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Israel is open – but should we go?

TALI FEINBERG

Israel has finally dropped South Africa from its red list as COVID-19 numbers surge in the Jewish state while the Omicron wave in South Africa begins to subside. But just because the gates are open, should we be going to Israel, especially with infection rates going through the roof?

"There was obviously tremendous excitement that people who are vaccinated can now travel to Israel without going through any bureaucratic hoops," says former Knesset minister and current *olim*

advocate Dov Lipman. His organisation assists *olim* to adapt to life in Israel and cope with its bureaucracy. It has been at the forefront of helping *olim* and their families navigate Israel's changing travel restrictions during the pandemic.

"However, among the reasons why this change was made is because of the degree to which the variant is spreading in Israel," Lipman says. "It reached a point where keeping the doors closed just didn't make sense. So people have to understand that they're coming into a country where people are getting corona[virus] regularly. Our

statistics last week showed that 10% of those arriving in Israel from overseas were testing positive.

"Yad L'Olim is getting regular messages from people saying, 'Help, I tested positive at the airport', or 'I'm visiting, didn't feel well, and tested positive', or 'I tested positive on my test before my flight home,'" he says. "As much as we want to help everyone, once someone tests positive in Israel, there is an automatic quarantine of 10 days [the government may reduce it to seven days]. The authorities are very strict about this. There is also the possibility that the

authorities will mandate that you do this quarantine in a hotel at your own expense if you don't have your own apartment. You need to know this risk before you come to Israel.

"Anyone coming in has to be aware of the very real possibility that they could test positive on their arrival or while they are here," he says. "And if that happens, they have to do full quarantine before they can leave. As an organisation, we're recommending that people consider travelling to Israel only if there's a need. If there's a family *simcha*, or a tragic situation,

something that cannot be put off. That's what I recommend."

For those concerned that this is just a small window of opportunity and that the borders may be closed again, Lipman says he doesn't think this the case. "I do believe that we will be able to maintain the open skies moving forward. At Yad L'Olim we are working hard with members of Knesset to create a plan now and for the future so that the gates remain open, especially for *olim* and their families and those that have a special reason to come to Israel."

He also wants to remind people that "any Israeli can leave the country if they choose to, and that might also be an option for those looking to unite with their families".

Johannesburg-based travel agent Shana Chrysler says that travelling to and from Israel right now can be complicated. "I cannot tell you how many people are testing positive and having to change at the last minute," she says. "A family of seven had to cancel this morning [11 January] who were coming for a wedding here [in South Africa]. We had more clients tonight [11 January] cancel due to COVID-19 results – passengers cannot come home if they test positive. South Africa requires a negative PCR test to return. I now have clients stuck in Turkey."

According to Israeli media, Israel has now begun authorising at-home antigen test kits, seeking to relieve the strain at overcrowded testing centres, and restricting PCR testing only to at-risk individuals. But the switch to home tests has also led to stores running out. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is reportedly looking to bring in 50 million tests within 10 days. The government is also planning to add 40 new testing centres, bringing the total nationwide to 300.

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Rush to start the year



Shaun Aronowitz (Grade 1) runs to class at King David Primary School Linksfield on Tuesday, the first day of school this year

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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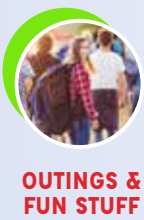
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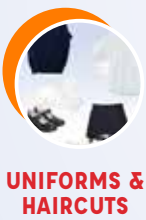
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Al Jama-ah hardliners put Jozi DA in tough corner

NICOLA MILTZ

The multi-party Democratic Alliance (DA)-led coalition in the City of Johannesburg hangs in the balance as the small Al

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AUTO AFRICA

Jama-ah party this week dramatically dropped out of coalition talks over ideological differences involving Israel.

This political snubbing by the anti-Israel party has left the DA three votes short of a majority going into the first sitting of the council on Thursday, 13 January.

The implications could be disastrous for residents of the city desperate for change and increased service delivery, say insiders.

At the time of going to press, the stakes were high for the DA-led coalition with the DA potentially finding itself in a tight corner, clinging to power.

“This is hardly surprising,” said election analyst Wayne Sussman.

“The Al Jama-ah party traditionally and currently prefers to work with the African National Congress [ANC], being ideologically closer to the ANC, so while this may be a setback for the DA, it should have been expected. The bigger news is that the DA thought it could count on the Al Jama-ah votes.”

Al Jama-ah turned down the DA due to its perceived support of Israel, taking its three seats with it.

Sussman said there were still a number of other smaller parties which the DA would be looking at, and would hope to get enough votes to get over the 50% mark.

However the situation remained unpredictable at

the time of going to press, with the DA potentially finding itself short of vital votes in upcoming motions in the city.

The DA was forced to form coalition governments in Gauteng’s hung metros of Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni after the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) handed it the mayoral chains rather than support the ANC.

This week’s turn of events has potentially left the door wide open for the ANC to try to form a coalition to take power from the DA. This, however, won’t be possible without the support of the EFF, which this week said it would keep the ANC out of power. EFF leader Julius Malema said at the Siyabonga rally in KwaZulu-Natal on 8 January that the EFF would work with all opposition parties to keep the ANC out of power.

Insiders say that the EFF knows it’s better for the party’s growth trajectory and prospects to have a weaker ANC than a weaker DA, even if it’s not on the same page as the DA.

The question is whether the DA will have to, as it did in 2016, count on the EFF’s vote to govern the City of Johannesburg in order to pass the budget and elect chairpersons of oversight committees.

This all remains to be seen. Sussman said the DA was “chancing it”. “Three seats is important. Historically, Al Jama-ah has been much closer to the ANC. When coalitions are flimsy, parties will do anything to stay in power, even negotiate with



Joburg Mayor Mpho Phalatse announcing her mayoral committee

parties that are unlikely to support it. It’s easier to speak to one party with three seats than three different parties with one seat.”

The DA has put itself in a tough corner, experts say.

Meanwhile, news that the anti-Israel party pulled its three votes has been met with disgust and disappointment.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) said it was “outraged” that Al Jama-ah had put a distant conflict above the interests of its own citizens.

“The political party Al Jama-ah is seemingly attempting to stonewall and obstruct the functioning of the City of Johannesburg by putting a foreign conflict above the interests of its own citizens. Our landscape is such that representatives from across the political spectrum are expected to work together to provide leadership and good governance. Joburg is struggling to provide its own residents with electricity, water, functioning transport infrastructure, healthcare, and other social services. If

Continued on page 3>>

Torah Thought

Tradition in transition

They say adapt or die. But must we jettison the old to embrace the new? Is the choice limited to modern or antiquated, or can one be a contemporary traditionalist?

At the beginning of this week’s parshah, we read that Moses was occupied with a special mission as the Jews were leaving Egypt. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him. Long before the great exodus, Joseph had made the Children of Israel swear that they would take him along when they eventually left Egypt. As viceroy of Egypt, Joseph couldn’t hope to be buried in Israel when he died as his father, Jacob, was. The Egyptians would never tolerate their political leader being buried in a foreign land. But he did have his brethren make a solemn undertaking that when the time came and the Israelites departed, they would take his remains along with them.

Now, Joseph wasn’t the only one to be re-interred in the holy land. His brothers, too, were accorded the same honour and last respects. Yet, it’s only Joseph whom the Torah finds it necessary to mention explicitly. Why?

The answer is that Joseph was unique. While his brothers were simple shepherds tending to their flocks, Joseph was running the superpower of the world. To be a practicing Jew while blissfully strolling through the meadows isn’t that complicated. But to serve as the most high-profile statesman in the land and remain faithful to one’s traditions – this is inspirational!

Thrust as he was from the simple life of a young shepherd boy into the hub of the nation’s capital to juggle the roles of viceroy and Jew, Joseph represented tradition amidst transition. It was possible, he taught the world, to be a contemporary traditionalist. One could successfully straddle both worlds.

Now that they were about to leave Egypt, the Jews were facing a new world order. Gone were slavery and oppression and in their place came freedom and liberty. During this time of transition, only Joseph could be their role model.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Life Rabbi emeritus, Sydenham Shul



He alone could show them the way forward into the new frontier.


Ever since leaving Egypt, we’ve been wandering Jews. And every move has come with its own challenges. Whether from Poland to America or Lithuania to South Africa, every transition brought culture shocks to our spiritual psyche. How do you make a living and still keep the Shabbos you kept in the shtetl when the factory boss says, “Cohen, if you don’t come in on Saturday, don’t come in on Monday either!” It was a test of faith that wasn’t easy. Many succumbed. But many others stood fast and survived, even flourished. It was the test of transition – and those who modelled themselves on Joseph were able to make the transition while remaining committed to tradition.

Democracy and a human-rights culture have made that part of Jewish life somewhat easier for us, but challenges still abound. May we continue to learn from Joseph.

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Bloemfontein	18:15	19:54
Port Elizabeth	18:15	20:09
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Kiff vibes for a well-known psalm

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish community received a special Shabbat “gift” on the first Friday of 2022, when David Scott (better known as The Kiffness) released his latest remix on 7 January. Taking a joyful rendition of the psalm *Im Hashem Lo Yivneh Bayis* by the Shira Choir, the South African musician added his own beats and even a cameo of a cat, to take it to new heights.

For many, it was a delight to see such a celebrated South African performer embrace Jewish music and bring it to his diverse and global audience. What’s more, Scott released the song online just hours before his wife gave birth to their first child. “It’s been a crazy day,” he told the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation (Gardens Shul) pre-Shabbat Zoom session, where he was a special guest. The shul’s chazan, Choni Goldman (Choni G), had provided invaluable advice to Scott as he worked with the song and then invited him to join the community online.

When Scott shared that his wife had just gone into labour, Gardens Shul Rabbi Osher Feldman blessed the musician and his family. He also thanked him for showing that music can bring people together.

Making time to speak to the *SA Jewish Report* from the hospital after his son was born, Scott explained how the remix came about. “Most of my remixes start with fans messaging me on Instagram, Facebook, or email. This particular video of the Shira Choir (who are based in Brooklyn, New York) popped up in my inboxes a couple of times, so I checked it out and was instantly hooked and amazed by the wonderful music.”

He says that the choir was aware that he was working with its music. “Whenever I embark on a collaboration of this nature, I always reach out to the original artist[s], introduce myself, tell them what I do, and ask if they would be okay with me doing a remix. I sent them an early draft of the remix I was busy working on. I was very glad to hear that they liked it! The rest was history.”

“The original is already a masterpiece on its own. My remix just injects a bit more *chutzpah* into the song,” he says.

