

south african Jewish Report

■ February 17 2017 / 21 Shevat 5777
■ Volume 21 – Number 5

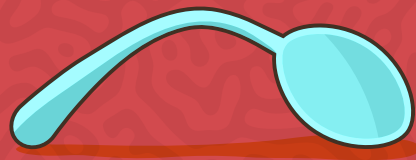
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Photo: Lilly Harmse

‘Times they are a changin’

It’s all about boys’ hair at school. The jury is out as to what is “neat and tidy” and now boys are invoking “gender equality” in an effort to be allowed to wear their hair longer. King David Schools are working on “a uniform code of conduct” for all its schools, while at Herzlia in Cape Town – with the learners leading the process – a code is being “fine-tuned”. But there are more ways to skin a cat. KDL matriculant Jasen Smaller shows his “tuft” which he covers under a kippah during school hours. See page 8.



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Ambassador Ngombane shocked at allegations

STEVEN GRUZD

South African Ambassador to Israel Sisa Ngombane was shocked when he arrived at work on Monday morning to find he was allegedly facing censure by the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (Dirco).

The Sunday Independent fingered him among eight South African diplomats. According to the article, Dirco asked the State Security Agency to investigate whether their security clearance should be withdrawn, which could lead to their recall or expulsion from the foreign service.

Among the alleged offences are public violence, tax fraud, reckless and negligent driving and culpable homicide. On that list is Ambassador Ngombane, whom the story says “was arrested after attending a gathering after it was prohibited”. The Jewish Report spoke to Ambassador Ngombane in Tel Aviv for his views.

“I had no inkling of this story until I got to the office on Monday. It was very painful for me and I was shocked to just see my name put there,” Ngombane, said. “I have never attended or been arrested at any prohibited gathering, here or in South Africa. This is a total fabrication.”

He was distressed that neither the journalist nor the parliamentary portfolio committee had contacted him before running the story. The Ambassador has made and received several calls in an attempt to clear his name.

Ngombane is an experienced career diplomat of 30 years, having been Ambassador to Côte d’Ivoire, the DRC and Malaysia, before taking up the Israel posting in 2013. But pro-Palestinian activists, including BDS-SA, have accused Ngombane of being too supportive of Israel, out of step with the Union Buildings, and betraying the Palestinian struggle.

One instance occurred at a media conference in October last year, welcoming a South African activist back to the country after she was deported from Israel, from a flotilla to Gaza.

A YouTube video shows the moderator stopping the Ambassador from speaking and him being angrily drowned out by cries of “Free, free, Palestine! Down, down, Israel!” after he mentioned the three Israeli teenagers murdered in the West Bank that sparked the 2014 conflict with Gaza. He was blamed for espousing “an Israeli narrative”.

Shortly thereafter, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Co-operation Luwellyn Landers, urged that Ambassador Ngombane be recalled, for veering from official South African foreign policy and putting forward his own views.

So, was BDS-SA behind this allegation? “We can’t discount that,” Ngombane said. “They have long accused me of mouthing an IDF (Israel Defence Forces) position, which is pure nonsense...”

“People always find reason to put my name in places that are not honourable, and imply that I am not fit to be a diplomat. This campaign unfortunately

is really becoming personal against me.” But he believes strongly in maintaining diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel, and that President Jacob Zuma retains confidence in him to do his job.

“The reality is South Africa wants to work for peace here. There is no other way, and the sides need to find each other. We need to maintain access and influence on the role players. This does not mean we always agree with the Israeli government, and we condemn them when needed.”

Dirco spokesman, Clayson Monyela, however, said the Sunday Independent article had misunderstood a response to a parliamentary question.

“The incidents referred to happened prior to the diplomats being posted,” he said. “No one is being investigated and they remain on active duty. None are being recalled.”

He would not elaborate on the specific allegation against Ngombane, and said Dirco has written to the newspaper asking for the opportunity to respond.

But the truth is the smears and reputational damage to Ambassador Sisa Ngombane, once aired, will be difficult to reverse.

Shabbat Times		
February 17/21 Shevat February 18/22 Shevat Parshat Yitro		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:21	Johannesburg
18:15	20:11	Cape Town
18:15	19:14	Durban
18:15	19:32	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:42	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:32	East London

it is all a matter of probability. But if the same probability that we accept as proof for any other historical fact is to be applied to Sinai, then anyone with an objective mind is forced to accept it.

How many people were present at the Battle of Waterloo, or at any other historic battle or great event? Surely much fewer than three million witnesses, yet we do not hesitate to accept them as fact.

To deny an event witnessed by so many solely because it is miraculous and fantastic, would be to hold a double standard. This is why the Torah uses the word “Veyadata - and you shall know” that G-d is the L-rd. It is something that one can grasp rationally.

Sure, Judaism has faith as well; we have 13 principles of faith, but we have the revelation at Sinai as proof.

For those who are satisfied with faith alone, that is beautiful and admirable. And for those who have faith, but are also blessed with a questioning mind as is human nature, there’s nothing wrong with that either.

The Torah was given to us to be studied using critical thinking in addition to faith, and the answers are all there. We need only to apply ourselves to find them.

Good Shabbos!

Parsha

Judaism: Faith or rational?



Parshat Yitro
Rabbi Eli Spinner
Chabad of Glenhazel

The age-old question theologians have been debating for centuries: Can religious beliefs be proven? Is religion synonymous with faith?

Most religions entail a claim of prophecy or a transcendent experience by one person who then goes and reports it to others and demands that they follow him in service of a deity.

The listeners are faced with three possibilities to believe; either the report was an intentional fabrication, or the prophet sincerely believes he experienced something real when it may have been a fantasy or a hallucination.

Or thirdly, everything he says is real and true.

Should they choose to believe the account and follow the prophet into this religion, it remains nothing more than faith. The adherents have not witnessed anything themselves or experienced any revelation. They are relying on a secondhand report;

there is no rational reason for them to follow it, rather they must rely on faith alone.

Not so with Judaism. Close to three million people witnessed the same event, G-d’s revelation at Mount Sinai. They didn’t blindly follow Moses commanding them instructions from G-d, rather they all personally heard G-d speak to them.

Is that called faith? Faith is when you accept something as true although you haven’t seen it. Contrary to the popular expression, seeing isn’t just believing - it’s knowing. If you would experience G-d talking to you and the three million people next to you, that is the biggest proof possible. As the Torah says in this week’s portion: “You saw that G-d spoke to you from the heavens.”

What about the generations that followed? They didn’t experience it. They are relying on secondhand hearsay. Perhaps we’re back to relying on super-rational faith?

But think for a moment what it would mean for someone to fabricate such an account: It would sound ludicrous. “All of your parents and grandparents witnessed something together.” Everyone would wonder why they were never told about this awesome event by their parents. Something of that magnitude is impossible to fabricate, even so long after. The revelation at Sinai remains proof for all generations to come.

Sure, one can try to deny it by simply refusing to accept this as proof. But by the same token, nothing in this world can be proven for certain;



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Will Israel downgrade ties with Senegal, New Zealand?

SUZANNE BELLING

Word spread this week that Israel was allegedly downgrading its diplomatic ties with New Zealand and Senegal over a United Nations resolution they had supported towards the end of last year and that the country had recalled its ambassadors. But Israel’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nachshon categorically denied the rumour, which is nonetheless persisting.

Informed sources close to Israel have intimated this is not the end of the issue.

There have been strong indications that Israel is not happy that some of its “friends”, especially in West Africa following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s successful foray to strengthen ties in Africa, had voted for the UN resolution, condemning Israeli settlements.

The Security Council called on both sides to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric in order to de-escalate the situation on the ground and rebuild trust and confidence.

the two sides through negotiations.

This resolution called for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians in Israel and the terroritories, including acts of terror, provocation and destruction. It further called for the strengthening of ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, including through existing security co-ordination, and to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism.

The vote for the resolution was 14-0, with the UK, France, Russia and China inter alia supporting it - and the United States - for the first time - abstaining.

The Security Council called on both sides to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric in order to de-escalate the situation on the ground and rebuild trust and confidence.

“There is no decision to downgrade diplomatic relations with Senegal and New Zealand,” Nachshon told the Jewish Report. He insisted the ambassadors - who are in Israel - were purely brought back “to hold consultations with them”.

The Israeli ambassador to Senegal is South African-born Paul Hirschson, formerly of Johannesburg, who studied at King Edward High School and was a Betar leader in his youth.

He obtained a BA degree in law and accounting from the University of the Witwatersrand and graduated from Boston University and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.


The small Jewish community in this mainly Muslim, West African, country are French Jewish expats, American Jews who work there and Israelis who have married locals.

In contrast, New Zealand has a Jewish population of only 6 867 (2013 census) out of the country’s total population of 4,5 million. The ambassador there is Dr Itzhak Gerberg.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday news reports said the Israeli Ambassador to Egypt David Govrin had returned to Israel over security concerns.

Nachshon told Jewish Report that Govrin had not been recalled (“it has nothing to do with relations with Egypt”) but had been working from Jerusalem as ambassador for the past three months.

The Israeli embassy reopened in Cairo in 2015 after being closed as a result of a mob attack on the diplomatic mission.



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Commuter who led clean-up of anti-Semitic subway graffiti to receive ADL award

NEW YORK - The New York commuter who led several others on a Manhattan subway to clean away anti-Semitic graffiti with hand sanitiser is being honoured by the Anti-Defamation League.

Jared Nied, 37, will receive ADL's Stand Up New Yorker Award, which recognises city residents for taking immediate action to help those being singled out for bigotry, or initiating efforts to denounce hate. Evan Bernstein, director of the ADL New York region, presented Nied with the award on Wednesday.

Nied's actions went viral after one of the commuters described the scene from the night of February 4 on Facebook.

