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“Let my people in” – chief rabbi takes on travel ban

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa's chief rabbi, Dr Warren Goldstein, has taken on the Israeli government over its sudden blanket travel ban in light of the new variant discovered by South African scientists.

He has been interviewed in Hebrew across multiple national radio stations, TV stations, print media, and online media in Israel.

In a plea to Israeli leaders, he said that shutting the door on world Jewry was a

mistake for a number of reasons.

Many South African Jews were turned back in transit between 25 and 26 November, and others are desperately trying to get there because of important family commitments. But the chief rabbi emphasises that “Israel is home to all Jews, especially in times of crisis, and a total closure signals a separation between Israeli and diaspora Jews. The new variant doesn't distinguish between Jews who have Israeli citizenship and other Jews.”

To him, there are two issues at stake. “The first is the relationship between Israel

and the South African Jewish community. Our relationship with Israel is very much part of our value system, and we are a very Zionist community. This is expressed in many different ways, for example, our aliyah numbers, which proportionately are really strong. It's also expressed in the high percentage of our community who have visited Israel, the fact that so many of our youth study in Israel, and especially in how so many of us have family in Israel. The connection goes very deep.”

To be blocked from entering Israel is therefore “a real blow to the South

African Jewish community – spiritually and emotionally”. This latest blanket ban comes after almost two years of very intermittent access to Israel, and the new extreme levels of restriction were a tipping point for him.

“I felt I needed to make my voice heard in Israeli society. This is why I went to the Hebrew media, so that this plea would be heard by society and decision makers. I wanted to send a message on behalf of our whole community.”

He says he has seen the pain of these restrictions reflected in many ways. For example, specific incidents, like a father not being able to attend his son's Barmitzvah, and a general sense of loss and distance.

The other reason he has spoken out is “for the sake of Israel itself, and for all Jews. Is Israel an ordinary state, or a Jewish state?” he asks rhetorically. “This is a direct plea to the Israeli government and goes to the heart of Israel's identity. Israel is the only Jewish state, and we are deeply connected to it. In light of that unbreakable bond, if the state says some Jews can't enter, it's drawing a divide between the state of Israel and communities across the diaspora. That partnership between diaspora Jewry and the state of Israel is crucial, and if you break that bond, it will hurt Israel and world Jewry.”

He isn't asking Israel to jeopardise the health of its citizens. Rather, he's asking that the same criteria be applied to Israeli citizens returning to Israel and Jews needing to visit. Israeli citizens who want to return are allowed to do so if they are fully vaccinated, do a PCR test, and go into quarantine.

“If you combine these three strict requirements, the Israeli authorities have deemed that the risk becomes negligible. If they are good enough for Israeli citizens, any Jew in the world should be allowed to enter on the same basis.”

Goldstein is speaking up now in particular because “vaccines have completely transformed the risk profile. We can see this in the current wave in South Africa.” He has written about it before, but not as extensively as now. “I've learnt that one needs to use multiple platforms and address Israeli society directly.”

He says the message has found “tremendous resonance with journalists. I haven't spoken to one Israeli interviewer who wasn't sympathetic. They have challenged me, and I have clarified that I'm not asking for more than what's granted to Israeli citizens. There has been a lot of support and interest.”

He says the incident in which South African Jews were forced away from Israel on Friday 26 November and made to fly on Shabbat was “an absolute disgrace and totally unacceptable for any state, but for a Jewish state, was unthinkable and beyond the pale. This is especially considering the circumstances of two of these Jews going to comfort the Kay family, whose son gave his life for the state of Israel. At the very least, the Israeli government must apologise for this conduct and promise its citizens and Jews around the world that such a thing will never happen again.”

Finally, he says “vaccination is everything. It's a blessing. Thank G-d for it. Take it with both hands: it is a big mitzvah to protect yourself and others.”



Anyone for a Chanukah miracle?

Rabbi Ari Kievman and Stan Berger light the giant menorah outside Sandton City this week

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NYPD hunts for women who assaulted Jewish kids

The New York Police Department Hate Crimes Unit is investigating three separate attacks against two Jewish children and a teenager in the Clinton Hill neighbourhood in Brooklyn.

Police are asking for the public’s help in identifying the suspects, who they have narrowed down to the same group of three women caught on surveillance footage.

The first attack occurred on Friday, 26 November, at about 18:00, when a three-year-old boy was slapped in the face.

The second two attacks occurred at about 17:30 on Sunday, 28 November, the first night of Chanukah. An 18-year-old girl was pulled to the ground, and a nine-year-old boy

was slapped on the head. All of the victims were wearing traditional Jewish clothing at the time of the attacks. According to the latest NYPD Hate Crimes dashboard, the NYPD has registered 416 hate crimes in New York City this year. Of these reported hate crimes, 144 – more than a third – have been committed against Jews. These numbers are 55% higher than they were during the same period in 2020, when 93 of 206 reported incidents were committed against Jews. The Anti-Defamation League of New York/New Jersey announced a reward of up to \$10 000 (R160 412) for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual or individuals responsible for the attacks.

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AUTO AFRICA



he has discussed for years in his many books and TV appearances: identity politics, France’s influx of Muslim immigrants, and what he sees as the country’s fading national identity.

Zemmour, 63, is the first major Jewish presidential candidate to run in France’s post-war Fifth Republic era. He will run as an independent without a political party and only in the presidential race, not the separate election for seats in parliament.


Recent polls show Zemmour enjoying a 13% approval rating, only trailing right-wing National Rally’s Marine Le Pen’s 19% and the 23% for Emmanuel Macron, the centrist incumbent.

Zemmour has raised controversy in French Jewish circles, which tend to be conservative. The leaders of prominent Jewish groups in France have condemned Zemmour’s rhetoric. French Chief Rabbi Haim Korsia said that Zemmour, the son of Jewish immigrants from Algeria who also has a Jewish wife and children, is an antisemite. But multiple prominent French-Jewish journalists and community leaders have defended Zemmour from some of the criticism, accusing communal leaders of meddling in politics to please a left-leaning political establishment.

Johnson’s menorah gaffe has Lapid in stitches

United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson made Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid laugh on Monday, but probably not in the way he intended.

At a luncheon in London hosted by the Conservative Friends for Israel group, Johnson and Lapid received menorahs as gifts as a token of gratitude in the midst of the



Boris Johnson

Photo: Jeff Gilbert - Pool/Getty Images

Chanukah holiday, which began on Sunday night.

After receiving his, Johnson waved it in the air like a trophy – sending pieces of the candle holder in all directions.

In a video published by the *Jewish News of London*, Johnson looked sheepish as the pieces were reassembled, while Lapid got a good laugh.

This wasn’t Johnson’s first struggle with a Jewish religious object.

At a synagogue ground breaking ceremony in 2011, Johnson, then the mayor of London, attempted to blow a shofar with little success as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, then chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, stood beside him and chuckled.

A video of the moment shows Johnson’s repeated attempts to blow the shofar and bewilderment when an onlooker tells him to try “on the side”, presumably referring to the side of his mouth but confusing Johnson as he looked in vain for another hole to blow into on the side of the shofar.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Torah Thought

Rabbi Rodney Richard – Emmarentia Shul



A shining light

I’m writing this only hours after watching the online kindling of the Menorah at the Kotel on the second night of Chanukah, which was dedicated in memory of Eli Kay z”l (who was killed in a terrorist attack near the Kotel on 21 November), and which has inspired what follows below.

The shamash (the attendant candle) on the chanukiah is not included in the mitzvah candles. Yet, without it there can be no light. It’s the enabler that creates the environment for mitzvah performance. Like the shamash, Eli brought so much light to those around him with grace and humility. King Solomon wrote, “the candle of G-d is the soul of man”. Within each of us is a divine spark, which connects us to Hashem and which, importantly, allows us to ignite and inspire others. By sharing his flame so magnanimously and selflessly, Eli was able to bring the light of others to the fore.

This “shamash effect” did not cease upon Eli’s passing. If anything, it only intensified. Eli’s passing has been the catalyst for the performance of mitzvot worldwide, whether it be a commitment to wearing tefillin, or the lighting of Shabbat and Chanukah candles. People have rededicated themselves to their Judaism in a powerful and tangible way. And surely this is what Chanukah is all about. More than merely commemorating a great miracle and the rededication of the holy Temple (from which the holiday gets its name), Chanukah affords us the opportunity each year to rededicate ourselves to our Judaism and to commit once again to our relationship with Hashem.

Pirsumei nisa (publicising the miracle) is an important element of the mitzvah of lighting the menorah. It’s for this reason that we place the chanukiah in the window or in a public place. We want the light of Chanukah to be visible to all.

Publicity, though, it’s not something we’re all necessarily comfortable with. We may feel an internal connection with Hashem and with our Judaism, but do we openly and proudly display it?

Eli had no such problem. Eli was a proud Jew and a proud Zionist. He was not just a Jew at heart or an idealistic Zionist. He directed his feelings to action.

This year, when the world seems so dark to so many, let’s try to emulate the shamash candle. Let’s emulate Eli. Let’s be the light unto the nations – starting with our own nation. Let’s help those around us to rediscover their light. Let’s stand tall and proud. Let’s ensure that our fresh commitment to mitzvot endures.

May the memory of Eli continue to be a guiding light to us all.

Chanukah Sameach.


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Community urged to be cautious as wave gathers speed

SAUL KAMIONSKY, TALI FEINBERG, AND NICOLA MILTZ

The Omicron variant is hitting the Johannesburg and Cape Town Jewish communities, with numbers rising rapidly but very few hospitalisations. Those hospitalised – at this point – are mainly unvaccinated.

However, many organisations have taken precautions to stem the tide to avoid a repeat – or worse – of what happened before. The *machanot* and Rage festival were this week cancelled, among many other private simchas.

The number of new infections in the community have increased rapidly over the past two weeks, says Darren Kahn, the executive general manager of Hatzolah Medical Rescue. There have been 272 new cases recorded this week, with 387 active cases in the community.

“To date, thankfully, there has only been one hospitalisation and we have two long-term patients on oxygen from the third wave,” he says.

“The current numbers are fast approaching our original planned numbers, and the wave is just beginning. The Hatzolah team is working around the clock to ensure the community is well cared for.”

Though Kahn said responders were fearful of a return to the COVID-19-positive numbers experienced only a few months ago, many experts believe this variant will be far milder than any we have had before if you have been vaccinated.

“We all enjoyed a couple of COVID-19-free months, but it’s unfortunately time to start being more careful again. We urge the community to go back to the basics: get vaccinated, wear a mask, keep a social distance, and sanitise. Let’s do this and get through the next wave together.”

To date, Hatzolah has vaccinated more than 30 000 people at its vaccination site.

In Cape Town, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and Community Security Organisation (CSO) sent out an alert to the community on the morning of Wednesday, 1 December, with the subject line: “COVID-19 warning: fourth wave is on our doorstep!”

“CSO Cape Town has seen active cases on its COVID-19 Wellness Monitoring Programme surge from 0 on Friday, 26 November, to 28 cases on Tuesday,

30 November. While little is known about this new variant, we do know that its reproductive rate is at the same level as it was at the peak of the previous waves.”

After meeting medical advisors, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein says shuls’ safety protocols haven’t changed. “This is rather just a call to reinforce what we have done so well since the beginning of the pandemic,” he said. “The message we need to communicate to our community is that there’s no need to panic and that, working together, our shuls will be safe places for them to attend, even at this time.”

Meanwhile, the Ballito Matric Rage festival was cancelled after one day, when 32 attendees and four staff members tested positive for COVID-19.