The response to the remix has been hugely positive. Asked why he thinks this is the case, Scott says, “Music is a universal language, and people recognise and resonate with good music regardless of where it comes

from. But I do think there’s something special about this song. I feel as if the composer tapped into something much bigger than ourselves when he wrote the melody, as did David when he wrote *The Song of Solomon* (Psalm 127).”

The lyrics translate as, “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Guardian of Israel.”

“The song resonates because it’s a gentle reminder that everything we build is in vain unless it is built upon solid principles,” he says. “I have always believed that anything that’s difficult now will make life easier in the long run, and anything that’s easy now will make life harder in the long run. We live in a society where instant gratification



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David Scott, aka The Kiffness



The Shira Choir

is rife, so it was refreshing to hear David’s psalm in the context of music. Music has a way of making truth more digestible.”

Though the response has been overwhelmingly positive, “unfortunately there have been a few negative comments,” he says. “My response is always either to ignore them, block them, or if I’m up to it, respond in kindness. The few nasty comments I have seen, I’ve decided to block.”

On working with Goldman, Scott says, “I know Choni G through performing at Barmitzvahs, Batmitzvahs, and weddings together. When I began remixing the song, I wanted to make sure I had all the right translations and transliterations in place. I knew Choni could help me, but what I didn’t know was how gracious he would be with his time and willingness to help. What a guy!”

For his part, Goldman told the *SA Jewish Report* that “Dave messaged me asking if I know the song, saying people had sent it to him asking to remix it, and

he digs it. I told him, ‘Go for it!’ I knew the choir, and pointed out that the verses are from Psalms. Dave is a super talented guy. He didn’t need my help! But wherever I thought I could help out from a Jewish perspective, or just by being a soundboard for him, I did.

“Over the next two weeks while he remixed it we were in touch with various things,” says Goldman. “This ranged from giving my take on subtleties, how people might receive it, to helping with translations, transliteration, and

Hebrew text, and putting him in touch with the right people in New York to license the song. The remix is great, and I’m a big fan of his work. I’d love to work on something together at some point. I’m sure we will.”

Scott says that joining the Gardens Shul pre-Shabbat Zoom session was “really great. It was very special to receive such a wonderful blessing from the rabbi before heading to the hospital as we prepared for the delivery of our first-born son.”

Asked if he would work with more Jewish music in future, he says, “I’m open

to all kinds of music as long as it resonates with my spirit. This particular song resonated with me deeply, and maybe it will open more doors to working with more Jewish music in the future.”

He says the community can support him by simply subscribing to his YouTube channel. “You will be notified of my upcoming videos. Every view helps me to keep an income and to continue what I enjoy doing.”

To the South African Jewish community, he says, “I’d like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the warm reception to the song. It was a leap of faith on my part [as a Christian] to work with music outside of my own faith, but I’m glad I stepped out of my comfort zone and went for it. I did find comfort in knowing that the Psalms are celebrated in both faiths and essentially point toward the same thing, which is G-d. So with that in mind, I had a gut feeling that it would work out, and I’m glad I was right. I have nothing but love and respect for my Jewish brothers and sisters.”

Al Jama-ah hardliners put Jozi DA in tough corner

>>> Continued from page 2

there ever was a time to for our politicians to roll up their sleeves and get work done, it’s now.”

“It is unclear what ‘supporting’ Israel means,” said Harold Jacobs, the Gauteng chairperson of the SAJBD. “The majority of countries, including South Africa, support a two-state solution, as do the majority of our political parties. The two-state solution is clearly not supported by Al Jama-ah, which is attempting to introduce extremist views into Johannesburg. In essence, it seems that Al Jama-ah wants no Israel. We want no potholes, functioning hospitals, and a world-class city that Joburg promises to be.

“We call on all our political parties to work together in the interests of their own citizens, and not allow an extremist, anti-peace, and single-focused issue to be the deciding factor in our local politics.”

Said DA councillor Daniel Schay, “I’m disappointed that a party has chosen to put a complex, 9 000km away conflict ahead of the residents of Johannesburg, where it has been elected to serve. I have full faith in the mayor and the chief whip and everyone else in power to assess potential coalition partners, and that they will engage with partners who are able to share our values and the values of the coalition, and put the residents of the city first. Also that they won’t simply allow people on board just for the sake of retaining power, but it will revolve around residents coming first and there will be no compromise on that, otherwise we are just repeating what the previous regime did.”

Insiders say clashes in ideology existed even before the coalition talks took place, and ask whether the coalition was stable to begin with or if there were instabilities at the time of announcing the multi-party government.

It’s understood that local Al Jama-ah councillors initially showed willingness to join the coalition, but when it reached the ears of its national leaders, it was considered unacceptable.

The first council sitting will, without doubt, be tough for the multiparty coalition at a time when stable coalition is vital to ensure service delivery.



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Cohen takes on new marathon at the NPC

NICOLA MILTZ

It's not every day that you get a phone call from the office of the minister in the presidency informing you that you have been appointed as a member of the third National Planning Commission (NPC).

It's also not every day that this call is followed soon after by a formal, signed letter from President Cyril Ramaphosa congratulating you.

This is how December played out for business leader Tanya Cohen. She is now one of 28 highly placed commissioners, external experts tasked with prioritising economic and social recovery in the wake of the pandemic.

It's a hefty task and pretty vital work, not something to take lightly, agrees the mother of two, who resigned as head of the Business Unity South Africa (Busa) in 2019. This follows what was a highly challenging, all-consuming, complex, and diverse role at Busa, which led to Cohen taking early departure ahead of pursuing new opportunities.

When she received the call in early December, it came up as an unknown number so at first she declined to answer. "Then I saw the same number come up again, and I thought I'd better answer it this time," she said with some amusement.

It's a good thing she did. "This is an exciting opportunity. It's a privilege to be able to participate in a group of people with a wealth of expertise and experience in diverse fields from urban planning to food security," she said. Being action-driven, Cohen was

especially heartened by the group's induction in mid-December, which, she says, showed commitment towards implementation and execution.

"It was exciting to meet fellow commissioners, some of whom I have worked with in the past and, of course, a number of others whom I look forward to engaging with, all of whom share a commitment to South Africa's prosperity and future," she said.

The NPC is a government agency established in 2010 responsible for strategic planning. It's an independent advisory body and think tank.

This commission's mandate is to develop strategy for a post COVID-19 economy and society to deal with the country's triple challenge of poverty, unemployment, and inequality by 2030.

"The challenges are complex and there are many, but there's hope. We're moving beyond a think tank into a 'do-tank'," said Cohen, who is hoping to prioritise a few key areas like youth unemployment, for example.

Minister in the Presidency Mondli Gungubele said the NPC was mandated also to support the strong leadership required to mobilise society to promote the acceleration of the National Development Plan (NDP) towards 2030.

The commissioners will assist in forging a conversation among key stakeholders, which it is hoped will lead to effective and impactful social compacts on a number of key issues. Issues such as food and water security, energy, education, the fourth industrial revolution, transport, and climate change to name a few, will be



Tanya Cohen has taken to long distance running, and is up for the marathon challenge that lies ahead

rigorously addressed.

All very ambitious, but Cohen believes the commissioners show real commitment. They will serve on a part-time basis for five years.

"I want to see the country succeed. This is what motivates me," she said. "It's a deep feeling of wanting to give back. I come across a lot of like-minded people. When you get involved in creating something better, it helps considerably."

So, how did Cohen get involved in the NPC?

After her surprise resignation from Busa, Cohen took a short break before being approached by former politician and businessman Roelf Meyer, the director of the In Transformation Initiative. He brought her on board as a co-ordinator for the Public Private Growth Initiative (PPGI).

The PPGI is spearheaded by Meyer

and Dr Johan van Zyl to promote sector-based growth strategies and projects by unlocking constraints and opportunities for economic growth and investment together with government, said Cohen.

Insiders say Cohen brings a clear sense of direction and delivery by being able to untangle myriad complexities – something desperately needed to kickstart the engine of the economy.

This role, and her time at Busa, position her as a sought after public-private impact advisor who comes with a healthy dose of humility.

So, when nominations for the NPC were called for early last year, Meyer put her name forward, believing her to be well placed.

In positioning Busa as the country's apex business organisation and a critical partner to government at the National

Economic Development and Labour Council, Cohen dealt with all sorts of sectors, and the work involved a lot of engagement with government, trade unions, business, and the community.

Also, as the former chairperson of the governing body of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration and having held the role of employee-relations executive at Woolworths, Cohen is looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

Clearly, she's up for any challenge. Soon after leaving Busa, she took up running, and it wasn't long afterwards that she started to train for her first marathon, which she completed in February 2020.

"I'm hooked, it's like meditation," she said.

With four marathons under her belt, she has set her sights on the Comrades Marathon later this year having "sneaked a Comrades qualifying time" insisting that she's "hopelessly slow".

So, where does her drive come from?

"My late mom always pushed my siblings and me to do more and do better," she said. The long distance running comes from her late father, John, who completed 22 Comrades, winning 13 silver and nine bronze medals.

Though South Africa is a long way off the ambitious goals set by the NDP for a sustainable life for all with full employment, greater equality, and the elimination of poverty by 2030, it's good to know that people like Cohen have the country's best interests at heart. No doubt, her work for the NPC will be a marathon of an altogether different kind.

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland. Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only. The most important things is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years. Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK. Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Horesh resides in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

My next visit to South Africa is planned for the end of January/beginning of February 2022. WhatsApp me on +48 783 953 223 • Email Avi Horesh adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

Tenacious Miss SA returns to hero’s welcome

PAULA SLIER AND SASHA STAR

In spite of being crowned Second Princess in the Miss Universe pageant held in Eilat, Israel, last month, Miss South Africa admits to having felt nervous about returning home to South Africa afterwards.

Lalela Mswane flew to Dubai and then Israel without the support – or knowledge – of the South African government, which had been pressurising her not to go for weeks beforehand.

“I didn’t know what was awaiting me [in South Africa]. I was anxious but optimistic at the same time. I had a warrior-princess attitude. I had been to hell and back. I felt like, ‘Bring it on!’” she says.

But the 24-year-old need not have worried. A hero’s welcome awaited her as ordinary South Africans showered her with pride.

During a press conference at OR Tambo International Airport, she expressed disappointment and anger at the government’s decision, and the mass criticism she had received in the lead-up to the contest.

“I felt abandoned,” she said. “I’ll never comprehend what I did to make people feel justified in their actions. You don’t have to be for me, but you don’t have to be against me. You don’t have to, certainly, wish death upon me because I made a choice.”

The starlet recognised the situation for what it was. It reminded her of the years of bullying she’d endured while growing up.

