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South African Jewish Report

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Experts cautiously optimistic about Omicron

TALI FEINBERG

A 73-year-old Jewish woman with dementia in Johannesburg tested positive for COVID-19 this week, but after 48 hours of being a bit sleepy, she was back to her usual self.

Though she's one of many people of all ages contracting the highly transmissible Omicron variant, this new mutation may lead to less hospitalisation and death and fewer disruptions to daily life than previous variants, experts say.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on Tuesday, 7 December 2021, Netcare Group Chief Executive Dr Richard Friedland said, "What we are seeing across the Gauteng province, which is the epicentre of this new variant, is that the vast majority of patients are presenting mild to moderate flu-like symptoms. We have been treating these patients symptomatically through our Medicross primary care clinics and emergency departments. We have 270 COVID-19-positive cases across our 53 hospitals in South Africa. Seventy-five percent of cases are in Gauteng. About 20% of the cases are in KwaZulu-Natal. We have less than 10% of patients on any form of oxygenation, which is in stark contrast to the other waves when the vast majority of COVID-19 cases were on some form of oxygenation and ventilation. As we speak, we have only six cases being ventilated."

Friedland thinks this variant is "highly transmissible, but at the moment there's no evidence of severe illness requiring hospitalisation and leading to death. It's very early to speculate, but this is the pattern we're seeing throughout the country. I want to re-emphasise that given that it's highly transmissible, we still need to continue vaccinating, and most importantly, ensure

that everyone is wearing a mask. This is an airborne virus, and mask wearing is incredibly effective."

"The virus seems to be spreading faster than ever before," says Dr Darren Joseph, specialist physician at the department of internal medicine at Steve Biko Academic Hospital, on 6 December. "We have seen a high number of re-infections. The feeling on the ground, though, at this stage, is one of cautious optimism. Though we are seeing ever-rising numbers of suspected cases and confirmed positivity, this hasn't yet translated into a dramatic increase in hospitalisation."

He points to a recent report authored by Dr Fareed Abdullah of the South African Medical Research Council, "which outlines our hospital complex's experience very well. At the Steve Biko Academic and Tshwane District Hospitals complex, we saw 166 new admissions with confirmed COVID-19 between 14 and 29 November 2021. Of those still admitted, the vast majority remain out of our critical-care units and roughly two-thirds of our admissions aren't oxygen requiring. This is in stark contrast to what was experienced at this point in previous waves. Fortunately, vaccination still offers protection, with the report showing that all the current admissions with pure COVID-19 pneumonia were unvaccinated individuals."

"We have also seen a much younger demographic so far in this wave, including a high number of paediatric infections and admissions," Joseph says.

Though there is cause to be optimistic, "my real concern is that if the narrative around this current wave is that the virus has somehow become less virulent and that this signals the end of COVID-19, we will be sending out the wrong message. The vulnerable remain vulnerable, and

Home for the holidays



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

The *SA Jewish Report* traditionally features an "off-to-machaneh" photo, but with camp being cancelled, disappointed children – including (left to right) Ashton Mervis, Jamie Kodesh, and Gideon Laffer – unpack their trunks and wonder what to do for the holidays.

if we throw caution to the wind, we still run the risk of having sick patients rapidly overwhelm our limited resources."

Hatzolah Operations Manager Uriel Rosen says, "Our numbers are rising by 100 a day. We are currently at 1 071 active cases, with 454 new cases this week." At the same time, "only 1.6% of our cases are on oxygen or need more intense treatment or hospitalisation. This is compared to 10.4% in the last wave. However, we are learning about this variant, and it's difficult to say categorically that it's weaker. It doesn't mean because the numbers of critical are low, there's no issue."

"Every event where all the protocols aren't fully observed is a super-spreader," says Rosen. "It's spreading like crazy. We need to take precautions."

Rosen says a lot more children are getting COVID-19. "The highest age group of active cases right now is from 11 to 20. It could be related to children not getting vaccinated or teens having only one vaccination, or it could be how this variant works. No person under 20 on our wellness programme has been hospitalised."

Regarding holidays, "Go on holiday, but be safe. If anyone from the Johannesburg Jewish community contracts COVID-19 on holiday – even overseas – contact Hatzolah, and we will look after them. We have 115 wellness volunteers and eight staff members that are 1 000% dedicated. They do it with passion and care, with at least 150 to 200 calls a day. We also have eight nurses for intensive cases. There are about 139 nurse rounds per day. We are the luckiest community in the world. At Hatzolah, we are doing it for our brothers, sisters, and family. No Yid gets left behind."

CSO (Community Security Organisation) Cape Town has witnessed a dramatic rise in cases, from two on 27 November to 127 on 7 December. "They mostly have moderate symptoms, with no one yet requiring hospitalisation," says director Loren Raize.

Continued on page 5>>

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2 SA JEWISH REPORT

Puerto Rican contestant reveals Holocaust heritage

When she won the privilege of representing Puerto Rico in the Miss Universe contest, Michelle Marie Colon spoke of her pride in making history as the first black woman from the territory to seize the honour.

This week in Israel, where the contest is being held, she has been touting pride in another aspect of her heritage: her Jewish great-grandfather who escaped the Holocaust.

Last week, Colon posted a photo of her holding hands with Noa Cochva, the Israeli entrant into the contest, beneath a wall covered with portraits of victims of the Holocaust.

"My great-grandfather, Rodolfo Cohn, was a survivor of the Holocaust," Colon wrote. "He moved to the Caribbean and met Dorila Thomas, my great-grandmother, an empowered Afro-Caribbean woman – the descendant of slaves – who was the administrator of a farm at the time. Together, they formed a solid family full of love, built upon empathy and resilience."

She had told the story in an impromptu talk while the contestants toured Yad Vashem, the national Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Yad Vashem Chairperson Dani Dayan posted her talk in a video on Twitter on Saturday, and it soon went viral.

Dayan said Colon, a 21-year-old pre-med student, "surprised her fellow Miss Universe contestants [and also Yad Vashem staff]."

Colon's comments come at a time when advocates

are seeking to turn the pageant, scheduled for 12 December in Eilat, into a political referendum on Israel.

Palestinian advocates have called for contestants to boycott the competition, but only Malaysia and Indonesia have so far committed to

doing so.

Meanwhile, South Africa's contestant is attending in spite of pressure from the South African government to boycott Israel. In addition, this year's competition will feature a contestant from the United Arab Emirates for the first time, and a contestant from Morocco for the first time in decades. Both of those countries signed diplomatic normalisation agreements with Israel in 2020.

Israeli stabbed by teenager near Sheikh Jarrah



Photo: Yonatan Sindel/Flash90

Police officers at the scene of a stabbing attack in East Jerusalem on 8 December 2021

An Israeli woman was stabbed by a Palestinian teenage girl near the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah Wednesday, 8 December, in the latest suspected "lone wolf" terror attack in recent weeks.

The woman, 26, was walking her children to school when the girl stabbed her in the back before fleeing the scene. The woman was taken to the hospital with light wounds, according to *The Times of Israel*. Israeli police arrested the girl at a school nearby.

The attack took place just outside of Sheikh Jarrah, the East Jerusalem neighbourhood where dozens of Palestinians faced eviction in a case before Israel's Supreme Court earlier this year and which became a flash point during the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in May.

The attack is the latest in a wave of lone wolf attacks in Jerusalem in recent weeks. Earlier this week, a

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Palestinian teenager rammed a car into a guard station at a West Bank checkpoint and injured a guard before being shot dead by Israeli officers. On Saturday, an Israeli man was stabbed by a Palestinian assailant in the Old City. The attacker was shot and killed at the scene. Last month, a Hamas gunman killed Eliyahu Kay, a 25-year-old Israeli, also in Jerusalem's Old City.

Jews Hill Fort struck with antisemitic graffiti

A tiny Spanish town that has veered over the centuries from being a refuge for Jews to a rallying cry for their death was defaced with widespread antisemitic graffiti.

Residents of Castrillo Mota de Judíos, a village in Northern Spain, began to discover the graffiti almost as soon as they woke on Monday, 6 December.

They ultimately found vandalism in four locations: on the entrance to the town hall, the signpost on the road entering the village, the planned site for the future Sephardic centre, and the sign commemorating the town's sisterhood with the Israeli city of Kfar Vradim.

No Jews live in the town, which has only about 50 inhabitants. The vandals were instead taking aim at the village's history and the efforts by its current mayor, Lorenzo Rodríguez, to preserve it.

The town was originally named Castrillo Motajudíos, or Jews' Hill Fort, in 1035 when Jews fleeing from a neighbouring pogrom settled there. The town was renamed Castrillo Matajudíos – Fort Kill The Jews – in 1627, during a period of extreme religious persecution by the Inquisition.

It wasn't until June 2015 that the town's name was restored to Castrillo Mota de Judíos following a referendum initiated by Rodríguez. Since then, he has worked to restore the town's Jewish past. His most recent project is the construction of the Centre of Jewish Memory of Castilla y León, which is expected to open in 2022 along the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage route undertaken annually by hundreds of thousands of Christians.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Torah Thought

Rav Ilan Herrmann –
Soul Workout Shul



The key to unlocking blessings

What's the key to the blessings we need from Hashem? One such approach is hinted at in the opening words of this week's portion, "Vayigash eilav Yehudah", "and Yehudah approach him" or more accurately, "And approached him Yehudah".

Contained in these three words are a hidden message. The verse merely says "him" (without specifying a name) and consequently, we can see a deeper hint here. "Him" can allude to the true Him – Hashem. So the verse reads, "And approached Him [Hashem] Yehudah." What does Yehudah mean? The name comes from the root word "*Hoda'ah*" (gratitude).

Thus, we uncover a secret in this verse: how do we approach Hashem to bring down the blessings we need? "Approached Him [Hashem] with gratitude [*yehudah-hoda'ah*]."

We often focus on what we lack, and appeal to Hashem from that consciousness to fulfil our needs. Yes, we must ask for our needs to be fulfilled by Hashem, but what's the posture or position most effective in approaching Hashem? This verse alludes to approaching through gratitude. By acknowledging and appreciating the many things we are blessed with, we create a channel for even more blessings.

Rabbi Moshe Schnerb recently told a story on ChaiFM that illustrates this. A family of many children had successfully been able to find marriage partners for all their children yet for some reason, was unsuccessful with one daughter in spite of the fact that she was full of *chein* (grace) and beauty and was certainly eligible. In spite of many attempts, there was no success. Repeated disappointment and heartache caused concern and frustration. The parents davened and prayed, asking Hashem "Why, why" she wasn't finding her *bashert* (soulmate). Their mood was bleak.

Soon afterwards, the girl met another candidate, everything seemed to be going well, and the good news was expected. At the 11th hour, however, the matchmaker called the parents with a heavy heart saying that the potential *chosson* (groom) had

decided to turn the marriage down. The girl and her parents were devastated.

The father turned to his wife and said, "We must be doing something wrong. Look at us, so blessed with children all happily settled with families and health yet all we are focusing on is what we don't have – our daughter's success in finding her match! From now on, we approach it differently – with gratitude. We thank Hashem for all we have been blessed with. That's our stance!"

Rabbi Schnerb continued that within an hour, the phone rang and the matchmaker said in excitement and disbelief, "I have no idea what happened, but the family called me back to stress that they definitely wanted to pursue the arrangement and didn't want to lose this special girl."

The change in focus to gratitude opened the gates of heaven, and the *brocha* flowed.

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Joburg mayor resolute in face of ANC insults

NICOLA MILTZ

Nothing was going to stop the executive mayor of Johannesburg, Dr Mpho Phalatse, last week from delivering her acceptance speech as the city’s first woman in the position.

Not even a rowdy group of chanting African National Congress (ANC) councillors hell bent on intimidating and harassing her by demanding that she withdraw pro-Israel comments she made more than three years ago.

Phalatse braced herself for attacks by the ANC when she entered the Constance Connie Bapela Council Chamber in Braamfontein on 2 December and saw ANC councillors brandishing placards clad in keffiyehs (traditional Palestinian scarves).

She remained calm in the face of taunting chants of “Free Palestine!” and posters saying “Away with a mayor pro-apartheid.”

“I folded my arms, maintained my composure, and allowed them to finish,” Phalatse said this week.

Council Speaker Vasco da Gama attempted to bring the formal proceedings to order as insults were hurled at the newly elected mayor who stood on the podium and waited.

“They were expecting a reaction but when they didn’t get one, they tired quickly,” Phalatse said.

A committed Christian and a single mother of three, Phalatse (44) was in 2018 suspended from her post as MMC for health and social development in Herman Mashaba’s Democratic Alliance (DA)-led government in the City of Johannesburg. This after comments she made expressing support for Israel during a South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) conference were taken out of context, causing outrage amongst the anti-Israel lobby. She was reinstated to her position after an investigation found no wrongdoing on her part, and after she made a public apology to the people of Johannesburg.

At the conference, Phalatse called herself and the City of

Johannesburg a “friend” of Israel.

“I’ve responded so many times, and I’ve said everything publicly that I needed to say on the issue. Last week, the ANC needed something to use on the day to try to discredit me and feel relevant, and I didn’t want to entertain it,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Instead, Phalatse, a medical doctor turned politician remained poised, steady, and calm and waited for the ANC to finish while the majority of councillors watched remotely as scenes of disorderly and unruly behaviour played out in the chamber.

“The behaviour didn’t shock me because every time they come with their scarves I know they have planned something.

“I had a speech to deliver which I hoped would unify the council behind the common vision of building the city. I needed to stay focused to get this message across,” she said.

DA Councillor Daniel Schay said the mayor stood firm and was undeterred.

“This was a deliberate attempt to try knock her off her game and disrupt the council. She remained calm and carried on with the business of the day, putting the residents of the city first.”

He was utterly amazed when the mayor came up to him afterwards and apologised for the ANC’s disrespectful behaviour. “She

said sorry to me! I said it wasn’t about me, and was more concerned about her,” he said.

Later Schay posted on Facebook, “Today was my first proper council meeting. Today, we were meant to be doing business that put the residents of Johannesburg first. The ANC had different ideas and tried to make today about a conflict 9 000km away while ignoring the pain and suffering it has caused in our own city.

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Dr Mpho Phalatse, whose religious beliefs and personal character were under attack today by vicious peddlers of falsehoods, I must bestow the greatest gratitude, for in that moment, you also showed great sensitivity to me and my well-being. Today, your leadership and humanity shined above the vile hatred and lies that emerged within the council chamber.”

SAFI said the ANC should prioritise service delivery over anti-Israel theatrics, and last week’s display by the ANC was an “obvious attempt at overt political intimidation”.

“It was a cheap political PR stunt, and yet another missed opportunity to promote peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while indulging in hateful anti-Israel propaganda. Meanwhile, the City of Johannesburg suffers from water shortages, power outages, refuse collection issues, sewerage-management problems, and decaying infrastructure. The ANC would do better to demonstrate its commitment to fix these serious service delivery problems instead of obsessing over its anti-Israeli agenda,” the organisation said.