But Ronen Klugman, the founder and director of Plett Rage, says that the festival will go ahead from 3 to 7 December, with



Photo: Tanya Midzuk

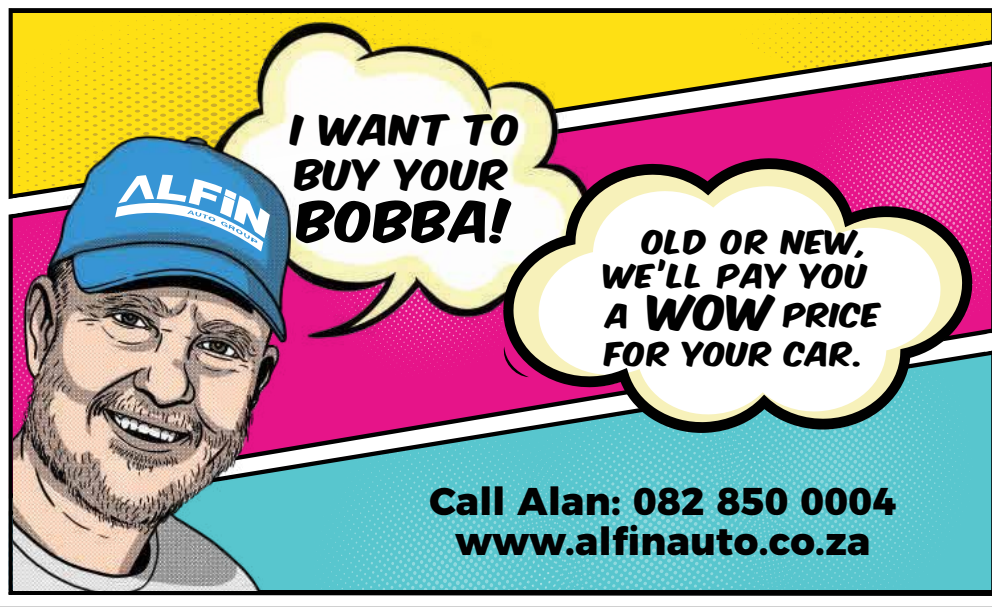
The number of people going to Hatzolah vaccination site in Glenhazel went up this week

about 900 people attending. “We’re not cancelling because we’re the last line of defence against this disaster of the new variant. Kids are already arriving – I can see them on the beach – and if we cancel, it will make the situation much worse. They will scatter, and spread all over this town, and there will be no control,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

But with the festival in place, “The only way they can get into events is if they go through our testing centre. We have the

responsibility to stick to our robust plan. Everyone is vaccinated, so that’s our first buffer. They have to take a PCR test before they leave. They present their vaccine certificate and PCR test on arrival. Then they go for a rapid antigen test. They get an AR band with a chip that only works for one day. Then they get tested again. If anyone tests positive, we implement contact tracing

and take any contacts out of the festival.” Local virology expert Professor Barry Schoub told Sky News, “All the cases [of the new Omicron variant] so far have been mild to moderate cases, and that’s a good sign.” Dr Efraim Kramer, a leading international expert in emergency medicine with a specialty in mass gatherings, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “At the moment, we’re still groping [for information about the new variant] because tests are being done in a laboratory. We’ll find out in the next one to



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two weeks exactly what its transmissibility is and what kind of clinical profile it has.” Dr Carron Zinman, a pulmonologist at Netcare Linksfield Hospital, told the *SA Jewish Report* that there had been differences in the symptoms of people who had presented with the new variant. “They are saying it’s presenting atypically. In general, people are complaining of loss of taste or loss of smell. The GPs are seeing a lot of extreme fatigue with nothing else. In terms of my patients in hospital, one came in with something unrelated, not knowing she had it. So, it’s behaving differently, and the bloods are looking different as well.”

Zinman believes the Omicron variant is the reason for most of the positive tests at the moment, and thinks the new variant is more contagious.

Kramer agrees with President Cyril Ramaphosa, who said on Sunday that South Africans need to learn to live with the virus. “The days of trying to run away from it, trying to evade it, being in lockdown, and those kinds of things are gone,” Kramer says. “It’s here almost to stay, and every time we think it’s gone away, another cousin arrives.”

“I don’t think there’s anything mysterious anymore about COVID-19. The president said we were staying at level 1. His statement was exceptionally positive in what he said, and exceptionally positive in what he didn’t say, if you read between the lines. In the meantime, we’ve kept the country on level 1, so we carry on.”

Kramer encourages people to go to shul. “There hasn’t been a single COVID-19 case in 20 months in people going to shul. Probably 99% of the people coming to shul are vaccinated,” he says.

If people want to go on holiday, they can as long as they take COVID-19 into consideration in everything they do, Kramer says. “The only mandatory aspect of that lifestyle is that people must get vaccinated

Continued on page 12>>

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SA Jewish leadership confront Israeli PM over travellers’ ordeal

TALI FEINBERG

Orthodox spiritual leaders in South Africa have expressed their shock and dismay over the treatment of South African travellers turned away from Ben Gurion Airport last Friday night.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, South African Rabbinical Association Chairperson Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, and the dayanim of the Beth Din of South Africa wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on 30 November expressing their unhappiness.

The group of five travellers from South Africa included two who were going to Israel to comfort the Kay family after the murder of their son and brother, Eli Kay, in a terrorist attack on 21 November.

They were in the air when Israeli authorities decided to ban South African travellers in light of a new COVID-19 variant discovered by South African scientists. On landing in Israel, they were forced onto a flight back to South Africa via Dubai on Shabbat.

“We were shocked and dismayed to hear that a group of Jewish travellers from South Africa, who arrived at Ben Gurion Airport this past Friday, were denied entry into Israel and forcibly returned to their country of origin, and as a result were compelled to desecrate Shabbat,” wrote our religious leaders.

“That this took place in the Jewish state is simply unconscionable,” they wrote. “To further compound the trauma, two of the passengers were making their way to Israel to spend Shabbat with the Kay family, who are mourning the loss of their beloved Eli in last week’s terror attack in Jerusalem. From the reports we received, no attempt was made to accommodate the passengers by allowing them to remain in quarantine over Shabbat.

“To force fellow Jews to desecrate Shabbat is a violation of the Jewish identity and Jewish values of the state,” they wrote. “The manner in which the religious rights of these individuals have been infringed isn’t something one would expect of any country, and certainly not the Jewish state. On behalf of South Africa’s rabbis and the communities we represent, we wish to record our strongest objection to the forced desecration of Shabbat.”

One of these travellers, Ilana Smith, says the incident led to more stress and trauma for the Kay family, who tried to help the travellers in spite of being in mourning. “I was going to Israel only to be there for the Kay family. I was staying nearby, and was going nowhere else. And now the Kay family had this extra stress on their hands – the last thing they needed! Kasriel Kay was phoning the rabbi in Dubai, trying to help us. My family back home went into Shabbos not knowing if I would be stuck in Dubai. There are post-traumatic repercussions from this ordeal.”

Melissa Genende was travelling to Israel from South Africa to see her grandchildren on the same flight as Smith. “We had no knowledge of the flight ban, and weren’t stopped until we arrived in Israel on Friday afternoon. Our passports were taken from us. We were marched underground and came up at the departure gate for the flight going back to Dubai.

“We were threatened that if we didn’t board the plane, the police would be called,” she said. “This in fact did happen while we explained that we didn’t want to fly on Shabbat. At this point, we had no choice but to get on the plane. I’m not fully *shomer* Shabbos, but I would never travel on a plane on Shabbat. I have travelled many times in my life, and always make a plan that I don’t travel on Shabbat, often with a lot of extra cost.”

She’s angry that all the other people on the plane entered Israel with no problem. “We came from South Africa on the same plane, so why were we not giving any other option? We could have gone into *bidud* [quarantine] for a few days. We had all been tested, and I had already prepaid for PCR tests at the airport. I understand the panic. What I don’t understand is how they make a decision for five people and let everyone else in the country.”

The group had no opportunity to get food or water while waiting in the airport. “Kosher food was also

unavailable to us for the entire two flights. When we landed in Dubai, it was already Shabbos. We had nowhere to wait all night until our flight at 05:00. We managed to find a lounge that would allow us to pay \$32 [R513] for four hours. There was no kosher food there.



Melissa Genende (red jersey) and Ilana Smith (black jacket) with the other South Africans turned away and forced to fly on Shabbat

We arrived back in South Africa at 12:00 on Saturday. Our luggage didn’t arrive, and we still have no idea where it is

or when will get it back.”

Genende has since been ill from dehydration and travel sickness. “I’m taking this as far as can. I’m hoping that the Israeli government will do something about the staff at the airport. At the very least, I want a new ticket to Israel. I will fight until I get answers and compensation.” Emirates, she says, won’t reimburse her as she has “used” the return flight.

Even though she was able to get home, she says she would have preferred to be stuck in Israel than to have experienced this. She says she and the other South Africans have since been asked to go to the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria to meet the ambassador. She’s waiting “with bated breath” to hear what’s said. She’s had no other communication from anyone in Israel.

Former MK and *olim* advocate, Dov Lipman, has worked tirelessly with his organisation, Yad L’Olim, to assist *olim* and their families to deal with travel restrictions throughout the pandemic.

Citizens take government to court over Miss SA bullying

NICOLA MILTZ

Citizens for Integrity (CFI) has accused the government and the minister of sports, arts, and culture of acting unconstitutionally and irrationally in its “bullying” of Miss SA.

The non-governmental organisation has filed papers in the North Gauteng High Court taking the government and Minister Nathi Mthethwa to task for withdrawing its support for the local beauty queen in November, and for calling for her to withdraw from the 70th Miss Universe pageant to be held in Israel in less than two weeks.

In a press statement issued this week, CFI said that as an organisation “aimed at protecting the rights of citizens and the public against abuse, unconstitutional action, and irrational government decisions which affect citizens’ rights”, it took issue with the government and the minister.

It has demanded an apology and an immediate retraction of the statement withdrawing its support for the Miss SA organisation and Miss SA, Lalela Mswane.

Mswane, a University of Pretoria LLB graduate who was born in KwaSokhulu in Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal, has consistently stood her ground through a steady stream of harassment and vilification by Israel-haters and politicians hell bent on scuppering her once-in-a-life time opportunity to participate on the international stage.

In spite of this, she left for Israel at the weekend in preparation for the pageant, with the full backing and support of the Miss SA organisation and countless fans who have steadfastly continued to support her in her decision to participate.

Following weeks of intimidation by anti-Israel lobbyists, Mswane, dressed in a bright yellow, summery jumpsuit left the country telling her fans, “We will Rise”, and expressing how grateful she was for the opportunity to represent her country.

The Miss SA organisation posted, “We stand united with you @lalela_mswane. You have already made us so proud, and we know you will continue to do so. We love and adore you.”

Willie Hofmeyr, the retired head of the asset forfeiture unit at the National Prosecuting Authority, and also one of the founders and directors of CFI, said this week that it was an “important issue to address.”

“We need to ensure that all citizens in the country are treated equally well and fairly. It appears as if Miss SA has not been treated fairly,” he said.

Sibongile Cele, the deputy chairperson of the African National Congress (ANC) Women’s League Johannesburg, also insisted that Miss SA’s rights had been infringed upon. “As a committed Christian, I felt it was important to look at her rights as a woman and her rights as Miss SA,” said Cele, who is also a spokesperson for the CFI.

“Her rights shouldn’t be infringed because of politics. The Miss Universe pageant shouldn’t be politicised, and as a citizen of this country, she has the right to compete in the pageant. She shouldn’t be held back, she won the title of Miss SA, and she is our ambassador,” Cele said. She isn’t afraid of a backlash from the ANC saying, “I am a Christian before I am a member of the ANC, we report to G-d first.”

The CFI said in papers before the court that the government’s decision also “didn’t constitute a legitimate purpose of government” as it didn’t “fall within the legitimate



Miss SA Lalela Mswane as she leaves South Africa on her way to Israel

powers and objectives conferred upon the government by the Constitution”.

“The government has not only failed, but has deliberately transgressed its obligation to respect and protect the human rights guaranteed to all in the Bill of Rights,” it said.

Although Mswane is already in Israel, the CFI launched an urgent application in the Gauteng North High Court to be heard on Tuesday, 7 December to have the government’s statement declared unconstitutional, said Cele.

She said the organisation’s attorneys had written to President Cyril Ramaphosa demanding an apology to South Africans “for exceeding the bounds of the government’s authority, and interfering in the rights of citizens”.

“The South African government’s decision to support a boycott of a country with which it has diplomatic relations and withdraw its support for a citizen – who will participate in a non-political cultural event in that country – is also irrational, especially in light of the fact that countries that don’t have diplomatic relations with Israel are allowing their citizens to participate and are furnishing them with due support,” said the CFI.

“That agents of the South African government approached Miss South Africa and attempted to coerce her to withdraw from her legitimate participation in the Miss Universe pageant is unconscionable and disgraceful by all normal standards of governance,” it said.

The decision constituted “a standard of bullying by government” and also induced “a sense of unease” that the government may arbitrarily and unconstitutionally pick on any citizen “regarded with disfavour”.