“I’m tenacity personified,” she quips. “I believe in standing for something. Even if you have to stand alone, or stand with very few people, be strong in your convictions.”

Born in Richards Bay and raised in Pretoria, the beauty queen discovered her love for ballet in the Jacaranda City, and went on to complete a Bachelor of Law at the University of Pretoria. Her passion for humanitarianism and creating positive change is what ultimately steered her towards competing in Miss South Africa.

“The dream [of being Miss South Africa] was planted in my heart when I was about seven,” she says. “I saw my predecessors do so many amazing things and the impact they could have.”

As a devout Christian, the opportunity to travel to Jerusalem was a dream come true.

“It was emotional. We went to the Western Wall and heard a prayer. I literally felt a sense of renewal and rebirth, and said to G-d, ‘Let your will be done.’ I was at peace from that moment on. For me, spiritually, that trip was everything and more.”

Mswane describes Israelis as “extremely friendly, very welcoming”, and even picked up a little Hebrew. “*Todah*”, she says perfectly. “The first thing I asked when I arrived was how to say thank you because I say thank you a lot!”

No trip abroad would be complete without sampling the country’s cuisine, and this journey was no exception. “Oh, the food! I think I gained weight. No, I *know* I gained weight,” she laughs. “I’m not a bread girl, but I couldn’t get enough of the bread there. It was so fresh! You could just get the sense that it was made with love.”

She’s even become a fan of Israel’s most famous dish – hummus.

“I’ve been converted. I had it the other day at a restaurant [in



Photo: Benjamin Askinas

Lalela Mswane on stage during the Top 3 Final Look segment of the 70th Miss Universe Competition

South Africa] but it didn’t hit the spot.”

Now that she’s back on home soil, Mswane is serious about placing the entire ordeal behind her and focusing on how she can help South Africa overcome unemployment.

“I don’t regret my decision one bit. I’m so happy I went. Israel was everything and more and I’ve often said that I would have gone regardless of the location. My stance was never political; it was me going to pursue a dream that I have always had.”

The battle has now turned to the courtroom where last month, nongovernmental organisation Citizens for Integrity (CFI) brought a case over the government’s withdrawal of its support to the high court as a matter of public interest. Although it failed to get the urgent hearing it anticipated, “no merits of the application were discussed. The only aspect discussed was urgency. The case continues,” says CFI founder Mark Hyman.

The application by Africa4Palestine (formerly the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions group) to be *amicus curae* (a friend of the court) wasn’t even heard by the judge, who asked it to leave.

The department of sport, arts and culture falsely claims on its website that the case was struck from the roll. Minister Nathi Mthethwa argues online that, “Our position is rooted in the responsibility to encourage a culture of moral stewardship amongst all who carry the South African name.” He has yet to respond to an open letter by CFI saying it isn’t too late for him and the government to apologise to Mswane.

Says Hyman, “We remain steadfast in the belief that only when the government is held accountable for its unacceptable conduct toward its own citizens, and the courts make such orders, can we say that we are making South Africa a better democratic society. This is what we seek to do by fighting for the rights of South Africans in this case.

“CFI remains convinced that the government has avoided its obligations and has failed to respect the rights of its citizens, and needs to be taken to task because of it. We believe that the government had no constitutional right to interfere in legitimate private business affairs in the first place or to bully such a party into submitting to the government position and to publicly sanction her for refusing to comply with its demand. We also believe that the government has unconstitutionally impaired Miss South Africa’s dignity by detailing to the public, in emotive terms, the nature of private discussions simply in order to justify a decision which it imposed on her.”

Mswane, though, has already put it behind her.

“I definitely cannot say I’m the same person. Before, I was searching for validation and support from everybody. Post everything, I feel like if something resonates with me deeply, I don’t need validation. Resonating with me should be enough.”

It’s often said that a person’s name has the ability to shape them. Mswane’s parents must have known this when they named her “Lalela” which means “listen” in isiZulu.

The greatest lesson she’s taken from the experience is to listen to her heart.

“If you know that you have found peace in a decision, do it, because you need to stand for something in life. Not everyone is going to agree with you, and that’s fine, but you need to back yourself all the damn time.”



Photo: GlamTuel



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He was a hero until he was a monster

OPINION RABBI SAM THURGOOD



פִּיַּם הָדָרִי יִנְיַע יִנְיַע הַיָּכּוֹב יָמָא הָלָא לֵעַ
(For this I weep – tears stream from my eyes.)
(Eicha/Lamentations 1:16)

It's this verse, that for so many years I have sung while sitting on the floor in mourning on Tisha B'Av, that came to my mind when reading about the horrific crimes of Chaim Walder and the way in which he caused such harm to so many people.

The background, for those who don't know, is that he was one of the most important children's authors in the religious Jewish world of this generation. His books filled bookshelves in much the same way as Julia Donaldson's books do now, or Dr Seuss or Roald Dahl's once did.

He was a therapist who specialised in working with children who have suffered trauma and abuse. He was a popular columnist, radio personality, and an example to many of how to help children express themselves and their emotions, to understand and to be understood.

I read his books to my own young children, and was so impressed by the way in which he was able to show the world from a child's perspective.

He even received the *Magen LeYeled*/Defender of the Child award from the Israel National Council for the Child in 2003.

Although his work primarily focused on the Haredi community, it went far beyond that. Translated into eight languages and with readers in virtually every Jewish community, he was a hero, a role-model, and a powerful example of how children could be empowered and respected.

Until it was discovered that Walder was a monster. From November last year, increasingly disturbing allegations began to emerge about his sexual abuse of women and children, abuse purportedly going back decades.

The chief rabbi of Tzfat, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, initiated Beth Din proceedings and received damning testimony that uncovered a pattern of such abuse going back decades.

It turned out that he had consistently and systematically abused his access to and position of power and influence with children to assault them in the most terrible way.

Behind the mask of the Defender of the Child was a manipulative predator seeking to harm the most vulnerable among us. Around the same time, Israeli police opened investigations into his wrongdoings. At this point, Walder took his own life to escape the net closing around him.

The way in which all this unfolded was shocking, confusing, and so tragic. First, we must think of his many, many victims, the terrible pain and shame he inflicted upon them, and the way in which their lives were so profoundly affected.

The mental and emotional scars can last a lifetime. One of his victims, Shifra Yocheved Horovitz – only 24 years old – committed suicide a few days ago. Many others will have to come to terms with what was done to them in crimes for which they aren't guilty and bear no responsibility. However, they so often, nonetheless, hold onto feelings of profound humiliation and guilt. It's for them that I weep when I think of this terrible affair.

Second, for many – myself included – it has taken a while to truly understand and wrap my head around this. We are living through a time of crisis in trust, when trust in governments, news agencies, and authorities are at a record low.

When hearing these worrying reports, I had to wonder whether it was actually true or whether it had been sensationalised – even fabricated – as he and his defenders claimed?

How could I reconcile the sensitive, understanding, and compassionate voice of Walder's books with testimony about a serial predator and abuser?

And even if the most terrible thing turned out to be true, what could I do about it anyway?

There are many who were far quicker than I, many who immediately realised the gravity of the situation, who publicly criticised Walder for his crimes and expressed support for his victims and victims of abuse generally. To those I say, thank you.

There are others who are still figuring this out, and others still who remain in support of Walder.

As I said, I believe this is an issue of trust. Do they trust Rabbi Eliyahu and his Beth Din? The many victims and witnesses who have come forward, or those who defend

him and believe the case to be libel?

Although more and more rabbonim and leaders in the Jewish world are coming out against Walder and his actions, it's difficult to tell someone who to trust. However, I do want to address the dynamic around trust, openness, and *lashon hara*.

In my years as a community rabbi, I have had to deal with several instances of abuse. Although I'm not an expert in this area and careful not to go beyond the limits of my knowledge, I'm grateful to have been able to direct such people towards our community organisations and professionals who deal with such cases.

We are, indeed, blessed with men and women who can handle such cases with the appropriate seriousness and sensitivity, and they should always be our first port of call. They can guide us towards appropriate police reporting and whatever else needs to be done in such situations.

I won't deny that I've also heard accusations about people and organisations which have turned out not to be abuse but the sorts of two-sided conflict that are an unfortunate but prevalent part of human life and interaction.

Nonetheless, when one believes that there is abuse, the first and most important step is to report it. Similarly, if a friend confides that there has been such abuse, one has an obligation to share it with those who can help and who can take action, even if it means breaking that confidence.

But is it not the case that trust, confidentiality, and respect for human dignity are cornerstones of Judaism,



Chaim Walder

and that such reporting can undermine these? There are a few answers to this question. First, there is nothing more important than the value of life. The Torah tells us, "וְאַתָּה פֶּדִי לֵעַ דְּמֵת אֶל רֵיחָטְבִּי לִיכָּר לְבֵית אֱלֹהִים" (Do not go as a talebearer amongst your people, and do not stand by while the blood of your fellow is shed – I am Hashem.) (Vayikra/Leviticus 19:16)

The same verse that warns us against *lashon hara* warns us against standing by when someone is in danger, and as we see from the late Shifra Yocheved Horovitz of blessed memory as well as far too many others, abuse kills.

It's our duty to protect and help people, even when that means losing the trust of victims who feel too ashamed to speak out, or challenging the reputations of the highly respected. As a friend of mine said, "The laws of *lashon hara* weren't given to protect criminals."

The verse with which I began this article, the sadness and the weeping, continues. "וַיִּחַנְנוּ בְּצִמָּם קִוְיָהּ" (For the comforter is far from me.) Who can comfort us in the wake of such a tragedy? How can we find meaning or consolation? That's beyond me.

I have removed Walder's books from my shul and my home, but it seems like a small gesture.

I speak to my children about appropriate and inappropriate touching. At home, we have a "no-secrets" policy – there's no such thing as a secret that you cannot tell mom and dad. I do these things, as I was taught by professionals who deal in these matters, in the same way that I teach them about crossing the road – with all due seriousness, but without panic. And I write this article.

Perhaps we can find some measure of comfort in creating a healthier community dynamic and conversation about abuse, one in which the victims are empowered to speak and to act, and one in which we take them very seriously indeed.

Hashem yerachem – may Hashem have compassion upon His children.

• *Rabbi Sam Thurgood is the rabbi at Beit Midrash Morasha @ Arthur's Road.*

No bigger wake-up call than the Chaim Walder debacle

OPINION ROZANNE SACK AND REBBETZIN WENDY HENDLER



We're heartbroken and devastated at the state of our community when it comes to sexual abuse, and the Chaim Walder debacle has had a deep impact.

