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Unterhalter's bid for Concourt thwarted again

NICOLA MILTZ

It was a case of action replay for esteemed Judge David Unterhalter this week at the re-run of the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) Constitutional Court judge interviews. The internationally renowned lawyer was yet again grilled about his brief charitable association with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) during the pandemic.

Never mind his years of pro bono work, mentorship, and dedication to academia, as well as his global expertise gleaned from serving on the World Trade Organisation's Appellate Body, it appeared to many commentators that his gender, race, and possibly even his faith stood firmly in his way of being included on a shortlist for possible appointments to the apex court.

He was again excluded from the latest JSC shortlist for two vacancies.

The JSC was forced to re-run its highly controversial and heavily politicised April 2021 Constitutional Court interview process after the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (Casac) challenged its lawfulness in the High Court.

Casac accused several members of the JSC, including Economic Freedom Fighters leader Julius Malema, of "political grandstanding", and argued that "party political considerations and political agendas should play no role in the JSC's decisions and processes".

During the first round of interviews, Unterhalter was interrogated about his association with the SAJBD after his

candidacy was vehemently opposed by the South African Boycott Divestment Sanctions Coalition and the Black Lawyers Association.

Unterhalter briefly assisted the SAJBD with the upliftment and welfare of the Jewish and broader community during the direst phase of the COVID-19 pandemic last year. He resigned from the SAJBD because he recognised that it sometimes litigates in the Constitutional Court which might cause conflicts.

The issue was raised yet again this week. JSC commissioner Advocate Thandazani Griffiths Madonsela, one of President Cyril Ramaphosa's candidates on the JSC, rehashed the now stale objections to his candidacy and persistently probed him about his time at the Board.

The Board criticised the JSC interview process describing it as "Groundhog Day for the Jewish community".

"Once again, a Jewish candidate for the Constitutional Court, Judge Unterhalter, was targeted for his association with the democratically elected representative body of the Jewish community," it said in a statement, adding "Once again, bias was evident."

The Board maintained, "In a series of four questions, Commissioner Madonsela's political agenda was distinctly evident, particularly his comment, 'It seems to me that the fundamental premise of the objection is the assertion that the SAJBD is a body that is pro-Zionist and that is in fact bullying all their people and organisations who are objecting to the Israeli establishment in the Palestine region.'"

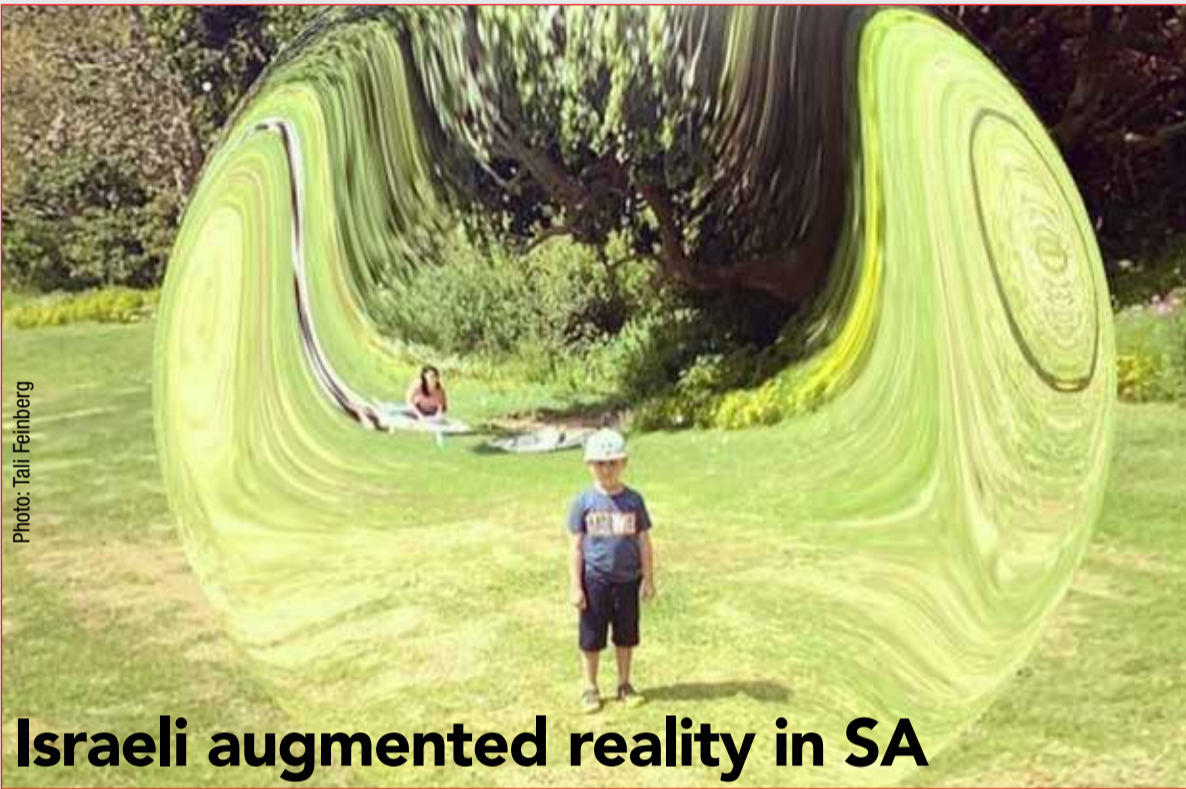


Photo: Tali Feinberg

Israeli augmented reality in SA

Josh Feinberg enjoying the 'Seeing the Invisible' augmented reality art exhibition at Kirstenbosch. The exhibition is an Israeli project.

Unterhalter denied this, saying, "Members of the Jewish community in this country, as in many other countries, hold a very wide variety of views about Zionism and the state of Israel. That's why people who are Zionists subscribe to organisations that bear that name and seek to pursue that particular political agenda."

"The Jewish Board of Deputies is a body that existed long before the state of Israel was ever created, and has its roots in the 19th century in this country, where it's simply founded to look after the interests of a particular community, in this instance the Jewish community, and largely to take care of its welfare as many community organisations representing many different parts of our society do," said the esteemed judge.

Unterhalter said that it was on this premise that during the COVID-19 pandemic, when there were "peculiarly large demands" placed on the welfare not just of the Jewish community but also in respect of its charitable work with other communities, he accepted a position on the Board thinking that it could be of some service to the community and the work it did.

The SAJBD said the depiction of the Board as a "bullying" organisation was "a baseless and highly offensive smear against an organisation whose mandate is to protect South African Jews' civil rights".

"If anyone should be accused of bullying, it's Commissioner Madonsela, whose factually inaccurate, prejudicial, and irresponsible assertions have no place in

an interview to assess judicial competence. The SAJBD objects strenuously to this vile characterisation of our organisation."

It said it found it "indefensible" that a person's association with a body that protects Jews' human rights in South Africa could preclude them from public office.

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer said the question from Madonsela about Unterhalter's affiliation with the SAJBD "showed an extreme prejudice against the Jewish community".

"It tries to insinuate strongly that Zionism is an unconstitutional project, and that it's a sinister belief system and anything even adjacent to it taints one so thoroughly, that one cannot sit as a judge on the

Continued on page 11>>

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Auschwitz museum hit by antisemitic graffiti

Police in Poland are investigating antisemitic vandalism at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum.

Spray-painted slogans in English and German, some of them “antisemitic in nature”, were found on the museum’s grounds recently, the institution wrote in a statement on 5 October. There were “two references to the Old Testament, often used by antisemites, and denial slogans”, the institution said.

The site has robust security and enforcement measures in place to prevent vandalism and other abuses, which are rare.

The perpetrators’ actions were “an outrageous attack on the symbol of one of the greatest tragedies in human history, and an extremely painful blow to the memory of all the victims of the German Nazi Auschwitz-Birkenau camp,” the museum said.

EU publishes ‘strategic’ antiterrorism plan

The European Union (EU) has published what it called a strategic plan for combating antisemitism.

The 26-page document that the European Commission, the executive branch of the EU, published on 5 October includes recommendation of the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism across the 27-state bloc. Published in 2016, it includes the demonisation of Israel and

denial of the Jewish people’s right to exist as potentially antisemitic.

Portugal, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Ireland, Denmark, Poland, Croatia, and Malta are among the European countries that have so far not adopted the definition.

The commission will organise “an annual civil society forum on combating antisemitism”, whereas member states are “encouraged to develop national strategies by the end of 2022 on combating antisemitism”, the document says.

The commission will also “increase knowledge and understanding about Jewish life among the general public through an awareness-raising campaign in close co-operation with Jewish communities”, the document states. The plan, which isn’t binding on member states, will be implemented by 2030, it says.

Lost toilet of the First Temple found in Jerusalem

A 2 700-year-old toilet from the days of the First Temple in Jerusalem has been discovered by Israel’s Antiquities Authority. Built as a private toilet stall at a time when few could afford such a luxury, the toilet was scheduled to be unveiled to the public on Wednesday, 6 October – though for viewing only.

Carved from limestone, the toilet appears much like the modern-day fixture, with a hole at the centre leading to a septic tank. At the time the ancient toilet was in use, private toilets were the exclusive province of the rich.

“A private toilet cubicle was very rare

in antiquity, and only a few were found to date, most of them in the City of David. In fact, only the rich could afford toilets. A thousand years later, the Mishnah and the Talmud raised various criteria that defined a rich person, and Rabbi Yossi suggested that to be rich is ‘to have the toilet next to his table,’” said Yaakov Billig, who directed the dig.

Archaeologists plan to use the septic tank below the toilet to investigate what people living in the First Temple period might have eaten and to better understand diseases of that time.

The toilet was found on the site of a large estate on the Armon Hanatziv promenade in Jerusalem. The estate overlooked the Temple Mount.

US Jewish federations join nationwide security

The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) is launching a campaign to expand its security programme to every federation in the country, an initiative that will cost \$54 million (R811 million).

JFNA Chief Executive Eric Fingerhut announced the initiative on 4 October at the organisation’s General Assembly in Washington. Currently, 45 of the 146 member federations are part of what the JFNA has since January dubbed LiveSecure, a network of security offices.

The new funding, to be raised over three years, will assist the 101 communities that have faced fundraising obstacles in establishing security points in their communities so they too can join LiveSecure, a programme launched after a spate of deadly antisemitic attacks in Pittsburgh; Poway, California; Monsey, New York; and Jersey City, New Jersey.

These points, called Community Service Initiatives, establish “a single point of contact for critical incident co-ordination, information, and intelligence sharing, safety and security training, and resources for every Jewish institution in a community,” a JFNA release said.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Torah Thought

My kind of hero

The world loves a hero. Every season, Hollywood invents new superheroes to fill the box-office coffers. Today, we even have a Jewish girl as the latest superhero. Now, superheroes are fantastic, but you’ve got to admit, they’re over the top, rather otherworldly and, realistically speaking, out of touch and out of reach. We can fantasise about flying through the skies in our capes, climbing skyscrapers with our webs, saving the world, or rescuing damsels in distress, but at the end of the day, it’s nothing more than wistful daydreaming. What bearing does it have on me and my life, me and my problems? Not much.

That’s why Noah always appealed to me. He comes across as a real-life hero, real in the sense of being human rather than superhuman and therefore realistically possible to emulate.