In her speech, Phalatse said the challenge that lay ahead for the 18 parties represented in the Johannesburg council was to bring hope to the city.

Born in Pretoria, Phalatse has hit the ground running since she took up office. She was handed the keys to the country’s largest metro after beating the ANC’s Mpho Moerane by 144 votes to 121, and became the first woman mayor of Johannesburg.

She has consistently said that her aim is to make Johannesburg a better place knowing full well the myriad problems facing the city from potholes; disrupted water supply; inadequate and failing infrastructure; shocking service delivery in poor areas; a complex, seemingly impossible electricity crisis; and the highly nuanced and controversial issue of undocumented foreigners.

Her days and nights are jampacked, from trawling night clubs last

week with metro police in search of establishments flouting COVID-19 protocols to meeting disgruntled Soweto residents and Eskom officials to sort out the city’s electricity crisis.

Former Johannesburg Mayor Mpho Moerane this week criticised Phalatse for “running a leaderless city” for not appointing the 10-member mayoral committee by now,

IT WAS A CHEAP POLITICAL PR STUNT, AND YET ANOTHER MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT WHILE INDULGING IN HATEFUL ANTI-ISRAEL PROPAGANDA.

the result of ongoing coalition discussions between the DA and other parties. Phalatse said the wait was necessary to form a stable government for Johannesburg “so that we can get down to the real business of effectively building a city we can eventually be proud of”.

“The ANC is trying to build a narrative that the DA is incapable and failing in its duties. This criticism is politically motivated, and we need to remain focused,” she said.

“The two-week odd delay in appointing the mayco won’t be harmful as the issues we face are historical.” She said they were winding down coalition talks and hoped to conclude discussions soon.

Phalatse said the very people who continued to hurl insults and criticism at her were the same people who, over the years, had taught her how to face them.

“The ANC has used lies, fabrications, has even made a song about me and called me names. They have given me training in resilience, and I’m grateful because I have grown a thick skin.”

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Businesses hang on for dear life on COVID-19 rollercoaster

TALI FEINBERG

In a cruel twist of fate, the businesses that were to benefit most over the festive season have now had to bear the brunt of COVID-19 restrictions in light of the new Omicron variant. Just as travel, hospitality, and theatre were opening up to pre-pandemic levels, they faced a fourth wave and restrictions that are taking them back to square one. Many in the South African Jewish community have been affected, but they vow to survive, overcome, adapt, and thrive into the New Year.

"When the United Kingdom initially took us off the red list, it seemed as though half of South Africa wanted to travel in December," says Andrea Bonalumi of Visa Box, a travel visa consultancy which services South African outbound travellers. "We were inundated with enquiries not just for the United Kingdom, but all European Union countries. So we went from zero to 1 000 overnight. We were working flat out!"

Because of this workload increase, "I hired back an employee whom I had previously retrenched. I also signed a lease agreement for 2022 so that we could all get back into an office, assuming the run would continue."

So, when the world slammed its doors on South Africa, it was a nightmare come true. "Now, I sit with these commitments I'm not sure I'll be able to honour and even worse, the unknown. When will this end, will it ever end, why did they react in such a way?" she asks. "Some of my clients haven't seen their family for more than two years. Some were going to meet grandchildren for the first time. Some had already spent tens of thousands [sometimes hundreds of thousands] of rands on a trip they will never enjoy. It's just terribly sad – and just before Christmas. I have a client who needs to go to Australia to attend a Barmitzva. Will that ever happen?"

"The industry as a whole is writhing, and our industry is massive. Not only outbound, but what about our tourism? It's a mess to say the least, but I just hope and pray that it will end as quickly as it started. We will

survive. I have to survive. It's my livelihood as well as that of my staff."

Fiona Sacks, a freelance tour guide and event organiser in the Western Cape, says, "I was due to have a bumper December. I had clients coming from Egypt and from Israel on a cruise. I had work for a company in Cape Town for its year-end function which involved a tour and its overseas team joining. Needless to say, within about a day and a half, everything was cancelled and the end-of-year function was postponed until next year. It felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me. And then, of course, the knock-on effect was felt across the whole industry."

Moving forward, "I'm seeing a trickle of new enquiries coming in so I'm cautiously optimistic that more work will come, and I will prevail," she says.

For Theatre on the Square owner Daphne Kuhn, the curveball is just one more challenge in the pandemic rollercoaster ride of those in the live entertainment industry. After a tough 20 months, "We finally opened about six weeks ago," she says. "There was no 'grand opening', and respecting the virus protocols, we've had to let out and rent the theatre for film shoots and other small functions. We had a number of concerts and we were often packed with people filling the 50% capacity, all of whom had to be vaccinated. This 'soft opening' also allowed for a number of our classical and jazz concerts, but these, sadly, were curtailed over the past few days. We cancelled the last three classical concerts this week as it wasn't safe to hold gatherings, and some of the artists were ill."

"We lost out on our marketing costs, publicity, printed programmes, as well as technical salaries of our employees, as there could be no income derived from ticket sales. The musicians lost their fees, as all income normally goes directly to the artists for our concerts where we promote musicians."

There have been a few saving graces. "The two big student showcases that were cancelled have been postponed for the New Year, so we didn't lose their fee,

as they hired the theatre in this case," says Kuhn. "It had an impact on our technical employees, whose fees I had to pay. Thankfully, everything has been postponed and rescheduled for the New Year when we hope it will be safer to open again. We have rent relief at the moment until the New Year, but utilities and all regular running costs continue – with no income! The only consolation is that nowadays, we normally close the theatre for three weeks over the festive season as Johannesburg becomes very quiet."

A number of concerts have been rescheduled from late January, and play productions have been scheduled from February 2022, if all is well," she says. "We remain positive and absolutely determined that in the second quarter of 2022, we will reopen formally with a series of intriguing stage productions that will entice audiences and get them back to savour the joy of live entertainment."

For DJ and performer Danielle Bitton, December 2021 was the summer season she had been waiting for. Along with the impact of the pandemic on the entertainment industry, she has spent



Danielle Bitton

the past two years battling and recovering from breast cancer. But she was finally going to be back behind the mic and the decks, where she belonged. That is, until the new variant took away those hopes.

"To say the past two years have been tough for us artists would be an understatement. Just when we thought there might be some semblance of normality and a December summer season, who decides to show up? Mr Omicron, making a grand entrance riding in on the fourth wave!" she quips.

"Since the announcement of this variant, some of my gigs have been cancelled as people are afraid of being out again. It's not just musicians who are suffering – the film industry is too. I was fortunate enough to book a commercial just before the announcement of the new variant, but friends who had international jobs lined up have all had them cancelled. This is a huge loss for the entertainment industry."

Ever the optimist, Bitton says the new variant won't get her down – physically or literally. "I recently took Mr Omicron home with me from an outdoor party, even though I'm double vaxxed with Pfizer. Was the hype worth it? Not really. I had a postnasal drip and a cough. I felt like I had a cold for two days, and then I felt fine. My only hope is that we don't get more restrictions. Us artists need this season to survive next year! I pray with this new milder variant that COVID-19 is on its way out!"

Pilanesberg steps up to the plate with kosher Villa

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



With the doors of international travel slammed shut on an exhausted nation, and South Africans desperate to escape the monotony of nearly two years of lockdown and working from home, a brand-new kosher option has opened in the African bush.

The tranquil Big Five, Pilanesberg game reserve, just two hours from Johannesburg, opened its gates in 1979 to coincide with the launch of the Vegas-style neon lights of Sun City, situated right next door. To stock the 550km² reserve, "Operation Genesis" was put into motion, one of the biggest ever relocations of wildlife game, with 6 000 animals shipped in to populate the park.

Its short distance from Johannesburg, malaria-free grasslands, abundance of wildlife, and 360 species of birds, has turned Pilanesberg into one of the country's most popular safari parks. The nature reserve situated in a 1.3 billion-year-old dormant volcano showcases the huge Mankwe Dam in the centre of the crater, its circular mountain ranges the remnants of the shockwave left over from the volcano's violent eruption.

As much as South Africa with its myriad of political problems, potholes, electricity blackouts, and water shortages frustrates us all, a few days in the bush, makes you fall in love with Africa all over again.

When you stare out over the endless thorn trees and dusty earth, with the cry of its insects and the rustle of an elephant feeding off the bark of a tree, you're reminded of the musings of Karen Blixen, in *Out of Africa*, who wrote, "Perhaps he knew, as I did not, that the earth was made round so that we would not see too far down the road."

During my recent 12-day stint in the park, I witnessed leopard hunt a baby impala, saw a lioness charge a herd of wildebeest, watched a standoff between rhino and hippo, and got caught in an elephant traffic jam, as baby pachyderms played endlessly on the road.

The enormity of Africa makes you feel small.

As the quality of accommodation in the Kruger Park and other national parks has rapidly deteriorated, the North-West Parks Board has seized the opportunity by

creating a slew of reasonably priced privately operated lodges within the Pilanesberg reserve. Many people will know the timeshare resorts of Kwa-Maritane and Bakubung in the game park, but the Ivory Tree and Shepherds Tree game lodges offer a big step up in terms of quality of accommodation and the genuine African Safari experience. Luxury accommodation combines with gourmet food and twice daily game drives through the savanna with game rangers in open jeeps.

But until now, the options for kosher travellers who want to take advantage of the African bush have been severely limited. Kosher food has generally been triple wrapped in tin-foil and served like airplane nosh in the chic dining rooms of Ivory Tree and Shepherds Tree lodges, while the other guests have feasted on gourmet cuisine.

That has all changed with the introduction by Ivory Tree of its new kosher Villa, with its kosher kitchen featuring guest chef Doron Gavronsky and certified supervising mashgiach, Aharon Bogati. The Villa will also soon be certified by the Johannesburg Kosher Department.

The Villa could best be described as a luxury kosher club-house within the lodge with indoor and outdoor lounges, dining areas, and a private swimming pool. Wild animals wander past the edge of the Villa, ignoring the sumptuous kosher food plated on the other side of the fence.

Guests who stay in the adjoining chalets can then make use of the boutique kosher Villa for all their meals, expertly curated and prepared by Bogati and Gavronsky. The Villa can accommodate up to 16 guests at a time, and serves three kosher meals per day.

There's nothing more exhilarating than watching a lioness call her pride, who come running through the high wheaten grass at sunset, or a cheetah hunting for food at dawn's pale light. As Alan Paton proclaimed, *Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful*.

For more information, contact ivory.shepherds@aha.co.za or call +27 (0) 442 5888.

• The writer was the guest of Ivory Tree Lodge management for two nights.



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Miss SA shines as local boycott goes to court

NICOLA MILTZ

It's just days before the Miss Universe pageant in Eilat, and Miss SA Lalela Mswane has been soaking up the sights and sounds of Israel and making friends with dozens of fellow contestants ahead of the glamorous event.

Beauty queens from at least 70 countries have toured a number of popular destinations such as Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, where they smothered themselves in healing black mud.

Over the past few days, they have been in the coastal city of Eilat posing in swimwear.

The deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, hailed Miss SA for her bravery in deciding to participate in the pageant in spite of Israel-haters' attempts to stop her from taking part.

Hassan-Nahoum thanked Mswane for "speaking truth to power", and for participating in spite of the South African government and the minister of sport, arts, and culture withdrawing support for her in November because the contest was taking place in Israel.

Following a fashion event hosted in Jerusalem, she tweeted, "I thanked #MissUniverse South African contestant Lalela Mswane for speaking truth to power and not just being a beautiful but a very brave lady."

Meanwhile back home, Africa4Palestine, an anti-Israel lobby group aligned with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, this week submitted an application to the High Court Gauteng Division to be an *amicus curiae* (an impartial adviser to a court of law in a particular case) in a case brought before the court by Citizens For Integrity (CFI).

CFI has accused the government and the minister of sport, arts, and culture of acting unconstitutionally and irrationally in its "bullying" of Miss SA.

The non-governmental organisation has filed papers in the 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 at the weekend.

It has demanded an apology and an immediate retraction of the statement withdrawing support for the Miss SA Organisation and Mswane.

Although Mswane is already in Israel, the CFI launched an urgent application to have the government's statement declared unconstitutional, said Sibongile Cele, the deputy chairperson of the African National Congress Women's League Johannesburg.

"We aren't changing our stance, we will give Miss SA our full support. She is being victimised by these people," said Cele.

In papers before the court, the anti-Israel group asked to be *amicus curiae* to assist the court in making its decision. It wanted to provide the court with information on alleged atrocities perpetrated by Israel as well as to provide information on reports by human rights bodies drawing parallels in Israel to apartheid in South Africa.

The organisation said the government had adopted a longstanding stance on the Palestinian-Israel conflict, and submissions by the CFI attempted to challenge its policy and stance on the "Israel occupation" and its right to act in accordance with those principles.

"In doing so, it attempts to allege that the government's stance is one which has been



Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem thanks Miss SA, Lalela Mswane, for her bravery in taking part in Miss Universe

adopted with the intention of allegedly violating the constitutional rights of Miss SA. This stance is blatantly false and misleading".

Mthethwa, in his heads of argument, accused the CFI of making "wild generalised statements and unsubstantiated allegations" which should be dismissed on the basis they are "hearsay and irrelevant".

The court papers stated that the minister's statement was made in "good faith", and was in line with legitimate government purpose in its "commitment to the advancement and protection of fundamental human rights, not only within the borders of the Republic of South Africa, but also extra-territorially".

"This commitment is immediately apparent in the Bill of Rights, which is the cornerstone of the constitutional democracy of the Republic and affirms democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom," the papers say.

The minister "Simply reiterates the policy by government in that South Africa will not tolerate the senseless and continued Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian people and denial of their right to self-determination. Accordingly, the egregious violation of human rights by the Israel people towards Palestine weighs more than the support that South Africa should show for Miss Universe pageant to be held in Israel."

It was heavily argued that the matter was not urgent and should be dismissed.

Willie Hofmeyr, the retired head of the asset

forfeiture unit at the National Prosecuting Authority and one of the founders and directors of CFI, was present during the proceedings and was unable to comment at the time of going to press.

Cele, who is also the spokesperson for the CFI, 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. The protesters can jump and scream, but we will stand up against this injustice. As Christians, we believe Israel is the apple of G-d's eye, and we will continue to pray for peace between Israel and South Africa."

Anti-Israel lobbyists staged a small protest outside court on Wednesday, 8 December. They have accused CFI of being "a front company for the Zionist lobby" and in an online poster advertising the protest, they said, "Israel keep your dirty hands off our government."

Throughout Miss SA's short reign, lobbyists have attempted to harass and bully her into withdrawing from the pageant, but she has stood her ground.