Meanwhile a smiling and ecstatic Mswane has posted pictures of herself on Instagram in Israel dressed in locally designed outfits.

After a long silence, the 24-year-old took to social media before she left, saying attending Miss Universe was “not only an honour but also a huge responsibility”.

“I am determined to serve our country proudly in the best way I can. I stand today as an empowered woman because of so many before me who fought for our voices to be heard. I feel my duty is to do the same for the women of the past, the women of today, and the women to come.

“There is no greater time to shed light on issues affecting women, to choose courage over comfort, and to be steadfast in my beliefs regarding the advancement of women and our rights.”

Mswane said she viewed her participation in the pageant as a “unique opportunity” hopefully to contribute to the process of dialogue and peace.

“I am deeply thankful to all the amazing people who have supported and uplifted me, and brought me joy and comfort during the lead-up to this moment. I wish to compete with the support of South Africans and do my country proud,” she said.

In spite of the anti-Israel lobby’s attempts to harass contestants into pulling out of the pageant, not one country is boycotting. Several have pulled out due to COVID-19, but none have withdrawn for political reasons. The Israel-haters spread fake news that countries such as Greece and Barbados had withdrawn because they were boycotting Israel, however this was proven false.

Mental illness – ‘a pandemic of its own’

NICOLA MILTZ

“My brother was like a boxer, he took many knocks and would always get up. In the end, there were just too many, and he gave up the fight.”

These are the words of a grieving sister whose brother, an observant young man in the community, took his life two weeks ago.

Her name is being withheld to protect his identity.

dramatically in the country in the shadow of the pandemic.

“I know of four people within the community who have taken their lives in the past four weeks,” said Rabbi Eitan Ash. “This is a pandemic of its own, and I’m petrified that this is just the start.”

“I’m not a doctor or a virologist, but I spend a lot of time speaking to people in the community, and people of all ages are struggling emotionally and psychologically,” he said.

feel more desperate, leading them down a dark spiral of hopelessness and causing them to make terrible decisions,” he said.

Ash said people needed to see this side of COVID-19 – that depression is a disease, an illness that needs to be treated just like any other and above all, destigmatised.

“People are caught up in the medical side of COVID-19, but we need to pay attention to the psychological and emotional side as well. The psychological damage caused by quarantine, lockdown, and isolation is huge.

“Single people in the 25 to 40 age group believe there is something wrong with them when actually they just haven’t had a chance to *jo!* and meet people,” he said.

It’s vital that the community embrace those suffering from depression, and give them a sense of belonging.

“We need to create a community brand that says no matter who you are, you are totally accepted, and we will help you no matter what your challenges are,” Ash said.

90% from the 695 cases reported during the 2019/20 financial year. A large portion of these include young people between the ages of 30 and 39.

According to Faith Mazibuko, the MEC for community safety, contributing factors include depression, anxiety, loss of income during the pandemic, financial difficulty, death of family members, and domestic violence.

Though the suicide numbers aren’t clear in the Jewish community, there has been a definite rise in those affected by anxiety and depression, say community-based social workers and experts in the field.

“The Chevrah Kadisha has 26 dedicated social workers dealing with hundreds of mental-health cases every month,” said Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chev this week.

“We are keenly aware of this mental-health crisis in the community. It’s staggering. Though suicide numbers haven’t risen dramatically during the pandemic, depression and anxiety has.”

Dr Sheri Hanson, mental-health co-ordinator at Hatzolah, said this time of year is always difficult for those going through hard times.

“It’s always tricky and coupled with COVID-19 and the uncertainty of the fourth wave, it can seem relentless,” she said.

“We’re dealing with people across the board. Every age is deeply affected by anxiety and depression which is a phenomenon that has come off COVID-19. The elderly are facing challenges of isolation and loneliness, middle-aged

people have lost jobs and income, and the youth has lost out socially.

“There’s a fine line between acknowledging your feelings and not being consumed and overwhelmed by them,” she said, pointing out that it’s important to engender a sense of hope, not judging, and to make sure that people know there’s lots of help within the community.

“We need people to know that all they have to do is reach out and help is available,” she said.

In September, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group reported that there were 23 known cases of suicide in South Africa every day, and for every person that committed suicide, 10 had attempted it. Before COVID-19, the organisation fielded 600 calls a day. As of September 2021, that number had risen to 2 200 calls a day – an increase of nearly 40%. Ongoing isolation, uncertainty, economic strain, bereavement, and loss have resulted in heightened anxiety across most ages including school-going children.

Ash said COVID-19 created a total disconnect. “People live their lives in a bubble. There has been little socialising and hardly any functions. The lonely feel lonelier, and people who would ordinarily reach out don’t even know when there’s a problem.”

For this reason, he and several rabbis in the community are encouraging people to reach out.

“Call a friend, reach out to your wider circle, make that call. That WhatsApp can literally save someone’s life.”



“He took one punch too many, and the ongoing challenges got the better of him. Now, our family is left behind to grieve and mourn this tragic loss,” she said.

The untimely passing of this father of two has shone the spotlight on suicide and mental health in the community at a time when the suicide rate has risen

He said the community needed to address mental health as a matter of urgency “from the leadership all the way down” and make sure people knew that there was plenty of help at hand and nothing to be ashamed of.

“People aren’t seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, which is making them

“My beloved son was driven to the point where he felt he had no way out. Something in him snapped. He had so much to give, and this is what makes it so tragic,” said the bereaved mother.

Reports this week indicate that Gauteng recorded 1 325 cases of death by suicide since April 2020, an increase of about

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Panic never got us anywhere

Isn't it amazing how we can plan things to perfection and then, in one fell swoop, it all falls apart. And we had nothing whatsoever to do with it, and no recourse.

This is what happened over the past week. We all had our holidays planned to a tee. We had end-of-year parties organised. Magnificent weddings and Barmitzvahs were on the cards. We had youth movement camps confirmed – trommels packed and ready. And even Rage, something many of us were worried about, was going ahead. So many things to look forward to.

And then, Omicron reared its ugly head, and our scientists told the world about it. So, the world turned on South Africa, and the rest is history. Though the latter is true, we cannot dispute the ever-worrying fact of COVID-19 numbers increasing very quickly.

Never before has the saying, “Man makes plans and G-d laughs” been so evidently true. However, I don't believe He is laughing when observant Jews are forced by Israel to fly home on Shabbos because the regulations changed while they were on their way there. Some of these people were doing a *mitzvah* in going to Israel to support the family of South African Eli Kay, who was murdered in a terrorist attack the week before.

I also don't believe that anyone is laughing when we are cut off from Israel – or the world. I love Israel but as I have said so many times, it's not perfect. But for the Jewish State to force Jewish people – observant or not – to fly on Shabbos in unacceptable. If there is one country that should know the implications of that for those people, it's Israel.

I have to say, I'm proud of our rabbinic leadership for standing up to Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and vocalising their anger. I'm also pleased to see our chief rabbi calling the Israeli government to task for preventing Jews from going to Israel at any point.

This group wasn't the only one whose international travel plans were shredded. In fact, the numbers of people who have been left in the lurch are only starting to surface. People were going for the birth of grandchildren, going to get married, going or coming for once-in-a-lifetime events, and making a long-awaited visit to their elderly parents, possibly for the last time.

All these plans have been scuppered. I guess if we knew that there was a fact-based reason – that we would contaminate or kill people with the virus – perhaps I can understand. But, for the most part, it was a knee-jerk reaction against South Africa and this continent.

However, though our anger and frustration can be taken out on governments around the world, the truth is that it might be misplaced. You see, at the end of the day, this is about this dreaded coronavirus that keeps mutating and coming back to hit us again and again.

The panic that was spread by overseas governments in shutting us off was, exactly that, panic. There was at the time no data-based information behind it except that it was a new, unusual variant.

At this point in time, we know that the numbers in Gauteng and the Western Cape are going up rapidly, but it hasn't yet been seen in hospitals. Perhaps that will follow, or perhaps not. We don't know.

What I'm hoping to hear is that our vaccines will keep us healthy – or limit the impact of the virus on us. And I believe that to be the case. So far, the people I know who have contracted COVID-19 recently and were vaccinated have suffered what appears to be much like flu.

I believe that if that's the case, we can learn to live with this virus, as President Cyril Ramaphosa said. But I'm not a scientist, nor can I see into the future.

What I do know is that panic never got us anywhere except into trouble. It's so much wiser to take the precautions we need to safeguard ourselves within reason.

Should you be cancelling your holiday? Well, are you going to be surrounded by unmasked and potentially COVID-19-positive people all day? If so, perhaps your holiday plans aren't so smart. But if you're going to hang out in your small bubble of people, spending most of your time outdoors, sanitising, washing hands regularly, wearing masks, and all the other protocols, I don't believe that you should cancel. I believe we cannot cancel our lives.

Our economy needs you to go on holiday and, after this year, so do we all. We have to live with caution, but we still have to live. The best way to do this is to follow the protocols and vaccinate. Vaccination – as I have said so many times – has to be the key to finding a balanced way of living with protocols, but still living.

We dare not ignore the numbers rising, and we have to take every precaution within reason. Perhaps I'll regret saying this, but there are two types of health involved in this pandemic. They are physical and mental health. Our mental health also needs to be nurtured, as is clear in the story on page 5.

And to be cut off from other people again could have devastating effects. Let's use our G-d-given *sechel* and not deny the existence of this virus. Let's not blame others, let's follow protocols, and within those parameters, go ahead with plans for our holidays.

Chag sameach for the rest of Chanukah! Here's hoping for another Chanukah miracle!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Omicron: hoping for a storm in a teacup

OPINION

DR DANIEL ISRAEL



An avalanche of panic calls, contact questions, and quarantine-bound disappointed families was certainly not what I expected in the last week of November. I have, once again, awoken this morning to a stream of positive COVID-19 test results.

Every day this week has been similar. This after a month of not a single COVID-19-positive result detected through my practice.

COVID-19 has been described as a pandemic of disease, economic challenge, and patient anxiety, and it's always that anxiety that we, family medical practitioners, have grappled with at the start of a new wave.

This community anxiety is applaudable because it reflects the deep respect that this virus has gained. The trauma our community has experienced over the past 22 months has scarred us. It's this deep respect that, in fact, propels our community to contain COVID-19 outbreaks and directly act to save lives now.

However, anxiety needs to be transformed into evidence-driven knowledge to be productive. Knowledge empowers patients to make informed choices about socialising, travelling, and even the symptoms to look out for in their bid to keep safe and still live “normally” during a COVID-19 surge.

Imparting this knowledge is the most time-consuming occupation for my GP colleagues and myself at the moment. We have, once again, invested deeply in responding to every question, sharing sound information, and finding innovative ways to educate our community appropriately.

The mental fatigue from the formidable task of caring virtually for dozens of COVID-19-positive patients is balanced by the sense of worth in making a dent in this pandemic.

I recognise that as much as long workdays and being a distracted father may not be the best input I could give my family now, these efforts may truly assist a large number of other families to get through this unexpected twist at the end of this challenging year. Each of the GPs in our community has expressed similar sentiments.

The COVID-19 sky isn't so dark this time round.



We're familiar with managing COVID-19 at home. I think back to June 2020 with its grocery sterilisations, runs on hydroxychloroquine, debates about whether masks actually matter, and even COVID-19-toe queries, and realise how far we've come.

We now know what evidence-based vitamin regimens to give patients early on in the disease. We know how to track their vital metrics at home. We know what signs of deterioration to look out for, and we have a good idea how to prevent the spread of infection.

The Omicron finding has been trying. We are now dealing with an “extra-novel” coronavirus. Virologists have warned that with more than 50 new mutations, more than 30 of which are on the

spike protein by which the virus enters the human cell, we can predict serious disease and a resultant escalation in hospitalisations and death.

The thought of once again conducting midnight rushes of hypoxic patients to hospital, running daily blood tests on serious patients at home, and counselling patients after regrettable losses is overwhelming.

However, our experience this week on the ground has been the saving grace so far. Our community is largely vaccinated, unlike the majority of South Africans who unfortunately aren't.

Amidst all the speculation as to whether vaccines work against the Omicron strain, we are seeing vaccinated patients easily contracting COVID-19, even if they have had a previous infection in the past three months.

Thankfully, though, they aren't becoming particularly ill.

