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Taliban takeover more than just a threat to Afghans

PAULA SLIER

Israel is bracing itself for renewed terrorism from the fundamentalist Taliban Sunni Muslim insurgency in Afghanistan.

Hamas was quick to praise the group's takeover of the Afghan capital, Kabul, on 15 August, calling it "a victory that came as the culmination of more than 20 years of struggle".

Jerusalem has chosen not to comment officially. However, many Israeli observers agree that the speed of the coup and the ensuing chaos that resulted in thousands of people desperately gathering at the capital's main airport, some dropping to their death as they hung onto departing planes, sends a strong message to the international community.

That message is more pertinent for countries who consider themselves allies of the United States (US) – that they cannot rely on Washington in a military crisis.

"We have to understand the limits of the Western superpowers," said Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser, an Israeli intelligence and security expert. "That's why we should keep saying to ourselves that we have to be able to do whatever is necessary in order to make sure that we can defend ourselves by ourselves."

"I refer particularly to the issue that's so contested – the Iranian issue. We have to be able to take care of this problem by ourselves because if the Americans are leaving Afghanistan just because they don't want to pay any price, will they take Iran on when Iran poses a critical threat?"

The answer for Kuperwasser is an obvious no. And the message, he believes, extends to Israel's relationship with the Palestinians.

"We have to be by ourselves and retain

control of the territories that are critical for our security and not rely on any foreign forces like America or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO], to come and take responsibility for our security. Like was suggested in the plan of [former US] President Barack Obama."

Colonel Richard Kemp, a former British commander who led troops in Afghanistan, said current developments were a reflection of the American decision to scale down its role as a superpower.

"Washington is eager to cut deals with radical Islamist groups in Afghanistan and Iran in the hope that they will take care of the ultra-radicals like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and stop them from threatening the security of the West. But it's not going to work," he reflected.

On the contrary, the feeling in the region is that the collapse of the Kabul government will help terror groups in their efforts to attack American and Israeli targets around the world.

"We are concerned that radical Islamist groups are going to use this event as a reason for blowing wind in their sails. They are going to feel emboldened, and try to carry out more attacks and have more influence in the region."

But there is one positive consequence. Retired Israel Defense Forces Intelligence Major-General, Amos Yadlin believes concerned countries might now reach the understanding that they must stick together in order to be more capable of confronting coming threats.

"The fall of Afghanistan could create space for Israel to strengthen defence ties with countries who may be looking for a more localised partner," he said.

What happened this week shouldn't have come as a surprise. Over the years, I



Afghans crowd at the tarmac of the Kabul airport on 16 August 2021, in an effort to flee the country as the Taliban retook control after 20 years

have visited Afghanistan, once spending a stint embedded with the American army as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in the country. Soldiers had nicknamed ISAF "I Surrender, Afghanistan's F###ed". I write this while looking at a magnet I picked up there, a duplicate of which I gave to my editors back home, "You sent me to Afghanistan, you bastards!"

I went on patrols with soldiers, once walking through a village where children came running after us. After we took a break and I took off my helmet, on recognising I was female, one of the boys came up to me and asked, "Ma'am, does your husband know you've left the house?"

When we weren't with the troops, locals would tell us they always knew when soldiers were coming to inspect a village and would inform the Taliban, who were usually family members. They would, in turn, lie low and emerge again only after the troops had left.

So much money was being invested by the international community, but so little of it made it to ordinary Afghans. At one time, there were 6 000 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) registered in the country. It was admissible for them to spend up to 40% of their budgets on security, which in turn was provided by more than 120 international private security firms. In this way, money would return to the NGO's home country, profit would line

the pockets of a select few, and most of the Afghan population would be no better off than before.

Even more ludicrous, the security companies would pay the Taliban who were active in certain parts of the county not to attack the convoys they were protecting. I remember local journalists telling me that the US strategy in Afghanistan made no sense.

"NATO doesn't seem to know whether it's fighting a war or making a peace. Real development will take place only if there's stability, which is exactly what NATO has demonstrated it cannot deliver for Afghans," one prophetically forecasted.

Continued on page 8>>



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2 SA JEWISH REPORT

Poland ponders changing concentration-camp trips

Amid a growing diplomatic crisis between Israel and Poland, a senior Polish diplomat said his government was “reviewing” changes to annual educational school trips from Israel to former Nazi death camps.

Paweł Jabłoński, the deputy minister of foreign affairs, called the trips “propaganda”, Gazeta Prawa reported. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tens of thousands of Israeli youths visited former death camps in Poland annually as part of programmes overseen by Israel’s education ministry.

“This propaganda, also based on hatred towards Poland, is seeping into the heads of young people from the early school years,” Jabłoński said. “The way in which these trips take place is clearly not the right way. We are reviewing this matter, and we will make appropriate decisions.”

Jewish humanitarian groups attempt to aid Haitians and Afghans

Jewish aid organisations are responding to two major humanitarian crises, although it’s unclear whether much can be done from afar to support Afghans now that the Taliban has retaken their country.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is among many foreign groups directing aid to Haiti following an earthquake on

14 August that killed nearly 1 300. The organisation is sending medical supplies to a hospital in the region of Haiti most affected. The American Jewish World Service, which has long been involved in helping Haitians advocate for human rights, is also raising funds for relief aid.

But when it comes to Afghanistan, humanitarian groups have fewer avenues to help. HIAS, originally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, wrote on Facebook on Sunday night that it would work to help Afghans who make it to the United States through a special programme designed to protect people who aided the US mission there.

Dylan sued for alleged sexual abuse 56 years later



Bob Dylan in 1984

A woman is suing Bob Dylan for sexually abusing her when she was 12 under a New York law that temporarily lifted limitations on such lawsuits. The woman, identified in court documents as

19 – 26 August 2021



JC, says the Jewish rock star groomed and exploited her in his room at the Chelsea Hotel over six weeks in 1965, USA Today reported on 16 August. She says she suffered physical and psychological harm. A lawyer for Dylan vigorously denied the charges.

Poland approves law that limits Holocaust restitution

Poland’s president on 14 August signed into law a bill that will restrict Holocaust restitution claims by Jews and others who had property stolen by the Nazis or Soviet-backed occupation forces during World War II.

The law, signed by President Andrzej Duda, gives all property restitution claims a 30-year time limit from the alleged theft. That will effectively wipe out any claims from the World War II years.

Israel’s top two leaders called the law antisemitic, and the country recalled its ambassador to Warsaw. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is Jewish, voiced concern prior to Duda’s signing, and international Holocaust restitution organisations also fumed after its passage.

Duda and other Polish leaders claim the bill will simplify the country’s property laws and end a period of corruption and confusion over restitution claims, but the move is a clear continuation of the country’s right-wing government’s longstanding crusade to separate itself from the effects of Nazi war crimes.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:32	18:23	Johannesburg
18:02	18:55	Cape Town
17:17	18:08	Durban
17:37	18:28	Bloemfontein
17:34	18:27	Port Elizabeth
17:25	18:18	East London

Torah Thought

Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if ...?

An easy, albeit shallow, approach to understanding suffering in this world is to suggest that Hashem is just letting things happen, that it’s just nature taking its course without divine intervention. It helps to cope with inexplicable events without our faith being shaken. But is this really faith or actually heresy? Our belief includes the tenet of *hashgacha pratit* (micro-control from above). Even a leaf blowing in the wind is engineered as part of what Tevya called the vast eternal plan.

The final verses of the Torah portion this Shabbat contain the famous command of Zachor to remember what Amalek did to our ancestors when they left Egypt, and to obliterate his memory forever. Throughout our history, many have tried to destroy us. Yet none of our other foes are singled out the way Amalek is.

The Torah explains that the reason for the commandment is because Amalek “happened upon you on the way”. The attack against the children of Israel in the desert was real, treacherous, and threatened lives. But in that sense, Amalek has come and gone, and we have no certainty as to where to find his descendants (though we may have some suspicions).

The philosophy of Amalek, however, is still alive and well to this day. “He happened upon you,” is the dangerous and heretical approach that things just happen for no reason and without control from above. This is what the Torah enjoins us to uproot and totally eradicate.

As the Jewish year 5781 nears its end, we traditionally engage in reflection during the final month, Elul. This past year has brought more than its fair share of inexplicable events. Our faith has

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin,
The Oxford Synagogue
Centre



been tested to the maximum by repeated sadness and tragedy.

It’s naïve to pretend that we can explain anything at all. Hashem’s ways are and remain unfathomable, particularly when dealing with enormity. However, we dare not suggest that there is no reason – there is one, we just don’t know what it is.

Maimonides, in his opening to the Laws of Fasts, suggests that if we say, “What has happened to us is the way of the world, and this trouble is merely happenstance,” it’s the way of cruelty, causing us to stick to our bad ways. Instead, we are obliged to use such events as a trigger for repentance and change.

What a trigger year we’ve had. As the year draws to a close, Hashem, send us a 5782 filled with blessing, healing, and prosperity.

Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

Editor Peta Krost Maunders – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz
Journalists Nicola Miltz • Tali Feinberg • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver
Editorial co-ordinator Martine Bass – editorial@sajewishreport.co.za
Proofreader Kim Hatchuel Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za • New business development manager Laura Kaufman laura@sajewishreport.co.za • Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman
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Unvaccinated patients flood Florida hospitals

NICOLA MILTZ

Doctors in the United States (US) are expressing their frustration as they battle to keep COVID-19 patients alive in Florida hospitals who chose not to be vaccinated or take the necessary precautions.

“The biggest tragedy we see is the preventable loss of life,” says ex-South African, Dr Ari Sareli, who is chief of critical-care medicine and oversees all of Memorial Healthcare System’s intensive-care units (ICUs).

Sareli, a King David High School Linksfield alumnus who grew up in Glenhazel, lives in Boca Raton. He told the *SA Jewish Report*, “It’s when people pay the ultimate price, and as healthcare workers, we understand the tragedy is that loss of life could have been prevented with vaccination.”

Certain states like Florida are buckling under a crippling summer surge in COVID-19 cases led by the contagious Delta variant.

In Florida, where thousands of Jewish ex-South Africans have settled, hospitals are groaning with severely ill patients – the majority of whom are unvaccinated. Mask wearing isn’t mandated, and restaurants, beaches, bars, and businesses remain open.

Florida is one of the worst hit US states in terms of new COVID-19 cases and death attributed to the disease. A few days ago, the state which comprises a little more than 6% of the US population, accounted for about one in five of the country’s new cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The state’s Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, has urged people to vaccinate, but hasn’t instituted a mask mandate and intends to keep the tourist state open in spite of the Delta spike. He is opposed to imposing lockdowns and new restrictions. Some are saying these factors have contributed to the surge in the sunshine state, and it’s not expected to reach a peak anytime soon.

Sareli said healthcare workers “get to see the suffering, we get to see the broken lives, and we see patients dying in what could have been a preventable tragedy”.

“It’s absolutely true that, with vaccination, a very small minority of people may get critically ill and may even die, but that proportion is so small and the overwhelming majority of people could be saved. They could be at a point in their lives where they aren’t devastated, where the lives of their

families aren’t shattered,” he said.

Governor DeSantis has reportedly tried to block local communities and schools from mandating the use of face masks, as well as opposing attempts by private businesses to require vaccination as a condition of providing services, drawing criticism from many local leaders.

As Florida continues to set records for new cases and hospitalisations, the mayor of Miami Beach, Dan Gelber, called DeSantis the “Pied Piper of COVID-19, leading everybody off a cliff”.

While many residents have been fully vaccinated, there are many who refuse to get the life-saving jab.

Hospital beds in the state are filling up rapidly with people who have serious cases of COVID-19. Some hospitals have reportedly reached capacity in their ICUs.

