



1964-2020

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# Chag Shavuot Sampeach



MAY 2020

# MAZON



## AUSTRALIA

**Mazon Australia, a Jewish Response to Hunger, was founded with a core belief:  
"IN A WORLD OF PLENTY, HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION SHOULD NOT EXIST."**

**MAZON IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT ALLOCATES DONATIONS FROM THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO PREVENT AND ALLEVIATE HUNGER AMONG PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS AND BACKGROUNDS.**

Each year Mazon coordinates three appeals, based around the three harvest festivals. We have a kitniyot (rice, corn, soybeans, peas, lentils and legumes) appeal during Pesach, a soup appeal during Shavuot and a non-perishable food appeal during Sukkot. For each appeal we ask Jewish congregations and organizations to collect the food and donate it to those in need in their community.

Mazon Australia had planned to have collections of kitniyot take place at congregations across the country, just prior to Pesach, with the food being donated to food banks. Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this was no longer possible. While many of us are unable to go shopping or go to our synagogue, those who are hungry still need food.

Mazon had purchased large quantities of kitniyot for marketing purposes for the appeal. Mazon

Director Joanne Loewy Irons and Mazon Chair Ellen Frajman donated this food to Major Karen Elkington of the Salvation Army. It was used to feed refugee and asylum seeker families.

It now appears that our Shavuot appeal will also be cancelled because of COVID-19. Last year we had synagogues and churches coming together to make soup which was then donated to soup kitchens and organizations such as OzHarvest. This year we cannot coordinate such an appeal. Instead, we suggest that you make soup during Shavuot for a friend, neighbour or family member who may be struggling.

Please consider a financial donation to Mazon Australia so that they can feed those in need. Making a donation allows us to act upon the command to "let all who are hungry come and eat".

**By visiting our website, [www.mazonaustralia.org/pesach](http://www.mazonaustralia.org/pesach), you can see what our Pesach plan had been and see what your donation can buy.**

Submitted by Ellen Frajman, Volunteer Chair of Mazon Australia



# What is the Power of Memory?

By Unpacked



This year, Holocaust Remembrance Day, which began on the evening of April 20, was like no other.

Although it's Israel's and the Jewish World's national day of commemoration to remember the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, COVID-19 meant public ceremonies and commemorations were cancelled and, unless they were on Zoom, we didn't have the privilege of hearing survivors tell their stories.

In some ways, it's a rehearsal for the coming years. The number of survivors is growing smaller and smaller and soon there won't be any to give their testimonies first hand.

Which raises an important question.

Once we lose the ability to hear these personal accounts of the events, will the Shoah (Holocaust) become just another part of history?

In this video below, the power of memory is examined, it is asked what untold stories add to the Holocaust narrative – and to the collective Jewish identity – and why COVID-19 could be a wake-up call for how we approach the memory of the Shoah. Please click on the link below to listen – it will make you think.

[\*\*Watch Now\*\*](#)

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The park will transform an old wastewater treatment plant into an oasis, featuring picnic areas, cycling trail, recreation areas and playgrounds.

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The project will also involve expanding the existing water reservoir, taking waste water from the surrounding neighbourhoods and recycling it for agricultural use.

The park will lift the morale of Nitzana residents, enable the arrival of new families, support the growth in eco-tourism and contribute to building a viable future for the residents along Israel's Southern periphery.

With this campaign we can together help secure the ongoing sustainability and security of Israel's South.



# A man with an eye for a story

By Jane Sullivan

THE AGE 20 March 2020

In the city of Guiyang in a remote province of China, the Australian traveller is befriended by the Little Gentleman. He is 10 years old, wears a patched grey suit, speaks fluent English and carries himself like an adult.

The Little Gentleman guides the traveller through the streets to the apartment where he lives with his grandparents. The family offers him food and hospitality, and the grandmother tells her story. She was a teacher, but the Cultural Revolution cut short her career. Her students beat her, made her wear a placard branding her a counter-revolutionary and forced her to crawl like a dog.

Yet this is not the focus of the grandmother's story. She and her husband are patient and accept the weight of history and suffering. What haunts her is the friendship that labelled her a counter-revolutionary. Her friend was a fellow teacher, an Englishwoman who went off on the train to return home. The grandmother is still hoping one day to visit England and find Mrs F. She keeps a poster on the wall, a Renoir painting of a veiled woman that reminds her of her long-lost friend.