We easily fall prey to making this issue of sexual abuse all about Israel and not us. We have a lot to say about how the religious leadership should be handling these types of cases. While these points may be valid, the danger is that it lets our community off the hook.

Abuse in our community

Hardly a day goes by where there isn't a call relating to abuse in our community to Koleinu's helpline. The cases relate to a range of issues from child-on-child sexual abuse, teenager on younger child sexual abuse, date rape, physical violence in our schools against children, domestic violence which includes emotional, verbal, physical, financial and sexual abuse, as well as authority abuse.

We get calls about extra-lesson teachers, doctors, religious leaders, and coaches.

Reluctance to report

In most of these cases, we find ourselves up against an invisible wall in which the victim refuses to report the perpetrator to the authorities. The reasons for this are varied, and we understand the difficulties that victims face when considering reporting the perpetrator.

They have to break through deep shame, humiliation, and fear. At times, it's just too hard for a victim to take this step. We never judge victims for their decisions, and we never pressurise them.

However, where our frustration lies is in the strongly rooted belief that our police system is useless and ineffective. While we understand the reasons for this thinking, we also know that it's counterproductive

in cases of sexual abuse.

Our community cuts itself off from any recourse to justice, and the perpetrator gets a message that there are no consequences for their crimes.

The South African justice system – friend or foe?

It's clear from international research, where perpetrators have been interviewed, that the only thing that will deter them is the fear of being caught and severely punished.

And yet, our community has a shocking track record when it comes to reporting perpetrators. Though there have been cases in which Jewish perpetrators have been prosecuted, these are few and far between.

A further frustration lies in the view that sending someone to jail in South Africa is an automatic death sentence. Captain Colin Morris, a retired captain from the family violence, child protection, and sexual investigative unit of the South African Police Services, with more than 30 years of experience, refutes this belief.

He says that while prison obviously isn't an easy place to be, when it comes to Jewish prisoners, there are many preventative measures to keep them safe. There are kosher food programmes, regular visits with monitoring by a Jewish chaplain, psychosocial services which can be arranged through the Jewish community, and often financial resources provided by the Jewish community to offer competent legal representation.

Our view is that though these measures are helpful, a perpetrator who offends in South Africa has to know that they face jail time if they are found guilty. We believe that possible imprisonment should not be a deterring factor in reporting these criminals.

This is the system we have, and we need to use it if we are ever going to reduce the amount of abuse in our community significantly.

Support services

We understand that the community has very little confidence in regular police services. However, we would

like to offer some reassurance that we have access to professional and committed legal professionals within our community. They are in a position to handle these cases extremely effectively and take on pro bono cases where necessary.

One of the lawyers in our community who is passionate about bringing sexual offenders to book had this to say, "We are specialists who assist in guiding and accompanying victims through the process of laying criminal charges against their perpetrators, either where no charges have been brought before or where an inadequate investigation was previously conducted. Using our expertise and support, we ensure that the process is followed correctly from the beginning so that all victims receive the justice and closure they deserve."

In addition to this, it's important for victims to know that their identity will be protected and they will remain anonymous. When it comes to children giving evidence, excellent programmes have been developed, such as using therapy dogs to prepare and support them through the court process.

Over and above all this, Koleinu is able to facilitate this process, and work behind the scenes with the victim to ease the way through. At no point will a victim, adult, or child, feel alone.

Further barriers to reporting

Religious barriers which have bearing on the paucity of reporting are the issues of *lashon hara* and *mesira* (handing a Jew over to the secular authorities such as the police).

There has been a plethora of instruction coming from rabbinic leadership locally and Internationally that the prohibitions of *lashon hara* and *mesira* fall away completely when it comes to protecting the community from a sexual predator. The protection of the vulnerable is an absolute priority in Jewish law.

In fact, failure to report means that any further acts of abuse by that perpetrator on future victims can be attributed to the community's silence.

In South African law, it's a criminal offence not to report suspected or actual child abuse, and failure to do so is punishable by serving time in jail. This is the level of seriousness our justice system gives to reporting these crimes. If we fail to protect children and the vulnerable in our community from these heinous acts, who will? Where can they turn?

Koleinu's message

We approach all victims of abuse with absolute humility and the greatest of admiration. Our hearts bleed for the victims of Chaim Walder, who had the courage to report him but unfortunately, justice was cruelly snatched from them when he committed suicide.

What was lost to the victims was their day in court, their opportunity to look their abuser the eye and hold him accountable. It adds yet another tragic element to their story.

We know, as victims of sexual abuse at the hands of a medical doctor in our community, how immensely difficult it must have been for these women to overcome their resistance and fear and speak out against a man held in such high esteem.

We also know, from our personal experience, how empowering it is to take one's power back from a perpetrator and hold them to account. There is great meaning and healing to be found on this journey. We hope and pray that the Chaim Walder story will elicit major change in the way that Jewish communities worldwide deal with abuse.

How impactful and comforting would it be for Walder's victims to know about the positive changes to world Jewry brought about by their suffering and their courage.

Koleinu is about to embark on a campaign to encourage the reporting of abuse. Our aim is to make reporting the norm, not the exception, and in so doing, to ensure the safety of our precious community and make the world of the perpetrator smaller and smaller.

• *Rozanne Sack and Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler are the co-founders and directors of Koleinu, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community. The helpline number is 011 264 0341, operating on Monday and Wednesday from 09:00 to 24:00, and Tuesday and Thursday from 07:00 to 22:00.*

Let my people in – how Israel slammed the door on diaspora Jews

OPINION

ZVIKA (BIKO) ARRAN



In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel chose to prevent the entry of foreigners including our brothers and sisters, the members of Jewish communities, into the country.

So, many couldn't attend a family Barmitzvah or be with family to sit shiva for a loved one. Although the ban has mostly been lifted, the damage has been done. However, Israel could change its policy before the next wave of COVID-19 (G-d forbid) to prevent exacerbating the problem.

The state of Israel is strengthening and growing, while many diaspora Jewish communities are shrinking and declining. For a generation that grew up in Israel, it's difficult to internalise that there are many Jews living in the diaspora who actually believe Israel is their second home.

There is a sense of belonging not only in a spiritual, deep, or biblical way. These Jews don't necessarily plan to make aliyah to Israel in the future. They have a good life in their countries. Yet they believe they have another home, a true motherland.

In some cases, this may be because they have family in Israel. They might even have a son who is a lone soldier serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

These same Jews, who live thousands of miles from Israel, go to shuls on Shabbat and pray every week for the well-being of Israel and its soldiers.

These Jews are loyal to their birthplace countries though they have another home that they care about. They're interested in everything going on in Israel. They get upset about any criticism of Israel. They defend the Jewish state in every social-media post and stand by our country in any discussion or argument. They attend rallies in support of Israel, and send donations whenever they can.

These are Jews who visit Israel on holiday and send their children to study there or on various educational and gap-year programmes. These are our Jewish brothers and sisters, who share our homeland even without an Israeli passport.

Facing the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel opted for a strict policy of intermittently blockading its borders. This right cannot be challenged. The policy of giving preferential treatment to its citizens – those who live in Israel – sounds reasonable.

Although in the past few days Israel was reopened to vaccinated people, we cannot ignore the suffering and frustration of blood brothers within Jewish communities.

We also have to prepare for the possible next wave, when Israel will again close its borders and Jews will again feel locked out from the Holy Land. Or will it be different? Will it have learnt a lesson and change the rules for certain people?

In the recent period when South Africa was red-listed, a South African family who came to comfort the mourners of terror victim Eli Kay was denied entry into Israel.

A grandmother who so wanted to be at her granddaughter's wedding was denied entry. She can fly in now, but the wedding is long over.

A South African father couldn't attend his Israeli son's Barmitzvah.

A South African mother of one of the *olot chadashot* (new women emigrants) wasn't able to be there for her daughter when she gave birth. This was a once-in-a-lifetime event that she missed. She can go there now, but the moment has passed.

A mother was delayed in being there

for the urgent surgery for her daughter, who suffered a stroke in Israel.

A son couldn't support his father on his deathbed. Fortunately, his request to be at the funeral was granted, but he will never be able to say those last words to his dying father.

A student who was on her way to start her university studies in Israel was sent home.

Israeli consulates around the world received instructions, and these were frequently changed, which only elevated the level of tension and confusion.

Contacting Knesset members influenced the discretion of the decision-makers and

opened their hearts and the gates of the Holy Land. A few more days, more pressure, more discussions, and more letters created a bit more relief, reducing restrictions.

But it was too late for most people. They missed lifetime opportunities.

The special committees for exceptional cases collapsed under the pressure of the large number of applications, including those whose affinity to Israel is easy to prove. These people aren't casual tourists who wanted to come on a holiday in the middle of a pandemic. They have family in Israel – first-degree relatives. Their foreign passport is packed with entry stamps to Israel. They had a one-time family special event, which has now passed.

After two years of coronavirus, it's not too late to design regulations that apply to this group of people who knock on Israel's doors. They're willing to go through every test and isolation, any vaccination, as well as hotel costs just to be able to be allowed into Israel, their other home.

After the devastating tsunami of Omicron in Israel, we'll hopefully have enough time to be prepared for the next cycle and set new rules – not an exhausting exceptions committee.

Don't get me wrong,

according to Israelis, Israel made no mistake in shutting its borders. They agree with the clear and transparent policy to minimise at all costs the importing of COVID-19 into Israel.

However, Israel needs to hear the voices of Jewish communities and consider future steps to avoid its conduct causing unnecessary frustration within world Jewry.

The stubbornness and procrastination in response to humanitarian requests have had a deep impact on those Jewish communities that believe Israel is also their home. Israelis have successfully managed to prove to their diaspora brothers and sisters on a daily basis how wrong they are.

Jewish communities are still Israel's "home front" and defenders, who have ancestral rights to the establishment of the state of Israel. They also play a role in strengthening the country and in the ongoing moral justification for Israel's existence. It was in their faces that Israel slammed the door.

Israelis don't understand how much the arrogant, bureaucratic process can hurt a lonely soldier who needs to go to South Africa. He might be serving in integral and powerful units in the IDF, and is then refused the right to go and see his family. This is unacceptable.

It's such an unnecessary but deep and painful hurt, yet very simple to heal with some care and kind attention. Our leaders need to consider this going forward.