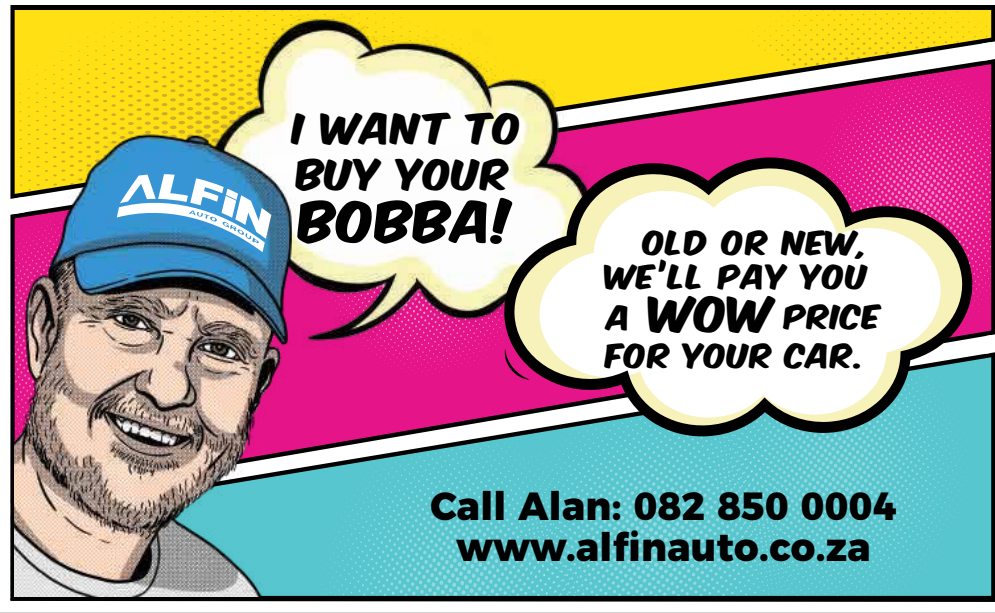


This week, Palm Beach County is to declare a state of emergency to deal with the pandemic. With more than 1 000 new COVID-19 cases per day, the community spread is high and the numbers are expected to rise, experts said.

The vaccination rate among the elderly is quite high, but lower among younger people, and healthcare workers are witnessing more hospitalisations in that population.

Sareli said that his hospital group had 133 ICU beds. At the time of going to print, there were 145 ICU patients, with the overwhelming majority of them ill with COVID-19, mostly on ventilators.

“The ICUs are operating above capacity. Cafeterias and conference rooms have been



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converted to provide additional patient spaces,” he said.

“There are problems with oxygen delivery, and the entire healthcare system in the state is under huge pressure.”

Justine Goldberg, originally from Johannesburg who lives in Miami, is a medical physician at Memorial Healthcare

reading this, but when you’re seeing someone fight for their life to take that breath and survive, it’s heartbreaking.”

An ex-South African mom in Boca Raton who preferred to remain anonymous, told the *SA Jewish Report* that though she and her family had taken every precaution to remain healthy, many did what they liked.

“We wear masks anywhere in public, but not everyone thinks like this. People are selfish, stupid, and ignorant,” she said.

“COVID-19 has gone crazy in Florida. While some of us are extra cautious, there are many refusing to wear masks or get the vaccination, and they are the ones getting gravely ill. It makes no sense to defy the evidence and the science – vaccination and masks work.”

She’s disappointed because like many of her friends, she wants life to return to a new normal as soon as possible. “My child hasn’t been to school for more than a year and a half. Our family hasn’t eaten at a restaurant since this pandemic started. Thankfully, when my son goes back to school later this month, masks will have been mandated at his private Jewish school, but other schools are different.

“Every conversation is about COVID-19. Everyone has their own thoughts and ideas. While our hospitals are full, people are going away on holiday, eating in restaurants, and travelling. The schools should do full COVID-19 testing on every staff member and kid before they go back to school. Kids have all been away on various summer camps, and bring the virus home with them. It’s going to get interesting.”

Annette Polovin, who also lives in Boca Raton, has been extra careful since the start of the pandemic to the point of insisting that her grandchildren are tested before visiting on weekends. In spite of this, three out of four family members contracted COVID-19 about a month ago.

“Fortunately, we were all fully vaccinated, so we had it mildly, but my sister in Durban got it and landed up in hospital. She hadn’t received the vaccination yet,” Polovin said.

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Abraham Accords have low-profile first birthdays

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

The Biden administration didn't exactly call attention to the anniversary of the Abraham Accords, the historic co-operation agreements between Israel and several of its Arab neighbours signed on 13 August 2020. In fact, the administration's spokespeople still won't even use the term "Abraham Accords". That's likely in part because the agreements were a foreign policy win for Donald Trump's team, and because Biden is prioritising other initiatives at the moment such as combating the latest COVID-19 case surge and addressing the fallout in Afghanistan.

"We welcome and support the normalisation agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab and Muslim world," a state department official said last week, responding to a JTA query about the status of the accords. "The United States (US) will continue to encourage other countries to normalise relations with Israel."

The degree to which the normalisation agreements are thriving varies from country to country, and for the moment it doesn't look like there are any imminent new members of the club. But experts and peace-brokers say that the deals are here to stay.

The Trump administration negotiated incentives for three of the four countries that normalised relations with Israel. These are in place – for now.

- The US agreed to sell the United Arab Emirates (UAE) state-of-the-art F-35 stealth fighter jets, which some – including (for a time) former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – believed could weaken Israel's "qualitative military edge" in the region.
- The US agreed to recognise Morocco's

claim to rule over disputed territory in the Western Sahara.

- The US removed Sudan from listings identifying the country as a terrorism sponsor. Sudan had landed on the list after harbouring the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, Osama bin Laden. The human-rights community immediately targeted all three of those incentives. They had compelling arguments:
- The UAE has acted as a sometimes malign interventionist actor in the region, most recently joining Saudi Arabia in backing the Yemen government in a devastating war against Houthi rebels who are backed by Iran.
- Recognising Morocco's claim to an area it has claimed by force was seen as undercutting efforts to counter other expansionist bids, for instance, Russia's effective annexation of Crimea.
- While the government of Sudan rejects everything its predecessors stood for, the families of victims of the September 11 attacks are still pressing for compensation.

Biden has so far kept all of them intact. At first, he froze the UAE F-35s deal, but then recommitted to it, in part because the pro-Israel community, which had joined the opposition to the deal, dropped its objections. The Biden administration has said that reversing the Western Sahara recognition is off the table for now. And Secretary of State Antony Blinken has accepted the terms of the Sudan deal, accepting payment for victims of some acts of terrorism Sudan facilitated in the 1990s and preserving the right of victims of the 9/11 attacks to continue their quest for compensation.

The UAE deal is the biggest success of the four, and Israel and the UAE have already exchanged official ambassadors.

This isn't in any sense a low-profile bromance: the UAE has rolled out the red carpet for top Israeli officials, including Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid.

Commercial ties are also thriving. A massive UAE investment in Israel's offshore natural gas extraction is going ahead. Tens of thousands of Israelis visited the UAE in the months after the signing. A kosher food industry is blossoming in Dubai.

There is still one important point of tension: Israel's military actions against the Palestinians. Before the latest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in May, the UAE criticised Israel's crackdown on Palestinians protesting evictions in eastern Jerusalem.

Bahrain, which houses a Jewish community that's more than a century old and which has had quiet relations with Israel and the pro-Israel community since the 2000s at least, didn't need a lot of convincing to buy into the accords. Two months after the signing, Bahrain's commerce minister was in Jerusalem formalising already existing commercial ties.

Bahrain has named an ambassador to Israel, but unlike the UAE, hasn't yet established an embassy in Israel.

Morocco was always seen as the easiest get: there's a huge Moroccan Jewish community in Israel that has since the

1990s travelled back to the country on pilgrimages. And of the four countries in the accords, it has the largest remnant Jewish community. A number of Moroccan Jews are advisers to King Mohammed VI. Morocco and Israel have existing commercial and, reportedly, security ties.

The countries have so far exchanged envoys, and have launched for the first time ever direct commercial flights.

But there have been some hiccups, a consequence, in part, of uncertainty for a period about how Biden would treat the recognition of the Western Sahara.

Another factor impeding a full-fledged mutual embrace has been the country's elected government, which is more Islamist than the royal court.

Yasmina Abouzzohour, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Center in Qatar and an expert on Morocco, said the pluses were the economic ties, the concomitant strengthening of ties with the US, and the potential for Morocco to have a bigger role in helping bring about a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But she said the average pro-Palestine Moroccan citizen wasn't thrilled about the relationship.

Sudan is another country that has long had sub rosa ties with Israel – it played a

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, left, confers with Nasser Bourita, his Moroccan counterpart in Rabat, Morocco

critical role in the 1980s in the wave of Ethiopian Jewish immigration.

Right now, its deal with Israel is stuck as the two sides hash out details, not because any of the parties are having second thoughts. Sudan's government is contending with internal tension as it transitions to democracy.

Who's next? The big domino that could lead to a cascade of mutual recognition in the Arab and Muslim worlds is Saudi Arabia.

But that's not likely to happen soon. Legislators in Congress, mostly Democrats but a number of Republicans as well, see the country as toxic because of its human-rights abuses, including its murder of a US-based journalist in 2018, and because of its Yemen war interventions.

That said, there are a number of countries that already have informal ties with Israel that could easily transition to full-blown ties, among them Oman, Mauritania, Indonesia, and Qatar.

Photo: Shlomi Amsalem, Israel Government Press Office

More countries boycott 'Israel hate-fest' conference

NICOLA MILTZ

The list of countries boycotting next month's United Nations anti-racism conference is growing over concerns that the gathering in New York will promote antisemitism.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the infamous United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance that was originally held in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in 2001.

Organised to discuss issues of racism and discrimination, the original conference devolved into an all-out campaign to delegitimise Israel and its supporters. It resulted in the "Durban Declaration and Programme of Action" against racism which condemned racism and all related forms, including antisemitism. However, an initial draft of that declaration attempted to equate Zionism with racism.

Known as the first Durban conference, held from 31 August to 8 September 2001, it veered into an anti-Israel, anti-Jewish hate-fest, according to numerous reports written at the time and several delegates present. It resulted in the popularisation of slogans such as "Israel apartheid" and the rise of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS) against Israel.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog last month said the upcoming United Nations conference, called Durban IV, is a "gathering of hatred and slander, an antisemitic event in the worst sense". Speaking at the Global Forum to Combat Antisemitism, he called for countries and organisations to band together by acting "decisively, unanimously, and fearlessly" against September's Durban IV conference.

Twenty years ago, countless non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were represented at the conference at a separate NGO Forum at which Israel was singled out for racism. According to reports, a strategy of isolating Israel through boycotts, legal attacks, and accusations of "apartheid" was launched.

Delegates present at the conference said some NGOs distributed anti-Jewish and anti-Israel material accusing Israel of genocide and questioning whether Hitler was right.

Several delegates including those from the United States and Israel walked out in protest as the negative tone against Israel continued unabated.

Last week, France joined the growing list of countries boycotting the upcoming conference. It brings to 11 the number of countries so far that have pulled out.

Israel, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Austria, Netherlands, and the Czech Republic are among them. The New York conference is being held on 22 September on the sidelines of the opening session of the 76th United Nations General Assembly.



Protestors from the opening of the Durban III Conference in New York in 2011

France also boycotted follow-up meetings in 2009 and 2011. At the 2009 conference, a speech by Iran's then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attacking Israel

sparked a walkout by many European delegates.

France made its announcement last Friday, 13 August. "France will continue to fight against all forces of racism, and will be watching to make sure that the Durban follow-up conference is held in accordance with the founding principles of the United Nations," the presidency said.

President Emmanuel Macron has promised to fight against antisemitism in all its forms, and last year, warned of "the unbearable resurgence of antisemitism in our Europe".

The government has in recent days expressed concern about antisemitic slogans at protests against COVID-19 restrictions.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) has resolutely opposed the 20th anniversary commemoration, describing it as "in effect a racist conference against the Jewish state".

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the SAZF, said this week, "We welcome the fact that 11 major countries will boycott next month's high-level event in New York. The Durban conference is known to have been the genesis of the modern antisemitic BDS movement, which over two decades, has been responsible for vile acts of antisemitism against Jews and a concerted campaign of demonisation and delegitimation against the world's only Jewish state.

"The anti-Israel activists in attendance in 2001 distributed the infamous antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and shared pro-Nazi flyers bemoaning that if only Hitler had won the war, Israel wouldn't have existed," he said.

The legacy of Durban is a "global and systematic effort to undermine Israel's right to exist as an indigenous Jewish and democratic state", Polovin said.

Austria has also joined the Durban conference boycott. The Austrian Embassy in Israel announced, "Austria supports efforts to combat racism worldwide

while rejecting the misuse of the Durban process to unfairly single out and target Israel."

Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok reportedly told the Dutch Parliament, "This decision was taken due to the history of the Durban process, the risk that this platform will once again be misused for antisemitic expressions, and because of the conference's disproportionate, one-sided focus on Israel, as exemplified in the original Durban declaration."

Earlier this year, Jerusalem-based research institute NGO Monitor hosted an online event titled, "20 Years of Hijacking Human Rights: The Lasting Impact of Durban", which brought together experts who discussed the enduring influence of the original Durban conference and the NGO campaign to delegitimise Israel.