Rashi describes Noah as a man of small faith who had doubts whether the flood would really happen. He didn’t enter the Ark

until the rains started and the floodwaters pushed him in. That explains why some people look down on Noah, especially when they compare him to other Biblical giants, like Abraham or Moses.

Personally, this is what makes Noah my kind of hero. He’s real. He’s human. He has doubts, just like you and me. Noah is a regular guy, plagued by doubts, and struggles with his faith. Which is precisely what makes him a hero. Because the fact is that, at the end of the day, his personal uncertainties notwithstanding, Noah does the job. He has faults and foibles, but he builds the Ark, *shleps* in all the animals, saves civilisation, and goes on to rebuild a shattered world. Doubts, shmouts, he did what had to be done!

Noah could easily be the guy next door. He is one of us. His greatness is, therefore, achievable. It’s not “pie in the sky”. His heroism can be emulated. If Abraham and Moses seem the superhero types too far-

Rabbi Yossy Goldman,
life rabbi emeritus,
Sydenham Shul



fetches for us ordinary mortals to see as practical role models, then Noah resonates with realism. After all, he had his doubts too, just like you and me.

There is an old Yiddish proverb that nobody died from an unanswered question. We can live with unanswered questions. It’s not the end of the world. The main thing isn’t to allow ourselves to become paralysed by our doubts. We can still do what must be done, in spite of our doubts.

Noah, the reluctant hero, reminds us that you don’t have to be fearless to get involved. You don’t have to be a *tzaddik* to do a *mitzvah*. You don’t have to be holy to keep kosher, nor do you have to be a professor to come to a *shiur*.

His faith may have been shaky. Perhaps he was a bit wobbly in the knees. But the bottom line is, he got the job done. My hero.

Stellenbosch students forced to choose between exams and yom tov

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish students at Stellenbosch University were deeply distressed by having to choose between observing high holy days or writing tests, including on erev Yom Kippur. They say that their desperate pleas to have assessments moved, even by a few hours, fell on deaf ears.

“Stellenbosch University scheduled tests for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur this year,” says Zianda Goldstuck, a first-year student. “Although the tests were for modules where each student’s two best marks out of three possible tests are used to calculate the final mark, it was concerning that Jewish students would have to forfeit the opportunity to improve their mark or, in some cases, pass the module.

“The university argued that the option of two best marks out of three was intended for this kind of eventuality, but in reality, it limited Jewish students to having to ensure the two tests were successfully written, with no recourse to improve marks or pass failed tests,” she adds. “It seems very unfair to have tests on two of the most important Jewish holidays of the year.”

She said that the South African Union of Jewish Students’ representative, as well as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) made contact with the university. “However, the university refused to make any accommodations as it claimed that the system of using only two out of the three tests was already an accommodation. It also claimed that it didn’t accommodate any religious holidays for minority religions.”

But after looking into it, Goldstuck found that the university had made accommodations in the past by moving tests or avoiding having tests on certain days. “This underscores the fact that Jewish students don’t get the same opportunities as other students,” she says. “We have to choose between observing religious holidays or our academics. It also seems contradictory that the university is trying to position itself as being diverse, yet refuses to accommodate minority religions. The situation caused a great deal of stress, and I was deeply disappointed in the university’s rigid stance.”

Another Stellenbosch University Jewish student, speaking on condition of anonymity, says, “I was supposed to write on 15 September at 17:30, erev Yom Kippur. This meant that I would have had to start my fast just before my test, and then drive home to Cape Town on Yom Kippur. I tried to write my test early, but the university claimed it was “unable” to make a plan for me.

“I was disgusted,” he says. “What made it worse is that the lecturer completely ignored my email asking him if he would write an exam over Christmas Eve. He just didn’t respond. I lost out on an opportunity to write a supplementary exam – I was basically punished.”

In the end, he chose not to write the exam. “They moved an exam to another day last semester as it was on a Muslim holiday. But they wouldn’t do the same for a Jew. They really could have made a plan. They chose not to because it was a hassle for them,” he says.

Another Jewish student at the university, speaking on condition of anonymity, says she chose to write the exam and not observe Yom Kippur. “I’ve kept Yom Kippur every year since Batmitzvah age. So it was weird not doing it. It’s the most important

“We have to choose between observing religious holidays or our academics.”



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assessment opportunities, it wouldn’t approve the request for alternate arrangements.

“It was at this point that the Cape SAJBD was informed about the matter. We engaged with the affected students, their parents, the university, and the university’s ombudsman. The university maintained that it hadn’t acted unfairly in this matter, as according to its policy, it had offered students two out of three assessment opportunities. We consulted external legal counsel, and were advised not to pursue further action.

“We feel strongly that no student should have to choose between utilising all three assessment opportunities or observing their faith,” he says. “Such policy couldn’t be reasonable and fair. We are encouraged that the university has a new draft

proposal for dealing with assessments and religious days (of various religions) and will meet the registrar and deputy-registrar to review this draft proposal and the timetable for 2022 to ensure that no future assessments are scheduled over our yom tov.

“We were informed that the University of Cape Town scheduled tests on yom tov, and that alternative arrangements were made for affected

students,” Brivik says.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn says, “The SAJBD assisted students with exams and assessments on chaggim and Shabbat at Wits [University of the Witwatersrand] and Varsity College, and these have been resolved. We have been working closely with Unisa [University of South Africa] in resolving the same situation. At this time, alternate assessments have been arranged for 44 of 72 exams, with 28 to be resolved in coming weeks.”

Stellenbosch University Media Manager Martin Viljoen told the SA Jewish Report that “Stellenbosch University deems the concerns and rights of our

various faith communities, including our Jewish student community, in the highest regard. We value and respect our Jewish student community and its holy and spiritual celebrations. The matter concerning the scheduling of tests on major Jewish holidays has thus received the required attention, while further engagements with the SAJBD are scheduled for later this month.”

He says the university didn’t purposefully schedule tests on Yom Kippur. “Due to the shift in the academic calendar, it was a bona fide mistake that this holiday wasn’t on the radar of the scheduling team which normally takes great care not to schedule on religious holidays.

“The assessment periods this year are all condensed because of COVID-19. There are implications for moving any assessment, and scheduling takes approximately four weeks to finalise. Consequently, any change will potentially affect our entire undergraduate and intermediary post-graduate student population,” he says.

“Concerned students were linked to the faculties of law, engineering, and economic and management sciences. After consultation with these faculties and other stakeholders, as well as meetings to consider suitable solutions, our conclusion is that our arrangements for flexible assessments make provision for students to write two out of three assessments,” he says. “This is to allow flexibility for students who fall ill on the day of an assessment, have an emergency or unforeseen delay getting to an exam venue, or have social, cultural, or religious obligations.”

But he says the university has arranged that modules of the faculty of engineering with assessments scheduled for 16 September [Yom Kippur], as well as on a Saturday, be moved to allow for two assessment opportunities. This is because that schedule leaves only one assessment opportunity free for Jewish students.

“The matter of scheduling assessments on religious holidays will be added to the agenda of the relevant academic governance structures to come to an institutional decision,” he says. “This year has brought about many challenges. We ask for your understanding of the limited options given our condensed academic calendar, while we commit to taking this matter forward for an optimal scheduling solution in years to come.”

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Arab-Israeli gangsterism a massive security threat



PAULA SLIER

many Arab citizens walked around armed. The concern was that those weapons, often stolen from the Israeli military, or smuggled across the border from Jordan, or manufactured in the West Bank, could be turned against the Israeli public. The police were quick to quell the unrest as quickly as it unfolded, leaving many to point out that when the security forces really wanted to deal with the violence, they could.

The new government insists it’s prioritising dealing with the situation. It says it has a detailed plan to improve access and trust in Arab communities that it is ready to put into action after the state budget is passed in November. It calls for recruiting an additional 1 100 police officers, legislative changes to deal more efficiently with economic crime, more use of technology, and an improved witness-protection programme.

The situation has become so bad that in some cases, police are afraid to enter neighbourhoods. The hashtag #ArabLivesMatter has caught on, inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter movement and among those embracing the hashtag is the country’s public security minister who faced stormy protests outside his home after seven shooting incidents rattled the Arab community in a single week. But although there’s growing public awareness of the problem, it won’t easily disappear. It’s been around for a long time, and will take some time to dissipate.

• *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.*



Israeli Arabs participate in a protest in March 2021

The current violence in Arab-Israeli cities is a greater threat to the state of Israel than Hamas and Hezbollah. The comparison might sound dramatic, but since stating it earlier this week, Israeli Justice Minister Gideon Sa’ar has only reinforced his concerns.

As many as half-a-million illegal weapons are estimated to be in the hands of the Israeli-Arab sector. Their prevalence is widely attributed to the killing of more than 90 Arab citizens since the start of this year in shootings and stabbings. Though some of these deaths have been the result of warfare before mafia families, others involved unlucky bystanders struck by a stray bullet or female victims of domestic violence. Of these cases, less than a quarter have been solved so far, compared with more than 70% in the Jewish community.

Many Arab Israelis say the identities of killers and crime families are well-known to residents and authorities. They complain that the lack of arrests reflects a double standard when it comes to Israeli police dealing with Arab communities.

The problem is further compounded by the lack of faith many Arabs have in the Israeli police’s will and ability to address the problem. A recent survey found that only 17.4% of Israeli Arabs said they trusted the police. The result is a Catch-22, as this lack of faith leads to fewer people being willing to risk co-operating with the police, who in turn have a more difficult time enforcing law and order.

For months now, the Israeli government has been trying to get a grip on the deteriorating security situation. Even the head of the United Arab List, parliamentarian Mansour Abbas, this week again stressed his concern about crime and violence in Arab communities.

But how to deal with it has created problems, with Arabs divided over Jerusalem’s recent announcement that it plans to involve the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) in assisting the Israeli police. While some Arabs firmly oppose the idea, others are desperate for any solution that could help quell the escalating violence.

It’s difficult trying to gauge opinion on the Arab street. Most people I approach are afraid to comment. Should they be seen to support the Shin Bet, they could face reprisals in their communities; and should they be seen to publicly oppose its involvement, they could – they tell me – be targeted by Israeli security authorities. The best answer, encapsulating what most people feel, is what one elderly man told me, “I’m doomed if I support the move, and I’m doomed if I don’t!”

As for the Shin Bet itself, its officials say they prefer not to be involved in anything beyond their more regular counter-terrorism missions. These are usually across the Green Line, in Palestinian territories, where suspects can be held for years without charge and prevented from meeting with lawyers.

Jerusalem has consistently argued that such

measures are necessary to prevent Palestinian terror attacks, but implementing them against Israeli citizens, albeit against those who are engaged in criminal activity, is a completely different ball game. The major concern, for Jews and Arabs alike, is that it could turn Israel into a police state. Many also question how a technologically advanced country like Israel, that was recently able to catch six escaped Palestinian prisoners within a week, has been unable to break up a few local criminal gangs. Some Arab citizens even suspect the government of deliberately letting the violence run amok in order to weaken the Arab minority in the country.

Several Israeli officials have expressed a popular view among the Israeli political right that “as long as they are killing each other, that’s their problem”. But this violence often spills over into Jewish neighbourhoods, often into nationalistic crimes, as was witnessed in May this year.