Beautiful pictures of her in a white bathing suit enjoying the sun at Coral Beach in Eilat were posted on the Miss SA Instagram page. The Miss Universe

organisation has challenged contestants to speak about sustainable fashion and according to the Miss SA Organisation, Mswane has embraced the challenge by using special outfits worn by her predecessors.

She has consistently thanked everyone who has supported her in the run-up to the competition.

The CFI opposed the application for *amicus curiae*. At the time of going to press, court was still in progress.

Lalela Mswane



Experts cautiously optimistic about Omicron

>>Continued from page 1

"This is a drastic change from last year this time, when we had 12 patients already hospitalised out of a total of 47. Close to 90% of our current patients are fully vaccinated, and 5% are partially vaccinated.

"Current patient demographics show that the majority are between the ages of 21 to 30 (30%) followed by 51 to 60 (18%)," she says. "We are expecting an influx of holidaymakers which we have prepared for. We hope that people won't avoid testing to avoid holiday plans being changed or cancelled." At the same time, "rushing out to get a test as soon as you are informed of a positive contact is counterproductive and can result in a false negative. This only compounds the problem. Anyone who has had high-risk exposure should isolate for the full period and test only if they develop symptoms."

Still, the community is being cautious. In Cape Town, the Highlands House Home for the Jewish Aged was locked down to visitors on 26 November. Within the home, it's business as usual. In Johannesburg, Chevrah Kadisha Chief Executive Saul Tomson says, "We have had some new cases in our residential facilities. We caught most early. Many originated from people who were at public hospitals. I think the big differentiator is that virtually all of our staff and residents are vaccinated. We're seeing very mild COVID-19. We're still allowing vaccinated visitors to come in. We've implemented measures to curb the spread inside facilities. We're also doing our best to fast-track boosters for our residents."

Also in Cape Town, general practitioner Dr Orit Laskov who practices in the heart of the Jewish hub of Sea Point says, "We're seeing many positive cases again, including kids. Cases I have seen so far have been mild. It's disheartening still to need to convince patients to get vaccinated."

In Johannesburg, general practitioner Dr Sheri Fanaroff says, "People who are fully vaccinated and have had COVID-19 before are still getting Omicron. We are also seeing shorter incubation times and a lot of

asymptomatic cases. Another trend is that people who are positive with classic symptoms are testing negative initially, both on PCR and in antigen tests. They must still isolate.

"The majority – if not all – the cases I have seen have been very mild," she says. "I have a number of COVID-19 patients over 70 or even 80 years old who are fully vaccinated. We are monitoring them, but so far, none have required hospitalisation or even home oxygen. Most of the blood parameters and oxygen levels remain good. But what we saw with Delta was deterioration from day eight, so I'm hesitant to say that it's definitely milder. We must remain cautious."

So, where to from here? International expert in emergency medicine, Dr Efraim Kramer, says, "Before vaccination, the main strategy was 'virus evasion' by social separation, face masks, hand sanitation, limited mass gatherings, and lockdowns. But in the current era, things are different. Especially in the Jewish community, the rate of vaccination is exceptionally high and many people are post-COVID-19 infection."

"Then came Omicron, and its supersonic transmissibility yet low virulence and illness severity. The huge question with this new threat is how to manage it: COVID-19 evasion versus COVID-19 cohabitation. That is, do we evade the virus, or do we learn to live with it – a new strategy, based on 'get vaccinated, get infected, get on with your life', preferably in that order. This becomes a reality when there is a highly transmissible virus but its mild infective illness results in low hospital admission rates and complications, especially amongst the vaccinated vulnerable."

Kramer says this means factoring COVID-19 into everything one does. "For example, at any wedding, adults exercise their personal autonomy by attending the event, fully conversant of the COVID-19 infective risk. Whichever strategy one chooses – evasion or cohabitation – it's a personal choice and both are correct."



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Get on with living ... cautiously

Too many people I’m close to have COVID-19. My housekeeper, two close friends, my sister and her family, and my rabbi. Go figure!

This is way too close to home. Having said that, home is exactly where we have been since this time last week.

We have been isolating. Doing what it takes to make sure that we don’t pass on this virus that we thought we might or might not have.

“We are sick of COVID-19!” It sounds like the mantra of this community, this country, and possibly the world. And I can’t say there’s any surprise in that.

This is the fourth time we have been bulldozed by this potentially deadly virus. This is the second December holiday that has been sorely impacted by this maddening illness. This is the third time I have had one of those irritating things stuck up my nose in a COVID-19 test. Others have had it done more often. And it’s the umpteenth time my precious plans have been thrown asunder because of this dreaded lurgy. I would so like to shout out that it’s enough, only I dare not do that.

You see, as much as I’m sick and tired of COVID-19, the virus seems to be getting smarter about spreading itself around those I care about. In that group are those who are more vulnerable.

The truth is, I would hate to know that I made anyone sick, especially if they got particularly ill or found themselves in a difficult situation because of me.

I have no desire to play G-d. I have to consider other people – we all do.

This weekend, my family and I were invited to go to a barmitzvah of a dear boy who is my son’s best friend. It was an event we had been looking forward to for ages. It was going to be a barmitzvah party to remember.

The young man was having a joint barmitzvah with his first cousin, whose birthday was just days apart from his.

The reason they were joining forces was because they have close family who live around the world and they wanted them to share in their *simcha*.

So, as you can imagine, first, the overseas family weren’t able to come. Then, the party was postponed, but the boys were still going to go ahead with reading their haftorah.

Only, the last straw was that our rabbi got COVID-19, and that put paid to the barmitzvah at this point.

These friends have been so gracious in accepting the inevitable, as were the young, soon-to-be barmitzvah boys. They learnt a very important lesson that you have to roll with the punches and deal with things not happening the way you want them to.

But though the disappointment was inevitable, the mother of my son’s best friend said, “We want this to be a special day, not a day that will be remembered for making people sick.”

I get that. I guess that was a similar reason for the rabbi of our shul making the decision to shut the shul down until the spike passes.

I know there’s absolutely nothing illegal in having protocol-compliant events. There are still large barmitzvahs, weddings, and other end-of-year functions happening. They may well be run totally according to government protocols, but that doesn’t mean they won’t land up spreading this variant. Who knows? Nobody does, that’s the point.

I cannot say to anyone, “Don’t have your event.” It’s not up to me and, more than that, I understand the need to have some fun. I understand the need to let my hair down. I understand the frustration of living so long under the threat of this dreaded coronavirus.

The idea of dancing at a party or having just plain fun is so enticing.

It’s such a difficult decision to make – to have or not to have an event. It’s difficult to decide to stay home from a restaurant because this variant is so contagious.

We planned a lovely outdoor end-of-year lunch, which we cancelled under advisement. I was so grumpy about it as I really wanted to spend time with my co-workers and our board. But, we did the right thing, albeit the unpopular and irritating thing.

I believe many of us are in a position where we want to do the right thing, but it’s becoming more and more difficult because we are so *gatvol* of living with this constantly mutating virus.

There are many who are questioning whether they should go on holiday, and some have already cancelled.

I’m not one of them. I believe I can safely have a beautiful holiday without putting myself or others under threat of illness. It isn’t that difficult to stay within your little bubble and not get up close and personal with others. Spend time on the beach, but keep your distance. Spend lots of quality time outdoors. Fly a kite. Take a long walk in the fresh air. Get a tan. Relax. Take a deep breath. Enjoy some quiet time with a good book.

Do those things that you don’t have time to do during the year but don’t involve being in close proximity to people without masks. You know the drill. We can all do it, it just takes being conscious and thinking before doing.

I know it’s frustrating to have to think constantly of ways of having fun that don’t involve being surrounded by people. I get it, but the time will come when this dreaded coronavirus is nothing more than the flu.

From all accounts, this strain of COVID-19 is much more contagious than the ones we have seen before, but it doesn’t seem to be making most people very ill. This is a very, very good sign. It appears to signal just what we are hoping for. Exactly when that will be, I can’t say. But it will happen.

So, for now, let’s just go with the flow. Do things consciously. And, most importantly, stay healthy and have a wonderful, relaxing, and peaceful holiday!

We won’t be publishing over the holiday period, but we’ll be back on 13 January 2022.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Clearing the confusion around Omicron

OPINION

PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB



Less than a month ago, the word “omicron” was meaningful only to the Greek community. It’s the 15th letter of the Greek alphabet, leaving only nine letters for future variants. Since Omicron made its debut in mid-November, there has been a deluge of media reporting, more dinner table conversation, and possibly even more social-media communication. One could say that on occasion, information about Omicron may be a tad fanciful or perhaps confusing, if not, maybe, even a trifle contradictory.

To some it will lead to alarm, to others complacency, and to others, perplexity.

So, what have we learnt so far, and what are we in the process of learning? It basically comes down to the uniqueness of this new kid on the block which has caused scientists and authorities to be very guarded in their communication and certainly in their predictions.

What’s so different about the Omicron virus?

1. It’s a completely new variant coming off its own independent evolutionary tree, and therefore unrelated to any other previous variant;
2. It possess far more mutations than any previous variant, more than 30 in the spike protein alone, and more than double that of Delta, previously the infectivity superman of variants;
3. Many of these mutations have never before been seen and, of course, it’s not known how they will affect the personality of the virus; and
4. The constellation of these numerous mutations is also unique.

Clearly, much remains to be unravelled about this mysterious new variant and how these mutations, or combinations of them, could translate into its behaviour.

We are now well into the fourth wave, and it’s clearly being driven by Omicron, so, where we are up to with this newest challenge?

1. How dangerous is Omicron? Is it causing more or less severe disease?

Many of the clinically ill patients infected with Omicron have been mild to moderate. Certainly, the great majority of those infected after vaccination have been mild. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in the incidence of hospital admissions in Gauteng and, to some extent, in KwaZulu-Natal, which reflects the more serious cases. This early pattern was also seen in the early phases of previous COVID-19 waves. The majority of these adult hospital admissions have been in unvaccinated individuals.

What has been striking in this early phase of the fourth wave in Gauteng is the steep rise in the number of hospitalised adolescents and children – steeper than anything seen before. It has been especially notable in the Tshwane metro, where it was reported that the incidence of infection, even in under five-year-old children in public hospitals is second only to that of the over 60-year-old age group. This may well be due to gross under-vaccination of the 12 to 17-year-old age group and absence of vaccination in under 12-year-old children. In addition, apparently very few of the adult carers of these children were vaccinated.

2. How effective is the current vaccine in protecting against Omicron?

An increasing number of breakthrough infections, in other words infections occurring in spite of vaccination, are now being seen with Omicron. Fortunately, in the great majority of these cases, the resulting illness has been mild and, in many cases, the COVID-19 infection was picked up only incidentally. Importantly, we can be reasonably confident that COVID-19 vaccines will be very effective – well over 90% – to protect against severe illness due to Omicron.

The level of protection against mild illness or protection from just simply being infected, would, however, be somewhat less than that – perhaps more like 50% to 60%.

3. How transmissible is Omicron?

One of the very prominent early features of Omicron has been its high transmissibility. The numbers of daily cases nationally have risen dramatically from 169 on 3 November to 273 on 17 November, 4 373 on 1 December, 16 366 on 5 December, and probably much more by the time you read this. The reproductive number – the measure of transmissibility which is determined by the number of susceptible individuals who could be infected by an infectious person – is presently 2.33, the highest it has ever been since the start of the pandemic.

4. Will the Omicron variant replace the Delta variant?

The ability of a virus to multiply in a given environment is referred to as its fitness. This is determined by two properties – transmissibility (i.e. contagiousness) as well as its ability to escape from immunity, both natural immunity which follows infection and also artificial immunity following vaccination. On both transmissibility and immune escape, Omicron betters all its competitors. It’s probably about 50% more contagious even than Delta, the erstwhile champion of variants. It’s probable that Omicron will now outcompete Delta to become the dominant variant in South Africa and likely also globally.



5. How long will this fourth wave last?

Of course, this is something one cannot predict now in this early stage of the fourth wave. Past waves have lasted between 75 to 100 days. There’s good evidence that the fourth wave may not be as severe as the previous three waves because of high levels of vaccine-induced immunity and high levels of post-infection natural immunity. But that may still depend on levels of vaccine coverage as well as attention to the infection-prevention protocols we all know so well.

6. Can we go on holiday, can we have an engagement party, can we go to shul?

The answer is a qualified “yes”. The qualification is provided all attendees are vaccinated, and all of the well-known infection-prevention protocols are diligently carried out. Participating numbers must be limited, functions should be outdoors or, at least, in very well-ventilated indoor venues, proper mask wearing must be enforced, and adequate spacing provided for eating. The elderly and the vulnerable may need to be excluded.

Unfortunately, this year, while it’s a yes for holidays and functions, it shouldn’t be holidays and functions as per usual. Allowances must be made for the poor timing of this fourth wave and this challenging variant.

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

Jewish groups slam ex-SA reporter comparing Fauci to Mengele

TALI FEINBERG

News reporter Lara Logan is known for her shocking statements, but she took it to new heights when she compared Dr Anthony Fauci to Dr Josef Mengele on Fox News on Monday, 29 November 2021.

Fauci is chief medical advisor to United States President Joe Biden. He’s also a physician-scientist and immunologist serving as the director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Mengele, also known as the “Angel of Death”, was a German (SS) officer who tortured and experimented on Jews in the Auschwitz concentration camp. He also selected victims to be killed in the gas chambers and was one of the people who administered the gas.

Logan was born and raised in Durban, South Africa. She’s not Jewish. On Monday, in a rant against pandemic restrictions and concerns in light of the Omicron variant of COVID-19, Logan claimed that many unnamed “people” had told her that Fauci “doesn’t represent science to them, he represents Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor who did experiments on Jews during the Second World War and in the concentration camps.

“And I’m talking about people all across the world [who are] saying this,” she continued. “Because the response from COVID-19, what it has done to countries everywhere, what it has done to civil liberties, the suicide rates, the poverty, it has obliterated economies. The level of suffering that has been created because of this disease is now being seen in the cold light of day, i.e. the truth. And people see that there’s no justification for what’s being done.”

Logan was immediately denounced by several prominent Jewish organisations, including the Auschwitz Museum. “Exploiting the tragedy of people who became victims of criminal pseudo-medical experiments in Auschwitz in a debate about vaccines, the pandemic, and people who fight to save human lives is shameful,” the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial said in a Twitter statement. “It’s disrespectful to victims and a sad symptom of moral and intellectual decline.”

The American Jewish Committee said the comments were “utterly shameful”, and noted that Mengele had earned his “Angel of Death” moniker by performing deadly experiments on Auschwitz prisoners, including many children. “There’s no comparing the hell these victims went through to public-health measures. An apology is needed,” it tweeted. Comparing Fauci to “history’s most sadistic medical experimenter is beyond vile”, said David Harris, the chief executive of the committee.