Although routine COVID-19-positive swabs aren't undergoing genomic sequencing to establish whether or not they are the Omicron strain, the massive uptick in cases with a concomitant community finding of a new variant suggests they are.

The juxtaposition of these facts implies that either Omicron is, in fact, mild, or that vaccines are, indeed, protective. It's too early to predict that this surge of Omicron will be mild, but if you are a clinical optimist, the prospects are looking good.

I have experienced a flood of questions this week requiring a recap of the basic facts.

- Exposure to a COVID-19-positive individual still requires a 10-day quarantine. A negative test at five days doesn't shorten that time;
- Exposure is defined as contact within two metres. Masks are protective, but in closed environments, masks don't obviate the need to quarantine unless the exposure is both outdoors and distanced;
- There are no new novel treatments for early COVID-19 infection. Vitamins remain the mainstay of early treatment, and steroids are largely contraindicated in the first week. (Regeneron, molnupiravir, and ritonavir are all new effective treatments for early COVID-19, but

aren't yet available in South Africa.);

- Isolation for infected patients remains 10 days;
- Secondary contacts don't need to quarantine; and
- Vaccinated individuals who are exposed to positive patients need to quarantine as well.

I believe the next two weeks will be the most telling time for our community in this pandemic thus far. We have all worked tirelessly to get ourselves vaccinated, and we are desperate

to continue our former lifestyles, even alongside COVID-19.

I'm filled with optimism, and hope that for those of us who have been vaccinated, the worst of this new strain of COVID-19 will be a disruption of our holiday and perhaps the experience of a contagious flu upon some of us.

However, until we know more, and while so many of the South African population is unvaccinated, it's vital that we pull up our masks, socialise safely, and test appropriately over this peak.

I look forward to the next relaxation of these measures, a population greater vaccinated, and a less daunting situation next year.

• *Dr Daniel Israel is a family practitioner in Johannesburg.*

Heartbreak and loss as the world slams doors on SA

TALI FEINBERG

Sarah Cohen* was woken by banging on the door at 04:30 on the morning of Friday 26 November. She was visiting from the United Kingdom (UK) with her one-year-old son and looking forward to enjoying all that her former home city of Cape Town had to offer. But there was a taxi driver at the front door sent by her father in London. He was to take her to the airport so that she could get on a plane that her husband, also back in London, has just booked. In light of the new COVID-19 variant, South Africa was going to be put back on the UK's red list, and she had to go – immediately.

the COVID-19 numbers started to rise. By Thursday we realised a fourth wave was imminent. We woke up on Friday to news of the UK travel ban.”

Amid frantic phone calls from family cancelling, they tried to bring the wedding forward so that they could celebrate with those who could still make it. The only date available was 6 December. It wasn't possible, and so their summer wedding dream was over.

They then heard that the United States (US) was banning travel from South Africa from Monday 29 November. From enjoying the lead-up to her long-awaited wedding, “Dani had to get on a flight and leave. She

“I truly thought that they can't stop somebody in mid-flight,” continued Snitcher. “I was in shock. They didn't even give a few hours' notice to allow people to get to a destination. I had no one to talk to. I called the airport, no one could help me. I called the health ministry, they couldn't help me. The only person who has been truly helping *olim* is Dov Lipman and his organisation Yad L'Olim. He did everything he could to get my mom to Israel. But after many hours we understood that it wasn't going to happen.”

Amid the chaos, they had to get her back to Cape Town. “It was extremely difficult, but she managed to get a ticket home. I think she was in the airport for 24 hours. We were so

defeated and heartbroken. When she stepped onto the plane they said, “This is the last flight out of Turkey.”

Snitcher says that Israel's response to the new variant has hurt the very people who care about the country the most. “I made aliyah, I'm a Zionist, and I feel extremely embarrassed at how Israel treated South Africans. I don't know when I'm going to see my mom again. I could cry from that feeling of desperation.”

Carla Stein and her husband Jared have had a tough year, losing two family members in a short space of time. They were counting down the days to a trip to Mauritius. But their dream turned into a nightmare of hours waiting in airports and on planes with small children, until finally they were allowed to fly. They landed on the island and were excited to be on holiday. That is, until they were told they weren't allowed to leave the airport. This was even after they and their children had had multiple PCR tests, and the fact that they are fully vaccinated.

They watched in horror as passengers from other countries were allowed to head to their resorts, but as South Africans, they were forced to stay put. “There were about 15 or 20 police officers in uniform blocking the [exit]. It was traumatic. They had announced only 10 minutes before that all people flying in from South Africa were required to do 14 days' quarantine,” said Stein. Negative PCR tests and vaccines didn't matter.

After more hours in a hot airport, they were told they would have to quarantine. “We didn't want to get shipped off to an unknown destination. The flight before us didn't have to quarantine, but that's what we were told to do.”

They were eventually taken to a hotel about 45 minutes away. Although their booked accommodation could ensure their isolation, they were transported to another hotel inland. “The next day my husband was told by someone, also in quarantine, that we were moving hotels. We weren't even informed.”

They were moved again, but still not to their booked accommodation. The hotel room they are now in has a tiny veranda – a small saving grace. “We were eventually told that we will be here for seven days, and can be released after negative PCR tests,” said Stein. “But if someone is positive from the flight we will have to quarantine for 14 days.” They plan to continue with the holiday when they are let out. “It's very hard being stuck in a room with a 19-month-old and an almost seven-year-old. But we have made it this far, and will try make the most of this experience.”

*Not her real name.



Carla Stein and her daughter (left) with other South Africans at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport in Mauritius

“It was intensely stressful and terrifying. It happened so fast. When I went to sleep on Thursday things were normal. Then I was suddenly woken up by a cab driver pounding on the door. I checked my phone to find about a thousand missed calls and WhatsApps. My husband had booked us a flight home via Munich. We just chucked everything in bags and legged it to the airport, worried we'd miss [the flight]. It was the last international flight out of Cape Town!”

She is one of thousands who have been directly or indirectly affected by the new Omicron variant discovered by South African scientists. The heartache and loss resulting from the international knee-jerk reaction is unquantifiable. Family reunions forfeited, simchas cancelled, stranded travellers forced into quarantine, and businesses bearing the brunt of the travel bans are parts of its ripple effects around the globe. Many South African Jews and their families have been affected.

Cohen counts herself among the lucky ones. “My flight was literally the only one and it left two hours before they [the UK] officially put South Africa on the red list. That's why I can isolate at home rather than being stuck in a hotel room with my toddler.”

Carole Levin and her family were looking forward to celebrating her son David's wedding on 16 December. But that dream was shattered in the space of 24 hours.

“David and his fiancée Daniella (Dani) Hayman have been living in the Caribbean for the last 18 months, as he got a job there. They left Cape Town in July 2020. We all thought by December 2021 we would be able to safely have a wedding.

“In the meantime, Dani's grandmother had a fall, and she came to see her at the beginning of October. Her plan was to stay until the wedding. David was booked to arrive on 6 December. On Monday last week



Daniella Hayman and David Levin

was distraught, devastated,” said Levin. Amid tears, they helped her pack late into the night. The next morning she was gone, on a flight to Washington via Addis Ababa and Dublin.

It was touch and go, and she sent a heartbreaking message from the airport in Ethiopia saying she had made it onto the flight to the US. “It was a very emotional moment,” said Levin. She recalls so many times in Jewish history where crossing oceans meant getting to safety, and how holding off simchas in times of trauma is a part of our story. She remains hopeful that the wedding will take place in 2022.

Tessa Snitcher, who made aliyah in 2007, said, “My mom was coming to Israel to see her grandchildren, whom she hasn't seen for two years. She booked on Turkish Airlines. She flew on 25 November at 17:00. By 20:30 there was a cabinet meeting in Israel. By midnight they had decided to close the border to South Africans. When I woke up 05:00, my mom called me hysterically, saying she wasn't allowed to get on the plane to Israel from Turkey.

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After all the bad news, the economic outlook is still positive

OPINION DAVID SHAPIRO



The legendary New York Yankees’ catcher, Yogi Berra, renowned for his paradoxical axioms, was attributed as saying, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.” Just as infections and hospitalisations were falling and we were beginning to delight in the pleasures of our former lives, along comes news of a new COVID-19 variant that has put an abrupt halt to our holiday plans.

At this point very little is known about Omicron – the name given to this new mutation. Apparently, it’s fast spreading, but other than that, we don’t know whether it’s dangerous and if our vaccines are sufficiently effective to fight it off. And as we have witnessed in the past, no one is hanging around to wait for the answers. While countries have slammed shut the doors to travellers from South Africa, in financial markets some investors, fearing a resumption of harsh social and economic measures to contain the spread of this new variant, have abandoned equity and commodity markets, seeking safety in the US dollar and US government bonds.



The past two years have been difficult for us in many respects, from worrying about our physical and mental health to being concerned about our relationships, our jobs, our businesses, and our families. From the outset, medical experts warned that it would take years of effort before the virus was tamed and relegated to nothing more than a commonplace flu. The good news, though, is that while things still seem bad, they’re getting a little less bad each day.

The pandemic caught the world off guard. Healthcare systems were inadequately equipped and organised to handle the load of wide-scale hospitalisations, COVID-19 testing, and vaccine rollouts. It could have proved to be a moment for global cooperation but, instead, each country acted on its own, protecting its borders and looking to develop its own remedies. Developed countries did little to safeguard less developed countries or share vaccines with them. Yet again, the latest outbreak demonstrates that until the whole world is vaccinated, no one is safe.

In response to these failings, vast amounts of money are being invested in global healthcare. Several new vaccines and drugs to treat chronic diseases will be released next year. Innovative genetic therapies – aimed at curing diseases by modifying or removing human genetic information – are finding their way to market, together with pioneering robotic surgical devices and groundbreaking diagnostic tools.

While domestic politics uncaringly controlled how countries chose to fight the pandemic, encouragingly, central bankers and governments took appropriate action to address the negative impact of an economic shutdown, pumping liquidity into the market, slashing interest rates and providing financial support to businesses and individuals. Also, recognising that the recent crisis was a health crisis and not a financial one, the world economy is favourably positioned to work its way back to prosperity. Corporate earnings are above their pre-pandemic levels and individuals, flush with savings hoarded during lockdown, are eager to splurge.

The pandemic has changed our behavioural

patterns, and even when we return to normality, the way we go about our lives, jobs, and relationships will never be the same. The pandemic brought forward the future. It accelerated our use of technology, from video conferencing to online shopping. It fast-tracked our adoption of technology to levels that had not been expected for years. In a matter of a few weeks, we were propelled five years forward. Yet more than anything, the pandemic burned our consciousness about the world in which we live, stirring us to build a new order rather than trying to return to or repair yesterday’s ways.

You can sense this in political calls for wealth redistribution and environmental action, and in society’s push to embrace gender and race equality at home, in schools, and in the workplace. Governments, eager to achieve net-zero carbon transition, are fast introducing legislation to penalise consumers and businesses that breach accepted pollution and emission standards. The path to clean air has become one of the most significant investment trends at present, opening appealing opportunities in renewable energy and carbon reduction solutions.

The drive to fight climate change has engulfed the motor industry that’s now riding a wave of exciting electric car strategies. Mainstream manufacturers cannot abandon petrol and diesel production altogether, but almost all are targeting all-electric output by 2030.

Electrification is not only the dominion of the motor firms but a big theme for the producers of semi-conductors and batteries too. It’s estimated that between \$2 500 (R40 354) and \$3 000 (R48 425) worth of computer chips will be embedded in each new-generation motor vehicle, while the challenge facing the battery industry is to reduce the size and weight of batteries and, at the same time, double its output and power. The need to secure metals essential for the manufacturing of batteries is a further demand. Apparently, a passenger vehicle battery requires 20kg of nickel, 20kg of cobalt, and 60kg of lithium compounds.

Besides possibilities arising out of the need to control our environment, the transition to automate business processes, boost efficiencies, and improve the quality of strategic decision-making will continue to spur investment spend. Disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, the use of big data, cyber security, and the rollout of 5G will remain dominant themes for at least the next decade. The downside to these enabling technologies is that with the number of connected devices growing rapidly, the hazard of online attacks has increased significantly.