At the time, I visited mixed Arab-Israeli cities in the heart of the country that resembled battlegrounds. Car tyres were burning on the streets, shops and homes were barricaded, and

SAJBD calls for implementation of hate-crimes law

NICOLA MILTZ

Describing a “culture of impunity” for hate-crime offenders in South Africa, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has called for the passing of the Hate Crimes Bill.

The Board called for official reporting mechanisms for hate crimes in its recent submission on the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services invited all stakeholders to once again put forward written submissions on the Bill for consideration.

The long awaited and highly anticipated Bill aims to give effect to the country’s obligations in terms of the Constitution and international human-rights instruments concerning racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance such as antisemitism.

It also aims to provide for the offence of hate crimes and hate speech; as well as the prosecution and prevention of these crimes.

The SAJBD said in its submission that in the two decades since the end of apartheid rule, South Africa had made significant progress in ensuring that human rights were respected and afforded to all.

However, in stark contrast to the

country’s progressive policy and legislative guarantees for fundamental human rights, incidences of hate crimes, hate speech, and bias-motivated violence had grown in recent years.

“There’s an epidemic of hate in the country,” said Alana Baranov who represents the Board on the steering committee of the Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG), a multisectoral network of non-government organisations set up to spearhead hate-crimes advocacy. “Gays, lesbians, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are being murdered.

There are gruesome stories just about weekly including stories involving asylum seekers and refugees. There’s impunity of hate, and we urgently need the Bill to be passed,” she said.

According to the Board’s submission, there’s no mechanism for reporting or recording hate crimes in South Africa in a way that distinguishes them from any other crimes.

“As a result, there’s no way to accurately assess the levels of hate crime across the country. In spite of the lack of an official reporting mechanism for hate crimes, civil society has observed clear trends regarding certain types of hate crimes in South Africa.”

It cited the “corrective rape” of black lesbians, race-related attacks, and attacks on foreign nationals such as the xenophobic violence of May 2008

and March 2015, as well as incidents of religious intolerance, which all continue to occur.

“The lack of measures taken to address these acts has created a culture of impunity for hate crime offenders,” the submission said.

Introducing legislation and policy on hate crimes in South Africa would not only help address crimes where the perpetrators are motivated by hatred or bias, but would also improve access to justice for all South African residents, according to the submission.

“Laws on hate crimes will allow the police and justice officials to track trends of crime targeting certain groups, and will ultimately improve the security of all vulnerable communities,” it said.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn, said, “We have been advocating for improvements on hate-crimes legislation for close on a decade. As a country, we are extremely aware of the dangers of unchecked acts of hatred directed against specific groups, be they foreigners, ethnic, or religious groups, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.”

Said Baranov, “After many years of lobbying and meeting with government

and civil society stakeholders, and countless workshops and conferences on hate crimes and hate speech, not to mention a few previous submissions on the Bill, I’m excited that the current version has reached this stage in the process. I really do hope that we don’t waste this opportunity to pass this important piece of legislation. Hate is something that affects not just the Jewish and other minority communities, but all who live in South Africa. Hate erodes social cohesion and damages our society. With the sharp rise in hate crimes that we have witnessed recently, the Bill is needed now more than ever.”

She said the Bill would send out a clear message that South Africa rejected prejudice, and that the country was committed to protecting diversity and equality.

Importantly, the Bill would assist the police in understanding what hate crime and hate speech was, and how best to investigate and charge offenders. “It would also give courts sentencing guidelines that recognise the seriousness of these ‘message crimes’ and their impact on the victim and their community.”



Finally, a law would mean that data on hate would be collected by the South African Police Service and the National Prosecuting Authority, which would help us to understand the nature and size of the problem and allow us to make effective and successful interventions, Baranov said.

As far as hate speech is concerned, the Board said the problem appeared to be not that existing anti-hate speech legislation was inadequate, but that there were serious problems in terms of how the law was being implemented.

“It’s proving very difficult in practice to follow through hate-speech complaints, whether through the South African Human Rights Commission or the Equality Courts. The processes laid down for following through complaints may also be too cumbersome, necessitating a review process. Members of the public are also, by and large, unaware of existing remedies and how to access them,” according to the submission.

It submitted that it was important to empower and strengthen the institutions dealing with hate crimes and hate speech in terms of personnel, training, and resources.

The Board also recommended “bolstering current restorative justice programmes in the county and the expansion of tolerance education”, which it added must be regarded as a crucial component of the school syllabus.

“It’s vital that our existing laws against hate speech are effectively implemented and comprehensive legislation on hate crimes is enacted. History has taught that what often ends in genocide and crimes against humanity, like the Holocaust and apartheid, begins with words and isolated hateful actions.”

Photo: Jamal Awad Flash90

Judge puts stop to delay in Thulsie twin trial

TALI FEINBERG

When the Thulsie twins, Tony-Lee and Brandon-Lee, were arrested in 2016 for allegedly planning terrorist attacks on Jewish and other institutions and individuals, it was hoped justice would be swift. But five years later, they remain behind bars, awaiting trial.

This week, the presiding judge put a stop to the endless delays when he criticised both sides for dragging out the proceedings for half a decade.

“I’m not inclined to give any postponement until next year. That’s unacceptable,” said Judge Ramarumo Monama. “What I’m trying to alert or revive is that we aren’t only dealing with the niceties of the law, we’re dealing with the essence of the survival of the rule of law if these people can be kept in custody for that long. So, for that reason, I was not going to entertain any application for this matter to be postponed to next year. It’s preposterous to make such an order,” he said.

The twins were arrested in a 2016 raid in Gauteng. Authorities allege they are linked to the Islamic State (ISIS) group.

In the official indictment filed in the Gauteng High Court in August 2018, “the said terrorist activities would have been perpetrated using firearms, explosives, and possibly poisons, and would have been directed against cartoonist Zapiro, a Jewish South African investment manager, Telfed, King David High School Linksfield, Jewish community events, and conferences as yet not more specifically identified by the accused”. They also planned to direct their enmity on other “individual South African

Jews and Jewish entities followed on Twitter, and a Jewish event identified on the Habonim website”, as well as other targets, according to the indictment.

On Thursday, 30 September, state prosecutor Advocate Adele Barnard informed Monama that the defence had requested a postponement to March 2022, according to News24. It was at this point that the judge put his foot down.

the matter since January. Monama said he would postpone the matter for only a month.

What does it mean for the Jewish community that the trial is being delayed for so long?

“There is little doubt that the ongoing delays in this case are frustrating and concerning,” says Community Security Organisation head of operations in Gauteng, Jevon Greenblatt. “We would like to see

real deterrence.

“What we do know for certain is that there are ISIS adherents operating in South Africa, and we see evidence to suggest that these individuals and cells exist across the country,” he says. “There is some evidence and mounting speculation that many are actively co-ordinating and co-operating with one another in what at best can be described as a loose network and in the worst-case scenario, an organised terror infrastructure.

“In addition, the rise of ISIS [and Al Qaeda] across sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly relevant to us, in Mozambique, is inspiring and emboldening local adherents of radical Islamic terror ideologies,” Greenblatt says. “It’s also important to remember that ISIS officially warned the South African government to stay out of the conflict [in Mozambique], or it would directly target South Africa. I don’t believe these threats were made idly. It’s clear that they have some form of infrastructure already established in South Africa to act on these warnings. Finally, we already suspect that there are connections between local adherents and the Mozambican insurgents, including a number of South Africans that have gone across to join the fighting. Some of these have documented, direct links to the Thulsie twins.”

Says Greenblatt, “It has been published in various press articles that the Thulsie twins and their cell weren’t acting alone. They had connections to and were interacting with international ISIS-linked individuals. We also know that the case spans many continents, possibly including players much higher

up the ISIS chain of command. That would mean that if this trial does go ahead, it could expose larger networks and individuals across the globe. This may be one reason why the twins’ defence appears to be stalling and possibly even sabotaging the case.

“As to why there have been delays from the state’s side, I cannot say, other than the possibility that in a case as high profile and consequential as this one, they have to make sure that every “I” is dotted and “T” is crossed in order to get the best possible outcome and to prevent the case from being thrown out or incorrectly judged due to an avoidable error,” he says. “Part of the delays may also have been caused by the long processes around international co-operation with law-enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions who have a material interest in this case and the broader links exposed in the investigations.

“Regardless of what happens in this trial, many experts agree that the South African environment is conducive to acts of terror and a comfortable environment for extremist groups to operate in,” Greenblatt says. “Their existence is well-documented, and they have already carried out a number of ideological attacks or attempted attacks within our borders. We, as a society and especially as a community, need to be vigilant and invest in measures, systems, and structures to prevent or in a worst-case scenario, mitigate this very real threat. That takes funding, time, planning, and effort. We have acted proactively rather than waiting for something to happen and only then reacting.”

The matter will be back in court on 29 October.



Tony-Lee and Brandon-Lee Thulsie

A trial date was set for January this year, but the defence launched an application to have the matter thrown out of court, arguing that there were irregularities in how the matter was transferred to the High Court in 2017. In July, the court dismissed their application, as well as their application for leave to appeal. Their lawyers have taken the dismissal of leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeal, where it’s yet to be heard, which affects the continuation of the matter in the High Court. Last week, Barnard said the state had been ready to proceed with

justice done, and if they are found to be guilty, it’s important that a strong precedent is set. Should this case be thrown out due to delays, it could embolden and encourage like-minded individuals to follow in the footsteps of the Thulsies, and next time, we may not be as lucky.

“Should justice not be seen to be done, the potential exists to create a more permissive environment for future terror attacks in South Africa,” says Greenblatt. “Without a real risk of getting caught and strong consequences to follow, there’s no



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Third wave has gone, but the virus hasn't

OPINION

PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB



President Cyril Ramaphosa announced last Thursday, 30 September, that the country would be moving down to adjusted level 1 lockdown. A number of restrictions have now been relaxed including curfew hours, controls of the sale of alcohol and, most controversially, the permitted number of people at gatherings has been increased.

Indoor venues are now allowed to hold up to 750 persons and outdoor venues up to 2 000 persons, a significant increase in permitted numbers for gatherings compared to the 250 for indoor and 500 for outdoor in the erstwhile alert level 2.

Undoubtedly the size of gatherings does pose a substantial potential risk of an outbreak of COVID-19. Generally, the risk of virus transmission at outdoor gatherings is much lower compared to indoor events.

Nevertheless, one is eerily reminded of the catastrophic second wave of COVID-19 in India in April – one of the most severe outbreaks in the history of the pandemic. This took place soon after widespread huge political rallies in that country. It was this outbreak which heralded the global spread of the Delta variant, the most contagious of all the SARS-CoV-2 variants.

South Africa has recently emerged from the third wave, the most intense and longest lasting of the epidemic waves in

the country. In Gauteng, the peak of the wave registered about 76 cases per 100 000 population, as against the 35 cases per 100 000 population at the peak of the second wave. Nationally, the third wave lasted more than 130 days compared to 75 days for each of the preceding two waves.

The current low viral activity of this inter-wave period has buoyed many people. It's within this milieu that the president, in consultation with various bodies, decided to bring the country to a lower level of restriction – alert level 1. As always, these decisions are driven by the balance between infection-prevention

restrictions in the interest of public-health and the damage these measures take on people's livelihoods and mental health as well as on the economy of the country.