The Jerusalem Report said participants at this event included NGO Monitor President Professor Gerald Steinberg; Professor Irwin Cotler, a former member of Parliament in Canada and minister of justice and attorney general; and NGO Monitor legal advisor Anne Herzberg, among others.

Said Steinberg, "Durban became one of the most potent symbols of organised hate against Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. We are now 20 years later, and the Durban NGO plan of action is being implemented in every direction."

Cotler, who participated in the Canadian delegation to the 2001 Durban Conference, said, "A conference that was to commemorate the dismantling of South Africa as an apartheid state turned into a conference calling for the dismantling of Israel as an apartheid state."

Herzberg said, "From the very outset, it was clear that antisemitism would be promoted rather than tackled, and that demonisation and delegitimation of Israel would be a central feature."

Said Polovin, "Ultimately, antisemites end up on the scrapheaps of history. Twenty years on, Israel is stronger, securer, richer, more loved, and more respected than ever before."

JSC to re-interview candidates for Constitutional Court

NICOLA MILTZ

Esteemed Gauteng Judge David Unterhalter as well as several other prospective candidates will have another chance at interviewing for a position on the Constitutional Court.

The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) last week agreed to run fresh interviews for Constitutional Court nominees following a challenge from the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (Casac), which criticised the interview process. Casac spokesperson Lawson Naidoo said last week that the civil society organisation had reached an agreement with the JSC following its intention to challenge the interview process in court.

He said the JSC had agreed to the relief sought by Casac in its application to the Gauteng High Court. Following the controversial interviews in April, Casac lodged a court application challenging the constitutionality of the JSC interviews of candidates for the vacant posts. Casac argued that the manner of questioning some of the candidates went beyond the bounds of what was permissible to determine the fitness and propriety of the candidates. It asserted that some of the questions were irrelevant, and were aimed at ambushing the candidates, which may have resulted in them suffering prejudice. The JSC was criticised for failing to deliberate on the performance of all the candidates following the interview process.



Judge David Unterhalter

Casac sought an order declaring the decision to shortlist five candidates invalid, and for it to be set aside.

From the start, the interviews were mired in controversy after politics seemingly played a heavy role above jurisprudential merit. Certain judges were subjected to relentless questioning and probed on their relationships with judges and judgments that affected politics.

In the main, the complaints centred on the interviews of KwaZulu-Natal High Court Judge Dhaya Pillay – a friend of Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan – and Gauteng High Court Judge Unterhalter, neither of whom made the JSC shortlist. In the days preceding the interviews, the South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition tried to stop Unterhalter from being interviewed. The organisation vehemently opposed Unterhalter’s candidacy on the basis that he was associated with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

However, in spite of its attack on the judge for his association with the SAJBD, Unterhalter’s interview went ahead, but he was grilled about his involvement with the SAJBD. Unterhalter briefly assisted the Board with the upliftment and welfare of the Jewish and broader community during the direst phase of the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

The SAJBD on 14 April lambasted BDS for attempting to have Unterhalter rejected from applying for the position, describing the organisation’s efforts as “yet another shocking

display of bigotry and intolerance”. National Director Wendy Kahn said, “When calls are made for Jews who serve on the Jewish community’s democratically elected representative body to be excluded from public service, it amounts to gross antisemitism.” Following the interviews, the names of Judge Fayeeza Kathree-Setiloane, Judge Jody Kollapen, Judge Rammaka Mathopo, Judge Mahube Molemela, and Judge Badshier Vally were submitted to the president for his final decision. Casac was opposed to the “political questions” that commissioners such as Economic Freedom Fighter leader Julius Malema put to prospective candidates. According to *City Press*, Naidoo said in his founding affidavit, “The interviews aren’t a platform for party politics; they aren’t there for the JSC to investigate and evaluate complaints against judges; and they aren’t there to give commissioners a chance to quibble with judgments they lost as litigants. “Nor do they exist to enable individual commissioners to ventilate grudges against judges. Party political considerations and political agendas should play no role in the JSC’s decisions and processes. The JSC’s obligation to guard its independence – and, through it, the judiciary’s independence – rests on each individual commissioner as well as the JSC’s chairperson, who has ultimate responsibility for controlling the conduct of meetings, interviews, and deliberations.” It’s understood that most of the nominees for vacancies at the Constitutional Court will be re-interviewed, and legal entities and members of the public can also have their say on the candidates. The recommended shortlist of candidates submitted by the JSC to President Cyril Ramaphosa in April is to be set aside, and new interviews will be conducted in October.

Illicit engagement party roils Australian Jews in lockdown

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Video from a packed engagement party is roiling the Jewish community of Melbourne, Australia, amid a growing outbreak of COVID-19 that has extended yet another stringent lockdown there. Compliance with local rules has been spotty across Melbourne during the latest lockdown, which comes after a year and a half of intense restrictions meant to stop the spread of coronavirus there. But the local Jewish community is again emerging as a hotspot. Local authorities are planning to set up vaccination and testing sites in the heavily Orthodox suburb of St Kilda East after a mother and son there tested positive, and sites in other Orthodox areas, including Caulfield and Balaclava, have landed on the growing list of locations with known exposures. In Melbourne, 25 people tested positive for COVID-19 on Saturday. Meanwhile, the engagement party video has offered what many say is hard proof that some Orthodox Jews aren’t taking the pandemic seriously. The video, which is circulating online, shows a groom speaking to a crowded room of unmasked guests, at one point joking, “Clearly this is legal, because this is a group therapy session.” Laughter follows.

“Many people will have seen a video from the engagement party circulating. I have,” Philip Dalidakis, a Jewish former legislator who works for Australia Post, wrote on Facebook on Sunday. “There are people in it that I know and I am speechless. I am genuinely shocked at the brazen disregard for our laws.” According to Rafael Epstein, a journalist with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 68 people were present and contact tracing is taking place after someone at the event tested positive for COVID-19. “If you’re angry, believe me you are not as angry as almost all of the Jewish community,” Epstein tweeted. Among those expressing anger was the *Australia Jewish News*, which called on local Orthodox leaders

to condemn gatherings that violate the city’s lockdown rules and to penalise local rabbis who have condoned them. On Sunday, the Rabbinical Council of Victoria issued a statement urging local Jews to “comply with all government restrictions without exception”, then it issued a stronger comment after criticism from the newspaper and others.

Photo: Recep Sakar/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images



A view of an empty street in Melbourne, Australia

“For the removal of any possible doubt, this includes all illegal gatherings including for prayer,” said the unsigned clarification, which was posted to Facebook. “We implore anybody considering flouting the law to refrain from doing so. We unreservedly condemn such actions, which bring risk and shame to the entire community.” But the group didn’t suggest that it would name or penalise rabbis who have participated in gatherings, which local Jews said had been happening for a variety of reasons throughout the pandemic. Responding to an *Australia Jewish News* Facebook post, Rabbi James Kennard, the principal of Mount Scopus Memorial College, a modern Orthodox school, wrote that such condemnation is needed, and signalled that a wide array of gatherings had been taking place in contravention of local rules. “It’s painful to speak out against fellow Jews in public. But at this time, the danger of staying silent is too great,”

Kennard wrote. “Because the law states that we must stay at home, because the experts tell us that this is the way to save lives, because of the risk of terrible *chillul Hashem* [desecration of G-d’s name], every rabbi and leader must cry out. We must take the heartbreaking path and stop the gatherings – for prayer, for *s’machot*, for school. Just stop.” Speaking on Australian television, Daniel Aghion, the president of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, said, “We’ve heard about a number of non-compliances. That’s actually quite disturbing for us.” Australia has experienced perhaps the world’s most stringent restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19. Since the pandemic began, Australians and permanent residents have effectively been barred from leaving the country, while only a small number of people have been allowed to enter. Under the current lockdown in Victoria, Melbourne’s region, all gatherings in private homes are banned, and the only kinds of gatherings allowed are funerals of 10 people or fewer. Tension over compliance with COVID-19 rules has emerged around the world in and around Orthodox communities since March 2020, when rules aimed at stopping the spread of disease made *minyans*, or the quorums required to say some prayers, illegal in many places. Early in the pandemic, Melbourne police raided several sites where Orthodox Jews were illegally holding *minyans*. Last October, private citizens confronted a group of Haredi Orthodox men leaving a school. Dalidakis wrote that most local Jews were adhering to the rules. But, he said, “small pockets of our Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox community need to see this event as an opportunity to reset and reflect on just how dangerous and selfish their behaviour has been.”

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Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4	Room 5
 <p>Leon Fenster Taipei</p> <p>Jewish art: From a Haggadah in Beijing to a Sukkah in Taipei</p>	 <p>Anshel Pfeffer Jerusalem</p> <p>Israel in the post-Netanyahu era</p>	 <p>Marc Katz New Jersey</p> <p>Yochanan's gamble: The controversial move that saved Judaism</p>	 <p>Judith Ancer / Karen Milner Johannesburg</p> <p>Beyond tea and tissues: Protecting and promoting mental health at work</p>	 <p>Ann Harris Cape Town</p> <p>Beyond our borders: Jewish life today in Sub-Saharan Africa</p>

7:00PM - SESSION 2

 <p>Caroline Rothstein New York</p> <p>We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For</p>	 <p>David Rosen Jerusalem</p> <p>The King(s of Saudi Arabia) and I</p>	 <p>Esther Safran Foer Washington DC</p> <p>I want you to know we're still here: A post Holocaust memoir</p>	 <p>Tamar Elad-Appelbaum Jerusalem</p> <p>Jerusalem: An ancient teacher of healing</p>	 <p>Melinda Silverman Johannesburg</p> <p>Season's greetings: A tour of Jewish history through Rosh Hashana cards</p>
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8:00PM - SESSION 3

 <p>Yakie Ayalon Jerusalem</p> <p>Scattgories - a film (90 minute session)</p>	 <p>Wayne Sussman Johannesburg</p> <p>Local government elections: Foregone conclusion or messy muddle?</p>	 <p>Daphne Geismar Connecticut</p> <p>Invisible years: The craft and artistry of making a book</p>	 <p>Aharon Ariel Lavi Negev</p> <p>Biblical agriculture in a post capitalist world: Shmita's relevance for economic and climate justice</p>	 <p>Ruben Shimonov New York</p> <p>Bukharian Jews: At the crossroads of Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Russian-speaking worlds</p>
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Walking with Mandela – an ‘Elul moment’

TALI FEINBERG

The Goldman family have experienced many incredible moments, but few have come close to the time they took a spontaneous stroll with then-president Nelson Mandela. Every Elul, Rabbi Michoel Goldman reflects on how this encounter reminds him of the power of this month.

Writing on Facebook last week from the United States where he is based, Goldman shared a photo with the caption, “Yes, that’s Nelson Mandela with my young brother, Yisroel.” In the image, one can see the statesman smiling and shaking hands with the Jewish youngster.

Elaborating on the memory, he says, “Shortly after he was released from prison, and a few months before he was inaugurated as the first black president, making history, Nelson Mandela decided to take a stroll through the neighbourhood, experiencing what it was like to walk freely. He had recently moved to a home not far from us.

“Since he was already president-elect, he had security detail behind him. My father was coming home from synagogue, and noticed this African gentleman being escorted by two white men, and did a double take: ‘Oh My G-d! That’s Nelson Mandela!’ He and some of my siblings walked and talked to Mandela for an easy 30 minutes. What a surprise encounter! What a memorable moment!”

He tells this story every year at the same time. “Why? Because tonight begins the Jewish month of Elul,” he wrote on Facebook. “This is the last month of the year as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah 30 days from now.

“This month is very special, known as a month of divine compassion,” continues Goldman. “Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad, taught that in this month, ‘the king is in the field’, meaning that while the high holidays are days of awe [like meeting a king in

the palace], over these next 29 days, we get the rare opportunity to have a face-to-face encounter with our king, but ‘outdoors’, in a casual setting.

“Imagine running into the president when he’s not in the White House, but on a casual walk, and being able to bypass all the red tape of an official meeting? You could speak your heart and have an intimate moment without all the protocol. This incident makes it real for me every year. Let’s maximise the power of the coming month to meet the king, radiant, in the everyday stuff of ordinary life.”

His brother, Mendel Goldman, reflects on how the moment stood out for him. “My recollection is I was about 16 years old, it was a fast day, I think it was 17 Tammuz. My dad had just come home and said, ‘Guess who’s walking outside?’ Madiba had apparently just walked past our house and I think my dad saw him on African Street, which is just around the corner.