Despite the odd setback, conditions in the world economy are improving. The success of the vaccine rollout backed by huge stimulus has enabled economies to open up. People are returning to work, socialising, spending, and getting their lives back. The erratic nature of the recovery has caused imbalances that will need to work their way through the system. These imbalances have manifested themselves in higher prices, especially in energy and labour, and until these are ironed out, interest rates will remain lower for longer. The economy that emerges from the pandemic will not be like the one we left behind, but that opens the way for attractive investment opportunities. The outlook for 2022 and beyond is encouraging.

• *David Shapiro is a veteran stockbroker, market commentator, and deputy chairman at Sasfin Securities.*

The Stockdale Paradox has lessons for locked-out South Africans

OPINION KIM KUR



** Trigger warning: This opinion piece references domestic abuse.*

What do you call it when you’re dependent on someone and feel you can’t escape them? What is it when you’re being controlled and beaten down daily and locked up, having done nothing wrong? When your only crime was to simply be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and yet you feel like you’re being punished in inconceivable ways.

Ongoing isolation from those you love and being made to feel like nobody wants you has become a part of daily life. Locked away, you obsess over ways to escape. When you do, you find another gate is there to keep you ‘secured’. You try everything. Resources are all but consumed by your battle for escape. Your family are begging for you to get to them, but you’re cut off with what feels like no hope.

Every day you look through the bars at others who somehow made their escape and yearn for your day to come. Gradually more and more break free.

Your anger diminishes as you focus on the freedom that lies ahead as your day seems to be approaching. Excitement builds.

You try to suppress that nagging warning at the back of your head reminding you that this isn’t the first time you’ve felt this close and that you need to step cautiously. And just as you’re ready to step out, the door slams loudly in your face. You run to another door, but it was double locked before you got there. Even the back door clangs shut as you speed towards it. You’re desperate.

You beg and plead, but no one seems to hear you. As the lights grow dim, you sit in the corner depleted – deathly afraid to try again. What’s the point?

This is what it feels like for many stranded in South Africa at the moment. This is what they have been and are again being subjected to.

When I was made aware on Wednesday morning of a new variant of the COVID-19 virus sequenced by South African scientists, I immediately called a few volunteers to warn them of the possibility that South Africa was about to feel the backlash. But never in my wildest imagination did I expect it to be within a matter of hours and with such intense escalation.

Since the first news of a country closing its doors to South Africa came that evening, my phone has not been quiet. The speed at which countries jumped on the banning bandwagon is unprecedented, even since the pandemic began. All sense of logic seemed to vanish instantaneously and what was put into action is what I refer to as the ‘vicious 3-Ps cycle’.

I have to believe that South Africa’s scientists had good intentions. Perhaps they didn’t realise the power of sharing their discovery. But when the 3Ps take over, there’s no stopping them.

The PRESS
The PANIC
The POLITICIANS

Each dangerously feeds the next. The press uses this news to grow their readership, exercising their global online reach to create, eagerly selling more advertising space.

The now anxious global citizens implore their

governments to keep them safe from the ‘scary variant’ they actually know little about.

Enter the politicians, many previously feeling the backlash from their voters blaming them for not having dealt rapidly enough with the Delta variant. They spring into banning action. There’s no time to reason and little to no logical consideration.

The press grabs hold of the fast-acting bans and race to cover them, creating more fear. The more experts try to engage with world leaders and reason with them over the fact that this isn’t exclusive to our country and is already found around the world, the more political heels are dug in for fear of losing face and votes.

Panic builds within South Africa. The press eat it up.


Everyone needs to step back, calm down, and take a strategic pause. There is a solution to navigate all this.

The best approach for most is to heed the ‘Stockdale Paradox’, so termed by Jim Collins, which highlights the incredible benefit of maintaining unwavering faith that, in the end, you will prevail in spite of the current struggles, but simultaneously remain cognisant of the harshest reality.

When Admiral James Stockdale was asked how he survived the torture of the ‘Hanoi Hilton’ war camps during the Vietnam War, not knowing when it would end, he answered, “I never lost faith in the end of the story ... I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I wouldn’t trade.”

He noted that the men who didn’t make it were ‘the optimists’. They were the ones optimistically setting deadlines for when they felt it would end. Deadlines that continued to be made and missed. “And they died of a broken heart.” Stockdale’s approach was, “We’re not getting out by Christmas. Deal with it.”

Unfortunately for many, deadlines are an obvious requirement when it comes to booking tickets and planning our travel abroad. But if we learn from Stockdale and his paradox, we would plan our journeys in pencil for now, keeping our eye on the inked, highlighted, and underlined goal of the destination and reunions. The time will come. It did before. And we will prevail. It’s just a matter of when and how.



Community Circle Home SA has been incredible throughout the pandemic but even more so in recent days, holding space for each other and providing updates and compassion. As I proudly watched the Facebook group grow by thousands this week, I wish it was for better reasons, but overwhelmingly grateful that we have a space that can guide those stranded and support them within the circle. We will help you navigate this. We will guide you to your goal and help make reunions a reality.

• *Kim Kur is the founder and lead volunteer of Community Circle Home SA.*

So close yet so far – variant prevents machaneh

TALI FEINBERG

The announcement by youth movements at the beginning of November that they would be holding COVID-19-safe summer machanot was greeted with joy and hope for brighter times ahead. It was the light at the end of the tunnel for many young people and their families. After a tough two years, at least they could go to Habonim Dror or Bnei Akiva camp in December.

The movements' leadership worked furiously to make camp come to fruition at such late notice, and many *chaverim* had signed up and paid. But when South African scientists announced the discovery of a new variant, the dominoes quickly came crashing down. On Monday, 29 November, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) notified the community that camp was officially cancelled.

SAZF executive member Anthony Rosmarin told the *SA Jewish Report* things changed incredibly fast. "The viability of hosting *machaneh* changed dramatically with the discovery of the Omicron variant. This necessitated urgent consultation between the youth movements, the SAZF, CSO [Community Security Organisation], and most importantly, the medical professionals who have been advising us throughout this challenging process.

"There's a lot of uncertainty about the variant, and the available data suggests significantly greater risk in hosting mass gatherings such as camps," he says. "While time may shed more light on this, a decision needed to be made urgently as to how to proceed. We held multiple discussions with our medical board and team. Ultimately, we felt that it was the responsible decision to cancel machaneh. We have a responsibility to develop Jewish youth in South Africa, but at the same time, we have a responsibility to act in the best interests of our community and at this time, that responsibility is to keep our community safe.

"The high probability of mass infection, the impact this would have on the movement's leadership and CSO's ability to host a safe and meaningful machaneh, and the risk of re-infection on returning to parents, grandparents, family, and friends, were the primary factors considered in the discussion," he says.

"I'm devastated. We're all devastated," says Bnei Akiva Rosh Machaneh Yoni Rosenthal. "I'm heartbroken for our 550 *channichim* and 100 *madrichim* who were going to be inspired and uplifted on our campsite this December. At the same time, I'm so proud of our camp team for putting in such effort over the past few months. We truly



Bnei Akiva channichim and madrichim having fun at Gurim's foam party on machaneh in 2019

turned a dream into a reality. We did everything that we could have possibly done to get ready for machaneh."

The decision is a devastating blow to all of the Zionist Jewish youth movements. "Youth movements have an important place in our Jewish community, and I was encouraged that both Habonim and Bnei Akiva were planning end of year machanot," says Habonim Dror *manhig* (leader) Wayne Sussman.

"Machaneh is crucial not only for the youth but also for future community leadership. It's a transformative space, whether it's at Mossel Bay for Bnei Akiva, Onrus for Habonim, or Glencairn for Netzer. I compare missing machaneh to a soccer player missing a season. In the lifespan of a madrich, they learn so many life skills. So, missing two machanot two years in a row will have a deep impact on every youth movement and our entire community."

Sussman says that since the announcement was made, Habonim's leadership has been "working every hour to see what of machaneh we can we salvage at this late stage. We will hopefully be having a *bogrim* [leadership] seminar so that at least our leaders can get the input they need from the best educators we have to offer." This seminar will hopefully take place on the Habonim campsite, giving *bogrim* the opportunity to connect with the "home" of the movement.

Looking back, Rosenthal says, "The past few weeks have been a bit of a roller coaster, physically and

emotionally. Our team has literally worked day and night over the past two months to turn the impossible into the possible. It became the norm to be calling each other into the early hours of the morning."

Sussman has consoled many devastated *chaverim* and their families. "One child has been coming to camp since Shilim [the youngest age group]. She knows that her father built something on the Habonim campsite, and has waited seven years to enter [the same] age group so that she could join the dots and connect to her father's pioneering contribution to the youth movement. Now that opportunity has been taken away from her. This decision has an impact on family ties," he says.

"Last year was a very dark hour for youth movements, but this may be an even darker hour," Sussman says. "That's why I'm so impressed by the leadership who have hardly slept over the past six weeks, trying to create a

safe, transformative machaneh, and are now trying to salvage what they can. To get so close and then to have the opportunity snuffed out is truly devastating." He notes that this decision could also financially cripple youth movements.

Says Rosenthal, "We need to hold our heads up high and be proud of our achievements. I believe that we have inspired our community over the past few months. I think it's also important to emphasise the incredible work that our team and *madrichim* have done throughout the year. We engaged with more than 1 000 *channichim* and *madrichim* in Joburg and Cape Town over the past few months.

"We have learned that Bnei Akiva is so much more than just a December camp," he says. "We are about people, not just a place. The incoming leadership has already started planning the best way forward, but I have no doubt that we will bounce back stronger in 2022." They have been thinking of a few ways to continue engaging with *channichim* and *madrichim*, and will be in contact about plans for December.

"I have been humbled by the support of the community throughout the process," says Rosenthal. "I also would like to thank Professor Barry Schoub, Dr Richard Friedland, and Uriel Rosen for their guidance over the past few months. I would like to thank the CSO, the SAZF, and our Bnei Akiva Foundation for all of their support as well."

Says Rosmarin, "Though everyone involved appreciated the short and long-term impact, as well as the cost of cancelling machaneh, the risk of disaster coupled with the uncertainty was deemed by our medical team to be too high. Based on this, the very difficult recommendation was made to cancel machanot, a recommendation that was adopted jointly by all the movements and role players. We are extremely disappointed and saddened by this sudden turn of events, and will continue to support our movements through this difficult time."

Black Eyed Peas lead singer says being in Israel is like *mishpocha*

SHIRA HANAU – JTA

Black Eyed Peas frontman will.i.am feels at home in Israel, so much so that he used a Yiddish word to describe the feeling he gets in the country.

While on a visit to Israel to perform with his group, will.i.am, born William James Adams Jr, said on 29 November that he wouldn't boycott the country, and that being in Israel was like being among family – or *mishpocha*.

"I always wanted to come to Israel. Growing up in Los Angeles, a lot of my friends are Israelis," said will.i.am, who isn't Jewish. "My grandma came here. When she visited, she would say, 'I'm going to the holy land.' She came with her church. It was always a place of aspiration and wonder, and when I first came, I brought my grandma. I always love coming here. It's like *mishpocha*."

The rapper made his remarks at a technology forum in the Orient Hotel in Jerusalem. This isn't the first time the Black Eyed Peas have performed in Israel, where they put on concerts in 2006 and 2007.

Speaking at the conference, will.i.am explained how one of his childhood friends inspired him to throw

some other Hebrew words into one of the band's most popular songs, *I Gotta Feeling*. In that song, will.i.am famously shouts out "*Mazeltov!*" and another band member responds with "*L'chaim!*"



Rapper will.i.am speaks at the IMPROVATE International Innovation and Investment Forum at the Orient Hotel in Jerusalem on 29 November 2021

"I wanted to make Benjamin's dad proud," the rapper said of his childhood friend. "So I said, 'Mazeltov,' 'L'chaim', and he was like, 'Will, I always knew you are *mishpocha*'. So to me, when I say *mishpocha*, I mean that dearly. This place is magical to me, for my grandma wanted to come here, and I can't let politics get in the way of where my heart is going."

Will.i.am also worked the word "*mishpocha*" into a music video for a song the Black Eyed Peas made with Israeli pop duo Static and Ben El in 2020.

"What's up, *mishpocha*?" he asks at the beginning of the music video.

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Tackling tough topics with teens needs ‘courageous conversations’

TALI FEINBERG

At some point in their lives, most parents will probably type “How do I talk to my kids about sex?” into an internet search engine. However, experts at a recent webinar warned that depending on the internet is not enough when it comes to talking to teens about sex, sexuality, pornography, drugs, alcohol, prejudice, violence, puberty, and other difficult topics.

