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Going to Rage like ‘playing Russian Roulette’

TALI FEINBERG

Expert in mass gathering medicine, Professor Efraim Kramer, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that “Rage is nothing short of teenage Russian Roulette that may take the lives of its participants and cause large national collateral damage in disease and death, as it did last year.”

Kramer said this following a letter written by the Gauteng General Practitioners Collaboration (GGPC) was sent to local principals, begging them to tell students not to go to end-of-year Rage festivals because of the pandemic.

Matric Rage is a group of festivals held at South African coastal towns like Plettenberg Bay and Ballito to celebrate the end of school. Matric Rage 2020 is widely considered to be the super-spreader event that fuelled South Africa's deadly second wave of COVID-19.

This year's Matric Rage organisers say they have put safety measures and protocols in place, including that no one can attend without being fully vaccinated. But in their letter, the general practitioners (GPs) say, “However good their intentions, we don't believe that the COVID-19 safety measures suggested by the organisers can prevent the spread of the virus. A large gathering like this, run over a few days, and consisting of excited teens is the ideal environment for a super-spreader event – as last year's event demonstrated. Even a ‘vax passport’ [now that 18 year olds are eligible] and daily rapid antigen tests are unlikely to be able to contain an inevitable presence and spread of COVID-19 amongst the revellers and beyond them to more vulnerable people.”

“Given the low vaccination rate in South Africa, a festival event of this size poses a considerable risk of a significant and

unnecessary contribution to a fourth spike [wave],” they said.

Kramer, head of the Division of Emergency Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, and professor of Sports Medicine at Pretoria University, said, “No parent has the right to put their children, other children, and society at health risk because of irresponsible personal excuses that the youngsters need to chill out. These mass gathering, high-risk events can cause death – it's no different to drinking and driving. Or will the same parents agree to drinking and driving because their kids had a difficult year?” he asked rhetorically.

“I agree that the young generation have sustained COVID-19 collateral damage psychologically, emotionally, and even mentally, all requiring adequate and appropriate countermeasures and social counselling activities,” said Kramer. “However, it's what's done, how it's done, when and where it's done, and the attention to health-precaution detail that's primary and paramount.”

“Regarding vaccination, these close-contact, mass gathering, crowded events remain a super-spreader, and have resulted in the unvaccinated and partially vaccinated occupying the majority of hospital ICU [intensive-care unit] beds, mechanical ventilators, and sadly, coffins,” he said.

“If Rage continues unabated against sound medical advice, no participant should be allowed back home without full COVID-19 testing. In addition, no participant should be allowed into any communal event including shuls or related activities without evidence of full COVID-19 testing. Finally, no participant should be allowed back to school or education institutions without evidence of full COVID-19 testing.”

“Let us not redress COVID-19 collateral

damage by bring out the worst in us,” he pleaded. “Let it rather bring out the best, the most innovative, the most exciting, energetic, low risk, safety-assured events that allow us all – young and old – to socialise with each other again. It can be done with discipline, attention to detail, direction, and supervision with effective command and control. All for one, and one for all.”

But one Cape Town parent, Mike Abel, said he will allow his son to go to Rage. “The fine balancing act as a parent is always to consider your children's physical health and their mental health. These two don't always go hand in hand when your kids run onto a rugby or hockey pitch with gum guards, head guards, knee guards, and silent words to the gods,” he said.

“Lockdown and COVID-19 restrictions have played havoc with mental and physical

health. As social creatures, our children have become more sedentary and disconnected. Rage is an opportunity for excitement, fun, and reconnection.

“Our son is 18 and vaccinated. Is Rage ideal? No. Is it 100% safe? No. Do we think it's the right decision for him to go? Yes. It will be better for him than not going. He'll have fun. He'll let off steam. He'll connect, laugh, play, swim, and enjoy his new-found freedom and transition from school to this new chapter and adventure. Will we sleep easy while he's there? No. But we hope his maturity, sense of responsibility, and values will guide him well-ish. Our kids need a degree of risk and freedom for both their physical and mental well-being.”

The GGPC letter was drafted by a group of GPs including three local Jewish doctors. One of them, Dr Sheri Fanaroff, said, “Even

with COVID-19 protocols in place, in reality they don't happen. It's the same as saying there should be no drugs allowed, but we know there are. I have a matric child, and I'm happy for her to go away and have fun, but not to a massive organised event. Yes, they've had a lousy two years, but there are safer ways to have fun. Parents don't want to make their child be the only one that's excluded, and we would rather the events be cancelled altogether than force parents and children to make a choice.

“The other issue is that many kids born later in the year won't be fully vaccinated and two weeks post vaccination by the time Rage comes. Many don't want to get vaccinated during exams,” she said. “And while young people don't always get extremely ill from COVID-19, we are seeing a fair amount of

Continued on page 6>>



Cold swim for charity

Johannesburg businessman Uri Krost trained in icy water throughout winter to get ready to swim from Robben Island to Cape Town to raise money for charity. He raised more than R180 000 for three charities, including Hatzolah. Krost swam the 7.7km in three hours and 30 minutes in water that was less than 14 degrees Celsius.

Photo: Greg Hack

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Dutch protesters against COVID-19 pantomime Nazi arrest
Several men dressed like Nazis were seen pretending to arrest a man wearing a yellow star as part of a rally against COVID-19 measures in the Netherlands.

The incident in Urk, near Amsterdam, on 11 September was the latest among the hundreds of rallies worldwide in which protesters have drawn what they regard as parallels between the persecution of Jews by Nazis to rules meant to curb the spread of the virus.

But the protest in Urk was unusual because of its theatrics and the fact that it happened where the Nazis actually rounded up Jews at gunpoint.

The 10 men involved in the incident apologised for their actions in a statement obtained by the *Hart van Nederland* television programme, saying that they didn't mean to offend Jews. "We wish to express our sincere apologies," the



Men wearing Nazi uniform during a COVID-19 protest in Urk on 11 September 2021
statement read, adding that the protest "crossed a line that it shouldn't have crossed".

The young men played out a scene in which SS officers at gunpoint led a man wearing a striped uniform and a yellow star, the NOS broadcaster reported.

The Urk municipality, which is considered one of the most pro-Israeli communities in the Netherlands, condemned the display in a statement.

"This behaviour is not only objectionable, but also extremely inappropriate and offensive for many groups in the population," the statement read.

Ohio man sentenced to 20 years for planning shul attack

A federal court sentenced an Ohio man to 20 years in prison for planning deadly attacks on a Toledo synagogue.

Damon Joseph of Holland, a Toledo suburb, had pleaded guilty in May to providing material support to a terrorist organisation and attempting to commit a hate crime. Along with the prison term, the United States District Court in Toledo sentenced Joseph to a lifetime of supervised release.

Joseph was 21 in 2018 when he posted recruitment propaganda for the Islamic State terrorist group on social media. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

agents engaged him online, and Joseph said he wanted to carry out a mass attack on a Toledo Jewish target, inspired in part by the mass murder of Jews at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October that year. The attack on the Tree of Life synagogue was the worst on US Jews in history.

Joseph was arrested when he accepted two disabled assault rifles from an undercover FBI agent.

"How appropriate that he has been sentenced as we commemorate the world's worst act of terror – 9/11," Ivor Lichterman, the cantor at the targeted synagogue, Congregation B'nai Israel, was quoted as saying by local CBS affiliate, WTOL11. "Similarly, this is around the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the time when Jews seek atonement, not only from G-d, but equally important, from our fellow man."

California legislators approve revised ethnic-studies curriculum

Jewish legislators critical of early drafts of an ethnic-studies curriculum said they were satisfied with a version of the curriculum that cleared both houses of the California legislature last week.

The bill mandating ethnic studies would make the state the first in the nation to require the course, which examines race and ethnicity with a focus on people of colour.

The liberal California Legislative Jewish Caucus criticised the original model of the curriculum, introduced in 2019, saying it carried an "anti-Jewish bias". They and others charged that it painted Israel in a negative light, barely mentioned antisemitism, and

included a rap lyric that they said contained an antisemitic trope.

The revised version of the curriculum, which was approved by the state board of education in March, includes two lessons on Jews in California – one on American Jewish identity and another on the experience of Mizrahi Jews, or Jews from the Middle East. It also removed the sections deemed anti-Israel and antisemitic.

The bill now heads to California Governor Gavin Newsom's desk.

Although the revised curriculum satisfied some Jewish organisations, including the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Relations Council, others remain fiercely opposed to the bill. In a statement last Thursday, antisemitism watchdog Amcha Initiative denounced its passage, and urged a veto by the governor, arguing that it didn't do nearly enough to prevent "overtly antisemitic" and anti-Zionist content from being taught in classrooms.

The debate over ethnic studies in California has become a flashpoint in the larger national debate over what schools should teach about history and racism in the US. Jewish critics of the curriculum see it as a foothold for marginalising Jews and demonising Israel.

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Torah Thought

Learning to fall teaches us to fly

"As an eagle that stirs up its nest, hovering over its young"

Rashi, one of our greatest commentators, explains that Hashem is compared to an eagle since eagles are so different to other birds. He says that they are the kings of all birds, and soar very high. Afraid only of man's bow and arrow, the eagle carries its young on its back. Other birds are afraid of the eagle, and have no choice but to choose the lesser of two evils and carry their babies underneath them in their talons.

This Rashi is problematic: Humans carry their babies in their arms. A monkey holds its young in much the same way. And a dog or cat picks up its offspring with its mouth. But what about birds? Do they ever carry their young on their backs?

Surprisingly, some birds do carry their offspring from one place to another, either to get them away from danger or to move them about as part of their daily care. Aquatic birds

let their chicks ride on their backs while they are swimming. Sometimes when the parent dives, the little one is carried underwater. And when the parent flies, the chick gets its first taste of being airborne without even using its own wings.

But, eagles? They just don't do this. So what's Rashi talking about?

Maybe our translation of *neshet* is incorrect. There's the opinion that a *neshet* is a vulture, but no vultures carry their young on their backs either, so what's going on? With respect to previous generations in Torah thought, we are never so arrogant as to say that we have superior knowledge. The further we move away from the Sinai experience, the more humble we become regarding the Torah knowledge of previous generations. Rashi lived almost a thousand years ago, and was a giant of Torah. So the best we can do is humbly admit that we don't

understand this Rashi.

One possible answer is brought by Rabbi Slifkin, who explains that when an eagle is teaching its eaglets to fly, it throws them from the nest and dives below to catch them on its back, ensuring that it breaks their fall before it breaks their neck. Perhaps this is what Rashi witnessed and wanted to use to describe Hashem's relationship with each one of us.

Not only did Hashem take us out of Egypt on the "wings of eagles", and not only will we be taken to the land of Israel when Moshiah comes on the "wings of eagles". But every single day, Hashem gently nudges us out of our comfort zone and while we are flailing and wondering how we'll cope, Hashem is ready to swoop down and catch us. It's that fall that teaches us how to soar!



Jewish activists take on alleged Hermanus rapist

NICOLA MILTZ

Two Johannesburg Jewish gender-abuse activists are at the centre of a battle to try stop an alleged rapist from preying on more young women travellers in the seaside town of Hermanus in the Western Cape.

Wendy Hendler and Rozanne Sack run a non-profit organisation called Koleinu, which offers a helpline to victims of abuse in the community.