“It was quite funny because I was in high school at the time, and we had just been doing a mock election [as an educational exercise]. The high school was divided into different groups representing political parties, and I was part of the ANC [African National Congress] representation. So I had a whole lot of paraphernalia like ANC badges, flags, and T-shirts. Also, for my Barmitzvah, I got a camera from my uncle which I remember was quite an advanced camera for a teenager to have at the time.

“So I grabbed my camera, put on an ANC badge, and ran outside. Mandela was there with his daughter and two policemen. I remember after stopping and talking to us for a couple of minutes, he asked if we could walk with him. So, we walked from the bottom of African Street all the way up to Cheltondale Park near the Norwood Pick n Pay, which is probably 800m. I vividly remember us kids each having a turn to talk to him, and I was running ahead taking photos.



Nelson Mandela and Mendel Goldman

“When it was my turn to walk with him, I remember him asking which school I went to, and I told him Torah Academy. I explained that it was a Jewish school, and told him it was up the road from there. He asked what I was studying, and at that stage, I was doing a *kodesh* stream, so I told him I was learning from the Talmud. He asked me what it was about.”

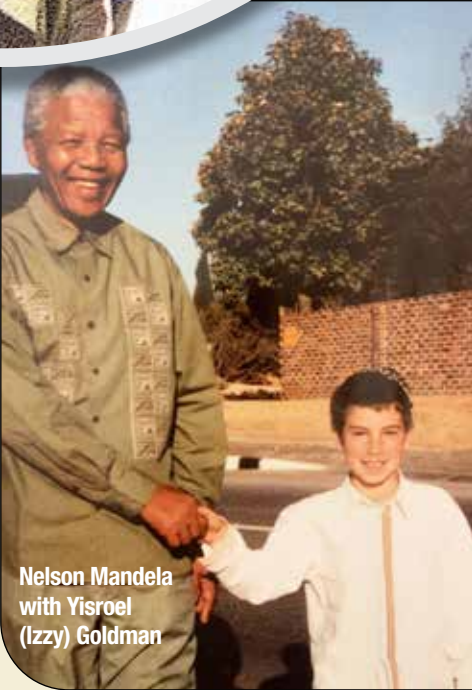
While he doesn’t remember exactly how he responded, he does recall that, “I tried to make a good impression of my school so that he could have a good impression of the Jewish community.”

Responding to his brother’s thoughts on how the encounter ties into the month of Elul, he says, “As a child, I felt honoured to have met the president of our country. What I couldn’t get over was how such an important person was able to connect with everyone on whatever level they were on. For example, I was a teenager, 15 to 16 years old, and yet he was able to make a connection. This very much talks not only to the ‘king being in the field’ but also to the king being able to connect to everyone on their level.”

Their father, Rabbi Yossy Goldman, remembers “doing a double take and seeing the unmistakable figure of Nelson Mandela. I ran into the house and said, ‘Kids come quick, Mandela’s on the corner!’ He chatted to all the kids. I was just hovering nearby. My daughter, Zeesy, was holding the youngest, Nissen, who was a baby. Madiba tried to engage him, but he wasn’t interested. He said, ‘This one is fighting old battles!’ And when we told him Yisroel’s name, he said he was hoping to go to Israel soon, with [the late] Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. And he did so, soon after that encounter.”

As the family walked with him, “he took the hands of my daughter, Sara [now Rebbetzin Sarah Feldman], and my son, Yisroel, and walked a full block holding their hands. He was like a *zaida* walking with his grandkids to shul.”

Feldman remembers the moment vividly. “I was eight



Nelson Mandela with Yisroel (Izzy) Goldman

years old. He held my hand and asked me all about school. I remember it clearly, and felt so special that he cared.”

Goldman says his son’s analogy to Elul is “beautiful and really fitting. This is a time when ‘the king’ is much more approachable and accessible. It’s a time of grace. Normally, getting an audience with a king isn’t easy. But this is a time when He doesn’t mind mixing with the crowds.

“I don’t know many heads of state who would do such a thing [that Mandela did that day], and take the time to chat to a bunch of children. He took such an interest in them, asking them what their favourite subject was at school, and so on. Politicians do it when they are running for election. But this wasn’t a photo op, it was genuine. He didn’t need the votes. That kind of humanity is very special.”

Taliban takeover more than just a threat to Afghans >> Continued from page 1

There was a lot of patronising going on. Foreign troops often couldn’t distinguish between the Taliban and local villagers, and neither could the Afghan American translators they used who’d grown up in the US. We visited an airbase where American pilots were training their Afghan colleagues. One told me off camera that he would never let an Afghan pilot fly him because they were so bad. Later, while standing alongside each other, the American pilots were proudly demonstrating their important role in the country when an Afghan pilot boldly said in Russian so the Americans wouldn’t understand how he couldn’t wait for them to leave and give them all their equipment.

Since taking over the country, representatives of the Taliban have been appearing on international television in an effort to reassure the world that their return won’t be the nightmare scenario many in the West fear. They’ve gone as far as to brand themselves “the new Taliban”.

This week, a spokesperson for the group stressed that they would respect the rights of minorities,

including those of the country’s last Jew, Zabulon Simantov. Although the spokesperson had never heard of Simantov, he said he had nothing to fear.

In June, Simantov, who lives in Kabul, vowed he would leave Afghanistan “by the time the Taliban come”. But on Tuesday, 17 August, he spoke to Indian TV, declaring that he wasn’t moving anywhere.

“I will not leave my home. If I had left, there would have been no one to maintain the synagogue.”

For 16 years, Simantov has been the only Jew living in Afghanistan after another Jew, Isaac Levi, died in 2005. Their relationship mirrored the well-known Jewish joke where a Jewish man is stranded on an island. When he’s found, he shows his rescuers the two synagogues that he’s built. Why two? “This is the one I go to,” he says, “and the other is the one I wouldn’t be caught dead in.”

Simantov and Levi never spoke to each other.

Without Simantov, the synagogue is likely to close, ending an era of Jewish life in Afghanistan that scholars believe began at least 2 000 years ago.



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Israeli TB patch could save millions

TALI FEINBERG

With COVID-19 on our minds, it’s easy to forget that tuberculosis (TB) is an epidemic that takes South African lives every day. Now, a tiny patch developed by Israeli scientists could make a big difference in getting TB under control, even eradicating it.



A prototype of the new Israeli tuberculosis-detecting skin patch
Courtesy of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology

A research team from the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology says it has produced and tested a patch that gives a diagnosis an hour after it’s attached to the skin. It will reduce the number of people who die from the disease due to a lack of diagnosis, and could help the world eradicate it altogether, the team says.

Not only that, it conducted much of its research in South Africa, where TB is the leading cause of death. About 89 000 people die from it every year – that’s 10 every hour.

The project’s scientific leader, Dr Rotem Vishinkin, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the patch was evaluated in collaboration with Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. “This collaboration wasn’t new – we had a previous mutual study in the past. Therefore, it was a natural choice to continue this collaboration with the TB patch. In a later stage, the study expanded to India and Latvia,” Vishinkin says.

TB is easily transmitted by sneezing, spitting, and coughing. Each infected person passes it to more than 10 people on average. About one-third of the world population is estimated to be infected with TB bacteria.

In spite of being a preventable and curable disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) has considered TB a global health emergency since 1993. It regards a fast, cheap, and efficient TB test to be crucial to fighting the disease.

It’s this need that Professor Hossam Haick and his team from the Wolfson Department of Chemical Engineering at the Technion address in their groundbreaking study. Led by Vishinkin, the group created a sticker patch to be applied to the patient’s arm. Containing a pouch of absorbent material, the patch collects compounds released through the skin. It then uses artificial intelligence and essentially “smells” the skin to detect TB. Haick is a pioneer of disease detection using smell.

“The patch contains sensors made from nanoparticles. What we’re doing is sensing changes in the smell pattern of the person, which can tell us with high accuracy whether or not they have TB,” Vishinkin says. The patch changes colour as it gives a diagnosis. If it turns red, the person is infected. If it turns green, they aren’t.

In the current model, a computer is needed to provide results, but the final product will automatically transmit results to a cell phone or clinic. More testing is taking place, and they hope to get the product on the market within a few years.

In addition, it will be cheap, fast, and simple to use, requiring no specially trained personnel. The group hopes the same methodology can be used to diagnose other diseases and conditions in future.

“The collaboration [with South Africa] was amazing and the engagement of health workers and volunteers was a great success,” Vishinkin says. “We had several training sessions and visits at local clinics prior to starting the actual volunteer recruitment.”

A recent survey shows that South Africa has a far higher number of people with TB than previously thought. The survey was conducted between 2017 and 2019 by the South African Medical Research Council, Human Sciences Research Council, and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases on behalf of the health department.

About three million cases of TB go undiagnosed annually, which results in 1.4 million deaths every year. Many people die because early symptoms are non-specific, which complicates the diagnosis. What makes matters worse is that existing diagnosis methods are slow and at times too expensive or complicated in rural or underdeveloped areas.

Asked what impact the patch could have on the TB epidemic in South Africa, Vishinkin says as a triage test that can be performed outside clinics at community-based levels and remote areas, it will “assist in lowering the burden on TB clinics and refer only those who get a possible result based on the patch test. Additionally, due to its low cost, it will allow for fast triaging, without the active involvement of the subject to produce a sputum sample or blood sample.”

They hope the patch will “lower the burden on health systems, provide instant results, and reduce further spread of disease and morbidity. In future, the patch will be efficient in detecting disease even before the appearance of physical symptoms.”

The study was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Vishinkin says, because “the urgent need for a triage test, defined by the WHO, encourages thinking out of the box as the solution. It must be not based on a sputum sample, and must be easy to use, rapid, and cost-effective. Our suggested approach answers these requirements, and has a great potential to mature into a technological tool used in practice.”

About Three million cases of TB go undiagnosed annually. Which results in 1.4 million deaths every year.

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Pandemic has turned the future of work into flexibility

TALI FEINBERG

Working from home has become a way of life, but before March 2020, it was unthinkable in many sectors of the South African workforce. All that changed in the space of a few days at the beginning of the pandemic. A corporate culture that prized in-person interaction had to deal with an earthquake of change.

What were the seismic effects of that moment, and what does it mean for the future of work?

“Remote working has led to improved productivity for 29% of organisations in South Africa, while that figure jumped to 70% for those businesses which had already rolled out digital transformation strategies prior to COVID-19,” says local tech expert Arthur Goldstuck. This is according to a study titled “Remote Working in South Africa 2020” that his organisation, World Wide Worx, conducted for IT company Cisco.

Goldstuck told the *SA Jewish Report* that flexible working environments are a key factor if an organisation wants to survive and thrive in a post-pandemic world.

“Companies insisting that all staff return to the office won’t be able to reap the digital dividends of a remote workforce,” he says. His advice to all employees is to “build a working environment around a hybrid future. Those companies that are unable to work in a hybrid fashion will be much less agile.

“Being able to leverage a hybrid or remote workforce is a powerful foundation for a more effective organisation,” he says. “It means you are much more ready for load shedding, chaos in traffic, rioting, floods, storms, pandemics – any natural or man-made catastrophe. If you have those foundations, you can cope with those disruptions. But if you insist on a blanket return to work, you’ll be subject to the vagaries of your environment.”

In addition, he believes that the best talent will seek jobs where they can work remotely. “People comfortable working from anywhere will enable an

organisation to be more resilient. Embracing that leads to a more resilient company. Fighting against it means that people who have a more resilient mindset will look for employment elsewhere, where it is valued,” he says.

He emphasises that “the pandemic will be with us for a while, so people will continue to be concerned about their safety and well-being. It may be a ‘deal breaker’ for them if they are forced to return to the office.”

For many, transitioning from a corporate lifestyle to work from home was a big adjustment. “I never thought I could work from home,” says a manager and risk analyst from Cape Town, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In March 2020, “we were given a few days’ notice that we would have to send everyone home”, he says. Having foreseen the lockdown, “we bought hundreds of laptops and cell phones to give to our call-centre staff to work from home, and scrambled to get them ready.

We managed to continue to trade when a lot of our competitors had to shut down. Our huge advantage was that we have an overseas office, so we already had the set-up to work using remote tools.”

He’s grateful that he has since been able to convert his garage into an office. From never imagining working from home, he now can’t imagine going back to the office full-time. And his colleagues feel the same way. “In a recent survey, 20% of our staff said they never want to return to the office, and a further 60% said they would prefer to go in for two days or less a week.”

He notes that “hybrid” means different things to different people – from four days a week in the office to once a month. “The company hasn’t decided on its approach. But we are looking to redesign the space so that when we do go in, it’s worth it, and the time is spent engaging with others. If you’re just going to go in and sit with your headphones on and not talk to anyone, there’s no point. So, we’re looking at collaborative sessions.”

