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Jewish Report

■ Volume 21 – Number 38 ■ November 10 2017 ■ 21 Cheshvan 5778

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Thousands of Christian supporters barred from Embassy



While a few hundred EFF members protested outside the Israeli Embassy, the huge police presence turned away around 2 500 peaceful pro-Israel Christian supporters. See page 4.



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Israeli government minister welcomed by top SA ministers

STAFF REPORTER

Israeli Minister for Regional Co-operation, Tzachi Hanegbi, was welcomed by, and held meetings with, top government ministers on his whistle-stop trip to South Africa this week.

He met with South African Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe and Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa and former Minister of Housing Tokyo Sexwale.

This was a great step forward in relations between the Israeli and South African governments. Hanegbi is the first Israeli minister to hold ministerial meetings in South Africa in the last five years, his office told the Times of Israel.

His meeting with Molewa was significant, both in the context of what Israel can do to help South Africa's water problems, but also in that she heads up the ANC's Foreign Affairs portfolio and convened the International Relations Commission at the ANC Policy Conference in July. It was there that the issue of downgrading the Israeli embassy came up.

Hanegbi is familiar with the South African political landscape, having in the past met with South African representatives in the Middle East. He was invited to South Africa to be guest speaker at two local Jewish communal

events, but made time to hold these groundbreaking meetings before he left. Israeli Ambassador to South Africa Lior Keinan – who attended the meetings with Hanegbi – was very pleased with how it had



Israel Ambassador to South Africa Lior Keinan, Edna Molewa, South African Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs and Israel's Minister of Regional Co-operation, Tzachi Hanegbi

gone. "The Minister was well received in all the meetings in which we had open and very sincere dialogue about the present and future of diplomatic relations between Israel and South Africa," said the ambassador. "It was a privilege to have been there."

He explains that it was like "friends talking openly – we met, exchanged views and it was appreciated on both sides".

He says they spoke about how Israel looks to South Africa for its experience in negotiations. "South Africa can contribute to the Middle East peace process with its knowhow. It would be important if South Africa was more involved. We could also assist on so many levels in South Africa. The ministers were receptive, open and sincere," says Keinan.

He said the Israeli minister will go back with the message that the South African government is open for dialogue and engagement.

"Israel and South Africa have a lot to discuss. We look forward to more dialogue and more South African involvement in the Middle East," says the ambassador.

The minister's visit comes after a series of Israeli members of parliament visiting South Africa: the delegation of five MPs in August and MK Avraham Neguise who was also here last week.

Israel sends aid to Madagascar

TALI FEINBERG

The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with Magen David Adom in South Africa, have put together an aid package for Madagascar to assist that country with the outbreak of the Black Death Plague there. All packages will be delivered to the International Red Cross in Madagascar this week.

The packages include 250 sets of gloves, masks, medical gowns, headgear and shoe coverings for those treating patients, to prevent the spread of infection to

themselves and others.

The Black Death was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. Warnings have been issued to nine countries surrounding Madagascar including South Africa for fears of the disease spreading via sea and flight routes. The death tolls have already reached 124 and more than 1 300 people are left infected.

Israeli Ambassador Lior Keinan said: "Israel has a long-standing tradition of offering humanitarian assistance and co-ordinating relief to alleviate disease,

hunger and poverty. Just like Mexico, lately and other countries, Israel will always provide assistance to help those in need."

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
18:12	19:05	Johannesburg
18:15	20:00	Cape Town
18:07	19:00	Durban
18:15	19:18	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:31	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:20	East London

Parshat Chayei Sarah

More ammunition for The Shabbos Project

Rev Joseph Matzner



Shabbos stands out from the other days, even as man stands out from all living creatures. Man was blessed and so was Shabbos.

G-d took soil from the earth, breathed into it the breath of life and created man. He took one day out of the physical days and infused it with holiness. And so, the seventh day became a different kind of day, a new type of day.

The leap from the physical days to this new type of day, was not unlike the leap from the animal world to the world of man.

Nature never ceases its work. It continues its work relentlessly day and night. Because, everything has to be non-Shabbosdik out there. Should even one star stop rotating or shining on Shabbos, our

Shabbos would be meaningless. Nature is not allowed to rest, Shabbos has to be the very opposite of nature.

The Midrash describes Shabbos rest as follows:

For six days G-d created only the parts, the individual parts of the universe. But the moment Shabbos began, the Divine hammer came down on the anvil and all the parts started to function in magnificent synch and harmony. The end-result of the six days work was revealed at last on Shabbos.

On that first seventh day the universe was launched on its incredible journey of 7 000 years and G-d gave his handiwork the blessing of bon voyage and the guarantee of safe arrival. The forces and energies released on that day were to continue non-stop day and night in amazing continuity.

Unfortunately, we happily let ourselves be rocked by the rhythms of nature and by its poetic and ensnaring beauty.

Evolution beckons with its glittering neon lights from every textbook and has safely installed itself in the seat of Ashmadai

proclaiming: "I am King".

This is the reality of the non-Sabbatical world, a world of sound and fury.

G-d sanctified the first seventh day and all following seventh days, in order to help man retain and nurture his G-d-given Divine image.

The Jewish people's responsibility has always been to be the guardian of the Divine image in man.

Let us keep Shabbos and merit to behold the splendour of a living and harmonious world.

A final shot from the Midrash: "The world looked like an empty chuppah, what was missing, the bride! Came Shabbos, came the bride!"

And here is another one: "The world was like a signet ring, without any identity as to who could possibly own it. Came Shabbos and everyone and everything knew immediately to whom the world belongs!" This is the Shabbos' greatest possible blessing.

Good Shabbos.

South African
Jewish Report



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BDS leader in Johannesburg shul on Yomtov

NICOLA MILTZ

Controversial Progressive Rabbi Sa’ar Shaked has landed himself in hot water once again with members of the broader Jewish community, after the chairman of BDS South Africa attended his shul’s “Open Sukkah” dinner over Sukkot. This week, following concerns by the community, members of the South African Union for Progressive Judaism (SAUPJ) and the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), issued statements dissociating themselves from BDS.

“It is our belief that interaction with them (BDS) by any of our leaders or individual members, threatens the stability and unity of our Movement. It would serve to drive a wedge not only between the leadership and members of the Progressive Movement, but equally between ourselves and the wider Jewish community,” said the SAUPJ statement.

Professor Farid Esack, chairman of BDS South Africa, attended the Beit Emanuel Progressive Synagogue in Parktown, Johannesburg on first night Sukkot, to the shock of several members of the congregation. News of his visit soon reached the ears of the wider community, causing huge upset.

Chairman of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), Ben Swartz, said: “The insult to our community, who we represent, is beyond measure.

“Let’s be very clear: Professor Farid Esack... is the head of a movement (BDS) that chanted unapologetically “Shoot the Jew” at a concert at Wits University. Esack led the efforts within the University of Johannesburg to boycott Ben-Gurion University and has been visibly active again in the current calls to implement a boycott at UCT.

“When BDS hosted the

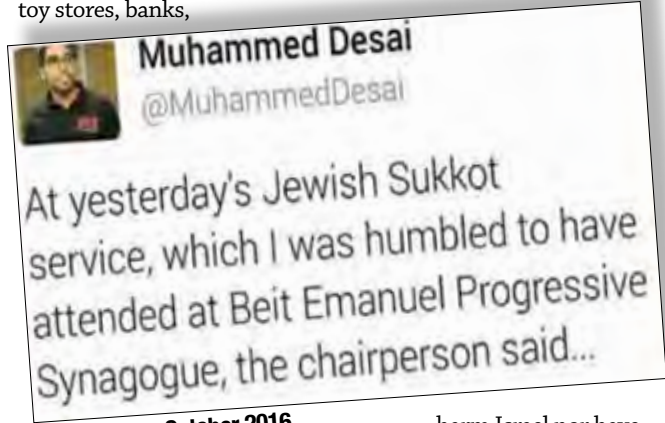


infamous airplane hijacker, Leila Khaled, for a national fundraiser in SA, she spoke at the University of Durban. The following day the SRC of the university issued a call for the expulsion of all Jews from the university.

“Under Esack’s leadership, BDS has made calls in South Africa to intimidate and (unsuccessfully) boycott toy stores, banks,

within 100 metres of the venue. “This also happened while Esack stood no more than 50 metres from the concert hall entrance, talking to and seemingly directing the protesters all the way through,” says Swartz. He said these were just some of numerous such incidents.

“These have done nothing to



A Tweet from October 2016

insurance companies, grocery retailers and pharmacy retailers, all because they are perceived to be ‘Jewish businesses’.”

Swartz recounted a Yom Ha’atzmaut celebration at Gold Reef City attended by hundreds of Jewish people, in which BDS stormed the concert “hurling stink bombs, screaming, intimidating and even assaulting members of the audience”.

Swartz said all this happened despite BDS having been issued with a court order disallowing them from being

harm Israel nor have they helped the Palestinian cause. But they... have festered and driven a hate-filled agenda that has and continues to directly affect, the South African Jewish community,” he said.

Beit Emanuel Synagogue chairperson, Liebe Kellen, sent a response on behalf of the shul to the SA Jewish Report. She said that Esack did not receive a personal invitation to attend; he was responding to an invitation which was extended to the general public.

Kellen said: “Every year Beit Emanuel holds an ‘Open Sukkah’, in keeping with

the spirit of the festival... No specific individuals are invited... but posters are put up around the neighbourhood inviting anyone, Jewish or non-Jewish, to experience a meal in a sukkah.”

Apparently over the years, Catholics, Evangelicals, Mormons, Hindus, Bahai and Buddhists, have attended.

“The purpose of the exercise: to encourage neighbourliness and interfaith understanding.

“This year, Farid Esack arrived.” She claims he “received no personal invitation from any shul official, but was responding to the general public invitation”.

According to Kellen, there was “a dispute” as to whether Esack should be “blocked and turned away” or whether he “should be allowed in”.

In the end, she said, “it was the opinion of the rabbi and management, that blocking him would cause a racial and religious incident which could well make it on to the front pages of The Star and Sunday Times, onto social media, and fuel even more anti-Jewish hostility.

“The man was allowed in, chatted briefly, and left. Few people even knew who he was. We believe we made the right decision and that the alternative would have been hot-headed, and potentially dangerous.”

However, this is not the first time Esack has made an appearance at the shul. He did so at the same time last year with BDS South Africa co-founder Muhammed Desai and the incident was met with similar outrage. It prompted meetings between the SAZF and the shul’s management.

Says Swartz: “It has now become clear to us that our best intentions to have our serious objections heard and noted, were not considered and we are deeply disappointed by this outcome.”

The SAUPJ said in its statement: “We are a proudly Zionist movement and will

never support anti-Zionist actions or statements. We fully recognise the right of all people to choose with whom to associate.

“However, at no time do we condone the opening of our shuls, or giving a platform, to any person or organisation that wishes to witness the destruction of the State of Israel. BDS initiatives, such as IAW (Israel Apartheid Week), endangers the lives of Jewish students on campuses and threatens the future of the Jewish community in South Africa.”

task of bridge-building and outreach.

“The purpose of an outreach programme is to attempt to engage with those who hold different opinions... Allowing a stranger to visit our campus is not proof of agreement with that stranger’s views.”