Jonathan Greenblatt, the chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, said there was “absolutely no comparison between COVID-19 mitigation efforts and what happened to Jews during the Holocaust. This includes making outlandish analogies suggesting Dr Fauci is akin to Nazi war

“
THERE’S NO COMPARING THE HELL
THESE VICTIMS WENT THROUGH TO
PUBLIC-HEALTH MEASURES.
AN APOLOGY IS NEEDED.

criminal Josef Mengele, known for his gruesome medical experiments on prisoners.”

But Logan doubled down on her comments. The day after her comments, she filled Twitter with links to conspiracy theories about Fauci. She also retweeted a user with only one follower who wrote, “Shame on the Auschwitz Museum for shaming Lara Logan for sharing that Jews like me believe Fauci is a modern-day Mengele.” In addition, the Auschwitz Museum said that Logan had blocked it on Twitter.

On Thursday, Fauci called Logan’s comment “absolutely preposterous and disgusting. It’s an insult to all of the people who suffered and died under the Nazi regime in the concentration camps. It’s unconscionable what she said.

“Forget about the fact that she was being totally slanderous to me and, as usual, had no idea what she was talking about,” he continued. “Saying that it’s as benign as flu. When did influenza kill 770 000 Americans?

“So, not only is she being slanderous and disrespectful to so many people who were killed in the concentration camps by

mockery of real evil. Every person should call out such trivialisation and stupidity, not just Jews.”

Logan’s comments came amidst a worldwide trend of comparing COVID-19 restrictions to the Holocaust. Just before a major conference in Malmö in October 2021, where world leaders pledged to further Holocaust remembrance and combat antisemitism, a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation) report warned of this phenomenon.

The report was written by Stefania Giannini, UNESCO assistant director-general for education, and Kathrin Meyer, the secretary general of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Among other points, they explained that “all around the world, opponents of COVID-19 measures invoke the genocide against the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its collaborators to paint themselves as victims and their governments as persecutorial regimes.

“In many cases, Holocaust distortion serves as a bridge between mainstream and more radical ideas. It fans the flames of hate – of antisemitism, conspiracy myths, hate speech, science scepticism, and distrust of democratic institutions, all of which have reached new heights during the pandemic.”

The report points out that “this history is abused, excused, misrepresented, and manipulated. Regardless of its form, Holocaust distortion always helps Holocaust denial, antisemitism, conspiracy myths, and populism to thrive.”

Holocaust distortion can be found at all levels of society and is far from a fringe phenomenon, the UNESCO report emphasises. “Often camouflaged as opinion,

distortion is difficult to identify and frequently goes unchallenged. Nowhere is this clearer than online. This primes people for more radical points of view. Holocaust distortion and its effects – antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and extreme nationalism – are international in scope.

Countering distortion therefore requires an international and interdisciplinary approach that bridges the gap between governments, experts, and civil society.”

The IHRA and UNESCO are therefore jointly launching a new programme to develop training and resources to empower education professionals, policymakers, public servants, and journalists to address and prevent Holocaust distortion.

“Each person has a responsibility to address Holocaust distortion and antisemitism wherever they may encounter it. Everyone has a stake in understanding the accurate lessons of the Holocaust and standing up to hate today,” they conclude.

Logan was formerly a star correspondent at CBS News’ *60 Minutes*. She was forced to take a leave of absence after her erroneous reporting on the 2012 Benghazi attack. She left CBS in 2018. She joined Fox Nation to host *Lara Logan Has No Agenda* in 2020, and has repeatedly engaged in controversy ever since.



Lara Logan

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Fifteen times South Africans didn't care about BDS



BENJI SHULMAN

Although Miss SA Lalela Mswane is the latest high-profile South African to be targeted for visiting Israel, bullying of this kind isn't new. For more than 10 years, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement has been trying and failing to stop South Africans from connecting with the holy land. Before the onset of COVID-19, trade between South Africa and Israel increased during the previous decade. In addition, South Africa remained the top country of



Nadine Gordimer

origin for tourists visiting Israel from Africa. South Africans from all walks of life are connected to Israel and choose to visit for religious, cultural, business, family, and innovation reasons. It's therefore unsurprising that BDS hasn't convinced South Africans to stop interacting with Israel. Here are the top 15 BDS failures in South African history:

- 1. Former President Nelson Mandela** – In 1999, Nelson Mandela decided to visit Israel. Many in his party were opposed to him going. He went anyway, and met several Israeli government ministers. His official visit included a trip to Yad Vashem. He went on to be presented with an honorary doctorate from the University of Ben Gurion;
- 2. DJ Black Coffee** – The award-winning international DJ played in Israel for the third time in 2018. He was criticised by the African National Congress (ANC) for doing so, but responded by saying, "Like everyone

used in South Africa at the time. However, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and BDS were opposed to it in spite of the fact that it had been endorsed by the World Health Organization and the Treatment Action Campaign. "The point isn't whether this device [PrePex] is the best or not. We are saying there should be a wholesale boycott of all products from Israel, including this one. We cannot have exceptions," COSATU said. In response, Thobile Mbengashe, the chief director of HIV and AIDS in the health department, urged COSATU to reconsider its stance saying, "We must leave out politics because what's important right now is saving people's lives";

- 4. Nadine Gordimer** – The South African Nobel Prize winner for literature attended the International Writers' Festival in Jerusalem in 2008. Although considered a critic of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, she faced demands that she not visit the country but she chose to go and call for peace between the parties;
- 5. Mmusi Maimane** – The head of the One South Movement visited Israel while he was leader of the Democratic Alliance in 2017. This angered the ANC and BDS groups, however Maimane said, "The noise shouldn't be about my visits, it should be about the basis of our foreign policy before banning people from going to other countries";
- 6. University of Cape Town** – After three long years, the senate of the top university in Africa voted in 2019 to reject a boycott petition by anti-Israel organisations at the university. Meanwhile, the University of the Free State signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Haifa to do joint research;

- 7. Bruce Fordyce** – The nine-times Comrades winner was pressured by BDS organisations not to run in the Jerusalem Marathon. He ignored them, and reportedly also enjoyed birding and archaeology in the country, his other interests;
- 8. Woolworths** – After fighting between Israel and Hamas took place in 2014, BDS launched a two year-long campaign against Woolworths for selling Israeli tomatoes which involved protesting outside stores. Most notably, at one of the protests, BDS demonstrators placed a pig's head in what they thought was the kosher section of the store. Israeli tomatoes are still widely sold in South Africa;
- 9. Anele Mdoda** – The 5FM radio host visited Israel in 2018 for a family holiday. After posting pictures of herself on the beach, social media followers commented negatively. She responded by saying, "Israel is beautiful. Please do not post your political babble on my page. I am not saying the politics here are pretty, I'm saying the land is beautiful. Please respect my page and my opinions";
- 10. Joburg Mayor Dr Mpho Phalatse** – When she was the MMC for health at the City of Johannesburg, she said the city was a "friend of Israel" at a South African Friends of Israel conference. She was temporarily suspended after an uproar by BDS and the Economic Freedom Fighters pending an investigation, and was subsequently cleared. Today she is the newly elected mayor;
- 11. Former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng** – Another South African who has been attacked for his pro-Israel stance is former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, who said that he loved Israel

because of his Christian faith and that South Africa could play a mediating role between Israel and the Palestinians. A complaint was laid against him with the Judicial Complaints Commission, however he has refused to apologise;

- 12. Elon Musk** – The richest person in the world is a regular investor in Israeli companies and has reportedly called the country a "technological power". When he visited Masada in 2018, he sent out a tweet saying, "live free or die";
- 13. Soccer** – South African footballers are regular players in Israeli teams, including household names like "Terror" Fanteni and Tsepo Masilela. Soccer legend Jomo Sono took things a step further in 2017 and entered a business partnership with an Israel television broadcaster to bring an open-access TV technology to the country;
- 14. Die Antwoord** – Musical and cultural acts often play in Israel. Well known South African rock band Die Antwoord was pressured not to go to Israel in 2018. In response, it issued a cryptic social media video and went on to play to a full house of Israeli fans; and
- 15. Davis Cup, tennis** – In 2018, Israel played South Africa in a Davis Cup tennis tie. BDS tried to block the tournament with a protest but the tournament went ahead. It has recently been announced that South Africa will be playing in Israel in 2022 in the Davis Cup in Tel Aviv.

• *Benji Shulman is the director of public policy for the South African Zionist Federation.*

Ramaphosa's four lies of 2021's apocalypse



HOWARD SACKSTEIN

As the year meanders to a close and the Chanukah candles start to flicker out, I can hear Fleetwood Mac's hit song, "Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies ..." playing in the background. The music is a little dated, but the lesson is timeless. When Barak Obama delivered the Nelson Mandela lecture at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg in 2018, he told the adoring audience, "All politicians lie, but the current president ..." He didn't need to finish the sentence; Donald Trump was still in office. Sitting just behind Obama on the stage, as he delivered his lecture, was our current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, apparently eagerly taking notes. We lap up lies because they make us feel a little better about ourselves. Yes, you don't look fat in those pants and of course, I can't wait to spend the holidays with your family. In 2021, our president perfected the art of lying.

Big Lie 1 – the world is punishing South Africa for our science

As the excited panel of South African scientists eagerly told the world about our discovery of the most mutated version of the COVID-19 virus, you could hear the doors of the world begin to swing shut in the background. Said Ramaphosa, "The least we expected was to be punished by various countries about what we have disclosed very transparently."

So convincing was the argument that the world was punishing us for our good science, that it was parroted on every social-media platform. My Instagram feed contained almost nothing other than stories of our victimhood. Our community leaders and talk show hosts berated Israel for closing its borders to South African Jews who had been so supportive of the Jewish state in times of need and "is this how they repay us?" Now, South Africa loves a good boycott, Miss South Africa participating in Miss Universe in Eilat is one case in point. Ironically, it was Israel that was the first country to trellidor its entrance to South Africans after the announcement of the yet to be named Omicron variant. However, South Africa's announcement of a new

dominant, highly contagious strain of the COVID-19 virus posed an unknown and unquantifiable danger to the rest of the world. Ramaphosa was playing politics not science. Asking the world to sacrifice the gains they had made in vaccination for the sake of tourism was just too much. Much to his dismay, the world ignored him, opting rather to protect their own populations from our Omicron pandemic.

Big Lie 2 – it was the colonists, damn them!

When our president failed to convince the nations to open their flights and air terminals to us immediately, he defaulted to the standard hymn of the African National Congress – European colonists versus African victims. His politics were undercut when fellow formerly colonised African countries Mauritius, Rwanda, Egypt, Morocco, and Angola joined the rest of the world in barring us from visiting. Ramaphosa's visceral reaction was a sense of betrayal. "We would like to have a discussion with them in a way where we would prefer that they do not react like our former colonisers, who are very quick to close Africa down," said Ramaphosa.

But the countries who shunned us were in fact not our colonisers at all, they were Japan, Philippines, Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Chile, Malaysia, Bahrain, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and even our BRICS partners Russia and Brazil. Alas, poor Cyril, our African siblings paid no heed, and decided that we shouldn't have a holiday on the palm-frond beaches of the creole island of Mauritius.

Big Lie 3 – vaccine apartheid

Skipping the country on a little jaunt into West Africa, Ramaphosa was determined to continue to spread the narrative of victimhood. Speaking in Senegal at the Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security, Ramaphosa said, "The greed that they demonstrated is something that is quite ... The lives of people in Africa are just as important as the lives in Europe, in North America, and all over the world ... This

is the type of vaccine apartheid we say must come to an end, because the health of people around the world is at stake." European Council President Charles Michel euphemistically described Ramaphosa's overly emotional outburst as "dramatic". Today, the world is awash with vaccines. By the end of the year, nearly 400 million doses would have been donated to Africa, 100 million by Europe, 50 million by the United States, 107 million by China, and 90 million by the Covax vaccine collective. Most of these vaccines have simply just not found their way into people's arms. The better run African countries have achieved enormously high vaccination rates. By October 2021, Seychelles had vaccinated 72% of its total population, Mauritius 62%, Morocco 48%, and Tunisia 28%. In comparison, at the same time, South Africa sat at a vaccination rate of 14% with 19 million dosages sitting unused in cold storage and a further 20 million diverted to other countries because we simply had no need for them. Today, just less than 15 million South Africans are fully vaccinated out of an eligible cohort of 40 million people. The problem isn't vaccine apartheid, the problem is government's failure to administer inoculations. In a world where words matter, accusing the West of "vaccine apartheid" seems more than dramatic, it seems wholly disingenuous.

Big Lie 4 – the 12 conspirators

The final big lie of 2021 was the president's assertion that the eight days of violence and looting that destroyed the nation in July was the work of 12 agent provocateurs. "We obviously as a government are extremely concerned at what happened here and we are doing everything to deal with it, and it's quite clear that all these incidents of unrest and looting were instigated," Ramaphosa said. Last week, Police minister Bheki Cele

said that though police initially said 12 suspected instigators were behind the violence, the number had now increased to 19. The identities of the conspirators remain a mystery. Arrests of an obscure politician and a radio DJ have



President Cyril Ramaphosa

revealed no masterminds and no grand plan. Although the violence in July was sparked by the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma, the spree of looting that unfolded thereafter was neither planned nor anticipated. Ordinary people saw the opportunity to steal because law and order had broken down, because an incapable state denuded by corruption, incompetence, and maladministration was unable to protect its own citizens. No imaginary dirty dozen or "N-n-n-n-nineteen" will explain the government's wholesale failure. But it's "Dezember" as South Africans like to call it, it's been a long, tough year, so I'm going to pour myself a brandy and Coke, put some Moise's boerewors on the braai, sit back, listen to the Christmas songs composed by some of the greatest Jewish song writers, and resolve, in 2022, to believe all the lies I'm told. That should make for a much easier year ahead. • *Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report board.*



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2021 was so last year

STEVEN GRUZD

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit South Africa in March 2020, everyone thought that the year of lockdowns, masks, and sanitisers would be like no other. We were in for a nasty surprise. 2021 wasn't much better. It proved to be our first full year under COVID-19 restrictions, with more job losses, hospitalisations, and deaths (almost 90 000 in total for the country). Days and months melded into one another – the year has seemed like one interminable Tuesday.

On 6 January, thousands of angry Donald Trump supporters gathered in Washington DC to protest against what they saw as the fraudulent election of Joe Biden. Egged on by Trump, they stormed the United States Capitol where Congress was scheduled to certify Biden's victory. Ugly scenes of violence in the very symbol of American constitutional democracy were broadcast around the world. Five people died. President Trump subsequently survived a second impeachment vote. Like 9/11, the date "January 6th" has entered the language as a shortcut for the astounding events of that day.

In March, global trade was disrupted after the giant container ship the Ever Given was wedged in the Suez Canal

Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett



for six days. And in April, Israel witnessed the tragic death of 45 people at Mount Meron during a Lag B'Omer celebration stampede.