After 18 months of quite onerous and irksome restrictions, burdensome encumbrances, and limitations on people's freedom of movement, the urge to go back to our pre-COVID-19 life is stronger than ever. Clearly, current parameters of viral activity are all looking good. The seven-day moving average of daily cases is at a low level of two per 100 000 population. The test positivity rate of 5% is also at one of the

lowest of levels.

The vaccination drive has, in recent times, faltered somewhat, but nevertheless, about a third of the adult population have been partially or fully vaccinated. The recently announced Vooma initiative of intensified weekend vaccination may well re-energise the programme and bring it back up to its originally promised level.

In addition, immunity following natural infection, as revealed by seroprevalence studies (studies to determine the prevalence of antibodies in the population), indicate that a significant proportion of the population may well already have protective antibodies, either from infection or from vaccination.

So, is the COVID-19 threat now finally over, and can we party again?

In a previous issue of the *SA Jewish Report* (2 September 2021), I described how, with current vaccines, we can get to a containment phase of the pandemic, which would still require so-called non-pharmaceutical interventions (masks, physical distancing, and avoiding gatherings) to supplement the contribution of vaccines in curbing the epidemic.

Nowhere is the folly of totally relying on vaccine coverage to stop circulation of coronavirus more graphically illustrated than the sequence of events in Israel. A world leader in achieving one of the highest levels of vaccine coverage, the country prematurely relaxed virtually all of its COVID-19 restrictions in June.

What followed in August was a dramatic upsurge of cases, nearly overtaking the number of cases experienced in the

country's pre-vaccine era. Similar scenarios following the premature removal of COVID-19 restrictions played out in several northern hemisphere countries, followed by similar upsurges of cases and infections.

Undoubtedly coronavirus vaccines have played an enormously important public-health role. Data from the United States have shown how fully vaccinated individuals have a tenfold lower risk of hospitalisation and death from COVID-19.

In South Africa, recent data from the Western Cape has similarly shown that only 4% of COVID-19 hospital admissions and only 1.7% of COVID-19 deaths occurred in vaccinated individuals. Transmission studies, including household transmission studies, have also demonstrated how vaccinated individuals pose a far lower risk of spreading the virus.

However, where there are conditions of more intense virus transmission as would occur in super-spreading events such as uncontrolled gatherings, parties, and functions, vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals remain almost equally susceptible to infection.

This has been observed in several well-studied outbreaks. For example, public gatherings in the county of Barnstable in Massachusetts in July left 469 individuals ill with COVID-19, in spite of 69% vaccine coverage.

In fact, 74% of those infected were fully vaccinated, as were four of the five who were hospitalised. The Delta variant of the virus was the culprit responsible.

More in-depth studies have recently shown that vaccinated individuals who do

get infected with the Delta variant harbour the same mass of virus in their throat and are as infectious as unvaccinated individuals.

Also lurking in the shadows is the spectre of further nefarious variants, which could spring into being and again trigger pandemics. They would arise by selective pressure from reservoirs of the virus in unvaccinated individuals or immunocompromised individuals who are chronically infected with the virus as a result their defective immune systems being unable to clear the virus in spite of vaccination.

Virologists, vaccinologists, and public-health specialists have achieved spectacular success in the campaign against the COVID-19 pandemic. But the journey isn't over yet. Non-pharmaceutical interventions are still mandated to augment the role of vaccines.

Was it entirely necessary to schedule local elections for November or could they have been postponed until we were further down the road controlling this virus? My personal opinion, perhaps borne out of ignorance of other considerations, is pretty clear.

• *Barry Schoub is professor emeritus of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and was the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases. He chairs the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccines. This article is written in his private capacity. He reports no conflicts of interest.*

After 18 months of quite onerous and irksome restrictions, burdensome encumbrances, and limitations on people's freedom of movement, the urge to go back to our pre-COVID-19 life is stronger than ever.

To vote or not to vote – that should not be the question

OPINION

MICHAEL BAGRAIM



I'm writing this as one of four Jewish members of parliament. All the Jewish MPs happen to be members of the official opposition.

Over the past few months, I've spent a lot of time engaging with voters within the Jewish community and outside. I'm the head of a constituency which includes the Atlantic Seaboard and has a very large group of Jewish ratepayers and voters.

I have tried to convince everyone who is registered to vote to at least come out and vote and to consider very carefully the value of that vote and the placement of same.

Obviously, we all have a choice whether to vote or not, and indeed the choice as to where we will place our cross. I implore everyone to consider their vote carefully before making a final decision. In essence, your vote is valuable and will count.

These local government elections are being challenged by numerous smaller parties and independent candidates. The splitting of these votes mean that the individual vote becomes more and more powerful.

My advice to everyone, regardless of their final decision, is to think carefully through a couple of factors. Local government elections should obviously be about service delivery. Clearly, service delivery will always be weighed up against the finances available and clean governance.

My strong feeling is that voting for a small and insignificant party or an independent will produce no results whatsoever.

There might be a feel-good factor at the

time of voting, but should this individual by chance get a seat, that seat will probably be meaningless with regard to service delivery in the long run. Remember, these individuals will take the seat for five years.

When voting for a larger political party, it would be useful to take into consideration their history of service delivery as opposed to the numerous hollow promises we are all seeing on an hourly basis.

Most of us want to live in cities which offer clean governance and as much service delivery as possible. When exercising your vote, you need to bear in mind that what you really want is to ensure that there is prevention of chaos and anarchy, and that you will have some access to the party thereafter.

Please look at the overall picture. It doesn't help to find small faults with particular city councillors and thereby slate the whole party. Look at the bigger picture, and become part of the solution.

It behoves our community to have a positive attitude, and to ensure that it lends its vote to an individual and a party which can aspire to the goals of a city which has a clean audit and keeps striving for better delivery.

I fully understand the two issues raised in *Ethics of Our Fathers*. We all know Rabbi Chanina's statement in which he calls for us to pray for the stability and welfare of government.

My understanding is that we require a government that can prevent chaos and anarchy. Unfortunately, we have just had a taste of that chaos and anarchy, and this needs to be prevented now and in the future.

I also understand the ancient Jewish practice of keeping a low profile with regard to government. In Pirkei Avot, Shemayah's words, "Do not become overly familiar with the government" need to be understood. We must preserve our morals and values, but likewise, we should be looking to a political party which we believe would be in a position to at least understand these morals and values and try to implement them.

• *Michael Bagraim is a member of parliament for the DA.*



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Jewish Zambian freedom fighter laid to rest in state funeral

TALI FEINBERG

It’s not often that one finds a Jewish freedom-fighting 96-year-old in Zambia, but Simon Zukas was one such man. Born in Lithuania and profoundly influenced by the events of the Holocaust, he played a pivotal role in bringing democracy to Zambia. He passed away on 27 September, and was laid to rest in an official state funeral on Tuesday, 5 October.

“Simon was profoundly influenced not just by the moral-ethical teachings of Judaism, but by the historical experience of the Jewish people with whom he never ceased to identify,” said African Jewish Congress (AJC) spiritual leader Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft in his eulogy. “In large part, his abhorrence of injustice, particularly when based on race, was informed by the tragic fate of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe including his own home-town during the Holocaust.” Silberhaft was flown out by the Zambian government to officiate the funeral.

Describing Zukas as “a devoted patriot, freedom fighter, and heroic pioneer of the nation of Zambia”, Silberhaft said that he was born Shimon Ber Zukas “in a small Lithuanian town in 1925, and had just entered his teens when he arrived in what was then Northern Rhodesia just before the outbreak of World War II. For the rest of his long and productive life, he would devote himself to furthering the well-being of his adopted country.”

He landed up in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia because it didn’t have quotas limiting Jewish settlers, unlike South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, later Zimbabwe.

Zukas studied civil engineering at the University of Cape Town, and got involved in student politics. He later joined the struggle for Zambian independence, and was eventually deported to the United Kingdom.

“He was declared a ‘danger to peace and good order’,



and, after a fruitless appeal to the high court and eight months in jail in Livingstone, he was deported to England, a country he had previously neither visited nor lived in,” wrote Sishuwa Sishuwa in the *Lusaka Times*. “Though constituting a risk to his own life, his decision to confront those who perpetuated injustice and become an active participant in the struggle for independence was a statement of his commitment to equality.”

But in 1965, following statehood, new Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda invited him to return. By now a qualified engineer running a successful consultancy in England, Zukas said he moved back to offer his professional expertise to major infrastructure projects. A career in politics also followed: his efforts to persuade Kaunda and his United National Independence Party to abandon a one-party state failed and, in 1990, he broke ranks and joined the drive towards multiparty politics, playing a leading role in its subsequent return. He was most recently leader of the Forum for Democracy and Development, an opposition political party. He retired from politics in 2005.

Alongside his political and engineering endeavours,

Zukas was committed to his Jewish identity. He was chairperson of the Council for Zambian Jewry, and vice-president of the AJC.

AJC President Ann Harris wrote to Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema on Zukas’s passing, describing how the AJC “represented the interests of all the Jewish communities in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa of which Zambia is a proud leader. Simon Zukas was an active member of our organisation. His pride in his nation of Zambia and the excellence and fortitude with which he served his country in many different public spheres created a glow of honour which reflected on our congress.”

Calling Zukas a “father figure”, she wrote that “he had the strength and loyalty to be at one and the same time the proudest of Zambians and an outspoken example of his Jewish identity. To us, the loss is immeasurable, and we are quite sure that all of Zambia feels the same.” She wished the president and the people of Zambia “long life” on his passing.

Writer Cynthia Hartley described in her blog how she found herself “crying hopelessly at the news of his death. We met through mutual friends in Zambia as well as work, engineering, politics, and art. Mike, my husband, was Jewish, and that was an important initial connection. Neither Mike nor Simon were observant Jews, but both cared deeply about the Jewish community and its continuity.

“There are excellent obituaries of Simon Zukas but not all explain how extraordinary his moral principles were,

given the universal background of racism he faced,” she wrote. She advised reading his autobiography, *Into Exile and Back*.

Alongside Zukas every step of the way was his loving wife, Cynthia (nee Robinson). Together, they had two sons. A painter by profession, she was awarded an Order of the British Empire in 2012, “for promoting visual arts in Zambia and for creating a historical archive of Zambian art”.

In his eulogy, Silberhaft described her as a “true partner” in her husband’s life’s work, and “an outstanding citizen in her own right”. Hartley said that “they were an extraordinary couple in their support for and understanding of each other. It was a relationship I have long envied.”

Silberhaft said, “Regardless of his foreign birth and the fact that he wasn’t just white but a member of a small religious minority, Simon Zukas was a Zambian to the core, and so was he regarded by his fellow citizens, regardless of race or creed.

“As spiritual leader to the AJC, I was privileged to have had many opportunities of meeting and working with him, and can attest to how strongly the teachings of his Jewish heritage underpinned his approach to everything that he did,” he said. “I’m bidding farewell not only to a member of my own far-flung African congregation, but also to a true colleague and friend. May the memory of Shimon Ber Zukas be a blessing, and may the example he set be a source of inspiration for all the generations to come.”



President of Zambia, Hakainde Hichilema, filling the grave

Clegg’s autobiography brings readers into his crazy, beautiful world

TALI FEINBERG

If you ever wanted to sit at the feet of the late, great Johnny Clegg, hearing tales of his early years in his own unique voice, you now have that opportunity. Although Clegg passed away in 2019, he began writing about his life in the years prior to his death. The result is the newly released *Scatterling of Africa*, which is his “origin story” in his own words.