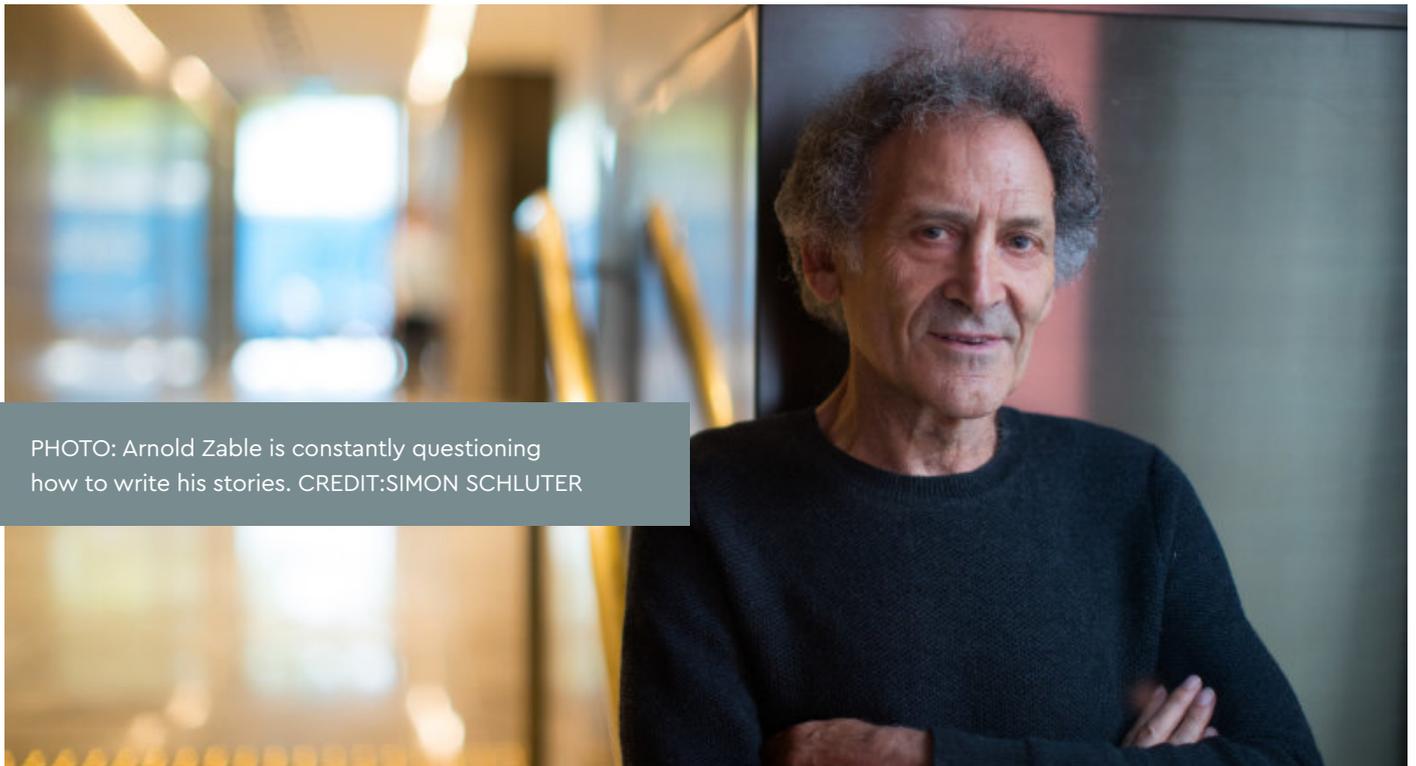


PHOTO: Arnold Zable is constantly questioning how to write his stories. CREDIT:SIMON SCHLUTER

This is one of many haunting traveller's tales in *The Watermill*, a book of true stories from China, Cambodia, wartime Europe, the SIEV-X disaster and Australian Aboriginal history. The traveller and narrator is Arnold Zable, novelist, educator, human

rights activist, and perhaps above all, master storyteller. This is his ninth book, and the Little Gentleman story, he says, is the one that gave him most pleasure.

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We meet at a bustling cafe in Flinders Lane in Melbourne, where Zable is sitting with a cup of coffee at his elbow, tapping away on his laptop. He is one of those writers who work well in a busy noisy environment, and he loves to travel and work alone. "You can be fully alert and present to people you meet," he says. "You can spend your days working in cafes. I need lights, I need a window, I like to see what's going on as people walk past. I can feel a sense of solitude and connection."

The Little Gentleman story comes from a time Zable spent in China in the 1980s, between the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square, an optimistic period when the country was beginning to open up to the West. He was in his early 30s and didn't yet see himself as a writer; he went to China to work as a teacher at an agricultural college.

But he was keeping a journal. "I have always been compelled to record what's happening around me," he says. "Without being aware of it, I was paving the way – being observant, alert, taking notes." For Zable, there's an importance, an urgency, about the tales he's been privileged to hear. "There are some stories that are meant to be told, and not to tell them would be to betray them."

The stories have been coming since Zable's first book, *Jewels and Ashes*, based on his travels in Poland to investigate his parents' youth. The books have won awards and acclaim; perhaps the best loved is *Cafe Scheherazade*, about the lives of

former refugees who meet in the St Kilda coffee shop.

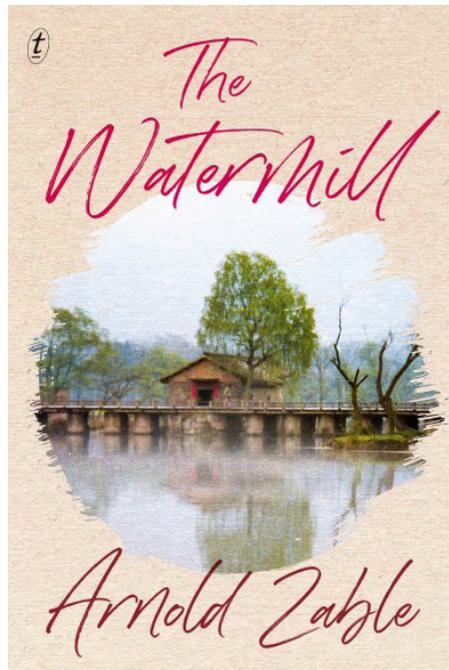
He has also been a zealous advocate for asylum seekers, notably the Kurdish writer Behrouz Boochani. They have been friends for years, communicating by smart phone, and finally got to meet last year in Christchurch in New Zealand

when Boochani won a visa that allowed him to leave Manus Island to attend a writers' festival. "We walked around the streets in freedom, one of the great highlights of my life. I think we're kindred spirits, we both feel the need to bear witness."

