, and while adults are speaking to their spouses, friends, and families, the children are listening. They also witness body language and feel their parents' anguish, which has an impact on them," she said.

"When parents grieve for a lost loved one, children feel the pain, not only because they, too, lost a loved one, but because they are sensitive to the emotions felt and expressed by their parents at home," said Cohen.

"How do we as parents speak to our children about the world around us? How do we speak to our children about South Africa? About the recent looting, crime, instability? Aliyah in the air? Are we giving our children a feeling of safety and security in the world at large? If we aren't giving our children a feeling of safety and positivity towards South Africa, how are our children to understand why we live here?" Cohen asks.

These are some of the questions she has grappled with as a therapist working in private practice in our community.

She said children needed to feel safe in the world.

"While there are no guarantees, we need to do what we can to assist them. While we might have electric fences and sophisticated alarms, what do we talk about at the dining room table? Do we undo

all the security efforts we put into our sophisticated systems in three seconds by sharing our anger and frustration at the government, the police, and the president?" she asked.

We know not to share the recent robbery up the road with our children, but what's less obvious is the "style and feeling" we have towards South Africa and the world around us.

"Children pick up on those thoughts and feelings, and it doesn't serve them well. While it gives us the opportunity to let off some steam, it leaves our children feeling unsafe and unprotected in the world at large at a time in their lives where they need the opposite.

"Feeling frustrated, anxious, upset, and disappointed about life in South Africa has become the norm. But then, in reality, we continue to live here. The discrepancy is a little hard to digest for children. Children don't do well with hypocrisy. They don't like a mixed message."

While she's aware it's a complex issue, she said it was important to provide a more balanced perspective.

"This would give them the opportunity to integrate

the positive and negative parts of the outside world and live with less stress and a greater sense of stability."

Urdang agrees that balance is crucial.

"Yes, times are challenging and there are problems, but we need to balance our views. Yes, we were slow to rollout the vaccine, but things are progressing rapidly and we have world-class scientists and doctors that we can be proud of. Yes, the riots and looting were terrible, but we will rise out of the ashes and just look at the astonishing community initiatives that it gave rise to.

As parents, we need to emphasise all the positives. While we should in no way diminish anxiety and pain, we need to be mindful and know that we have a lot to be grateful for."

When it comes to COVID-19, experts say parents should offer children comfort and honesty.

Temper scary information and headlines about death with facts and reliable-up-to-date information. Speak in a calm voice, and try to sound reassuring not panicked.

It's important to give children the space to share their fears, but offer them reassuring information, they say. It's also important to help children feel in control by doing things like wearing a mask and washing hands often.

Young kids and teenagers worry more about family and friends than themselves. For this reason, parents should encourage their children to FaceTime or voice call their grandparents often.

It's also important to let them know that it's normal to feel stressed at times. By recognising and acknowledging these feelings, children get a sense that this too shall pass and life will get back to a new normal. This ultimately helps children build resilience and inner strength.



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BEN SALES – JTA

- *This year's Generation Sinai on Tuesday 17 August at 18:00 will give parents and children the opportunity to learn together about G-d. You can register at chief Rabbi.co.za/generationsinai*

Arch of Elul at KDPP Linksfield

Children at King David Pre-Primary Linksfield had an uplifting start to the week on Tuesday, with balloon arches welcoming them into school in celebration of Rosh Chodesh Elul. The excitement and curiosity generated a lot of “why” questions in class and a discussion about Elul. Afterwards, the children sat on the tennis court to hear the blowing of the shofar by Josh Sevitz, King David’s head of SOUL and Jewish Life.



David Kay, a pupil in Grade R at King David Pre-Primary Linksfield, enjoys the balloon arch in celebration of Rosh Chodesh Elul

KDVP students get to heart of healthy relationships



Mari De Sousa, Bianca Shimkin, Lee Rumbak, KDVP school counsellor Gita Lipschitz, and Bev Lourens participate in a healthy relationship workshop

Grade 9 students at King David High School Victory Park recently took part in a healthy relationship workshop to guide them in their journey through adolescence. Facilitated by Solid Ground and organised by psychologist Claudia Abelheim, activity and discussion helped students to understand the difference between attraction (what you see), infatuation (what you feel), and love (what you know), as well as consent and assertiveness.