"The train was silent as everyone stared at each other, uncomfortable and unsure what to do," Gregory Locke wrote in his post. "One guy got up and said: 'Hand sanitiser gets rid of Sharpie. We need alcohol.' He found some tissues and got to work."

Nied, who works as a sous chef in New York, also posted about the incident on Facebook that night.

"Sitting across from this... stay classy, New York," read the post, which included a photo of some of the graffiti. It read "Destroy Israel Heil Hitler" and included a swastika.

The post continued: "VERY IMPORTANT EDIT - hand sanitiser and tissues will totally erase sharpie graffiti. Share and spread the word!"

The following day Nied posted: "Bewildered, confused and pleasantly shocked doesn't even begin to describe this... never in a million years did I think anybody would record my moment, let alone that it would explode like this. I'm honestly not sure what to say other than that I was just doing the right thing, the thing that needed to be done." (JTA)

It's all in the belly

HOWARD FELDMAN

Sona 2017 - the State of the Nations - address made me very anxious. And in truth I imagine that South African Jews felt very much the same way.

I know that across rainbow nations there were concerns about the violence in Parliament, the aggression and the police presence.

I have seen articles detailing the content of President Jacob Zuma's speech and the consequences of his policies. But strangely, very little has been written about the elephant in the room. For

Jews, living in a land that is not a friend to Israel, the concern was much greater. It was really impossible to not notice how much weight Julius Malema has lost.



And if anything makes us uneasy it is unexplained weight loss. The man is bordering on being thin (G-d forbid a thousand times). And as Jews we understand that no good ever comes from that.

I scoured my TV and Facebook for clues. But aside from spotting some condiments in the upper gallery (pepper spray) there was no sign of anything for Parliamentarians to eat. Not a buffet in sight. No pass-arounds. Maybe like those mini kebabs both in beef and chicken, but with a vegetarian option? With a nice sweet and sour dipping sauce? Maybe some open sandwiches with pesto and feta (on health bread or seed loaf).

And aside from empty bottles of water (quite prominently displayed during the bar room brawl scene), very little to even drink. It's little wonder that they became so angry and aggressive. Who wouldn't? Visit any shul around two in the afternoon on Yom Kippur and see what happens. I am certain it's the real reason we don't wear leather on the day... so no one gets hurt. And SONA is not a fast day for G-d's sake!

And it's not just Julius. Anyone spotted President Zuma lately? Understandably one might have missed him given that the bloke is half his size. All those wives - and not one can make him a meal? Clearly not a Jewish mother in law among them.

They would be ashamed of their offspring. Certainly not how they were brought up. And when there was the fuss about him leaving Parliament in the middle of the fracas? He wasn't storming out, he just popped out to eat a rice cake with tuna. It's not healthy. He isn't a youngster any more.

Gone are the days when our Parliamentarians would roll down Adderley Street, drumstick in hand, looking colourful and large. And happy. We rejoiced in their size and we were comforted by the heftiness.

Their rolls might have been paid for by taxpayer money but it was our pleasure to provide. Because their rolls were our rolls and that is the kind of redistribution that we can relate to. In their mass we felt safe and positive. Because every Jew knows that if leaders love their food then they are the leaders for us.

In a sense watching SONA 2017 was like watching the Jewish Olympics. There were never going to be any winners. Only those who would lose less badly.

Like sports day at a Jewish day schools there was always going to be lots of cheering, lots of hype but hardly any substance. But everyone was dressed well and everyone was meant to be there to have fun. It was about "sportsmanship" and not about sport. And as Jews we get that.

The contents of Zuma's speech were initially a concern. His mention of "Occupied Palestine" of "radical economic transformation" among the other things if taken seriously, are serious.

But there is comfort in knowing that much of his speech was copy pasted from last year and the year before. And that after all this time in office he is yet to complete a task. This year is unlikely to be any different.

South African Jews are right to be concerned. But it's more about the health fad that is sweeping Parliament than it is anything else.

News

SONA as a 'circus' overshadowed the content of the address

SUZANNE BELLING

While the violence and protest around President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address stole most of the show last Thursday in Parliament, the few Jews in the house took exception to Zuma's brief but pointed comments on Israel and the Palestinians.

He said: "This year marks the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Palestine. The expansion of Israeli settlements undermines global efforts aimed at realising the two-state solution and the Oslo Accords. We wish to reiterate our support for the Palestinian cause."

Glynis Breytenbach, DA shadow minister for justice and constitutional development, told Jewish Report: "The ANC under Zuma has made it clear where their support lies. It is not a balanced approach with a genuine interest in finding a lasting solution."

"It is an approach that is biased against Israel and the Jewish people. It cannot be supported and is deeply disappointing given the history of our own country and the values espoused in our own Constitution."

She was "deeply appalled" at the chaos in the House.

"This was meant to be an occasion for South Africans to enjoy their democratic process and get direction for the year ahead from their President. They got none of that. They were confronted by a President in whom no-one has any faith and for whom no-one can have respect; and a military presence (in the parliamentary precinct) that was ominous and out of place in a constitutional democracy.

"This type of unruly behaviour diminishes Parliament and sets a shocking example for all. Violence is not the solution and the militarisation of Parliament is extremely disturbing."

What was noteworthy is that in welcoming faith leaders, Zuma mentioned the Muslims by name, but not the other

religions. "The approach by Zuma is deeply disrespectful by design - and offensive. "The Jewish community has made an enormous contribution to this country and continues to do so. They deserve to be recognised. The ANC have adopted an unfortunate approach which is not sustainable." She added: "South Africans will take back their own democracy and the contributions of all South Africans, including the



The Parliamentary "white shirts" security forces forcibly remove EFF members while inset, President Zuma seems to be enjoying the spectacle.


Jewish community, will be essential in getting us back onto a trajectory of which we all will be proud." DA MP Darren Bergman said he "knew it (the fracas) was going to happen" because it was the fulfilment of a threat. "The Speaker and chairman of the National Council of Provinces do not have control over the House because they do not have the respect of the House. To rely on external security to handle members that have a right to be in the House, says a lot about the current state of our nation."

On the "punch-up" he said: "More and more people are watching channel 408 and events such as SONA. Unfortunately, it is usually out of eager anticipation of the expected shenanigans, rather than an academic approach in understanding the current political lay of the land. "The world is watching and this no doubt has an impact on foreign aid and investment." On Zuma's support pledge to the Palestinians, Bergman said that South Africa has "built itself" as a reliable mediator between the Israelis and the Palestinians, (but) "the more they take a partisan approach, the more unreliable they become in ever being credible mediators. "Every time we blur the lines between Zionism and anti-Semitism, we push a simultaneous divide that is harmful to the Jewish community. Racist behaviour is dangerous and divisive. Anti-Semitism is racism." Michael Bagraim, DA shadow deputy minister of labour, pointed out that this year's SONA was not much different from last year's. What happened had been largely expected. "By its very nature, we know that government is bureaucratic, intrusive and expensive and we should be self-dependent and self-reliant and therefore we are enjoined to keep our distance and not interfere too much with government."

He said the government, in essence, had become so weak that it could not control - not only the problems experienced in the townships which instilled disobedience - but even the people in Parliament itself. "This surely tells every citizen that we need change and we need it desperately." Israel's Ambassador to South Africa Arthur Lenk attended SONA for the fifth time. "If the truth be told, the ruckus was nothing new. South Africa is still a young democracy and is finding its way. "It is interesting that we can all learn from South Africa and its vibrant, confrontational, hands-on" approach, he said.

NEWSMAKER

Q & A



Businessman Gavin Varejes, who heads the SA Rugby Legend Association, delivered a moving eulogy at the memorial service for South African legend Joost van der Westhuizen, who after a long battle, finally succumbed to motor neuron disease.

What does rugby mean to you?
Rugby isn't a sport, it's a brotherhood. It brings together different cultures, races and personalities with one common goal, to get a result after 80 minutes. For this, players sacrifice life and limb and in the process learn more about themselves and their darkest fears, like losing, facing a hostile crowd and disappointment in not only losing a tough game, but also letting your teammates and yourself down.

When and why did you set up the SA Rugby Legends?
The SA Rugby Legends Association was started in 2001 as an "old boys club" for provincial and professional players who still wanted to belong and give back to the game.

What did you hope to achieve with it?
The transition from professional rugby to life after rugby is brutal. If SARLA can make this process easier for ex-players and grow the base of rugby players at grassroots level, it is doing its job. We focus on rugby development and also the wellbeing of the ex-players after rugby.

Describe your relationship with Joost van der Westhuizen
Joost and I had a very open and honest relationship. He was the captain of the SA Rugby Legends and a hero in our country. He was also the tequila king! Off the field and after the party, we were helping transform his sporting skills to a business skill.
Joost was working at one of the companies in our group. In early 2011, I called him in and had concerns that he had been drinking because he was slurring his words and I noticed that his gait was unsteady. He was quite offended and assured me that he hadn't. I thought that he must've been partying too hard and it persisted. I think it really worried him as well.
And then, early in April 2011, he was told that he had 18 to 24 months to live. He was devastated and told me he had motor neuron disease and it was incurable. We cried together, he then got up and walked out. We never cried again together.

What and when was your first interaction with him?
The first time I met Joost, was a few years after the 1995 Rugby World Cup when I got the World Cup captains together, including David Kirk, Nick Farr Jones and Francois Pienaar in 1998. My initial motivation was to unite people and players through sport. Joost was one of the players who put his hand up to make a difference.

Describe Joost as a rugby player.
Joost was one of a kind and well ahead of his time. If you wanted to play against him, you had to play like him or you were lost. Eighty-nine test matches speaks for themselves and 38 tries, twice as many as the scrumhalf who scored the next highest number of tries, is an incredible feat.

Describe him as a rugby legend.
His never-say-die attitude could inspire not only a rugby team but a whole nation and gave many something to believe in the toughest of times, on and off the field.