Zable's love of stories goes back to when he was a boy: he'd sit on the Canning Street median strip in Carlton, telling made-up stories to a friend, or to his younger brother at home at night, through a hole in the wall. From an early age he heard "extraordinary stories of resistance fighters, great courage and struggle" from his parents, Meier and Hadassah,

and from the local Jewish community: memories of how their families and forebears defied the Nazis.

In particular, the stories go back to his mother Hadassah, who grew up in Poland and escaped the Holocaust, but lost her entire family, except for two sisters, to genocide. She could not forgive herself for surviving, Zable writes. But she channelled the energy and purpose she had left into raising her three sons, helping her husband at his Victoria Market stall, sewing garments for the factories and singing Yiddish songs around the house – songs she had once performed in public at community celebrations.



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By Jane Sullivan

THE AGE 20 March 2020

"There were times when it was very difficult, when she was going into that sense that life had broken her," Zable says. "She would break into rages. Or there were moments when she was no longer there, she was in that other place.

"So I learned as a child to sit with trauma, and that's carried through. I sit with stories, and I also probe. I want to know more, to tease it out. People are encouraged by that. If they sense you're interested and willing to go to those places, they will open up."



PHOTO: Arnold Zable drinking tea in China with tribespeople near Huaxi in Guizhou Province.

Some of his stories have taken a long time to emerge. One comes from a 30-year friendship with Sonia Lizaron, who died at 95. Lizaron was one of thousands liberated from Bergen-Belsen in 1945; she and her first husband Sami created a camp theatre where they performed reenactments of the horrors they had lived through.

Another story began to emerge after just one morning, when Zable was introducing a writing workshop in Phnom Penh in Cambodia. In the afternoon he was approached by a student, Keo Narom, who wanted to tell him about how she survived the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge.

"She began, and after that she and I grabbed whatever chance we could to tell it and hear it." Much of the story was told in a car in a traffic jam, spinning out between Zable, Narom and their interpreter. "Story was the currency that united us."

As Zable sees it, it's not just the story itself that's important. It's "what I sense when I'm with people": the place where the story is told, the details of that place, the gestures the storyteller makes. Sonia Lizaron passes her clenched fist in front of her eyes, as if to dispel bad memories. Narom makes beautiful shapes with her hands,

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like the Cambodian temple dancers. And Faris, a Kurdish refugee who lost his wife and daughter to the sea in the SIEV-X tragedy, lies on his back on the floor to recreate the memory of floating in the water waiting for rescue.

Zable is constantly questioning how to write these stories. "I'm always acutely aware it's like walking a tightrope, getting the tone right. You want to honour the experience, and that means honouring the craft, and bringing to it everything you have learned as a writer: the art of scene construction, the necessary rhythms, the poetic quality that a story sometimes demands."

Many of the stories arise out of trauma, dispossession, persecution and suffering, but Zable doesn't see them as dark: he communicates moments of beauty, energy, contentment and radiance. "They are true to life and there are saving graces. Quite often you'll see a movement from being totally uprooted to searching for a haven and refuge – and they find it. Not everyone makes it, but people often come through and become grounded.

"These people are not victims. They have got on with their lives and have regained purpose, and sometimes that can be extraordinary." Keo Narom, who lost her entire family to Pol Pot, has become one of her country's leading ethnomusicologists, a revered teacher in a country in desperate need of elders.

Since Zable began to bear witness in his stories, a view has arisen that only those who have lived through the stories themselves, or who belong to the ethnic group experiencing them, have the right to have their voices heard. His response is that he's seeking to cross cultural boundaries and to get to know "the other". His stories are informed by much background research.

"I'm also writing about what I think I understand because of where I'm coming from, what I experienced as a child. So all I can do is write out of respect and be as true as I can to what I have experienced and lived and intently observed."

As I leave, Zable sits on for a while in the cafe, opens up his laptop, thinks and types. Another story is on the way. – THE AGE





# Jewish Help in Need Society of Queensland

Jewish Help in Need Society of Queensland is a registered not-for-profit Charity which provides financial assistance in the form of no-interest loans to members of the Jewish Community in Queensland.

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# Jeremy Corbyn in historical perspective

By Ben Cohen

The era of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the opposition Labour Party in the United Kingdom mercifully came to an end last week, with the election of the more centrist-minded Sir Keir Starmer as his successor.

For Jews in Britain, especially, the four-and-a-half years that Corbyn spent at Labour's helm was a nightmare. In the process, the problem of anti-Semitism in Britain gained an international audience as never before, with Corbyn and those around him coming to symbolize the attitude of the extreme left—contemptuous and suspicious in equal measure—to Jewish causes and concerns.

Now that his leadership is in the past tense, did we learn anything from Corbyn that we didn't know already about the far-left's hostility to Jews as a self-conscious collective? To put that question another way, was the anti-Semitism that marked the Corbyn era simply more of the same, but uttered by more influential people with much louder voices, or did we encounter something qualitatively new?

To my mind, the answer lies somewhere in the middle.