KDL kids a formidable team in global maths competition

King David Senior Primary Linksfield Grade 7 students Jessica Solomon and Noah Greenblatt won a bronze medal in the Upper Primary category of the Indonesian International Mathematics Competition (IIMC), held from 27 July to 1 August. The IIMC is one of the most prestigious and largest maths competitions for primary and secondary



Jessica Solomon Noah Greenblatt

school children in the world. The pair, who competed against 600 participants from 30 countries and five continents to solve advanced mathematical problems, also earned merit awards for the individual category. In the initial rounds, they competed against more than 3 000 children from around South Africa for selection. Only 16 children were finally selected to represent South Africa at the competition. Solomon and Greenblatt have brought immense pride to South Africa, King David, and their families.

Abel and willing at 100

Ben Abel, who turns 100 on 11 August, attributes his health to an active, fulfilled, and balanced life. Abel keeps physically fit, regularly attending yoga and pilates classes at the Wellness Centre of Melrose Manor, where he has lived for 15 years. His commitment to regular exercise was built many years ago when he lived in Greenside and took



up running, particularly around Parkview Golf Course. Abel is also often at Melrose’s social and wellness events, and loves its movie and music evenings. Well-known and loved by residents and team members alike, Melrose commends him for his interactiveness, saying that it keeps him as healthy and engaged as he is.

It’s Generation Sinai time again and this year we are talking about Hashem. This is the most important conversation of all!

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies
Communications revolution strengthens SAJBD

Whatever a post-COVID-19 world will look like, the changes the pandemic has imposed on how society operates are likely to become a permanent part of how things are done in the future. This is especially true in terms of communications.

Although there will no doubt be a return to some degree to how people interacted prior to COVID-19 with participants at particular events being physically present, virtual engagements in the form of Zoom meetings, webinars, online conferences, and the like will continue to be part of our *modus operandi*. Not that this is a bad thing. Thanks to the communications revolution, it has become easier, quicker, and more affordable both to organise and participate in all kinds of events, from everyday operational meetings in the workplace to major public happenings like national conferences. As an organisation that operates in the communications field to a great extent, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has been able to adapt very well to this ever-changing environment.

Over the past week, Board representatives have figured prominently in a host of high-profile public engagements. On the local front, Vice-President Zev Krengel spoke on the economic and unifying impacts of the recent turmoil in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in an online briefing titled, “South Africa after the unrest”, hosted by the Hellenic Italian and Portuguese Alliance of SA.

Professor Karen Milner spoke on a panel hosted by Habonim titled, “Building back from the brink – a South African update with Johnny Copelyn, Khaya Sithole, and Rafael Friedman”.

Internationally, President Mary Kluk and Reeva Forman spoke on a webinar on South Africa hosted by the Australian Jewish National Fund, and past president (and Wimbledon veteran) Marlene Bethlehem spoke on “Jewish sports people from 1933 onwards” at a



ABOVE BOARD
Shaun Zagnoev

launch of the German exhibition, “Between Success and Persecution”. Professor Milner was a panellist for Maroubra Synagogue in Sydney’s webinar on the response of South African Jewry to unrest in the country.

This week, National Director Wendy Kahn, along with her counterparts on the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anti-Defamation League, was a guest speaker on a webinar titled “Navigating online hate and antisemitism” organised by the SAJBD – Cape. The Board is also involved in planning meetings for an upcoming webinar with local and international input on the legacy of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban to mark the 20th anniversary of that notorious event.

Israel in Africa

In spite of raucous opposition from a number of African states (including, sadly, our own), Israel was recently accorded observer status on the African Union Commission. In our press statement welcoming the decision, we commended the commission for enhancing the potential for engagement between Israel and Africa in many important spheres. We also expressed disappointment at our government’s negative reaction to the move, commenting that we would have hoped that it would have embraced it as an opportunity for constructive engagement and dialogue, and expressing the hope that it would reconsider its position and make itself part of the positive changes that lie ahead.