In May, protests in Jerusalem over planned evictions and violence on the Temple Mount triggered 12 days of fighting with Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. More than 4 400 rockets were fired at Israel, which retaliated by hitting Palestinian targets in Gaza through Operation Guardian of the Walls. This was yet another bloody conflict with the extremists ruling Gaza since Israel unilaterally left the territory in 2005.

After four inconclusive elections in two years, Israeli politicians were finally able to hammer out a coalition agreement in June. Naftali Bennett unseated Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister, even though Bennett's Yamina party won only seven out of 120 Knesset seats. If the

government survives, Bennett is meant to cede the post of prime minister to Yesh Atid's Yair Lapid in 2023.

In South Africa in July, former President Jacob Zuma was found guilty of contempt towards the Zondo Commission on State Capture, and was sent to prison. This ignited ten days of deadly riots in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in the worst violence since the end of apartheid. About 342 people died from the unrest, and thousands of shops were looted and destroyed, with the damages estimated to be at least R50 billion. Conspiracy theories continue to swirl around these attacks. Zuma was controversially released on medical parole, but still faces corruption charges for the arms deal in the 1990s.

By 30 August, all United States troops had pulled out of Afghanistan, after 20 years of fighting in a country grimly dubbed "the graveyard of empires". It left many wondering what had actually been achieved, as the Taliban rapidly overran the country in September. The economic situation has rapidly deteriorated, and questions have been raised about the US's diminished global power and reach.

In spite of the pandemic, South Africans went to the polls on 1 November in local government elections. The turnout was poor at just eight million of 26.2 million registered voters. The African National Congress (ANC) dipped well below 50% for the first time, with 47.52% of the national vote, and more than 70 councils had to form multiparty governing coalitions. The smaller parties picked up support at the expense of the ANC and the Democratic Alliance.

In what's sure to stump trivia addicts in decades to come, many sports events originally meant to have been held in 2020 took place in 2021. These included the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, the 2020 UEFA European Championship (won by Italy against England on penalties), and the 2020 Ryder Cup golf showdown, where the US beat Europe emphatically. The Springboks triumphed 2-1 in the rugby series against the British and Irish Lions in empty stadia because of COVID-19, and by the end of the year, regained the top spot in world rugby rankings. The Proteas – sigh, yet again – failed miserably in the T20 Cricket World Cup in October-November.

It wasn't just sporting events that played catch-up. The 2020 Eurovision Song Contest, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), and Expo 2020 in the United Arab Emirates were all held in 2021.

Key anniversaries commemorated included 75 years of the United Nations, 30 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and 10 years since the Arab Spring.

This has been a year that we want to put behind us. We hold out hope that in 2022, we will finally experience a return to something approaching normality if COVID-19 is contained.

- *Steven Gruzd is a political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.*

What to watch out for in 2022

STEVEN GRUZD

It's that time of the year to read the tea leaves and see what 2022 holds in store for us.

The United Nations has declared 2022 as International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. It's also the International Year of Glass. So, keep fish in a tank to cover both bases.

COVID-19 sadly hasn't disappeared, and South Africa will grapple with its fourth wave of the disease well into the new year, driven by the new Omicron variant.

As the coronavirus continues to mutate rapidly, we're going to run out of Greek letters to name variants. Unless the country can vaccinate a much higher proportion of the population (currently at just 24%), we won't get on top of COVID-19 in 2022.

Economists have a generally gloomy outlook for South Africa next year, predicting a weaker rand, high inflation, and continued loadshedding. It's time to invest in a generator or inverter to keep your lights on.


Politically, the fragile coalitions formed in the wake of local government elections will be put to the test. And will we, eventually, receive the report from the Zondo Commission into State Capture and see some senior figures prosecuted?

Israelis will be keenly following the legal proceedings against former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2022. However, taking a leaf from Jacob Zuma's book, he seems likely to delay and prevaricate to draw out his prosecution, using every legal loophole.

2022 is the 55th anniversary of the Six-Day War in 1967. Israel will celebrate the reunification of Jerusalem on Yom Yerushalayim in spite of a new United Nations General Assembly resolution only recognising Palestinian claims to sovereignty over East Jerusalem.

There are flashpoints that might erupt into fighting in 2022, including by Russia against

Ukraine and China against Taiwan. Diplomatic efforts to prevent war will need to be stepped up by the international community. Fighting in Ethiopia, Libya, and Syria will continue to demand international attention, as will unchecked migration across the Mediterranean, from Eastern Europe, and on the United States border with Mexico. African conflicts also displace millions of people within and between countries.



The Winter Olympics

February will mark the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, marking 70 years on the throne for the 95-year-old monarch. This is the longest ever reign of a British sovereign. Her first prime minister was Winston Churchill, and she has been served by 13 others since then.

France goes to the polls in April to see whether Emmanuel Macron can win a second term by fending off challengers from the right and left.

Brazil has an election slated for September, with President Jair Bolsonaro growing increasingly unpopular. South America's largest country will mark its bicentennial from its founding in 1822.

The United States will vote in congressional midterm elections in November. Will the Democratic majorities be upheld in the Senate and House of Representatives, or will there be a swing towards Republicans? Is Donald Trump going to be a factor in these contests? Undoubtedly, the composition of Congress will shape the remainder of President Joe Biden's term.

In terms of milestone anniversaries, 2022 is the 110th year since the sinking of the Titanic, the 100th year since the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb, and the 75th year of independence for Pakistan and India. Egypt will celebrate 100 years of independence from Britain.

2022 marks 80 years since the infamous Wannsee Conference that plotted the genocide against European Jewry, and the 70th year since the first publication of Anne Frank's diary. It will be 50 years since the massacre by Palestinian terrorists of Israeli athletes and coaches at 1972 Munich Olympics, an event commemorated for the first time only at the Tokyo 2020 games (held this year).

It's 25 years since the deaths of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Princess Diana. It's 50 years since the release of *The Godfather*. It's also 500 years since Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan's Victoria became the first ship to circumnavigate the world.

Big sporting events include the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing in February, the first time that the same city will host both summer and winter games. The Commonwealth Games are scheduled for Birmingham in July-August. Qatar will host the 2022 FIFA World Cup in November-December. This is the first time a World Cup is being held in the northern winter, as Qatar is brutally hot in summer.

In 2022, the world and South Africa will continue to battle against the pandemic, and it's likely to remain the biggest news story, with many ups and downs. Get used to loadshedding, rising prices, and economic stagnation.

Finally, the African National Congress's (ANC's) elective conference in December 2022 is also one to watch to see whether Cyril Ramaphosa survives or is replaced as ANC president, a decision that resonates well beyond the party.

- *Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.*

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Tis the season to enjoy a good book

BOOKS

BATYA BRICKER



It may be “the season”, but there’s a crop of superb books with Jewish flavour hitting the bookshelves. The themes vary from the Holocaust to magic, the voices are as diverse as a TikTok corporate from a South African cultural icon, and the range features an historian and an award-winner.

Whatever it is you need this December – comfort, perspective, nostalgia, or even Judaism with a touch of 21st century glamour – you’ll find it between these pages.

What Would You Do if You Weren’t Afraid? Michal Oshman

Michal is what we in the book trade would call “highly marketable”. She’s gorgeous, accomplished, a supermom/wife, and now head of culture at TikTok, the popular social-media app. But behind the uber-successful façade, Michal was beset with deep-seated fears and anxieties. A question emblazoned at the entrance of TikTok, “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” set Oshman, an Israeli-born, secularly-raised Jew, on a life-changing religious and spiritual journey.

Based on her own experience of self-healing, Oshman offers readers a personal growth path based on Jewish and Hasidic concepts. Because of Oshman’s background, her approach isn’t stuffy or precious, and her experience illustrates the universality and timelessness of ancient Torah wisdom in a modern world.

Scatterling of Africa – Johnny Clegg

Just hearing the title of this book gets your foot tapping.

For years, rumours circulated in the book trade about this Very Important Autobiography about to be published. It was worth the wait.

The music, language, and dance of Juluka and later Savuka stirred the hearts of millions across the world. Their music was the soundtrack to many South Africans’ lives during the turbulent 1970s and 1980s as the country moved from legislated oppression to democratic freedom.

This is the story of how it all began – how the son of an unconventional mother, the grandson of Jewish immigrants, came to realise that identity can be a choice and home is a place you leave and return to as surely as the seasons change. The story, as Johnny Clegg wrote it and wanted it told.

The Promise – Damon Galgut

Following in the illustrious footsteps of Nadine Gordimer and

JM Coetzee, Damon Galgut is now the third South African to be recognised with the Man Booker Prize, for his 2021 novel *The Promise*.

In this book, the story of the white Afrikaans Swart family (catch Galgut’s sense of irony) plays out against the background

of a tumultuous South African history over four decades – from the state of emergency in the mid-1980s, to the

triumphalism of the mid-1990s (when we won the rugby world cup), to the fissuring of the non-racial dream under Mbeki, to the abjection of the Zuma years when the “promise” soured.

Galgut said that he wanted the critically acclaimed novel to show the impact of “the passing of time” on a family, a country,

its politics, and “notions of justice”, all while also exploring mortality. And according to the critics, he pulled it off with originality and fluidity of voice.

Books themed around the Holocaust are heart breaking

to read, yet the interest and popularity of this genre never seems to wane even amidst the frivolity of December holidays. Maybe it’s because

no matter how bleak our reality may seem, a book from this period

puts everything into sharp perspective. Or because as a nation with the benefit of two or even three generations behind us, we can look back and process our collective trauma with less raw emotion and more nuance. Possibly it’s because in our darkest hour, moments of triumph, of good winning over evil, give us hope. No matter the reason, here are some new ones to add to your collection:

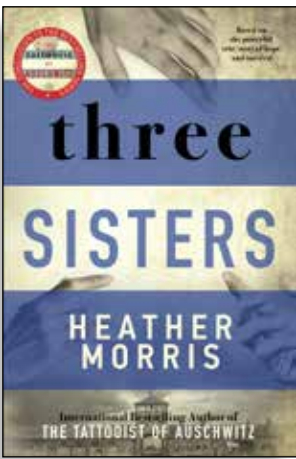
Three Sisters – Heather Morris

From international bestselling author Heather Morris comes the breath taking conclusion to *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* trilogy. Rich in vivid detail and beautifully told, *Three Sisters* will break your heart but leave you amazed and uplifted by the courage and fierce love of three sisters, whose promise to each other amidst the horror of the death camp kept them alive. Two of the sisters are in Israel today, surrounded by family and friends. They have chosen Heather Morris to reimagine their story in her astonishing new novel. Heather Morris’ books linger for weeks on bestseller lists both here and abroad, and no doubt this third will too.

The Dressmakers of Auschwitz – Lucy Adlington

At the height of the Holocaust, 25 young inmates of the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp – mainly Jewish women and girls – were selected to design, cut, and sew beautiful fashion for elite Nazi women in a dedicated salon, a fashion workshop called the Upper Tailoring Studio. It was work that they hoped would spare them from the gas chambers.

Drawing on diverse sources including interviews with the last surviving seamstress, *The Dressmakers of Auschwitz* follows the fate of these brave women



and their part in camp resistance. A book about the greed, cruelty, and hypocrisy of the Third Reich and a fresh look at a little-known chapter of World War II and the Holocaust.

A touch of Alice Hoffman magic

Alice Hoffman’s seasonal offering is *The Book of Magic* – a stunning, unforgettable conclusion to the beloved *Practical Magic* series, but for me, it’s in the book *The World that We Knew*, that Alice Hoffman truly perfects her alchemy.

In Berlin in 1941, at a time

when the world changed, Hanni Kohn knows she must send her 12-year-old daughter away to save her from the Nazi regime. She finds her way to a renowned rabbi, but it’s

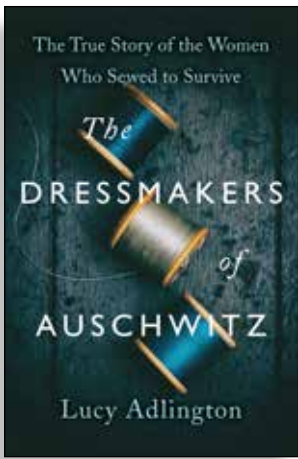
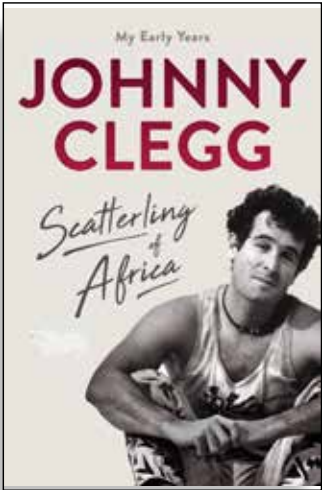
his daughter, Ettie, who offers hope of salvation when she creates a mystical Jewish creature, a rare and unusual golem, who is sworn to protect



Lea. Once Ava is brought to life, she, Lea, and Ettie become eternally entwined, their paths fated to cross, their fortunes linked.

Only Alice Hoffman could pull off so adroitly this heady mix of historical fiction, magic realism, and fantasy, the imagined and the mortal.

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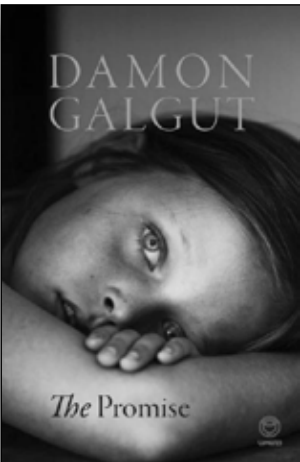
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Farewell to the doyen of diabetes

TRIBUTE

“So you have diabetes? Remember, diabetes isn’t a disease. It’s a condition that will make you live healthier.” These are the first words my traumatised parents and I heard when we met Professor Larry Distiller after my unexpected diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes at the age of 14.

We were guided by him on the lifetime of injections, finger-pricks, and dietary restrictions that would follow. His ability to turn crisis into calm epitomised who Distiller really was – a man who envisaged turning diabetes into a manageable condition, with which patients could live normally, free of its wretched complications.

The diabetes community in South Africa and abroad this week had the unexpected news of the sudden passing of this doyen of diabetes. Tributes, condolences, and messages of disbelief have flooded every relevant space since.

Distiller, a self-made man from humble beginnings, completed his Bachelor of Science degree, medical degree, physician specialty training, and sub-specialty in endocrinology at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and soon became a dreamer. He understood that enabling patients to control their diabetes and transferring the financial risk of poor control to their healthcare team was the most efficacious and cost-effective method to control the diabetes pandemic, which has reached alarming proportions worldwide.

Distiller founded the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology (CDE) in Parktown in 1995, and brought to South Africa the concept of the diabetes-team approach.

Every patient would need not only a physician but an educator, dietician, biokineticist, podiatrist, and possibly even a psychologist to ensure diabetic longevity. The results of improved diabetes control in the community spoke for themselves, and under his quest to rally healthcare funders to adopt this approach, his CDE has grown in 25 years into an empire that has touched and saved thousands and thousands of lives.