When Corbyn took the stage at the United Kingdom's annual Glastonbury Festival in 2017, revelling in the thousands of audience members chanting his name to the tune of "Seven Nation Army" by the White Stripes, many commentators saw this rock-star moment as inaugurating a boldly new and potentially unstoppable Socialist opposition. But there was another way of looking at it—as the last gasp of the not-so-New Left of the 1960s, unexpectedly given a fresh lease on life thanks to a frightful political mess within the Labour Party that enabled Corbyn to win the



British Labour Party and Opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, May 12, 2017. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

leadership post at the 11th hour. Overnight, a man derided as a humourless relic of the Cold War—someone who had expressed sympathy for the IRA and the PFLP and sorrow over the Soviet Union's demise—was poised to become the next prime minister.

Or so they said.

In the end, his rise was hardly meteoric, while his fall was quite spectacular. After four years of media headlines exposing the lurid anti-Semitism that had mushroomed among Corbyn's supporters, the Labour Party performed disastrously in a December 2019 election it really should have won. Recall that at the time, the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union (Brexit) was in chaos and the bitterly divided Conservative Party had just replaced Prime Minister Theresa May with Boris Johnson. But whatever the doubts about Johnson and the Tories, the most brutal verdict of the electors was reserved for Corbyn, whose eye-wateringly low personal ratings were mirrored in Labour's own showing. On the morning after the vote, news report after news report emphasized that it had been Labour's worst defeat since the election of 1935.

## Jeremy Corbyn in historical perspective

By Ben Cohen

Anti-Semitism was always a persistent problem on the New Left, and as Labour leader, Corbyn duly legitimized that strain which codes its attacks with the words "Zionism" and "Zionist," and which portrays the Palestinians as victims of a Nazi-style genocide launched by an apartheid state. But thanks to the internet, this salonfähig variant of anti-Semitism, whose advocates angrily denied that it was anti-Semitism, found itself in the company of Holocaust-deniers and assorted other conspiracy theorists more commonly found on the far-right. During Corbyn's tenure, the Labour Party accumulated hundreds of internal complaints about anti-Semitism, of which a good number centred not on offensive speech about the Jewish national movement, but on more traditional anti-Semitic tropes, such as the alleged control exercised by the Rothschild banking family over the global economy.

Anyone who has studied the history of left-wing anti-Semitism will be aware that these seemingly counterintuitive associations have been made many times before by left-wing parties in various countries. In Labour's case, however, there was a new mode of distribution in the form of social media. Each real-world instance of Labour anti-Semitism was echoed online many times over to the point that the entire problem came to define Corbyn's leadership.

Anti-Semitism was not the only (and definitely not the most important) reason why Corbyn and Labour lost the 2019 election, but it was certainly a factor. Across the United Kingdom, Labour Party workers reported on doorstep encounters in which Corbyn's political war against Britain's Jewish community was cited with bemused disapproval.

Still, whatever the damage done to Labour's relationship with British Jews, theoretically at least, that can be repaired; conversely, Corbyn belongs to the party's past, his place in the gallery of Labour leaders who never made it out of opposition firmly assured.

What of Keir Starmer, Corbyn's successor? In the days that followed his election, Starmer underlined his determination to wipe away the "stain" of anti-Semitism from within the Labour Party.

He continued that an apology on its own, without corresponding action, would not be good enough, proposing a two-pronged strategy whereby Labour will deal "robustly and swiftly" with outstanding cases of anti-Semitism in its ranks, at the same time transforming its institutional understanding of what anti-Semitism is and how to fight it. Like Corbyn himself, Starmer seems to be saying that the fate of anti-Semitism in Labour's ranks is to be consigned to history. We shall see.

**Ben Cohen** is a New York City-based journalist and author who writes a weekly column on Jewish and international affairs for JNS. – J – Wire



# Diary of Samuel Pepys shows how life under the bubonic plague mirrored today's pandemic

By Ute Lotz-Heumann

In early April, writer Jen Miller urged New York Times readers to start a coronavirus diary.

"Who knows," she wrote, "maybe one day your diary will provide a valuable window into this period."

During a different pandemic, one 17th-century British naval administrator named Samuel Pepys did just that. He fastidiously kept a diary from 1660 to 1669 – a period of time that included a severe outbreak of the bubonic plague in London. Epidemics have always haunted humans, but rarely do we get such a detailed glimpse into one person's life during a crisis from so long ago.

There were no Zoom meetings, drive-through testing or ventilators in 17th-century London. But Pepys' diary reveals that there were some striking resemblances in how people responded to the pandemic.

## A creeping sense of crisis

For Pepys and the inhabitants of London, there was no way of knowing whether an outbreak of the plague that occurred in the parish of St. Giles, a poor area outside the city walls, in late 1664 and early 1665 would become an epidemic.

The plague first entered Pepys' consciousness enough to warrant a diary entry on April 30, 1665:

"Great fears of the Sickenesse here in the City," he wrote, "it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all."

Portrait of Samuel Pepys by John Hayls (1666). National Portrait Gallery Pepys continued to live his life normally until the beginning of June, when, for the first time, he saw houses "shut up" – the term his contemporaries used for quarantine – with his own eyes, "marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord have mercy upon us' writ there." After this, Pepys became increasingly troubled by the outbreak.

He soon observed corpses being taken to their burial in the streets, and a number of his acquaintances died, including his own physician.