She stressed that Beit Emanuel’s position on Israel is “governed by the SAUPJ constitution, in which our rabbi played a key role.

“The claim that the management and rabbi embrace BDS, is an out and out lie. We challenge those



Rabbi Sa’ar Shaked

The WUPJ said: “We urge our 1 200 member Progressive and Reform synagogues around the world to join with the SAUPJ in our shared commitment and determination to support a strong and vibrant State of Israel.”

Swartz said the Progressive community remain among the most committed and active members of the SAZF. “Not surprisingly, the greatest and most aggrieved voices to these events have come from the Progressive community,” he said.

According to Kellen, however, Beit Emanuel holds an open sukkah because it believes that “a community as small and marginalised as ours, is obliged to engage in the difficult and long-term

who make the claim, to produce the evidence. This claim, a fine example of unsubstantiated ‘fake news’, has been repeatedly denied by us, but continues to be spread by people who have never set foot in our shul.

“The claim that the rabbi frequently makes anti-Israel statements from the pulpit, is once again a lie.”

Earlier this year, Shaked took a few swipes at Israel for “religious intolerance” at the opening of the ANC Policy Conference where he was called upon to say a prayer. The leadership of the Jewish community was furious, not least of all considering the ANC’s clear anti-Israel stance.

Rabbi Shaked’s contract with Beit Emanuel Synagogue was recently renewed for

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Pro-Israel supporters prevented from protesting EFF march

TALI FEINBERG AND MOSES MOYO

Around 2 500 Christian Zionists who planned to stage a peaceful protest countering the Economic Freedom Fighter’s (EFF) march on the Israeli Embassy last Friday, were forced to disperse or were stopped and sent home before they got close. Those who came to defend the Embassy, way outnumbered the 600 to 800 EFF protesters.

Police forced bus-loads of people to turn around, even impounding four buses, to prevent the Christian Israel supporters from getting to the Israeli Embassy. The police insisted that they would not be able to protect them from EFF protesters, who were becoming “aggressive and militant”.

A Christian Zionist leader, who asked to remain anonymous for his security, says he was taken to a police station, detained and questioned. “They said they only know of the EFF march and if we are not wearing EFF T-shirts we cannot be there,” he says. His people were forced off buses and told to leave the area individually, he says, as walking in groups would have been seen as an illegal protest.

However, once their protest was scuppered, some Christian pro-Israel supporters put on EFF T-shirts and joined the EFF march, so that if the Embassy was attacked in any way they would have been there to protect it, said the organiser.

He added that many EFF members fought to get onto the buses that had been arranged for Christian Zionists, harassing the people and physically pushing them off the buses. One bus was stoned by EFF members, and the driver refused to carry on driving.

He added that the Christian pro-Israel supporters hadn’t actually obtained official permission to gather, but they had warned law enforcement that they were organising a counter-protest “to protect the Embassy”, he said. The Christian leaders backed up their presence with an official letter from the EFF inviting “leaders of faith-based groups” to be there.

This leader’s colleague Masindi Mgwena adds: “If we were coming in peace, why did we need permission? You can’t be told not to be in your own home, and the Embassy is our home.

“We told them that we were going to be there in numbers, but they blocked our way, stopped our buses and pushed our people off. The police sabotaged us, ensuring we didn’t make an impact.”

He adds that both the EFF and police “made a point of intimidating our people and what we wanted to stand for”. However, they had decided beforehand to avoid confrontation, and refused to get involved in any physical or verbal altercations.

“We came on a principle of peace and must



Pro-Israel demonstrators who were prevented from protecting the Israeli Embassy

Photos: Moses Moyo

Many EFF members fought to get onto the buses that had been arranged for Christian Zionists, harassing the people and physically pushing them off the buses.

One bus was stoned by EFF members, and the driver refused to carry on driving.

not allow any confrontation,” he says, and so they dispersed peacefully.

With bibles in hand, the large group of Christians went to defend the Embassy to show their heartfelt support for the State of Israel, which they say is “rooted in the Holy Scriptures”. They took on this mission waving Israeli flags and wearing T-shirts with the words “We stand with Israel” on them.

“It is ironic that the EFF has chosen to protest against the only democracy in the Middle East,” said one elderly woman who had left her home in Ekhuruleni in the early hours of the morning to be a part of this protest.

She and her comrades told the SA Jewish Report that they wanted to educate Julius Malema and his lieutenants that “Israel has been a functioning democracy in the Middle East for nearly 70 years and people of all faiths



At the entrance to the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria on Thursday

are welcome to visit it”.

Others said they wanted to make sure the EFF and those opposed to Israel in South Africa, “are under no illusion as to the many millions of South Africans, from all walks of life, who are supportive and appreciative of Israel and what it stands for”.

They also said that they felt that there are far more pressing things for the political parties like the EFF to be dealing with and “they should be putting the needs of South Africa first”, rather than “exploiting opportunities to grandstand”.

SA Zionist Federation Chairman Ben Swartz, said he understands that although the authorities may have agreed to the protest originally, on the day they saw the situation could be dangerous and so they encouraged pro-Israel supporters to leave for their own safety.

“We have it on good advice that many elements from the anti-Israel lobby are party to the planning and funding of this protest, which in turn reveals the political agenda which the EFF is supporting, namely, the demise of the State of Israel,” Swartz said.

“By attempting to destroy the relationship with Israel, South Africa and its people stand to lose the most. Time and time again, Israel has offered to co-operate across many vital sectors, including water, technology, agriculture and cyber security. This is a time to be focused on viable solutions for both the Middle East and South Africa.

“It is also with much gratitude, that we acknowledge and salute the thousands of South Africans who have stepped forward, in defence, love and support of the Holy Land and its right to exist as the national homeland for the Jews,” he said.

“We have it on good advice that many elements from the anti-Israel lobby are party to the planning and funding of this protest, which in turn reveals the political agenda which the EFF is supporting, namely, the demise of the State of Israel”.

During the protest, Julius Malema called on the business community, universities and academics to cut ties with Israel. “We are saying to all South Africans, do not visit Israel until the land is returned back into the hands of the rightful owners,” he said.

EFF National spokesperson Mbuyiseni Quintin Ndlozi said in a statement: “If South Africa can resolve its apartheid question by building a peaceful democratic state, we believe that so can Palestine. The EFF believes in progressive internationalism and thus we see our own struggle for economic freedom as intractably linked to the freedom of oppressed people of the world like Palestine. We will never rest until Palestinians are free.”

Israel’s Ambassador to South Africa Lior Keinan, wrote on Facebook: “The Israeli Embassy would like to thank the thousands of people who arrived today to show their friendship and love to Israel. Even though they were not given access to the Embassy, their message of support of Israel was loud and clear. We are humbled to call you our friends.”

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Chief Rabbi pulls out all the stops against abuse

NICOLA MILTZ

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has taken a zero tolerance approach to all forms of abuse within the Jewish community. He has set up a world class abuse review board to make sure that no case is swept under the carpet or slips through the cracks.

“Sadly our community is not immune to abuse. Potential perpetrators need to know that the community is watching,” said the Chief Rabbi. “It is crucial that we have in place safety mechanisms that will ensure full accountability and transparency in cases of abuse within the Jewish community.”

The newly formed Abuse Review Board, according to its head, Advocate Liza Segal, is not the first port of call when reporting a case of abuse. It acts as a “safety net” to ensure that every report of abuse is “properly dealt with and that no victim is left unprotected”.

Cases of abuse should first be reported to the Jewish Community Services of the Chevrah Kadisha, said Segal, “This is a statutory body that fills the requirements of the law and it does incredible work.”

“As a community we have to do everything in our power to make sure we protect people vulnerable to abuse,” said the Chief Rabbi, “The review board is an extra safety mechanism to do this. We cannot be complacent.”

“Abuse will not be hushed,” said Segal, “Abusers will not be put on the first aeroplane out of the country, so as to shift the problem from one place to another. Abusers will not be spared the full weight of the law... the purpose of the board is to protect the community and take steps that are constructive for all concerned,” she said.

Segal has had many years’ experience in family law matters. The board includes psychologist Brenda Lasersohn, Dr Efrat Barnes, medical director of the Teddy Bear Foundation and child abuse expert; Rabbi Gidon Fox, chairman of the SA Rabbinical Association and Rabbi of the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation; and Rabbi Anton Klein of the Johannesburg Beth Din.

Segal said the board will investigate complaints regarding abuse that have “not been properly handled.”

“The scope of the Board’s objectives include inter alia safeguarding the community from and ensuring that all complaints in cases relating to sexual, physical, domestic and communal abuse (including the abuse of power by individuals and institutions in positions of authority) and neglect are managed and dealt with appropriately and in accordance with necessary protocols as well as halacha and the laws of the Republic of South Africa.”

The board will produce reports containing findings and recommendations for the Chief Rabbi where appropriate; liaise with and give direction to activist organisations and interest groups to ensure the best international practices are employed; review and prescribe communal policies and protocols in relation to the prevention of abuse; ensure that at all times the best interests of minor children are upheld; and retain the confidentiality of matters dealt with by the Board.

“Abuse is on the increase. On the positive side, our society has progressed from what it was in years gone by (where abuse was considered shameful for the victim and their family and swept under the carpet to avoid public

humiliation and/or bringing the name of the family into disrepute) to a place where victims feel more comfortable, supported and prepared to speak up and take action to prevent the abuse being perpetuated,” said Segal.

Lasersohn said the creation of the board “stems from the accurate view of Chief Rabbi Goldstein that at times, even as matters are reported to supposedly relevant agencies or institutions, the process may not be adequately addressed in ways that are necessary. In the case of child abuse for instance there is a ‘Duty to Report’ as well as a ‘Duty of Care’ which have to be responded to.”

“The phenomenon of abusive practices is an uncomfortable truth to admit and thus denial and ‘covering up’ in our community is rife. Not unlike secular settings it is simply accepted as ‘that’s the way it is’ or ‘everyone knows he doesn’t mean it’ or ‘she’s a good person deep down’. These platitudes simply trivialise and normalise disturbing behaviour which simply perpetuates the trauma for victims of abuse who are often disbelieved or dismissed as ‘trouble makers’.

She said currently there is no strict protocol available to the community as to how they should respond or to whom they could report a matter, should they suspect or

are witness to the abuse of a child particularly. Differing organisations respond in their own way to the concern with little co-ordination.

“The Chief Rabbi’s vision is to create a protocol advising our community as to what they can do if they experience abuse of any kind; witness abuse of any kind; or are victims of abuse of any kind in their daily lives involving

persons within any structure of our community. Their first port of call then would be to report such matters to Chevrah Kadisha Community Services who would then immediately trigger the necessary processes required to adequately and timeously respond to the reported matter.”