“It’s a hugely surreal moment for us and a joy to share our dad’s incredible story with the world. It has been a long journey to get to this point, and we are honoured and proud to be able to finally release it,” says his son, Jesse Clegg, in an interview with the *SA Jewish Report*.

The past few years have been “an emotionally challenging period to be without our dad, especially considering the circumstances we find ourselves in the world”, says his younger son, Jaron Clegg. “We are, however, hugely comforted and feel his presence when we see his music and storytelling connect with people. This book was a way for us to share his presence again and working on it was cathartic because it felt like he was with us as we were making our way through his journey.”

Clegg was known as Le Zoulou Blanc and didn’t emphasise his Jewish identity, and yet the book shows how his life was “book ended” by two very Jewish life-cycle events. We are introduced to his overbearing grandfather, Harry Braudo, who insisted that Clegg have a *Brit Milah* even though his biological father wasn’t Jewish. This moment and Braudo’s decisions at the time reverberate across the generations.

Then, on the second page of the book, the Clegg family thanks the Chevrah Kadisha for its support over the very difficult period of Clegg’s passing. And so, in birth and death, Clegg was bound to Judaism. In between, as he writes, there were moments when he wrestled with his Jewish identity as well as the question of whether one can change identities, finding a home in another community that welcomes you as one of its own sons.”

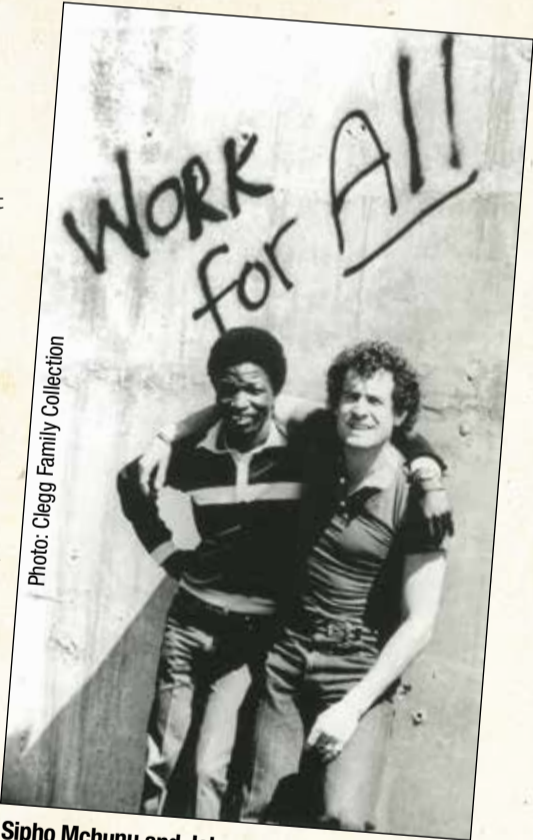
“An anthropologist by training, our dad always had a curiosity and appreciation for all cultures and religions,” says Jesse. “With Judaism, there were many principles and values that he respected deeply and connected us to as his children. Sometimes we would light the Shabbos candles and he would explain the symbolism around the traditions, and we also had Barmitzvahs. Our family has always had a connection to the Jewish community, and we are grateful for the support and compassion we’ve received.”

Although it can be unsettling to read the writings of someone whose early death remains so raw, Clegg’s voice shines through from the very first word in the most comforting way. He takes us into his childhood memories and teenage explorations with a gentle hand, as if to say “come, let me show you something wonderful”. He talks about how both he and his mother had an almost naïve fearlessness and boundless curiosity, which allowed him to follow a path that none had treaded before.

Asked how the book came together, Jaron explains that his father “chose to focus on his formative years, as it was these years that were so important in shaping his journey as an artist and as a human. It came together sporadically in moments and short vignettes and stories that he would write down as they came to him, and it continued like that until the end. When he passed, we were left with a beautiful collection of anecdotes and memories and so our job, with the editor, was to order and structure the text into a cohesive narrative. With that said, our main priority was that everything was in his own words and nothing was altered from the original text.”

“We had never heard some of these stories before!” says Jesse. “He goes into incredible detail about his family life, his connection to music, and his connection to Zulu culture and South Africa in general.”

In many accounts, Clegg’s stepfather, journalist Dan Pienaar’s decision to take the young Clegg with him to the townships, is credited with kindling his interest in Zulu



Sipho Mchunu and Johnny Clegg on the cover of their sixth album as Juluka, called ‘Work for All’

culture. But in the book, we see that many more forces were at play, including Clegg’s initiative, drive, and joy in discovering a new world – often at great risk. He describes the impact Pienaar’s approach to life had on him in many ways, especially during the year they spent in Zambia. Linked to this are other fascinating stories, such as how Pienaar kidnapped Clegg’s stepsister and went to Australia.

Asked how Zulu culture featured in their lives, Jesse says, “We spent many weekends in Zululand growing up, so we were very exposed to this world and experienced the magical community. We certainly hold dear the Zulu culture and way of life. We visit Sipho Mchunu’s homestead in Makhabaleni often, and reminisce about the life he shared with our father. And every time we drive down, as the Tugela River Valley opens up, it’s like a

doorway into another world. This is part of the magic of the place our dad came to love and live by.”

Having access to their father’s story after his passing “is a gift for us as a family because of how strong his voice is and how clearly he comes across”, says Jaron. “We feel especially lucky to have this piece of him as we move forward, something that we can tangibly hold on to and read through whenever we want to hear his voice.”

In the cast of characters we are introduced to in the book, Clegg’s mother, Muriel, plays an important part. “Muriel, or ‘Gogo’ as we used to call her, was a strong and eccentric woman who had a massive role in our dad’s life,” says Jesse. “She championed him in many ways especially in his music career. Of course, she wasn’t without her own troubles and traumas and some of that baggage was carried by our dad throughout his life. To us, she was a good grandmother who read to us all the time and introduced us to the magic of poetry, storytelling, and karate.”

The Clegg sons carry the surname of their father’s biological dad, Dennis Clegg, who their father wasn’t allowed to meet until he was 21. “Without a father, there certainly was a void in his life growing up, and in a way, it reinforced his connection to the Zulu culture as their masculine values as well as their music and dance gave him the tools to father himself,” says Jaron.

“My brother and I did get to meet Dennis, and in fact, we spent a few holidays with him. He would come down to South Africa to visit us, and we always enjoyed seeing him. He was a very kind and gentle man, and incredibly funny. He could also talk to dogs!”

They hope the book “will give people an intimate look at the man behind the music, a glimpse into the world that shaped him and people who championed his journey. For us, our dad’s life serves as testament to human connection against all odds, and the incredible power of music and dance to transcend our differences. We feel honoured and proud to be able to share it with the world.”

Blue plaque recognises Muizenberg Jewish community’s heritage

TALI FEINBERG

Muizenberg holds a special place in the hearts and memories of many South African Jews, and its Jewish community has now been recognised for its historic significance in the area with a prestigious blue plaque.

The plaque was unveiled at a small ceremony at the beginning of September.

Blue plaques are commemorative signs placed on buildings and in locations of significance. The Muizenberg synagogue on Camp Road was one of two buildings in the area, as designated by the Muizenberg Historical Conservation Society, to receive blue-plaque status.

“I was contacted by Glenn Babb, the head of the Muizenberg Historical Society. It wanted to honour the Muizenberg Jewish community for its service and influence in Muizenberg over many decades, and thought it appropriate to put a plaque at the shul,” says Muizenberg Hebrew Congregation Rabbi Ryan Newfield.

Chris Taylor, the chairperson of the Muizenberg Historical Society, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the plaque was to commemorate the Jewish community’s integral role in Muizenberg history, rather than the shul building itself.

“For a couple of years, we’ve had a low-key project to erect blue plaques on buildings of historical significance or to commemorate people,” he says. “For example, Agatha Christie learned to surf in Muizenberg, so we have one for her. A great deal of the history

of Muizenberg was driven by the Jewish community. At its peak, there were about 600 families living there, mainly from Lithuania. Although there has been an exodus of Jews from Muizenberg since the 1960s, they left behind a great deal of history. This blue plaque is to commemorate that past. The shul is and was the heart of the community, which is why we felt the plaque should go there.”

He notes that there are still a small number of Jews who live in Muizenberg or who come on holiday, mainly from Johannesburg. He finds it interesting that the builder of the synagogue was Charles McCarthy. Taylor dug into his history, and found that he was “an Irish Catholic Cockney, who converted to Judaism for the woman he loved before coming to South Africa from London. So, he was an Irish Catholic Cockney Jew.”

According to the book *Muizenberg: the Story of the Shtetl by the Sea* by Hedy Davis, the

woman McCarthy fell in love with and married was Fanny Schindler. They settled in Kalk Bay, and McCarthy never accepted payment for his work on the synagogue. He served on the shul committee, and was a loyal member of the Muizenberg Hebrew Congregation until his death.

He and his wife are buried in the Muizenberg Cemetery. Their story is just one of many that made up the thriving, dynamic Muizenberg Jewish community in its heyday.

Newfield says he was asked what they wanted to be written on the plaque.

“I left the words to some of the oldest and most involved members of our community. They chose to keep it simple, and give its full name – the Muizenberg and Kalk Bay Hebrew Congregation – and the date of establishment. The date itself was subject to dispute, but the earliest was 1916, the first step in setting up a Talmud Torah. We went with that date, as

everyone who was involved in setting up the Jewish infrastructure of Muizenberg should be honoured.”

The keynote speaker at the ceremony was Democratic Alliance federal council chair Helen Zille, who spoke about “various Jewish people who changed Muizenberg forever, like Gerald Musikanth and Mendel Kaplan, who helped to build the boardwalk to Kalk Bay, as well as many others”, says the rabbi.

“I commended the society for remembering history as the Jewish people so often remember their history, and it seems the Torah promotes looking back at the past to understand who we are in the present,” he says. “I also mentioned that in a world of numbers, where everyone is focused on COVID-19 numbers, vaccination numbers, etcetera, the Jewish people have defied numbers. The Muizenberg Jewish community is no different. Somehow, a little corner of Africa was built and largely influenced by a few hundred Jewish families that would forever change this part of the world.”

“The event itself was delightful, and Helen Zille asked to be invited to our century anniversary of the current shul building in 2024,” he says. “It was a bad week of weather, but somehow the sun came out for the event, and Glenn Babb joked to me that G-d answered my prayers.”

Ward councillor of the Cape’s Ward 64, Aimee Kuhl, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “I’m always enthusiastic about anything that celebrates history in my ward because I believe that only once we remember where we come from do we know where we’re going.” She made the time to attend the blue plaque unveiling ceremony at the shul, and says, “We cherish the Jewish rich cultural history that we have in Muizenberg. As ward councillor, I’m very aware of that history.”



Scenes from the blue plaque unveiling ceremony at Muizenberg Shul



He and his wife are buried in the Muizenberg Cemetery. Their story is just one of many that made up the thriving, dynamic Muizenberg Jewish community in its heyday.