• *Advocate Zvika (Biko) Arran is a social entrepreneur. He lives in South Africa with his wife, Liat, who is the Jewish Agency representative in South Africa, and their children.*



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



2022 – the year of the fanatics and the fed-up

HARRY JOFFE

OPINION

2022 is going to be an interesting year. It should be the year when interest rates in the United States (US) start to rise, and, of course, COVID-19 is still with us. The following are the key flash points to watch out for:

■ **Russia and Ukraine**

According to most sources, Russia has about 170 000 troops near or on the border with Ukraine. With a lot of heavy equipment close to the border as well, invasion could happen at any time. US President Joe Biden has had two conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin on this issue, and issued stern warnings on the economic consequences for Russia if it invades, such is the nervousness in the West.

Why is Putin, the master chess player and strategist, ramping up tensions like this? There are many reasons. First, he likes to keep major Western countries off-balance. Escalating tensions on the Ukraine border and then de-escalating them when he gets the concessions he wants, achieves exactly this. No one in the West can afford to ignore Russia. More importantly, by forcing Biden to meet him and treat him like an equal, Putin ensures he's seen as a world statesman and Russia as a world power.

That plays very well to his audience back home and gets him much-needed support at a time when economic conditions aren't good. Second, Putin generally wants some concession from the West on Ukraine. Any student of history knows that when Russia was invaded by Hitler, one of the main routes of invasion was through the Ukraine. Putin isn't going to allow any repeat of that, unlikely as it might be. Russia sees this as an existential issue. He wants a neutral Ukraine, not part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), something the West won't agree to. He therefore raises the temperature every so often to pressurise the West



Russian President Vladimir Putin



United States President Joe Biden

into making some concession in this regard. At the very least, Ukraine won't be joining NATO in the foreseeable future.

Although full invasion is unlikely, with two armies facing each other across a very informal border, things can get out of control quickly. This will probably remain the most tense area in 2022.

■ **Taiwan**

The Economist recently ran a headline edition describing Taiwan potentially as the most dangerous place on earth. China claims that Taiwan belongs to it and sees it as a breakaway province that must "come back home". The people of Taiwan want it to remain a sovereign state, although it isn't recognised by most of the rest of the world. There's little room for compromise, apart from the current tense status quo in which Taiwan doesn't declare independence and China still talks about "one China". Things have been getting more unstable recently, with many academics and even US generals starting to talk openly about a potential invasion.

While, again, invasion is highly unlikely this year, the temperature will remain hot, with the Chinese Air Force testing Taiwanese defences regularly by ramping up flights into its air-defence zone.

■ **Israel and Iran**

One must know the world is unstable when Israel and Iran are only item three on the flashpoint list! Things have been very tense here for a long time, with the two sides in a low level, behind-the-scenes shadow war. However, matters are now coming to a head with Iran now openly amassing a stockpile of enriched uranium that's many times larger than permitted, including at least 17.7kg of material enriched to 60% purity – just below the level needed for a nuclear bomb.

This means that the clock is ticking, and at some point, if Iran doesn't rejoin the JCPOA (the nuclear deal with the US, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany), Israel will have to make a decision on taking more drastic action. Although crossing the nuclear threshold doesn't mean Iran can immediately attack Israel as it still needs to obtain the technology to send the bomb on a missile, Israel is unlikely to take the chance and wait. As soon as that nuclear threshold is close to being crossed, it will probably act. It would prefer to act together with the US and not alone as an attack on Iran would stretch it to the limits of its capacity. That's why it has delayed to this point. However, don't expect it to last forever. As soon as Iran approaches the nuclear threshold, the tension will ratchet up dramatically.

■ **Elections**

There are some interesting elections scheduled this year. The French presidential elections take place in April, in which incumbent President Emmanuel Macron faces the traditional threat from the right wing in Marine Le Pen, but also this time from the far right in the form of Éric Zemmour. Things might go calmly, and Macron might have to run off against centrist Valérie Pécresse, but if Zemmour does well in the polls, it will portray a swing to the right in the heart of Europe. The election has the potential to increase tension in France if Zemmour does better than expected.

Then there's an election in Hungary in April/May. Populist incumbent Viktor Orbán faces a real threat from a united opposition this time. It will be a close election for the first time in years in Hungary, and is unlikely to be a quiet affair.

Finally, Brazil faces an election in October. Current President Jair Bolsonaro, known by many as "the Trump of the tropics", is lagging his main rival in the polls. If he loses, he might not go quietly and there might well be a Trump-style challenge to the election results. American democracy was shaken by Trump's actions last January in refusing to concede defeat, and Brazil might face the same. The only difference is that the US's democratic institutions (the courts, local governors, and electoral institutions) are vastly experienced and have been developed over hundreds of years. They were able to stand firm. Brazil's institutions are less experienced as it is a far younger democracy. Things might get really uncertain in Brazil come October.

■ **Overall**

2022 promises to be an interesting year geopolitically. Overlay this with the fact that COVID-19 will soon have run for more than two years, mass exhaustion with all the restrictions – even if they are necessary for public health – and we have the scene set for an unpredictable, combustible year. A combination of unstable international politics and an angry population worldwide will make for some interesting developments in international affairs. The riots which broke out in the previously stable country of Kazakhstan as this story went to press, and which threatened the stability of the government, are a perfect example of this.

• *Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.*

Shock as ‘Eishet Chayil’ murdered in Cape Town

TALI FEINBERG

At the beginning of 2021, Doreen Lewis’ brother, David Lewis, died from COVID-19 at age 68. The siblings lived together and were deeply involved in the Cape Town Jewish community. But before the year was out, tragedy struck again: Doreen was murdered in her home in lower Vredehoek around midday on 14 December 2021. Described as having a “special neshama”, Doreen (73), dedicated herself to caring for her brother, who was born deaf. She was planning her brother’s consecration an hour before she was brutally murdered. The two siblings are now buried one grave apart. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from London, their surviving brother, Frank Lewis, says he hadn’t seen his siblings since before the pandemic, but they spoke every day. Even though he left South Africa in 1989, he never imagined his sister would one day be tied up and murdered in her own home. “Doreen was a beautiful girl who never married. She dedicated herself to caring for my late parents and brother,” says Frank, pointing out that there are many “unanswered questions” about the murder. Their cousin, David Stein in Cape Town, says that after her brother’s passing, Doreen lived alone, although more recently her domestic helper and her husband had moved in after their room on the property had burnt down. Because the domestic helper’s room was being rebuilt, there were many builders on site. The flat is in Myrtle Street, right by the Gardens Shopping Centre. “They think the guy [who murdered her] posed as a builder or insurance agent. It happened around noon – in broad daylight,” he says. “The domestic helper and her husband were in the flat, but they heard nothing. The murderer can be seen on the security cameras but because he’s wearing a mask, it’s difficult to identify him. All he took was an old cell phone.

The motive was probably robbery.” Stein says the domestic worker discovered the body, but isn’t a suspect. “The investigation is being dealt with by seasoned detectives”, Warrant Officer Joseph Swartbooi of the South African Police Services Western Cape Media Centre told the *SA Jewish Report*. “The investigation has reached a sensitive stage, and the investigating officer is following up on all leads.” Captain Ezra October of the Cape Town Central Police Station added that he had interviewed the investigator, Detective Warrant Officer Shaun Bardien, regarding an update. “He informed me that the investigation is at a sensitive stage. The community arranged possible video footage, and he is awaiting feedback.” Bardien is a member of the Serious and Violent Crimes detectives unit. Local media report that he and his team have successfully solved two murder cases in the Cape Town City Bowl, so there’s hope that this killer will also be apprehended. Victims in the two cases were aged 81 (killed in 2017) and 60 (killed in 2018). They were both killed in their homes. Cape Town Jewish Jewry and the wider community reacted in shock and anger to the murder, especially because the area has deteriorated in recent years. “We lived near Gardens Centre for a while and it was more dodgy than just about anywhere else we’ve lived subsequently, including on Long Street,” wrote one resident of the area on Facebook. “A very uneasy mix of street dwellers and car guards checking out



The late David and Doreen Lewis

everybody and everything. My car got broken into four times near Gardens Centre.” Said another resident, “I moved here last year, and as much as I know that no area is unaffected by crime, I have never felt this uneasy in my own home.” Another person added, “I have been threatened by multiple car guards while walking in Schoonder and Myrtle streets after shopping.” “The Gardens Centre area has been frightening for us all to park nearby and approach on foot for many years,” wrote a third resident. “This area has been described as a hot spot for years. Residents have had to fight for themselves.” Doreen’s brother, Frank, says they spoke about his sister moving after David’s passing, but she didn’t want to as she was comfortable in her lifelong family home. Her murder comes after another elderly Jewish couple, Rosalie Bloch and Aubrey Jackson, were tied up and murdered in their home in 2018. Two years ago, Western Cape police offered a R100 000 reward for information, but the investigation has stalled. “Doreen was a quiet type, and well-loved. She was an excellent cook and baker,” says Stein. “Their parents always had a welcoming and *hamishe* home. They lived close to Schoonder Street Shul, and every visiting rabbi would spend Shabbat with them.” Cape Town attorney Peter Greenberg knew the siblings for many years. “I had my law practice in Gardens Centre for 28 years and during this time, I got to know Doreen and her brothers. I think David’s passing was devastating for Doreen as they were very close. Doreen was devoted to taking excellent care

of David’s day-to-day needs. She was well-loved and a true *eishet chayil* [woman of valour]. Her untimely and sudden passing was a huge shock.” “David was the first deaf referee in South Africa, and was known to have given Rabbi David Rosen a red card in a local soccer game,” Stein says. “He also played bowls and loved Yiddishkeit. They were both in hospital with COVID-19. Doreen survived, David didn’t.” “David refereed at provisional and club level, and he represented South Africa as a referee at the Maccabi Games as well as local derbies,” says his friend, Adam Zartz. Frank Lewis’ sister-in-law in Cape Town, Jenny Cohen, says, “Doreen had an amazing sense of humour. She would do small acts of kindness, like taking a plate of homemade biscuits to the guard every time she visited the cemetery.” Now, she lies in that same cemetery, taken too soon. Stanley Norrie of Café Riteve on the Cape Town Jewish Community Campus says Doreen visited the café every day, spending time with old friends as they reminisced about their childhoods centred around Schoonder Street Shul. Writing on Facebook on 15 December 2021, he said, “Two weeks ago, Doreen Lewis was celebrating a birthday with her friends at Café Riteve. Every day we saw Israel, Noreen, and Doreen smiling and laughing. Yesterday, she was brutally murdered! We are so sad and wish her family strength. It’s absolutely incomprehensible.” Zartz says Doreen battled in the wake of her brother’s passing, especially because COVID-19 restrictions meant that she couldn’t attend the community events she so loved. “Maybe this was Hashem’s way of saying that she and her brother needed to be together. Their memory will be cherished.” Anyone with information is urged to call Crime Stop on 08600 10111.