More than 600 people registered for the webinar, hosted by the Chevrah Kadisha social services department, with many more watching on Facebook. This shows how many parents are looking for answers when dealing with these difficult questions. The Chevrah Kadisha also launched its new e-book, *Courageous Conversations: Helping Teens to Talk and Listen*, which includes advice from 22 local and international experts.

All of the experts on the panel said that avoiding ‘taboo’ topics with children and teens was a recipe for disaster, since the youngsters would then turn to other sources for information, which could lead them onto dangerous paths. Furthermore, “addressing the tough stuff makes our kids feel safer, it strengthens our bond, and teaches them about the world,” said educational psychologist Ashley Jay. “If these conversations begin at home, it lays a foundation for children to recognise situations that may be inappropriate. This makes them able to speak up.”

She emphasised that feelings don’t scare children – it’s being left alone with those feelings that scares them, no matter how old they are. These conversations must not be lectures, but rather a space where ideas are exchanged and the parent becomes an ‘active listener’. “This means lot of eye contact, follow-up questions, limited interruptions and communicating as clearly as possible.”

In addition, it’s important that you “be clued up”, as children and teens often have more knowledge than the adults do. At the same time, “it’s okay to not always have the answers in the moment. Be honest that you’re learning too, and challenge your own generational biases and prejudices.”

Clinical psychologist Yael O’Reilly said that “studies show that having honest, open, appropriate conversations with our kids about difficult topics actually leads to safer behaviour. Silence gives our kids the message that we’re not a ‘safe landing’ for them.”

When approaching these issues, “we first need to understand the needs of the generation that we are parenting,” she explained. “Teach through connection – that’s the golden principle for this generation. The approach of ‘you will do as I say’ no longer has the weight it used to. We have to be actively curious, engaging, and always working on meeting our kids where they are in order to form a trusting relationship.”

Have a “stacked approach”, she advised. “Information is buildable – so start small, start young, and build it up from there. When it comes to pornography and drugs, we need to be starting these conversations when



they are seven, eight, or nine years old, and building on them slowly and organically. This means we use everyday events as connection points with our kids. For example, when you see someone smoking a cigarette, ask them what they think. At a simcha, ask what it means to them when they see people drinking,” and so on.

When they are young, it’s about introducing the distinction between safe versus unsafe behaviour. As they get older, parents can start to introduce ideas in more detail. “With pornography, older tweens (10 to 12) need to have a basic understanding of what it is. This means that they have to have a basic understanding of what sex is,” she explains.

“The conversation can look something like, ‘We need to make sure that we know what isn’t safe online. Have you heard of porn or pornography? These are online sites for adults where there are pictures or videos of adults doing sexual things. These sites are for adults who want to look at them. They are never for children, but there’s no control over who clicks on them. So if this happens, what do we do? We close the page straight away and show it to mom or dad. Or if it’s being shown to us by someone else, we walk away and tell a trusted adult.’ So explain briefly what it is and what to do if they are exposed.”

Later on, this discussion can open up others about the negative messages embedded in pornography – “that it’s often violent or disturbing, sets unrealistic expectations of what sex is really like, and disregards the intimacy that comes with sex,” she explains. “When it comes to drugs, follow a similar format.”

Importantly, parents must create a ‘way out’ pact, where they tell their child that “you can call me at any time of the day or night and I will come and get you, no questions asked. This doesn’t mean you’re letting them off the hook, it just means that in that moment of vulnerability and potential danger you’re able to be a safe space for them.”

In addition, ‘no’ is only effective when balanced with ‘yes’. “Take stock of the ratio between yes and no in your home. Have some non-negotiables that are clearly communicated, but be open to negotiating everything else,” said O’Reilly. We need to remember that teens are going to make bad decisions. So expect it, “then set your

relationship so that you can be the person that they can rely on in times of distress”.

Psychologist Dr Hanan Bushkin said that it was never too late to have these conversations, and that they should be part of general conversations about life. “Have conversations about values. When you say you should respect your body or others’ bodies, explain why. What are the values underpinning these instructions? The moment you explain the ‘why’, it makes the instruction much more palatable. Parents need to feel comfortable [about the topic]. If you’re uncomfortable, can you imagine what the message looks like?”

However, even if you’re not comfortable with the discussion yet, a factual conversation is better than nothing.

It’s important to portray sexuality as a natural part of being human – as natural as eating. “Explain that we all get hungry, and that’s not a problem. But we can direct that hunger at healthy or unhealthy foods or decisions. There should be no shame.”

“Teenagers are the most misunderstood people on the planet,” said Bushkin. “We treat them like children, but expect them to act like adults. Being a parent to a teenager is very hard, but being a teenager is hard too. This is an incredible opportunity to mould a child into an image you feel proud of. Having a front-row seat to your children growing up is an incredible gift and opportunity. Make your time count.”

No angels or demons in schoolyard bullying

SAUL KAMIONSKY

When King David Junior School Linksfield principal Ruth Isaacson listens to two children each telling their side of a story that potentially involves bullying, she usually doesn’t find any angels or demons.

“You find that there has been some provocation,” she said on 23 November during her school’s webinar entitled ‘Bully-proofing Your Child by Building Resilience and Grit’. “What we try to do is to remain neutral, listen to both sides of the story, and point out what can be done differently, and what could have been done differently.”

Depending on the severity of the situation, Isaacson tells the children, “I need to have a meeting with you in three days’ time. I want to check to see how the days are going, and whether you have had better days.”

She said giving children accountability changes the dynamic because they won’t bully another child when another meeting is on the horizon.

The webinar focused on equipping children with skills to face bullying. Bullies are present in every life stage, and all children will have to deal with conflict at some point in their lives.

“The idea of this webinar came about because we’re still trying to educate children not to use the term ‘bullying’ loosely,” said Isaacson. “If children understand what bullying is and what it’s not, they can alert their parents and teachers who will help de-escalate the situation and provide preventative tools for future encounters.”

Using the right language is crucial in determining if a behaviour is bullying, agreed Jo Hamilton, an educational psychologist who’s interested in teaching children how to manage conflict situations. She’s written a book, *The Ultimate Assertiveness Toolbox for Kids*, on the subject.

“A huge difference exists between bullying, and everyday mean, unkind, thoughtless, competitive, nasty behaviour,” said Hamilton. Bullying is distinctive because it’s intentional, repetitive, and creates an actual or perceived imbalance of power, she said.

“An actual imbalance of power is where the person who’s bullying is taller, stronger, older, or has more facilities at their means,” said Hamilton. “In a perceived imbalance of power, as with social power, they seem more powerful.” For example, bullying may give rise to the bullied person thinking, “If I say or do something, [that] will [turn] the whole [class] against me.”

Luke Lamprecht, a child protection and development specialist, believes the idea that the bullied become bullies, and that bullies have poor self-esteem, are both a bit of a myth.

“My experience of the bullies I’ve been sent [to work with] – and these are proper, taunting, harassing bullies – is they have an extremely strong sense of themselves,” he said. “They’re just unable to take the perspective of another, and that for me is the really challenging part to manage.”

Having worked for several years in a girls’ school, Hamilton has seen how girls are often raised to be kind, thoughtful, and caring, but believes they should also be raised to be assertive and respectful to themselves.

Lamprecht’s experience of working mainly with boys and

running a boxing gym in Hillbrow has shown him that boys are quite different. “It tends to be quite explosive, immediate, kind of ‘Let’s shake hands afterwards and get on with it.’”

This candidate Master of Science in child health said children, especially boys, are often seen by their peers as weak or a snitch when they seek help. “The idea of becoming a man is somehow performative in the world. You have to perform. You have to see how many times you can be beaten down and stand up again. What we don’t recognise is that if we don’t intervene, both the victim of the bullying and the bully are denied services.”

If parents help their children to take responsibility, they’re giving them tools to become better socialised, said Isaacson. “By not dealing with the situation, they’re actually starting that process of isolating their child,” she said. “We know kids sort each other out. They’ll stay away from a child who is too confident, picks on kids, or feels quite empowered to do so.”

Isaacson and Lamprecht acknowledged the importance of the maternal function of hugging and loving unconditionally, and the paternal function of instilling discipline.

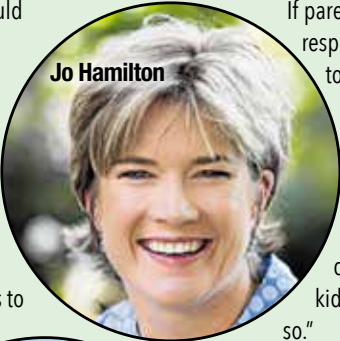
Asked by a parent watching the webinar what to do when a boy is mean to your daughter, Lamprecht responded, “You tell your daughter to inform that boy to never talk to you like that again, because boys don’t talk to girls in mean ways. Boys are kind, and they talk to girls in kind ways, and girls like kind boys.”

Lamprecht said it’s “mad” that girls have to interpret nasty behaviour by boys as a sign that they like them. “We cannot allow that to be perpetuated because the long-term consequences are really dire,” he said. “Parents of boys should tell their boys to not speak to girls in mean ways, and give them a flower if they like them.”

He believes children model their behaviour on their parents and a world that’s fraught with competitiveness.

Isaacson said, “Our social workers are also looking at kids being one to two years behind [because of the pandemic]. There’s a lag in social and emotional development. Something to do is maybe have discussions with your kids when there isn’t a crisis. Don’t wait until your kid comes home absolutely distraught. Rather have the discussion about how we should react if somebody provokes us or says something mean.”

She related how she once phoned a parent whose child was reacting badly to some provocation. “The mother said she had told her child to think about what might be happening in the other child’s life that’s making him behave in a way that isn’t so nice. I thought that was quite an exceptional level of parenting. The most important thing is the role-modelling, the kindness, just hearing your child out, and also being sympathetic and empathetic towards not only your own child, but also other people’s children.”



Jo Hamilton



Luke Lamprecht



Ruth Isaacson

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Rabbonim called on to recognise GBV in Torah

TALI FEINBERG

The scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) is as pervasive in the Jewish community as it is elsewhere. Because of this, the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Cape Town and the Commonwealth Jewish Women’s Network (CJWN) have asked rabbis to help fight it by addressing the matter with their congregations. It’s rare that the GBV that occurs in the Torah is ever discussed.

The women’s organisations recently called on Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and all rabbonim to share the story of Dinah at this time. The United Nations has designated 25 November to 10 December 2021 as 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, and the women hope that addressing the rape of Dinah, which took place in a recent parsha would highlight the need for activism.

Dinah was the daughter of Jacob and Leah. In Parashat Vayishlach, Dinah is abducted and raped. “Shechem saw her; and he abducted her, lay with her and afflicted her” (Genesis 34:1-2).

“The rape of Dinah is a very difficult and complicated story,” explains local Jewish educator Adina Roth. “She is raped by the prince of Shechem and then her brothers mount a vengeance campaign against the people of Shechem, massacring everyone.

“What’s really disturbing is that Dinah’s voice is excised from the story. Her only moment of agency in the story is at its opening, when she ‘goes out to visit the daughters of the land’. It’s during this ‘going out’ that the rape happens. ‘Going out to visit’ is an unusual sentence in the Torah. It’s suggesting that she was sociable and curious about life, meeting other people and stepping beyond the tent, which was often the circumscribed space for women in the Bible.

“The story subtly suggests that her going out is what puts her in danger, leading to the implication that she’s partially to blame for what ensues. This narrative is enforced by some commentaries that suggest that Dinah exposed herself by showing her arms, or that she was like her mother Leah who also ‘went out’ of the tent to claim her husband Yaakov. So sadly the commentaries end up assigning blame to Dinah and perpetuating myths that women somehow ask for it,” says Roth.

Karen Kallman of the UJW Cape Town echoes this sentiment. “What was she wearing? Why was she out so late? Did she provoke him?” are what is implied. The ‘16 Days’ is a fantastic opportunity to have conversations about respect, equality, and the role we can play in helping to end violence,” she said.

Ilona Lee of the CJWN says, “Dinah has no voice in this parsha. In what ways are women silenced in our world

today?” She elaborates on questions that could follow from reading the parsha. “What does respect look like in a relationship? What are some of the expectations we have of men and women in society? What are the impacts of blaming victims of violence?”