Earlier this year, it was brought to their attention that a man accused of sexual harassment and rape was working as a surf instructor and owner of a guesthouse and surf school in the popular coastal town renowned for whale watching. The man, whose name is known to the *SA Jewish Report*, hasn't appeared in court or been formally charged, and for this reason, he cannot be named. He has vehemently denied all allegations against him.

Said Hendler, "Koleinu received information from a caller to our helpline informing us about victims she knew of. She was advised to put them in touch with us as soon as possible."

So began a mammoth task of gathering information and supporting victims to expose him.

In the course of their investigation, Hendler and Sack have taken statements from two international female tourists to South Africa who claim they were raped by him. One was allegedly raped in February last year during her stay at his guesthouse and surf school, the other seven years ago in Cape Town while she was a foreign student.

With the help of abuse activist Luke Lamprecht and attorneys specialising in the field, Hendler and Sack have compiled information on the man's alleged inappropriate sexual behaviour and harassment, which they say spans several years.

Following a recent article in *Daily Maverick* highlighting the women's horrific ordeals, news of the man's behaviour has shocked the Hermanus townsfolk. The local surfing community held an anti-gender-based violence demonstration last week near the Hermanus Magistrates Court, where all concerned citizens of the town were invited.

Although the man's hostel and surf school has an excellent 9.1 rating on Booking.com with some glowing reviews, Tripadvisor last week posted a message saying that it had been made aware of recent media reports or events concerning the property "which may not be reflected in reviews found on this listing".

"Accordingly, you may wish to perform additional research for information about this property when making your travel plans," the site said.

The two victims, whose names are being withheld to protect their identity, are grateful to Koleinu.

"When I left South Africa, I was traumatised and in denial," said Melanie (not her real name), "Koleinu has given me hope that other women won't become victims of his abuse. Its comfort and guidance has been wonderful. I feel that in some way, I have played a small part in stopping him."

Melanie, who lives in the United States, and Julia (also not her real name) from the United Kingdom, connected for the first time on social media after Melanie reached out to fellow travellers a year ago online in a bid to find people who may have experienced a similar ordeal.

"I had never looked him up before, and as soon as I saw his Instagram page and all the pictures of him with young women, it was like being hit by a lightning bolt," she said.

She direct-messaged women from the surf school's Instagram page, posting how she had met the owner of the surf school when she was 20 years old studying abroad in South Africa six years ago. After he befriended her and showed her around Cape Town, she wrote, "On our third meeting, he drugged and aggressively raped me in his truck outside of a bar. It took me years to process this, to actually realise what happened and get over it, but I was in denial at the time and didn't press charges. I'm reaching out to anyone who has ever associated with him and inquiring if this behaviour is a pattern. Has he done anything to you? Or anyone you know?"

To her astonishment, she was flooded with responses by women from all over the world, including countries like Israel and Mexico, alleging inappropriate sexual behaviour and harassment.

One of the women was Julia, who said he had raped her in a bedroom at his Hermanus guest accommodation in February last year.

The man has denied any involvement, telling the *SA Jewish Report*, "Those allegations are completely twisted, false, and damaging. I would never drug

Rozanne Sack and Wendy Hendler



anyone. It's an extremely hurtful allegation." He said he was talking to attorneys in Cape Town with a view to suing for defamation.

"I would like to add that these allegations were started by a girl seven years ago with no connection to my business who messaged thousands of my Instagram followers telling them I date drugged her."

In relation to the other victims' allegations, he said, "Some allegations are from a rival business owner in my road who wants me out of the picture. Proper scandal."

Hendler and Sack are hoping that the publicity will encourage other victims to come forward and alert

to lay charges against him while they don't live in this country."

Although the two tourists' ordeals differ, Hendler said the alleged perpetrator had preyed on their vulnerabilities.

"These types of abusers often have a radar for people's vulnerabilities, and they zone in and demolish their victims' defences," she said.

From dozens of posts online, the man openly body shames women, and has been described as a sex pest and pervert.

One Johannesburg teenager who met him during her

tourists and locals about the possible danger he presents.

"We need a local victim to come forward and be willing to lay criminal charges against him," said Sack, "In this way, a legal case can be instituted. It's difficult – if not impossible – for the two women

brief stay at his surf school told the *SA Jewish Report* that he was "weird and creepy".

"From the minute I met him, I felt uncomfortable. He was dodgy from the start," she said.

One local 22-year-old resident said that on two separate occasions, once in Cape Town the other in Hermanus, he had made her feel very uncomfortable.

"I told him more than three times to stop touching me, but after expressing that he would, he still continued being inappropriate towards me and I felt I was being sexually harassed. I believe he needs to be stopped as soon as possible."

Said Hendler, "Violent crime against women in this country generally isn't reported. It's only by empowering victims to find their voice and join in support of one another that we can hope to make any kind of change. We implore any other victims of this man to follow the example of these two courageous young ladies."

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Stories from hell: SA Jews remember 9/11

TALI FEINBERG

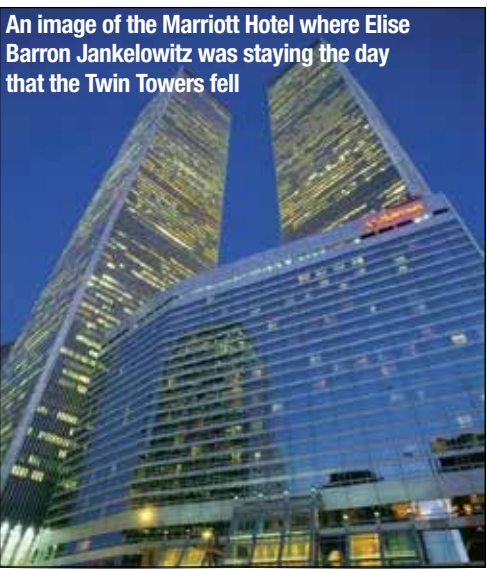
September 11 2001 was 20 years ago and seemingly a million miles away, but for some South African Jews who were eye witness to the events, it remains close to home.

"I still have nightmares," says Jonathan "Jonty" Kantor, who was meant to meet a friend at the World Trade Center (WTC) that day. He slept late, and woke to news of the attack, which profoundly changed his life.

"We didn't know what was going on, and we honestly thought the world was coming to an end," he says, a sentiment echoed by other South African Jews who were there. With all communication cut off, those who witnessed the chaos and horror had reason to believe it.

Kantor now lives in Johannesburg, but he was a student at Yeshiva Somayach Monsey at the time. He remembers that when he woke up, "everything was so quiet. Then I saw other students in a panic. They believed we were all about to die. They told me that planes had hit the WTC. I had always wanted to go there, and had arranged to

An image of the Marriott Hotel where Elise Barron Jankelowitz was staying the day that the Twin Towers fell



meet a friend there that morning, but we both thankfully survived."

He was also teaching a class whose students all had parents working at the WTC. By some miracle, all the parents survived. He also remembers that there were two brisses that day, which delayed people from going to work.

In the weeks that followed, "it was the same heaviness in the whole city that you see in a dead body. The only light was seeing Hatzolah rushing in to help. And you couldn't walk more than a block without people hugging you." This was in complete contrast to the city he had arrived in at the end of 2000, where he found people to be incredibly unfriendly.

Soon afterwards, he decided to return to South Africa. "I realised that nothing was more important than being with the people I love. 9/11 taught me that we shouldn't take for granted the life we have. We complain about the small things, but they're actually not important. Here in South Africa, we have a really good life, even with the difficulties. If we focused more on the positives, we could be happier."

Port Elizabeth-born Grant Gochin, who now lives in Los Angeles, was supposed to be on United Airlines Flight 175, which crashed into Tower Two. "Our friends Dan, Ron, and their three-year-old son David had been on vacation in Rhode Island. We were in Manhattan. We were supposed to meet up and fly home together. My son, Bryce, was only about five months old. He was as cranky as hell. I was so frustrated that I said to [my husband], Russell, 'Let's just go home.'"

"We came home on the Monday. On the Tuesday morning we had the television on. The first plane hit, and I thought it had been an accident. Then United 175 hit, and I asked Russell, 'Wasn't that the flight we were supposed to be on?' We realised that Dan, Ron, and David were dead."

American born and bred Stacie Hasson now lives in Cape Town, and has some unsettling links to 9/11. Her close friend lived next door to lead hijacker Mohamed Atta, who lived and trained in South Florida in the months before the attack. "We would spend so much time at my friend's house, and Atta would be around. He was always wearing a baseball cap and dark glasses," she says.

Not only that, but she also lost a friend in the attack. "I remember exactly where I was at just 21 years old, learning that my childhood neighbour, Michelle Goldstein, lost her life in Tower Two shortly after calling her mother to say she was okay after Tower One was hit. She got married six months to the day before it happened. Finding Michelle's name at the memorial was unlike anything I could have prepared myself for."

"I saw people jumping out of the towers," says Elise Barron Jankelowitz, who was visiting New York with her brother after attending her other brother's wedding in Chicago. They were going to stay at a friend, but landed up staying at the Marriott Hotel that linked the Twin Towers.

"We arrived the night before, and woke up to a blast. The hotel's alarm was going off. Our windows were starting to crack, and we saw smoke and debris." At first they were told to stay in their rooms. If they had, they wouldn't be here to tell the tale.

"Eventually, they told us to get out. We got dressed, grabbed passports and travellers cheques, and started walking down the stairs from the 15th floor," she says. "The lifts weren't working. We heard people shout,



Jonathan Kantor

'A body hit my [hotel] window!' Lots of people were in pyjamas. As we were ushered out, policemen said, 'Cover your head and run.' As we were crossing the road, we heard this insane noise of a jet engine, and then the second plane hit."

That was when they saw people jump. It was also when her brother told her "these buildings are coming down – we need to get away". He also said they should stay near water in case they needed to jump in.

That was when the first building fell. "I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. A man appeared and it looked like his eyes were bleeding. He was covered in ash. I gave him a bottle of water, and as he washed his face, he said, 'I've just come from hell.'"

They were waiting by the Staten Island Ferry when the second tower fell. "We hid under a truck. Everyone thought bombs might fall, or another plane might hit." Eventually, they made their way to Staten Island where they bought essentials and got hold of family. They lost everything they left in the hotel, but were grateful to be alive. "As we flew out of New York six days later, there were fighter jets on either side of us. I'm so grateful my brother thought so smartly. We went back a year later to retrace our steps."

Rabbi Levi Avtzon, now rabbi of Linksfield Shul, was a 17-year-old yeshiva student when he saw the second plane hit. "In the corner of the large study hall, which was on the fourth floor of a large building in Brooklyn, there

People putting up images of the missing the day after 9/11



Photo: Elise Barron Jankelowitz

Firefighters rushing towards the scene



Photo: Elise Barron Jankelowitz

He heard that smoke was coming out of the towers, so he and others went to look. Some drifted away, but he stayed. "A plane suddenly showed up. I was sure it was from the fire department coming to spray water. A split second later, the top half of the south tower blew up. It looked like a 50-story fire – like a bubble of fire."

Later, visiting Ground Zero, "I remember the stench. It was all-encompassing. The whole experience made me feel unsafe. I would stand at the same fire escape and check that the Empire State Building was still there. Twenty years later, I still struggle to make sense of the events of the day."