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‘Kosher’ prawns and mussels spark packaging alert

TALI FEINBERG

For some Jews, kosher prawns and mussels would be a dream come true. So, when it emerged in December 2021 that two local *treif* seafood products had a United Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) Beth Din kosher hechsher on their packaging, many laughed it off as a humorous error.

Others took it more seriously, saying that if prawns can be labelled kosher, there may be mistakes where the distinction isn't so clear cut.

The prawns were a Woolworths product, while the mussels were from Shoprite.

"The erroneous use of the Beth Din logo on products is nothing new," says a member of the local Kosher Consumers Organisation (KCO), speaking on condition of anonymity. "It happens from time to time and occurs throughout the world. It's acceptable, and mistakes do happen, but only up to a point. We're concerned about the frequency with which this is happening in South Africa. Almost every alert which goes out is about products which contain the logo when they shouldn't, or products which contain the incorrect designation of *parev* or dairy. As consumers, it's impossible to keep track. It also makes one question the reliability of the logo when it does appear on a product.

"Chocolate, cold drinks and the like is one thing, but prawns and mussels is another completely," the consumer says. "This is unacceptable. It speaks to a breakdown in controls and systems of monitoring and approval. In an age of fake meat and fake cheese, the damage that can be done by the Beth Din logo on non-kosher seafood can be immeasurable. The response from the UOS has been tepid – one email sent to the community. One email only. What about people who have no email? Where's the urgency?"

The KCO points out that "the *treif* seafood which bears the Beth Din logo is made in Cape Town. The latest extremely confusing alert which went out about wine which has the Beth Din logo on it, but also the Hebrew words 'not kosher' is also a product made in Cape Town. Following the passing of Rabbi Desmond Maizels a year ago, the UOS of Johannesburg has taken over the kashrus operations of Cape Town."

The group says it remains anonymous because it's fearful. "We wish we could be open, but one cannot tackle the establishment these days without repercussions. We understand that our anonymity may prevent us from being taken seriously, and that's a price we need to pay. But we're concerned for our livelihoods. The Kosher Consumer Organisation of the 70s to the 90s was a powerful force in the community. Times have changed, the community has changed. But it had a great history and was well-received by the community."

Commenting on the *treif* seafood labelling saga, UOS Kosher Department Managing Director Rabbi Dovi Goldstein says the error lies with the companies concerned. "Woolworths and Shoprite are longstanding and major clients of the Kosher Department, with thousands of kosher-certified products on their shelves. Both companies have been committed to the Jewish community for years and were most apologetic and co-operative in rectifying

the problem when this printing error was brought to their attention," he says.

"In both instances, the mislabelled products were brought to our attention by members of the community. Unfortunately, errors like these occur from time to time all around the world. When we were made aware of them, we remedied it by notifying the community via email and our various social-media channels, and we contacted the companies and had the products removed from their stores or the logo covered, to which they agreed.

"Where issues of mislabelling occur, we work with manufacturers to address the issue to ensure it doesn't happen again and notify our community immediately," Goldstein says. "In addition, over the holiday period, Villa Cape wine was also seen on shelves bearing an unauthorised logo, together with the Hebrew lettering stating 'not kosher'. This was an unauthorised use of our logo, and the company in question has also been contacted and the products recalled from the shelves.

"The reality is that we have tens of

thousands of products with our logo on the shelf, which is positive for the kosher consumer. The community is our eyes and ears on the ground, and may very well spot a labelling error on packaging on the shelf before we do as the kosher

department. We have recently established a dedicated email for community members to send this kind of information through to our team. If you come across any product that bears our logo and seems unauthorised, please email notkosher@uos.co.za with a photograph and the details of the packaging, and we will investigate."

Woolworths spokesperson Kirsten Hewett said, "We apologise for this labelling error. Accurate, transparent, and helpful product labelling is very important for our customers. The kosher authority notified us of the packaging error on 20 December 2021.

"We immediately removed all the incorrectly labelled products from our store shelves on 20 December. As an interim measure, a sticker will cover the kosher logo on the packaging while the label is being corrected.

While we do have procedures in place to prevent mistakes, we are reviewing these procedures and will implement further

controls to prevent errors in future."

One community member complained directly to Woolworths, and shared extracts of the response he received. "Our technical team was extremely concerned to hear about the matter. All factories producing products for Woolworths are audited independently by various inspection services to ensure that the highest standards are maintained.

"Following your complaint, we have conducted a full investigation with the manufacturer which involves a detailed investigation of the label printing and approval process. We have identified the error, and have corrected it immediately. We have addressed this with our supplier and reinforced the importance of following the correct labelling procedure. We take pride in adhering to the correct kosher practices when manufacturing and packing our kosher products," the company wrote.

The Shoprite media team said, "The supermarket chain would like to apologise to its loyal customers for oversight of this labelling error. It has already agreed with the UOS of South Africa and Kosher SA to ensure that the packaging is updated and correctly labelled in its next packaging print run. A kosher alert was subsequently issued detailing the particulars."



Capitol revolt anniversary ‘reminder of danger of extremism’

SAUL KAMIONSKY

On the anniversary of the storming of the Unites States Capitol, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an international Jewish non-governmental organisation combatting hate, has called on the world to "take extremists at their word" and hold them to account.

"It's frightening how these extremists have grown more organised," ADL Chief Executive Jonathan Greenblatt said in a special ADL webinar on the anniversary of the 6 January insurrection.

"They've shifted from large public rallies to small local school board meetings, to attacking the integrity of medical professionals, and intimidating town council members and what not," he said during the webinar that formed part of ADL's "Fighting Hate from Home" webinar series.

Based in the United States, ADL fights all forms of hate, is the first point of call in America when acts of antisemitism occur, and is now at the forefront of the battle against the insurrectionists and violent vigilantes who stormed the Capitol.

"What we saw a year ago is what I would describe as the most predictable terror attack in American history because they told us they were going to do it," said Greenblatt.

"It could have been far, far worse were it not for the remarkable law enforcement officers who did such an extraordinary job of preventing these individuals from capturing, kidnapping, and potentially killing our elected representatives during an event that has no precedent."

The ADL has been tracking extremists for many decades, and has helped identify many of the perpetrators involved in the insurrection.

According to Greenblatt, although hundreds of the perpetrators of the attack on the Capitol have been arrested and others are being prosecuted, it isn't enough.

"To see men barging through the building wearing 'Camp Auschwitz' sweatshirts, spouting insane antisemitic QAnon conspiracies, and brandishing weapons reminds us as Jews not only about our vulnerability, but our society's vulnerability," said Greenblatt. "This is because we know better than most what can happen when extremism really runs."

The ADL recently filed a federal lawsuit to hold two violent groups accountable for the role they played in planning and carrying out the uprising. Greenblatt said this lawsuit was aimed at taking down the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, and more than 30 individuals, and holding them to account for their role in planning and executing the terror attack.

"What we're doing in this case is particularly important," said Eileen Hershenov, the ADL's senior vice-president of policy. "We're never going to get rid of extremism and hate completely. We have to push it back to its fringes."

"Last year, the ADL launched its Protect Plan, a comprehensive framework to address the threat of domestic terrorism while safeguarding civil liberties. We were really pleased to work with the White House to advise it on our perspective and to see it release its national strategy on countering domestic terrorism," said Greenblatt.

The ADL also launched a comprehensive Repair Plan to fight hate online. "We have asked for a whole-of-government approach for the administration and Congress to take steps," said Hershenov. "We have also recently worked with the secretary for homeland security, Alejandro Mayorkas, on many of the initiatives that he, we, other civil society organisations, and government are putting together to fight the ongoing threat of extremist violence."

Mayorkas was sworn in to his current position by Vice-President Kamala Harris in February last year.

"I think back to the time when I first moved to Washington DC to join the Obama-Biden administration in 2009," said Mayorkas. "If someone then had told me that 11 or 12 years later, we would have an insurrection at the Capitol, that people would storm the Capitol, break into it, threaten the life of our vice-president and our leader of the house, and that, in the aftermath, this country wouldn't come together in unanimity to condemn it, I don't think I would have believed it."

Mayorkas said his department of homeland security was focused on equipping and empowering local

communities to "identify ideologies of hate and false narratives, their connectivity to violence, and to prevent that threat from ever materialising, and should it unfortunately materialise, to respond and prove resilient in the face of it".

He said his department needed to lead by example, ferret out domestic violent extremism within its own ranks, and educate people entering government about the special responsibilities they hold as public servants and representative not only of the American people, but also of the values and ideals that define the country.

His department is spreading information about what it knows to alert the landscape of law enforcement and, more generally, create public awareness.

"We're also equipping local communities with the capability to prevent threats from occurring and respond, should they occur," said Mayorkas. "We're doing that through our grant programmes to faith-based organisations, non-profit organisations, and state and local municipalities, so they have the tools to address the threat that's real and hasn't diminished this past year, but has certainly held steady, if not grown in severity."

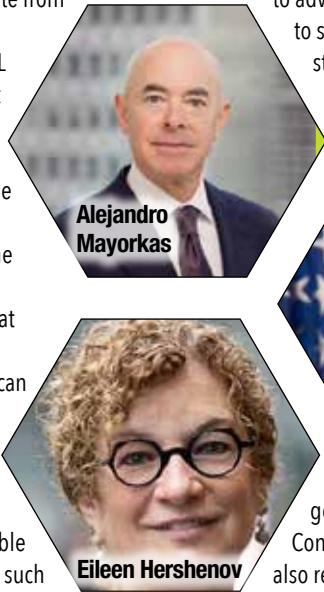
"Anyone who has been paying attention to extremist activity across the country or to the chorus of disinformation and hatred rampant across media and social media will tell you that what happened at the US Capitol in January was in some ways the most predictable act of political violence in American history," Hershenov said.

Washington DC Attorney General Karl Racine remembered watching television with his team and talking to Metropolitan Police Department officers who rushed to the Capitol to help save America's freedom. "We committed that we would do everything we could every single day until I'm no longer attorney general to continue to fight against hate," he recalled.

Racine said the ADL had done an unbelievable job of identifying the defendants. "Our investigation continues. There may be more defendants. We're going to go where the evidence takes us, and we're going to hold them financially accountable. Bankrupting these organisations and individuals is my objective."

He and Greenblatt urged everyone to turn the television off and be part of the civil process by volunteering in their community or going to their local schools and parks to elevate humanity over hate.

"This isn't being a Republican or a Democrat," said Greenblatt. "It's not about being a conservative or a liberal. It's about being an American, and agreeing to things that hold our democracy together like decency, humanism, and respect."