By mid-August, he had drawn up his will, writing, "that I shall be in much better state of soul, I hope, if it should please the Lord to call me away this sickly time." Later that month, he wrote of deserted streets; the pedestrians he encountered were "walking like people that had taken leave of the world."



Portrait of Samuel Pepys by John Hayls (1666).

## Diary of Samuel Pepys shows how life under the bubonic plague mirrored today's pandemic

By Ute Lotz-Heumann

### Tracking mortality counts

In London, the Company of Parish Clerks printed "bills of mortality," the weekly tallies of burials.

Because these lists noted London's burials – not deaths – they undoubtedly undercounted the dead. Just as we follow these numbers closely today, Pepys documented the growing number of plague victims in his diary.

'Bills of mortality' were regularly posted. Photo 12/Universal Images Group via Getty Image  
At the end of August, he cited the bill of mortality as having recorded 6,102 victims of the plague, but feared "that the true number of the dead this week is near 10,000," mostly because the victims among the urban poor weren't counted. A week later, he noted the official number of 6,978 in one week, "a most dreadfull Number."

By mid-September, all attempts to control the plague were failing. Quarantines were not being enforced, and people gathered in places like the Royal Exchange. Social distancing, in short, was not happening.

He was equally alarmed by people attending funerals in spite of official orders. Although plague victims were supposed to be interred at night, this system broke down as well, and Pepys griped that burials were taking place "in broad daylight."

### Desperate for remedies

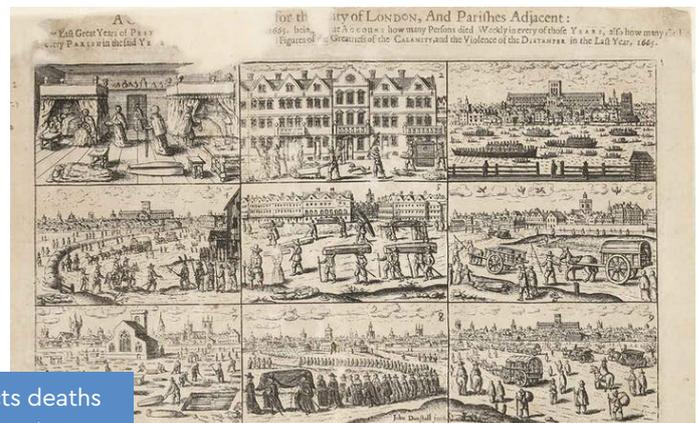
There are few known effective treatment options for COVID-19. Medical and scientific research need time, but people hit hard by the virus are willing to try anything. Fraudulent treatments, from teas and colloidal silver, to cognac and cow urine, have been floated.

Although Pepys lived during the Scientific Revolution, nobody in the 17th century knew that the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium carried by fleas caused the plague. Instead, the era's scientists theorized that the plague was spreading through miasma, or "bad air" created by rotting organic matter and identifiable by its foul smell. Some of the most popular measures to combat the plague involved purifying the air by smoking tobacco or by holding herbs and spices in front of one's nose.

Tobacco was the first remedy that Pepys sought during the plague outbreak. In early June, seeing shut-up houses "put me into an ill conception of myself and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell ... and chew." Later, in July, a noble patroness gave him "a bottle of plague-water" – a medicine made from various herbs. But he wasn't sure whether any of this was effective. Having participated in a coffeehouse discussion about "the plague growing upon us in this town and remedies against it," he could only conclude that "some saying one thing, some another."

During the outbreak, Pepys was also very concerned with his frame of mind; he constantly mentioned that he was trying to be in good spirits.

This was not only an attempt to "not let it get to him" – as we might say today – but also informed by the medical theory of the era, which claimed that an imbalance of the so-called humors in the body – blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm – led to disease.



A 1666 engraving by John Dunstall depicts deaths and burials in London during the bubonic plague.

## Diary of Samuel Pepys shows how life under the bubonic plague mirrored today's pandemic

By Ute Lotz-Heumann

Melancholy – which, according to doctors, resulted from an excess of black bile – could be dangerous to one's health, so Pepys sought to suppress negative emotions; on Sept. 14, for example, he wrote that hearing about dead friends and acquaintances "doth put me into great apprehensions of melancholy. ... But I put off the thoughts of sadness as much as I can."

### Balancing paranoia and risk

Humans are social animals and thrive on interaction, so it's no surprise that so many have found social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic challenging. It can require constant risk assessment: How close is too close? How can we avoid infection and keep our loved ones safe, while also staying sane? What should we do when someone in our house develops a cough?

During the plague, this sort of paranoia also abounded. Pepys found that when he left London and entered other towns, the townspeople became visibly nervous about visitors.

"They are afeared of us that come to them," he wrote in mid-July, "insomuch that I am troubled at it."

Pepys succumbed to paranoia himself: In late July, his servant Will suddenly developed a headache. Fearing that his entire house would be shut up if a servant came down with the plague, Pepys mobilized all his other servants to get Will out of the house as quickly as possible. It turned out that Will didn't have the plague, and he returned the next day.