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Safe socialising saves lives

OPINION

The overarching emotion that signified the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was fear. I remember a palpable fear that permeated the community before the first case on our shores, and months before it had to grapple with the overwhelming grief from COVID-19 that would follow.

The fear extended far beyond our encapsulated, almost self-governed community that holds the value of life supreme. Throughout the world, social media warned of the risks of doing almost anything in light of the unknown entity of COVID-19 that had hit the world.

In contrast, 20 months later, we are scampering about – albeit still with some trepidation – trying to recover from the immeasurable social losses we have all experienced. In fact, there are many who are so cognitive of these losses that they have nullified all fear of COVID-19 whatsoever, and have swung to diametrical behavioural extremes just to “get life back to normal now”.

This is a controversial article – probably one of my more controversial articles – because it makes a case for socialising, celebrating, and physically meeting up with loved ones at this stage of the pandemic in South Africa.

The controversy is that as a medical professional who has previously insisted that people “lock themselves down at level 5 and become their own president” is now seemingly advocating the opposite. The controversy is really a fallacy, and by understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic is fluid and requires a constant weigh-up of risks, we can understand why.

Let’s examine the option of remaining completely socially isolated until this pandemic is over.

A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council reported in October 2020 that 33% of South Africans were depressed, while 45% were fearful, and 29%

were experiencing loneliness during the first lockdown period.

These statistics are significant, and since then, we have endured two far larger peaks of infection. Not a day goes by that my practice doesn’t diagnose a new case of depression caused by the social and economic effects of lockdown or social distancing.

Grandparents are missing out on the opportunity of shaping their grandchildren’s development. The elderly are spending the last years of their lives isolated. Young adults are struggling to find suitable life companions. Children are growing up fearful of the world, and previously successful business people have had their self-esteem crushed as they continue to tread water in survival mode.

The real challenge over this pandemic is to re-evaluate the balance of risk and decide on the safer route, repeatedly. With the reproductive number of COVID-19 well below 1 currently, and with the successful vaccination of a high percentage of individuals in community “bubbles”, we need to understand that the personal risk of not getting out there and socialising is greater than the risk of serious disease imposed on vaccinated communities by COVID-19 at the moment.

I recently encountered a personal dilemma in this space. My elder daughter turned 12, and in an observant Jewish family, her Batmitzvah was a big deal to us. This was our opportunity to mark and celebrate the momentous occasion of her becoming a responsible Jewish woman.

After balancing the gains of a celebration against its risks, I decided to allow her to have a full function, but I ensured that we remained focused on the important details that ensure that such celebrations don’t become super-spreader events. This focus is vital to keep the

decision to celebrate sound.

There’s no reason to host an indoor function if wonderful outdoor alternatives exist. Ventilation is probably the single most important factor to prevent COVID-19 spread. Masks are still vital: particularly in close person-to-person contact. Temperature screening alone has shown to be ineffective, but imploring individuals who are feeling under the weather not to attend is important.

Consuming food and alcohol – which necessitate mask removal – only in good open spaces and with distance between people is a must.

If this reduced-risk approach to hosting a function is so simple, why haven’t we been holding such celebrations for months? The answer certainly lies in one word: vaccination.

Vaccination is the only intervention that has changed our risk balance. It’s now known that vaccination doesn’t stop infection or spread, but it certainly drastically reduces both COVID-19 incidence and its spread – by at least 50%.

More importantly, vaccination undeniably prevents people from becoming significantly ill. This point is the game-changer.

Last week, a study of 50 000 COVID-19 deaths in the United Kingdom demonstrated that only 640 of the deceased had been vaccinated. That’s only 1.28%. This week, Momentum, a South African financial services provider, released statistics that over the past two months only 2% of its COVID-19 death claims were in vaccinated individuals. There are many such congruent data sets from all across the world.

It’s time to realise that we’re in a different phase of this pandemic. Get out there, or risk the long-term damage of not doing so. But ensure that you are vaccinated and still well-focused on the measures that reduce the spread of COVID-19.

There may be a time in the near future when the balance of factors will necessitate staying home strictly again. But now is the time to smell the spring air with your safe friends. It smells good.

• Dr Daniel Israel is a family practitioner in Johannesburg.



DR DANIEL ISRAEL



Dr Daniel Israel’s elder daughter’s Batmitzvah setting

Stoney sign demarcates graves at Westpark

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Westpark Cemetery in Johannesburg has opened a new Jewish section at the top of the cemetery – called section E – in which only “flat tombstones and standard Jewish emblems will be permitted”, according to a notice posted by the Chevrah Kadisha Burial Society on the fence.

The instruction about the tombstones and symbols is on what used to be the east boundary fence of the Jewish cemetery and is now a clear demarcation line between the “old” section with upright tombstones, and the newly opened section, which allows only flat slabs or tombstones not more than 0.5m high.

The change comes as Jewish graves around the country have been vandalised, particularly in country communities, the most recent incidents occurring in Outdushoorn in August 2020, when 33 gravestones were vandalised, and Bloemfontein, where 125 gravestones were smashed. In those cases, work has been done to repair and relay the upright tombstones flat at the expense of local Jewish organisations and families.

But the new rules at Westpark aren’t primarily motivated by vandalism, although “future vandalism” is a factor, according to a member of the Chevrah Kadisha who wanted to remain anonymous.

“A number of families don’t live in South Africa any longer – COVID-19 has made this particularly clear to us,” he said. “Therefore, there’s nobody to maintain the

tombstones if they fall over. Sometimes, we flip them over on their backs, but sometimes they fall and smash the grave bed. If that happens, it can cost about R20 000 to fix.”

This issue was highlighted by a tornado in Johannesburg a few years ago which took down about 12 tombstones, he said.

“We try to trace the families to do repairs, but often we aren’t able to.” In that case, the grave is left broken,



as the Chev doesn’t have the budget to maintain graves.

Another reason for the change is that the new section E is “far away from anywhere”, he said, so it’s more secure to have low tombstones as “vagabonds hide behind vertical tombstones to attack mourners”.

Tombstones are fast becoming a luxury few can afford. In the United States, the Jewish Cemetery Association of Massachusetts, the largest Jewish cemetery association in North America, changed its rules to prevent mourners – even those who could afford a gravestone – from putting up a tombstone if they hadn’t paid for a funeral, according to an article in *The Forward* published in 2016. In those cases, only a small flat stone with room for some words would be allowed “in the interest of fairness”.

South African stonemasons say that the cost for flat tombstones is actually higher than upright ones as a full slab can be mandatory with a flat grave whereas upright tombstones often don’t include a full slab. But they point out that horizontal tombstones are better – and fast being adopted, particularly in Cape country communities – because there is “no fear of them being stolen”.

A rabbi closely associated with the Chev, who also wanted to remain anonymous, said that while they “try not to be too dogmatic”, the prescription is a maximum tombstone height of 0.5m.

It was easier to introduce the new prescriptions at Westpark upon opening a completely new Jewish section, the rabbi said, so the demarcation would be clear. He has no idea when – or even if – the enormous fence dividing the two Jewish sections will be removed.

Although all Jewish graves in Westpark are required to have a Jewish inscription including the Hebrew name of the deceased and the name of the parent/s, the situation is trickier when it comes to emblems, the rabbi said.

The aim of the rule about “only standard Jewish symbols” is to exclude “secular symbols” from tombstones – such as soccer balls, the rabbi says. Even Kohanim hands and Shabbos candles are frowned upon, but he insists that overall, these rules are intended to keep things “tasteful”.

“A tombstone is a holy monument,” he said, pointing out that the uniform look of a Jewish cemetery comes straight from a decree from our sages that tombstones be standardised. In fact, during interviews for this story, it was pointed out that Westpark has a rule that all gravestones be made out of grey granite, although the rabbi said that there was “no rule regarding what stone is used for tombstones”.

“Death is the great equaliser,” he said. “We shouldn’t make a grave stand out. Hashem will decide who is truly great.”

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A little leeway is harder than none

Why, oh, why are these doctors making such a big deal about our matriculants going on Rage at the end of the year? I mean, so many of us have been vaccinated, and it’s hardly going to be an action replay of last year...

Okay, that’s not how I feel at all, but I imagine there are some who do feel this way.

The truth is, we have no way of knowing that Rage 2021 won’t have the potential to be far worse than last year in terms of the spread of COVID-19. You see, we haven’t all been vaccinated, and being vaccinated doesn’t make us all safe.

We may well be in a different space to what we were this time last year, and Rage 2020 was the launch pad of the second wave of COVID-19 in South Africa. However, we don’t know what December 2021 will bring. That’s the crazy thing about this coronavirus, we simply cannot tell. Even the experts aren’t 100% sure what will happen and what will set off the fourth wave.

Yes, it’s damn frustrating! Yes, we all wish COVID-19 was behind us and we could regain a semblance of normality. But, that’s just it!

Right now, most of the adults I know have been ‘double vaxxed’ I was so excited to be vaccinated because I believed it would give me back some freedom. But has it?

I’m 100% sure that I’m safer from death and the intensive-care unit, but somehow it doesn’t mean we can let our hair down.

Here’s my confession: I celebrated my son’s Barmitzvah this past weekend. Yes, it was very low key and just immediate family, but COVID-19 protocols weren’t observed 100%.

I remember standing in shul watching my son begin singing his parsha, and I felt loving hands automatically reaching out for mine. I needed those hands. I needed the love and support, and I got it.

However, COVID-19 protocols don’t allow for loved ones who don’t live with you – who I have kept away from for a year and a half – to hold my hands and hug me. In that moment, I really understood how difficult it is to maintain COVID-19 protocols when we have all been vaccinated and are so tired of living in tiny bubbles.

I come from a loving and physically affectionate family – like so many Jewish families. We show our affection physically and verbally, and we rarely held back in the past. And this year and a half has been difficult.

But since March last year, we have been exemplary in following the protocols, so concerned were we about each other and making someone sick. But this weekend, it was a *simcha*, and it was so hard to reconcile the fact that although we had all been vaccinated, we still had to stay away from each other.

I certainly longed for and needed the hugs and love.

I do understand that we can perhaps let down our guard a little, but we still need to take care. However, to be honest, it’s sometimes tougher to let down your guard a little bit than not at all. As an adult who some may refer to as middle aged, that’s how I feel.

So, let’s move swiftly to the idea of Rage. Seventeen and 18-year-old teenagers are celebrating their freedom from school, exams, and their childhood. They are no longer school kids, but they aren’t yet adults.

Having recognised just how hard it is for me to hold back from affection as the mother of a Barmitzvah boy, I can only imagine the impossibility of expecting restraint from young adults or old teens. Surely, expecting them to show restraint is too much to expect.

So, you need to know that if you send your children to Rage, don’t expect them to hold back. It isn’t going to happen.

Don’t rely on the organisers of Rage – who promised to follow protocols last year – to restrain your children. They can’t. They are simply too few, and can’t be everywhere all the time. How can they even make promises? They shouldn’t.

So, if there is one super-spreader event at Rage, it can and will spread COVID-19 all over again. Will vaccines make the difference? All depends on how many have been vaccinated and what strain is on the go then.

So, I totally understand why GPs and other doctors are pleading with schools and parents not to send their matriculants to Rage.

As a parent, I also understand the need to give our children the gift of freedom – something they haven’t had even a semblance of for a long, long time, thanks to this horrid coronavirus. I understand wanting to allow them to enjoy time with their friends, to make new ones, and simply have the gift of pure, youthful fun.