Describe him as a friend.
Loyal, but also brutally honest at times and often turned this brutality on himself, facing and never cheating "the man in the mirror". He lived and loved life to the max and had an infectious laugh. His glass was always full, half water, half air. You need both.

What did you learn from knowing Joost?
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I learnt that even I don't know what a bad day is. Joost did. His body became his tomb. MND is in my opinion the worst disease in the world. The day you die, your brain is as alert as the day you get the disease.
I learned what real friendships, integrity, family and brotherhood meant. His family were absolutely epic. His brother Pieter put his life on hold and made the most selfless sacrifices for Joost. He became Joost's alter ego.

What can the Jewish world take from Joost?
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south african
Jewish Report
What Donald Trump does, matters to us

“Why should I care if Donald Trump rules in America? It doesn’t affect me.” This sentiment, which was proffered as feedback for our edition last week, seems to be widespread among the community.

I find it curious that people believe that what happens in what is perceived to be the “centre of the free world” doesn’t impact on us. I understand we are continents away and our way of life may be different, but we are all connected.

Consider how many of us have relatives living in the US. It is so commonplace to hear a South African accent in places like Boca Rotan in Florida and even in New York, Washington and Chicago. Suffice to say, the Jewish world is a small one.

But, that’s not all. What happens in the US has a direct impact on Israel and South Africa. The connection between the US and Israel is a bit like a child tied to its mother by its umbilical cord. The only issue is that the brain of the mother keeps changing and sometimes she is not quite as fond of her baby as at other times. While she looks after her young, she doesn’t always back her on every decision the youngster makes.

As for the connection with South Africa, we are part of a world that is impacted by the uber-powerful US on economic, social and political levels.

Clearly Trump was not our biggest fan. “I really like Nelson Mandela but South Africa is a crime-ridden mess that is just waiting to explode - not a good situation for the people!”

This was a Tweet Trump made back in December 2013. Then in 2015, he tweeted: “As I have long been saying, South Africa is a total - and very dangerous - mess. Just watch the evening news (when not talking about weather).”

However, perhaps things are looking up for our relationship following Trump’s much hyped request to call President Jacob Zuma on Monday. The two leaders were said to reaffirm their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations between them and security matters on this continent.

“There are 600 US companies in South Africa and strong trade relations between the two countries,” according to the SA presidency.

So, does Trump matter to us? I would say he does, whether we agree with his policies and ideas about running a country or not. Does it matter that there are many Jews in his Cabinet? I would say it does. Does it matter what he does about ISIS? Yes, because ISIS would be happy if we weren’t on the face of this earth. Does it matter if he gives his 100 per cent support to settlements? Sure does.

Elana Stein, from the Academy of Jewish Thought who spoke at Greenside Shul over Tu B’Shvat, made this relationship we have so clear in biological terms. She described how a fig can only be pollinated by wasps, but not just any wasp. Each sub-species of fig has to be pollinated by a specific sub-species of wasp.

If a specific type of wasp becomes extinct, the type of fig it pollinates will die out. If that happens, it will sorely impact on that ecosystem, including the animals and possibly humans that rely on the figs.

That will have a microcosmic impact, which will then spread. For me, this is an analogy of how we operate as Jews, as the Jewish world, as South Africans and citizens of the world. It matters to us what happens in the US and in the rest of the world.

Just some food for thought.
Shabbat Shalom!



Peta Krost Maunder

Corruption among Israeli leaders

PAULA SLIER

The first time I met former Israeli President Moshe Katzav was on a staircase - I was entering an apartment to interview a young woman whose husband had been killed while serving in the Israel Defence Forces.

Katzav was exiting, having paid his respects to the family as is customary for the president of Israel to do whenever a soldier dies, and we exchanged pleasantries. The next time I saw him he was entering prison on charges of rape and sexual assault.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at the time that Katzav’s sentencing was “a day of sadness and shame” for Israel. “But there is also deep appreciation and pride in the Israeli justice system,” he observed.

Today no-one remembers much about Katzav’s tenure other than that he ended it behind bars. And I wonder how many remember Netanyahu’s remarks that could in retrospect prove to be prophetic of his own possible fate.

In the coming weeks it’s widely expected (but far from guaranteed) that Israeli police will indict Netanyahu after conducting multiple investigations into his alleged involvement in bribery and corruption.

The most serious charges point to Netanyahu accepting gifts like suits and cigars to the value of



other than his prison time. If Olmert could have it his way, the history books would record him as the Israeli leader who went further than anyone else to reach peace with the Palestinians.

During his final year in office, Olmert presented Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas with a written proposal expressing his readiness to give up almost all (94 per cent) of the West Bank, so a Palestinian state could be formed. Abbas didn’t bother to reply.

Although the accounts were completely managed by his wife, Prime Minister Rabin took responsibility and resigned. The not-so-honourable behaviour of Israel’s politicians certainly goes back quite a few years.

Waking up to this fact seems to sadden and sometimes even surprise people, but why should Israel be held to a higher moral ground than other countries? It is after all a functioning modern state with all the challenges, successes and failures that come with that.

Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, once famously said: “When Israel has prostitutes and thieves we’ll be a state just like any other.” Ben-Gurion might not have been angling for corrupt politicians, but his state - just like others around the world - has them. Not least of all South Africa.

If one is measuring a country’s moral compass then South Africa has fallen far since the halcyon days of Nelson Mandela. Accused of corruption, abuse of power and even tried for rape, President Jacob Zuma has so far managed to remain in power and evade the full wrath of the law.

Netanyahu might not be so lucky. Katzav and Olmert, and at least a dozen other Israeli politicians, certainly weren’t. Say what you like, something is working in Israel that South Africa is in dire need of.

That’s not to say Israel is perfect - far from it. In Netanyahu’s defence it has to be said he gets a lot of bad press and he’s repeatedly accused the Israeli media of conducting a witch-hunt against him alongside his opponents who’re desperately trying to discredit him.

There are voices warning against overzealous criminal investigations and double standards. But no democracy is perfect - not Israel’s and not South Africa’s. Yet, while Israeli leaders caught doing wrong inevitably find themselves having to own up and face the consequences of their actions, Zuma’s cronies have let him off the hook once too often. South Africans have been shamed for too long - a little pride wouldn’t go amiss.



tens of thousands of dollars from wealthy businessmen. Netanyahu has vehemently denied any wrongdoing.

Corruption scandals are nothing new to Netanyahu - or to Israel. They tend to leave many Israelis feeling ashamed but at the same time proud - knowing that nobody is above the law.

Most Israelis I speak to believe that putting an Israeli president behind bars shows the strength of the country’s independent judiciary and law enforcement system. For all its faults, Israel’s democracy is the only one to have put a president - and a prime minister - in jail for their crimes.

Like Katzav, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert would no doubt prefer to be remembered for something

Beata Lipman – fighter against injustice

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Struggle veterans galore gathered at the Women’s Section of the Old Fort Prison on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg last Sunday, to bid farewell to struggle veteran Beata Maria Lipman (pictured), in a memorial service. Lipman died on December 8, last year.

Retired ANC minister Ronnie Kasrils, writer and activist Elinor Sisulu, as well as Minister of Women in the Presidency Susan Shabangu, were just a few of the recognisable faces to bid farewell to the woman who hand-wrote the original Freedom Charter in Kliptown in 1955.

There was nothing average about Lipman. Journalist Pippa Green recalls from the memorial on Facebook this week: “Elinor Sisulu recounted how she (Beata) had demonstrated to Ma Albertina Sisulu one day how she could stand on her head. Elinor said she would never forget the look on Ma Sisulu’s face that day.”

Beata, an indefatigable Struggle activist and noted journalist and TV producer, lived a full and fruitful life, devoted to point out and root out injustice - a tough, bright, warm woman, interested in the world and committed to social justice, her daughter Jane Thandi and son Peter remembered.

Beata was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1928.The family lived in Berlin. With Hitler’s ascent to power and the rise of fascism in Germany, the family fled to South Africa in 1932 and



became part of the German Jewish community in Johannesburg.

In 1952 Beata ran a nursery school in Lamontville in Durban. As repression started to increase in South Africa, she and her architect husband Professor Alan Robert Lipman, became active in the struggle against apartheid. They joined the Communist Party, only to leave when the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1956.

She was part of the 1956 Women’s March against repressive pass laws. Beata was active in the townships of South Africa, working with the ANC and for the liberation Struggle newspaper New Age. As an active member of the Congress of Democrats, she worked closely with leaders of the movement including Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela.

In 1963, Beata became a refugee again when she and Alan left South Africa to escape detention due to their underground activities. In the UK she worked as a journalist and TV

producer. She wrote the book “We Make Freedom - Women in South Africa” and “Israel, the Embattled Land - Palestinian and Jewish Women Talk About Their Lives”.

She and Alan returned to South Africa in 1990 on the eve of democracy and she made documentaries about Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, William Kentridge, Chris Hani and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, among others.

Gemma Cronin, wife of Communist Party deputy secretary-general Jeremy Cronin, said in a note of condolences to the family: “For our generation of ‘whities’, people from the older generation, like Beata, who had taken a stand against apartheid and lived with the consequence, were hugely influential. I will never forget meeting her and the vivid sense of her strength, purposeful and critical engagement with the world I felt at the time.”

Green on her Facebook page said the tributes at the memorial were spot-on. “Not sentimental, but grasped the generosity and humour and courage of this amazing woman...”

Kasrils recalled how Beata had told a security guard in Durban in the 60s when they were distributing illegal pamphlets that they were for “A Just World Order - Praise the Lord” and he had assumed they were Jehovah’s Witnesses and left them alone!”

Beata’s husband Alan died in January 2013.She is survived by her children Peter and Jane Thandi and her grandchildren Martha, Caitlin and Joshua.

Books

Is there ‘redemption’ for Shoah murderers?