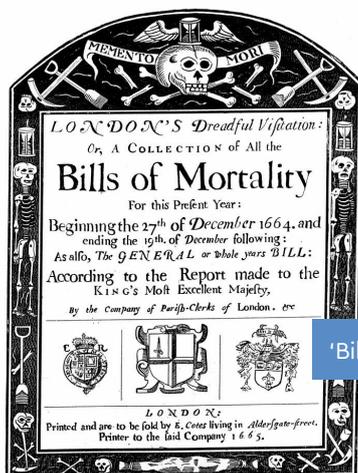
In early September, Pepys refrained from wearing a wig he bought in an area of London that was a hotspot of the disease, and he wondered whether other people would also fear wearing wigs because they could potentially be made of the hair of plague victims.

And yet he was willing to risk his health to meet certain needs; by early October, he visited his mistress without any regard for the danger: "round about and next door on every side is the plague, but I did not value it but there did what I could con ella."

Just as people around the world eagerly wait for a falling death toll as a sign of the pandemic letting up, so did Pepys derive hope – and perhaps the impetus to see his mistress – from the first decline in deaths in mid-September. A week later, he noted a substantial decline of more than 1,800.

Let's hope that, like Pepys, we'll soon see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Ute Lotz-Heumann is the Heiko A. Oberman Professor of Late Medieval and Reformation History, University of Arizona. This article was published in The CONVERSATION APRIL 2020.



'Bills of mortality' were regularly posted.

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# JNF BLUE BOX PESACH CAMPAIGN

2019

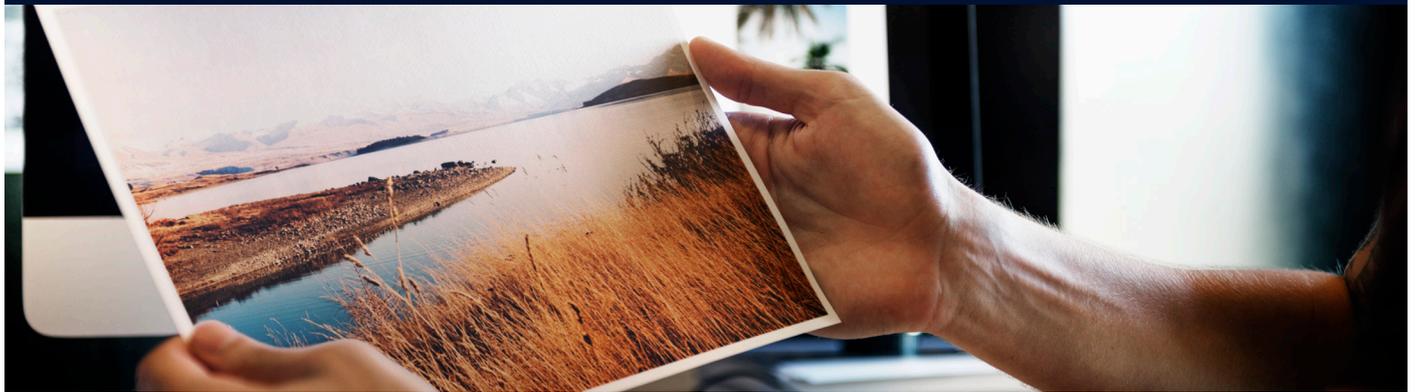
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(March 2020 to February 2021)

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<b>Please support the Brisbane Chevra Kadisha by:</b> Annual membership, donations & bequests, planning for the future, making your wishes known, ensuring details of your Jewish name and heritage are known. Funeral and monument costs are substantial (refer <a href="http://bck.net.au">http://bck.net.au</a> ). We suggest community members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meet with <b>trusted advisers</b> to organise finances and insurances</li><li>• <b>Join the Chevra:</b> We perform many duties when a Jewish person passes away and BCK (Tahara/Chapel) fees are part of overall funeral / burial costs. The BCK fee component is reduced for members (5 years continuous)</li><li>• Work through the Chevra to <b>pre-purchase a burial plot</b> at Mt Gravatt Cemetery's Jewish Section</li><li>• Consider the 'Guardian Plan' (<a href="https://www.guardianplan.com.au">https://www.guardianplan.com.au</a>), accessible through George Hartnett Metropolitan Funerals, as a way to <b>pre-pay future funeral fees at today's prices.</b></li></ul>	

The Chevra is run by volunteers who meet with family, coordinate with George Hartnett Metropolitan Funerals and Brisbane City Council cemetery management, conduct Tahara, supervise the funeral and burial, assist with arrangements for a monument. We work with cemetery management to manage the Jewish section at Mt Gravatt. We operate the Jewish Chapel, maintain the Anzac Memorial Garden and Martyrs' Memorial and retain a watching brief over the Jewish section at the historic Toowong cemetery.



# A JEWISH GUIDE TO Death & Bereavement

For Judaism, life is the supreme value, the great privilege, the precious opportunity.

Death is inevitable, and there is an after-life; but for the Jewish tradition it is life on earth that is "olam ha'asiyyah", "the world where man achieves things".

Out of this life-affirming attitude a number of consequences flow:

1. People should not speculate too much about death and the after-life. These matters can be left to God.

Our mental and physical energies should be devoted to the here and now, to finding good deeds to do on earth.

2. Death is not superior to life. Every moment on earth should be savoured.

Even when life is full of pressures the answer is not to seek to end it all, but to accept help in handling the realities and working through the crisis.

Hence suicide is a sin. It usurps God's prerogative to judge when to begin a life and when to end it.

Indeed there was a time when a suicide was deemed a sinner and buried at the edge of the cemetery, but this rule has long been relaxed and suicides are regarded as having acted out of mental distress and are considered sick and not sinful.