We all had that in some form or another when we finished matric, but this is a different time. This is the time of a virus that knows no barriers.

So, sending your matriculant with their nearest and dearest friends to a flat on the coast would be preferable. Bring it down a dozen notches so that the threat of the virus is far less daunting.

In reality, we don’t have a choice. We aren’t being unkind by making plans for a different holiday (not Rage), we are being kind and thoughtful – not just for our children, but for everyone in the country.

Unfortunately, we need to live within the constraints of safety. I realise more than ever just how hard that is. I just want to hug so many people – but the time for that will come.

Hopefully, it will get easier and easier, and we will have more and more freedom. Until then, let’s try our best to bide the time it takes to be safe.

And if you do fall off the wagon of the protocols, as I did, dust yourself off and get back on again, hoping that the virus stays away from you and your loved ones.

G’Mar Gatima Tova and Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

PS: We won’t be publishing the *SA Jewish Report* for the next two weeks because of the festivals. You will find us again on 7 October 2021.



Abraham Accords, one year on



OPINION

PAULA SLIER

This week a year ago, Ebrahim Dahood Nonoo switched on his television set and like the rest of the world, heard the surprise announcement that Bahrain, a tiny country of 33 islands situated between the Qatari peninsula and the north eastern coast of Saudi Arabia, was making peace with Israel.

Nonoo was stunned. As head of the Bahraini Jewish community that comprises only 36 Jews, he had no idea what had been happening behind closed doors.

“For me it came out of the blue,” he says while we walk through the local souk (marketplace) where his grandfather sold spices after arriving from Iraq in the early 1900s. The tiny shops on the cobbled streets all advertise the same clothing, spices, and antiques, regardless of what the pushy merchants claim as we walk past.

“We knew the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was signing peace with Israel and that was a huge step forward,” smiles Nonoo.

“We were thinking, ‘Oh G-d, is it going to be us next?’ But we didn’t know. And then, of course, after it was announced, all the newspapers wanted to know more details and I went to the foreign minister and said to him, ‘Listen, they’re all asking us to give information. So what do you want us to do?’ He said, ‘Well, just tell them whatever you want.’”

Just two days after the announcement, a signing ceremony was held at the White House.

Israel, the United States (US), the UAE, and Bahrain signed the historic Abraham Accords in which the latter two recognised, for the first time, the state of Israel and set about normalising diplomatic relations with her.

Later, two other Arab nations, Sudan and Morocco, followed suit and joined the Accords, raising the number of Arab states with formal diplomatic ties to Israel from two to six.

The Abraham Accords weren’t just a diplomatic victory. They opened up collaboration on tourism, trade, technology, and more. But because they were a foreign policy win for former American president, Donald Trump, his successor, Joe Biden, didn’t exactly call attention to this year’s anniversary. In fact, the current US administration’s spokesperson has never used the term “Abraham Accords”.

Trump predicted at this time last year that about five more Gulf countries would sign similar normalisation agreements with Israel in the ensuing months. Although this hasn’t happened – nor is it expected to any time soon – the good news is that experts agree the inked deals, at least, are here to stay.

“For more than 70 years we have been in a state of no war, no peace, stagnation,” says Dr Shaikh Khalid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, the chairperson of the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence in Bahrain. We meet in his air-conditioned office where he regales me with stories about his first visit to Israel at the end of last year.

“This is a historic moment for us. My generation has wasted time with hatred, wars, and violence, as everyone knows. People in Bahrain have changed in recent years. If you mentioned Israelis 20 years ago, it would evoke war, violence, and hatred. Today it’s different.”

Al Khalifa insists most Bahrainis support the deal in spite of the Palestinians claiming to feel betrayed.

“We really have to end it. There’s no way that we can continue living in a state where we aren’t really in a war with Israel and we aren’t at peace. It should have been done years ago, especially as we in Bahrain have no enmity with Judaism as a religion. For us, the Christians, Jews, and Muslims are one,” says Al Khalifa.

Bahrain’s Jewish community is one of the smallest in the world although its origins date back more than a century. Arabic sources record Jews living in the area at the time of the Islamic conquest in 630 CE.

Nonoo, sporting a black yarmulke, meets me at the souk at midday. It’s the worst time to visit as the temperature has climbed to 45 degrees Celsius and most prospective shoppers have gone home to return later in the evening. But as soon as they notice Nonoo, there’s a lot of “Salaam alaikum” and back-slapping.

“This is where commerce started in Bahrain,” he tells me, pausing to sip some dark Arabic coffee. “All these little shops sold mostly materials and Jews were very good at that. Many of the first Jews who came here, came from Iraq looking for opportunities. They had an edge because they were able to transact with suppliers from across Europe. They would take container loads of goods and sell them and pay the suppliers back later. There was so much Jewish participation in the market that on Saturdays, everything closed here for Shabbat. Even the local Bahrainis, the Muslims and Christians, used to close.”

Since the 2000s, Bahrain has had quiet relations with Israel and especially the local pro-Israel community didn’t need a lot of convincing to buy into the Accords. But several Bahrainis I talk to, off record, and who ask not to be named, say they are still suspicious of Israel and any peace agreement. “You can’t expect us to change our views overnight,” one university student proclaims. “There’s still the occupation and Israel continues to build settlements on Palestinian land!”

But while there might be anti-Israel sentiment in some quarters, albeit the minority, Nonoo insists that antisemitism has never been a problem in the country. It’s a view echoed by everyone I meet. And Nonoo’s grandfather?

“If he was alive today, he wouldn’t believe that something like the Abraham Accords could happen. It’s absolutely amazing,” his grandson declares!

• *Paula Slier is the Middle East bureau chief of RT, the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International, and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards*



Ebrahim Dahood Nonoo

Going to Rage like ‘playing Russian Roulette’

>>Continued from page 1

long-term consequences. A good percent of this age group are battling six months later with chronic fatigue, arthritis, joint pain, brain fog, and the emotional consequences of all of that.”

Another GP involved in the drafting of the letter, Dr Daniel Israel, said, “One has to differentiate between normal social events and super-spreader events. I’m pretty pro people getting out socially at the moment with safe protocols, but super-spreader events are a no-go. These are teenagers who have just finished matric, and everything about their partying has to do with consumption of alcohol, physical

closeness, and small spaces, which all lends itself to COVID-19 spreading. So, by the nature of the people who come to it, you can’t have a safe event.

“A question could be, ‘well these are young, healthy kids – what’s the difference?’ But we know even from last year that when they get home, they don’t isolate properly, they go home on planes, and they do spread it,” he said. “So, the same way that we haven’t been able to do certain things in a pandemic – like Broadway is closed – we think Rage should be closed too. We may be able to have holidays, but not Rage. We’re hoping that next year, we’ll be in a different place.”

Telfed under strain from SA aliyah wave

TALI FEINBERG

Telfed, the South African Zionist Federation in Israel, has resorted to a fundraiser as its resources come under strain because of the volume of people making aliyah from South Africa.

“We have a situation on our hands. Last month, Telfed welcomed the highest number of South African immigrants to Israel in one month in 44 years [since 1977]. Our resources are under intense strain,” said Telfed Chief Executive Doron Kline in the fundraiser message.

Kline told the *SA Jewish Report*, “We are a small team dealing with a large wave of South African aliyah, which we are delighted about. People need a lot more assistance due to corona[virus], and we have limited resources. As our community grows, we have more people to assist. There’s an increase in the number of South African *olim* applying for Telfed’s financial assistance.”

Telfed provides two types of services: klita (absorption) and social welfare. These include financial assistance and “food cards” for more than 400 needy South African *olim* every month, social-work counselling, and higher-education bursaries – the organisation receives more than 1 000 applications every year. Klita services include pre and post-aliyah advice from a klita advisor and social worker, employment counselling, subsidised rental apartments, and social events.

In the fundraiser, members of Telfed said there had been a “300% increase in the number of South Africans wanting to move to Israel”. Elaborating on this, Kline says “the 300% relates to the rise in aliyah enquiries that Telfed received over the past 1.5 years. Liat Amar Arran from the South African Israel Centre also spoke about a dramatic increase in opening aliyah files – from 300 to 1 000. In addition, the Kaplan Centre report from 2019 highlighted growing interest in aliyah.”

They also describe a “10% increase in the number of South African immigrants battling to make ends meet in Israel”. Kline explains that “the cost of living in Israel is high, and it’s unreasonable for most to replicate the standard of living that they had in South Africa. Yes, education and healthcare are comparatively inexpensive, but salaries in Israel can be lower. Our South African *olim* deal with an unfavourable exchange rate, and property prices are significantly higher in Israel. We want those who are making aliyah to have a realistic expectation of what lies ahead.

“Israel is a wonderful country, and the advantages of living here are significant, but it’s expensive,” he says. “As long as people know what to expect, they can prepare accordingly. Sadly, some *olim* take out loans that they cannot repay or they haven’t saved up for an unexpected expense. Some have fallen ill, and aren’t able to work. Some have left unhealthy

marriages, or are dealing with mental-health issues.

“Telfed doesn’t replace the financial assistance provided by the Israeli government and municipality; we augment it,” he says. “We have limited means, so we carefully assess each case before deciding how best to help. In many cases, we will provide financial planning to help ensure that *olim* won’t fall into the same position again. We try to empower our *olim* with the skills to be self-sufficient. Sometimes, all they need is a little extra guidance.”

The fundraiser also mentions that there is a 50% increase (70 families) on the waiting list for housing in Telfed community buildings. “Telfed’s subsidised rental housing is available for South African *olim* who wish to live in either Tel Aviv or Ra’anana,” says Kline. “We give priority to new *olim* and former lone soldiers. The apartments are appealing because the tenants live in a community of *olim* with the same background. Tel Aviv and Ra’anana are highly sought-after locations. The *olim* deal with an English speaking property and maintenance manager. These seem like small advantages, but when one arrives in a new country with limited language skills, it makes settling in so much easier.

“Seventy percent of rental income is used to assist *olim* with their absorption and to help those in

financial need. Thirty percent is used for building maintenance, renovation, and upkeep. The increase in the waiting list is as a result of the rise in the number of aliyah applications and new *olim*,” he says. “*Olim* will rent apartments on the open market until the Telfed apartments become available. *Olim* may live in Telfed subsidised rental housing for up to three years.”



There is an urgent tone to Telfed’s campaign, and it feels like an unprecedented situation. Kline says “all non-profit organisations have felt the impact of the pandemic, and the need for our services has grown. Up until now, we haven’t highlighted the welfare role that Telfed plays. The primary reason for this is because our community is small, and confidentiality is imperative. For

decades, we have provided emergency support to those in dire need.

“Telfed received generous funding from the Jewish Agency for many years, but it stopped in the late 1990s, and the need for our services didn’t. We are here to assist *olim*, but we do need to cover our operating costs. In addition, there is a greater need amongst *olim* for financial help.”

Kline emphasises that “South Africans should come here because of their love of Israel and not because they are running away. Israel isn’t always an easy place to live. We want South African Jews to move for the right reasons.

“We have a significant number of committees [comprised of dedicated volunteers] and professionals who ensure that we can best assist those who need our assistance and guidance. For more than 70 years, we have had South African trained lawyers, accountants, and businesspeople onboard to ensure good governance and transparency,” Kline says.