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From university of life to LifeBook – a storied tale

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Have you ever heard of a primary school teacher travelling more than 1 000km to say goodbye to one of her scholars? South African-born Roy Moëd recalls his King David Linksfield Grade 2 teacher travelling from Johannesburg to Cape Town in 1960 with a farewell gift for him just before he emigrated.

“I must have been so cute that teacher Bessie gave me a silver identity bracelet with the name Roy on the front and on the back, ‘Teacher Bessie 1960,’” Moëd told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I will always remember her. I never saw her again, but I still have the bracelet. She was a very special woman.”

It’s precious stories like this that Moëd, who founded a successful airline catering business and bespoke autobiography service, wants to highlight.

It’s sad, says Moëd, that these kinds of stories about your average person generally go untold. He founded LifeBook, a bespoke autobiography service, in 2011, because he’s passionate about telling these stories.

All because his teacher, Bessie Taurog, drove all the way to Cape Town shortly after the Sharpeville Massacre to say goodbye to a seven-year-old boy who was moving to Jersey, the largest of the Channel Islands with his parents and three siblings.

Moëd – who is dyslexic, making reading and writing difficult – has made the process of getting people’s stories printed as simple as possible.

“All you have to do is tell your story across twelve 90-minute interviews, and at the last interview, we record you talking about your favourite stories so your family can always hear them being retold in your voice,” he says.

Ten autobiographical books are then printed for the client to distribute among their family and friends, preserving their history and legacy.

“This my greatest business achievement and true legacy,” says Moëd. “We are changing people’s lives because we’re making and preserving this huge social history – there are now 10 000 people around the world who hold a LifeBook in their hands with their parents’ story or stories that they would never have heard.”

Not too shabby for a guy who was born in Waverley, Johannesburg, in 1953, and battled at school. “I failed everything, got kept down,” he recalls.

Moëd regularly went to Waverley Shul before his family decided to emigrate due to apartheid and the last of his grandparents having passed away. He did, however, return to the shul for his Barmitzvah.

By then, Moëd’s mother had realised that Jersey wasn’t, as she was told, a “beautiful tropical island with palm trees”. In fact, Moëd recalls, “the palm trees were all dead”.

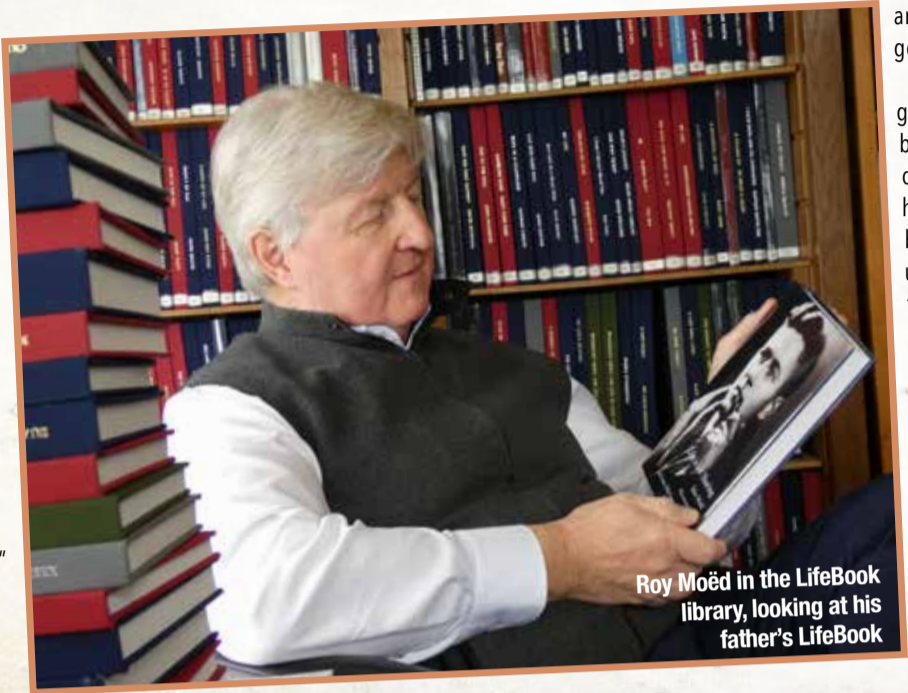
“When I was 19, I was already living in London, but returned to Jersey to run a restaurant for my dad,” he says. “It was a Doll’s House [roadhouse]. He brought the idea to the island. However, the weather was rubbish, so we would be open for only three or four months of the year.”

Moëd went on to try his hand at 29 different jobs over the next six years, which he describes as “the university of life”. He did everything from door-to-door insurance to being a barman, waiter, smoked salmon slicer, and fruit and veg van driver. He also had spells working on a kibbutz in Israel, serving as a chef and manager of a restaurant, and managing a hotel.

“At the age of 25, I was basically unemployable.

I was really good at interviews, but I wasn’t good at doing the jobs so I kept getting fired.”

In 1978, he started a catering business for the airline industry. “Today, I do a presentation called ‘the value of legacy, not money’, in which I talk about how I grew this business from two



employees to 600 and reengineered it four times before selling it in 2007.”

One of Moëd’s proudest moments was the unexpected response he received from the 140 people his catering business had made redundant after deciding to outsource its warehousing and distribution. “I had a party for these people even though everybody said that I was mad and my old classic car was going to get keyed.”

Although they were being let go, they ended up hugging Moëd because he had given them opportunity by employing them in his business. “These people then became our customers as we landed up delivering to the doors of where they went on to be employed,” Moëd says.

His LifeBook company is working on 200 autobiographies for people around the world – from Mauritius and Uganda to the United States. “We always get a local interviewer who lives within 30 minutes of the client. The interviewer is trained by us how to conduct the interview, record the story, and take photographs. We then use a suitable writer – like an Asian if the subject is Asian – as they understand the nuances of things like local terminology.”

Moëd’s expert team includes project managers, editors, typesetters, proofreaders, printers, and bookbinders.

“The key to LifeBook is also that the people who do it enjoy it. I started it because of my dad. I wanted to give him a project that he would enjoy and give him self-worth. As we get older, we start to lose our faculties in different ways, but to have a sense of self-worth at what you did, and to have your grandchildren know your values is really important. A great African proverb says, ‘When an elder passes on, a whole library burns down’. My greatest business achievement is that many of these kinds of libraries haven’t burnt down.”

Moëd’s business philosophy is inspired by a book titled *The customer comes second*. “The essence of that book is that if you get your people right, the customer will be happy. The philosophy is to treat people as people, build a team of people who are doing it for more than just the money, and create an environment where people enjoy coming to work and what they do.”

Business aside, Moëd flew in a race from London to Sydney in 2001. He has a pilot license and an instrument rating, which, he says, “is really academic, and I surprised myself in doing it”.

He has returned to South Africa many times as a tourist, and played polo at Plettenberg Bay, where his parents spent their honeymoon once upon a time.

Cyril Harris Centre to reopen for culture and social life

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre is to reopen its doors after a 20-month hiatus due to COVID-19.

The 21-year-old centre, situated in the precincts of the Great Park Synagogue in Johannesburg, unwillingly closed in March 2020 because of the pandemic.

But René Sidley and Hazel Cohen, the centre’s operations managers, say that the easing of COVID-19 restrictions will result in them returning to work very soon.

“We’ve been sitting at home since March last year,” says Sidley. “People come and pay at the door. Once we closed, nobody is coming and paying, so there’s nothing. We have no income. When we closed, we had no phones as Telkom let us down. We were starting to install fibre, and that didn’t happen. We’ve been struggling the past few years. If we could get sponsorship, it would be absolutely marvellous. That’s would really help us.”

Although the centre falls within the Great Park Synagogue, it’s a separate non-profit organisation. Its income derives from ticket sales at the door, a few donations, and annual membership, which gives members a 30% discount to all events.

The centre started in 2000 with very little funding and no database. Rabbi Cyril Harris, then chief rabbi of South Africa, had the vision to create a cultural centre in the Great Park Synagogue while it was being built, and it was accomplished together with Ernest Leibowitz, Lolly Lotzoff, and Anthony Spitz.

The mandate of the centre, as a Jewish-based organisation, is to provide recreational, cultural, educational, and social programmes to perpetuate, strengthen, and serve the greater Johannesburg community. This was achieved beyond the most optimistic expectations because of the generosity of many who supported its functions and events.

“The community centre has been a vibrant part not just of the Jewish community, because a lot of non-Jews come to us as well,” says Sidley. “We have the most amazing talks, lectures, and films and it’s not what you find on the circuit. You can’t go to Ster-Kinekor and see one of our movies. It’s just been such a fabulous centre and a safe place for people to come on their own.”

The centre’s Monday matinees, supervised bridge mornings, Yiddish classes, and art exhibitions are very popular, and give the audience another avenue for

discussion and enjoyment.

It has hosted many international and local luminaries. Well-known locals include FW de Klerk, Professor Barry Schoub, Albie Sachs, Professor Adam Habib, Arthur Chaskalson, George Bizos, and Pieter-Dirk Uys.

The centre used to host about two evening events a week, and each event was followed by tea in the lounge. “The tea is famous for the fruit cake, and this gives our audience the opportunity to meet each other, discuss the evening, and socialise,” says Sidley. “Many people have made new friends and rediscovered old friends. There has even been a marriage of a couple who met here.”

One of the memorable moments Sidley recounts at the centre was when almost every doctor attended late renowned palaeontologist Professor Phillip Tobias’s lecture, which he had to repeat because of overbooking.

Artist William Kentridge came to talk about his frieze along the embankment of Tiber River in Rome’s urban waterfront. The evening was so oversubscribed, Kentridge agreed to do two talks on the same night and the auditorium could have been filled to overflowing for a third session.

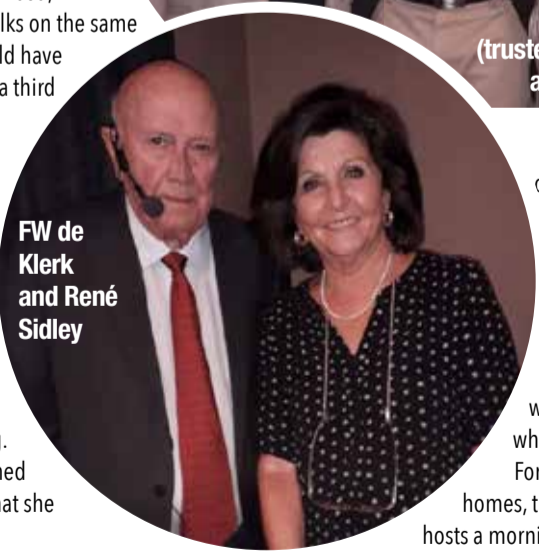
The three Pelham sisters, Naomi, Ruth and Aviva, were persuaded by the centre to do an evening of song, which they put together as a tribute to their mother, and at the end of the performance, they called their 90-year-old mother onto the stage to join them in song. It was so successful, Aviva turned it into a musical production that she took to London.

The centre, which hosts many book launches, was once asked by one of its regular visitors to host the launch of a book he had written on Alzheimer’s. The centre thought that no one would attend, but it decided to give him the platform. “To our amazement, the auditorium was filled to capacity, and at the end of his talk, we were approached to continue with this programme by two women who gave a talk on memory retention,” recalls Sidley.