“Thank you Larry for keeping me alive and well for 44 years” were the words spoken by Rabbi Anthony Gerson, a patient of Distiller’s as he paid his respects at his funeral drizzling with rain and tears at Westpark Cemetery on Sunday.

Surrounded by Distiller’s colleagues, family, and patients, Gerson announced, “Larry is dancing in the rain.” Indeed, he must have been as he finally saw the difference he had made in the world from a new vantage point.

Professor Roy Shires, a fellow endocrinologist from Wits and a man not many could educate any further, described Distiller as the pre-eminent voice on diabetes in South Africa. “I looked up to Larry, and he taught me throughout my career.”

For many years, Professors Distiller, Shires, Harry Seftel, and Barry Joffe travelled regularly to the Society of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes in Pretoria, where they gained knowledge to share. “Larry was a great inspiration,” Professor Shires said.

Dr Stan Landau, a fellow physician at the CDE, posted on social media about his devastation at Distiller’s passing, describing him as his “long-term mentor, teacher, and friend and a giant amongst his peers”. Dr Debbie Gordon, an endocrinologist formerly at the CDE and now practicing in Melbourne, described Distiller as “a pioneer of the approach to truly caring for patients’ well-being. He was a fair man – with a firm, but kind hand ... a force not to be reckoned with.”

She reflected on Distiller’s faith in her abilities, and spoke of his later selfless encouragement of her to pursue overseas

opportunities even to the detriment of the practice in Johannesburg. She admitted to their “Kit-Kat breaks” on a Friday afternoon that grew her bond with “this gentle giant”.

Grant Newton, the current chief executive of the CDE, and Shelley Harris, public-relations officer and long-term colleague, shared the sentiment that even though Distiller didn’t always verbally address the crowds, he didn’t need to, his stately presence achieved this. They spoke of the legacy he left, and of the revolutionary projects the CDE was undertaking, which would now go ahead without him but still be led vicariously by his calm, unwavering principles of leadership.

Distiller was far more than just a professional. He married Brenda, an actor best known for her “Cremora, it’s not inside, it’s on top” advertisement, and built a marriage that shone with love and affection. He cultivated a family that appreciated sport and wildlife. His children, Natasha, Greg, and Kevin, and his six grandchildren were the real focus of his soul. Two years after Brenda suddenly passed away, he married Barbara in 2019. She became the new focus of his affection.

Kevin, his younger son, described him to me as not only a father but a father figure to so many. “In spite of his impact, he remained

Dr Debbie Gordon, boxer Flo Simba, and Professor Larry Distiller



humble, generous, kind, and committed to his values,” he said.

CDE biokineticist Andrew Heilbrunn expressed gratitude for Distiller’s mentorship since 1992 – a relationship that included Distiller’s speech at Heilbrunn’s wedding and the advice he still draws from it.

I wrote this piece because Distiller was my personal hero. He saved my parents from the trauma of their only child becoming diabetic at a time when modern information on diabetes management was rather

inaccessible.

He looked after my diabetes for 27 years, promising me that if I followed his guidance, I would remain healthy until I became old. I’m distraught that I could prove to him how correct he was only until my 40s.

Distiller inspired me to become a doctor. We all have role models when we embark on formidable challenges. He was mine. Envisioning my potential to touch diabetic lives as a diabetic myself, he encouraged and sponsored me to do my postgraduate

DR DANIEL ISRAEL



training in diabetes at Cardiff University, one of two universities where he held an honorary professorship.

Throughout my career, the buck has always stopped with him. With his deep commitment to evidence-based medicine, he was always the voice that distinguished fact from fiction in my patient care.

Distiller and I spoke about me contributing weekly time to practicing at the CDE in Houghton for some time now. I saw him for a regular check-up two months ago, and this time, he insisted on my commitment to practice diabetology at his centre for some sessions next year. I agreed, but had no idea that it would be without him. He has truly left an unfillable void in my life.

Darren Basserabie, a diabetic patient of Distiller for 30 years so poignantly told me that being cared for by Distiller was knowing that “the world expert was at your back, and his perspective would be spot on”. Every diabetic treated by him agrees. In his own words, Distiller lived “as strong as an ox”. With his everlasting legacy, he died “as strong as an ox” too. The world of diabetes will always be powered by that strength.

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

Sweet enough without the sugar – savouring life as a diabetic

PERSONAL STORY

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY



It’s why grocery shopping is a minefield. It’s why watching the cooking channel can be torturous. It’s why I stood in a queue for more than five hours to get my first COVID-19 vaccine. Hi. I’m Gillian, and I have Type 2 diabetes.

In all my years of visiting my dear family doctor, I never thought I’d be swearing in his office. Not at him, mind you, but within his earshot. When you’re a committed chocoholic and your doctor tells you that you have diabetes, I think it’s a justifiable reaction. That and crying. But all he did, as I immediately apologised, is adjust his *yarmi* and give me a look of genuine empathy.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve had a sweet tooth. It’s become somewhat of a running joke that when it comes to my eating habits, I’m a bit of an overgrown kid. I only eat white bread. I’ve been known to hide in the pantry eating chocolate slabs so my children can’t find me to claim a block. Fanta Grape is one of my favourite beverages. I’ve even made my husband bring me back a slice of icing-laden birthday cake from more than one kiddie birthday party that I’ve missed. And as for much of the vegetable family, let’s just say we haven’t always been on the best of terms.

I’ve also never been much of a fitness fundi. Running – and I use the word loosely – up and down the stairs after my kids has pretty much summed up my exercise regimen for the past few years. In my younger days, I was blessed with a fantastic metabolism. And although it’s slowed down, especially in my 30s, the fact that I’m quite tall has always been an advantage when it comes to weight gain. Breastfeeding my two sons was a great slimming tool as well. So, although I may have put on a few kilos here and there, I’m lucky enough never to have had a serious weight problem. That’s why indulging in some unhealthy cravings was never much of a problem. Or so I thought.

You’d think that with all these bad habits, I’d have anticipated diabetes. But while my diet and inactivity undoubtedly played a part, even the doctors were slightly puzzled. I wasn’t excessively overweight; I have no family history of diabetes – which is often the case with sufferers; I didn’t have gestational diabetes during either of my pregnancies; and my sugar levels a year before my diagnosis were completely normal. I was also 37 when I was diagnosed last year, and those at the

greatest risk for Type 2 diabetes are 45 and over. Yet, here we are.

Obviously developing diabetes – a noted COVID-19 comorbidity – in the thick of the pandemic was a real concern. But what I found far more difficult to handle were the lifestyle changes I was forced to make. When it comes to diabetes,



medication isn’t enough. You have to cut out sugar, lose the unhealthy carbs and fats, load up on the veggies, and exercise regularly. For me, it was a struggle. To be honest, it often still is.

These kinds of changes don’t happen seamlessly. The few months that followed my diagnosis were an emotional rollercoaster. Coming off sugar was incredibly hard. Sugar withdrawal – it’s a real thing – came with weeks of headaches, bloating, cravings, and depression. My regular pick-me-up when I’m feeling down or stressed, namely chocolate, wasn’t an option. I remember resentfully munching carrots, slamming them into hummus and fighting back tears, while others at a small party we attended enjoyed bulkas and cupcakes.

While my instinct as a journalist is to do loads of research, I’ve basically banned myself from reading too much about the disease. In the early days, when I started delving into all the possible risks that come with diabetes, I’d panic. I quickly abandoned a book that spoke of how the diagnosis was once a death sentence – even though that’s clearly no longer the case, thank G-d. So, while

I’m far from ignorant, I’m not overloaded with information either. For me, protecting my mental health has been almost as important as managing my physical health.

With the support of amazing family and friends, I’ve somehow managed to adjust. I go for walks

and do exercise videos, sometimes with my boys jumping enthusiastically by my side – always a bonus. I always add veggies to lunch and supper. I generally only drink water. I’ve found healthier alternatives for some of my favourite foods. If you’re looking for a graded list of sugar-free chocolate brands, I’m your girl. I can fit into jeans I haven’t worn for a decade – one of the few welcome side effects. I’m glad I’m healthier.

But let’s not kid ourselves. Almost a year on, this lifestyle still doesn’t come naturally to me. I sometimes skip the exercise. I allow myself a sugary indulgence – or two – on weekends, and relish each bite like never before. I’m not trying to be the perfect example of how to handle diabetes. I know I’ll never be. But I’m trying my best.

And it’s paying off. At a recent visit to my endocrinologist, a year after my diagnosis, my tests revealed that my overall sugar levels are back within normal range. The diet and exercise are here to stay but I’m in a much better position than I was a year ago. As I prepare to enter 2022 with my beloved family, I know my life is sweet enough without the sugar – bar the occasional bulka.

A close-up portrait of a middle-aged man with a grey beard and mustache, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light-colored shirt, and a patterned tie.

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TALI FEINBERG

In the time when Dr Nir Tsuk visited South Africa, the country went from barely any COVID-19 cases a day to a rapidly increasing fourth wave. Tsuk was here on behalf of the Jewish Agency to talk about “Adaptive innovation in times of disruption”, and the circumstances couldn’t have reflected this need more clearly.

“A year and a half ago, the world stopped. Life was uncertain to begin with, now it’s even more so,” said Tsuk. “Reality is a disrupter. After COVID-19, it will be climate change, politics, and the economy. We all need to be adaptive innovators. That doesn’t mean we need to be Elon Musk. But without innovation, we may not be able to see ageing parents, send our kids to school, or retain a job. Innovation is now much more adaptive and reactive. It’s coming from the bottom up. We don’t have time to wait for governments. It’s about working with what you have. Innovation used to be a ‘nice to have’. Now it’s a critical path.”

Tsuk is New York University’s Global Distinguished Scholar and the founder of the Institute for Impact and Intrapreneurship. He is also visiting professor of entrepreneurship at University of Osaka. He has more than 20 years of international experience in the fields of social capital, entrepreneurship, and building a culture of innovation.

He shared a story about car company Audi, where his brother is a marketing director.

“When Audi saw there was a shortage of ventilators at the beginning of the pandemic, it converted one of its assembly lines which made windscreen wipers into an assembly line to manufacture ventilators. Both used the same engine. Were they the best or most

sophisticated ventilators? No. Did they work? Yes. Did they create a solution to a new problem? Absolutely. They took a week to convert it into a ventilator assembly line. They made ventilators for a month. And when the need eased up, they converted it back to an assembly line for windscreen wipers. It was from the bottom up, a reactive solution to a new problem.”

We’ve seen this in our own “lockdown lives” around the world and how this has sometimes improved situations or even made businesses boom. Often the innovations are necessities, not goals. But they work to allow life to continue in a “new normal”, Tsuk said.

“Disruption” is the word of the moment, but what exactly does it mean? “On a continuum, innovation makes things better, entrepreneurship creates new solutions to new problems, and disruption makes the old solution become completely irrelevant,” Tsuk said.

Looking at companies like Amazon, Tesla, and Apple, he noted that they all disrupted the previous status quo, but something like the printing press was a disruptor with the force of all of these combined. So disruption isn’t new. In addition, disruptive tools are often made up of old tools combined in new ways. “For example, everything that Apple used to combine into an iPhone already existed. They just put it together in a beautiful new way.”

Creating new things to make the old obsolete is generally the “holy grail” of disruption. However, in a pandemic, this changes slightly. Now, it’s more about adapting internally, as there isn’t time to build something entirely new.

Also, it’s about survival. Something that existed before COVID-19 may not survive unless forced to adapt. The new version may not be perfect, it may use only rudimentary systems or tools, or it may only be a temporary measure. But it’s better to be able to pivot than to wait to develop something perfect.



Dr Nir Tsuk

Tsuk said failure is a key part of entrepreneurship innovation and disruption. “Fail fast and learn faster. Studies show that entrepreneurs who fail in their first attempt succeed five times more than those who don’t. As my colleagues say, sometimes I win, sometimes I learn. Learning from failure is not emphasised strongly enough.”

Looking “outside the box” at how things can connect is another way to create something new. For example, in Israel, the army has developed a tool that’s used on the Gaza border to listen for repetitive noises that could signal the digging of a tunnel. They then found that the same invention could detect insects digging tunnels in trees, which they could use to improve agriculture. “This

is the arc of combination – connecting two completely unconnected fields, and allowing one innovation to help both.”

Tsuk said that change often needs to come from the bottom rather than the top. Especially in a pandemic, we cannot necessarily wait for our governments or leaders to act. Essentially we’re on our own, and this can lead to great innovation and rapid change. In ten years’ time, the way we govern ourselves may look very different. This is because the unspoken contract between people and politicians is changing in the face of COVID-19 regulation.

He pointed out that the divide between social and business ventures is shrinking, and they are both using more of the same tools for problem solving and risk taking. “Intrapreneurship” means finding new solutions for an existing entity. He often sees organisations that need an internal revolution rather than to create an entirely new organisation. He would advise Jewish community organisations to focus on intrapreneurship rather than the more external entrepreneurship. With limited resources, disruption and change can take place inside an organisation, without needing to dismantle it altogether.

If we look at the last global disaster of World War II, according to Tsuk, it led to great loss but also incredible technological and social innovation. For example, women were called to the factories when men went to the front – a huge boost for the feminist movement.

He ended his presentation by sharing an image of a billboard he saw with an advert from an orthodontics group. A woman is wearing a mask alongside the words, “Best time ever to get braces!” For him, that’s the “pure magic” of a company adapting to new circumstances and turning them to their advantage.

“When you can’t control what’s happening, challenge yourself to control the way you respond to what’s happening,” he says. “That’s where the power is.”

Cool, outdoor, COVID-19-safe things to do in December

Johannesburg
Feed the ducks and take a boat out on Zoo Lake
Rent a rowboat and take some seeds along to the Zoo Lake to feed the ducks and geese. The rowboats can fit up to six people. You'll have a great time paddling about. The boat club is open from 09:30 to 17:00 from Tuesday to Sunday. Cost: A minimum charge of R15 per boat. www.zoolake.org
Visit Melville Koppies Reserve
This nature reserve and heritage site is in the heart of Joburg. It provides great views of the three-million-year-old ridges that made up the Johannesburg landscape. Cost: R80 per adult in the controlled access hiking area. www.mk.org.za
Explore Honeydew Mazes
There's so much fun to be had exploring mazes, secret gardens, and completing mind-bending quizzes. The Mazes are open every weekend and most public holidays. Cost: R150 per adult, R100 per child. www.honeydewmazes.co.za
Take a picnic to the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens waterfall
Take a break from Jozi's bustling city and venture into the peaceful cover of the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens, a 30-minute drive from the CBD. Cost: Adults R65, free for children under the age of six. www.sanbi.org

Cape Town
Cycle along the promenade
Rent a bike from Up Cycles at the Sea Point Pavilion, and explore Cape Town at your own pace.
Take a hike up Lions Head
The free Lions Head hike is a hit with locals and visitors. For the price of a bottle of water and a packet of chips, you enjoy unsurpassed views from the top of the city's second most iconic mountain.