“Our next most significant project is constructing a new Telfed subsidised rental housing unit in Tel Aviv. We will build 74 new rental apartments to provide for the dramatic increase in South African aliyah. It is a 100 million shekel (R442.2 million) building project, and we need to raise the funds from generous donors,” Kline says.

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SA Jewry’s pandemic response unique and robust, experts say

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish community’s response to the pandemic has been singled out as unique, efficient, and robust in an academic paper that tracks how the community galvanised itself from March to October 2020.

From the start of hard lockdown, “It became apparent to me that our response as a community was unusually speedy, pro-active, and comprehensive,” says Leah Gilbert on what motivated her to write the paper. “I was impressed with the fact that we used the expertise available among us to inform the community. In addition, the quick emergence of support programmes for people who were infected was unique.”

Gilbert is emeritus professor of Health Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she taught and researched health and disease in the social context for 35 years. Her daughter and fellow author of the article, Shirli Gilbert, is professor of Modern Jewish History at University College London, and academic director of the Sir Martin Gilbert Learning Centre.

The article has already been accessed almost 1 000 times online, a high number for an academic study of this kind. The authors hope it will be useful for understanding communal responses to the pandemic in South Africa and in other communities worldwide.

Of all the Jewish communities in the world, why did they decide to focus on this one? “During the first lockdown in Johannesburg, observing through my professional lens my society’s relationship to health and disease, I had the idea of documenting our community’s response to the pandemic,” says the elder Gilbert.

“It began with the first *SA Jewish Report* webinar with medical experts, and the subsequent dissemination and sharing of knowledge and activities,” she says. “I approached my daughter, whose research focuses on the South African Jewish community, and we started collecting relevant material.

“The community’s response to the pandemic spanned the gamut from physical and mental health to religious observance, home schooling, financial relief, food aid, and social-welfare support,” Gilbert says. “The common theme among the initiatives was the efficiency with which resources were mobilised, something possible only because of a robust and highly centralised pre-existing communal infrastructure and strong networks of social capital.”

In their paper, they note that, “The unique response of the South African Jewish community to COVID-19 must be understood within the larger context of the relationship between Jews and health. Scholarship suggests that Jews have a heightened concern for health relative to other groups.”

They also write that “unlike other diaspora communities, in South Africa, a great deal of emphasis has historically been placed on communal unity”. Another unique factor is that “following the transition [to democracy], communal investment in outreach has expanded significantly”.

“Taken together, the centrality of health, robust communal infrastructure, and strong community social capital against the background of the Jewish community’s particular positioning in post-apartheid South Africa helps to account for the uniquely co-ordinated, energetic, and multipronged nature of the community’s pandemic response.”

However, the community also faced many challenges during the pandemic. “The ageing nature of the Jewish

community in South Africa meant that the percentage of vulnerable people was relatively high,” says the elder Gilbert.

“This higher risk profile helps to explain the motivation for the quick and powerful mobilisation of resources. There was some friction around the question of how support for Jewish communal welfare fitted alongside South African Jews’ commitment to broader South African society. On the whole, however, evidence suggests that community support for both ‘inreach’ and ‘outreach’ initiatives has been generous and widespread.

“The pandemic has also been difficult for this community in particular because of the extent to which Jewish families are dispersed across the world, which meant long periods of time for families to be apart.”

Another challenge has been resources, especially financial. As they write, “despite the robustness of the community’s infrastructure and its still considerable resources, there are concerns about its long-term health and prospects. On 19 June [2020], the Chev [Chevrah Kadisha] was forced for the first time in its 132-year history to call for emergency financial support. Its work in both residential care and financial assistance – sectors especially impacted by the pandemic – left it severely exposed, and with almost no state support and overwhelming reliance on private donor funds, it was placed under unprecedented strain.

“The community remains highly vigilant, and co-ordinated leadership continues to be delivered by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the office of the chief rabbi, and the Chevrah Kadisha, together with other organisations and in partnership with Jewish experts,” they write in their conclusion. “Some cracks, however, are already beginning to show. The extent to which it will be possible to retain the strength and co-ordination of these responses as the pandemic’s severe effects persist remains to be seen.”

They researched their subject by collecting data from all issues of South African Jewish publications during the period under study (March to October 2020). This included the *SA Jewish Report*, the *Cape Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish Life*, and *Jewish Affairs*, as well as websites, social media, and other public communications of major communal institutions, the office of the chief rabbi, and Jewish-led relief initiatives and organisations. “The analysis of the data took two months, after which we wrote up the article itself,” says the younger Gilbert.

The *SA Jewish Report* was one of their prime resources, “since it provided granular detail of what was happening on a weekly basis, both events and ongoing discussions and debates. The *SA Jewish Report* webinars were also key as they were helping to provide support and access to information that the community needed,” she says.

Asked how they think the South African Jewish community will emerge from the pandemic, they say, “The conclusion [of the paper] is a paradoxical one. On the one hand, the article emphasises the robustness of the community’s infrastructure and its considerable resources, which have allowed it to mount an impressive response to the pandemic.

“On the other hand, the enormous challenges posed by the pandemic have also heightened existing feelings of precariousness and vulnerability within the community. The economic future of largely self-funded Jewish communal organisations is uncertain, emigration is ongoing and possibly increasing, and the self-employed (among whom Jews are strongly represented) have been hard-hit,” according to the elder Gilbert.

Asked if they will conduct research on the South African Jewish community in future, the younger Gilbert says, “My historical research on the South African Jewish community is ongoing. I’m working on a study of German Jews who came to South Africa in the 1930s, as well as a special journal issue on South African Jews co-edited with Professor Adam Mendelsohn. In October-November 2021, I’ll be teaching a six-part online course on Jews in South Africa for the Sir Martin Gilbert Learning Centre. Everyone is welcome.”

- The academic paper can be accessed by searching “South African Jewish Responses to COVID-19” on Google
- The Sir Martin Gilbert Learning Centre course can be accessed by looking at the “What’s On” tab on www.sirmartingilbertlearningcentre.org



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Mangoes and the Queen Mum: new book documents Jews of Kampala

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Janice Masur is keeping alive the memory of one of many Jewish communities that disappeared in the past century – the Jews of Uganda.

The history of Eastern European Jewry in Kampala had all but died out when Masur recently brought out a book believed to be the only one devoted to the Jewish community in the capital city of Uganda.

Titled *Shalom Uganda: A Jewish Community on the Equator*, the well-researched book begins with a historical overview of Jews in Africa, and goes on to tell Masur's story of living in a little-known Ashkenazi Jewish community in Kampala from 1949 to 1961.

Although this tiny and remote community had no rabbi or synagogue, its 23 families formed a cohesive group that celebrated all Jewish festivals together and upheld their Jewish identity. Sadly, while Kampala Jewry made every effort to survive, the community eventually withered under the hot African sun, leaving few traces of its existence.

However, Masur's desire to bear witness to the place where she spent her childhood has resulted in its history being preserved in this compelling memoir, supported by interviews, photographs, and in-depth research.

The idea for the book originated in a modern East African history class she attended at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She began writing in 2005, travelling to interview octogenarians and nonagenarians who had arrived in Kampala earlier in their lives.

Masur herself was born in Eritrea, where her parents chose to move from Palestine in 1942, presumably for better job and financial opportunities. They settled in Uganda in 1949 after Masur's father, Helmut, was hired to manage the isolated Kampala Tile and Brickwork Company.

"I am a second-generation Jewish woman and have only one cousin who joined us in Kampala with his family," Masur told the *SA Jewish Report* from her home in Vancouver, Canada. "We visited South Africa in 1961 when travelling by car from Uganda to Durban – and stayed in a Jewish hotel – to board a cargo ship which deposited us in New Zealand [where she

attended university].”

Today, she is strongly rooted in her Jewish community in Vancouver, where she lives with her husband.

"I visited South Africa again in 2001, meeting a childhood friend in Cape Town," Masur said. "I visited Namibia in 2010 – not really South Africa."

In one of the anecdotes as a nine-year-old, Masur writes in her book that “a rabbi was imported from South Africa for Yom Kippur” in 1953. He stayed with her family, and held the service in their house. Her parents told her to eat breakfast in the bathroom so that the rabbi would be unaware of her not fasting.

“Many years later, I learned that children under the age of 12 were permitted to eat on the fast day of Yom Kippur, so it seems that Jewish law wasn’t fully understood. Still, my parents did their best with whatever they remembered,” she writes.

Masur shares another experience in her book, the significance of which she discovered only later in life. While living in a single-level house that had an avocado tree and a badminton court, she often saw her family's "houseboy", Odera, dancing and singing around the house.

“My mother spent a lot of time screaming at the houseboy in frustration at his supposed inability to follow instructions, which I later learned was a passive tactic of rebellion against British rule,” she writes.

From 1957 to 1960, she attended the government (semi-private) Highlands School in Eldoret, Kenya, and noticed that post-war antisemitism was endemic. “Unkind girls in Eldoret would sometimes bully me by telling me that I was a misfit because my nationality was Jewish, not British, although I was naturalised British and my religion was Jewish!” she writes.

On several occasions, Masur stood with her mother in the driveway outside the gates of Government House in Entebbe with a crowd of other people to watch the arrival or departure of Princess Margaret, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Queen Mother.

In preparation for the visit of the latter in 1959, all the shops on the main street were scrubbed and painted, the road islands were dolled up, and flags and bunting feverishly bought. To meet the dress requirements, Masur's mother and aunty had to borrow gloves and hats from friends. Soon, the duo laughed to see their picture shown on the front page of the *Uganda Argus* newspaper with the Queen Mum.

Masur hasn't returned to Uganda since leaving Kampala for New Zealand as she thinks that "perhaps memories are best left to glitter in the distance".

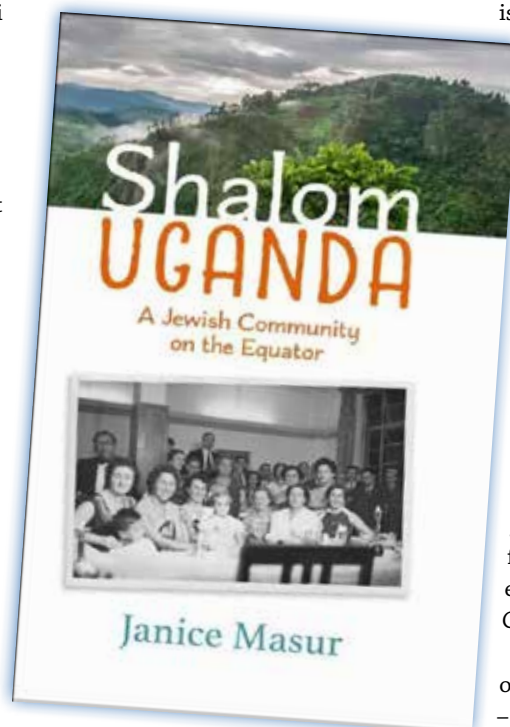
That said, her formative years in the country have left a lasting imprint.

"To this day, I love mangoes, and growing up in Kampala has made me feel comfortable in the company of all ethnic groups," Masur recently told the Canadian website *Jewish Independent*.