While people may be more productive at home, he says they also sometimes struggle to “switch off”, which is leading to burnout. On the other hand, Goldstuck’s study showed that being allowed to spend time with

“

THE PANDEMIC WILL BE WITH US FOR A WHILE, SO PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SAFETY AND WELL-BEING. IT MAY BE A ‘DEAL BREAKER’ FOR THEM IF THEY ARE FORCED TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE.

children during the work day is a major success factor for remote working. The pandemic has had all kinds of effects on family life, but for many, it has been one step closer to finding that elusive work-life balance.

If the COVID-19 pandemic hadn’t happened, where would we be? “The pandemic brought us forward five years,” says Goldstuck. “It highlights that those companies that are desperate to stick to the old ways are five years behind the times. If you apply this to going back to what some refer to as normal, you realise that ‘back to normal’ is going backwards.”

He notes that the term “new normal” is thrown about a lot, but what he has realised is that “there’s no new normal – everyone has a different normal. But if your normal was the way things were before, you’re putting yourself at a massive disadvantage.”

The shift to remote work will mean a “massive acceleration” in technology. “At Cisco, for example, everything the company is doing now is geared towards a hybrid environment. There is also a more extensive rollout of permanent technology for working from home. So, what was previously temporary might become more permanent.

“For example, I’m installing a signal booster, so if my fibre goes down, my cellular data will still be fast enough to give live talks online. I can work regardless of the circumstances and operate at full capacity. It’s not necessarily new technology, but it’s about embracing it to facilitate hybrid work.”

Looking back, he says the pandemic’s impact on work was like a digital awakening. “It wasn’t that the world changed, it was that we woke up to a changed world. It’s been changing for decades and the tools have become more available, but it was only when lockdown happened that we woke up to this change.

“It was like a light went on. People suddenly realised that for most workers, their laptop, smart phone and internet connection was their office. That was the clarity that the moment of lockdown brought home – literally and figuratively. It was like a tsunami that washed away everything we thought we knew.”

Nominate achievers who bring us hope

STAFF REPORTER

Remember when you were raving about the incredible work someone in the community had done? Well, if you haven’t done so already, now is the time to nominate them for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. You don’t have much time...

Last year, the focus was on what winners did over and beyond COVID-19 and through the toughest part of the pandemic.

This year, it’s all about hope, as we see the end of the pandemic in sight, death rates are dropping, people are vaccinated, and we are looking towards a brighter future. Who is enabling this? Who are the people who have brought us hope? Who’s bringing us hope right now, and will continue to inspire us in the future? Who are our winners?

“We are looking for those people who brought us hope in professional excellence and business leadership during these tough times,” says Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards and the board of the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Nominate those who showed true leadership and went way beyond the call of duty when there was looting and rioting in the country as well as a spike in the pandemic numbers.”

Sackstein admits that the judges’ decisions will be tough this year as many heroes have risen to the challenges of community and country. “It’s essential to create a record of these times, and those who have stood out when life was at its most challenging,” he says.

Professor Barry Schoub last year won the Kia Community Service Award for his awesome contribution to the Jewish community through COVID-19. The emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases came out of retirement to help the community, going on to become chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 vaccines.

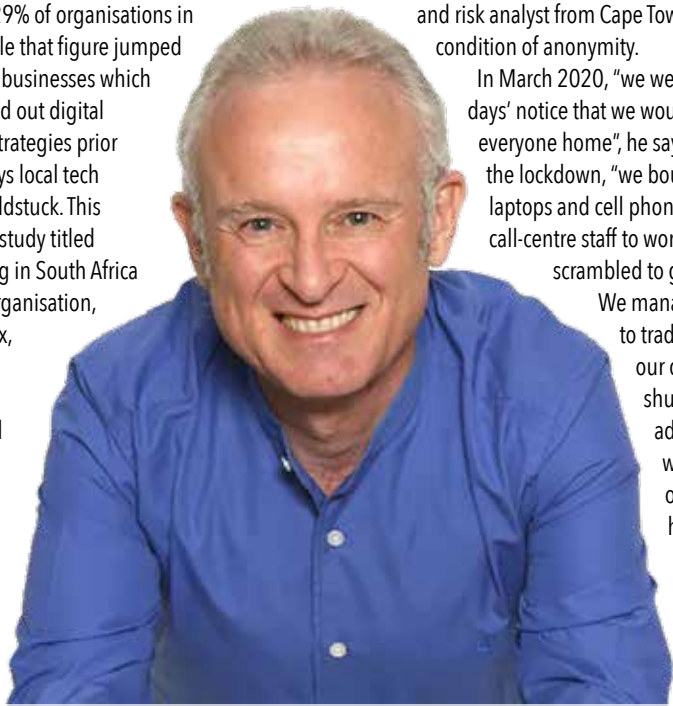
Since his award, he has led South Africa through the process of acquiring vaccines and getting vaccinated.

Dr Mervyn Mer, who won the award for professional excellence in the time of COVID,

has gone on to save many more lives from this dreaded coronavirus. He also almost singlehandedly reopened the COVID-19 ward at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital after the medical facility was closed following a fire. As the numbers of people getting desperately ill due to COVID-19 rose during the third wave, he did what he believed he needed to do to save lives.

Our other winners, Johnny Broomberg, Suzanne Ackerman-Berman, Liran Assness, Michael Katz, Wendy Fisher, Jody Scheckter, and Sir Sydney Kentridge have gone from strength to strength since then.

You have until the close of business on 3 September to make your nominations. Don’t wait, do it now. Go to <https://www.sajr.co.za/absa-jewish-achiever-awards-2021/>



Arthur Goldstuck



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Awarded to a Jewish person who has played a critical leadership role in business during this period.

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Awarded to a Jewish professional who has achieved national recognition and acclaim in their profession during this period.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has a proven track record in entrepreneurial ventures.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has served the Jewish community with remarkable distinction.

EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

Honouring the leadership, impact, achievements, success and overall contribution of distinctive Jewish women in business or in the broader South African community.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

In honour of Helen Suzman

Awarded to a Jewish person who has contributed in an extraordinary manner over a long period of time.

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Awarded to a Jewish person who has excelled in any of these spheres.

HUMANITARIAN AWARD

In honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris

Awarded to a Jewish or non-Jewish person who has contributed substantially to the betterment of the lives of the people of South Africa.

Absa
Jewish Achiever Awards

2021



Orange list travel still poses heaps of red tape for Saffers

TALI FEINBERG

South African *olim* and their families last week welcomed the news that Israel had downgraded South Africa to its “orange list” of countries. Though it eases travel from the Jewish state, it still poses complicated restrictions for South Africans wanting to go there.

“I’m thrilled that everyone is excited about the possibility of coming to Israel,” says former MK Dov Lipman, whose organisation Yad L’Olim, assists *olim* with all kinds of bureaucracy. He has been at the forefront of dealing with the changing travel restrictions.

“We have been lobbying for safe travel from South Africa for quite a while. I do want to caution everyone to reduce their expectations. The authorities are overwhelmed by the numbers of applications – some receive approvals very quickly, others wait weeks, and some have had to even cancel or postpone their flights. We’ll do what we can to help you, but understand that it’s not always simple or straightforward.

“People need to understand that Israel isn’t open for tourists,” says Kim Kur, who runs the Facebook group Community Circle Home SA, a resource for South African expats and travellers. “Israel still needs to protect her borders. The Iron Dome protects her from enemy fire, and these restrictions protect her from a deadly virus. We can’t pick and choose when Israel has a right to defend herself.”

So how can you get to Israel? Those that can enter without approval and without vaccination are Israeli citizens and certain visa holders (A Class Visa Holders [A1-A5] and B1 and B4 visa holders who hold

a multiple-entry visa [it says m/1 on it])). “This doesn’t apply to those travelling from countries deemed ‘red’ by Israel,” says Kur.

If South Africans are vaccinated, they can apply to travel to Israel if they are a first-degree relative of a registered Israeli citizen. A first-degree relative means a spouse, parent, child, or sibling. “So, if the child is on a gap year, the parent cannot visit because the child isn’t an Israeli citizen,” Kur says.

They can apply for a second-degree relative to come with a first-degree relative if required – for example a dependant or child that cannot be left alone back in South Africa. But this is a separate application and approval isn’t guaranteed. Grandparents can come for the birth of a grandchild even if the new parents aren’t Israeli citizens.

The only time that unvaccinated South Africans may be allowed in is for a wedding (parents only), a funeral (for only 24 hours), for a family emergency, or if they are a first-degree relatives of a lone soldier.

“All approvals given will be for 30 days,” Lipman says. “Therefore, apply within 30 days of the flight – the earlier the better.”

He says all passengers entering Israel must take a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test 72 hours prior to boarding the flight. Their passport number appears on the test results. Passengers must show the negative test result at check in. Passengers with no valid PCR test won’t be allowed to board the flight.

They must also fill out and print an entry declaration for each person travelling.

“If you are entering Israel from an orange or red country, you must quarantine for 14 days. This can be reduced to seven days with a negative PCR test upon arrival and on day seven,” he says.



Kur says that you will need to provide an “isolation affidavit” and show that your insurance covers COVID-19. The isolation affidavit says that you will be able to isolate effectively. This can be in any accommodation – even with family – as long as you have your own separate bedroom and bathroom and can completely isolate. And they will check!”

Asked if, for example, a grandparent could travel to Israel from South Africa for a grandchild’s Barmitzvah, both experts say it’s unlikely. “They’re not allowed to come because of the Barmitzvah, but they’re allowed to come if they are visiting a first-degree relative who is the parent of the Barmitzvah boy,” says Lipman. “There’s no allowance to come for a Barmitzvah. There’s an allowance for parents to visit their children who may be holding a Barmitzvah for their child.”

Kur’s tips for those applying are to apply 30 days before, and allow sufficient time due to the backlog. “Exactly 30 days before, book your ticket. In theory, you don’t have to book a ticket, but we recommend you do. It shows intent and an actual date. When buying your ticket, pay the little bit extra to move or cancel it if needed. And this isn’t the time to do your booking yourself. This is the time for reaching out to travel agents who know Israel and fully understand the rules.

“It’s not easy, and it’s a waiting game. There’s a long list of people applying,” says Kur. “Furthermore, anybody who applied before 16 August must reapply. That application is no longer valid and will be processed as if we are still a red country. Approvals before 16 August are null and

void. There’s not much that can be done to speed up the process. But if you are having problems, reach out for help.”

She also advises that in the comments section of applications, clearly write your name and the reason for travel. “Spell it out, as it makes it easier for them on the other side. Also, make sure your PDFs are small. Don’t send huge documents as they might not get through. There are websites you can use to make PDFs smaller.”

Then, “the passport number you travel with must match the application form. If they have already replied and need additional information, put the letter ‘P’ before your passport number to reapply. If you haven’t heard back, don’t reapply – it adds to the backlog,” she says.

Asked if families should rather bring relatives out from Israel to visit them in South Africa, Kur says it’s better not to if the person in Israel isn’t a citizen as they may have trouble getting back in.

Lipman emphasises that anyone applying to travel to Israel must “please make sure your documents are okay. Problems with documents are the number-one cause for not receiving approval, and the authorities won’t necessarily notify you about this. Yad L’Olim is available to review your documents for you to make sure they are in order. Email info@yadlim.org, and we will guide you how to do that.”

Apply via the foreign ministry or the interior ministry. The links are available on the Community Circle Home SA Facebook page or the Yad L’Olim website or Facebook page.

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Israel donates emergency kits to Cape Winelands

Fifty-eight specialised Israeli emergency medical kits were donated this past week by the Israeli embassy in collaboration with the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council (SAZFCC) to the Western Cape Association for Persons with Disabilities.


The embassy’s chargé d’affaires, Hila Rose Friedman, spoke about the Hebrew term *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and how this value of helping those most in need is a cornerstone of the embassy’s mission.

“When the Cape Winelands District Municipality suggested we donate to the Association for Persons with Disabilities, it was as if all the pieces of this project suddenly fit together. Israel is a world leader in addressing projects that specifically focus on innovation that improves the lives of the physically disabled.”

The project was facilitated by Chaya Singer, the

executive director of the SAZFCC, and Western Cape Agriculture Minister Dr Ivan Meyer, the executive mayor of the Cape Winelands District Municipality and federal chairperson of the Democratic Alliance.