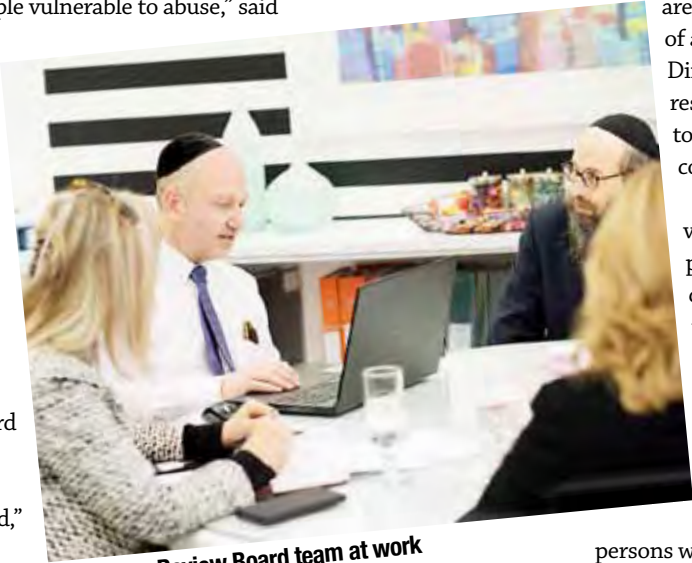
The Review Board is not to work as a reporting agency, but rather to be available as an oversight body, she said.

Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler of Koleinu, an organisation offering a helpline for victims of abuse, welcomes the initiative. “We are very excited about this oversight committee. It will serve as a mechanism within the community to which cases of abuse requiring a halachic approach can be referred. As well as this, the board would greatly enhance the work of the other abuse organisations in the community, specifically making these organisations accountable as to how they deal with their cases.”

She said the board would be able to accomplish a great deal in situations where authorities were unable to do anything.

For example in cases the police closed due to insufficient evidence; cases in which someone was guilty of worrisome behaviour but the law was not broken; cases in which victims refused to press charges; cases in which victims wait until they are over 18, in which case mandatory reporting no longer applies; cases in which the victims refused to come forward, but where the rabbis were able to confront a perpetrator effectively.

For all queries contact chairman@abusereviewboard.co.za



The Abuse Review Board team at work



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South African
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We are all hungry for truth!

South African book stores this week couldn’t get enough copies of Jacques Pauw’s book “The President’s Keeper”, where this multi-award-winning journalist documents more of President Jacob Zuma’s corruption.

People are desperate to get their hands on this book. Within days of its launch, it was rated a bestseller by Amazon and the Kindle edition became the eighth fastest selling e-book globally. That is despite a pirated PDF version being circulated like wildfire. I personally received four such copies.



To me, this speaks of South Africans being hungry for truth and not wanting to be kept in the dark by our leadership. I believe we all want transparency. We want to know the truth no matter how ugly it might be.

It is not up to Zuma or any other leader to decide what we need to know. If we choose to ignore something or simply live with it, that is our choice. But don’t make decisions about what we need to know. I firmly believe that every person in this country does not want leaders to decide what they are to be told or not told.

Many of us have lived through the apartheid era, when the government decided what we were allowed to know. They selected what we could put out in the media and even played dirty tricks with something they called “Stratcom”. This stood for strategic communication, which was the government’s way of “winning the hearts and minds” of the population.

They would create and leak scenarios to journalists that would be sure to make people angry and hate the ANC, who was then the “enemy” of the government. They would also have a representative sitting in our newsrooms to ensure we didn’t print anything they didn’t want people to know.

It was a very dark time for the media – but far darker for the population because they were not being told the truth and there were huge gaps in the information they were given.

As a citizen, I don’t believe anyone has the right to keep information – particularly if somehow concerns us – from us.

I know that there are certain leaders in our community who also feel strongly that we don’t need to know everything. If there are some things they believe we wouldn’t be proud of, perhaps it might upset us or have us seen in a less than squeaky clean light, then they would rather we aren’t told. Instead, they consider it better to deal with it “in-house”, rather than share it with the community.

As elected leaders, it is their responsibility to decide how to deal with situations and what would be in the best interests of the community. But it isn’t their responsibility to decide what we know or don’t. If it affects us, we should know. Making that decision to hide it from us, could be construed as censorship and it is something we should have left behind with apartheid.

Having said that, it takes a brave person to swim against the tide. When others would rather you keep quiet, it is not easy to say “no”.

Since I started as editor here, I have come across a number of incredibly strong leaders and people who hold themselves and the community up to a moral mirror. They are not afraid to be transparent, real and go against the tide. I salute them for their bravery.

Let me make myself clear: This editorial is not a criticism of any one leader or organisation, nor is it about any specific occurrence. It is simply relaying what we – at The SA Jewish Report – are often faced with.

We believe that it is the duty of this newspaper to tell you what is happening in and about the community and what is of interest to the community. It is also our mandate to hold leadership to account.

We are your eyes and ears and we are here so that you know what is happening. As leaders, please work with us in ensuring this community – that is clearly also hungry for the truth – is kept in the know.

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Dateline: Middle East

A moral, legal and human obligation to bring her soldiers home

PAULA SLIER

It was deadly quiet at the Tel Nof air force base, southeast of Tel Aviv. A few seconds earlier the media tent had been abuzz with loudspeakers and journalists chattering into their phones. But now all eyes were turned on a huge white screen as the first grainy images of an Israeli soldier some had feared was dead, flickered to life.

It was the morning of October 18, 2011 and after five-and-a-half torturous years, Gilad Shalit was being handed over by his Hamas captors to Egyptian mediators.

You could hear a pin drop. A few journalists raised their arms and some wiped their eyes. Disbelief turned to cheers as the impossible slowly became possible – the soldier who’d been 19 years old the last time he was seen alive, sat peering, pale and thin, through his rimless glasses into the world’s cameras.

Weeks earlier I had interviewed his father, Noam, who’d never lost hope he’d see his son again. “It’s the only thing that keeps me going,” he’d confessed.

That same belief helped another father, Herzl Shaul, stay strong – but the fight eventually killed him. Herzl’s son, 20-year-old Staff-Sgt Oron Shaul, died three years ago in the last Gaza war when he left his armoured personnel carrier to repair it after Hamas fired on his unit.

In the same war, 23-year-old Lt Hadar Goldin died after Hamas operatives exited from a tunnel located in the basement of a house in Gaza – it was two hours after a ceasefire had been declared.

Hadar’s body was dragged into an underground tunnel and despite pleas from both families and threats by the Israeli government, neither soldier’s remains have been handed over to Israel for burial.

“My Oron, my hero son, my mighty warrior, since you left, my body started to betray me,” Herzl wrote days before he was hospitalised for the final time. Stricken with cancer, his family released his last heartfelt letter to his son a week after he died. Herzl wrote that he still had faith that one day his son would return home, wounded but alive. He confessed how proud he’d been when he’d joined a combat unit, but wrote: “I want to apologise to you my dear son that I didn’t listen to your mother” who had been against it.

This week Oron and Hadar are back in the news after the Israeli army blew up a Gaza tunnel, killing seven Palestinians inside. Five Hamas men subsequently died trying to save them. Jerusalem has their bodies and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he will not return them unless there’s progress in negotiations to release Oron and Hadar’s remains – together with four Israeli citizens currently in Gaza.

The four willingly, and illegally, crossed over the border although it’s not clear if they’re all being held captive by Hamas.

Jerusalem has been accused of racism and of not doing enough to bring them back – three are Arab; one is of Ethiopian descent and three seem to be suffering from psychological disorders.

Hamas has refused outright. It accuses Netanyahu of blackmail and says it will only provide information in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. According to a report by Prisoners Support and Human Rights Association, there are more than 6 000 behind Israeli bars.

But Jerusalem is not keen on prisoner exchanges – especially after 1 027 Palestinian were released for Shalit in one of the biggest such deals. More than 200 of them have since been re-arrested by the security establishment for involvement in terrorism and seven Israelis have been directly or indirectly murdered by them.

I interviewed the sister-in-law of an Israeli policeman who’d been killed while sitting in his car. His killer was among those released for Shalit. She, like thousands of others, supported the deal, but feared the price. She cried the entire two hours we were together.

The family of Hadar Goldin, is criticising the Israeli government for not taking any real action to bring their son’s body home and have now filed a petition stopping the government from handing over the bodies of those Palestinians killed in the Gaza tunnel.

They’ve also called on the state to limit both visits to Hamas members in Israeli prisons, and humanitarian aid to Gaza, and say they intend going all the way to the High Court.

Netanyahu is on their side, but they’re up against the courts. Both Israeli and international law says everyone – including those deemed terrorists – have the right to be buried. But the law works both ways and the holding of bodies of soldiers killed in action and refusing their return so their next of kin can bury them, is a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions and international law.

In the letter to his son, Herzl wrote: “Since you were taken, hundreds of thousands of people who have never met you or know you, from the north to the south, all reached out and helped, showering us with genuine endless love. Simply because you were sent to war to protect them.”

Israel has a moral, human and legal obligation – despite the costs – to bring her soldiers home. Netanyahu knows this; Israelis know this; and Hamas too, knows this; which is why they’re not giving in easily. What’s not so readily known, is how to make it happen.

When Gilad Shalit was handed over, he was wearing a checked shirt. En route to Tel Nof air force base he changed into the IDF uniform he was wearing when he was captured. He exited the chopper onto the tarmac and saluted Netanyahu, his commander in chief.

“I brought your boy home,” the Prime Minister proudly told his parents as they – and the rest of Israel – breathed a sigh of respite. It seems only right that other parents be afforded the same relief.

• Paula Slier is the Middle East Bureau Chief of RT, the founder and CEO of NewshoundMedia and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Woman in Leadership Award of the South African Absa Jewish Achievers.



Gilad Shalit returns home

Third Reich abused drugs to help them fight the war

VIC ALHADEFF
SYDNEY

“I demand that you do not sleep for at least three days and nights if that is required,” General Heinz Guderian is reported to have told the thousands of German troops who had massed to cross the River Meuse and push into Belgium and France.

The largest motorised unit in military history had assembled, comprising 41 410 vehicles and including 1 222 tanks. Its goal – to reach the French town of Sedan before the French Army did. But only by fighting non-stop for at least 72 hours would that be physically possible.

Noted General Franz Halder in his diary: “We have to resort to unusual means.” That meant one thing – drugs. Specifically, methamphetamine.

A supply of 20 000 pills was distributed to the soldiers, who collectively consumed the entire stock during the night of May 10 - 11, 1940.

“Twenty minutes later, the nerve cells in their brains started releasing neurotransmitters,” writes German author Norman Ohler. “All of a sudden, dopamine and noradrenaline put the soldiers in a state of absolute alertness. The night brightened, no one would sleep, lights were turned on and the Wehrmacht started eating its way tirelessly towards Belgium.

A supply of 20 000 pills was distributed to the soldiers, who collectively consumed the entire stock during the night of May 10 - 11, 1940.

“The listlessness and frustration of the first few hours made way for new and strange feelings. Something started happening, something no one could readily explain. An intense chill crept across scalps, a hot feeling of cold filled everyone from within. There were as yet no storms of steel, as in the First

World War, but instead a storm of chemicals broke out, punctuated by euphoric flashes of mental lightning.

“The level of activity reached its peak. The drivers drove; the radio operators’ decoding machines, like futuristic typewriters, radioed; gunners in black combat trousers and dark grey shirts crouched behind their weapons, ready to fire.