Today, Uganda has about 2 000 observant Jews known as the Abayudaya – the “people of Judah”. Having converted to Judaism in passive rebellion against

British rule in 1921, the Abayudaya is a now-thriving, self-sufficient black Jewish community in Mbale, boasting synagogues, Jewish schools, a mikvah, and a cemetery.

However, there isn't even a cemetery to mark the existence of Masur's family and 22 others who managed to create an Eastern European Jewish community in Kampala. Masur hopes that her book will document and honour what she describes as "an imploded star vanished in the diasporic galaxy".



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Bake bosses: fondant queens take the cake

MIRAH LANGER

Some are adorned with the delicate lace, glistening pearls, and relief cameos of a baroque boudoir; others uphold a gallery of watercolour Peter Rabbits in petite. In one, the entire history of Cape Jewish life is rendered in mini-marvels, while in another, an edible garden of Namaqualand succulents and aloes blooms.

Indeed, there's no telling what portal you have opened when lifting the lid of another of Vivienne Basckin's boxes of cupcake compositions. Yet the real wonderland lives inside the imagination extraordinaire of this Cape Town-based cupcake artist.



"I enjoy the challenge of taking it out the box – if someone says, 'Could you...?' There's no limit to what one can do when you explore and play."

Entirely self-taught, Basckin says that while she used to enjoy making cakes for her children and even came up with a koi fish one for her husband "using the salmon mould everyone uses for Pesach", she discovered her cupcake artistry in 2015 when she was invited to a friend's 60th birthday and felt stuck for a gift idea, "So I made 60 cupcakes and from then, the whole thing started. It's a hobby gone mad."

Although she has always loved the flamboyance of the baroque and rococo periods, she had never found an artistic medium for this fascination – until, surprising, she found fondant. "When I started to work with it, I realised that this little piece of fondant afforded me every single opportunity to do colour and form. I wanted to do something that's a bit more edgy."

Through trial, error, and zany experimentation, Basckin is now renowned not just for this striking antique style – but a wide range of designs.

Beyond the kitchen, Zimbabwean-born Basckin has globe-trotted with her husband and now-grown-up children. Her son was born while they were in Amsterdam, and her daughter in Hong Kong. She worked for more than 40 years as a teacher and lecturer in institutions as diverse as Harold Cressy High School

and Herzlia, the University of Amsterdam, and the Professional Communications Unit of the University of Cape Town's engineering faculty. Today, she also works as a guide at the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

When it comes to non-edible art, she is also an accomplished painter. Twenty of her watercolour renderings of Western Cape synagogues are displayed at the South African Jewish Museum. Now, Basckin has even translated her talent onto the cupcake as canvasses, painting with edible watercolours onto dainty slates of fondant. She has also become a sculptor of note – albeit on a Lilliputian scale – of figurines of any fancy.

Basckin's cupcakes are made in sets. Each individual mini-cake is a unique design, making up an overall artistic arrangement within a specific colour palette and artistic theme. "I can't go to bed at night until I have actually got the composition right."

Most recently, she has been creating baked biographies for birthdays in which she designs a set of cupcakes, each one depicting an individual aspect of the person's life and likes. For example, one customer had their dog's portrait painted on one, and their beloved Bentley immortalised on another.

A rich maroon theatre curtain is folded over the top of another with golden drama masks, while a tiny bowl and chopsticks adorned another to show off a love of Chinese food.

The actual cupcakes are all classic vanilla with a butter icing underneath the design. "All the excitement is on the top!" she quips. Basckin is able to make kosher orders, partnering to use the premises of a kosher caterer. Although she has investigated the possibility of deliveries to other cities or overseas, the fragility of the creations makes it impossible.

However, her acclaim has travelled so far, a friend in Austria contacted her saying there was a woman there who wanted Basckin's cupcakes for her son's wedding.

When Basckin explained that it wasn't possible to send them over, they paid for Basckin to come to the country for a week to make her masterpieces for the happy occasion.

Ultimately, says Basckin, the best part of the work, is the connection with people and their celebrations. "The loveliest has been going on a journey with a family, from making their engagement cupcakes to their wedding ones, and now for their child's fifth birthday!"

She says her husband jokes that she loves the "instant gratification – the joy when they gasp, and I just know it hits the spot!"

The Egoli empresses of edibles

Esti Cohen of Esti's Boutique Baking Studio, Kerry Halfon of Sugar Bear Bakery, Sharit Shapiro of Biscuit by Design, and Natasha Seef-Bear of Ma Baker love bringing a bit of sweetness to Joburgers' lives all year round.

Although they come from backgrounds as diverse as the fashion design, psychology, marketing, and documentary filmmaking, they all share a love of creative expression and a passion for people.

"I've always been artistic. Even when I was two years old, I would draw the Smurf village on the wall," recalls Cohen, who was born in Israel but lives with her husband and three children in Johannesburg.

For her, baking also started as a hobby, but has evolved into a professional craft whereby she has so many culinary fans, that she gets calls at night for those craving her carrot cake. "Customers become so dedicated to a cake, be it the carrot, lemon meringue, or coffee. They will buy three or four at a time!"

Her highly decorated birthday cakes come in perfected classics like chocolate and vanilla, as well as marble, and indeed, for Cohen, the balance is always between delicious flavour and beautiful appearance. "First you eat with your eyes, and then it must be a joy to taste," she says.

Most of her recipes are family secrets that are worked and reworked according to their approval. "A lot of my recipes go way, way back. We will take a recipe and do it over and over until everyone in the family agrees – because they are the ones who will be blunt with you. When we are happy with it, we launch it into the world!"



Kerry Halfon



Natasha Seef-Bear

about their simcha. This is what G-d blessed me with: they feeling that I can be a part of happy things."

Halfon of Sugar Bear Bakery also believes there is no better feeling than a satisfied customer. When a little birthday boy or girl "doesn't want to cut their cake" because they love it so much, she knows she's managed to bake magic into the mix.

She says the trends for girls are all about Candyland and glitter fantasy figures like unicorns, mermaids, and Frozen characters. Many boys are into gaming at the moment like Roblox and Fortnite. Paw Patrol seems to close the gender gap.

Halfon also enjoys the "entrepreneurial aspect of the work", and her business has grown to the point that she's able to oversee much of the running of it, a perfect



Sharit Shapiro

She has also enjoyed teaching workshops, especially to children, in various creative pursuits, and views her business as "always evolving". She works in a studio in Sandringham, and is kosher under the Beth Din. During COVID-19, Cohen began making a Shabbat menu, which has been very successful.

She says that even after 15 years, every time she get a compliment, it fills her with happiness. "I love the whole process, from when the client contacts me and is excited

blending of her previous experience in marketing for a food magazine.

Seef-Bear of Ma Baker started her journey by making her children's birthday cakes and realising how much she enjoyed it. She started making for friends, then advertised on social media until it became a full-time pursuit, one built around being able to have quality time with her children.

"I sit up at night when the kids go to bed and just create things," she says about her love of sculpting figurines and challenging herself to try new designs.

Her business, which is kosher but not under the Beth Din, has allowed her to gain in confidence as she has taught herself a variety of skills. Right now, fidget pops in fondant is a popular choice for celebration cakes, as are Disney options.

Yet, like Shapiro of Biscuit by Design, she has had her share of wackier requests. Both have been asked to forge intimate appendages in dough form for racier occasions – the former in cake and the latter in biscuit bites.

But beyond this bit of the bawdy, Shapiro's repertoire is indeed refined, crafting the most elegant of floral wedding sets, to bright and bold pop-culture compositions.

Like Seef-Bear, Shapiro is self-taught – "You can learn anything on the internet!" – and first discovered her passion for baking making her children's birthday treats.

As a child, while she "liked being in the kitchen because my mother was always there", Shapiro says she has never considered herself artistic and therefore was surprised to discover her creative side.

As life comes full-circle, her mother now works with her in the running of things, with Shapiro declaring, "She's the force behind the business, actually."

She also offers unique products that allow people to decorate or paint different biscuit designs, with one range offering an edible version of a "colouring-in-page" for children. Kosher under the Beth Din, they have also launched a build your-own-sukkah biscuit kit alongside their existing gingerbread house ones.

And as for her tips for the year ahead, "It's definitely have a cookie a day!"

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Kentridge artwork sales throw lifeline to artists

SAUL KAMIONSKY

"The situation we are in cannot be the end state of the world; there has to be a better condition for everyone, including artists."

So said world-famous South African artist William Kentridge, whose donation of an artwork titled *Oh to Believe in Another World* to The Lockdown Collection (TLC) has contributed to the awarding of 60 bursaries this year.

Almost R720 000 was raised through the sale of this blue rebus-text artwork as well as a previous Kentridge poster sold over lockdown called *Weigh All Tears*. As a result, the TLC exceeded its goals, and enabled 60 students to be awarded a bursary of R12 000 each.

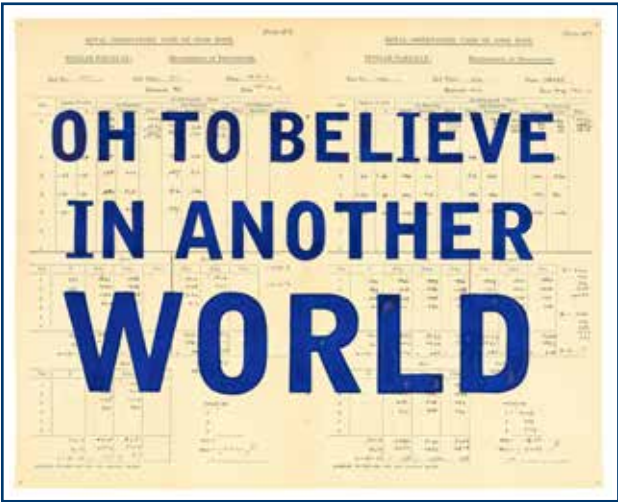
A charitable and art-inspired initiative, the TLC was conceived and developed by Lauren Woolf, the founder of consultancy Mrs Woolf; Kim Berman, the founding director of Artist Proof Studio (APS); and Carl Bates, the founding partner of business leadership initiative Sirdar in 2020 in order to capture South Africa's historic COVID-19 lockdown and support vulnerable artists. The organisation recently won two accolades at the 2020/2021 BASA (Business and Arts South Africa) Awards.

Mrs Woolf, with arts partner APS, won the SMME (Small, Micro or Medium-sized Enterprise) Award, and Sirdar, with arts partner APS, won the First Time Sponsor Award.

"It was awesome recognition to receive the two BASA awards on behalf of Artist Proof Studio with the TLC partners," said Berman, a professor in visual art at the University of Johannesburg.

The TLC was launched within 48 hours on the eve of South Africa's historic first COVID-19 lockdown. Due to the instant fallout of the pandemic, it aimed to raise desperately needed funds for artists and the broader community.

Ahead of TLC's auction the following month, Mark Auslander, a professor from Central Washington University in the United States, said, "This is the most significant



William Kentridge's blue rebus-text artwork initiative in the art world on planet earth right now."

The auction raised more than R2 million in just a few hours. It was a "white glove sale", which means every artwork in the auction sold, including additional artworks by Kentridge sold in an innovative Zoom live bidding format.

Since then, the TLC has raised more than R3.5 million in total, allocated more than 500 grants to vulnerable artists, and just recently awarded 50 bursaries for art students.

Said a beneficiary, "The funding allowed me to buy food and pay for electricity and data. This, in turn, allowed me to continue marketing my work online for possible sales. This wouldn't have been possible [had] I not had the support from TLC and the fund."