SUZANNE BELLING

Former Herzlia headmaster Solly Kaplinski grew up as a child of Holocaust survivors, Sima and Izak, who escaped with the Bielski partisans in Belarus. Next week he launches a novella “A World of Pains – A Redemptive Parable”, which is based on “the theme of accountability, growing up in the long shadow of the Shoah”.

Kaplinsky says that growing up, he didn’t know much about the suffering of the Shoah. His parents did not speak about it, “only my father had nightmares and my mother would not open the door when the bell rang - or answer the phone.

“I assumed my background could be compared with those of my friends, but I started to realise it was not the same when my father was called to give testimony in a Nazi trial in Germany. It was all over the newspapers and my peers in Cape Town started asking me questions.”

He went to Herzlia School “because my parents wanted me to live a Jewish protected life”.

Kaplinski - who graduated with a BA (Honours) in psychology from the University of Cape Town, later attaining a Masters from Unisa - says he only later found out that offspring of Holocaust survivors were drawn to



“helping” professions. His first job was at Rondebosch Boys’ High School “where I became a ‘diplomat’ on Jewish-related matters”.

He joined the staff of Herzlia High School in 1977, initially as a counsellor and later as principal of the High School, eventually heading up the United Herzlia Schools.

He lived in Canada, in both Toronto and Vancouver, before making aliyah in 2000, where he worked at the English desk of Yad Vashem and was involved in the development of its new museum.

Kaplinski’s hero in his book is a successful human rights American lawyer, who “performed many mitzvot, but his Nazi past came back to haunt him. He has visions of what transpired, says Kaplinski.

“My book presents the challenge - is there any redemption? - given the exemplary life he led in America.”The ending, he admits, “is controversial but I am not giving it away”.

Kaplinski, his wife Arleen and three daughters and nine grandchildren, live in Jerusalem.

- The book will be launched on February 23 at the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre and is available on Amazon at \$15 (\$8,50 on Kindle) and R150 in South Africa.

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Hair today; what will tomorrow bring?

ANT KATZ

“Give me a head with hair... shoulder length or longer,” so went the title song of the 60s-era rock opera Hair. In the 21st century, however, the issue of boys wearing long hair (and other gender equality issues) have been a concern to high schools in particular - and secular Jewish day schools are in the thick of it.

The King David schools in Johannesburg and Herzlia in Cape Town, have been engaging over the past year seeking solutions as to how they should move forward after both were approached by boys on the issue last year.

King David Linksfield (KDL) boys say they have been on a quest for what they call “gender equality” (read: long hair and earrings) while on the Victory Park (KDVP) campus a five-person committee argue that people with intelligent minds analyse rules and don’t follow them blindly.

The hair policy, they say, stops boys from having autonomy. The KDVP committee dissociate themselves from the KDL learners’ position on broader gender equality as they feel it tarnishes what they stand for.

The strategies in the process of being adopted by King David and Herzlia, however, are quite the opposite of one-another.

At KDL some boys wearing long hair or “tuft”, a style which is long on top and short on the sides. This has proven itself particularly successful as some of the Linksfield boys are suddenly sprouting kippot - not for religious reasons, but to hide their hair.

The hair issue is by no means confined to King David. Last year a school in Pretoria and two in



It’s as easy as one... two... three – King David Linksfield matric pupil Jasen Smaller shows how he hides his hair under a kippa.

Cape Town made headlines over this and other gender equality issues. And a Jewish matriculant at a small Catholic school in Johannesburg, (see sidebar), also fought for, and won, the right for boys to wear long hair.

At King David’s Victory Park campus, the situation has been one of “constructive engagement”, says Principal Andrew Baker. As it stands, the current Code of Conduct applies to all 10 schools within the SABJE umbrella.

A hair policy, however, is not included. It is school-specific, says Baker. “Linksfield High and VP High are currently aligning the wording of the school policies with regards to hair,” says Baker.

The current KDVP policy on boys’ hair reads: “Hairstyles must be neat and appropriate. For boys - hair should be cut neatly off the collar and the ears. In the case of boys with thick hair, please can it be thinned out appropriately.

Neither long or spiky hair, shaven heads nor the colouring of hair is acceptable.”

The Jewish Report did not get access to the KDL policy, but a parent sent a several-year-old document which said simply that KDL boys’ hair: “should be off the ears and collar”. This, says learner Jasen Smaller who is refusing to cut his hair, “is being complied with”.

Baker, who took up his post in January 2016 had to deal with the issue of boys’ hair in his first few days at the school, having been “approached by some learners on “a very specific issue” - that of boys’ hair.

Thus begun what Baker refers to as a “very positive and amicable process of engagement without any animosity at all”.

The ongoing engagement remained at that positive level throughout 2016, which was probably precipitated by the new

principal’s immediately invoking a moratorium on the enforcement of the schools’ rules relating to boy’s hair until the engagement process was finalised. This would most likely been seen as an act of respect and good faith by the learners and set the tone for the constructive nature of the year-long engagement that ensued.

“We are heading towards the final phase of the process,” Baker told Jewish Report.

KDL Principal Lorraine Srage, told Jewish Report this week that there was no new hair policy, only a clarification that they were legally and constitutionally able to enforce the existing code of conduct as it relates to boys’ hair.

“I have cut the sides of my hair shorter and am careful to not grow it beyond what can fit neatly under my kippa,” says Smaller, who is one of many boys at the school, he says, who use the same trick to meet the school requirements on the one hand, but are able to adopt their individuality once out of school uniform.

The schools had been challenged by boys regarding the hair policy last year, Srage explains. “We listened, we debated, we took counsel, and a decision was made”.

Srage says that “a cultural issue is fundamentally different” and that if any pupil’s requirement to act outside of the code of conduct “is underpinned by a religious or cultural requirement,” such as a boy not shaving due to a halachic commitment, the school would make an exception in these cases.

A different kettle of fish in Cape Town

Herzlia Schools in Cape Town are also involved in a similar process but both their approach, and the likely impending outcome, are completely different to that of King David Schools.

Marc Falconer, principal of Cape Town’s Herzlia High School (he was previously principal at KDL), rubbishes the concept of trying to enforce “colonial-type rules and regulations” on high schoolers in a manner which “would not have been out of place at the time of WWI”.

Falconer believes the status quo is “anachronistic” and that it is just a matter of time before all schools will have to review their policies “in this era of decolonisation and the modern education environment”.

Herzlia is presently looking at a proposal of “simple equality” between boys’ and girls’ hair regulations.

While Falconer agrees that “hair is the burning issue”, he believes that a far larger process of modernisation is required.

Herzlia’s Student Leader Council sent out a survey asking learners to air their views on allowing long hair for boys. An incredible 87 per cent responded, he says, and 85 per cent of those were in favour.

KDVP learners also conducted a poll and had over 74 per cent in favour of longer hair.

Herzlia’s Uniform Committee members, too, are on the cusp of finalising a new hair code. The principal has included representatives from the Student Leader Council to be “part of the decision-making process” and he believes the experiment has proven a huge success.

The learners have been able to “appreciate the time taken in consulting the various Herzlia stakeholders”, Falconer explains.

And, he says, once a new policy is in place it will be up to the student leadership to understand and uphold “their concomitant responsibility and maintain discipline” within the new rules and regulations.

Herzlia is not at the forefront of this issue in Cape Town, says the principal. “Some liberal schools such as Westerford and Camps Bay have already implemented gender neutral policies.”

Herzlia favours “peer leadership” policies, says Falconer. “We want them to take ownership.”

Back in Johannesburg: Last week KDL head of discipline, Tom Johnson, insisted that some of the boys concerned cut their hair on the same day.

The Jewish Report will keep our readers updated on this issue.

• SEE MORE ON www.sajr.co.za

Taking on the system – and winning

Jeremy Crouch, who matriculated at Sacred Heart College in Observatory last year, took up the cudgels of the right for boys to wear their hair long – and won.

Crouch – one of a number of Jewish learners at this Johannesburg Catholic school – said the issue of how long the boys’ hair could be had been a hot topic at the school for years.

The school had previously allowed boys to wear their hair long and neat, but after these rules were abused, the school withdrew this right.

Crouch, as deputy head of the student council in 2016, felt it was his right to wear his hair long and was determined that these rules be reconsidered.

Crouch took this up with school headmistress Heather Blanckensee, who was very supportive of his efforts and, after discussions with the school board and parents, the rule was changed.

“I have very curly hair,” said Crouch. “And I would go to



school with my hair tied tightly and lots and lots of clips.

“Oftentimes the question of piercings (also) came up so we chose to only make it about hair,” says Jeremy.

In this way, the class of 2016 was paving the way for the naysayers to see it wasn’t so bad, and allowing space for future councils to deal with more gender issues, he says.

The policy is now that both girls and boys can wear their hair any length as long as it is in accordance with the school’s former girls’ rules.

At the school’s end of year prizegiving, Crouch was given a once-off Special Award “for the role he played in challenging the status quo, and making the way for change which enhanced the reputation of the school,” according to his mother.

The wording engraved on the award is: “We will always remember you for your strong leadership and vision, helping others to find their voice, and serving them with humility.”

Funky rabbi spreads love online



PETA KROST MAUNDER

When around 400 Orthodox rabbis gathered for a photograph at the end of Kinnus in New York recently, one rabbi opened his black coat to reveal a batman onesie. It was caught on camera.

This rabbi’s name is Meir Kalmanson (pictured), or Meir Kay as he calls himself, and he is a part of the US Chabad community, but his own community is the world and he “spreads love” through outrageous online videos.

Of his rabbinical photographic moment, he says: “At first not many people noticed... Once a photographer shouted ‘hey look this way’, rabbis turned in my direction and it was a sight to see. Lots of smiles and chuckles.”

Kay doesn’t have his own shul or physical congregation, but there are more people who follow his “teachings” than most rabbis with huge congregations.