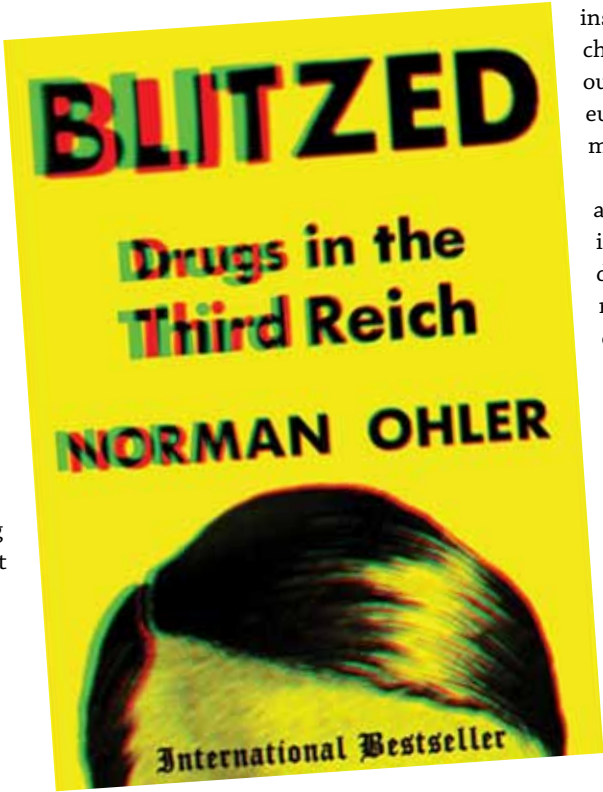
“There were no more breaks;

an uninterrupted chemical bombardment had broken out in the cerebrum, the body released greater quantities of nutrients, boosting its sugar production so that the machine was running at maximum output and the pistons were going up and down exponentially. The average blood pressure increased by up to 25 per cent and hearts thundered in the cylinder chamber of the chest.”

Ohler featured at a recent Sydney Writers Festival to discuss Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich, his hitherto-untold account of the astonishing reliance on drugs within the Third Reich – all the way to the Nazi high command and Hitler himself.

Endorsed by British historian Ian Kershaw, who wrote Hitler: A Biography, Ohler shed light on the extraordinary drug-taking within the German army – untold millions of pills – and their role in enabling soldiers to stave off sleep for as long as 17 days and thereby to catch Allied forces off-guard in key battles.

“We felt a kind of high, an exceptional state,” related a German soldier, whose unit had fought without a break for three days. “We were sitting in our vehicles, covered in



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dust, exhausted, wired.”

Methamphetamine reportedly became an indispensable component of numerous German battle plans, one tank group consuming 30 million pills within months, the mental high and military victories giving troops a sense of arrogance, fearlessness and uninhibited invincibility.

Of course, there were consequences – cardiac arrests, heart attacks, physical collapse.

German pilots also used the drug, enabling their Messerschmitts to keep flying for longer than Britain’s Spitfires, as did the navy, with Hitler Youth recruited to pilot one-man torpedo vehicles while ingesting cocaine-spiked chewing-gum. Many drowned at sea.

Drugs were also used as a form of torture, with cocaine administered to Sachsenhausen inmates to test how long they could keep walking, some managing four days non-stop.

As for Hitler, he became increasingly dependent on drugs, Dr Theodor Morell administering 28 pills a day at one stage, in addition to a barrage of injections, scarring his patient’s arms where the skin was perforated.

As the pressure of losing the war mounted, Hitler’s physical decline belied his unrealistic drug-imbued optimism and he began experiencing tremors, regularly placing his right hand over his left and right leg over his left to conceal the shaking when seated.

As for Hitler, he became increasingly dependent on drugs, Dr Theodor Morell administering 28 pills a day at one stage, in addition to a barrage of injections, scarring his patient’s arms where the skin was perforated.

Having spent five years researching the book, the author is at pains to emphasise that Hitler’s “goals and motives were not the result of drugs, but established much earlier. Hitler did not murder because he was living in a haze,” he stresses; “quite the contrary, he remained sane until the end. Hitler was always the master of his senses and knew exactly what he was doing.

“He acted always in an alert, cold-blooded way. He acted systematically and with terrible consistency to the end. He was anything but insane. He could go on taking as many drugs as he liked to keep himself in a state in which he could commit his crimes. It does not diminish his monstrous guilt.”

• Vic Alhadeff is chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies in Sydney, Australia. Twitter: @VicAlhadeff

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She was an international icon, she was Jewish and would have been 100

SUZANNE BELLING

Never in the annals of South Africa’s Jewish community has a single person – and a woman at that – made the same global impact as the late Helen Suzman, who, had she lived, would have turned 100 on Tuesday.

She, with Nelson Mandela, whom she admired unequivocally and visited during his incarceration on Robben Island, was a household name internationally in the anti-apartheid struggle and made a towering contribution to liberating this country and bringing about democracy, which she lived to witness in 1994.

“Her life was dedicated to seeking justice,” Francis Antonie, director of the Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF), told the Beit Emanuel congregation in a guest sermon last Friday.

This was one of several celebrations of Suzman’s life – including at the Holy Family Convent, adjacent to the shul, in a plenary session at the HSF, an address by Mosiuoa Lekota, president of Cope, and the commemorative issue of stamps in Suzman’s honour, with an address by former SA President Kgalema Motlanthe on “Power and privilege in politically uncertain times”.

Born in Germiston to Jewish parents from Lithuania, Samuel and Frieda Gavronsky, Suzman attended Parktown Convent, before going to Wits, where she qualified as an economist and statistician. She interrupted her studies in 1937 to marry Dr Moses Suzman, but returned to university lecturing in 1944, later giving up teaching to enter politics.

She remained the only representative of her party in the House of Assembly for 13 years, when eventually she was joined by four others.

She had two daughters, Frances, an art historian, who lives in London, and Patricia, a medical specialist in Boston.

She was elected as a United Party Member of Parliament in 1953, serving the Houghton constituency.

In 1959, she and 11 other liberal members of the UP broke away to form the Progressive Party, but in the 1961 election, all her peers lost their seats, leaving her the sole anti-apartheid parliamentarian. She remained the only representative of her party in the House of Assembly for 13 years, when eventually she



Helen Suzman (centre) in her heyday, with former party colleagues and Jewish community leaders, from left: Herbert Hirsch, former provincial councillor; Myra Osrin, founder of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre; Alf Widman, former mayor of Johannesburg; Harry Schwarz, former MP and ambassador to the United States; and Mervyn Smith, former chairman and president of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and Sea Point Progressive Party and later DA chairman.

was joined by four others.

The only English-speaking Jewish woman in a parliament dominated by Calvinist Afrikaner men, she was once accused by a minister of asking questions that embarrassed South Africa. Her reply was: “It is not my questions that embarrass South Africa, it is your answers.”

She was constantly harassed regarding her liberalism and Jewishness. She was frequently called upon to “go back to Israel!”

As the white opposition numbers in Parliament grew after the mid-1970s, the Progressive Party merged with Harry Schwarz’s Reform Party, to become the Progressive Reform Party.

It was renamed the Progressive Federal Party and was joined in Parliament by liberal colleagues such as Colin Eglin. It is now known as the Democratic Alliance.

She spent 36 years in Parliament, with her party then again called the Progressive Party.

As an MP, she used her prison visiting privileges to go to Robben Island, where she met and befriended Nelson Mandela and other inmates, as well as inspecting their living conditions.

With Mandela, it was the start of a long relationship of mutual respect and friendship.

She was among those who persuaded Nelson Mandela to drop the ANC’s revolutionary programme in favour of an evolutionary approach, retaining a market economy and a parliamentary democracy.

The ANC and SACP, however, were critical of her methods. She was denounced as an agent of colonialism and for her failure under apartheid to back sanctions.

But Mandela was steadfast in

She was once accused by a minister of asking questions that embarrassed South Africa. Her reply was: “It is not my questions that embarrass South Africa, it is your answers.”

his admiration for her.

He said: “The consistency with which you defended the basic values of freedom and the rule of law over the last three decades, has earned you the admiration of many South Africans.”

Her successor in the Houghton constituency and later leader of the DA, Tony Leon, told the SA Jewish Report: “When Helen Suzman turned 90, 10 years ago, I telephoned her from Harvard

principle, helped to achieve the transformation of her country into a democracy under the rule of law, her essential purpose in her 36 years in Parliament.

“I had the honour of succeeding her as Member of Parliament for Houghton,” he said, “and her stellar example provided a durable road map for public service and the purpose in politics.”

Suzman was awarded 27 honorary doctorates from universities around the world and was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize. She received many other awards from religious and human rights organisations globally.

Queen Elizabeth 2, of Great Britain and head of the Commonwealth, made Suzman an honorary Dame Commander (Civil Division) in 1989.

Suzman was also voted among

Post Office honours Suzman with commemorative stamp

The South African Post Office on Tuesday issued a commemorative Helen Suzman stamp to honour “this great, brave and pioneering woman”. Suzman would have been 100 this Tuesday. She died in 2009.

where I was a Fellow and unable to attend her celebrations and reminded her that she had outlived both the Russian Revolution and apartheid and the other monstrosities of the 20th century.

“She found this very amusing and her humour, her indefatigable courage and her clarity of

the Top 100 Great South Africans in a television series.

In March 2011, Liberia issued a postage stamp to honour Suzman, referring to her as “one of the legendary heroes of Africa”.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies’ Human Rights Award to those who had made an outstanding contribution to the

cause of human rights in South Africa, was given to Suzman in 2006, by the then national chairman, Michael Bagraim, who is today himself a DA member of Parliament.

In the introduction to the award, he said: “This year, the Board has decided to honour one of the towering figures in the saga of South Africa’s journey to democracy, the legendary Helen Suzman.

“Few, if any, members of our Jewish community have been as acclaimed as this brave and brilliant woman, who fought so tenaciously, for so long, and under such difficult circumstances for justice in our country.

“She was a source of pride to Jews everywhere and, without ever seeking it for herself, became an international icon feted the world over.”

The illuminated citation presented to her read: “The SA Jewish Board of Deputies, on behalf of the South African Jewish community, hereby acknowledges your outstanding contribution to the fight for justice and democracy in South Africa.

“During the darkest days of apartheid years, you were in the forefront of those who fought for the rights of the oppressed majority. Long before apartheid’s demise and the ushering in of a democratic society, the dedication, vision and unswerving moral courage you unfailingly displayed, had made you a legend in your own lifetime.

“Your indefatigable stand against injustice was an inspiring example for human rights activists throughout the world. For many years, you fought a lone battle in Parliament on behalf of the Progressive Party in opposing the apartheid system, in the process winning the respect of even your most inflexible opponents.

“Following the transition to non-racial democracy, you have continued to affirm the liberal values that underpinned your life’s mission, despite the denigration in some quarters of the role played by the liberal establishment in overthrowing apartheid.

“The Jewish people throughout the world were honoured by its association with you. Your Jewish origin was sometimes used against you, yet it was always something that you affirmed with pride. This, coupled with your many outstanding achievements, has made you a role model for the Jewish youth of today and for the generations to come.

“The name ‘Helen Suzman’ has become synonymous with fighting for justice, no matter how formidable the odds. We, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, salute you for the momentous contribution you have made to achieving peace and democracy in our country.”

Israeli minister: Mooted diplomatic downgrade ‘simply counterproductive’

STEVEN GRUZD

Israel’s Minister of Regional Co-operation Tzachi Hanegbi, is the latest high-profile Israeli politician to visit South Africa, undermining the notion that diplomatic ties between the two countries are in tatters.