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

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

Don’t leave in fight or flight mode

‘I’ll just come out and say it. There should be a pause on all aliyah applications for six months. Like a cooling off period. Because whereas going to live in Israel might be the appropriate and right decision for all the right reasons for many, the decision isn’t a small one. It has major implications. It isn’t without its challenges. And it shouldn’t be made when we are in fight or flight mode.

Even those of us who aren’t psychologists but can read, know this. At times of perceived danger, our primal instincts kick in. When faced with what we think is a threat, our adrenaline surges, and we are unable to think rationally. Our need for survival takes over, and we quickly assess if we should stay to fight, or if we should run for the hills as fast as our Jewish flat feet can carry us (which is probably not that fast).

The fight or flight instinct has kept us alive – or at least running – for generations. It has largely worked, and is the most likely reason that most Jewish South Africans are alive to tell the tale, our grandparents or great grandparents having chosen flight rather than fight.

There is a “but”, however. Not every situation is life-and-death danger. Not every event is pre-war Europe, and not every Facebook post from a concerned expat is without its own perspective. The challenge is to recognise what’s long-term vision versus short-term, knee-jerk reaction.

When faced with real danger, the implementation of a “flight” strategy correctly places survival over every other factor. Other factors like financial concerns, education, social, and family are moved to the “less important” column.

This is perfectly sensible, given that a dead person doesn’t need to earn a living or worry about who to invite for Friday night. What this means is that making a fight or flight decision



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

when one is not in mortal danger can result in a pretty poor decision.

It’s not just a South African phenomenon. The pandemic-related lockdown has made many of us jittery and anxious. Our need to travel, engage, and feel less “trapped” will undoubtedly result in a significant global migration, as people seek something new or different. We aren’t alone in that. Where South Africa is different is that the recent unrest has been particularly unnerving. Coupled with lack of faith in the government, and there’s little surprise that people are nervous.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean “flight”.

As someone who has lived in several countries around the world, I’m by no means suggesting that people don’t make aliyah or move to Australia. What I’m saying is that the decision should be made rationally. Look not only at what awaits, but also what you are giving up on. Look at the magnificence of the South African Jewish community, look at what you are able to do to make the country a better place and how that feeds you. Look at the education and the medical systems that we have in place, and look at fellow South Africans from all the beautiful communities that make up this insane country. Write down what you love about South Africa, and then write down the reasons you want to leave.

The suggestion of a pause of aliyah applications is, of course, not literal. If anyone wants to go and live in Israel, they should be encouraged to do so. But there is a major difference between running away from something and running towards it.

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Tokyo Olympics entertains and stirs debate

STEVEN GRUZD

The modern Olympic Games have been cancelled only three times since their introduction in 1896. The Games of Berlin in 1916, 1940 in Helsinki (originally awarded to Tokyo), and 1944 in London were scrapped due to world wars. Last year, the COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented one-year postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, to 2021.

Many thought the Games couldn't happen under coronavirus conditions. Nevertheless, they went ahead, without spectators other than delegations and officials. Offering a welcome escape from the monotonous days induced by the 18-month coronavirus lockdown, the Games also provoked some critical debate off the field.

South Africa's performance was dismal. The Rainbow Nation bagged two silvers – from surfer Bianca Buitendag and breaststroker Tatjana Schoenmaker in the 100m. Schoenmaker also won South Africa's only gold medal in a world record in the 200m breaststroke. This placed South Africa a lowly 52nd on the medals table. Last time around, in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, South Africa won 10 medals. Tokyo was the third worst showing for South Africa since readmission to the Olympic Games in 1992 in Barcelona. This was in spite of 179 athletes competing in 19 different sports. They were totally outclassed in team sports like hockey, soccer, and water polo.

By contrast, Israel, with four medals, had its best

Olympics ever, finishing in 39th position. It sent 90 athletes to the Games – more than double the number competing in Rio. Israel picked up two bronzes – in the mixed Judo team event, and for Avishag Semberg in Taekwondo. Artem Dolgopyat won gold in the men's floor for artistic gymnastics. The mainstream media chose to focus on the fact that Dolgopyat – whose father is Jewish but whose mother isn't – wouldn't be allowed to marry in Israel under current legislation.