Roth also points out that the rape of Dinah was not the only instance of GBV in the Torah. “One of David’s sons, Amnon, rapes his sister Tamar in a very disturbing story. It’s clear that she resists and begs him to leave her alone,” says Roth. “After the rape she cries and tears her clothes. Her utter distress is recorded in the Tanach. Thereafter we don’t see her again. What happened to her?” While that question cannot be answered, the community of today can ensure that women do not disappear from our narrative.

“What’s [also] important is that in this story it’s an Israelite assaulting her. It’s important to realise [that] we need to take responsibility for what happens in our Jewish communities, and for the patriarchy, abuse, and misogyny that comes from within,” said Roth.

Goldstein responded positively to the initiative, writing to rabbonim on 18 November. “I believe we have a responsibility to support this important message and lend our voice to the issues raised by the campaign. The UJW in Johannesburg has written to me to suggest we harness the collective influence of all our rabbis, and that we speak about



Rabbi Nissen Goldman speaking at the Western Cape government's event in remembrance of victims of gender-based violence

the issue of abuse during our shul *droshas* and *shiurim* this Shabbos. As difficult as this subject is, I believe we need to address it head on. As leaders we can use our influence to bring these issues out into the open, and galvanise our communities to deal with them.”

Rabbi Osher Feldman of the Gardens Shul in Cape Town was one rabbi who joined the campaign. His Shabbos *drosha* on 19 November was entitled ‘What type of man are you? A protest against gender-based violence’. In the sermon, he stressed that GBV was not just something ‘out there’ but sadly very much alive in our communities. “The true definition of strength and power is not in our control over others, but in our control over ourselves. As Pirkei Avot puts it, ‘Who is strong? He who controls his own inclinations,’” he said.

Also in Cape Town on 25 November, the Western Cape government invited faith leaders to light candles in honour of those who had lost their lives to GBV. The

Jewish community was represented by Rabbi Nissen Goldman.

Writing about this on Facebook, Goldman said, “Today I had the privilege and responsibility of addressing the Western Cape government as they launched the 16 Days of Activism campaign. They lit candles, and I doubt anyone realised it at the time, but the way each speaker placed their candle ended up forming a menorah.

“I thought it was a message for the occasion. GBV doesn’t just happen. Like most things, it doesn’t exist in a vacuum.” While not excusing the behaviour, he noted, “We need to be asking ourselves why this man felt the need to do this. Men are hurting others because they have been deeply hurt. And this is what needs to be addressed: trauma, from as early on as possible. This is where the menorah comes in. Its message is clear. ‘I reflect you. Look inside! The world needs you and your light, now go shine.’ If only men were taught that.”

Teacher fired for pro-Israel status heads to labour court

TALI FEINBERG

Pretoria teacher Sudesh Mooloo’s life was turned upside down in May 2021 when he wrote a WhatsApp status saying, “I’m not anti-Palestine. I’m anti-Hamas. I stand with Israel.” After teaching Afrikaans, social science, and creative arts at Laudium Secondary School (LSS) for 25 years, he was fired the next day for expressing these views.

He also received death threats, family members turned their backs on him, and his children were victimised. But as a Christian with strongly-held beliefs, he never gave up hope, and decided to fight back.

“His employer – the school – terminated his employment,” says labour lawyer Tzvi Brivik, the attorney on record and the chairperson of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

“As is required by labour-law regulation, the dispute was first referred to the CCMA [the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration] as an unfair dismissal. It remained unresolved. Our client alleges that his employer failed to respect or promote his religious beliefs and personal opinions. These alleged underlying reasons for the termination of his employment fall within the ambit of the Employment Equity Act and as such, the dispute must be determined by a judge sitting in the labour court. The respondent, namely the school, has disputed the allegations, and we now prepare for trial”.



Sudesh Mooloo

Mooloo says this development is positive in his fight for justice. “I’m happy that the matter will no longer be with the CCMA but with a higher authority – the labour courts.” The case will probably be heard in February or March 2022.

“My name is tarnished at the bank because last year, I took out a loan to buy a car and I couldn’t pay for four months when I was unemployed after being dismissed at LSS,” he says. “The bank wants to hand me over. Because of all of this, I’m expecting them to pay me a lump sum. They must pay for not following something as simple as procedure. They must pay for coming up against my religious beliefs. They must pay!”

Mooloo says he’s grateful to the South African Jewish community for its support while he hasn’t been able to earn a salary.

In the meantime, he’s helping out (but isn’t employed) at a very small Christian school. “I love it at this school, and I would never want to return to LSS,” he says.

At the end of July, a donation toward planting trees in the Tzorah Forest, Jerusalem, was made in Mooloo’s name by the South African Friends of Israel “in recognition of his bravery and strong moral conviction in supporting Israel”.

“I have received the biggest honour ever,” said an emotional Mooloo, sharing the news with the *SA Jewish Report* at the time. “My stand wasn’t in vain.”

Community urged to be cautious as wave gathers speed

>>Continued from page 3

so that if you do get it, you don’t get it severely. Our community is highly compliant in terms of COVID-19 vaccination. That’s fantastic as it means that life can almost carry on for them.

“If they want to go on holiday, they must go on holiday. If they want to get married, they must get married. We can’t knock people around anymore. We’re going to have a generation of dysfunctional kids if we carry on this way. People must do what they want to, they must just be careful.”

Kramer has criticised the “political panic” around Omicron, saying, “They believe that by closing doors, they’re going to keep it out. What they don’t know is that it’s there already. They just don’t know who’s got it, how many have got it, and how quickly it’s going to spread.”

“Closing borders doesn’t make scientific sense,” Schoub told Bloomberg TV. “What we have

to recognise is this measure is politically motivated, which is highly damaging to countries like South Africa that depend on the tourist industry.”

Kramer says unvaccinated people shouldn’t be named and shamed. “We don’t know why people haven’t been vaccinated. It could be because they choose not to, because they’re scared to have it. It could be that they’re allergic to the preservative in the vaccination and they’re not allowed to have it because they’ve been anaphylactic before.” But he warns, “The people that are landing up in intensive care are the ones that aren’t vaccinated.”

Asked if the vaccines we have protect us from the new variant, Zinman says, “All of that needs to be worked out. I think that you have to accept that there’s got to be some protection from the vaccine, because the vaccines to date have shown efficacy against all the variants.”



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A new play opens debate on playing Wagner

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Many Jewish musicians will not play or listen to the music of Richard Wagner because he has been promoted as Hitler's favourite composer, but for most this is an unspoken agreement.

Victor Gordon, the late award-winning Pretoria playwright, has pulled the Band Aid off this debate in his play *You Will Not Play Wagner*. It has been turned into a Zoom film with award-winning actress Annette Miller, who previously played Golda Meir in *Golda's Balcony*, as its lead and premiered internationally on 16 November.

"The film opens a discussion on a topic that's usually not discussed – intergenerational trauma, community, and the assumptions about Wagner," says Tali Nates, founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

"Should Wagner's music be played or not? Why is Wagner in the conversation and not others who were much more antisemitic than him? All these critical thinking questions need to be discussed, and I think this play or film allows us to do that."

The film is dedicated to the memory of Gordon, who was also an artist, musician, community leader, and strong literary advocate for Israel. It was directed by Lilia Levitina.

The play was Gordon's second international production, and was performed live in both Israel and Australia. He adapted it for Zoom just before he succumbed to COVID-19 in June this year.

Gordon, a retired pharmacist, wrote his first play at the age of 13. He also developed an interest in painting and music, and would go on to sell just under 100 paintings and play jazz semi-professionally for more than 40 years.

He was aware of the informal ban on Wagner's music in Israel because of the German composer being promoted during the Nazi era as Hitler's favourite composer. Although this unofficial ban has been unsuccessfully challenged by acclaimed conductors Zubin Mehta and Daniel Barenboim, Gordon wrote a play to explore the dramatic possibilities inherent in the debate around this

subject matter.

Set in New York and Tel Aviv during the COVID-19 pandemic, the film focuses on the days leading up to the final of the Esther Greenbaum Conductors Competition. Greenbaum is a Holocaust survivor and the competition's patron who puts up the prize money for the winner.

She would like the character, Ya'akov, a millennial Israeli upstart, to beat the other five composers, each of a different nationality, in the final. To her surprise, Ya'akov chooses to play music by Wagner in the final.

Ya'akov, who believes the taboo on Wagner's music in Israel must change, engages in an emotional argument with Greenbaum and the competition's organiser, whose name is Morris, during a Zoom meeting.

Morris says Ya'akov's choice will not be tolerated by the general public while Israel remains home to one Holocaust survivor. Ya'akov stands by his selection because he has not transgressed the competition rules and believes the anti-Wagner tradition is "stupid".

He questions whether a problem would have arisen had he chosen a composer like Mikhail Glinka or Modest Mussorgsky, who never hid their dislike of Jews. He says Wagner had Jewish friends and made great music which presents a unique challenge for any conductor.

Greenbaum argues that Wagner had an influence on Hitler and the philosophy of the Third Reich.



Having ended the meeting in a hysterical state, Greenbaum tries to get her final Zoom meeting with Ya'akov off to a better start, but it soon becomes extremely heated.

When Ya'akov says a live experience with Wagner's music made him the composer he is today, Greenbaum says that is not her experience. As a mere child, she was forced on pain of death to play Wagner for her concentration camp's orchestra. "Were I not able to play the violin – were it not for Wagner's music – I would not now be alive," she says.

Ya'akov argues we should not forever remain victims of the Nazis and playing Wagner would be the ultimate victory over them.

Nates, a historian who lectures internationally on Holocaust education, says it's not important whether playing Wagner in Israel would amount to treachery or

triumph. "The discussion and the dialogue are the most important," says Nates, whose father and uncle were among the many Jews saved by businessman Oskar Schindler during the Holocaust.

"The film is so powerful because it's not just telling a Holocaust story, a survivor's story, or an artefact's story. It's not telling one story. It tells about memory, intergenerational memory, and coming to terms with history. It connects history and personal history, and memory and the importance of collective memory and collective trauma."

Nates was impressed with how Gordon changed the configuration of the play into a film, but she says it doesn't cover all aspects of the Holocaust, "which has a complicated history with many layers".

She says the complicated relationship between Hitler's admiration of Wagner and the missing pieces of this part of history means playing Wagner in Israel has become a pop culture taboo.

"One of the key historians of Wagner and the Holocaust wrote a book that basically questioned the assumption that Wagner's music was played by the orchestra of Auschwitz. It was 100% not played by the orchestra in the camps, but it is pop culture belief that it was."

Sale of Herzlia Constantia secures UHS future

United Herzlia Schools (UHS) has signed a deal with Rabie Property Group to develop a retirement village on the land previously occupied by the school's Constantia campus, closed 18 months ago.

"To ensure the sustainability of the world-class education UHS offers its pupils, there had to be sacrifices. This came 18 months ago in the form of the closure of the Constantia campus," UHS said on the sale.

A small section of the former Constantia campus has been retained for the Herzlia Kerem Pre-Primary campus. From there, children complete their schooling at Herzlia Highlands campus in the Cape Town City Bowl.

"It was very important to UHS and the broader community to retain the Constantia Hebrew Congregation in close proximity

to our school," UHS said. "It will be comfortably accommodated in this new section of our remaining property.

"This has been a difficult journey, but one that we are confident will see us continuing to do the best we can for the Jewish children of Cape Town.

"As our motto, taken from the wise words of Theodor Herzl, says, *"Im tirtzu, ein zo aggadah"* (If you will it, it's no dream)." This dream will live on and grow for all our pupils.



Rainbows welcomed the students back to class at the new Herzlia Kerem Pre-Primary campus

Letters

IT'S A SIN TO REMAIN SILENT – REPORT ABUSE

I recently came across a poster on an Orthodox Jewish website that said something like, "Don't do anything that you don't want others to find out about." Its message is simple: be respectful. Behave morally. Don't hurt. Be kind.

I mention this in response to Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler's recent article in the *SA Jewish Report* titled 'Men also face gender-based violence', specifically in relation to her reference to the barriers that we Jews put up in our community regarding *lashon hara* or *mesirah* (one Jew handing over another Jew to secular authorities).

If these laws are preventing our Jewish community from calling out abusers, it indicates that most people don't fully understand them, and have taken laws regarding speech too far and in the wrong direction.