Last year, the late Shimon Peres visited South Africa in January, followed by Foreign Affairs Director-General Dore Gold, and five Members of Knesset in August this year. Hanegbi nevertheless urged South African Jewry to fight the mooted downgrading of official relations, and reflected on threats to the Jewish State.

Hanegbi, who has held multiple Cabinet positions, was guest speaker at a sumptuous fundraising dinner for the IAU-UCF (Israel United Appeal – United Communal Fund), at Johannesburg’s Houghton Golf Club on Sunday.

Israel’s Ambassador to South Africa Lior Keinan and IAU-UCF Chairman Avrom Krengel, both reflected on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, the EFF’s protest outside the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria, and strong support for Israel by both the Jewish community and many South African Christians.



Israeli Minister of Regional Co-operation Tzachi Hanegbi, Rabbi David Masinter and Naomi Hadar

Howard Feldman, columnist, talk show host and master of ceremonies, put questions to Hanegbi.

On the ANC’s threats to downgrade diplomatic ties between South Africa and Israel, Hanegbi said that this community has stood up against many provocations “and you won them all”, mentioning the labelling of Israeli goods and anti-Israel activities on university campuses.

“This new threat is not easy to intercept,” he admitted, but said a downgrade “would be simply a counterproductive move. It won’t help the Palestinians and it won’t help the South African Government in any way. It’s a desperate, primitive move which doesn’t have logic.”

He said he would tell South African

leaders to pressurise the Palestinian leadership to make bold concessions, as (then) Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and King Hussein of Jordan had done. “That’s the only way into our hearts – they have to show they are ready to recognise and live in peace with Israel.”

On Syria, Hanegbi cited the biblical warning that “trouble might come from the north” but quipped that “this is not a Game of Thrones”. He said that since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel had not faced conventional war from Syria, and in the six-year Syrian civil war, Damascus’s missiles were generally aimed at domestic opponents.

But Hezbollah, “a very capable terrorist organisation” and a proxy of

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Iran, has helped Bashar al-Assad’s regime survive and push back the Islamic State. Today, Iran seeks to establish Shi’ite army bases in Syria and if it uses Hezbollah to try to retake the Golan Heights, Hanegbi said Jerusalem had told both Moscow and Washington that this would be “an unacceptable threat that would cross a red line”. He said Israel would try and resolve the situation diplomatically, “but if that fails, we know what to do”.

Hanegbi said Israel’s philosophy “before all else, is to prevent this Iranian regime from acquiring weapons of mass destruction”, and he recalled how the Menachem Begin government had destroyed Iraqi nuclear facilities in 1981.

He said “it was no secret” that Likud and the Obama government “did not see eye to eye on the Iranian nuclear issue. We failed to convince the world and the US that [the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran] was the wrong agreement to sign.”

He said “fortunately” there has been a change in the US administration, but it would take a

long time to undo this deal. “Sometimes diplomacy works, but with Iran, this will never be the most relevant policy... Diplomacy should always be the first tool, but if it fails, don’t keep praying. Adopt more assertive policies.”

Feldman probed Hanegbi’s views on the recently-announced unity pact between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. He said similar reconciliation deals had failed at least seven times before, and Hamas had not tempered its hatred of Israel.

Hanegbi asserted that Likud had won three elections because of Israel’s unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005, “which caused big disappointment and agony”.

Israel dismantled 21 settlements, repatriated thousands of settlers and even disinterred Jewish graves, but a year later Hamas violently took over Gaza, “a kingdom of terror driven by Iran... Israel got tunnels, missiles and rockets” and three wars in a decade. He said Israelis vote with this logic and “will not do the same naïve adventure” in the West Bank.

Learning to trust

One of my favourite life-coaching life lessons is learning to “trust the process”. For me, it means letting go of one’s fears and “limiting beliefs” and having faith that things are going to work out the way they are supposed to, in the end.

But trusting other people is a whole different topic, and I have been amazed on so many occasions in the last few months by the way people in Israel often trust strangers, clearly giving them the benefit of the doubt or believing that fellow human beings are simply genuinely good people.

Going the extra mile...

Standing in a tyre shop in the industrial area of Raanana, nine months into our aliyah, is not exactly what I would call my comfort zone. My knowledge of car parts is embarrassingly sparse.

The Israeli tyre shop owner was helpful and efficient, his tough, almost curt verbal

tone betraying the fact that he was clearly the type of person who would go the extra mile for his clients.

After attaching a new tyre at the front of my car, he asked me if I would stay and watch over the premises, because he had to leave for a short while. The surprised look on my face prompted him to explain that it was important to check that all four tyres were aligned, and that he wouldn’t be long.

That wasn’t why I was shocked. I couldn’t understand why a man would leave his empty shop, with a total stranger “watching over it”. I smiled to myself when I realised the “trust” I had shown in turn, as I had willingly given him the keys to my car to take to an unknown destination.

So, there I was standing in a tyre shop, wondering what I would say to any customer who may pop in?

As promised, the alignment at a nearby premises hadn’t taken long and I drove out



Aliya – the good, the bad and the meshuga

Benita Levin

a short while later, highly amused at the unusual way things had all been sorted out.

Do you want more chips? And more...

The issue of “trusting” a client, also came up in conversation, when we were enjoying shawarmas at a casual place in Ramat HaSharon. The “honesty” payment system left me baffled.

You order your shawarma at a counter and can then return to the buffet section for as many chips and salads as you can handle. The drinks are taken out of a fridge on the far end of the eatery. Only when you’re all finished eating, do you go to the counter and tell the cashier how much you owe.

It’s an informal system, and seemingly no-one is keeping tabs on how many drinks are being taken out of the fridge.

“How does this work”, I asked, “it would also be easy for someone to change the number of meals they’d ordered, especially when it’s so packed?”

“But why would anyone do that,” came the equally surprised response, from a woman who has lived here for many years. A refreshing question. An excellent point.

Trusting strangers – the way people seem to do here – is going to take a little time.

New phrase of the week...

“Sim Layv” – pay attention. (Often seen on road signs too)

New word of the week...

Braai (in South Africa) – Barbecue (if you are speaking in English to anyone who isn’t South African) – “Ul Ha-Aish” – (in Hebrew) – literally means “on the fire”.

KRAV MAGA **SELF DEFENSE**
AGES 16-25

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Barmi brothers honour Holocaust victims

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Twins Judd and Tyler Sandler recently celebrated their barmitzvah in memory of another set of twins: Abraham and Benjamin Barmherzig who perished in the Holocaust just before their 12th birthday.

“They were energetic and amazing boys who loved to play sports and to play the violin. They studied Talmud and went to shul on Shabbat with their father. They had big dreams...”

Born in Poland in 1931, Abraham and Benjamin Barmherzig were killed in Auschwitz in 1943, just over a year before they would have had their barmitzvah on 3 Elul 5704, August 22, 1944.

Almost exactly 73 years later, the Sandler twins celebrated their barmitzvah on 11 Elul 5777 – September 2 this year. Not only did the Sandler family honour the Barmherzig twins, they also tracked down the descendants of the only surviving member of the Barmherzig family and struck up a special friendship.

The plan was always to commemorate young victims of

the Holocaust through Judd and Tyler’s barmitzvah, says their mother, Lauren Sandler. “I’m a firm believer in remembering the Holocaust and I’d love to encourage other families to honour victims in this way – it’s so important to pass it down to the next generation,” she says.

Initially, the Sandlers contacted the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre who mailed Yad Vashem to try and find a set of twins the boys could honour – a task that seemed almost impossible.

“They battled, but with sheer luck they eventually managed to



Alex Barmherzig's four children. Alex was the twins' brother – the only Barmherzig that survived the Holocaust.

find the Barmherzig twins,” says Lauren.

Lauren went online and read

the testimonials of the twins’ only surviving family member, their brother, Alex Barmherzig. Seeing that he’d provided testimony in 1999, Lauren decided to do more online research and discovered that he’d passed away in 2014 in Toronto.

“There was an obituary from the shul, so I contacted them and they put me in touch with Alex’s four children in Canada,” she says. “They were completely overwhelmed that my boys were going to honour their late uncles and we started communicating.”

The pairing seemed to be Divine intervention. Striking up a friendship with Alex’s daughter Faye Weisman, Lauren was amazed to find many similarities between the families.

Aside from both sets of twins sharing similar barmitzvah dates, they also came from families who practised the same trade. “The father of the Barmherzig twins was a suit maker,” says Lauren. “My husband’s grandfather, who had come to South Africa from Latvia, started a suit factory, which my husband eventually also ran.”



Faye spoke of coming to South Africa for the barmitzvah, but it clashed with a family wedding. “On the Friday night before the barmitzvah, she hosted a special Shabbos dinner in Toronto in honour of my boys, though, and sent us videos of the whole family who attended,” says Lauren. “The family also sponsored our shul brocha.”

In a mail to Judd and Tyler, Faye told them things her father had shared about his late brothers. She also wrote: “You have touched us very deeply by doing this. As you embrace the Torah and read your parsha, know that Abraham and Benjamin’s spirit will be there

smiling from above and that you have touched so many lives.”

“Honouring the Barmherzig twins added huge meaning to the barmitzvah for all of us,” says Lauren. The Sandler twins, who attend King David Linksfield Primary, told their story at their school assembly on the day before their barmitzvah.

The boys concluded their speech saying: “We all have a duty to remember the Holocaust and the six million Jews who lost their lives. This has been such a special journey for us and is such a special and meaningful way of taking on the responsibility of remembering.”

Cape Town Torah High – a school unlike any other

TALI FEINBERG

At the foot of Table Mountain, a school in a historic synagogue, allows its teenage pupils to rest on bean bag pillows, study Torah in chevruta, learn at their own pace, and take the internationally-recognised SAT exams, making the world their oyster.

This is Cape Town Torah High (CTTH), a niche Orthodox Jewish school that is providing observant families and others with an exciting, revolutionary and alternative education that is different from anything you’ve ever seen before.

“We aim to provide a Torah-based educational environment for Jewish families. Our school is cutting-edge in that we aspire and prescribe to a personalised, self-directed educational philosophy,” explains founder and general studies principal, Sheila Valentini.

It all started in her home, where she was teaching a small group of teens. With the freedom of independence, she was able to tap into innovative global trends and explore a child-centric approach to education.

An Observant Orthodox Jew, with a BA (Hons), her methods started to attract other families of the Orthodox community who needed a high school for their children.

A team of visionary community leaders and educators from across the community, joined forces, and the Cape Town Torah High concept became a reality. The school soon needed a senior high, and so an accomplished and highly qualified educator, Teresa Dennis, came on board in 2013 to establish and head up grades 10-12/13.

This was followed by Rabbi Avi Shlomo in 2015, who was appointed as the religious principal, and took the school to the next level of permanence and stability.

The school soon moved from the



CTTH students learning with Rabbi Kalman Green

Valentini home to the historic Ponevez Shul. Two properties on the same block were leased from the City to become “school houses” and a functional campus in the heart of the city emerged.

“The move to the Ponovez Synagogue carries much historical significance,” explains Valentini. “The Ponovez community in Lithuania was known as a centre of great Torah learning and produced some of the greatest works of law and literature.