3. Life must not be shortened, even by a moment. Judaism is adamant that one may not actively hasten death, but it recognises the morality of permitting people to die.

The classical view suggests that if there is some external factor which is preventing the departure of the dying person's soul, that factor may be eliminated. Hence, subject to safeguards, Judaism would approve allowing the life forces to ebb naturally without artificial impediments to dying. The effect is not to shorten a person's living, but to shorten their dying.

Judaism has the principle of "mitah yafah", a dignified death. Cold, clinical, callous surroundings all militate against a "mitah yafah". Relatives and friends should be able to come and go. Pain control should help a patient to continue to relate to them and to the world.

In particular, there are things that need to be said by and to the dying person. These include the confession before death. Spiritually and psychologically it enables a person to bring their earthly accounts to a tidy conclusion. It enables them, and their dear ones, to commend their spirit to the care of the Almighty.

Some have the mistaken view that a dying person should not be allowed to be aware of their condition. Judaism agrees that if it would greatly disturb their peace of mind, they should not be told.

But most people would prefer to know so that what needs to be said, to other people as well as to God, can be attempted.

If, however, the patient is not conscious, the confession is said on their behalf by family or friends. Understandably, many shrink from this moment of truth; for family and friends it is often harder than for the dying person. A counselling approach which could be offered in such cases is to say that this is almost like an insurance policy for the patient.

Hopefully, the patient will be granted a miracle, and recover; they will then surely understand and not be angry that these prayers were offered.

## A JEWISH GUIDE TO Death & Bereavement

If death does occur, then their soul will enjoy a double degree of Divine approval because they have dear ones who love them so much.

The approach of death brings its fears. It is the experience of dying, however, rather than the state of being dead, that may be the greater cause for apprehension.

As to death itself, the words of Andre Chenier are specially pertinent: "Fear death? What nonsense! We can only fear something which we can grasp with our minds. Being is imaginable and one may well fear it. Non-being is unimaginable, so how can there be room for fear? Perhaps we live for ever!"

The Bible often refers to death as sleep: a magnificent, moving metaphor. We fall asleep, just for a moment; then we wake again, and are in the World To Come.

The dying person may well fear to leave life behind. So many things one wanted to do, so many things one should have done; so many things one did and regrets.

The best time to solve those problems is whilst we are still in the midst of life, by not wasting our fruitful opportunities for worthwhile deeds, by repenting our acts of hurt and folly and moving on to better things.

Rabbi Tarfon says, "It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it". That principle should provide sufficient encouragement to say, "God, no-one completes their task on earth fully, but I did my best. Please understand."

Both patient and family grieve at the loss of each other. A helpful comment is made by Morris Adler: "Sorrow is the obverse side of love. To ask for immunity from sorrow is to ask for more than a special dispensation granted no other. It is to ask that we love not, gain no

friends or devotedly serve any cause. To enter into any relationship of deep meaning is to run the risk of sorrow. The contingency of pain is the only condition on which love, friendship and happiness are ever offered to us. This recognition is the hallmark of maturity."

Abraham Joshua Heschel calls death "reciprocity on man's part for God's gift of life". Yet he also urges that we understand that the moment of death can be "grim, harsh, cruel".

When the moment comes, he says, "Our first reaction... is consternation. We are stunned and distraught. Slowly our sense of dismay is followed by a sense of mystery. Suddenly a whole life has veiled itself in secrecy. Our speech stops, our understanding fails. In the presence of death there is only silence and a sense of awe".

With all the philosophising and counselling, bereavement brings the survivors the need to be angry, the feeling of guilt, the demand to know "why?"

In Judaism the approach is not so much to answer and explain, as to provide a framework within which to respond to and handle what has happened.

Hence there is a pattern of procedures that commences with death and accompanies and leads the mourners through the various stages of grief – not trying to say what is hard to put into words, but to offer what may be history's oldest and best form of grief recovery.

## PROCEDURES

1. Upon death the eyes of the deceased are closed, the arms laid by their side, any tubes and medical equipment are removed, and the body is covered by a plain sheet.

A rabbi does not have to be there to carry out last rites, but as soon as possible the Jewish burial society, the Chevra Kadisha, should be informed and they then take charge of funeral arrangements.

## A JEWISH GUIDE TO Death & Bereavement

The Chevra Kadisha is a voluntary organisation which reverently and carefully carries out the traditional Jewish procedures. So seriously does it take its task that once a year its members fast in atonement for any unwitting act of disrespect to the dead.

2. The traditional Jewish way of disposing of the dead is by burial in the earth. Judaism does not permit cremation. It regards it as an insult to God; the body is His, not ours, and no-one may injure, mutilate, or destroy a body, in life or after death. Orthodox rabbis will not officiate at a cremation, nor will the Chevra Kadisha organise one.

The funeral should be as soon as possible after death; delaying funerals is not regarded as respectful except in special cases when, for instance, a relative needs time to arrive from overseas or there is some other pressing emergency.

3. Generally Judaism does not permit post-mortems. Once again the principle is that the body should be buried as soon as possible and not be mutilated or treated disrespectfully.

A post-mortem is countenanced only where the law of the country insists upon it or where it would clearly and materially assist medical science to find a cure for other patients. In all cases a rabbi must be consulted.