They were meant to create atmospheres of *shalom*, and guide us regarding speech, what is acceptable to talk about and what's not. It's better to discuss the words of the Torah than talk disparagingly about the Rebbetzin's new *sheitel*. Use speech to elevate the world.

The laws of speech were never meant to protect abusers, nor to pressurise victims into remaining

silent. To think that we cannot speak out against an abuser is distorted. Abusers have shattered and poisoned any atmosphere of *shalom* that speech laws were meant to facilitate.

Getting back to the website message, I want to say firstly: it's true. If your actions embarrass you it's often an indication you did something wrong. The remedy for that is to not do wrong things.

Secondly, seeing this message on an Orthodox Jewish website was a breath of fresh air, because we Orthodox Jews are so used to emphasising the laws of *lashon hara* that some people may be too scared to talk about anyone or anything at all, even abuse. This idea is out of control. We have extended the umbrella of *lashon hara* too far, and included things it wasn't meant to include.

To the contrary, there are certain harmful aspects of individual behaviour that we must expose. It is a sin to remain silent. It is *pikuach nefesh* – the *mitzvah* of 'saving a life' – which Rebbetzin Hendler also echoes when she says, "For victims, child sexual abuse is akin to being a living murder victim."

The bottom line is: report abuse. And teach your children to report abuse too.

- Michele Engelberg, Johannesburg

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Of doggie dreams and the kindness of strangers

This isn't a column about Daisy. It's a column about kindness and appreciation. And even though Daisy, our beloved German Shepherd, is central to the story, she's not the least of what it's about.

Daisy died yesterday. It involved a Checkers Sixty60 guy, a motorbike, and the unfulfilled dream of a dog whose ambition was some day, before her dog years were up, to catch one. Yesterday she finally did it. Although sadly it didn't end well. Not for Daisy or the bike. The Sixty60 guy was thankfully fine.

I was in a meeting when I started to receive calls. When they became insistent, I answered to hear the frantic voice of a woman I'd never met. She explained that Daisy, who had been taken for her daily walk by Prince, had been involved in an accident. She assured me that she, and a few others, would stay with Prince, who was distraught, and with Daisy (who wasn't in a state to be aware) until help arrived. They had called CAP Security as well as the vet, who was apparently on the way.

Before anyone had had a chance to leave the house, she called again with an update. The vet had arrived and along with CAP were escorting Daisy to the vet for urgent care. She explained where they were going, and suggested that we go straight there. She also reiterated that what had happened was no one's fault. Daisy had managed to get out of her harness and Prince was in need of a little TLC.

By the time we arrived at the vet a few minutes later, Prince had passed away. It was that quick. And there was clearly little that could have been done.

We gathered at home in shocked silence

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



trying to process what had happened when my wife received this message, "Hi Heidi, Zameer here from CAP Security. My deepest condolences for the loss of your Shepherd. We did our best to take her as soon as possible to the Orange Grove vet. We arrived on the scene three minutes after it happened. If there's anything we can do for you at CAP, please let us know. We also offer K9 therapy to overcome trauma, with a friendly female dog called Storm. Kind regards Zameer."

As if the kindness of strangers who sat with Prince as he cried over Daisy, who called us and made sure that we understood the situation, and who arranged for the vet and CAP to assist wasn't enough, we now had this message to contend with.

It's remarkable the difference these gestures made to us on what was a terrible day.

We knew of Daisy's aspiration to one day catch a Sixty60 delivery guy, but as she hadn't been well lately, we all assumed that her dreams would never be actualised. Until yesterday when, in a last burst of youth, she broke through her harness and finally did what she had dreamed of doing for all her dog years.

I have no idea if there's a dog heaven. But if there is, it's filled with kind people like those who sit with a dying dog, with people like Prince, with vets, and with people like Zameer who reach out to strangers to show they care. I guess there's also an ongoing supply of Checkers Sixty60 guys who ride up and down to fulfil unrealised dreams.

Alex kids to get library from King David

King David Schools, in partnership with the King David Schools' Foundation and Feed SA, will be donating a library, called the Kacev Family Library, to the Twala Centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg. The project was conceived to honour Rabbi Craig Kacev's dedication and contribution to education in South Africa. Prior to leaving South Africa for Israel, Rabbi Kacev spent 18 years at the helm of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE), and was known for his love of books and his passion for reading.

King David students have been collecting and sorting fiction, non-fiction, and educational books to donate to the library. It will be housed in a 12-metre-long insulated container which has been remodelled and fitted with electricity, lighting, carpeting, beautiful furniture, and bookshelves. The students will paint and decorate the exterior as part of an art project.

Once fully equipped, it will be transported to its new home in the Twala Centre (also known as the Alexandra Development Centre), a street away from the central shopping and commuting hub in Alexandra.

Lawrence Ruele will be tasked with the ongoing curatorship and maintenance of the library. He is the personal assistant and apprentice to Linda Twala, Alexandra's well-known philanthropist, and vice-president of the We Love Alexandra Community Makeover Project. Under Ruele's guidance, the library will also be cared for by the community. Several teachers, tutors, and youth have committed to assisting.

"King David Schools envisage the Kacev Family Library to be a warm, inviting educational space for the children of Alexandra to spend time reading, using their imaginations, and growing their education," says

Rabbi Ricky Seeff, General Director of the SABJE. "This long-term project is an ideal opportunity to encourage meaningful interaction and engagement between King David students and their Alexandra counterparts."



Grade 7 students at King David Senior Primary Linksfield Danni Angel, Raquel Bravo, Ava Gonen, Emma Raff, and Jamie Zwarenstein with some of the books that have been collected

Endings and beginnings for Yeshiva's class of 2021

"Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." – Winston Churchill

That's all, folks! The class of 2021 has bowed out after an intense matric year. Their final exam – on 24 November – behind them at last. A fitting send-off was held on campus last week in their honour, a tribute to a talented group of young adults in whom the Yeshiva College family takes tremendous pride.



Photo: Jason Crouse

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Don't panic, but behave responsibly

The announcement of the new Omicron variant and its dire impact on overseas travel continues to dominate the news.

With the sharp increase in infection numbers in Gauteng, the Board on 28 November convened a meeting of the national leadership of the major communal bodies together with Professor Barry Schoub and Dr Richard Friedland, two experts in the field of communicable diseases who have guided and advised us throughout the COVID-19 crisis. At our request, Professor Schoub and Dr Friedland have prepared guidelines on how to reduce the impact of the impending fourth wave on our community. These can be found on our Facebook page. To watch last week's "Midweek COVID-19 Update with Professor Schoub", visit <https://bit.ly/2VpwmKX>. Those who have any questions for Professor Schoub can leave them in the comment section or email midweekcovidupdate@gmail.com.

Fighting the good fight

One welcome piece of good news over the weekend was that Miss South Africa, Lalela Mswane, had arrived in Israel in preparation for taking part in the Miss Universe contest. This was in spite of a sustained campaign by Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) factions to prevent her participation, characterised by intimidation, defamation, blackmail, and misinformation. The Board saw it as essential to have a voice in this debate as the intent clearly is to target the only Jewish state in a way intended to deny and demonise South African Jews' historical, cultural, religious, and familial ties to Israel. We engaged in the debates and obtained significant press coverage to offer an alternative narrative to the hate-filled position of those calling for boycotts.

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



The Board was also called on last week to respond to various statements by organisations like Africa4Palestine, the Media Review Network, and the Muslim Lawyers Association on the death in a terror attack of former community member Eli Kay. Using the language of demonisation and incitement that led to Eli's murder in the first place, these factions brazenly celebrated and sought to justify the atrocity. In an opinion piece for News24, South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Vice-President Mary Kluk pointed out how such dehumanisation is an inevitable stage in a process that if left unchecked, can easily have deadly consequences. While not inciting violence directly, the hate-filled rhetoric of the BDS lobby is fostering an environment in which such attacks become that much more likely.

As a former chairperson and long-serving SAJBD executive member, a much respected World Jewish Congress executive member, and in her capacity as director of the Durban Holocaust Centre, Kluk has for many years been at the forefront of defending Jewish rights while also promoting the kind of culture of respect and tolerance for diversity that's so critical to South Africa's future as a united, democratic, and non-racial society. To find out more about her career, see Wendy Kahn's tribute in the latest issue of *Jewish Life*. A link to the article, as well as to Kluk's News24 column, can be found on our Facebook page.

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

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SA-born rugby star helps beat the Boks

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African-born rugby player Sarah Levy scored a hat-trick as the Barbarians trounced the Springboks 60-5 at Twickenham in London. A record crowd for women's rugby – 29 581 spectators – attended the 27 November match.

The Barbarians, an invitational all-star side known as the Baa-Baas, went into half time 38-0 up with winger Levy having crossed the whitewash twice. The number 11 grabbed her third try after the break to seal the biggest win for the Barbarians women's team since its first match in November 2017.

"I was so honoured to play with the Baa-Baas, and to play against my birth country makes it even more special," Levy told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I've never played against a South African team, and to play against them with the Barbarians makes this experience even more special."

Levy, who plays for the New York Rugby Club, the oldest rugby club in the United States, was born in Cape Town to a South African father and an American mother. When she was two years old, her family made aliyah to Israel. A couple of years later, they moved to San Diego in California, where she grew up.

Her father Denis and uncles Rob, Nelson, and Peter all played rugby. By being selected to represent the Barbarians, she has now joined her great-grandfather, Louis Babrow, as a life member of the famous club. In 1931, Babrow become one of the first Jews to play for the Springboks. The first Jewish Springbok was his cousin Morris Zimmerman. A medical doctor and lifelong opponent of apartheid, Babrow played for the Baa-Baas in England before going to fight in World War II.

The Baa-Baas roll of honour reads like a who's who of the history of rugby, featuring famous names like Jonah Lomu, Francois Pienaar, and Bryan Habana.

Receiving an invitation to don the club's famous black

and white hooped jersey is a source of enormous pride to players.

Levy said it was "unreal to play with so many legends" in the Barbarians women's team, which consists of over 700 international caps across nine nations. The New York Rugby Club player was one of four United States-based players in the squad, which included World Cup winners, current and former international captains, and even someone like Irish prop Lindsay Peat, who has played rugby, basketball, and Gaelic football.

"It's been a fun training environment, and everyone's very supportive," said Levy. "It's nice to play with new people and have a different game plan from what I've been doing with the US team. These connections I'm making are so special."

Levy got into rugby after having signed up for every sport at her school's club fair. She received a rugby email, saying that practise was in two days' time before a



Sarah Levy in action

tournament that weekend, and another girl convinced her to take part.

"She went from strength to strength, and made progress going up the ranks. Two years ago, she was selected to represent the United States at rugby," said Denis.

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After taking up rugby, most of Levy's conversations with her dad were about the game. "He would tell me all about Louis' playing days, and he gave me newspaper clippings and photos and showed me YouTube clips," Levy told *SA Rugby* magazine. "That made me want to play even more. I knew I have a connection to South Africa. I always had a Springbok jersey, but I never realised the meaning behind it. Suddenly, when I started playing rugby and reading about rugby, it meant so much more. It made me feel more connected to South Africa, and Grandpa Louis and all the other men in my family who have played."

Levy keeps up to date with everything that's going on in South Africa, including the economy and politics. "My dad once brought me a pair of shoelaces with a South African flag on them," she told the magazine. "I had them in my cleats all through senior year at college. My dad's brother ended up moving to the same city as us, and we braai all the time."

Her family members living in the US are mostly girls, and they all played soccer at school. "Our parents never thought about us playing rugby, but I wish I had started playing early because I love it so much," she told the magazine. "It's cool to see that I can do what my uncles and granddad used to do. My *ouma* sent me a newspaper clipping of her playing in a touch game with other nurses."

Levy trains full-time with the US seven-a-side team, a hopeful for the next Olympics. "I go in four days a week for usually three sessions a day," she said. "This consists of two rugby sessions and a weightlifting or speed session." This season, she got selected to play for the 15s in a northern-hemisphere series against England and Ireland.

"Rugby is a very rapidly growing sport in America, especially at universities," said Denis. "It's not as big as in England and Ireland, but it's growing very fast."

Levy, a Bachelor of Science graduate studying physiotherapy at the University of California, would "love to have the honour" of being selected for a World Cup or Olympics. "I would also like for the US team to earn a medal in those events someday," she said.

Levy has great appreciation for her roots. "I love the Jewish community, and what it provided for me growing up."

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