Said Singer, “We thank Minister Ivan Meyer and the Cape Winelands District Municipality for facilitating this opportunity for the SAZF to contribute meaningfully. We look forward to further collaboration, and are confident that partnership between South Africa and Israel in business and technology will assist in addressing our triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality”.



Israel brings emergency medical kits to the Cape Winelands District

Lose the learning labels, embrace the individual, say experts

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Master's graduates, performing artists, business owners – if the people behind these success stories had allowed themselves to be defined by their learning difficulties, they may never have reached their limitless potential. That's why discarding labels and supporting our children is so important when it comes to navigating barriers to learning.

"There's the young man who at just 23 is a pilot instructor, not bad when anxiety and apraxia were marked difficulties; another who runs an upmarket game lodge; a student who secured his actuarial candidacy with a large corporate before he even finished matric; the dancer who defies all who say the hard-of-hearing won't manage professional repertoires; the young girl with profound dyslexia graduating cum laude to teach; the lad whose engineering work controls OR Tambo airspace using software and management. The list goes on." So says Alison Scott, the principal of remedial school Bellavista, speaking of the countless Bellavista students who go on to fly after matric.

"That's not to say that the journey through high school has been easy," she says. "Yet, with goals, support, an ability to sit with being uncomfortable, self-confidence, strategies, and a deep knowledge of who you are and a heap of grit, you can't but succeed." That's why putting in place the correct support structures as early as possible is so important.

"Learning difficulties or barriers to learning are impairments which create a barrier to a specific form of learning but don't alter one's intelligence," says Johannesburg-based educational psychologist Lee-Anne Lewis. Though they may not learn in the same way or at the same pace as their peers, these children shouldn't feel limited or defined by their barriers. With the guidance of professionals, they learn how to process information in alternative ways to achieve their full potential. "The emotional well-being of children and adolescents with barriers to learning is also imperative

for their current and future success," Lewis says.

"A child will achieve only as high as we set our expectations," says Ilana Gerschlowitz, the author of *Saving my Sons – A Journey with Autism* and the founding director of The Star Academy for Autism and Catch Up Kids, which caters for the needs of students with ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) or learning challenges.

"Sadly, students are largely defined and boxed in by their labels. When a child is restricted by a label and there are no expectations – or the wrong expectations – it will be challenging for that child to have the self-confidence and motivation to succeed." That's why seeing beyond a child's learning challenges is so important – both in the school and home environment.

Scott echoes this thinking. "At Bellavista, we hold at the very core of our view of the child that every human being has the propensity for learning and no limits can or should be applied, internally or externally," she says. "A child may have a diagnosis which powerfully directs evidence-based interventions, but no child has a label that suggests they are defined by that description."

That's why the school is careful about descriptions. For example, Michael may live with dyslexia, but he's not dyslexic. Far more important than a child's diagnosis is who the child actually is – a unique individual. "At school, we don't allow that the child references their learning difficulty in any fashion other than to demonstrate self-awareness and a commitment to growth," Scott says.

In an open letter on Facebook, Nicola Date recently spoke of her own learning challenges and how the support of her parents, who always encouraged her individualism, helped her to reach her potential. For Date, now a 32-year-old senior copywriter who has



also built a successful arts and entertainment career, being placed in a "small class" at a mainstream school in Grade 5 was the start of a significant decline.

"We were marginalised and not given the same education as our more competent buddies," she recalls. "Being in the 'small class' affected my education, social standing – I was bullied – and my desire to learn. I spent the rest of my school career feeling limited, stunted, and not good enough to achieve. However, I found my solace in art and drama, and discovered my academic abilities in my later university years."

Both Scott and Gerschlowitz argue against placing children in "special" classes in a mainstream school environment. "I would challenge the premise of needing to separate children out based on their learning differences as a start point," says Scott. "An inclusive school environment will adjust every structure it has to afford every child belonging. It would be important for learning difficulties, as it is for any point of our

human difference, that a culture of tolerance, empathy, and genuine inclusivity is cultivated so that no child is ostracised or made to feel less capable by the system or by their peers."

Gerschlowitz is a strong advocate for mainstream schooling for children with learning challenges. "As soon as there's a child with a difference, our schools tend to highlight the deficit and refer to remedial or other therapies," she says. "Instead, so much could be achieved if certain accommodations in the mainstream classroom were made. If mainstream teachers are paired with the correct special-education programme and receive the necessary training, the student with a label can succeed in the mainstream classroom."

Joshua Poyurs, 28, who recently attained his Master's in research and clinical psychology, managed to make this transition. Poyurs was born with brain damage on the right side of the brain. This affected movement in the left side of the body, mathematical ability, and resulted in epilepsy, speech disorders, dyspraxia – which affects movement and co-ordination – and poor sensory integration.

With years of intensive physiotherapy from the age of three months, as well as occupational therapy and speech therapy each day, Poyurs transitioned to mainstream schooling in Grade 2. With the support of teachers and classmates, Poyurs began an academic path and ultimately matriculated with four distinctions.

Yet, it was his parents who played the biggest part in his success. "My dad taught me that knowledge is invaluable, and that being on a mission to discover what you don't know is exciting," he says. "My mom is a hero in my eyes. I don't know how she had the strength to do what she did. She did physio with me, never gave up on me, and wouldn't let my anxiety break me."

"I think as a kid when you're different like this, you know it, but you don't understand it, you just feel different. It can be disheartening when you start to mainstream and realise how far behind you are. But as a parent, you can teach your child that there are no rules about what you can become."



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Journey from reverend’s daughter to rebbetzin

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Born into a Christian family, South African born Rebbetzin Elisheva Goldschmidt never felt that she quite belonged. When a trip to Israel sparked a passion for Judaism, she followed an unexpected path to becoming a rebbetzin in Kochi, India.

“As a child, I felt external to my human experience,” said Goldschmidt speaking at a Sydenham Shul webinar this week. “I never felt like I fitted in, and I had no idea why.” At an early age, she found her calling in singing, music, and dance, yet this didn’t detract from her unexplained feeling of otherness.

Growing up in a small town where her father served as a reverend to the church, Christianity was the prevalent religion. Goldschmidt, an only child, was never exposed to anything except conservative churches. “Anything that was other was shied away from and not explained. I never met a Jew until much later.”

While she was a bit like a chameleon who adapted to her surroundings, Goldschmidt felt very little connection to her peers or family. “Internally, I grew increasingly distant from everything and everybody.” She felt there was no one to talk to about her feelings of dislocation. When she encountered an energetic pastor at one of her many choir performances

who claimed to have spoken to G-d, she decided to try to do so too to find some form of connection, albeit unsuccessfully.

Goldschmidt was about 16 when her parents divorced. “Knowing the private reasons surrounding their split, I could no longer keep up this farce of spirituality,” she said. “I lost all faith in the church and the system of which I

was a part.” It led to extreme rebellion. “I got into all sorts of trouble and landed in abusive relationships, all while still shining on the music front. I had this dual life. I was struggling with all these things that one wasn’t allowed to talk about in our community. Inside I was screaming for attention and acceptance.”

After moving to a new town with her mother and joining a new church, Goldschmidt began vocalising all her long-held questions – something that was strongly discouraged at school and church.

When her history teacher began preaching religion, telling the class that if they give their hearts to Jesus, they would be alright for the rest of their lives, Goldschmidt questioned this idea. Kicked out of the class, she wouldn’t be silenced, and decided to read the Christian Bible cover to cover.

This gave rise to even more questions, especially as she was forced to prepare for a pledge of allegiance to the church at the end of the school year. She caused such a “disruption” in her classes at the church that the pastor paid a visit to her mother telling her that he’d prefer it if she didn’t return. Goldschmidt therefore left the church. Afterwards, she explored all sides of Christianity, searching for meaning, eventually investigating the Messianic movement. Yet, she battled to find a sense of belonging in any of the belief systems she encountered.

That’s when a friend suggested that Goldschmidt travel to Israel. At the age of 19, in the midst of her music studies, she took the trip that would kickstart a greater journey. “When I stepped foot on the El Al flight, it was the first time I’d heard Hebrew spoken or met a Jew. I was intrigued. In Israel, I was on cloud nine all the time, it was like walking into a world that I didn’t know existed.” As she approached the Western Wall, Goldschmidt felt something within her shake. “I sat down and started crying. I had no idea why, but I couldn’t stop. The reason is that I heard the call of home.”

Giving insight into the world of converts, Goldschmidt said, “At the beginning, when Hashem created this beautiful collective soul of *am Yisrael*, it was almost like a container with glitter. With the fall of Adam HaRishon [the fall of man], that lid came off, and some of those sparks went flying and landed in people like me – other people. And we hear the call of Shema to come home.” Indeed, someone recited the Shema as Goldschmidt sat on the steps approaching the wall. “My little spark could no longer sit on that step, I had to find my way home.”

Yet it was still a long road to conversion. After returning to South Africa and marrying and divorcing within a year, Goldschmidt embarked on an international opera tour. Escaping an abusive relationship that began during this time, she returned to Israel. “I went back to where I felt I had an identity, back to where I felt a sense of belonging.” There, she began her conversion process and met her future husband, who later helped her complete the process back in South Africa.

She believes her journey was part of a greater plan. Though she’d never learned about the Holocaust as a child, Goldschmidt says that she’d suffered from nightmares for most of her life. Some were about going into half-moon shaped ovens. Others were about being stuck in a train in a tiny wooden cart packed with people, when a soldier opens the door and they step out into the snow. “Since coming out of the mikvah after converting almost 10 years ago, I’ve never had another nightmare,” she said.

She and her husband married in Cape Town, and soon made aliyah. The couple joined a *shlichut kollel*, which sent rabbis and their families to run *kollels* (study institutes) abroad. It was Goldschmidt’s idea to ask for a posting in India as her husband had frequently travelled there and loved it. His family also had longstanding business connections in the country. And so, they moved to Kochi and took over the Pardasei Synagogue, the oldest shul in the commonwealth, built in 1568. This is also home to the only kosher mikvah in the south of India.

Today, the Goldschmidts have three children and are a central part of Jewish life in Kochi. While only 24 families remain in the area, they are committed to supporting this colourful community. “It’s an aging community, so I want to make sure that if anyone, G-d forbid, passes, we’re there to help them transition in a beautiful way,” said Goldschmidt.

“When tourism resumes, we also hope to keep serving the couple of thousand Israelis who pass through each month. We’re the only shul in the south of India – the closest one is a two-hour plane ride away.” And so, the rebbetzin’s journey continues.



Rebbetzin Elisheva Goldschmidt spreading love in India

Archaeology’s rising star sheds light on the past

TALI FEINBERG

Most of us picture archaeology as digging in the dust, but Ruby-Anne Birin is using cutting edge technology to blaze a trail in the field.

An archaeological science student at Oxford University, Birin is passionate about history and its relevance to our present and future.

She was drawn to the field because she has “always had an interest in the past, as well as geography and science. Archaeology is a broad umbrella that allows for all these different parts of human interest to collide and help uncover human stories”.

Her work includes “developing maps to show how technological innovation moved through southern Africa, the home of many of these ideas, through space and time during the Middle Stone Age [300 000 to 30 000 years ago]. This will involve collating ages of archaeological sites. These ages are derived through several techniques including optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) – which I might get to do myself, uranium-series, and a little bit of radiocarbon dating.”

Her undergraduate degree included working across southern Africa. “As part of your undergraduate, students are encouraged to go to field schools. These trips show the breadth of South Africa’s heritage – from the caves in Sterkfontein, which contain our *hominin* ancestors to the southern African coast, which hold keys to early human innovation and the much more modern pre-colonial and colonial past.”

Birin decided to go into OSL dating in part because of her interests in all these periods. “Initially, I worked as a lab technician for Dr Mary Evans at the Wits luminescence labs [University of the Witwatersrand], helping her prepare samples from across southern Africa and the globe. In my Honours, under the supervision of Dr Evans and Professor Alex Schoeman, I applied these skills to Bokoni, a part of Mpumalanga which has the southernmost terraced farming. This farming is remarkable in scope, and a demonstration of urban farming towns. The age of these sites were unknown, however. Through my work, we

managed to establish their pre-colonial origins in the 15th century. This is important as it undermines often racist suggestions that African farmers didn’t innovate prior to European innovation.”

The work took several years to write up, and a few months ago, they published the final results. “We accompanied this academic paper with a public-engagement paper in *The Conversation* to ensure that everyone has access to our work.”

Meanwhile, at Oxford, for her Masters, “I applied a new type of luminescence dating to Wonderwerk Cave and Pniel. These ancient sites show very early human innovation and development. I have now shifted my interests to understanding what all the ages mean for our shared African story. This will be obtained through many methods and from multiple labs.”