“My mission in life is to live up to my name Meir; which means to illuminate,” he told the Jewish Report. “I envision a world filled with kindness and compassion. I’m making it my mission to spread positivity and happiness through the videos I create, talks that I give, and in my daily personal interactions.”

Kay, 27, was brought up in Connecticut and went through the traditional Chabad yeshiva schooling system, graduating with his rabbinical certification in Singapore. “In Chabad community, obtaining smicha (rabbinical degree) is the final step and graduation from the schooling system,” he explains. “The Lubavitcher Rebbe wanted every man to be a rabbi of his own home.”

Finding his rabbinical path through video, Kay learnt his production skills through experience on movie sets as production assistant and then working on short films.

His videos vary from one in which he challenges strangers to a dance off in New York subway stations while wearing boxer shorts that read “100% kosher”; then dressed in a Star Wars robe he challenges New Yorkers to duel with light sabres; to high fiving commuters with their hands out to hail a taxi.

In his favourite video, titled “Be A Kid Again” he took a bed around New York City to give people the opportunity to jump on it. “When we pulled out the bed at Times Square, we got shut down right away, but we persuaded the police officer to give us five minutes. Then young and old people were getting on that bed and jumping around on it. It was priceless. For five minutes, New Yorkers and tourists alike, were kids again.

“This experience really hit the core of who we all are. We’re just a bunch of kids inside and we want to be

happy and to be free. We need to be reminded of this as we get older, and I like to be that reminder.”

Kay wants his videos to spread positivity and happiness to everyone who watches them. “I want to see people smile, laugh and walk away inspired,” he says. “The best reaction is when viewers go forth and perform an act of kindness and spread positivity on their own.

“I am trying to grow a community of like-minded people who want to hear about the good things in life and just take a break from the negative which is regurgitated in the media.”

He is also now branching out into public speaking and designing apparel, which are all about spreading the message of positivity and happiness.

He says people appreciate his videos and the message he shares, some being moved to tears, smiles and laughter. “The best part is hearing the stories people send me about how the videos moved them to action.”

He uses the Internet as his pulpit that amplifies his voice to reach as many as possible through YouTube, Facebook or Instagram. He gets many “messages of love” via e-mail and Facebook from people in the US, Europe, Israel, India and the Philippines.

His fellow rabbis, he says, have mostly reacted positively and some have even shared his videos in their weekly newsletters.

“They also write how people from their communities have asked if they knew me, and how wonderful it was to see a frumpy doing what I’m doing.”

And back at Kinnus, he says, the energy in the neighbourhood was electric during the conference, because there was a mutual hunger to achieve selfless goals to better the world. Only most rabbis don’t do it quite like Kay does.

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Madcap Suzelle of DIY fame has a Jewish connection

SUZANNE BELLING

South Africa’s favourite online celebrity, SuzelleDIY, has an alter ego - Julia Anastasopoulos. “Suzelle” bubbles all over as she does her YouTube DIY videos, presenting in “a thick Cape Afrikaans accent”, whereas Julia is genteel, her voice modulated, as she laughs softly at being recognised on the streets of Cape Town.

What few fans know about either Suzelle or Julia is that their long-time boyfriend and betrothed is Jewish and, because of that, she is more than familiar with all things Jewish.

Partners in every sense of the word, Julia and Ari Kruger attend Rabbi Greg Alexander’s Temple Israel and are due to be married in the near future. Being a DIY fundi - she is adept at making “just about anything” - Julia has designed and is making her own wedding gown.

“We are going to be married at Leeuwenhof, the residence of the Premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille.

“This came about when we were doing a shoot there on water conservation. We were looking for a place to be married in central Cape Town. I asked Helen Zille and she said ‘yes’!”

Suzelle made her debut into Jewish communal life when she was commissioned to explain challah-making - savoury and sweet - for The Shabbos Project.

She wasn’t that au fait with challah-making initially, but now she is an expert and attended The Shabbos Project challah bake.

Kids run after her, calling out “Suzelle”, particularly when she wears her hair in an up-style, but Julia is grounded and manages her two lives

with ease - with the help of her partner and director, Ari, who also takes most of her photographs.

Suzelle was created about three years ago, as Julia and Ari wanted to start a project aside from their commercial work. Julia is an artist, illustrator and her murals can be seen around Cape Town. She was commissioned to design a mural for display in The Book Lounge - a trendy bookshop - in the children’s book section and has illustrated books.

Born in Johannesburg, Julia was educated at St Mary’s School in Waverley. She moved to Cape Town, where she obtained a BA in theatre and performance, majoring in acting, from the University of Cape Town.

In 2004 she took part in The Blue Room at the Arena Theatre and two years later she played Ophelia in Hamlet in the Artscape Teatre.

Julia appeared in Interrupting Henry at the Artscape Arena, Done London at the Kalk Bay Theatre and played Helena in a production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

She was active in the design of Fugard Studio’s theatre production of Master Harold... and the Boys, and created illustrations for Tree/Boom/Umthi, a short narrative for young children.

She also designed the set for Vigil for the Gramhamstown National Arts Festival in 2013.

A recipient of the Eskom Energy Efficient Lighting Design Competition, she was also awarded the title of South Africa’s “Favourite Online Celebrity”.

Coming from a highly creative family in many spheres, Julia has not let her acting ability fall by the way - evidenced by her Suzelle DIY videos.

Julia lives in an apartment in Cape Town’s City Bowl, while her alter ego Suzelle lives in Somerset West, where she braais with her neighbour, Hennie.

Suzelle aka Julia ‘voila-ing’ her challah.

Umhlanga’s Shalom Mikvah – a dream come true

ALANA BARANOV

“If you will it, it is no dream; and if you do not will it, a dream it is and a dream it will stay.”

Theodor Herzl’s immortal words on his vision for a Jewish homeland were brought to life once again, this time in the seaside North Coast village of Umhlanga Rocks where the decades long aspiration of Reb Shlomo and Devorah Wainer to open a mikvah has become a reality.

The Shalom Mikvah Complex, comprising luxury and private men’s and women’s mikvahs as well as a convenient keilim mikvah [for utensils], was officially opened with a special ceremony on December 14 last year - 14 Kislev 5777.

Situated next door to the Chabad in Umhlanga Outreach and Activity Centre, shul and Umhlanga Kosher Guest House in the heart of Umhlanga, the event celebrating these world class facilities was attended by many locals as well as an illustrious list of rabbonim from the South African Jewish community and beyond.

Rabbi Meir Posen, world expert and halachic authority on mikvahs; Rabbi Anton Klein from the Beth Din in Johannesburg; Rabbi Michael Katz, co-director of Chabad House in Johannesburg; Rabbi Sholom Ber Groner, rav of the Chabad community in South Africa and halachic authority, all attended.

Together with Rabbi Posen, South African Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein shared a few words of congratulations on the auspicious occasion and highlighted



the importance of a mikvah for the growth and spiritual development of a community.

Rabbi Goldstein also mentioned what a great resource the mikvah would be to the hundreds of holidaymakers who flock to Umhlanga and Chabad in Umhlanga to experience Reb Shlomo and Devorah’s famous hospitality.

The Wainers’ tireless work to keep the shul going throughout the year and to offer a wide variety of learning facilities, family activities and outreach work, came in for special praise.

Rabbi Jared Garber took the opportunity to make a siyyum on the Mishnayos that his study group had

been learning since the start of the mikvah building - a special way to mark the completion of the mikvah project.

“Sometimes you do one mitzvah and others come around,” said Rabbi Garber.

John and Anna Moshal were presented with a gift of appreciation from Reb Shlomo for their financial assistance with the ambitious project. John Moshal emphasised the wonderful work done by the Wainers and the role that Judaism and its values has played in his family’s philanthropic work.

Reb Shlomo thanked all those who had played a role in seeing the mikvah dream come true. He mentioned the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s vision to make Yiddishkeit accessible to each and every Jew and that one should strengthen one’s own structures, which are built on sincerity and purity, on Torah and mitzvahs, even if it needs actual mesirus nefesh or sacrifice for that good.

He also paid tribute to project manager David Unterslak and the many architects and builders for their hard work.

Reb Shlomo said there was still a chance to be a part of this important mitzvah; contributions to the mikvah fund are still being accepted and no amount is too big or too small.

- For more information and to make an online contribution, check out the website www.mikvahrocks.co.za. Ladies mikvah by appointment only. Call Devorah on 072-775-7753.

World News in Brief

Senate confirms Steve Mnuchin for Treasury, David Shulkin for VA posts

WASHINGTON - The US Senate on Monday confirmed Steven Mnuchin as Treasury secretary and David Shulkin as secretary of Veterans Affairs. Both are Jewish.

Mnuchin was confirmed by 53-47, along party lines, with Joe Manchin of West Virginia the only Democrat to vote in his favour. He was sworn in the same evening by Vice President Mike Pence, with President Donald Trump present, in the Oval Office.

Democrats opposed Mnuchin, who was treasurer for Trump’s campaign, alleging that the bank he led, OneWest, used foreclosures during the financial crisis of the late 2000s to prey on vulnerable homeowners.

Trump said at the swearing-in ceremony that Mnuchin, who also was a Hollywood producer, would be a champion of the middle class.

“To all citizens I say Steven will be your champion, and a great champion,” Trump said. “He will fight for middle-class tax reductions, financial reforms, and open up lending and create millions of new jobs, and fiercely defend the American tax dollar and our financial security.”

Mnuchin said a priority would be to combat terrorist financing.

“I am committed to using the full powers of this office to create more jobs, to combat terrorist activities and financing, and to make America great again,” he said.

The Treasury under successive administrations have been a key venue for targeting terrorist finances through exposure and finances. The scrutiny has intensified since the implementation of the Iran nuclear deal a year ago, in part to assuage Israeli fears that sanctions relief under the agreement would facilitate Iranian backing for terrorist groups.