The Boomslang at Kirstenbosch
On the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, Kirstenbosch Gardens is internationally acclaimed as one of the seven most magnificent botanical gardens in the world. The aerial walkway offers a fresh perspective over the lush gardens. Contact: 021 799 8800
Pick strawberries at Polkadraai Farm
Just a short day trip out of town, enjoy strawberry picking at Polkadraai Farm near Stellenbosch. Fun for all ages. Contact: 021 881 3303



Durban
The Skycar at Moses Mabhida Stadium
Take the Skycar, a single cabin that runs up steel tracks on the northern arch of the stadium, up to the Big Sky Walk along the arch of the stadium for the most amazing views. www.mmstadium.com
Visit Mini Town
Durban's Mini Town is fun for kids and grown-ups. www.mini.co.za
Mitchell Park Zoo
Mitchell Park Zoo used to be an ostrich farm but now houses crocodiles, buck, meerkats, cranes, flamingos, wallabies, monkeys, and tortoises. Contact: 031 303 2275
Try surfing at Addington Beach
Grab a board and do as the locals do on Addington Beach. There are plenty of surf shops to book a private or group lesson.

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The eight greatest Jewish sport miracles of all time

JACOB GURVIS, EMILY BURACK – JTA

This Chanukah, we’re celebrating Jewish sport miracles. We picked one for each of the holiday’s eight nights, plus one for the shamash. Our only criteria? Each moment had to feel miraculous – think underdogs, defying all odds, and incredible feats of athletic skill.

Night one: Sue Bird at the buzzer in 2001. Close your eyes. It’s the Big East Tournament Championship in March 2001, between two women’s college basketball powerhouses: the University of Connecticut Huskies and the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. With a few seconds left to play, star Jewish guard Sue Bird grabs the ball from a free throw rebound and sprints down the court. She stops inside the paint and shoots a fadeaway that gives the Huskies the win at the buzzer.

Bird’s buzzer-beater has gone down in history as one of the best shots of all time.

Night two: Diego Schwartzman defeats the “King of Clay” – on clay – in 2020. On 19 September 2020, Jewish tennis player Diego Schwartzman achieved the nearly impossible, he defeated “King of Clay” Rafael Nadal on a clay court in the Italian Open quarterfinals.

In their tenth meeting, Schwartzman stunned Nadal in straight sets after losing his nine previous matches to the Spanish player who has dominated the surface like no other tennis player in history.

Night three: Linoy Ashram becomes the third Israeli to win gold at the Olympics – by 0.15 of a point in 2021. At the postponed Tokyo Olympics, the 22-year-old won gold in the all-around rhythmic gymnastics competition, narrowly beating her Russian competitor, scoring just 0.15 of a point



Linoy Ashram

higher than Dina Averina. Ashram became the first Israeli woman to ever win a gold medal. If 0.15 of a point isn’t a miracle, what is?

Night four: Julian Edelman’s catch in the fourth quarter of Super Bowl LI in 2017. With his New England Patriots down 28-20 with 2:28 left in the fourth quarter (they had been down 28-3), Julian Edelman reeled in one of the greatest catches in Super Bowl history.

During what would become the game-tying drive, Edelman fought off three Atlanta Falcons defenders to make a miraculous catch in the middle of the field, one that seems more improbable with each replay. Tom Brady’s pass was swatted in the air by a Falcons cornerback, causing Edelman and three defenders to collide into a pile on the ground, limbs pointing in all directions, with each player trying to find the football. Edelman somehow kept his concentration and got his hands around the ball, weaving through the arms and legs of his opponents to grip Brady’s 23-yard pass. Even a last-second bobble wasn’t enough to break Edelman’s focus.

Night five: Aly Raisman makes an epic Olympic comeback as captain of the United States gymnastics Final Five team. At the 2012 London Olympics, gymnast Aly Raisman became a Jewish sports legend when she performed her floor routine to *Hava Nagila* and won gold.



Photo: Jamie Schwaberow/NCAA Photos Via Getty Images

Guard Sue Bird (10) of the University of Connecticut drives to the hoop against guard Niele Ivey (33) of Notre Dame during the Division I Women’s basketball semi-finals held at the Savvis Center in St Louis

After the Games, she took a break from competing, but in 2014, her comeback was swift. She was named to the 2016 US Olympic women’s gymnastics team, becoming one of only two US women – alongside Gabby Douglas – to make back-to-back Olympic gymnastics teams since 2000. So why a miracle? There was her age – at 22 in Rio, she was the oldest member of Team USA. But as we found out a little over a year after the Rio Olympics, Raisman had also been a victim of sexual abuse by Olympic physician Larry Nassar. She became one of the strongest voices speaking out against Nassar in the years following.

Night six: Team Israel finishes sixth in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. Entering the 2017 World Baseball Classic (WBC), Team Israel was ranked 41st in the world – the ultimate underdog. ESPN called the squad “the Jamaican bobsled team of the WBC”. The team’s odds to win the tournament were 200-1. Talk about David versus Goliath. But the group, made up of mostly American Jewish ballplayers like Sam

Fuld and Ty Kelly, pulled off an improbable four-game winning streak in the international tournament, beating several of the top-ranked teams in the world.

Night seven: Mark Spitz wins seven gold medals in the 1972 Olympics. In what is now commonly referred to as the Munich Massacre, 11 Israeli athletes and coaches were held hostage and killed by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

But those summer games also witnessed one of the most dominant runs of any Olympic athlete: Jewish swimmer Mark Spitz won seven gold medals, setting a world record in each competition. He won the 100m freestyle, 200m freestyle, 100m butterfly, 200m butterfly, 4×100m freestyle relay, 4×200m freestyle relay, and 4×100m medley relay. Spitz’s seven gold medals in one Olympics set a record which stood for a fitting 36 years until Michael Phelps’ eight golds in 2008.

Night eight: Annie Cohen Kopchovksy bikes around the world in 1894. In June 1894, at the age of 23, Annie Cohen Kopchovksy set off from her home in Boston, leaving her husband and three small children, to journey around the world – by bicycle. A Jewish immigrant from Latvia, she called herself Annie Londonderry after her sponsor, the Londonderry Lithia Spring Water Company of New Hampshire. Her journey took her around the world and was a huge accomplishment for women’s athletics.

The shamash: Sandy Koufax and the 1965 World Series. In the long and rich history of Jews and sports, there remains one player, one moment, one feat, that eclipses them all. The cherry on top. The icing on the cake. The shamash on our Jewish sports chanukiah: Sandy Koufax and the 1965 World Series.

Koufax is perhaps best known for that game he didn’t pitch. After a dominant 1965 season – for which he would win his second Cy Young Award – Koufax famously declined to pitch Game 1 of the World Series for the Los Angeles Dodgers because it fell on Yom Kippur. Koufax would go on to pitch Game 2, holding the Minnesota Twins to two runs over six innings, while striking out nine. The oil didn’t run out from there. On just two days of rest, Koufax took the mound for Game 7, and boy, did he pitch! Koufax hurled a complete game shutout, giving up just three hits while striking out 10. He was named World Series MVP (Most Valuable Player).

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Behind the scenes of a South African-born acting icon

NICOLA MILTZ

To most people, he was Sir Antony Sher, one of Britain's finest stage actors who was internationally renowned for tackling the toughest Shakespearean roles with successful stints on the big and small screen.

To his beloved family in South Africa, he was “just Ant”, not a “Sir” knighted by the Queen for his contribution to theatre or a celebrated thespian who graced the world’s most famous playhouses. They just saw him as a humble, reserved, and warm man who loved Cape Town with all his heart and visited as often as he could.

Sher died last week of cancer at the age of 72. His illness was reported in September, when the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) announced that its artistic director, Sher’s husband, Greg Doran, would be taking compassionate leave to care for him at the couple’s Stratford-upon-Avon home.

“In the United Kingdom [UK], they called him Tony. Here he was Antony, a loved son, brother, uncle, cousin, and friend,” said his niece, Monique Sher, this week.

“I fondly referred to him as ‘Sir Uncle’. He once jokingly teased I should be calling him ‘Sir Doctor Uncle’ because I think he received three honorary doctorates,” she said.

While the theatre world mourned Sher’s untimely passing, his family took time to reflect on his “magnificent life well lived”.

“He was a very lucky man whose passion became his job, and he was good at it,” said Monique. “He died too young at 72, but he had an amazing, wonderful, full life.”

She said Sher and Doran, who directed him in many plays, loved to travel and went everywhere together.

“From the gorillas in Uganda to my late great-grandfather’s village in Lithuania, they travelled a lot.”

Not only was Sher a hugely celebrated actor, he was a fine artist and the accomplished author of several books.

“He got to do it all. What a great life he had!” she said.

Monique’s father, Randall Sher, said he was hoping to see his late brother soon in London. “Antony and I were very close – as close as brothers could be,” he said.

“Antony called me from the UK most Sundays at about 18:00. We were always on the same page. I cannot remember having any disagreements with him,” he said.

Sher was one of four siblings including Randall, the eldest, then their sister Verne, Antony in the middle, followed by Joel, the youngest.

The children were born and raised in Sea Point, where the boys attended Sea Point Primary and High School.

Their parents, Mannie and Margery, were very supportive of Sher, visiting him annually in London and accompanying him when Sher was knighted.

“There was a big leaning towards the theatre in our home because our mother was mad about it,” said Randall. “We were very much a theatre-going family although my father fell asleep from the minute the curtain was raised until the end. He would often attend Antony’s performances in London only to sleep through the entire show.”

As a child, he said Antony was “withdrawn and quiet”.

“He was very artistic and liked to do his own thing. He had one or two good friends. but liked to stay pretty much to himself. He was very talented, and it was often a toss-up over whether he should pursue acting or art as a career,” he said.

After completing compulsory military service, Sher moved to London at the age of 19 to study drama and acting. After stints with various performance schools, his professional career began at the Liverpool Everyman Theatre before he moved to the RSC in 1982.

It took him years to forge an identity he was comfortable with. He’s quoted in *The Times* as saying, “Gay, Jewish, white South African, that’s three minority groups. I wasn’t ready to come out as gay. Jewish I was a bit worried about because I couldn’t see any examples of great leading classical actors who were Jewish, and white South African was a problem because my political education didn’t really start until I got here [Britain] and I suddenly realised I’d been part of one of the most abhorrent societies on earth.”

From the RSC, a career as one of the greatest stage actors of his time began. His many tributes all mention his astounding 1984 performance as the titular king in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* as his breakthrough. He would win the Laurence Olivier Award – the most prestigious theatre award in the UK – for the performance as well as for his diverse portrayals including a drag artist in

Harvey Fierstein’s *Torch Song Trilogy*. In his acceptance speech, he quipped, “I’m very happy to be the first actor to win an award for playing both a king and a queen.”

Sher went on to win once more in 1997. He toured the country performing with the RSC, and also appeared in television and film productions.

One of Sher’s favourite longstanding family traditions was to jump off the imposing granite rocks into the icy sea at Saunders’ Rocks Beach in Bantry Bay.

“Once he did it on the way to the airport after one of his visits,” said Monique.

Though the family wasn’t religious, they would always get together for meals on Friday nights and high holidays.

Upon hearing the news of his passing, Prince Charles paid tribute to Sher, calling him a “great man and an irreplaceable talent”. In a statement posted on his official website, he wrote that he was “deeply saddened” by the news.

“As the president of the Royal Shakespeare Company, I had the great joy and privilege of knowing him for many years, and admired him enormously for the consummate skill and passion he brought to every role,” Prince Charles wrote. “My most treasured memory of him was as Falstaff in a brilliant production of Greg Doran’s. I feel particularly blessed to have known him, but we have all lost a giant of the stage at the height of his genius.”

Sher was a prolific writer, with novels such as *Middlepost* (1989) named after the blink-and-you-miss-it town founded by his grandfather when the family arrived



The Sher family: Randall, Verne, Antony, and Joel (at the back)

in South Africa in the early 1900s; an autobiography titled *Beside Myself* (2001); and theatre-diaries-cum-acting manuals for young actors including *Year of the King* (1985), chronicling his role in *Richard III*; *Year of the Fat Knight* (2015) about working on *Falstaff*; and *Year of the ‘Mad King’* (2018) after his portrayal of King Lear which earned him the 2019 Theatre Book Prize.

His lifelong “work-and-life” friend, well known South African theatre director Janice Honeyman, described Sher as her “theatre-hero”, her “soul-brother, buddy, colleague, thinker, perfectionist, personal teacher, inspiration, and consummate artist” whom she had known since childhood.

In a tribute to her friend in the *Sunday Times*, she said, “You have always been pure pleasure to direct – you

showed willingness to go anywhere I led you, you were greedy for direction, for exploration, for personalising the role, internalising, finding the intimate and infinite detail in the writing, every aspect of your character, and ever-eager for more and more notes to work on! Have you any idea, Tony, how stimulating and gratifying that is for any director?”

Another of his closest friends and colleagues, celebrated actor, activist, and playwright, John Kani, said he was “gutted and left breathless” by the news.

Ironically, Kani last worked with Sher on Kani’s *Kunene and the King*, the story of an actor trying

to get to play King Lear while dying of liver cancer, directed by Honeyman.

Sher’s great-nephew, Joshua Maughan, posted on Facebook, “Not only was he a great uncle, but a mentor and role model who helped me to navigate some of the most transformative moments in my life. It seems more pertinent than ever that the first text we worked on together was *Richard III* where we sat, overlooking Cape Town’s endless oceans, discussing the stark reality of mortality and how tangible life feels. I will always carry an indescribable amount of love and gratitude for all you were and all you did. I have no doubt that you’re sipping a strong [as it should be] G&T with the Bard upstairs. I miss you already.”

Elliot Wolf, the mannered *mensch* who inspired King David

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“I never married and I never had my own children, but I’ve been blessed with thousands who, in return, provide me with so much pleasure and pride that I could wish for nothing better.”

These words by the late Elliot Wolf in a documentary made in 2015 perfectly sum up his relationship with the 7 395 pupils he encountered either as a teacher or headmaster at King David High School Linksfield.

And they resonated through the webinar that the King David Schools’ Foundation hosted in tribute to him on Tuesday, 7 December.

Wolf gave 33 years of service to King David High School Linksfield (KDHSL) as a teacher, deputy head, and headmaster.

Thousands of people felt the loss of his sudden passing at the beginning of last month, said his twin brother, Jeffrey Wolf. “Thousands for whom he was both an icon of Jewish education and the Jewish community.”

Wolf and his brother grew up in Yeoville, Johannesburg. In 1956, they graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand, majoring in English, Latin, and Hebrew. Two years later, Wolf started a ten-year spell as a teacher at Parktown Boys High School.