“The entire community was massacred by the Nazis in 1941. The memory of these martyrs is now fortified by young Jewish adults learning Torah in a synagogue that is named after them, at the tip of Africa.”

What else is unusual about Cape Town Torah High? “We keep our classes small and personalise each student’s educational roadmap,” says Valentini. This means that pupils work at their own work-stations, set their own timetable and complete projects at their own pace.

They are assessed with progress reporting, which means that achievements

are updated daily, as and when the pupil achieves in unit tests and modular assessments.

“The end-of-term exam mad rush and writing up of reports is not something the students or teachers experience with this method. Detailed remarks are given for results, so that the student is empowered to improve their knowledge.

“In other words, results are not marks; they are guidelines for what can be celebrated and what needs improvement. Both students and parents are given live access to these progress reports using the Google Drive platform.”

Blended and experiential learning are also used extensively. “Blended learning allows technology to teach the mundane. In maths, for example, the student watches a video of the material. If they do not understand, then they simply rewind and listen again, without feeling the embarrassment of ‘holding up the class’ or irritating the teacher. Only if the concept is still not understood, does the student approach the teacher.”

The school takes the needs of the teenager into account, so the ergonomics of the learning environment are important. “Teenagers should be in group settings when they are sharing ideas – preferably as low to the ground as possible. Bean bags and couches come to mind. Their bodies are awkward, let them sloth!” explains Valentini.

“On the other hand, they need a set-apart designated learning space that is only theirs, that expresses their identity. In our school, we identify desks just by looking at the ‘decoration’.

“Give them chairs that move with their bodies. They need to rock, they need to swivel, they need to turn. Sometimes they even need to hang upside down. And even so, even with this magnificent ‘office space’, they need to turn a chair into a table every now and again.

“Let them. As long as they are not disturbing others – does it really matter how they sit? Choose your battles. What matters is that they learn.”

These teaching methods mean that pupils experience less exam anxiety; they are empowered and feel like they are the engineers of their education; they feel valued as individuals; and they are able to get to know themselves as a person and not just a member of an institution, explains Valentini.

On top of all this, “Kodesh learning is the heartbeat of why we exist as a school. We keep the secular to what matters most.”

Pupils are taught Torah chevruta-style, in a classroom setting and can study independently. Girls and boys are separated according to Orthodox tradition, and “CTTH is unique in that it accommodates a wide spectrum of minhagim (levels and varieties of religious observance). This creates a healthy diversity and vibrancy, and a beautiful sense of camaraderie and Jewish unity,” writes Principal Rabbi Shlomo.



THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Israel tells its envoys to back Saudis, Hariri against Hezbollah, Iran

STUART WINER AND TOI STAFF

The Foreign Ministry has instructed Israeli ambassadors around the world to begin in earnest a diplomatic campaign against Iran and Hezbollah that includes backing Saudi Arabian claims that the two Shiite allies were behind a missile attack on Riyadh International Airport over the weekend.

Channel 10 reported on Wednesday that the ministry sent a classified memo to Israel’s envoys around the world urging them to contact government officials and plead the case for reining in Iran and its Lebanese proxy.

The missive, reportedly sent on Sunday, came the day after Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, shocked Lebanon and the region by announcing his resignation while on a visit to Saudi Arabia, saying he feared an assassination plot against him.

He used the opportunity to lash out at the influence of Hezbollah and Iran on his country.

“The events in Lebanon, and the ballistic missile launched by [Yemen’s rebel] Houthis toward Riyadh International Airport, should cause [the world] to increase the pressure on Iran and Hezbollah on a range of issues, from ballistic missile production to its efforts at regional subversion,” the Foreign Ministry memo read.

The Houthis, a Shiite militia backed by Iran, took credit for the missile, which was intercepted near the Saudi capital’s airport.

“At the request of the director-general you are asked to urgently contact foreign ministries and additional relevant entities

at the government level and to stress that Hariri’s resignation and his comments on the reasons that led him to resign, illustrate yet again the destructive character of Iran and Hezbollah and their danger to Lebanon’s stability and the countries in the region,” the memo said, according to Channel 10.

“Hariri’s resignation proves that the claim heard abroad that Hezbollah’s inclusion in [Lebanon’s] government is a recipe for stability is fundamentally mistaken,” the missive explains.

“This artificial unity creates paralysis and prevents domestic political forces from making decisions that serve their national interests. In practice it makes them hostages subject to physical threats who are forced against their will to advance the interests of a foreign power – Iran – even if the matter is likely to endanger the security of their country.”

Israel has long criticised Hezbollah’s involvement in Lebanese politics, where the terror group holds some 10 per cent of the seats in Beirut’s parliament and two out of the ten seats in the Cabinet.

Funded and equipped by Iran, Hezbollah has fought two wars against Israel since the IDF pulled out of southern Lebanon in 2000.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have long been at odds and back feuding Shiite and Sunni forces throughout the region.

Channel 10 also reported that Egypt had warned Saudi Arabia against putting too much pressure on Iran and Hezbollah as it may quickly plunge the region into violent conflict between Iran and its branches and Saudi Arabia and its allies.



Saudi King Salman, right, meets with outgoing Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Monday.

Photo: Saudi Press Agency, via AP

US CONGRESS COMMITTEE DEBATES MOVING EMBASSY TO JERUSALEM

RAPHAEL AHREN

The US House Oversight Committee’s Subcommittee for National Security, which is in charge of security arrangements for US diplomatic missions across the globe, is discussing the possibility of moving the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.



The US Consulate in Jerusalem’s Talpiot neighbourhood, adjoining a possible site for the US Embassy.

Representative Ron DeSantis of Florida, who chairs the committee, calls for the relocation, suggesting the US consulate building in the capital’s Arnona neighbourhood as a site for the embassy.

In June, President Donald Trump signed a waiver that delays any plan to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem for six months. The waiver is expiring on December 1, but Trump is expected to renew it again, arguing that relocating the embassy could jeopardise efforts to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

“The president has always made it very clear that it is a matter of when, not if. We have no news to share at this time,” a White House official told The Times of Israel.

“I believe that recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital city and relocating our embassy there on incontestably Israeli sovereign territory, would be sensible, prudent and efficient for the United States government,” former US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton says.

“Indeed, fully regularising the American diplomatic presence in Israel will benefit both countries, which is why, worldwide, the US embassy in virtually every other country we recognise is in the host country’s capital city.”

Dore Gold, a former director-general of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, argues for the relocation as well, saying that only Israel will safeguard religious freedom for all at the holy sites in Jerusalem.

“It is my view that President Donald Trump has made a commitment in that regard and I believe he will stand by what he has said,” Gold told the subcommittee.

Spike seen in Israeli women reporting sexual abuse after #MeToo

TOI STAFF

The number of Israeli women reporting sexual harassment or abuse, has reportedly increased dramatically in the wake of the #MeToo social media campaign and the numerous instances of high-profile stars, both at home and abroad, who have opened up about their own experiences.

Sexual assault centres across the country have seen a spike in reported cases in the past few weeks, according to a Wednesday report by Ynet.

“There has been a large increase in the number of calls,” Orit Sulitzeanu, CEO of the Association of Rape Crisis Centres in Israel, told Ynet. “Some centres have seen an increase of 20 per cent, but there are also some that have

jumped by almost double.”

She said that many of the centres noted that some of the women were motivated to contact them because of the public discussion of the subject.

Galia Wolloch, president of Na’amat, an organisation that works to advance the standing of women, told Ynet that the social media campaign led to a revolution.

“Women are changing the rules of the game. If until now women were silent, now they are not prepared to be silent. “There is no doubt that the discourse is about to change, and I am sure that men are taking note of this.”

Wolloch said the change could be attributed to the number of celebrities talking about the issues of sexual harassment and abuse.

Netanyahu vows to bring ‘our boys back home’ from Gaza

TOI STAFF

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Monday to bring back Israelis held by the Hamas terror group in Gaza, signalling he would use bodies of Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists held by Israel as leverage.

In an event in the northern town of Migdal Haemek, Netanyahu said he would not give any “free gifts” to Israel’s enemies.

On Sunday the army announced it had recovered the bodies of five Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists that were buried last week when the IDF destroyed a Gazan attack tunnel that crossed into Israeli territory.

“A government has two major tasks,” Netanyahu said. “The first is to protect the country and the second is to build the land. We are doing both these things together. We protect the land with a simple rule – anyone who tries to attack us, we attack them. And second, we do not give free gifts. We will bring our boys back home. There are no free gifts.”

Two Israeli civilians – Hisham al-Sayed and Abera Mengistu – and the remains of two slain IDF soldiers – Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin – are believed to be held by Hamas in Gaza. A third civilian, Jumaa Abu Ghanima, was initially thought to have been a captive, but there is now suspicion that he has joined Hamas.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad said on Sunday it would not negotiate for the return of the bodies of its men, and threatened violence, saying that Israel “will not be able to bargain over our fighters.

“Our battle is open-ended and shall not end. The freedom tunnel is not the only tunnel owned by the Islamic Jihad. It has many tunnels and many options,” warned Ahmad al-Mudalal, a senior member of the group.

The five men whose bodies were recovered by Israel, were apparently diggers who had been working inside the tunnel at the time of the strike. They were found inside Israeli territory, the army said.

The Arab Israeli human rights organisation Adalah, has submitted a petition to the High Court of Justice asking it to require the government to return the bodies of the buried terrorists.

The Justice Ministry last Friday said in a legal brief that it wasn’t the “duty of the government to allow the terrorist organisations operating in Gaza to collect the bodies of its



Prime Minister Benajmin Netanyahu signs a deal for new housing in the northern town of Migdal Haemek terrorists”.

The Goldin family called on the government to withhold the bodies until the remains of their son were returned, and threatened to take the case to the High Court in order to prevent it.

“Instead of levying a heavy price on Hamas and steamrolling it, they tell us in meetings that the next missiles on Sderot, Ashdod and Ashkelon will be because of the pressure we want to put in place. Enough excuses – it’s time for action,” said Goldin’s mother, Lea.

The PIJ attack tunnel, which began in the Gazan city of Khan Younis, went under the border and into Israeli territory, near Kibbutz Kissufim. The IDF destroyed it last Monday.

The tunnel did not yet have an exit, and the IDF said it was monitored from the time it crossed into Israeli territory, so it did not pose a threat to civilians.

According to Israeli assessment, 14 terrorists – mostly from PIJ, but also several from Hamas – were killed in the blast and its aftermath.

Rivlin pledges Israeli support to Jews against anti-Semitism

TOI STAFF
MADRID

Meeting with leaders of the Jewish community of Madrid on Sunday, President Reuven Rivlin pledged Israel’s support in the fight against anti-Semitism and celebrated 100 years of resurgent Jewish presence in the country.

Rivlin took part in an event at Madrid’s Ibn Gabirol School to mark 100 years since the re-establishment of the nation’s Jewish community after the expulsion of 1492.

“The community here today is a magnificent community, with tens of thousands of members of all ages,” he said. “Jewish life on the Iberian Peninsula, which was cut off more than 500 years ago, is now full of life, and this is a great joy. This is a great victory for history and the spirit of the Jewish people.”

He added that he was aware of the community’s concerns over growing incidents of anti-Semitism directed against local Jews.