COVID-19 – a Kilimanjaro for KDVP alumnus honoured in Canada

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African-born doctor Graham Sher was surprised, speechless, and deeply moved to be appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada, one of the country's highest civilian honours, on 29 December last year.

This King David Victory Park (KDVP) matriculant, who has been chief executive of Canadian Blood Services (CBS) since 2001 and an executive from its founding in 1998, was honoured for his contribution to public health and for being instrumental in the development of Canada's largest blood system operator.

During Sher's time leading CBS, a national organisation with 4 000 employees, he has navigated the challenges posed by the West Nile virus and severe acute respiratory syndrome. Having also summited Mount Kilimanjaro in 2013 to raise funds for his organisation's national

public cord blood bank, his latest obstacle is the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Although I've managed many crises in the past, nothing has been as big, complex, sustained, and challenging as COVID-19," Sher told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"In the many challenges I have had to lead the organisation through over time, I have had to be agile and responsive to understand what the nature of the emerging challenges are. I have had to protect the blood supply. I have made sure that safety is the single most important factor in every decision we make. I literally have been very close to the notion that a safe and secure blood supply is non-negotiable."

When Sher emigrated to Canada after matriculating from KDVP in 1980 and completing his medical and doctoral degrees at the University of the Witwatersrand, he could never have dreamed of being tasked with conquering such hurdles.

"I had an outstanding and phenomenal education at Victory Park," says Sher, who was at the school from Grade one to matric. "I remember very well some of my outstanding teachers. A lot of people were highly influential in my life – Joseph Sherman, Jeffrey Wolf, and a number of maths and science teachers."

His time at KDVP was important for him in many ways. "I came out of there certainly prizing the values of education and striving to do one's best. I grew up in a household that was probably substantially below the economic norm within King David, so I was very grateful for the financial support from the community, the board, and others to help me get through my time there."

It taught him, he says, that there are always people in the world less fortunate than oneself. "It has certainly influenced who I am and the type of work I do. It's one of the reasons I've

been drawn to spend my career working in the public rather than the private sector."

After becoming the first person in his extended family to obtain a university degree of any kind, he initially undertook a post-doctoral research programme at the University of Toronto. While there, he was accepted to pursue speciality training in haematology, the study of blood and blood disorders.

"One of the reasons I chose to come to Canada as opposed to the United States is that I'm a big believer in publicly-insured and publicly-administered healthcare systems," says Sher. "Those systems, which we have in Canada, are better health systems than those in which access to healthcare is dependent on one's economic ability."

In the spring of 1998, when Sher was comfortably settled in Toronto with a flourishing academic medical career at the University of Toronto and the Toronto Hospital, he was approached to become the vice-president of medical affairs of a new organisation that would be replacing the Canadian Red Cross Society.

Before he knew it, he had his first executive position with the organisation that became CBS. Less than three years later, at just 38, he became its second chief executive.

"My role as CEO is to lead the organisation, set strategy, ensure operational success, and make sure we can deliver against our mission and mandate. What that entails is delivering a large number of products and services to the healthcare system to support every hospital in Canada."

Sher says CBS is unique because it's a national organisation, meaning that it has a responsibility for delivering products and services to the entire healthcare system across the country.

"Although our name stresses the word 'blood', we're involved in many other business lines," he says "We're responsible for collecting blood from blood donors in Canada, manufacturing it, and testing it, making sure it's safe, and sending it to all the hospitals. But we're

also responsible for the collection and manufacture of many human-plasma derived pharmaceuticals. We run a diagnostic laboratory division. We're also responsible for all of the work involved in stem cell bone marrow transplantation and organ transplantation for the country."

Some of the organisation's achievements during Sher's time at the helm are developing new products and services, commencing work with the organ and tissue donation and transplantation community, and opening a national public cord blood bank to collect and provide lifesaving cord blood stem cells for transplant.

Sher hired Tusker, a guide company in America, to lead him and the 24 other members of the group up Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest single free-standing mountain in the world, in 2013.

"Tusker's owner turned out to be a Jewish ex-South African named Eddie Frank, who was a very good friend of one of my first cousins. He had a photograph of me at the Barmitzvah of my cousin, Paul Sher, 50 years earlier. To make a long story short, in climbing Mount Kilimanjaro for personal and professional reasons, I landed up connecting with an excellent African Jewish guy who lives in the United States and is world famous for leading clients up Mount Kilimanjaro."

Frank successfully led Sher, who was in the best shape of his life at the time, and the other members of the group to the summit and back. "It was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life by far," says Sher. "It was a complete life-changing event. It taught me that I could push myself to physical and emotional extremes in a way I had never really understood before."

The previous year, the youngest of Sher's three sons had his Barmitzvah at the Johannesburg-based Greenside Shul. "It was the same shul where I had my Barmitzvah," says Sher. "Interestingly, the rabbi, Mendel Rabinowitz, was a good friend of mine at school at King David."

Going forward, Sher wants to continue preparing CBS for the post-COVID-19 world.



Dr Graham Sher

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland. Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only. The most important things is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years. Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK. Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Horesh resides in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

My next visit to South Africa is planned for the end of January/beginning of February 2022. WhatsApp me on +48 783 953 223 • Email Avi Horesh adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

Esports a green field for soccer pro Larry Cohen

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Larry Cohen trained with football stars like Gareth Bale, Harry Kane, and Gianluigi Buffon during his playing career, but now he's cheering for the likes of Bale and other renowned players in the world of esports.

Cohen decided to hang up his boots in 2016 after playing for Jomo Cosmos, Chippa United, and Moroka Swallows in the top tier of South African football. However, he's still involved with the game – albeit the simulated version.

His business, 38 Entertainment Group, brings together the world's top footballers to play FIFA against each other, and Cohen enjoys egging them on, just like he supported his teammates sitting in the dugout as a substitute during his playing days.

"Sitting on the bench, you could watch but you couldn't do anything, yet you still got that thrill of your team participating, winning, and you doing well," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "That's the way it is with esports, because you have no control over the guys, but you're there supporting."

His father, Martin, whose gritty flair anchored the Highlands Park midfield in the 1970s, was his hero growing up in Morribrook Avenue in Linksfield North, Johannesburg.

"As a footballer, my

dad was one of the best in the country," says Cohen. "I always looked up to him. I got to see only a few clips of him playing, but he always guided me in the right direction without being pushy."

Cohen's time at King David Linksfield taught him the values, camaraderie, and what he describes as "the KDL fight" needed to believe in yourself and do well in life.

He admits he wasn't the best student and got into a lot of trouble because his priority was "the beautiful game", and playing for SuperSport United Academy occupied a lot of his time.

"In matric, I used to come to school quite late because I was training with a professional team," he says. "Principal [Arnie] Altshuler wasn't very happy with me. But it was a great experience. I loved being at King David, and the Jewish community is always close to my heart."



Larry Cohen playing for Chippa United

Jomo Cosmos coach Jomo Sono gave Cohen his first professional contract at the age of 19. Having just returned from training with West Ham in England, he was thankful that his potential was noticed by the man who had played alongside his dad in a mixed-race South African team's 5-0 win against a rebel Argentina XI during the apartheid era.

"It's always not easy getting your first contract and to break into the professional ranks, but then it's even more difficult to stay there," says Cohen.

When Cohen was 22, he trained with English club Tottenham Hotspur.

"I could never play in England because I had a South African passport so I couldn't get a work permit. I saw it as an opportunity to improve my game. I was training with the likes of Kane in the reserve team. A few days a week, I would mix up with the first team, which included Bale and Emmanuel Adebayor."

A highlight of Cohen's career occurred during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

He was set for an off-season break from playing duties at Wits when the club's head of development, Eric Tinkler, gave him a call.

"One of the Italy players got injured," said the former Bafana Bafana midfielder. "Would you mind training with them for the next 10 days?"

Cohen jumped at the chance. "Training with the likes of Gattuso, Pirlo, and Buffon was an incredible experience," he says. "They were really friendly and welcoming. I remember going back to the hotel to have lunch, and Buffon, the Italian goalkeeper who is an absolute legend, pushed one of the players out the way and said, 'No, Larry, you come sit here, my friend.'"

While playing for Moroka Swallows, where he recalls forming a great centre-back partnership with Roger da Costa, he almost played for Lithuania against the Wayne Rooney-captained England in a Euro 2016 qualifier at Wembley.

He was called up to the Lithuanian national team after finally receiving citizenship. Playing against England at Wembley would have been an absolute dream for the great-grandchild of Lithuanian emigrants to South Africa.

"It's a pity it didn't happen," he says. "FIFA denied my call up, saying my citizenship had to come

through my grandparents. It was heartbreaking, having worked so hard to reach that level."

Bafana Bafana Coach Gordon Igesund then chatted to Cohen about playing for South Africa. "He said he

"I loved being at King David, and the Jewish community is always close to my heart."

was going to call me up," says Cohen. "Unfortunately, about two weeks before the game, I pulled [a muscle in] my groin, and I was out for about a month. So, I had a few unlucky breaks in my international career."

At the age of 28, he retired from playing because he

had fallen out of love with the game. The unsuccessful call up to both national teams was "a bitter pill to swallow". "It was always my dream to play overseas. I was at the age where I thought to myself, 'I've done well, I've achieved what I wanted to achieve in terms of becoming a professional footballer, I've enjoyed my time, and I'd rather call it on my terms.' I wanted to pursue other dreams."

He moved to London, and co-founded 38 Entertainment Group with fellow King David alumnus Jonathan Kark. "The business has two brands," says Cohen. "One of them is Elevens esports, which we run and code with Gareth Bale. Working with him is great; he's an absolute superstar. We have a professional FIFA team, so the guys enter competitions around the world. Currently, our FIFA team is second in Europe and sixth in the world."

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the business starting an initiative called Combat Corona, in which 10 footballers played FIFA against each other live on Twitch. The likes of Bale, Paulo Dybala, Luke Shaw, and Mason Mount participated in the event, which raised money to help the United Nations Children's Fund fight the pandemic.

"During our three events to date, we've worked with more than 150 celebrities from around the world and received just more than 10 million live views on Twitch," Cohen says.

'It's about respect,' couple says on seven decades of marriage

TALI FEINBERG

Israel and Vera (nee Wilkov) Bulafkin were high-school sweethearts when they first fell in love, and it has remained a romance for the ages as they celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary last week.

"Israel is 92 [born in 1929] and Vera is 91 [born in 1930]," says their son-in-law, Stanley Pincus. "Israel is from Krugersdorp and Vera from Randfontein. They met at Krugersdorp High School in Standard 6 [Grade 8]. It was love at first sight, and they got married on 6 January 1952 at the Berea Shul in Johannesburg."