On Sukkot, the Holocaust & Genocide Centre often

brought survivors for a film and tea in the Sukkah at the centre. Rabbi Dovid Hazdan of the Great Park Synagogue joined the survivors for tea, and helped them partake in the *mitzvah* of the lulav and etrog. For one of the survivors, it was the first time she had even held a lulav and etrog, and it was quite an emotional experience for all concerned.

The centre’s chairperson, Marlene Bethlehem, opened the *South Africa Rugby Minyan* exhibition wearing her Springbok rugby shirt, and got rugby great Syd Nomis, who was there, to autograph the back of her shirt.




Judith Mason, one of South Africa’s leading artists, designed the stained-glass windows in the Great Park Synagogue. A tribute was held in the centre when she passed away. For residents of old-age homes, the centre annually hosts a morning in which they see a movie with a Jewish theme, followed

by tea.

“The centre is a beacon of light, stimulation, and entertainment for the Jewish community and to the many loyal non-Jewish members who take delight in the programmes,” says Sidley. “It plays such an important and vibrant role in the Jewish community that it must reopen. To do so, it needs help with funding, and we can only appeal to our wonderful community to support us.”



fer fools
Gordhan

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, wearing glasses, a dark suit, a white shirt, and a red and blue striped tie. He is looking slightly to the left with a serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

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Israeli augmented reality exhibit takes root at Kirstenbosch

TALI FEINBERG

An Israeli project that combines augmented reality (AR) with art has made its way to South Africa in an exhibition that is being displayed for a year in the famed Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens at the foot of Table Mountain.

Called *Seeing the Invisible*, the contemporary art exhibition features 13 AR artworks by established artists from various countries. Kirstenbosch was chosen as one of 12 different botanical gardens from around the globe to feature the exhibition simultaneously.

The project was initiated by the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens in partnership with Outset Contemporary Art Fund, with the



Viewers enjoy the augmented reality art exhibition *Seeing the Invisible* at Kirstenbosch

collaboration in the Middle East, this beautiful poetic utopian idea, conceived in 2010 and nourished by a wild political imagination, is yet to be realised on site. In its current

AR manifestation, the work combines a tall salt stalagmite and a set of three salt bridges, offering viewers endless routes of exploration around the work and inside its hidden creeks. It touches on the notion of the bridge as a means of passage, a medium connecting people, cultures, and languages, and activating peace,” says the artist.

Says events and tourism manager at Kirstenbosch, Sarah Struys, of the choice of Kirstenbosch as a venue, “The organisers approached the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to request participation by one national botanical garden in the programme. SANBI decided to place the exhibition in

Kirstenbosch as it has the highest profile amongst SANBI’s network of gardens and would reach the most people.

“We are pleased to be one of 12 international botanical gardens – and the only garden in Africa – to be part of this unique exhibition, and to display the works of 13 top contemporary artists from across the world,” Struys says. “The use of augmented reality to create art is very exciting and has many benefits in our environment. There is no carbon footprint related to bringing materials in, and no physical impact on the garden to create the works as they are all digital.”

Struys says the space where each artwork is placed was carefully selected by the Kirstenbosch team in collaboration with the curators of the exhibition. “The natural environment complements each work beautifully, and visitors can experience and rediscover each work throughout the seasons, as the exhibition is on for a whole year. The experience of the exhibition also reaches beyond Kirstenbosch, because the same works are displayed in different biomes in various gardens across the world. Even if one cannot travel from garden to garden, each participating garden shares photos of the art on its website and social-media platforms.

It’s fascinating to compare photos of a work set in Kirstenbosch to the same work in a garden in Australia, Canada, or Israel, for example.”

Asked why the exhibition works so well in a space like Kirstenbosch, especially during the pandemic, she responds, “It was the team of the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens who came up with this brilliant idea. They had the same challenges as all visitor attractions when the pandemic struck, but they thought out of the box and came up with this international event that brings people together through gardens, art, and technology, in a safe way.

“Outdoor spaces are known to be significantly safer than indoor venues during the pandemic,” she says. “While we haven’t been able to hold big events at Kirstenbosch such as our concerts, this exhibition is a great opportunity for us to hold a big and meaningful – yet very safe – event that’s not affected by changing COVID-19 regulations. Visitors explore the exhibition individually or as families at any time of day, with lots of space for social distancing from other visitors.

“Each artwork is an interactive



experience. We hope that visitors will enjoy each experience and discover or rediscover Kirstenbosch while exploring the art and having fun,” she says. “We are already hearing from visitors who have come to Kirstenbosch several times since the exhibition opened, to experience the works over and over. We also notice that the art, the use of technology, and the interaction of the art with the natural environment are sparking interesting conversations.”

showcasing artwork in a new and exciting manner.

“It’s interesting and beneficial to us to work with like-minded managers of botanical gardens from across the world,” she says. “We feel that if people from all backgrounds can come to appreciate the artwork and the beauty of the surroundings in which they exist, this would have a positive and uniting effect across all sectors of society.”



support of the Jerusalem Foundation, and is co-curated by Hadas Maor (curator of contemporary art) and Tal Michael Haring (virtual and augmented reality expert and curator).

They worked with the artists to select existing works as well as commission new ones, and to position these new experiential artworks in unique spots in each of the participating botanical gardens.

After downloading the *Seeing the Invisible* app, viewers enter the gardens and follow a map on their screen to find each artwork. A magical treasure hunt for children and adults alike, one may find an eerie cave, a giant archway, a mysterious sphere, or a piano playing music as birds flutter around the keys, amongst other dynamic works.

For more than 15 years, the Dead Sea has been a source of inspiration for Sigalit Landau’s video works, photographic series, and salt sculptures. Now, with a unique, innovative use of Dead Sea minerals, her AR artwork, *Salt Stalagmite #1 [Three Bridges]*, is included in the exhibition. It originates from Landau’s original idea of building a floating salt bridge over the Dead Sea to connect Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan.

“A symbol of hope and

Scientist David Julius wins Nobel Prize in medicine

SHIRA HANAU - JTA

David Julius, a professor of physiology at the University of California, San Francisco, whose grandparents fled antisemitism in Czarist Russia, was awarded this year’s Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine on Monday. He shared the award with Ardem Patapoutian, a molecular biologist and neuroscientist at the Scripps Research Institute.

The Nobel Prize committee cited Julius and Patapoutian’s research “for their discoveries of receptors for temperature and touch”, which have improved treatments for pain caused by a range of diseases.

Julius was born in 1955 and grew up in Brighton Beach, which was then home to a large population

of Russian Jewish emigres. Julius described the neighbourhood as “a landing pad for Eastern European immigrants like my grandparents, who fled Czarist Russia and antisemitism in pursuit of a better life”.

A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of California, Berkeley, Julius has spent his career researching the way human senses like touch, pain, and heat function and has used capsaicin, the chemical in chili peppers that makes them burn, to explore how human nerve endings feel heat.

“These breakthrough discoveries launched intense research activities leading to a rapid increase in our understanding of how our nervous system senses heat, cold, and mechanical stimuli,” the Nobel Prize committee wrote in its announcement of the winners.



David Julius

Photo: University of California, San Francisco

SAJBD National Conference

2021



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Panel discussion

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RSVP to attend the conference online: sajbd.org

When music is a family matter, harmony is easy

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

A thread that weaves its way through different generations, a powerful way to connect and express ourselves creatively, music has been a unifying force in numerous talented families.

For renowned opera singer, Aviva Pelham (73), some of her best memories are of performing with her sisters, Naomi and Ruth, also talented singers. It started with their parents, Santa and Jack, who knew one another only through letters before becoming engaged.

“These two strangers lived a 63-year marriage, and the things that glued them together were yiddishkeit, the fact that they were both casualties of war situations, and music,” says Pelham. “They were both highly musical. There was always music in the house, and my mother had a stupendous voice.”

This passion, particularly for opera and Yiddish songs, was passed on to the couple’s three daughters. “There would be two of us playing piano duets from different sides of the house and there was always a lot of singing and harmonising,” Pelham says. “We used to sing in the car, at picnics, at Shabbos, at lunch. It was very natural, our voices resonated with one another.” Although, as adults, the sisters have long lived in different cities, they remain bonded by music, rehearsing telephonically and performing together whenever possible.

Having built an illustrious opera career, Pelham used music to convey her mother’s fascinating life story through her acclaimed musical, *Santa’s Story*, which she performed internationally.

“My mother herself used to come onstage in her 90s and sing for the encore – people were so moved. We filmed it so that after she passed away, it was still on the screen behind me as an encore. In Sydney, I had four generations singing simultaneously. There was my mom on the screen, and my son, Adam, and his daughter, Noa, alongside me onstage. It gives me enormous joy when my family take pleasure in music. Hopefully through my singing, directing, mentoring, and teaching, I have inspired others through music.”

Indeed, one of the many performers Pelham has influenced is her great niece, Ariella Barnett (25). Naomi’s granddaughter,

Barnett is a passionate actress and singer who recently penned her own musical, a three-women show titled *Feeling Pretty*, soon to be performed in Cape Town. Her grandmother, great aunts, and especially *Santa’s Story* had a particular impact on her.

“I grew up listening to



Breindy and Matt

these stories from my great granny, Santa, and from my grandmother, Naomi,” Barnett says. “Seeing Aviva performing it live on stage through musical theatre was a big moment that spoke to me about what I wanted to do with my life. It was also a special way of connecting to my heritage and ancestry.”

Barnett’s mother and Naomi’s daughter, Natalie Barnett, have also been touched by music. “One of the most magnificent experiences for me was to sit in the Baxter Theatre and see my gran, my mom, her two sisters, and my two daughters all singing in Yiddish together on stage,” she recalls. There was another occasion where Natalie joined her family singing at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

“It was much more than just the four generations; it was thinking about the past and how we have this unbelievable Jewish heritage through music. My gran, Santa, as a refugee survivor, represented that. Her legacy is to pass that down to her three daughters, and to me and to my daughters, who will pass it down to their children. There really is something spectacular about that thread of music that connects the generations.”

With the marriage of Pelham’s daughter, Gabi Sulcas, to Craig Nudelman, another musical thread was added to the family tree. Craig, his sister Leigh, and brothers Jake and

Zach are all very musical. Craig and Leigh, performed with the Pelham sisters and all the Nudelman siblings have sung in shul choirs. Leigh also plays the saxophone, Jake the piano and keyboard, and Zach the guitar and bass guitar. Together, they form The Nudelman Band. “Making music together has become almost habitual when there are family gatherings,” says Zach.

Music connected the family during COVID-19. “For the past two years, the four of us have put together songs for our Pesach seders,” says Leigh. “We live in three different cities and couldn’t come together in person like we usually do because of the pandemic, but through technology, we got our voices together. It was very moving.”

“It’s been a massive part of our relationship as siblings to share in our love for music,” says Jake. “Not only because we have something to enjoy together, but also because we have all influenced one another’s musical journeys.”

Growing up in a musical home with a piano-playing mother, the siblings recall singing along to the Disney musicals that formed the soundtrack to their family holidays. “My parents also listened to Classic FM, where I got a taste for classical music,” says Nudelman, who sings for the Symphony Choir of Cape Town. “I later found



The Nudelman Band

a love for *chazonus* and classical singing.”

Leigh has also used music to do outreach work, and has delved into her Jewish heritage by making a celebrated Yiddish-language album. “Music has always been inside of me,” she says. “It allows me to discover the parts of myself I never knew existed, to connect with my family, and with those who are far removed from me, like the homeless.”