Speaking about what she will take out of TLC, Woolf said, "That energy that comes with the urgency. The creative energy, the physical and spiritual energy that comes when a lot of people come together for a cause and initiative that they believe in."

Berman described working with Woolf and Bates as "a dynamite combination of skills and collaboration. The synergy was electric and catalysed hundreds of people

all over the world who bought into and invested in the concept.

"We raised R2 million from one auction with the sale of 21 artworks, which was remarkable. The business and marketing networks of the co-founders were quite awesome to witness. They could mobilise the business community to get involved and invest in this visionary idea. My role was to invite the artists to participate, and use the Artist Proof Studio network, an organisation I co-founded 30 years ago, to reach out to the art community. It offered an amazing opportunity to organise a campaign that supported hundreds of vulnerable artists across the country, and many of them are students or alumni of APS. The impact this has had on so many artists during a very hard time was moving."

The initiative "motivated the artists to carry on working and at the same time gave them a platform to show how the pandemic had affected them and their families", said

Cynthia Sifa Mulanga, an artist who contributed to the collection.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on vulnerable artists, said Berman. "APS has taken a leading role in ensuring that artists are supported over this time. At APS, our key interest is to keep artists making art and remain self-sustaining by keeping them healthy, connected, and having the materials to create. Many of the APS artists received grants and bursaries to sustain their practices and livelihoods. At the same time, it's important to acknowledge that it's the artists in all disciplines who have kept the world hopeful, entertained, and inspired during this global trauma."

Asked for her advice for aspiring artists, Berman said, "In my book called *Finding Voice: A Visual Arts Approach to Engaging Social Change*, I write about the use of art as a vehicle for solidarity and collective action that leads to empowerment and agency in addressing the challenges faced in times of trauma. I see the TLC art campaign and the voices of students as a hopeful vision for engaging greater social justice in our institutions and communities."

Bacher hit for six by Boucher outrage

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Former South African cricket captain and veteran administrator Ali Bacher has been criticised for defending Proteas coach Mark Boucher, who has been accused of racial discrimination during his years playing for South Africa.

Bacher has been steadfast in his support for Boucher, telling the *SA Jewish Report* this week that he's not surprised by the flak he has taken as we live in a democratic country where everyone has the right to freedom of expression.

The accusations were made in Cricket South Africa's (CSA's) social justice and nation building hearings into racial discrimination. Boucher has since apologised "unreservedly for any offensive conduct, real or perceived, that has been attributed to me".

Boucher went on to say, "We, the team, coaching staff, selectors and CSA, during the period in question, should have been more sensitive and created an environment where all members of the team could raise and talk about these issues without allowing them to fester, as they clearly have."

In an article in the *Sunday Times* on 29 August 2021, Bacher said, "Let me simply put it like this: Mark Boucher is one of the best cricketers this country has ever produced. He has apologised for what he has said previously. We all make mistakes."

In the "letters to the editor" section of the following week's *Sunday Times*, Bacher was criticised. "Neither Bacher nor some of his teammates who have suddenly found their voices spoke out against apartheid sport or racism in society at that time," wrote one reader.

However, Bacher did make a stand in the apartheid era through his actions. In 1976, Bacher and the South African Cricket Union introduced "normal cricket" to playing fields across the country. With the cricket community split over the politics of race, "normal cricket" was an attempt to integrate the sport in South Africa, allowing black teams to play white teams on formerly whites-only playing grounds.

He soon realised that cricket had no long-term future in the country unless cricketers in formerly disadvantaged communities were encouraged to reach their full potential. As a result, he organised mass coaching clinics and development programmes in townships in the 1980s.

He soon realised that cricket had no long-term future in the country unless cricketers in formerly disadvantaged communities were encouraged to reach their full potential. As a result, he organised mass coaching clinics and development programmes in townships in the 1980s.

In 2009, Bacher told *The Sunday Independent*, "I never voted for the National Party, never supported apartheid. Many times I was castigated by state media for that."

Bacher had the foresight to form a single, colour-independent body to oversee all cricket in South



Ali Bacher and Nelson Mandela

Africa. Asking Steve Tshwete to help get the parties to agree on such a unified entity, he became friends with the head of the African National Congress's (ANC's) sports desk. This was followed by a London visit, in which South Africa was admitted to the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1991.

Another letter writer wrote, "As far as Bacher and his ilk are concerned, they need to be reminded of the role they played in trying to prop up apartheid sport with those rebel tours in the 1980s."

With apartheid South Africa excluded from the ICC and test match cricket, Bacher believed that "rebel" tours were essential to maintain playing levels in South Africa. Although six previous rebel tours had passed smoothly, the 1989-1990 one against England coincided with the unbanning of the ANC and Nelson Mandela's release from prison. Bacher was hit for six by angry demonstrators who simply hadn't been allowed to show their frustration and resentment on previous occasions.

"That tour nearly finished me off emotionally," Bacher told *The Guardian* in 2010. "When we had the previous rebel tours, there were packed crowds, mainly white people, no demonstrations. I thought that the country, the people, had no problem [with it]. I must confess that if I had known the anger and the hurt that those tours would cause, I would have thought twice about them. It was very hurtful for me. I had been a liberal all my life."

Realising he had made a major political error, he negotiated to halt the tour, bringing an end to the "rebel" era.

Another letter writer claimed, "White people like Ali Bacher are still very arrogant. You don't know the pain, Mr Bacher. You have never experienced that kind of pain and humiliation."

A general practitioner by profession, Bacher's work as a doctor at the teeming Baragwanath Hospital on the outskirts of Soweto made him painfully aware that the South Africa in which most of his countrymen lived and died was a vastly different place to that inhabited by suburban, privileged whites, who had access to superb sporting facilities at institutions like King Edward VII School, where he had been a prodigy.

Said Bacher this week, "Amongst the black community, in the 1970s and 1980s, I have no doubt that there were many fine, aspiring young cricketers who, if given the opportunities, encouragement, facilities, and coaching that our white cricketers experienced, would have come through too and reached international stardom."

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Sea Point “boytijie” Paul Sulcas leaves a legacy

TALI FEINBERG

Cape Town Jewish community elder Professor Paul Sulcas, who passed away on Friday, 10 September 2021, has been likened to Moshe Rabeinu and called “a giant amongst men” by community leaders.

A soft-spoken scholar, sportsman, and quintessential all-rounder, he died at the age of 77 after a long illness. He was cared for with love and devotion until the end by his opera singer wife, Aviva Pelham.

“My dad would say that he was just a simple boytijie from Sea Point and, in a sense, that’s true. He studied, played sports, went to the beach, fell in love, raised some kids, worked his job – the playbook for a nice Jewish boy from Cape Town. But within this simplicity, he shone like a pearl. Without pulling any extravagant moves, without being the loudest voice at the table or the most forceful character in the room, my dad stole the show wherever he went,” said his daughter, Gabi Sulcas Nudelman, in her eulogy at his funeral on Sunday.

Cape Town community leader Philip Krawitz echoed her sentiments. “Our community has lost a humble giant in the passing of the late Professor Paul Sulcas,” he says. “Paul was there as advisor to every community organisation. Whenever there was conflict or questions, he would try to resolve it. He was the most non-political person and had a holistic view of community. He would take his knowledge of business and expertise as a professor of strategy, IT, information systems, and accounting and apply it to the community so that we would benefit from the best advice.

And he did it in an unostentatious way. He followed the adage, ‘listen much, talk little’. He would let others talk, then provide a reasoned outcome.”

Sulcas sat on the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies for a number of years, and his Jewish identity was at the core of everything he did. He worked in industry as a consultant and mediator, supporting the growth of private and public-sector organisations.

“He realised that many people who leave South Africa cite the inability to find a job and that supporting them is a huge financial drain on the community,” says Krawitz. “He saw one of the main communal functions as helping people to find jobs, and he was instrumental in the conception and establishment of Cape community agency Staffwise, leaving a profound impact on the organisation.

“He also saw the Community Security Organisation (CSO) as reason to avoid emigration. Safety for the community was paramount, and he was one of the founders of the CSO. He also loved the idea of young men and women doing something positive and keeping fit in mind and body,” says Krawitz. “He was a fitness fanatic.”

In his eulogy at the funeral, Rabbi Osher Feldman emphasised this point. “Paul was a legend because it’s not often that you

have a doctor, a professor, an academic so darn good at sports! He still holds records at Sea Point Boys High School. How many professors represent Western Province in School in Israel.

“An advisor to corporates, nongovernmental organisations, and the arts, he was often called to resolve intergenerational business conflicts,” says Krawitz. “He gently facilitated the progress of countless organisations. Always calm, always rational, he steadied many a rocking boat, and cleared the paths for others’ progress,” says his daughter.

“He was the most present and committed husband, father, grandfather, brother, son, uncle, and cousin. There wasn’t a moment in Rob, Adam, or my life where we didn’t know that my dad was here for us. My father is a giant in our lives,” she says. “His grandchildren, siblings, in-laws, nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts, and cousins are always proud to say, ‘Yes, we’re related to Paul Sulcas.’”

She describes her parents’ marriage as “a love affair for the ages – a real coming together of soulmates who complemented each other in every facet. Both highly successful and regarded on their own, it was in their union that they thrived. When my mom was performing, my dad would sit in the audience, looking up at her with glittering eyes. He was enthralled by her when she bumped into him arriving for a squash tour at Salisbury airport and commented on his tennis racquets, he was enthralled by her at their wedding on 23 January 1969, and he continued to

be enthralled with her for their entire life together.”

Sulcas’ niece, Natalie Barnett, says one moment that still makes her laugh is when “he was an extra in one of Aviva’s operas for fun”. It was probably a personal highlight for him, as he had a deep love of the arts.

“He never let anyone down. He was a friend to so many, and an egalitarian,” says Krawitz. “He respected every human, and was incredibly generous with his time and philanthropy. He blazed a trail in that he was happy to share in the childcare and let Aviva spread her wings.”

In the wake of his passing, “people have described him as a true mensch, a real friend, a much needed mentor, a role model, their rock, someone who fundamentally altered the course of their lives through his gentle steerage”, says his daughter. “He taught us that while you can’t choose how you die, you can choose how you live.”

While his illness afflicted him for more than a decade, “even during the darkest times, he had the most incredible courage to carry on”, Krawitz says. “He died this past Friday afternoon, and the parsha for the week was *Vayeilech*, about Moses’ last days. And in many ways, Paul reminds me of Moshe Rabeinu. Just like Moses, he was a visionary, but one of the most humble men to walk the earth. He always saw the good in the future – the Promised Land. He thought about the future a lot. He did so much to ensure the community was well-positioned to survive into the future. We will miss his wisdom, kindness, passion, care, and reason.”



The late Paul Sulcas with his wife Aviva Pelham (right) and their children Robert, Gabi, and Adam



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To a sweet, unsticky, New Year

I hate honey. I might be a blasphemer of note for even thinking such a thing, but “living my truth” means being honest. And honestly, I hate honey. Seriously hate honey. I hate the stickiness, the sweetness, and the fact that I’m judged for not wanting to douse every consumable, edible item in sweet syrupiness.

And if that makes me the Grinch of Rosh Hashanah, then so be it. But with the unburdening comes the immense relief that at last, I’m no longer obliged to pretend.