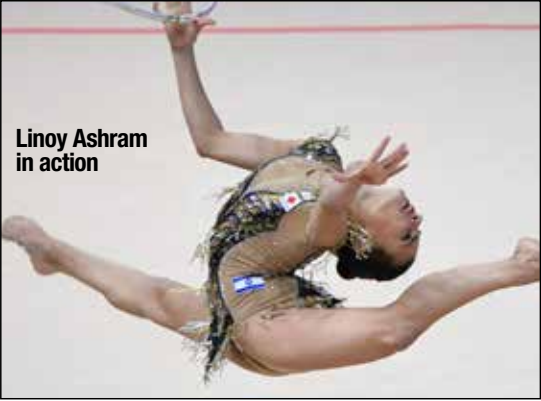
There was high drama around Israel's second gold. Rhythmic gymnast Linoy Ashram had built up a

small lead in the all-around competition going in the last round with the ribbon. Clad in blue and white and sporting a large Magen David on her leotard, she performed her routine to a jazzed-up version of *Hava Nagila*. Halfway through, though, she lost control of the ribbon and it fell to the floor. She managed to keep her lead, however, at 107.800 points. Her biggest rival, Russian world

champion Dina Averina, needed to score 24.150 points on the ribbon to win. She fell agonisingly short with a 24, handing Israel its first gold in this sport. The Russians have since cried foul and demanded an investigation.

Politics is never far from sport. Earlier in the Games, there was controversy about Israeli participation. Algerian Fethi Nourine withdrew from the Judo competition because he might have had to face Israeli judoka Tohar Butbul, citing political support for the Palestinians as his reason. Nourine and his coach were suspended. A second judoka, Mohamed Abdalrasool from Sudan, similarly dropped out later, without an explanation.

The *Jerusalem Post's* Seth Frantzman summed it up well. "The treatment of Israeli athletes is unique. No other



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country in the world has athletes who are so often treated like this due to political or diplomatic disputes between countries. The treatment of Israel is entirely about hatred of Jews and nothing else in the Middle East. This is clear from the fact that no matter how awful other conflicts are all over the world, these same athletes don't refuse to compete with one another."

But things can go in the other direction too. Tahani al-Qahtani from Saudi Arabia did face Israel's Raz Hershko in Judo, and was lauded in Israel for doing so. She also received support at home in spite of her loss to the Israeli. And Saeid Mollaei, a former Iranian judoka now representing Mongolia, won a silver medal, and he thanked Israel for its support of him over many years. "Thank you to Israel for the good energy. This medal is dedicated also to Israel," he said on television. Mollaei has a close friendship with Israel's Sagi Muki, with their story being filmed for an Israeli television series.

Israel was also grateful at the opening ceremony that for the first time since the massacre of Israeli athletes and coaches at the 1972 Munich Olympics, an official minute's silence was held.

Tokyo 2020 will be remembered for heated conversations about gender. Before the Games, Norway's women's beach handball team was fined

€1 500 (R26 016) for "improper clothing" after players chose to wear shorts instead of bikini bottoms in a European tournament. Singer Pink offered to pay the fine. The German women's gymnastics team chose full-body leotards instead of bikini-cut versions at Tokyo, saying it was a statement "against sexualisation".

The language used for male and female sportspeople is overwhelmingly more positive in tone when describing men's sports. Commentators were criticised for not learning female athletes' names properly and for referring to women condescendingly as "girls". Journalists were taken to task for comments about the physical appearance of female athletes. This, in spite of the International Olympic Committee's new media guidelines to avoid sexualising women and not focus "unnecessarily on looks, clothing, or intimate body parts".

There is also more discussion now about how transgender athletes should be accommodated in the modern Games. This was spurred by the participation of New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard, the first out transgender woman to ever compete at the Olympics.

Sport will continue to be effected by political and social issues. We wait to see how they will play out at the Winter Olympics in Beijing in 2022, and the next Summer Olympics in Paris in 2024.

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