Shulkin also was confirmed on Monday - but unanimously. Shulkin, a physician, was deputy VA secretary under President Barack Obama and is the only holdover from that administration. (JTA)

Aliyah – the good, the bad and the meshuga

Benita Levin

Touchdown in Tel Aviv. The start of a new chapter for my husband, 10-year old son and nine-year old daughter. The El Al flight is mandatory for anyone making aliyah - not only because the country pays for that one-way ticket to Ben-Gurion Airport, but because from a sentimental point of view, flying in on the national carrier is part of the immigration experience.

It's a flight we've been lucky enough to make before as holidaymakers from South Africa over the years, but this time is different. We don't have return tickets booked. We are arriving as olim chadashim - new immigrants. So many different emotions. It's exciting. Terrifying. Surreal.

The woman sitting next to me is a vivacious 30-something American, Rachel, who is heading back home to Tel Aviv, after travelling around South Africa. Her eyes light up when she talks about the freedom she knows to be normal in Israel. She walks home alone after work at midnight. (Many people here work so-called "American" hours.) "Tel Aviv doesn't sleep," she explains. She couldn't understand why people in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands warned her about driving alone at night. "I was born in KZN," I smile. Fabulous childhood memories will always stay with us.

Rachel's effervescent take on life in Israel, is just what I needed to hear as the pilot announced in Hebrew that we were about to land. The plane flew out over a massive expanse of ocean before turning back to make its descent.

The view was breath-taking. Sky-rise buildings, a stunning beach, adjoining promenade and the deep blue sea. Hard to

The phrase I used most this week - Ani lo mevina - I don't understand.

The phrase I heard others use most often this week - Ze hu - that's it.

New English translation for the week - Ramzor is a traffic light. It's not called a "robot" here!

Smile of the week - chatting to a friendly Israeli woman who asked about our move. "It's good that you're here," she said. "You're right," I replied, "it is good for us that we're here. She smiled - "No, it's not only good for you, it's good for us too."

believe we were flying over a desert. Hard to believe we were flying over our new home.

So, nu, how long does it take to become an official Israeli citizen?

The airport is bustling. A colossal, modern building. Before we even arrive at customs, we were met by a tall man, holding a sign with our surname on it. We are the only family on this flight making aliyah.

Avram takes us upstairs to the Department of Absorption. (What an apt name for the man taking us to enter our new home country!)

We'd been warned that the bureaucratic process could take a while. That wasn't the case at all. We were ushered into a warm office and offered coffee and snacks. An older woman sat across from us at a desk, stoically asking a range of official sounding questions in Hebrew. (The fact that my husband can speak the language, is a huge plus.)

I am making out every couple of words, answering tentatively where I can with "Nachon" (correct) or "Beseder" (that's fine). I thought of my fabulous Hebrew school teacher in Durban, Izzy Fisher, and smiled thinking an urgent refresher course is going to be a priority. Luckily, a Hebrew ulpan is offered to olim here. Note to self: Sign up soon. The question and answer session includes watching the woman spell out your English name in Hebrew letters. She hands us each a small blue book, with a plastic cover. The ID with your photo and your somewhat different looking name. Then she gives us our medical aid certificates. The hard expression on her face softens into a warm maternal smile: "Bruchim ha'baim," she says. "Behatzlacha." Welcome and good luck.

That was quick. Thirty minutes. We're officially Israeli citizens? Free medical aid and all. I think back to a few months earlier, as I waited for the same length of time in a queue

at a post office in Johannesburg, trying to renew my car licence.

This felt like a good start. "Rak rega" - (one moment) - Avram calls us as we make our way out of the office. We turn around to see a woman coming towards us with large see-through bags with new duvets.

We look back at her, slightly confused. "Take the duvets," she smiles, "they're for you."

That was easy and stress-free. Our gut instincts about the move still felt right. Both the initial interview in South Africa a few months before, and this half hour in the airport had been seamless. Not quite the welcome many immigrants are experiencing in various part of the world right now. We left feeling upbeat, positive and ready for what lay ahead in the land of milk and honey.

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Letters

Disclaimer

The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff or directors of the Jewish Report.

The Editor, PO Box 84650, Greenside, 2034 email: sharon@sajewishreport.co.za

Guidelines for letters

Letters of up to 400 words get preference. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. We do not publish letters under noms de plume. Letters should preferably be e-mailed. Letters may be edited or shortened.

HEADLINE ON CAPE FIRES EXAMPLE OF BLINKERED THINKING

LOOKING FOR WEINERS RELATED TO CHAIKEL WEINER

The headline in the Jewish Report of January 27 states: "Cape Town fires: Fortunately no major Jewish property damage". This headline gave me cold shivers. It took me back to the bad days of apartheid when we would read similar headlines, such as "Ten-car pile-up – no-one seriously injured. Three blacks died".

It is a most insensitive, narrow-minded, chilling example of blinkered thinking, and I was ashamed to read it in a Jewish newspaper.

Hillary Yasmer Shemin who lives in the United States, is looking for descendants of two Weiner brothers who immigrated from Eastern Europe (Courland or Lithuania) to Pretoria in the early 1900s.

Hillary's mother Anne Cutler Yasmer was the daughter of Hinda Weiner Cutler who had a brother Chaikel Weiner who did not leave Europe, but two of his sons (names unknown) emigrated to Pretoria and opened businesses there.

Shemin is trying to establish if there are any Weiner families in Pretoria or elsewhere in South Africa that may have been related to or descendants of Chaikel Weiner.

Information may be passed on to Eli Goldstein at 082-460-3287.

Penny Hochfeld

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How Israel’s travel bans are – and aren’t – like Trump’s

ANDREW TOBIN
TEL AVIV

Defending his executive order directing the construction of a wall along the US border with Mexico, President Donald Trump pointed to Israel as a model, saying “a wall protects”.

With another swipe of his pen two days later, on January 27, Trump enacted a targeted travel ban. As it turns out, that executive order, which has since been suspended by a federal judge, also has at least superficial similarities to Israel’s immigration regime.

“Officially, we are like Trump,” said Amnon Rubenstein, a law professor at the Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya and former Israeli education minister. “We don’t accept refugees or immigrants” who aren’t Jewish under Israel’s Law of Return. “But the reality is a little different.”

Israel for years has maintained Trumpian semi-bans on entry by citizens from several Arab countries and asylum seekers. The difference is that the law is often not enforced.

The Trump travel ban barred entry to the United States by immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries - Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen - for 90 days. It also blocked all refugees for 120 days, and refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria indefinitely.

Since 2007, Israel has legally refused entry to most citizens from three of the countries on Trump’s list - Iran, Iraq and Syria - as well as from Lebanon. These “enemy states” were added to a 2003 emergency law, passed in response to the second intifada, that has largely stopped Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from living in Israel.

Israel has also taken a relatively

hard line on asylum seekers, who in its case come mostly from Eritrea and Sudan. The state has generally deemed these migrants “infiltrators” seeking work, though many have fled persecution and human rights abuses at home, according to human rights groups.

Between 2009 and the beginning of 2015, Israel granted refugee status to just five of more than 3 500 applicants, or a fraction of 1 per cent. That

contrasts with the 84 per cent of Eritreans and 56 per cent of Sudanese asylum seekers who received either refugee status or extended protection in other countries in 2014, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

At the same time, Israel has deterred more African migrants from coming and sent out those who have already arrived. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted in a tweet

responding to Trump’s shout-out, Israel in 2014 completed a fence along its border with Egyptian-controlled Sinai.

The previous year, Israel built a detention centre in the Negev just for the migrants, and it has given cash incentives to tens of thousands to return to South Sudan or go to third countries with which Israel has reached agreements.

“Israel, like the US right now, is violating its obligations to

refugees,” said Tally Kritzman-Amir, an expert in immigration law at the College of Law and Business outside Tel Aviv and the academic supervisor of its Clinic for Migrants’ Rights.

“If you ask me, part of being Jewish is about remembering what happened to our people in the past, and maybe even being proud that we are able to provide some protection now.”

But whereas Trump’s travel ban allows few exceptions, Israel’s

immigration laws are full of loopholes and are sometimes simply ignored entirely.

“Israel is primarily a country of Jewish repatriation. Non-Jewish immigration is supposed to be very limited,” said Alexander Yakobson, a historian at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. “And yet the number of non-Jewish immigrants here is staggering. This is achieved not through policy but through non-enforcement of immigration laws.”

or some other important matter of State”. Such a person, whose family may be included, must identify with “Israel and its goals”.

A 30-year old gay poet who had fled persecution for his sexuality in Iran and professed to be “in love with” Israel was allowed to enter the country last year and stay.

For those who need to enter Israel for work or medical care, temporary visas can be issued. Israeli army medics have brought more than 2 600 Syrians to the country for care, though the state will not recognise them as refugees, and tens of thousands of West Bank Palestinians are permitted to work in Israel, with thousands more coming in illegally.

Even African migrants in many ways have been accommodated. Israel has expelled few, and more than 45 000 are estimated to remain in the country. Several years ago, the state announced it would not enforce employment laws that would prevent them from working. In Tel Aviv, where most of the migrants have settled, they work behind the counters of bars and restaurants on nearly every block, speaking Hebrew with Israeli waiters and waitresses.

Trump’s travel ban has been challenged in US federal courts as discriminatory, with lawyers pointing to his calls as a candidate for a “Muslim ban” as proof. Israel has similarly been accused in its Supreme Court of privileging Jews and discriminating against would-be Palestinian immigrants and African refugees when it comes to immigration.

The state’s security arguments have mostly carried the day, with the courts only requiring tweaks to its policies.

A US federal appeals court is expected to rule on the legality of Trump’s travel ban within days, after which an appeal to the Supreme Court is likely. (JTA)



Asylum seekers protesting at the Holot detention centre in Israel's southern Negev Desert on February 17, 2014.

Titan clash: Judges head to head with corruptors, ideologues



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

In three countries close to South African Jews - Israel, South Africa and the United States - a monumental fight is raging between defenders of the law and powerful politicians attempting to subvert it.