I remember that back in the day, we simply ate apples dipped in honey on both the first and second nights of Rosh Hashanah. Those were simple times. It was measured and sensible, and it was contained.

Back in my day, honey knew its place. It belonged on apples and maybe in a “tzimmes” dish that my grandmother would make and that my mother would burn in error year after year after year after year.

There was nothing sweet about the argument that followed, especially when my mother raised the defence that it happened only because my grandmother insisted on using “cheap pots”.

It was safe back then. But then whilst I was busy growing up and not paying attention, the honey custom found its way to the challah as well.

What began with apples quickly spread (as honey does) to challah until before we knew it, we were lathering it over everything all the way until the end of Sukkoth. I’m genuinely perplexed.

However, by that time (the end of Sukkot), we will have repented. We will have fasted. We will have endured hours and countless sermons along with empty WhatsApp messages and the uncertainty about

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



responding to them. Surely, we have suffered enough without needing to shower every time we sit down to a meal.

I have even heard stories of young couples who substitute honey for salt for the entire first year of marriage. Because nothing screams love and devotion like growing obese together – or injecting each other with insulin.

I’m concerned that we might have lost the plot. We live in an age of excess, and one where measure and restraint isn’t easy. If we have money, we want more, if we have social media followers, we need more. We need more time, more attention, more food, and more everything.

And it now appears that when it comes to symbols, we’re no different. Symbolism is good. And powerful. And meaningful. Until we take it so far, it makes us nauseous.

Perhaps the need to make everything stupidly sweet is more a reflection of our anxiety. We live in a world and at a time where the future is scary and worrisome. There’s very little that we know for sure. And maybe at some deeper level, we think that the little bit of honey and sweetness that we add to something might be the very thing that makes all the difference. Perhaps it will. I’m just not convinced.

I’m not a heretic. Or at least I don’t think I’m one. And of course, I want a sweet year. I just don’t necessarily want a sticky one. Shana tova!

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Make Us Count 2021



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

After several weeks of uncertainty, it has been confirmed that this year’s municipal elections will be going ahead on the slightly later date of 1 November. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is now hard at work putting together its flagship “Make Us Count” (MUC) pre-election education and engagement campaign, something we have been running since the 2009 national and provincial elections.

As with previous campaigns, MUC kicked off with a voter-registration drive. We have publicised details about the upcoming voter-registration weekend on 18 to 19 October, as well as online registration. I urge everyone, particularly first-time voters, to check that they are on the roll and that their details are correct. In addition to first-time voters, those already on the roll whose details might have changed also need to visit the relevant IEC (Independent Electoral Commission) registration station to ensure that their information is up to date come polling day. For more details, see our website: <https://www.sajbd.org/>.

A highlight of previous MUC initiatives has been putting together an interfaith election-observer team to monitor proceedings at polling stations throughout the country. In addition to observing the voting to ensure that everything is fair and above board, the team assists the IEC to, among others, supervise the delivery of ballot boxes and open the polls, helping to resolve problems at polling stations and ensuring that counting begins on time. MUC has applied to the IEC for accreditation to once again run this highly successful project, which apart from the practical assistance it provides to election officials is an inspiring bridge-building experience in which South Africans

of widely differing backgrounds come together to contribute to our country’s democratic process. For more information and to register to be part of this unique community initiative, sign up at <https://t.co/bglH3yNJJa> or contact makescountsa@gmail.com.

Another important plank of MUC is to make our community more aware of the nitty-gritty issues that the various political parties are dealing with, and their policies in regard to them. One of the ways we do this is by hosting “Great Debates” between representatives of the main competing parties. Gauteng’s Great Debate will take place on 6 October, and I’m pleased to report that well-known journalist and author Mandy Wiener, who did such a superb job on previous occasions, will again be moderating. The Cape Board will host its debate on ENCA on 10 October, while KwaZulu-Natal was finalising the date for its event at the time of writing.

On 12 October, the SAJBD will also be hosting a “Navigating the Elections” webinar to better inform people what the elections are about, how they are likely to unfold, and their significance for the country as a whole. It will feature a panel of top political analysts hosted by eminent political commentator Stephen Grootes and comprising Wayne Sussman, Ralph Mathekgga, and Nompumelelo Runji. We hope you will join us for what promises to be an interesting and stimulating discussion as well as for the other MUC that will be taking place.

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

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

Letters

TRIBUTE TO A MAN WHO EMBODIES JUDAISM AT ITS BEST

As the Torah observant manager of a busy food establishment and as a member of the Jewish community, I wish to give thanks and recognition to a pillar of righteousness.

Rabbi Yossi Baumgarten joined the United Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) kashrut department more than 40 years ago, and gave the prime of his life to serve the community.

No factory was too far. No *mashgiach* question was turned away, even if called at 01:00.

Baumgarten addressed kashrut matters with integrity and honesty, and with a zest and energy that motivated and inspired all those who had the privilege and honour to work with him.

I once had the privilege of going on a trip with Baumgarten. The man is utter Judaism. From the way he

treats others, to the way he ties his shoes and walks. His greatness is in his kindness, humility, and truthfulness.

The UOS kashrut department has been internationally recognised for decades as a result of the sterling input of Baumgarten, and this is evident by the many calls and messages he would field throughout the day from people all over the world. Whether it be a call from the Orthodox Union or the OK or Star K certification agencies, or a *mashgiach* or local housewife, the Jewish local community and the kosher world at large owe Baumgarten a debt of gratitude.

On behalf of the Mashgiach Association, we wish Baumgarten much strength and success in all his future endeavours.

– Velvy Bokow and all the *mashgichim*

DEAFENING SILENCE ABOUT AFGHANISTAN, HUE AND CRY ABOUT ISRAEL

Tali Feinberg’s excellent piece in the *SA Jewish Report* (2 September) titled *Africa4Palestine Compares Israel to Nazi Germany*, offers sufficient expert academic opinion to totally discredit this narrative that is the backbone of the organisation’s campaign. That crusade together with the continuous use of the apartheid canard has one goal only: the total destruction and delegitimisation of Israel. Both apartheid and Nazi myths carry powerful emotive connotations.

While these falsehoods are somewhat over-played and over-used, Israel’s defensive operations are what elevates the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation’s attack to a crescendo. Just months ago, the world erupted in a show of anger, with hordes filling the streets of capital cities, admonishing only Israel during a conflict with the Hamas terror group.

Contrast that to the recent get together in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad poured congratulations on

the Taliban for the takeover of Afghanistan and broke bread together. These Sunni terror groups, including Al-Qaeda, share an ideology of gender violence and misogyny, and support each other in multiple ways. Of course, the Taliban’s unmentionable barbaric treatment of women has been well documented and condemned by most of the world.

Those throngs of protesters voicing thunderous support for Hamas, the blood brothers of the Taliban, now manifest a deafening silence. Where is “the squad” – Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib? Not forgetting Jewish college students on the left, who all had much to say in their condemnation of the only country in the region able to stand up to terrorism of this kind.

Are those protesters oblivious to the plight of Afghan girls and women?

– Allan Wolman, Israel

Disclaimer: The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not reflect the views of the *SA Jewish Report*. The editor is not obliged to use every letter and will not publish vitriolic statements or any letters with inappropriate content. Letters will be edited and – if need be – shortened. **Guidelines:** Letters are limited to 400 words. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. Letters should be emailed to editorial@sajewishreport.co.za



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The record-breaking, observant “Jewish Jordan”

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Although basketball seldom grabs the headlines in South Africa, *SA Jewish Report* readers have probably heard of Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and LeBron James. Another basketballer who played in the prestigious Capital Classic All-Star Game, American-Israeli Tamir Goodman, is a religious Jew who, as a 17-year-old high-school junior at the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore in the United States, was dubbed “the Jewish Jordan” by *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

The 6-foot-3 (1.9m-tall) Goodman went on to become the first Jewish basketball player to play Division-1 college and professional basketball without playing on Shabbat. He also set the record as the first yarmulke-clad player in Division-1 college basketball history.

Excited by the upcoming movie about his life, Goodman believes that “basketball is a universal language”, and he offers physical, mental, and spiritual lessons in his book, *Triple Threat*. He described some of the qualities that stood him in good stead.

“I would like to share the messages of humility, resilience, strong identity, time management, organisation, dreaming big, listening, paying attention, and trying to learn each day. Do small things well all the time, which will eventually lead to big accomplishments. Don’t stay too down when you’re down, and don’t celebrate



Tamir Goodman

too much when you’re on top of your game.” Growing up as an Orthodox Jew in Baltimore, Maryland, in the 1980s, Goodman had eight siblings, and began playing basketball at the age of five. His father, Karl, was an attorney, and his mother, Chava, threw the javelin and discus. In spite of his dream of being an elite basketballer seemingly out of reach as most teams played on Shabbat, the sport was Goodman’s passion, and he could practice regularly as his family had a hoop in the backyard. He gained national attention after averaging more than 35 points per game as a junior at the Talmudical Academy. In Grade 11, he was ranked the 25th best high school player in the country.

Frequently, Goodman’s religious and secular worlds overlapped. After completing a 24-hour religious fast, Goodman placed second in a local slam-dunk contest in 1998. He didn’t know how he was going to be able to pass his SATs because not only was there high expectation of him as a basketballer, he had also been diagnosed with severe dyslexia. “What G-d hindered him with, G-d blessed him with something else,” Goodman’s high-school coach, Harold Katz, later said. “His vision was honestly as good as anybody I’ve ever seen play basketball.” Goodman received a scholarship from the University of Maryland, and his life changed completely. News of his plans to play in one of the top-ranked basketball teams in the country attracted more than 700 media requests that week, he said. “I remember going to services with my



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father on Friday night. There were reporters inside the temple. It was just completely indescribable.” He chose to play for Towson University, which better accommodated his religious observance. “I realise G-d gave me this talent and if I use it the wrong way, he can take it away from me just as fast as he gave it to me,” Goodman said at the time. The first freshman to start at Towson in more than a decade, Goodman was presented the Coach’s Award for his performance on the court and in the classroom. Once, when the team was on the road and sundown was approaching, Goodman got out of the van and walked three blocks to a house where he was staying for Shabbat. “My teammates see me fasting on some days, and they learn about *havdalah* and kosher food,” Goodman said. “It’s a great opportunity to teach them about Judaism.” After Goodman and his Towson teammates finished seventh on the 2000/2001 America East Conference standings, the university changed its head coach. Goodman and the new incumbent didn’t have the best relationship. “I thought to myself, ‘What clearer message could I have had from G-d telling me it was time to leave Towson?’” said Goodman. “I just picked up and went on to Israel.” He joined Maccabi Tel Aviv, a powerful force in European basketball. “It was a pretty easy choice for me. I wrote in my seventh-grade yearbook that I wanted to be a professional basketball player in Israel and serve in the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces].” In 2004, he took a break from the sport to accomplish the latter. He was named the most outstanding soldier of his platoon in boot camp, and did guard duty right in front of Gaza. Since retiring from professional basketball in 2009, he has evolved into a successful coach, educator, motivational speaker, and entrepreneur. Goodman has spoken via Zoom to communities around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic in an attempt to inspire them. “I’ve spoken to different synagogues and community centres across South Africa,” he says. “Hopefully one day I will come on a basketball speaking and clinic tour in the country.”

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