4. Where a Jewish person dies in a place where no synagogue or Jewish community exists, the major synagogue in the nearest capital city should be contacted for advice.
5. The mourners make a "k'riah", a tear in their garments, at the moment of death or prior to the funeral. This symbolises the painful tear which the occasion has made in one's heart. For a parent the tear is on the left-hand side, and on the right-hand side for other close relatives.

6. The funeral service consists of prayers, psalms and readings, and when the coffin is lowered the relatives and friends present in turn take a spade and put three spadefuls of earth in the grave. This emphasises the reality, the finality, of death.

The spade is not passed directly from one to another, as if to show that such tasks are performed with deep reluctance and resignation.

7. At the end of the ceremony, and thereafter each day for eleven months, Kaddish ("Sanctification") is recited at congregational worship.

Kaddish is said by sons; if there are no sons, it is recited by a male relative or friend. Women are not obligated but are permitted to say Kaddish.

Kaddish is not a prayer for the dead, but an affirmation, at the moment when it is hardest to utter it, of God's holiness and greatness, and a prayer that His kingdom may come.

It has been said of the Kaddish, "To know that when thou diest, the earth falling on thy head will not cover thee entirely; to know that there remain behind those who, whenever they may be on this wide earth, whether they may be poor or rich, will send this prayer after thee... what more satisfying knowledge canst thou ever hope for?" (L Kornbert).

8. Neighbours or friends serve the mourners their first meal on returning home from the funeral. This simple meal contains hard-boiled eggs, reminiscent of the wheel of life that never ceases to turn.
9. Probably unique to Judaism is the institution of "shivah", the first week of mourning when one stays home and finds comfort in the visits of family and friends who join each day in the services held in the house (except for the Sabbath, when mourners attend the synagogue).

## A JEWISH GUIDE TO Death & Bereavement

During the shivah, the mourners sit on low seats or even on the floor; mirrors in the house are covered, as this is not a time to be concerned with one's personal appearance; and a memorial candle is kept burning.

The mourners do not wear leather shoes or shave, since both are ways of looking and feeling physically comfortable and one is too grief-stricken for that.

- 10.** The period of mourning covers three stages of grief recovery: the "shivah"; the "sh'loshim" or first thirty days when one may resume going to work but not attend any form of entertainment; and the "avelut", the twelve months observed for a parent when one still does not take part in any form of entertainment.

By the end of the year a person is expected to have recovered to a certain point, though things will never be fully the same again. Judaism is not sympathetic to the Queen Victoria syndrome of perpetual grief with its refusal to accept that life has anything left to offer.

- 11.** A tombstone is erected in memory of the departed to mark their last resting place, though Judaism also encourages living memorials in terms of deeds inspired by the thought of the deceased.

There is no strict law as to when to erect the tombstone; in Israel it is usually done after the shivah or sh'loshim, and elsewhere at about the end of the year of mourning.

- 12.** Each year on the anniversary of death, memorial prayers and Kaddish are said, often accompanied by charitable donations and sometimes by fasting. In the synagogue, memorial prayers are also recited on four of the religious festivals that take place each year. These memorial prayers contain both an occasion for private remembrance and also prayers for martyrs, especially the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

4,000 years of learning the art of living, and dying, are behind this range of rituals designed to help the mourner work through the pain and grief.

In themselves the rituals do not answer the age-old anguished questions that give the bereaved no rest, make them so angry and threaten to destroy their faith.

Yet those who have observed this pattern of observances testify that it has helped them to express their grief, accept the reality of their situation, and integrate their bereavement – doubts and questions and all – into a reshaped set of values, views and ways of living.

A psychiatrist has said, "I consider the Jewish traditional laws and ceremonies surrounding bereavement of such psychological therapeutic value that I would even recommend them to the Christian religion".

*Rabbi Raymond Apple was for many years Australia's highest profile rabbi and the leading spokesman on Jewish religious issues. After serving congregations in London, Rabbi Apple was chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, for 32 years. He also held many public roles, particularly in the fields of chaplaincy, interfaith dialogue and Freemasonry, and is the recipient of several national and civic honours. Now retired, he lives in Jerusalem and blogs at [www.oztorah.com](http://www.oztorah.com)*

[www.jcareqld.com](http://www.jcareqld.com)



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JCareQld is a charitable association that provides help to members of the Queensland Jewish Community.

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# Brisbane Chevra Kadisha

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Maariv 7:00pm

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Monday Evening: Shiur 6:30pm, covering the weekly Torah portion, the festivals and our sages

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### GOLD COAST

<b>Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation</b>	07 5570 1851
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<b>Friends of Hebrew University</b>	07 5539 0632
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<b>Gold Coast Chevra Kadisha</b>	
Robbie Ventura	07 5596 6919

## COMMUNITY CALENDAR

### BRISBANE - REGULAR EVENTS

<b>Community Diary Bookings</b>	Kathy Gould
	07 3411 3664
	0402 497 413
	kathygould45@msn.com
<b>WIZO Aviva</b>	2nd Tuesday each Month (n)
	07 3715 6562
	wizoqld@gmail.com
<b>NCJWA Meeting</b>	3rd Monday 7:30pm

### GOLD COAST - REGULAR EVENTS

<b>NCJWA Gold Coast</b>	Monthly Meetings
www.ncjwa.org.au	7:30pm - 1st Monday of each month
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<b>Temple Shalom Services</b>	Office 07 5570 1716
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THURSDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2020

Submission, letters and articles may be edited for publication.

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