Explaining OSL in layman’s terms, Birin says, “OSL measures when last quartz grains [the shiny stones you often find at gift shops] that are the size of beach sand were last exposed to light. Imagine each little grain is a battery. The battery exists at 100%. However, when it’s exposed to sunlight, the battery drops to 0%. The grain is then buried or trapped in a pot. Within the soil, there are radioactive elements. The grain uses these elements to recharge itself. Archaeologists extract these grains using lightproof tubes, and then open and measure them in a dark lab environment, making sure that the quartz isn’t re-exposed to light, resetting it to 0%.

“We then measure how much the grain has been able to charge itself and divide it by the rate at which it recharges itself. This gives us how long ago the grain was buried. If you think of it as your phone – if someone comes and sees that it is on x% and they know that the voltage is y, they can assume you plugged your phone in however many hours or minutes ago.”

Birin was privileged to go to Ashkelon in Israel for her first excavation. “This remarkable site was occupied and abandoned [often after a violent conflict] several times over the centuries,” she says. “The evidence we get of people living in a region often comes from these abandoned, destroyed layers that capture a

city in a moment of chaos – much like Pompeii. Our knowledge of the Philistine period at Ashkelon comes from one of these layers. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Ashkelon in 604 BCE, 20 years before his destruction of the first Jewish Temple.

“This was the first time such a cemetery was excavated,” she says. “The cemetery provided a way to explore human life before this destruction, to understand the ritual and livelihoods of these people. It gave us the opportunity to tell the Philistine story, not through the lens of their enemies, but through their own remains. It gives the Philistines their own place in history rather than remaining a footnote for others.”

Asked why archaeology is important, she says, “Archaeology helps us to connect with our past. It isn’t only about the history that’s written, but the everyday people who lived throughout our human journey. It’s deeply personal and collective, giving insight into individual stories, helping us to understand how as a society we came to be where we are today. These discoveries can bring happiness, excitement, and heartache. It helps us understand who we were in the past, and that can guide us to where we are going in the future.”

Her advice to anyone wanting to go into archaeology is to contact your local university and find out if there are any public lectures or clubs you can be part of. “You can also get involved in excavations to see if you like field work. You can find out about local opportunities through the universities or online in the case of Israel. Every year, many Israeli sites welcome hundreds of people with little archaeological field experience. The team I was with in Ashkelon now runs a site called Tel Shimron. Mostly, keep an open mind. Archaeology is diverse, and whether your interests lie in the humanities or sciences, there is space to explore as long as you are willing to look.”

Her ultimate goal is to be involved in public engagement and research, “helping to link our past and make it relevant and accessible to people in the present”.

She says growing up in the South African Jewish community had an impact on where she is today. “I believe being in a community that valued education was incredibly valuable. I don’t mean this is a way of getting good grades at school, but more in the space where lifelong learning is valued.

“In South Africa, we’re privileged to be in a space with a long and incredible, exciting, but sometimes complex and painful human history,” she says. “Our community has a strong history in helping understand these records and remains. We need to show pride in our country’s heritage while thinking consciously about how we will be remembered through our own archaeological remains.”



Ruby-Anne Birin



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Home and hearty – lockdown creates new niche for caterers

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Offering weekly menus, baked goods, Shabbat meals, and *yom tov* specialties, home-based cooks aren't just sustaining the community through their delicious meals, they're also building viable businesses in the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Retrenched just one week before her wedding, Jodi Witz Bedil embraced the chance to start a new chapter – personally and professionally. “For years, I wanted to start my own cooking business, but I didn't have the guts to take the plunge,” she says. “Losing my sales management job after four years was a major wake-up call to follow my passion.”

In May this year, Witz Bedil officially launched her Joburg-based business, Cooked by Jodi. “There has been an increase in demand for home-cooked meals as more people go out less during the COVID-19 pandemic,” she says. “It allows them to have the feeling of eating a good meal that they don't have to get at a restaurant or prepare themselves. While COVID-19 has played a part in her immediate success, Witz Bedil says the timing was simply right.

Witz Bedil, in fact, trained as a chef. Her culinary flair was passed down from her mother and late grandmother, both outstanding cooks. “Now, I'm cooking from the heart and bringing my family's

recipes to your table,” she says. Cooked by Jodi offers weekly and seasonal menus with different Shabbat offerings and a



specialised Rosh Hashanah menu. “I do this to keep things fresh, to create a diverse and exciting offering. The support of this community is incredible. Word of mouth has definitely helped, and something new is always attractive.”

While she's not kosher, Witz Bedil cooks with kosher meat on request. She's considered kashrut as a way to bring in more business, but it isn't on the cards at the moment. “I believe that delicious Jewish food can be enjoyed even though it's not kosher,” she says.

For now, she's nourishing the space that she's carved out for herself. Female empowerment is also a long-term focus. “I'd like to be able to grow this business enough so that I can employ and teach the underprivileged, those who cannot enter the regular job market or who are struggling with employment. I believe that by teaching a skill set, one can help make a difference.”

Cape Town-based caterer Barbara Saacks has similar goals. Having been in the cooking business for almost 40 years, Saacks is known for her delicious *brochas* and functions at various shuls. Though she caters for the school and shul at Chabad of the West Coast, lockdown offered her the chance to tackle an unfulfilled ambition.

“I always

and training staff to run daytime operations.

Though her food is kosher, pursuing Beth Din certification isn't a prospect. “One has to have a completely separate kitchen, new equipment, and a full-time *mashgiach*,” says Saacks. “Because I work during the day, the primary hours of Barbara Saacks Catering must be during the evening. I can do this only at home, which was one of the main reasons why I decided not to go the Beth Din route.”

Yet, providing a unique offering on a smaller scale sets her apart from other caterers in the community. “There are a few Beth Din caterers in Cape Town, but most specialise in meat products. Because I specialise in vegan and vegetarian foods, people call me.”

For Bev Cohen, lockdown also provided an opportunity to enter the home-catering space. An active member of the Union of Jewish Women,



Cohen's passion project was Silver Lining, a programme for those suffering from Alzheimer's, dementia, and other conditions. “When we went into lockdown last year and I couldn't do this work, I realised that I had to do something,” she recalls. Her kids suggested she turn her love of cooking into a business, and DC Gourmet was born. “Lockdown is absolutely conducive to running this kind of business. It kept

dreamed that I could use my skills in the kitchen as a way to start my own business,” she says. “While schools were closed during the initial lockdown, there was no better time to make this a reality. It also kept me busy when we were stuck at home. Knowing the multitude of households out there who were also struggling during lockdown, I felt it was an opportune time to take the pressure off preparing meals.”

A committed vegetarian, Saacks has capitalised on the growing demand for kosher, fresh, and healthy meals, which aren't always accessible or affordable in supermarkets. “My cooking provides a variety of options in the vegan and vegetarian space,” she says. “I'm always experimenting with new recipes and ingredients. It's a niche market that's fortunately become more prevalent in the Western Cape as people become increasingly health conscious.”

In establishing this niche, Saacks has also been able to appeal to a broader clientele. “The marketing is done by my daughter, and we post on various social-media platforms to Jewish and non-Jewish groups. I have clients across the board.”

However, being an integral part of Cape Town's shul catering space is an undeniable advantage. “People know me from the shuls and around Cape Town, so I owe a lot of my success to this,” says Saacks. “Many orders come via word of mouth. It's been very successful, in fact far more than I thought it would be at this point.”

What began as a lockdown project now has the potential to be something more. Saacks sees herself possibly moving her business to a more industrial kitchen, creating employment,



me at home, and gave me something to do. I do a limited weekly menu, and I've really enjoyed it.”

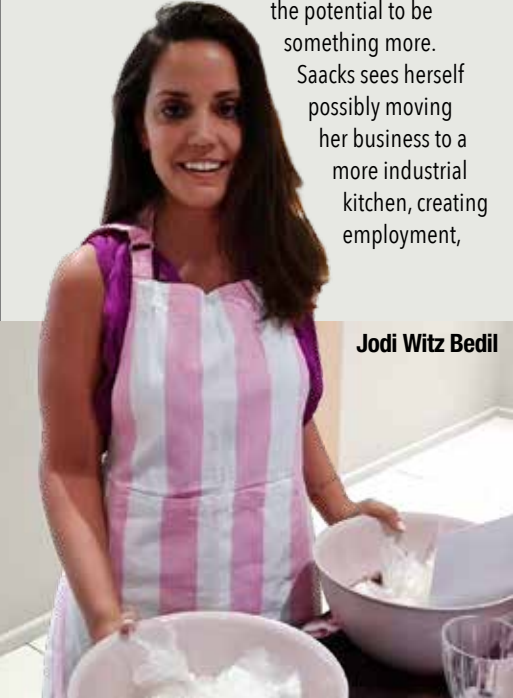
Initially there was an influx of COVID-19-related orders. “I just dropped them off at the front door,” says Cohen. “A lot of people came back and asked me to pass that service onto someone else.”

She feels that there's continued demand for businesses like hers because people are bored with their own food, tired of slaving away in the kitchen, or simply hate cooking. “When you're in your house all the time, it can get a little monotonous,” she says. “It's fantastic that so many home-cooking businesses

have arisen during COVID-19. I've found my niche through making basic home-cooked and hearty meals, I think that's what people want.” While the frequency of orders varies, Cohen is anticipating an upsurge as she releases her Rosh Hashanah menu.

Like many who offer this service in the community, Cohen does “kosher-style” cooking, using only kosher ingredients. She cites the expense and complications that come with running a home-based business under the Beth Din. “Very religious people certainly wouldn't buy from me, and I respect them for that, but a lot of people are quite happy with kosher ingredients and a delicious meal.”

Cohen is deeply saddened by the closure of some established, larger-scale caterers, but doesn't see a direct correlation between this and the upswing in home-based culinary businesses. “I don't believe that we can take on the big functions that these caterers used to do,” she says. While functions may be smaller going forward, they'll probably remain the domain of larger, Beth Din-licensed caterers.



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T'S & C'S APPLY

Couple live streams wedding – including the rabbi

SAUL KAMIONSKY

History was probably made at the Red Ivory wedding venue in Hartbeespoort on 8 August 2021, when a progressive Jewish wedding took place without a rabbi in attendance.

Falling on Rosh Chodesh Elul, a day for celebration, the wedding was officiated by Rabbi David Benjamin over Zoom from Israel.

The bride, Tammy Solomon, and groom, Devan Becker, stood under the chuppah while the 40 attendees, comprised of immediate family and a few friends, watched the East London-born Rabbi on television. It was set up in front of the chuppah by Larry Nussbaum, a live streaming and Zoom specialist who has worked in the wedding industry for a quarter of a century. Nussbaum also placed cameras around the chuppah so Benjamin and about 40 other online viewers could watch the marriage of the animal-loving couple who met about seven years earlier.

A glass of wine was held up in front of the screen when Benjamin said *sheva brachot*, and the *ketubah* was held in front of a camera so Benjamin could read it.

Why the couple wanted Benjamin is a long story that starts when Becker converted to reform Judaism while he was Solomon’s fiancé.

“We tried desperately to do it Orthodox. We tried to prove that he

was Jewish because there were papers on his mother’s side that prove it,” says Solomon. “There was just no help from anybody, so we went to Bet David [in Sandton] and Rabbi Adrian Schell

go ahead and do what we had to do. He said, ‘It can be done; I don’t have to be there. As long as you’ve got witnesses, it’s fine because that’s what you need.’ “I decided to stream it because I have

funerals for the Chevrah Kadisha. “Larry was very helpful,” says Solomon. “We had a meeting the night before the wedding, so it was last minute, but he pulled off the technical

provided some light entertainment while photographs were taken before the reception. Though the reception wasn’t streamed, it followed COVID-19 protocols just like the chuppah ceremony.

“With COVID-19 and so many restrictions, you would never get that same big Jewish wedding that you’ve always dreamed of having,” says Solomon. “People don’t want to be on the dance floor doing the *horahs*, they don’t want to be on top of one another. We had it to an extent, as Jarred sussed out the vibes, he gave us a little bit of the *horahs*, got people on the dance floor, but also knew when people didn’t want to continue.”

Dinner, which included hot beef on rye as the main meal, was served by Stacey Baron Catering. “It was amazing,” says Solomon. “We wanted something different, so we went with what I think was a unique menu. It wasn’t the normal food you would get if you had Riva or Gary Friedman Caterers.” Instead of a wedding cake, they had a mini doughnut cake.

“Above everything else, the venue and the rabbi worked perfectly, and it was just an amazing day,” says Becker.