Music also connects brothers Isaac and Matthew Klawansky, who both infused it into their careers. They recall becoming completely engrossed in the songs their parents would play on road trips, their dad’s 60s and 70s rock n roll and their mother’s classical tunes. Matthew also credits his mother for sending him, Isaac, and their two other siblings, Daniel and Ruthanna, to music lessons early on.

“Music was always just part of our lives,” says Isaac. “My mom played the violin for as long as I could remember, while my dad used to be a drummer. Growing up, he played in a band with his two brothers and a friend.”

Matthew, now a music and podcast producer and one half of husband-and-wife musical duo, Breindy and Matt, loves the fact that two generations of brothers have performed together. “Hearing those stories about my dad and uncles and bouncing ideas off them and my cousins, who are also musical, played a big role,” he says.

Matthew discovered his beloved guitar at around 11, while Isaac was hooked on drums the minute his father bought a drum kit. “He gave me one lesson on how to get all your limbs moving at the same time, and



Ariella Barnett

taught me a simple beat,” recalls Isaac, who has since drummed for well-known groups including Shadowclub and Flash Republic. “It was the most valuable drum lesson I’ve ever had.”

Once they chose their instruments, the brothers would spend hours jamming in their parents’ garage. They were sometimes joined by Ruthanna on violin. “Having each other to play with was hugely beneficial to our musical growth and relationship,” says Matthew.

“Matt and I formed a band together with a friend, and played together for ages,” says Isaac. “Even though we’re in different cities now, I still often collaborate with him.” Having played together for so long, the two instinctively feed off one another’s strengths.

A deep connection to music and the memories and emotions it evokes continues to bond the family across cities and continents. It’s an appreciation that’s filtering through to the next generation. “When I play the songs I grew up with to my kids, it creates new experiences for them and reconnects me to my childhood,” says Matthew.

Pretoria rabbis ordained after challenging year

In terms of learning, it was a regular year for Yeshiva LeRabbonus Pretoria, which in late August conferred *semicha* (ordination) to 11 students from the class of 5780/5781, but in many other respects, it was very different. Due to complications with travelling to South Africa, the final-year rabbinical students began their year over Zoom and their dormitory life in Namibia before finally being allowed to travel to the yeshiva in Pretoria to begin the year in earnest. Two graduates had to return overseas prior to the *semicha* ceremony, watched on Zoom by family and friends across the globe.

Open *hashgocha protis* (divine intervention) brought the *bochurim* through flight paths wrapped in serious red tape, and the rebbe’s *brocha* to the *bochurim* was felt, making the students more determined to learn Torah and work towards *smicha*.

More remarkable was the way the *bochurim* who finished their pre-*smicha* year over Zoom were able to return to complete the *smicha* year.

At the *tekes* (graduation ceremony), Dayan Rabbi Gidon Fox, the *menahel* (principal) of the yeshiva, exhorted the *bochurim* to dig deeper into themselves than in past years to realise that *shlichus* (being an emissary) is built on bringing out the best in others, even if it means suffering discomfort to do so.

The academic year took place during the months when South



Graduates of Yeshiva LeRabbonus Pretoria: Back: Dovid Yarmush, Mendel Weiss, Zalman Marcus, Mendel Azoulay, Levi Salek, Levi Lebovic, and Mendeli Allouche; Front: Mendy Ash, Dayan Rabbi Gidon Fox, Rabbi Chaim Finkelstein, Rabbi YY Kesselman, and Yosef Yitzhak Sher.

Africa was under lockdown, making interaction with the wider community difficult, which is in itself a tutorial in *shlichus*! Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Finkelstein cited various sources that “Torah learned with deep devotion at a time of harshness within the universe is the ultimate connection to the Aibeshter (uppermost) and the ultimate refinement of the *nefesh habehamis* (the human soul).”

The ceremony marked the 19th graduation class of Pretoria’s yeshiva, starting in October 2001 as Yeshiva Mahon L’Hora’ah under Rabbi Levi Wynberg. Five years ago, the name was changed to Yeshiva L’Rabbonus Pretoria under Finkelstein, who was born in Pretoria, coming full circle. The yeshiva is hoping to have 20 graduates in its 20th graduation year.

KDL ‘heritage swap’ a triumph

KELLI HOLLANDER, GRADE 11

South Africa belongs to all of us, yet how much do we know about our fellow South Africans? King David Linksfield’s awareness and advocacy committee recently decided to bring the colours of our rainbow nation together for a “heritage swap” in celebration of Heritage Month.

More than 100 students from King David and Bona Comprehensive High School in Soweto came together on 3 October to learn about each other’s traditions, culture, and

heritage. The day started off on a literal high note, as students from Bona Comprehensive got off the bus singing and dancing, dressed in colourful traditional costumes.

With the help of Robyn Smookler, the girls baked challah and the boys were given some insights by Rabbi Ash. We were then shown how to make Dombolo, an African traditional bread. Then onto the sports field, where we played volleyball, soccer, and netball in integrated teams. The day carried on with Bona Comprehensive students learning Israeli dances, which they

did with ease. Admittedly, it took a little longer for King Davidians to master their traditional dances, but our efforts were valiant. We spent the rest of the day getting to know each other and discovered that, as diverse as our differences are, there’s far more that unites us.



King David Linksfield and Bona Comprehensive High School students

Letters

GOLDEN ACRES YOM TOV SERVICES A SHINING LIGHT

I’m sure we speak for scores of Golden Acres residents who attended the recent *yom tov* services in expressing our deepest appreciation to Rabbi Jonathan Fox and the management of the Chev for the most inspiring services.

Although Fox wasn’t physically present, his designated officials were outstanding. Thanks to Rabbi Gideon Waks, Rabbi/Cantor Hilly Chrysler, and Spencer Schwartz (your shofar blowing was superb) for leading the services so professionally. Rabbi Fox, the venture served as a perfect substitute for a live *drosha*. Thanks also to our resident *kohen*, Tony Damelin, for

administering the priestly blessings.

A special thanks to Golden Acres residents Selwyn and Helen Meyers for their usual tireless efforts in making this operation a fulfilling success. Also to Denise Rubin and her dedicated staff for arranging seating under trying circumstances, and for all the paperwork involved.

Once again, sincere thanks to all concerned and to our fellow residents. Thanks also to the Chev for the beautiful flowers and delicious chocolates sent to every resident.
– Norman, Brenda, Choni, and Miriam

Running with no-one chasing him

It took me a while to comprehend what he was telling me. Because it made no sense to me that anyone would choose to run 100km in one day when there was no-one chasing them. But given that I had been friends with Selwyn Kahlberg for 37 years and in all that time, I had never heard him joke, I knew he meant what he was saying.

Selwyn had decided to run 100km in one day to raise money for a cause.

The upside was that he didn't ask me to join him.

What made him do this? "All runners want to run further or faster. Faster is getting more challenging so I was stuck with further." It turns out that in about May, Selwyn set his mind on running 100km. He chose the Malka Ella (Fertility Fund) as a cause as it has a long standing relationship with the running fraternity and the work that it does spoke to him.

The Malka Ella Fund was started in 2001. In these 20 years, it has assisted in more than 550 treatments, including IVF, surrogacies, and adoptions. In fact, more than 260 Jewish babies have been born through its endeavours.

At a time when the community has lost so many souls to COVID-19, what better cause is there than one that assists in bringing some back into this world.

I thought that I couldn't be prouder. But then he ran it. And I was.

Sunday, 3 October, was the day of the run. Selwyn set off at 05:30 with a few brave runners that would alternate throughout the day. Selwyn's wife, Robyn, his family, support teams, refreshment stations, drivers, and runners would keep him company, keep him motivated, and keep everyone up to date on his progress.

According to Selwyn, "The hardest part was from kilometre 53 to 58. We were in the back end of Benoni, in the midday heat. I was very sore and basically just

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



shuffling along with a grimace. Cars were speeding past on a narrow road and we even received some abuse. At that stage, it was just about getting to the next kilometre. I had some robust conversations with Hashem at that point. Fortunately, in Malka Ella, I had

a very compelling "why" for my run which helped me to keep going."

There were also many highlights along the way. "I was totally overwhelmed by many unexpected runners and supporters who travelled long distances from home just to support me on the route. The vibe in the last kilometre and coming into the finish was way beyond expectation."

The commitment and the cause captured the hearts of many. Ahuva Raff and her family happened to pass Selwyn as he completed the day. "I was at this crossroad with my family, when

Selwyn and his group of runners were crossing," she said. "I don't know Selwyn, but when I was explaining to my kids about his run and why he was running, I felt so emotional, especially with my four children in the back, one just a few weeks old. How someone can run a mile for precious children! This made me realise what an amazing cause it was!"

Selwyn raised more than R100 000 for Malka Ella.

Initiatives have a strange way of being born. And I have little doubt that Sunday saw the birth of an event that will become an annual one.

And whereas I have little intention of running any part of it, I'm fully prepared to check my tyres once again, fill my tank, and head off to Benoni in search of the guy who is running with no-one chasing him.



Chabad brings Sukkot to our doorstep



Gedaliah and Tzipi Kievman assist senior residents of Willowbrook Retirement Village in Sandton to fulfil the mitzvah of shaking lulav and etrog in celebration of the festival of Sukkot

Chabad ensured that hundreds of Jews who couldn't otherwise celebrate Sukkot were able to do so by building sukkahs at shopping centres, universities, and retirement facilities.

With the COVID-19 pandemic stretching into its nineteenth month, it brought observance of the holiday to Jews of all ages while being mindful of pandemic-related precautions.

In Johannesburg, Chabad built public sukkahs manned by rabbinic interns at shopping centres including BluBird,

Benmore, Norwood, and Grayston, among others, as well as at universities and retirement facilities. The portable "Sukkah mobiles" were also active throughout the intermediate days of *chol hamoed*, allowing many thousands to engage in celebration of the holiday at their convenience.

And, as he has been doing for more than a decade, Rabbi Ari Kievman and his children took to the streets with a sukkah in the back of his Mitzvah Tank minivan, helping to bring the holiday right to people's doorstep with snacks and inspiration.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Board calls for practical implementation of hate-crime legislation



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

JSC drops ball a second time at Concourt interviews

Earlier this year, the way in which two Jewish candidates for Constitutional Court positions were treated during their interviews by the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) generated much justified outrage. As previously recounted in this column, both were subjected to a barrage of irrelevant and inappropriate questions pertaining to their Jewish identity, association with the SAJBD, and views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Other candidates were also subjected to inappropriate treatment. In response, the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution launched a successful challenge to that process in the High Court, resulting in the JSC being directed to re-interview the candidates.

Unfortunately, the second round of interviews, conducted earlier this week, amounted to "Groundhog Day" for the Jewish community. Following their stinging rebuke at the hands of civil society and the courts, one would have expected the JSC to steer clear this time round of offensive questions concerning a candidate's Jewish affiliations, yet once again, a Jewish candidate was so targeted, specifically for his previous association with the SAJBD. The characterisation by one of the commissioners of the SAJBD as a "pro-Zionist body that is bullying their people and organisations who are objecting to the Israeli establishment in the Palestine region" was especially out of line. This was specifically referred to in our media release issued this week, and will be one of the key issues we will address with the JSC.

• 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

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