In 1968, the Wolf twins crossed professional paths for the first time when KDHSL Principal Norman Sandler recruited them as Latin and English teachers. By 1974, they had become twin headmasters, with Jeffrey serving as the principal of King David Victory Park.



Elliot Wolf

“Not a week went by without our having long conversations to compare notes, confer, advise, and counsel each other,” recalls Jeffrey.

For Jeffrey, the loss of his brother feels like he has lost a limb or, even more than that, a part of his heart.

“We were one ovum, which Hashem decided to split into two, knowing that our beloved mom wouldn’t be able to have more children,” says Jeffrey. “Yes, we looked alike. Some even thought we were identical. But it’s in our thoughts and feelings that we were always in total sync, replicating what the other thought and felt. His identity was dissolved into mine, mine into his.”

From wombmates to roommates and soulmates, their lives mirrored each other in many ways.

“We were always in the same class at the same schools, at the same cheder,” says Jeffrey. “We both studied the piano together for 10 years. And we loved tennis. We played doubles together in many tournaments, even bickering if one of us was guilty of a mishit. At school, we always chose the same subjects. We majored at university in the same three languages, but for one reason, in order to be together.”

From the beginning of their time at KDHSL, Wolf and his brother were seen by Sheryl Benjamin and other teachers at the school as being groomed for a position of importance in the Jewish school system.

“We knew from early on that Elliot was being groomed to take over from Norman Sandler,” says Benjamin. “Even though in the early days he was just a teacher, he was always that little bit reserved. I mean, I was nearly wed, so I didn’t participate in this,

but there were many good-looking young teachers who tried quite hard to attract his attention, but if you know Elliot Wolf, he never once behaved in an inappropriate way.”

“One really came into contact with greatness together with humility when interacting with Mr Wolf,” said Rabbi Craig Kacev, the former director of the South African Board of Jewish Education. “Real achievement, real stature, what David Brooks calls ‘eulogy virtues’, not resume virtues. He really aimed for the right things in this world.”

Wolf would show his perfectionist side by making his voice heard if anything wasn’t to his liking, says Kacev. “Yet, at the same time, you could have an open conversation, and, at the end, if he felt he was wrong, you’d hear him chuckle, and that wonderful smile would appear on his face.”

To Lorraine Srage’s mind, Wolf never believed she would be sitting in his chair as principal of KDHSL today.

“Sometimes, in my office, I kind of feel like he’s looking over me, and thinking, ‘Oh my G-d, she hasn’t changed much.’”

Srage loved sport when she started teaching at KDHSL in 1982.

“I just want to teach phys-ed,” she told Wolf. Wolf looked her in the eye, and responded, “You’re not only going to teach phys-ed, you’re going into the classroom.”

That set Srage’s career on a path for which she’s “forever indebted to him”.

They shared a passion for sport, with Srage marvelling at Wolf’s love for tennis and cricket. “He used to come to me on a Monday morning with the *Rand Daily Mail*, and show me all the Jewish children that had been selected in those days for Transvaal.”

Wolf’s nephew, Graham Wolf, says, “The incredible closeness and the place that uncle El had in all our lives was for me so clearly demonstrated in an amusing story: I had a birthday party while I was at nursery school. One of the kids that came to the party left, shattered and in tears, and told his mother that it was really unfair that Graham had two dads. That’s the reality, uncle El was my second dad. Shabbos, supper, Sunday lunch, every family holiday he was on would have never been the same without uncle El, and certainly won’t be the same again.”

Raelene Tradonsky, one of the very few people who could call Wolf by his first name, travelled around the world with him to visit alumni and raise funds for King David schools. “I got to witness first-hand how revered he was by his former students years after they matriculated,” she says. “They treated us like royalty.”

During the webinar, a video was shown of Wolf recounting his time attending King David reunions all over the world. “It’s been an amazing experience to see what the students have achieved wherever they’re living,” he said in the video. “It’s been rewarding also to see how strong their Jewish conscience is. Many of them are taking leading roles in the schools where their children are enrolled, and have been leaders in their Jewish community. These students have made their mark. And, of course, for any educationist, to see what your students have achieved gives one tremendous vicarious pride.”

The webinar featured tributes from King David alumni, who described Wolf as the quintessential *mensch* who brought out the best in everyone and encouraged students to seize every opportunity. He was 50 years ahead of his time in understanding children, they said.

TIME TO PLAN YOUR FUTURE IN CYPRUS

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.” – Chinese proverb

Although vaccine rollouts are taking place worldwide, coronavirus is affecting global travel and some countries are still enforcing lockdowns, mandatory testing, and restrictions. It seems that this is going to be our way of life for a while to come.

It's the perfect time to take a breath, do some reflection, and start working on a plan for your and your family's future in Cyprus.

Cyprus is an English-speaking former British colony and a full member of the European Union, and is an extremely popular European destination for investors. Not only has it been voted as having the best permanent residency programme on offer, but a great deal of investment is pouring into the economy.

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term. There is demand;

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6. Cyprus has been voted one of the safest countries in the world, so your personal safety and property investment is assured; and
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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

The waves buffeting our shores

The year began with South Africa in the middle of a second wave of COVID-19 infections, and unfortunately, is ending with a fourth wave now well underway. Among other things, it has resulted in the cancellation for the second time of the end-of-year machanot. For many hundreds of young members of our community, it will have come as a tremendous disappointment, particularly after so many months of enforced separation from friends and classmates and the stresses and disruptions of long-distance learning. The psychological fall-out of the pandemic has affected all of us, but its impact will have been especially severe on younger people in the formative stages of their emotional development. It's something that parents, educators, and communal leaders alike need to recognise and pay due attention to when looking ahead to a post-COVID-19 future.

The fact that the Omicron-driven fourth wave arrived at the end of another difficult year and at a time when many were hoping that the worst of the pandemic was finally behind them will have been especially disheartening. However, and while it's of course still early days, there are hopeful signs that the impact of the latest wave of infections may be less severe than was previously the case. Infection rates have, indeed, increased sharply in the course of the past week, but thus far, they have not resulted in the multiple hospitalisations that we experienced during the first three waves.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



Much of this can be attributed to vaccination. What we are seeing is that while not preventing people from contracting the Omicron variant, being vaccinated helps to reduce its harmful effects. This underscores the urgency for everyone in our community to ensure that they are fully vaccinated and to encourage everyone around them (especially in the work environment) to do likewise. At the same time, we must continue to adhere rigorously to standard safety protocols like wearing masks and observing social distancing. Much of the pandemic is out of our hands, but this is something we can influence, and the kind of year 2022 turns out to be thus, to a large extent, depends on us.

From the point of view of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), we are gratified by how much was achieved this year in terms of our core mandate of promoting the welfare and safeguarding the rights and freedoms of our community in spite of the often difficult circumstances.

This being my last column for 2021, I take this opportunity to thank my SAJBD colleagues and professional staff for all their support and good work, and wish you all a safe, healthy, and relaxing end-of-year break.

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

Kaunas festival dedicated to Jewish memory

Jewish memory is the theme of Kaunas European Capital of Culture 2022, a project funded by municipalities and the national government.

The Lithuanian city was named European Capital of Culture 2022 by the European Commission jury in 2017, sparking a project to explore its identity through art and culture and to speak about relevant current issues. Most of Kaunas' 2022 programme will be dedicated to projects that speak about the city's Jewish history. One of the most important elements of the project is the book, *Jews of Kaunas*. It describes what was once one of the largest ethnic groups in Kaunas from the 15th century onwards, the settlement of Jews in the city, the most important names of the Kaunasians who lived and worked in the city, their contribution to education, medicine, industry, business, culture, and other spheres of life, and touches on history's painful elements.

The rich Jewish history of Kaunas will also be represented in more than 20 art projects – exhibitions, concerts, and performances featuring artists from South Africa, Israel, France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States.

It kicks off with the exhibition, "What we don't remember" by South African artist William Kentridge, one of the world's most formidable "Litvaks", which will be open all year round at the M.K.Čiurlionis National Museum of Art. In this exhibition, the artist hopes to fill in the gaps in our memory and, at the same time, talk to us about what we do not remember, consciously or

unconsciously.

In the summer of 2022, events dedicated to the Holocaust and the Kaunas Ghetto will be presented. Several will take place at Kaunas 9th Fort. Audiences in Kaunas and in Esch-sur-Alsette will be invited to revisit a tragic story from World War II in an interdisciplinary project that sheds light on the traumatic past of the two cities.

At the end of the summer, UK artist Jenny Kagan's exhibition, "Out of Darkness" will be presented, in which the artist will revive her parents' stories about their experiences in Kaunas during the Holocaust. And on 23 September, the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide of the Lithuanian Jews, the Kaunas Youth Project will present a performance, "Youth Speaks about War" in which young citizens

invite the audience to listen to forgotten stories of World War II and consider the challenges of history.

From 29 to 30 September, as part of the Litvak Forum, artists, academics, and representatives of the cultural world will speak about the role of culture and art in perpetuating Jewish memory and heritage, the Litvak identity, and other relevant topics.

One of the forum's largest musical projects, the *Kaunas Cantata*, will be presented. The cantata was written especially for Kaunas by composer Philip Miller in collaboration with Kagan and local musicians. The programme includes a concert of Yiddish songs performed by Marija Krupoves, and a traveling klezmer orchestra will evoke the Jewish memory in Kaunas district towns.

• A detailed programme can be found at: <https://kaunas2022.eu/en/programme/>



A street artwork for Kaunas 2022 recalls the Israeli poet, Leah Goldberg, who was originally from Kaunas

Not easy being a Jew in a pandemic

I suspect that Debs has me on speed dial. As her one-phone-call-away COVID-19 reassurance go-to person, I suspect I'm just one in a series of contacts available to her and who she turns to when her anxiety gets the better of her.

Last evening at about 20:30 was her last call, having found out that her husband's business associate had just tested positive, she needed to be talked off the ledge. She was understandably worried (read; hysterical) and flipping through the pages of the proverbial Yellow Pages in search of a 24-hour testing station, preferably one where they didn't know them by name and wouldn't realise that their last test had been a few days prior.

The fact that her husband hadn't actually seen the guy for a few weeks only played a minor part in calming her down, but did make me worry about her general level of anxiety. When eventually things settled, I asked why she was so worried? Her response was clear.

"Howie, my boy," she said confidently, albeit patronisingly, "It's really not easy being a Jew in a pandemic." Debs isn't wrong. Whereas it might not be easy to be anyone in a pandemic, being a Jew is no joke either. So much so, that it should be considered a comorbidity.

It's a well-known medical phenomenon that Jewish males add at least one new chronic medication for each decade. What starts with Crestor for high cholesterol in his late twenties, quickly leads to Nexium, to some sort of blood pressure meds, and a little something like Puricos for uric acid before it develops, G-d forbid, into gout.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



By the time he has reached his seventies, if the stress hasn't managed to get the better of him, he's on at least a handful and a half of various items, without which he wouldn't last even a minute beyond breakfast (assuming he isn't intermittent fasting for his prediabetes).

Jews also have a finely tuned sense of danger, which sets off the anxiety alarm when there's a chance that someone or something is a potential threat. Generations of persecution, of antisemitism, and of the need to flee country after country with bobba's soup ladle as carry-on luggage has chiselled an early warning system into our consciousness. Add reducing numbers, interbreeding, and poor habits to the mix and it should hardly be a surprise that a pandemic pushed us right over the edge. It would be more of a surprise if it hadn't.

The reaction of thrice vaccinated, double masked, and oft PCR-ed Debs is one that I fully relate to. It might not be the outwardly calm and contained image that I try to project, but it's nevertheless one that I fully relate to.

Because no matter how much we might roll our eyes at those who appear to be at their wits end, there's a small part of all of us who at this very moment are flipping frantically through the proverbial Yellow Pages in search of a testing station that we can go to which won't greet us by name.

A column of WIZO South Africa

WIZO SA thrives in challenging year

In spite of the challenges of 2021, WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation) South Africa, under the excellent leadership of President Shelley Trope-Friedman, enjoyed a productive and successful year. Ranging from thought-provoking Zoom talks and increased

media exposure to local community outreach and international workshops, WIZO South Africa's activities have borne great fruit.

A brilliant initiative by Trope-Friedman has been her regular "Shelley Shares" column. Through it, she has ensured that WIZO South Africa uses its platform to motivate and inspire. Her messages have been applauded by those involved with WIZO and beyond, locally and internationally.

WIZO South Africa is delighted that international participants and local Jewish community leaders have regularly registered for its Zoom talks. The organisation secured exemplary speakers who provided relevant and meaningful discussions, shining a light on the high standing and stature of WIZO.

WIZO South Africa actively promotes co-existence and unity. In September, the organisation joined hands with Christian Zionists for the hugely successful Jerusalem Woven Destiny concert. How significant this friendship is right now at a time when antisemitism is rearing its ugly head!

Trope-Friedman perfectly summed this up when she said, "The reality of the sharp rise of antisemitism in our own backyard as well as around the world makes the genuine friendship and solidarity expressed by our Christian Zionist friends even more essential and appreciated. The concert gave a platform to the voices of unity, hope, and love."

All of WIZO South Africa's societies in Cape Town,

Durban, Johannesburg, and Port Elizabeth have worked diligently through a challenging year to raise funds for its projects in Israel, and they must all be commended for their effort and dedication to advancing the mandate of WIZO.

As members of WIZO South Africa,

we are committed to raising funds to ensure that all our projects in Israel continue to flourish but we also recognise the needs of our own country and have used our WIZO spirit to bring about opportunity and hope locally as well.

WIZO South Africa's nationwide Wheelchairs of Hope project continues to transform the lives of South African children by giving them the gift of mobility through the donation of Israeli-designed wheelchairs. In a recent visit to Mitchells Plain, Trope-Friedman along with WIZO Cape Town members personally handed over wheelchairs and promoted WIZO to local families.

In addition, WIZO Cape Town's outreach arm makes a big impact in Khayelitsha and other townships in the area. Members help to support soup kitchens and crèches by donating provisions,

toys, books, and food. They have also worked to establish gardening projects to achieve food security and sustainability.

As 2021 draws to a close, Trope-Friedman remains committed to making a difference in the lives of those who need it most by breaking down socio-economic barriers and furthering the vision of WIZO to empower, equip, and educate in Israel and in our backyard.

• Written by Galya Tregenza Hall, WIZO South Africa national administrator and PA to the president.

This column paid for by WIZO SA



Shelley Trope-Friedman, President WIZO SA



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Wulfsohn, an attorney of the high court of

Urdang, a qualified and practising biokineticist, has been in leadership roles in the Jewish community for many years. She is a past chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students, representing the movement in Israel and the Czech Republic. She's an elected office bearer of the South African Zionist Federation and an advanced Community Security Organisation member. She's also on the board of ZAKA South Africa, and the head of the organisation's relief, resilience, and logistics.

Photo: Trevor Sachs

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