“There was obviously a lot of stress about the day with it being over Zoom, worrying about the connection and what people would think,” says Solomon. “But it went smoothly. We’re just happy it happened, and the way it worked out. The most important thing is that we got married.”



completed the conversion on 6 August last year.”

The couple got engaged 17 days later, but soon found themselves without a rabbi after Schell, who Tammy describes as “a great guy”, informed them that he was leaving the country.

They eventually came across Benjamin, a University of Cape Town alumnus who moved to Israel in 1989. “He was actually supposed to be in the country, but with Israel not letting anybody out, we had to make a plan,” says Solomon. “We got to know him, and he was a very nice guy and we were happy with him, so we just decided to

a lot of family in Israel and America who couldn’t make it to the wedding,” says Solomon. “My grandfather is, like, 80 or something now – he had tickets booked and everything, and Israel was like, ‘no, no leaving’, so they had to cancel their tickets, and I was like, ‘let me stream.’”

Solomon approached Nussbaum with what he describes as “a challenge”. Having grown up in the wedding industry, Nussbaum developed live-stream capability about 13 years ago, and his company, YouView, facilitates Zooms for people and live streams weddings and other events such as

side of it. He made sure that everything was correct and perfect; he muted everyone so that we didn’t have people talking. He was a big part of making sure that it worked perfectly. I don’t know how it would have happened if he hadn’t stepped in.”

Nussbaum facilitated the Zoom meeting, co-ordinated all the parties involved such as DJ Jarred Kruger, made sure the PA system worked clearly, and basically managed the whole process from an electronic point of view.

The Marks Trio, a jazz band, played at the chuppah ceremony and

Learning Pirkei Avot through art and culture

More than 1 500 children took part in the recent Pirkei Avot Arts and Culture Competition, designed to bring the teachings of the Pirkei Avot alive and make them meaningful and practical.

The initial phase of the programme, run by Tzivos Hashem South Africa, was a five-week learning course for students across the country. Interactive lessons were offered in various forms – some schools included lessons in their curriculum, others promoted learning in after-school Zoom classes or YouTube videos.

Each child received their own beautiful Pirkei Avot book from Chabad House,

followed by the student workbook and lesson materials from Tzivos Hashem.

“So many children studying the same Torah themes together created a wonderful experience of Jewish unity. The feedback from children, parents, and teachers has been outstanding,” said Devorah Leah Wineberg, the director of Tzivos Hashem, South Africa.

Following the study programme, the children were invited to prepare a project based on any theme that had inspired them in Pirkei Avot. They could use their creative talent in any area of art, music, or writing to produce their exhibit. Their projects went on display at Huddle Park this past week.

“When you make a project of Torah, you really acquire what you have learned,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein after viewing the projects at Huddle Park on Sunday.



Rabbi Ziv Weinberg and Devorah Leah Weinberg with Rebbetzin Gina and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

Durban Holocaust centre highlights plight of refugees

The Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre (DHGC) hosted a dialogue on 12 August, “Reflecting on the effects of the current unrest in South Africa on refugees, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal”.

The 30 delegates at the event, which was held in collaboration with Forge Zoë Life and Nehemiah Hope

Africa, were taken on a detailed tour of the DHGC’s exhibition. Many of them had very limited knowledge of the Holocaust, and were visibly moved by the history. The tour provided a foundation for discussion, and emphasised the importance of dialogue for promoting peace, tolerance, and understanding.

“During these unprecedented times, we are pleased to be fulfilling our mission of creating a world where human rights and diversity are valued and respected by highlighting the dangers of prejudice, discrimination, and racism,” said Claudia Blythe, DHGC education facilitator.

“The DHGC stands in solidarity with the refugees in our province who, together with so many others, have been deeply affected by the recent unrest in KwaZulu-Natal. The impact of job losses, together with the fear of a resurgence in xenophobic attacks, has exacerbated the insecurity already felt by the refugee community. The event, which is anticipated to be the first of many, was a resounding success with thought-provoking conversations and interactive discussion.”



A 30-member delegation takes part in the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre’s recent dialogue on the effect of unrest on refugees, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal

Youth leads the way

Mazaltov to the newly-elected student leaders for 2022 from their schools and the SA Jewish Report!

Herzlia High School



Head Student: Benjamin Anstey
Deputy Head & Secretary: Sino Nomkonwana

Deputy Head and Outreach: Sabrina Brivik
Deputy Head and Zionism: Olivia Diamond
Sport: Aaron Schwartz
Jewish Life and Learning: Adi Ayache
Social Affairs: Mila Smith
Culture: Jamie McNally
Student Wellness: Jared Daitsh, Lilla Fleischmann

King David High School Linksfield



Head Student Leader: Gabi Sassen
Head Student Leader: Daniel Appleton

Deputy Head Student Leaders: Shiri Kaplan, Judah Marx
Heads of Committees: Advocacy and Awareness – Kelli Hollander
Arts and Culture – Mia Peretz
Eco – Danielle Novick
Judaica – Yoni Porter

Outreach – Hannah Gnesin
SMACC – Dylan Heller
Sports and Lifestyle – Rachel Sacks

Leaders: Leigh Appleton, Gabriella Berkman, Jonathan Borowitz, Ricki-Lee Friedman, Michael Gingell, Anja Gluch, Ben Goss, Jessie Herring, Raphael Hirschowitz, Ryan Jammy, Joseph Joffe, Lior Kolman, Melissa Krawitz, Amy Lurie, Chiara Miller, Tali Pimstein, Zak Rachelson, Rory Rosenberg, Aiden Sack, Dalya Uria, Isabella Woznica

Yeshiva College High School boys



Head Boy: Gabriel Kahlberg

Vice Head Boy: Josh Sachs
Head of Israel: Benji Chazen
Head of Unity and Inspiration: Asher Levenstein, Gidon Ralph
Head of Chessed: Daniel Sacks
Head of Media: Joseph Levin
Head of Environment and Advocacy: Joshua Hirschowitz
Head of Sports, Arts, and Culture: Jonathan Lewis

Yeshiva College High School girls



Head Girl: Liat Lew

Vice Head Girl, Head of Israel: Ariella Friedland
Head of Unity and Inspiration: Ariella Feinblum, Talya Shlesinger
Head of Chessed: Tali Kozinsky
Head of Media: Carrie Goldstein
Head of Environment and Advocacy: Batsheva Levy
Head of Sports, Arts, and Culture: Hannah Farber, Liora Rosenberg

King David High School Victory Park



Head Boy: Jarrod Kapeluschnik
Head Girl: Megan Gruz

Deputy Head Boy – Liron Krawitz
Deputy Head Girl – Leah Meyerowitz
Chief Whip – Ariella Scop
Judaica Committee: Nadav Sundy, Liora Scop
Arts and Culture Committee: Keren Katzew, Joshua Milner
Spirit and Sport Committee: Adam Dakes, Elle Ochayon
Outreach Committee: Shira Woolf
Global Awareness Committee: Environment – Jessica Blem
Civic and Social Awareness – Jamie Treger
Service Committee: Public Relations and Communication – Daniel Rismani
Foundation and Mentoring – Natalie Cohen

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Raging against Rage 2021

The “good book” is quite specific. It tells us that we need to circumcise our sons, teach our children Torah, make sure that they understand what marriage entails, to earn a living, and we need to teach our children to swim. What it doesn’t tell us, but probably should, is that we should also do what we can to prevent our children from going to the December Rage festival. No matter what it takes.

Although I was somewhat gobsmacked to read that the Plett Rage festival is back on, as a supporter of the free market, I understand that it’s their choice to offer willing participants to, well, participate.

That said, just because they “build it” doesn’t mean that we need to send our children. And I would go so far as to say that parents who do might consider if the whole parenting thing is for them. After all, as easy as it is to acquiesce, it most definitely isn’t the responsible thing to do.

According to the organisers, “We will be adhering to all governmental restrictions. Your safety is our number-one concern.” Which is nice. But most likely untrue. I’m certain that there are many concerns that they have had before safety even comes into it. And if I was cynical, I might even suggest a rewording so that it now reads that “the perception of your safety is our number-one concern”.

Most of us would prefer to forget what happened last year when the KwaZulu-Natal Rage Festival went ahead. The impact on the country was staggering. So much so, that in the *Communicable Diseases Communiqué*, it even became a study. According to its research, “Of the 2 253 Rage attendees, 848 (37.6%) laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases were identified, of which

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



846 (99.8%) were revellers and two were crew (0.2%).”

According to the report, “The investigation revealed that two of the Rage attendees had positive SARS-CoV-2 results before Rage but still proceeded to attend the event. This indicates lack of discipline and irresponsible risk behaviour amongst revellers as there is little or no adherence to the recommended prevention measures.”

What followed the Rage Festival was a rapid spread of the Beta variant (thought to have evolved at that time) and a spike in infections that brought the country to a standstill. It had an impact on coastal towns that rely on the December period, and cost the country billions in revenue.

Worse than that, it cost lives. Not of the revellers, but of those they brought it home to. The Jewish community was particularly hard hit. Families were impacted not only by illness, but were forced to quarantine, cancel holiday plans, and deal with the fall out.

I spoke to a number of parents who felt guilty, regretful, and embarrassed that they had allowed their children to attend in 2020. Most, given the chance, wouldn’t allow it to happen again. The difference between 2020 and 2021 is experience. Where last year there might have been doubt about the consequences, this year plausible deniability is no longer an option.

It isn’t always easy to be a parent. But your kids will thank you for it.

Letters

HATZOLAH HEROES SHOW WHAT CARING REALLY MEANS

As we flounder in the unrelenting chaos of COVID-19, Hatzolah comforts and cares for those stricken by the virus when others turn away for fear of contagion.

It’s taken me a while to write this. I’m usually never at a loss for words, yet as a COVID-19 survivor and deeply fortunate beneficiary of Hatzolah’s selfless expertise, the words to express my gratitude escaped me.

Within a short while of testing positive and registering with Hatzolah, a volunteer in full personal protective equipment (PPE) arrived at my door with an oximeter, thermometer, and other equipment needed for me to monitor my symptoms, oxygen saturation, temperature, and pulse. As the virus swept through my family leaving each person to deal with their own specific COVID-19-related issues, none of us ever felt alone because of the regular, twice daily calls that came from the various dedicated volunteers assigned to keep track of how the virus was affecting us.

As my SATS plummeted to the low 70s and my GP facilitated an admission to hospital, the Hatzolah heroes hovered in the background to reassure me that they were

keeping track of my progress. Having only had one Pfizer vaccine, I’m one of the lucky ones who survived hospitalisation with just oxygen rather than ventilation.

Given the alarming escalation of COVID-19 cases while I took ill, it would be normal to expect the guardian angels of Hatzolah to move on to other patients in critical condition after I was admitted to hospital. But although they did focus attention on newer COVID-19 victims, they never abandoned me or made me feel like I was navigating this journey solo. When I was discharged after a week in hospital, they sent a specially partitioned Uber to take me home. Thereafter, a PPE-clad nurse came to my house to take bloods and monitor my blood pressure and sugar levels.

To Carin, Tali, Shayna, and Shevi, the beacons of light at the end of an unknown and very scary tunnel, you’ll never know the profound impact that your care has had upon my life. May you and the rest of the Hatzolah superheroes continue to support, comfort, nurture, and save our community in the most nightmarish of circumstances.

– Michael Block, Ghita Block, Heide, and Adam Stern

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PowerFM reprimanded by BCCSA over right of response

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



Last week, two important meetings were held. The first took place between our senior lay and professional leadership and the world security and online hate team to address a right-wing group posting racism and antisemitism on Telegram. I’m happy to report that through our work with the World Jewish Congress, action has now been taken. The second meeting took place with Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, to brief him on antisemitism in South Africa, particularly the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. National Director Wendy Kahn has worked previously with Shaheed, giving input to his report on global antisemitism presented to the UN in October 2019. We are now preparing a detailed report for him on the local situation.

In conclusion, the Board also congratulates the Council for the Advancement of the SA Constitution (Casac) on its successful high court challenge to the way the interviews for Constitutional Court positions were conducted by the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) earlier this year. As will be remembered, two Jewish candidates were subjected to a barrage of irrelevant and inappropriate questions pertaining to their Jewish identity, association with the SAJBD, and views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Other candidates were also subjected to inappropriate treatment during their interviews. Thanks to Casac, the JSC was directed to re-hold its interviews in October. This represents an important reaffirmation by our courts of the principle of judicial independence and a defeat for those, including Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions agitators, who sought to manipulate the judicial selection process for their own ideological ends.

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

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