Protagonists are public figures holding high office including presidents, judges and political leaders. The effects will ultimately be felt by ordinary people. South Africans cheered last year when Constitutional Court Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng ruled in a landmark case that President Jacob Zuma failed to uphold the Constitution of the Republic.

He had refused to implement the Public Protector’s instructions to pay compensation for benefits he received from state money spent upgrading his private Nkandla homestead. The chief justice’s finding affirmed that the law applied equally to all, despite the President’s contempt for it, and Zuma had to pay back over R7 million to the state.

In Parliament last week, the Economic Freedom Fighters labelled him a constitutional “delinquent”.

In the United States in the last two months, judges stood firm against their new president, Donald Trump, ruling that his

executive order signed immediately after taking office, barring entry to people from seven Muslim-majority countries be put on hold until its constitutionality was properly tested.

Trump’s response was outrage towards the judges, who were doggedly teaching him the limits of his power. He had to abide by their rulings.

In Israel, a battle is raging between proponents of constitutional legality and the settler movement, which succeeded last week in passing in the Knesset the Regularisation Law, driven by Education Minister Naftali Bennett’s Jewish Home party.

Dubbed the “Land-Grab Law” by its detractors, it would allow private Palestinian land in the West Bank to be expropriated by Israel to retroactively legalise settlements which were built there illegally. The settlers will not gain ownership of the land but will be allowed to remain.

The law’s illegality is so blatant that Israeli President Reuven Rivlin publicly condemned it, since Israel has not established sovereignty over the West Bank.

This principled stand by Rivlin, who actually supports settlements and reportedly believes in a binational state with equal citizenship among Arabs and Jews as the solution to the conflict, echoed that of Israeli Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit, who said he would not defend it before the Supreme Court, which is where it will inevitably land up.

Rivlin said: “Israel has adopted international law [and cannot] apply and enforce its laws on territories that are not

under its sovereignty. [Doing so] will cause Israel to be seen as an apartheid state, which it is not.”

The word “apartheid” is usually applied to Israel by rabid Israel-haters such as the BDS movement and similar groups. South African Jews who lived through apartheid are highly sensitive to its use, claiming it is totally inappropriate for Israel. Now, alarmingly, Israel’s president has himself warned the country by reference to this word. The extremists among the settlers don’t seem to care, however.

Legally, the case against the Regularisation Law is clear and the Supreme Court will almost certainly declare it unconstitutional. But extreme rightwing political forces will not buckle so easily, and the settler lobby is threatening to undercut the Supreme Court’s authority by passing a law enabling the Knesset to override the Court in certain cases.

Fortunately, other eminent rightwing figures in the government have said they would oppose this, such as Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon: “We have no other Supreme Court and it must not be harmed.”

What’s in a name? The law’s proponents call it the Regularisation Law; but those who call it the Land-Grab Law have a point. Hopefully, the principled Israelis in positions of power who are defending the country’s commitment to legality, will prevail.

• Read Geoff Sifrin’s regular columns on his blog [sifrintakingissue.wordpress.com](#)

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies




Above Board
Jeff Katz
National Chairman

Board covers whole spectrum of Jewish activity in SA

Since its establishment in 1903, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies has represented the interests and worked to uphold the civil rights of the South African Jewish community.

Originally, the main function of the Board was to address problems relating to Jewish immigration that arose after the Anglo-Boer War. This was later expanded to what is today our core mandate, dealing with all issues relating to anti-Semitism, including in the political and social spheres.

Overall, the mandate of the SAJBD has been to safeguard the fundamental rights to dignity, equality and security of South African Jewry. However, over the decades, the role and functions of the organisation has expanded to encompass a broad range of other areas relating to the pursuance of Jewish life in this country.

Historically, this has included contributing in the areas of religious and adult education, leadership development, youth activities and social welfare. While in a number of cases such functions no longer form part of the Board’s mandate, in other important areas we continue to be very active.

In the remainder of this column, I will list and briefly describe some of the ways in which the Board serves the greater Jewish community.

A crucial element of the Board’s core mission is to foster harmonious relations between Jews and the wider population.

This we do through, among other things, representing the community to government, civil society and the media, joining with others in combating racism and safeguarding democracy and human rights (such as through our participation on the steering committee of the Hate Crimes Working Group) and making input into national legislation. We are also involved in the interfaith sphere.

For over six decades, the Board has been responsible for seeing to the needs of Jews living in the smaller towns and rural districts so far as these relate to the continuance of Jewish religious and communal life in those areas. Our Country Communities’ Department

continues to provide support to members of our community who live far from the main Jewish centres, helping them to maintain their connection to their heritage and feel part of the greater community.

As the representative umbrella body for SA Jewry, the Board is the natural port of call for those seeking information on the community, both historical and contemporary. The services we provide include running a rich and unique historical archive and regular publications such as our popular biennial Guide to Jewish Southern Africa.

As has frequently been reported on in this column, a perennial concern of the Board has been assisting religiously observant Jewish students whose exams have been set on Shabbat or Yomtov. This in turn forms part of a broader mission by the Board to ensure that Jews can practise their religion without being unfairly disadvantaged.

In the cultural sphere, our journal Jewish Affairs is still going strong 75 years later and is widely considered to be this country’s foremost Jewish current affairs and historical publication. Regarding Holocaust education and commemoration, we organise the annual Yom Hashoah ceremonies countrywide, in addition to hosting regular related events.

Finally, mention should be made of the role played by the Board in representing SA Jewry on a range of important international Jewish bodies, among them the World Jewish Congress and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

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

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

What’s On		
Friday (February 17)	Learning Launch” - a symposium entitled “Mini Davos: SA & The New World Order.” with guest presenters Dr Azar Jammine, director and chief economist of Econometrix; Johnny Capelyn, CEO of HCI; former trade unionist and MP; Dr Reuel Khoza; and Brooks Spector, former diplomat, associate editor Daily Maverick and political analyst. Bookings on-line at sydshul.co.za, through the office at (011) 640-5021 or at the door.	Arcadia Day Care Centre, 1 Long Avenue, Glenhazel. Time: 19:45. Entrance: R50 (incl light refreshments). Booking: Sharon (011) 532-9616 or enrich@jhbchev.co.za
Sunday (February 19)	• UJW adult education division hosts Paul Rodgers, MD & principal bassoon, Johannesburg Festival Orchestra, on “Orchestral Music in SA - Present & Future”. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton Time: 09:30. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW Office (011) 648-1053.	Thursday (February 23)
• RCHCC screens the Royal Ballet’s “Don Quixote”. Venue: Clive M Beck Auditorium. Time: 19:30. Donation: R80 (incl refreshments). Booking: Hazel or René (011) 728-8088/8378, a/h (011) 728-8378 or e-mail: rhcc@telkomsa.net or rene.s@telkomsa.net	• Cape Town Holocaust Centre hosts Michael J Cohen on “Churchill and Auschwitz”. Venue: 88 Hatfield Street, Gardens. Time: 18:00. Light refreshments will be served. RSVP Dianne: (021) 462-5553 or admin@holocaust.org.za	• Hebrew Club invites all fluent Hebrew speakers to meet on the 2nd floor at Beyachad. A variety of topics will be discussed. Time 11:00 - 12:00. Information: Abigail (011) 640-2376 or 072-432-9198.
• Johannesburg Light Music Society meets at Roosevelt Park Recreational Centre. Time: 14:00. Audio and visual presentations will be made by members of the society. Refreshments R20 pp (optional). Information: David (011) 678-9725 or 076-574-1446.	Tuesday (February 21)	• JH&GC hosts a conversation with Solly Kaplinski, former headmaster at Herzlia, at the launch of his book, “A World of Pains: A Redemptive Parable?” The terrible events in Lithuania during the Holocaust are the backdrop for this fictionalised story. Booking is essential to shirley@jhbholocaust.co.za or (011) 640-3100. Admission is free, donations welcome
• Second Innings hosts Bruce Hepburn on “Rescue Missions South Africa”. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors (incl tea and light refreshments). Information: Linda Fleishman (011) 532-9616.	Wednesday (February 22)	Friday (February 24)
Monday (February 20)	• The Chev Social Services presents “The Healthy Living Makeover” - when you are sick and tired of being sick and tired. Enrich 2017 with Elma Hamilton, Nurse Jenny Fleisher and Ray Perkel. Venue: The New	• Shalom Seniors Club meets on the last Friday of each month. Tea will be served and there will be a selection of board games to play, cards and of course the usual convivial, friendly atmosphere. Estelle Sher will speak on “Can There be a Jewish Soul in Concert Music?” Contact: Esther (011) 485-5619 Monday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday mornings.
• Sydenham Shul hosts its big “Annual		

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Outreach Committee brightens up walls at Bumble Bees Crèche

OWN CORRESPONDENT

King David Linksfield’s Outreach Committee forms a great part of the high school’s activities. The committee provides each learner the opportunity to give back to the Jewish community, also to those less fortunate than themselves and to people in need in general.

The Outreach Committee is divided into two clubs, namely the Interact Club and the Animal Welfare Club. Members of the Interact Club are given the opportunity to either interact with children from Bumble Bee Crèche, Impilo Orphanage, Norwood Primary or Johannesburg Children’s Home.

They also visit the elderly every Friday at Sandringham Gardens and undertake weekly visits to Selwyn Segal. Strong bonds and memorable moments are thus created

The Animal Welfare Club undertakes outings to the SPCA to nurture and comfort the animals there.

Every Friday the Outreach Committee collects

money for a different cause and once a month the members collect non-perishable food for Khayelitsha. The committee brings people with the same aspirations together; they all want to work together to help change other people’s lives for the better, whether through a visit or a donation, or just by putting a smile on their faces. There is nothing better in this world than the feeling of making a difference in someone else’s life. This the Outreach Committee does.