“According to the Spanish interior minister’s report on anti-Semitism, in recent years there has been a rise of hundreds of per cent in manifestations of anti-Semitism in Spain.” Rivlin said: “We must not surrender to anti-Semitism, we must fight it. I am pleased that the Spanish government is taking steps in legislation and enforcement against this ugly phenomenon. We must not be ashamed of or hide our identity.

“I know that there are concerns, and fears of terrorism against Jews, and of anti-Semitism which poses as criticism against Israel. We will fight these challenges together,” he said.

Rabbis threaten IDF with boycott over mixed-gender service

JUDAH ARI GROSS

A group of leading Orthodox rabbis and teachers are reportedly planning to urge their students to boycott the army’s officers’ training course, unless the military makes significant changes to its policies on mixed-gender service.

The rabbis made the decision on Sunday, ahead of a meeting with IDF Chief of Staff Lt Gen Gadi Eisenkot planned for this week, Army Radio reported on Monday.

The issue of women’s service in the Israel Defence Forces is a constant source of tension between the army and Israel’s Orthodox community, parts of which object both to mixed-gender service – especially in combat units – and, separately, to service for religious women.

“If there isn’t a significant change in the spirit of the [mixed-gender orders] and in the practices in the field, we will block religious Jews from joining officers’ courses,” the rabbis threatened, according to the report.

Rabbi Zalman Melamed, of the Beit El Yeshiva, will boycott the meeting with Eisenkot out of the assumption that the army will not make any of the proposed changes, according to the report. A second rabbi is also reportedly considering staying away from the meeting.

Michal Nagen, one of the religious leaders present when the ostensible decision to boycott the officers’ course was made, downplayed its significance.

“Who’s threatening? There’s no threat. It’s an ongoing, open conversation that’s been happening for months between us and the chief of staff,” Nagen, who heads a pre-army academy for Orthodox women, told Army



Religious soldiers of the Netzah Yehuda Battalion pray while completing the final stages of a 40 kilometre journey in 2010.

Radio.

Nagen said the “threat” was a statement of fact – that without changes Orthodox soldiers would not go to officers’ training out of a renewed sense of “awareness” regarding the issue.

“Our male and female students, who observe Jewish law, are locked in a situation where they can’t live as devout people in certain parts of the army,” she said. “We want results on the ground, and so far there have been no changes.”

Yesh Atid MK Ofer Shelah decried the rabbis’ action as “impertinent” and called on the chief of staff to cancel his meeting with them, “unless they apologise and rescind the threats”.

Shelah, seen as his party’s defence strategist, said the rabbis’ threat was also a fairly empty one, as they are not in a position to forbid their students from becoming IDF officers.

“[The rabbis] don’t ‘send them’ to officers’ training course. They go out of an appreciation for its value and from a sense of duty,”

Government votes to collect Jewish National Fund revenues

The Israeli Cabinet votes to advance legislation that would channel 80 per cent of revenues from Jewish National Fund land sales to national infrastructure projects.

“Over the years the Jewish National Fund has done many important things on behalf of the Jewish People and the State of Israel. But today it is clearer than ever that the future of the Jewish People is strongly bound to the future of the State of Israel.

“It is here that the fate and future of the Jewish People will be decided. The needs of the State of Israel are many,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tells his ministers at the Cabinet meeting.

“The JNF sells lands every year and receives billions of shekels in return. It is very important that this money be channelled to the needs of the State of Israel. These needs cannot wait. This is the nature of our meeting today and we make decisions,” he adds.

The move comes as the government is engaged in a battle with the JNF over some NIS 2 billion (\$570 000) owed to the government that could threaten its tax exemption if not paid.

In January, State Comptroller Joseph Shapira released a report slamming the JNF and its operational branch, the Land Development Administration, as a “bloated organisation” with little transparency that may have mishandled funds and acted out of conflicts of interest.



SOUTH
AFRICAN
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Think most asylum seekers in Israel are African? Try Ukrainian

MELANIE LIDMAN

The line starts early in the afternoon at 53 Salome Street in south Tel Aviv. As the afternoon progresses, the line grows. By midnight, the line might have swollen to hundreds of people. Mostly they wait patiently.

Snippets of Ukrainian and Russian pepper the air along with broken English, and sometimes there’s a bit of shoving. They settle down to wait through the night for the Population Immigration and Borders Authority to open its doors at 08:00.

Welcome to the new face of illegal immigration in Israel. Over the past few years, politicians and activists have focused the illegal immigration spotlight on the approximately 50 000 African asylum seekers in Israel, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu touring Tel Aviv’s Neve Shaanan neighbourhood and Miri Regev saying that Israelis

in South Tel Aviv feel like “refugees in their own homes”. But under the radar, almost 22 000 Ukrainian and Georgian migrants have entered Israel over the past two years as tourists and tried to stay as refugees. This puts paid to the general notion that Israel struggles to keep illegal immigrants out of the country.

The illegals from the Ukraine and Georgia say their lives are in danger, either from the fighting in eastern Ukraine or because of a difficult political situation in Georgia, and they wait in line for days to file an application for refugee status with the Interior Ministry.

A new report from the non-profit Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, claims that these “refugees” are part of a larger scheme of shady companies taking advantage of Israel’s broken asylum system by charging people in Ukraine and Georgia thousands of dollars for so-called “work opportunities” in Israel.

Companies freely advertise on the Internet, encouraging people who want to move to Israel to buy the “tourist” package for anywhere from \$800 to \$1 200, to come to Israel on three-month tourist visas, available to them on arrival at Ben-Gurion Airport.

The companies help their “clients” figure out what to say at the airport to fool border officials about their purpose in coming to Israel and make sure they have erased all electronic communication that could give them away.

Then-interior minister Avigdor Lieberman made tourist visas available on arrival for Ukrainians in 2011, in an attempt to improve bilateral ties, citing success with cancelling the visa requirement for Russian tourists. The Interior Ministry similarly allowed Georgian tourists to obtain visas on arrival in 2014.

“Immediately after this, people started coming and requesting asylum,” said Dror Sadot, the spokeswoman for Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, a non-profit that provides advocacy and legal services to these groups. “There are many networks of agents who saw that the asylum system in Israel simply isn’t working, so they can take advantage of that.”

It takes years to process applications, during which time the asylum seeker is in a kind of legal limbo and can try to find work. And there is an established community of people from these countries already in Israel.



The line late at night outside the office of the Population Immigration and Borders Authority

Poll: 67 per cent of Arab Israelis reject Israel as a Jewish nation-state

MARISSA NEWMAN

Two-thirds of Arab Israelis believe Israel has “no right” to define itself as the Jewish nation-state, while a majority of Jewish Israelis (58 per cent) say those who reject that definition of Israel should have their citizenship revoked, according to a new poll underlining deep divisions between the two communities.

Some 67 per cent of Arab respondents “answered that the State of Israel had no right to be defined as the national home of the Jewish people,” the Israel Democracy Institute survey, released on Tuesday, found.

The poll came as Israeli lawmakers are advancing the so-called Jewish state bill to enshrine Israel’s status as a Jewish state in its quasi-constitutional Basic Laws, for the first time.

According to the survey, most Arab Israelis feel Israeli – but most Jewish Israelis believe they don’t. It found that most Jewish Israelis (63 per cent) maintain that a majority of Arab Israelis do not feel a part of Israeli society and 68 per cent say one cannot identify as Palestinian and remain loyal to Israel. However, according to the survey, a majority (54 per cent) of Arab Israelis say they do feel a part of Israeli society, and two-thirds (66 per cent) are proud of the country’s accomplishments in such areas as science and sports. Just 14 per cent of Arab Israelis say “Palestinian” is their primary identity, according to the survey, with most giving their Arab (39 per cent) and religious (34 per cent) identities greater prominence.

Though a majority of Jewish Israelis (67 per cent) believe Israel acts “in a democratic manner” toward its Arab minority (compared to 45 per cent of Arab Israelis), a similar number of Jews (64 per cent) said Israel should introduce a comprehensive plan to reduce gaps between the two communities (compared to 90 per cent of Arabs). Some 52 per cent of Jews and 77 per cent of Arabs, agreed Israeli governments in the past did not treat the Arabs in a manner equal to its treatment of Jewish citizens.

Most Jews (58 per cent) say Arabs should “be given fair and equal treatment in allocating budgets to residential communities.” At the same time, one-quarter of Jewish Israelis said Arabs should not be permitted to buy land in the State of Israel, while 41 per cent said they should, but only in Arab areas.

Jewish Israelis are still hesitant to put Arab Israelis in positions of power, according to the poll, with 66 per cent opposing the inclusion of Arab parties in the government.

Actress Natalie Portman named winner of \$1 million ‘Jewish Nobel’

JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY

Natalie Portman, a celebrated actress, director and social activist, was named the winner of the 2018 Genesis Prize.

Portman’s award of the so-called “Jewish Nobel” was announced on Tuesday by the Genesis Prize Foundation.

She joins artist Anish Kapoor, violinist Itzhak Perlman, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and actor-director Michael Douglas as a recipient of the \$1 million prize, which honours individuals who serve as an inspiration to the next generation of Jews through their outstanding professional achievement, commitment to Jewish values and to the Jewish people.

Portman’s prize money will go to programmes that focus on advancing women’s equality. The funds will be used for grants to organisations involved in promoting women’s educational opportunities, economic advancement, health and safety, and full participation in policy formulation and political activity.

A significant portion of the funds will go to programs advancing women’s equality in Israel, the foundation said in a statement.

Portman was born in Israel and, after moving to the United States as a child, retained a close connection to her Jewish and Israeli roots. She is a noted social activist in such areas as gender equality, combating poverty, microfinance, and animal rights.

She began her acting career at the age of 12 and took up directing in recent years. She is a winner of multiple prestigious awards, including an Academy Award, two Golden Globe Awards, the British Academy of Film and



Director Natalie Portman attends a photocall for “A Tale Of Love And Darkness” during the 68th annual Cannes Film Festival

Television Award, and other industry honours.

In 2015, she directed “A Tale of Love and Darkness”, a Hebrew-language film made in Israel and based on the novel by Israeli writer Amos Oz, in which she also played a starring role.

“Natalie’s charismatic on-screen presence has touched the hearts of millions. Her talent, her commitment to social causes and her deep connection to her Jewish and Israeli roots are greatly admired. She exemplifies the core traits of the Jewish character and values of the Jewish people – persistence and hard work, pursuit of excellence, intellectual curiosity, and a heartfelt desire to contribute to making the world a better place.

“Without a doubt, she is a role model for millions of young Jews around the world,” Stan Polovets, co-founder and chairman of the Genesis Prize Foundation, said in a statement.

Portman, who in the statement said she is “proud of my Israeli roots and Jewish heritage,” will be honoured at the Genesis Prize Ceremony in Jerusalem in June. (JTA)



SOUTH
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Weinstein hired former Mossad agents to suppress sexual assault stories – report

ERIC CORTELLESSA
WASHINGTON

Shamed film producer Harvey Weinstein reportedly hired former Mossad agents to suppress the publication of looming stories that he sexually harassed and assaulted scores of women for decades, according to a new report in The New Yorker magazine.

Starting in the autumn of 2016, as reporters were digging into his conduct, Weinstein reportedly began to hire private security agencies to “collect information on the women and journalists trying to expose the allegations” that he serially assaulted women.