Israel is a pharmacist who ran a pharmacy called Medicine Chest in Northcliff. Vera worked with him throughout the time that they ran that business until they retired some time ago. They lived in Krugersdorp all their lives until they moved to Johannesburg about two years ago to be with their children. They have three children, Helene Pincus, Alan Bulafkin, and Malcolm Bulafkin (all married), eight grandchildren (four of whom are married), and three great grandchildren.

The couple say the secret to a successful marriage is "essentially to respect each other. Try not to argue much, but if you have an argument, don't go to bed until you resolve the issue. Always put your spouse first!"



Vera and Israel Bulafkin

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Late to the COVID party

It's like man-flu, only with everyone around being even more annoying than they usually are. That's my experience a few days into a bout with Omicron. Thankfully, I'm late to this series and have experienced none of the pilot, season one, Beta, or even Delta. I have also been twice vaccinated, and given what I have seen of this variant, might suffer the real symptoms but not the anxiety of prior episodes.

Not that you would think that I was ill if the family's reaction is anything to go by. Instead, they seem annoyed that I have had an impact on their lives and they are now forced to quarantine when the year is about to get started.

No cups of tea, no mopping of my brow when clamminess overtakes me, and no slow shaking of heads in a sad, sympathetic manner. Not a get-well card or gift or a slab of Lindt 80% chocolate.

Nothing.

Quite the contrary. It seems that much like the overnight erection of the Berlin Wall, I find myself having been barred from parts of the house where others reside.

Hostile stares and accusatory looks are more the theme. I try in my rasping, weak voice to explain that I have no idea where I got the plague from. But my words fall on the uncaring, more concerned about quarantine than the delicate health of an ageing father.

It might not be true to say that I haven't been preparing for this diagnosis for two years. As a third-generation hypochondriac (on both sides), from the day I heard the word "Wuhan", I became certain that we were all going to perish. A pandemic is something I have unknowingly been training for most of my life.

I have imagined, enacted, and re-enacted the recipe of this positive diagnosis so often, that when it did arrive, it was admittedly almost anticlimactic. That's not to say that it didn't, much like COVID-19 itself, take my breath away.

In some sense, it's my time to shine. The number of interviews, podcasts, articles, and sessions I have conducted on COVID-19 has by no means made me an expert on it, but it has allowed me to engage with those who are knowledgeable. So much so, that someone referred to me as "the deputy head boy of COVID South Africa". Head boy, I assume, being Dr Anton Meyberg of the Sunday COVID Podcast. Not that I accepted the title by any means – because simply put, I'm no one's "deputy".

Lack of sympathy aside, the reality is that I'm deeply grateful for so much. I don't feel well at all, I have lost my voice, am incredibly fatigued, and my family is annoying.

For me, Omicron hasn't been easy. But the fact that I have this variant and not one of the prior variants, the fact that I'm vaccinated and that our medical care, family, and community is so exceptionally caring makes this something to celebrate, not fear.

It's also possible that when my kids gesticulate

wildly when I come near them it's not because they are unsympathetic and don't want me around, but rather because they are so concerned about me that seeing me like this is too painful for them to witness.

I'm certain that must be it.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



Israel is open – but should we go?

>>Continued from page 1

Since Omicron and the travel bans hit the world late last year, "Yad L'Olim has been busy literally 24 hours a day", says Lipman. "This includes answering people's questions about the new rules, guiding people especially when they test positive here in Israel, and advocating for expanding the rules. We have especially advocated for allowing those who have recovered [from COVID-19] to enter Israel, especially if they have a special reason to come.

"On the ground in Israel, people know that that the virus is spreading very quickly," he says. "They are choosing to stay out of public environments as much as possible. I wouldn't say that people are functioning in fear because the number of serious cases and deaths isn't at a place where it's causing that fear, but people are certainly being cautious."

But other *olim* told the *SA Jewish Report* that Israelis are tired of the rules and many don't wear masks or use sanitiser in public. And while Lipman cautions against going to the country, many said they thought it was fine to visit Israel. Says Josh Buchalter (24) in Tel Aviv, "The Omicron wave really seems like annual winter flu, for 20-35 year olds at least. I haven't really spoken to anyone outside of that bracket.

"My girlfriend tested positive and I tested negative. We live together, so it made no sense that I was negative. But either way, our symptoms were really like flu and nothing else. For one to two days we were clearly sick, sneezing a lot. But we rested, and by the third day, we were much better. By the fourth or fifth day we were 100% fine.

"Although it's a personal decision, my opinion is that if someone is double vaccinated and not a high-risk individual, there's nothing to fear," he says. "Besides the 15-degree weather, everything in Israel is *sababa* (cool)!"

At this point in time, foreigners can enter Israel with no permit provided they are vaccinated with a second or third dose within 180 days of their visit. They must be 14 days from the vaccination date. If more than 180 days have passed since the traveller's booster (the third dose), Israel will honour it until the end of February 2022.

There's no automatic allowance for unvaccinated children of any age. If you need to travel with children, you can try to get a permit, but these will be granted only in extreme emergencies.

To enter Israel, you must complete the pre-flight form within 48 hours of your flight. You must get a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure to Israel or a negative lab-based antigen test within 24 hours of departure. You are exempted from this requirement if you fit the criteria for entry and you have a positive PCR test to show from between 11 days and three months before your flight.

The quarantine period exists until you receive your negative PCR test back from Ben Gurion, or after 24 hours, whichever comes first.

"Recently recovered COVID-19 patients may continue to test positive upon arrival at Ben Gurion," notes Lipman. "If this happens, please be aware that you must apply for release from quarantine, and it can take time and effort to secure that release."

To get updates on Israel's changing travel restrictions, visit yadlolim.org/corona-update

Israel and the ANC: new dawn or old yawn?

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Every year on the anniversary of its founding in 1912, the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) issues its "January 8th Statement". In a marathon speech, the ANC president assesses the state of the ruling party and the country and provides a formal view of the path forward. Israel always gets a passing mention. So, what did President Cyril Ramaphosa say – and not say – about the Middle East this year? And does it signify anything new?

In a speech running to scores of paragraphs, there's a short section on international relations from the ANC's perspective. It usually covers the ANC's solidarity with regimes like Cuba, and support for the self-determination of the Western Sahara (under Moroccan occupation). It routinely calls for reform of the United Nations Security Council and for conflicts on the African continent to end. This year's speech in Limpopo had all these regular ingredients.

There were two paragraphs on the Middle East, quoted here in full: "We recall the principled solidarity with the people of Palestine demonstrated by our recently departed Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. The archbishop was at the forefront of highlighting the similarities between the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people and the brutality of the apartheid regime.

"The ANC repeats our condemnation of the ongoing illegal settlements, state-sponsored settler violence against Palestinians, and threats of illegally annexing more Palestinian land, including the Golan Heights. We will intensify our work around the world and with Palestinian and Israeli representatives, for the achievement of Palestinian self-determination."

However, according to a video of the speech on YouTube, the president's delivery differed from his script. He omitted the entire emotive paragraph about Archbishop Tutu, as well as the line about working with peacemakers on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Now, there's no way to tell whether these sections were pre-deleted from the presidential iPad or left out as the speech was running long and the audience was losing interest after hours of orations. We may never know if the omission was ideological, pragmatic, or just a matter of timing.

The reality is that the spoken remarks were less harsh in their criticism of Israel than they might have been, while still making it clear which side the ANC is on in this conflict.

Does the mention of working with Palestinian and Israeli representatives signal a slightly softer approach now that Benjamin Netanyahu is out of power? Does it perhaps signal a revival of real peace-driven dialogue? It's a pity it wasn't mentioned in the spoken version. Or is this just me clutching at straws?

Make no mistake, the speech was still a swipe against Israel, which the ANC continues to cast as the villain. Sadly, South Africans are used to this. We still haven't had an ambassador in Israel since May 2018. Our government joined in the bullying of Miss South Africa not to participate in the Miss Universe pageant because it was held in Eilat, a campaign that failed. Senior ANC officials support sanctions and boycotts against Israel. The list is long.

Parsing what was said this time, the focus was on settlements and land. The mention of the Golan Heights is an interesting one. Israel captured this high-lying land from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, and formally annexed it in 1981. The only other country to recognise this annexation is the United States, under President Donald Trump in 2019. The ANC seems to want this land returned to Syria, or to form part of a putative Palestinian state. Israel is unlikely to consider either in a hurry.

While the emphasis may have been different, this speech echoes the long-standing ANC positions on the conflict. Not much has moved in the last year.


Are we as Jewish South Africans hypersensitive when anyone says anything about Israel? Do we have our own obsession with the ANC's obsession with Israel? Or should we counter each and every bit of comment, criticism, vitriol, and disinformation? I'll leave that to you to decide.

As Oscar Wilde said, "There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."

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

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UJW kits out sewing graduates with new skills

The Union of Jewish Women’s (UJW’s) Sewing Empowerment School, established in 2010, held its graduation on 15 December with a fashion show, certificates, prizes, and lunch attended by students, families, and executive members.

The school was created to help alleviate South Africa’s most pressing problems – skills development and poverty. Since then, more than 85 students have graduated with new skills. Some of them have found employment in the industry and others are working for themselves.



The UJW Sewing Empowerment School graduates and past students

Generous donors enable the UJW to run the school, giving students greater opportunities and the ability to earn a small income.

Students come to the four-month intensive sewing course hardly able to switch on a sewing machine and complete the course with enthusiasm and skill. Talented teacher Chido Tsodzo guides them through the programme with patience and care, supported by dedicated manager Ariane Heneck. The production team is made up of former students, who are ready for all participants’ sewing requirements.

Yeshiva College kicks off 2022

The year started with a bang at Yeshiva College on Monday, as staff from across the schools came together for breakfast at Frangelicas. Coffee and inspiration flowed as they welcomed Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Nechemya Taylor, who offered insightful words of *chizuk* (spiritual support). The morning rounded off with a tense game of bingo, before teachers headed back to school to prepare for what’s sure to be an incredible year. Wishing everyone *הברכה החלה* (much success) for 2022.



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I’m researching the history of the Milnerton Shul. There is currently very little information about it.

Please help me by emailing any information you may have on the shul to the following address: nicky@stein.org.za.

– Nicky Stein-Aginsky



Samantha Pelkowitz, Cassey Vermaak, and Vanessa Bank

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OMO WASHING LIQUID AUTO CONCENTRATED 1.5L

29⁹⁹

SUNLIGHT DISHWASH LIQUID ANTI BACTERIAL 750ML

17⁹⁹

MONTAGU DATES PITTED 250G

221⁹⁹

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