Recently the school had its “Outreach Week”, in which it created awareness of the importance of education, gratitude, animal welfare and hunger. The Outreach Committee made posters for underprivileged schools and thousands of sandwiches that went to ORT SA, another charity organisation feeding children at less fortunate schools and then last Sunday committee members went to paint the crèche.

The committee boasts more than 150 members and is led by Alex Cohen; Cassidy Haefner; Angie Sevel; and Carly Soicher.



The Outreach Committee went to Bumble Bees Crèche to paint murals so the kids could learn in a fun and bright environment.

Young Arielle Traub more than deserves her coveted White Blazer

OWN CORRESPONDENT

A white Honours Blazer is the highest award a learner can achieve at Crawford College Sandton. A learner qualifies for such a blazer by achieving full colours in at least three disciplines covering at least three of the awards categories.

Congratulations to Arielle Traub (pictured) for her outstanding achievements.

She achieved Senior Full Colours for academic, cultural (public speaking) and service. She has excelled in public speaking since grade 8. Proficient in both forum and individual oratory, she can always be relied upon to deliver entertaining, thought-provoking speeches.

She consistently achieved outstanding results in the Eisteddfod competitions. For her skilled oratory she was awarded Senior Full Colours for public speaking in grade 11.

In the academic arena, Arielle is very organised and ensures that she manages her tasks well while exceeding the academic requirements set. This has resulted in her being placed in the top 20 for the past four years and achieving Senior Full Academic Colours.

Despite her academic achievements, Arielle remains humble. Her kind and caring nature has steered her towards community service with an involvement in Interact where she served the school and community for the past four years. She was elected as chairman of the Interact board.



She has spent hours involving herself in many community and college service projects. During her tenure, she was involved at the Ark Animal Centre, assisted grade 1 learners at Crawford Preparatory Aftercare and managed the “Stop Hunger” project.

She has spent many weekends and afternoons in the Pick n Pick collections, making sandwiches, doing peer-to peer-teaching and rendering first aid at various college sports activities.

For this she was awarded Senior Full Colours.

It is truly a remarkable feat to earn Senior Full Colours in no fewer than three separate disciplines.

First aid and CPR course may prove a life-saver

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Parents, domestic workers and security guards of Minnie Bersohn Pre-Primary School recently took part in a basic first aid and CPR course, arranged by the school’s CSO Parent Protection Team Leader Greg Sochen.

This life-saving course was expertly presented by Hatzolah.



Two YC learners will serve on Junior City Council



Joseph Kaplan and Gabi Osrin with Denese Bloch, Yeshiva College principal.

OWN CORRESPONDENT

Two of Yeshiva College learners had singular honours bestowed on them. Joseph Kaplan and Gabi Osrin have been appointed as the school’s Junior City Council representatives.

A rough ‘Qhubeka’ ride for a very good cause

JOSHUA AND GAVRIEL NOSSEL

On Sunday February 5, eight learners from King David Victory Park and Linksfield set out on a 50km bicycle ride around the Cradle of Humankind near Magaliesburg.

What made this ride different is that we were riding on 20kg single gear Qhubeka bikes.

The reason for the ride was to raise money to donate the bicycles to help learners in disadvantaged areas get to school.

Qhubeka, which means “to move forward”, is an organisation which helps communities progress by giving them bicycles. Their motto is: “Bicycles change lives”. Of the 17 million children in South Africa, 11 million walk to school, with half a million walking more than an hour daily each way.

This impacts concentration, learning ability and attendance, and ultimately school completion.

We managed to raise over R30 000 in just four days, which will help nine learners get to school daily.

The response we received through donations and messages via social media, really inspired us on the tough hills in the heat of the day. This was a great experience for all of us.



Justin Bolnick; Josh Modlin; Josh Nossel; Josh Jackson; Ross Nowitz; and Jamey Wolpe. Front: Gavriel Nossel and Ariel Raz.



Eden College



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Torah Academy

Celebrating Tu B'Shvat

Children love Tu B'Shvat, the festival of trees. Jewish day schools around the country – and some other schools with a sizeable Jewish presence – did their fair share of planting trees last week. The photographs speak for themselves.

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Jake Pinchus returns to China for martial art action



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JACK MILNER

People travel to China for various reasons - Olympics, sightseeing, to walk the Great Wall - but for Jake Pinchus it is all about martial arts.

Jake can thank a school bully for his love of this form of sport. Tired of her nine-year-old boy getting beaten up at school, his mother decided to enrol him in a self-defence course with a friend of hers.

He became so engrossed and proficient in the martial arts that in time he beat up the bully and then enrolled to train with the coach who trained his mother’s friend.

Jake was doing so well that his new coach took him to China to earn his first Dan.

“That changed my life forever,” said Jake. “While practising new techniques with one of their masters, out of the corner of my eye I saw a 14-year-old-boy, the same age as I was, flying through the air doing what I learned later was a flying front kick.



Wushu enthusiast Jake Pinchus flies through the air. He will be taking a group of people to China to experience martial arts in their purest form.

“He seemed to stay in the air for what felt like minutes. His movements were so powerful and quick. It was if he was doing a deadly dance.”

Jake learned that the boy was doing wushu, which translates as “Chinese martial arts”.

Said Jake: “When I came back to South Africa I enrolled myself in wushu classes and began to prepare for my first national trials where I won four gold medals.”

Prior to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Jake went back to China and trained with their Olympic first team and was placed with 18-year-olds. “I was now living my dream, flying through the air alongside my heroes. I competed in Bali at the Second Junior World Wushu Champs and placed in the top 10.

“At this stage I realised I should actually say thank you to my childhood bully because without him I would never have realised I had such a passion and talent for Chinese martial arts.”

After finishing school, Jake went to train with Israel’s national team for a year. “Their coach is Russian, so training was tough.”

To train with the team he had to be an Israeli citizen, physically fit and better than anyone else in his category.

“I arrived in January 2011 at what I thought would be my first training session. I was not greeted or noticed by the coach or athletes, even though we had spoken via e-mail. I figured the coach was busy, so I remained seated and watched the team train vigorously.

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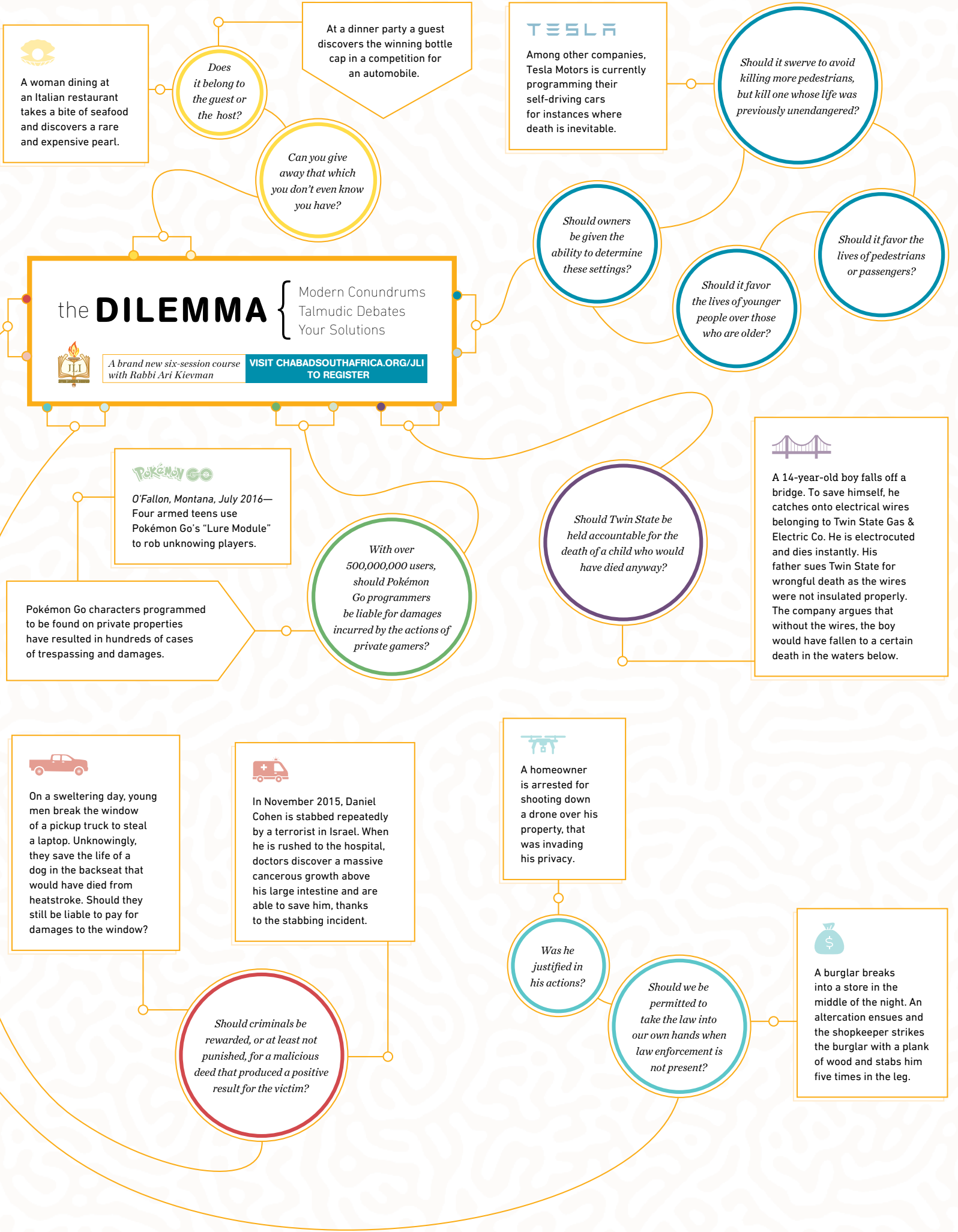
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