These allegations were first published several weeks ago through bombshell reports in The New York Times and The New Yorker.

Among the firms Weinstein is said to have hired was Black Cube, an Israeli company headquartered in Tel Aviv that is comprised mostly of former Mossad officers.

On its website, it bills itself as a “select group of veterans from the Israeli elite intelligence units that specialises in tailored solutions to complex business and litigation challenges.”

Ronan Farrow, who also authored the initial New Yorker report that detailed claims against Weinstein, said he obtained a copy of the contract between Weinstein and the firm that was signed in July.

Farrow said the “explicit goal of the investigations”, was to “stop the publication of the abuse allegations against Weinstein”.

Over the one-year period the firm worked for Weinstein, it reportedly targeted dozens of individuals to collect personal information on them, including their sexual histories, to attempt to prevent them from going forward with reporting Weinstein’s alleged behaviour.

The magazine report said that two operatives with Black Cube met with Rose McGowan, an American actress who accuses Weinstein of raping her, using fake identities – one as a women’s rights advocate – and secretly recorded their conversations.

Weinstein was said to have closely monitored this work as it was ongoing, although his lawyers worked with investigators as well. This included David Boies, who is most famous for having represented former vice president



Photo: AFP Photo/Robyn Beck
Producer Harvey Weinstein (left) and Colony Capital CEO Thomas J Barrack, Jr attending the premiere of “August: Osage County”.

Al Gore in the highly-consequential Supreme Court case Bush v Gore.

Boies himself signed the contract with Black Cube stipulating that they would work to stop The New York Times from publishing its story on Weinstein. At the same time, his firm was representing The New York Times in separate cases. Boies confirmed to The New Yorker that his law firm engaged in these contracts.

Weinstein’s spokeswoman Sallie Hofmeister issued a statement to The New Yorker that accused it of trafficking in “inaccuracies and wild conspiracy theories”.

Ferrari display at Western Wall sparks outrage

TOI STAFF

Parking your car in the Western Wall plaza in Jerusalem is strictly prohibited.

Apparently, though, there’s some leeway if you’re the top brass of a world-famous auto manufacturer.

That’s what visitors to the holy site discovered last Friday morning, when they were met with a display of 10 Ferrari sports cars smack dab in the middle of the holy site plaza.

Ferrari, celebrating its 70th anniversary, had apparently asked for permission to bring its cars to the Wall for a quick stop as executives toured the country to mark the event. The Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which runs the site, approved.

Some ogled the admittedly eye-pleasing vehicles, but others were annoyed, if not outraged.

One visitor told the Ynet website it was “disgusting” and “outrageous” for the holy site to be commercialised so.

Another told Channel 10 news: “It’s not clear why we need such an exhibit in Israel’s poorest city.”

The liberal religious group Ne’emanei Torah Va’Avodah said the Wall was no place for such a “commercial gimmick”.

Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch said the incident was “an innocent agreement to allow parking for a few minutes in the early morning” for touring Ferrari executives. He stressed that the cars were not on display but simply parked there for a few minutes while company staff toured the site, and said there had been no payment for the parking privilege.

Also, vocally unhappy was Religious Services Minister David Azoulay, who said he had expressed his chagrin to the site’s administrators.

“There is no place for such flashy displays at this holy place,” Azoulay said. He added that the ministry would this week hold a meeting with all relevant authorities to ensure such incidents do not recur.



Where the street has their name

STUART WINER

A curious street party took place last Friday in the southern Baka neighbourhood of Jerusalem, when a group of women gathered to celebrate the naming of a new road in the capital, Dina Street, in honour the biblical figure who was the daughter of the patriarch Jacob and matriarch Leah.

What made the event unusual was that all nine of those taking part, carried the same name – Dina – albeit with some spelling variations.

The gathering was organised by Deena Levenstein and Dina Pinner via Facebook and invited all those named after the original Dinah, to mark the new street.

Dina Street is a small pedestrian mall that leads through a new housing complex off the city’s Bethlehem Road, in the south of the capital. Many of the streets in the area are named after biblical characters – including 11 of Jacob’s 12 sons, excluding Joseph.

Pinner said she only heard about the street when a friend posted a picture of the street sign on Facebook, which gave her the idea of having a celebration.

Joined by a common name and all living in Jerusalem, the Dinas included immigrants from a variety of countries and professions. There was a speech therapist, a statistician, a teacher and a doula Dina.



Photo: Stuart Winer/Times of Israel
Dina, Dina, Dina, Dina, Dina, Deena, Dina, and Dina, stand at the entrance to Dina Street, Jerusalem, last Friday.

Star-studded Montreal memorial concert celebrates life and work of Leonard Cohen

ROBERT SARNER
MONTREAL

Those who came into contact with the late Leonard Cohen would invariably speak of his incredible presence – whether it was up close in person, in a TV interview or on stage during a concert.

On Monday night in Montreal, on the eve of the first anniversary of his death, his presence was keenly felt by the 17 000 people who attended a sold-out, three-hour, star-studded concert in his memory.

Despite his physical absence, Cohen, 82 at his death, loomed large throughout the evening by way of his songs and spoken words, photographs, videos, paintings, poetry and self-portraits projected on screens above and next to the stage.

A feeling of familiarity, togetherness

and shared emotion prevailed at the Bell Centre.

Chalk it up to Cohen’s persona and oeuvre, and the way it was showcased – coupled with the appreciation he’s always attracted from the public.

His family put together the event, billed as “Tower of Song: A Memorial Tribute to Leonard Cohen”, which featured an impressive line-up of Canadian and international performers.

As Sting opened the concert singing “Dance Me to the End of Love”, a black and white photograph of Cohen appeared on the upper wall behind the stage. Dressed in a jacket and tie, wearing his trademark fedora and looking out of a window, it appeared that Cohen was three or four storeys up, watching over the proceedings below.



Photo: Claude Dufresne
Sting performing at the Leonard Cohen memorial concert in Montreal

Cohen’s 45-year-old son, Adam, a gifted singer and musician in his own right, was the co-producer and driving force behind the event.

“I see this concert as a fulfilment of my duties to my father that we gather in Montreal to ring the bells that still can

ring.”

The concert, a half-century since his first album came out in 1967, kicked off a week of events in Montreal honouring Cohen’s life and legacy. They include a major multidisciplinary exhibition at the city’s Museum of Contemporary Art that will run until April.

Five songs into the concert, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his wife Sophie appeared on stage. They spoke with great affinity for Cohen, arguably the most famous and internationally admired Jew that Canada has every produced.

“Leonard was an extraordinary Canadian, but he was a giant of Montreal,” Trudeau said before his wife Sophie added: “As Montrealers, we like to think Leonard belongs to us, but let’s remember he belongs to the world.”

Honouring SA’s Six Day War volunteers

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

South Africa’s many Six Day War IDF volunteers, form an integral part of Israel’s proud military history. And 50 years later, more than 60 of them were honoured at a breakfast with guest speaker, Israeli Minister for Regional Co-operation, Tzachi Hanegbi.

Committing to six months in the Israeli army, a total of 1 200 South African volunteers were flown to Israel by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). Arriving just days after Israel’s miraculous victory, they worked tirelessly, helping the country deal with the aftermath of war.

At the breakfast organised by the SAZF on November 6, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, Israel’s Ambassador to South Africa Lior Keinan and SAZF President Avrom Krengel, paid tribute to these brave men and women who answered the call to help Israel during the 1967 war.

Hanegbi recalled his own experience of the Six Day War, which took place when he was only 10 years old, growing up in Tel Aviv and not understanding the gravity of the situation.

“I had a great time – there was no school and we were living in the shelter with mattresses everywhere and all the kids in the apartment got to have sleepovers,” he said.

“We knew something was going on, though, and our parents listened to the radio constantly. One day our mothers started crying and I asked mine what was happening and she explained that people could cry from happiness – a new concept for me.

“She attempted to explain how we’d won the war. Today I wanted to be here to thank you personally,” he told the volunteers. “Every Israeli is thankful for everything you did.”

In a touching video featuring clips, photos and interviews, volunteers spoke of how they’d been forever changed by their experiences.

The SA Jewish Report talked to some of them after the morning’s formalities. Gina Bergman (nee Gibor) who’d served in the Israeli army in 1961 and 1962, returned to volunteer in 1967.

“I’m very passionate about Israel. I come from Sabra stock, my father and my mother’s parents were born there, and I’m a real Zionist,” she said. “Before I volunteered for the Six Day War, I was one of the selectors at the SAZF – we went through thousands of applications from aspiring volunteers and only allowed those who we thought could help Israel, not those who Israel could help.”

Epitomising what it means to be a strong woman, Bergman was determined to really work when she volunteered. “I was stationed in the Sinai Desert in Jebel Libni and the madricha was sending the girls to the kitchen,” she recalled. “I said: ‘There’s no way I’m going to work in the kitchen, I’ve served in the army; I



At the breakfast honouring the Six Day War volunteers

want to do a job here.’

“The madricha asked if I could use a big truck and I said, ‘Of course I can.’ I’d never been in a truck in my life!”

Yet Bergman embraced the role. “I loved everything, we’d leave at midnight and return at 08:00 – you couldn’t drive in the day as it was too hot – 40-45 degrees. We’d drive the booty to El Arish where the trains would take everything up to Israel for the army.

“We picked up bullets, weapons – Kalashnikovs, you name it, it was there. The Arabs had just dropped their weapons.”

Eventually becoming the madricha of the volunteers herself, Bergman said the experience changed her. “I’m sure I might have been a different person if I hadn’t experienced the army and the Six Day War. I matured in a different way.”

“We did a lot of travelling in the Sinai and got as far as the Suez Canal,” recalled volunteer and mischief-maker Jack Riback. “I jumped into the Suez Canal to go for a swim, which didn’t go down too well with the Israeli army!

“On another occasion, I saw an abandoned tank and drove it back to the camp and told the neighbour it was a present from Drom Afrika.”

Asked why he volunteered, Riback joked: “Because it was free!” Actually, seeing the chance to serve in Israel as a great opportunity, Riback drove the enemy’s abandoned tanks, which he recalled were brand new.

“We used to collect guns like Carl Gustavs made in Egypt where you had to be careful as they’d start firing by themselves. One South African blew his ear off with a bazooka by mistake.”

Knowing that the South Africans were hard workers, the Israelis treated them well. “The South Africans were liked because we were grafters,” said Riback.

“We were working in Jordan in the Dead Sea area and it was really hot. You could see who came from which country because the English were passing out and we’d drag them under the

trucks for some shade and carry on working! Meeting Jews from around the world was a great experience.”

Shirley Shevel (née Elian) was living in the UK when she volunteered. Upon arriving, she was thrilled to be placed with her fellow South Africans.

“An incredible image I have is of getting there and seeing convoy upon convoy that stretched as far as the desert went. There were sand missiles, trucks, bulldozers and tanks, just abandoned. The tanks had instructions in Russian and here were these poor, virtually peasants who’d been forced to go to war and they’d abandoned the tanks with their boots lying nearby.

“We were treated like absolute heroes, like we’d won the war, when we actually only flew in a few days afterwards,” she continued. “Not knowing what to expect, I caught a bus on the first morning and was told we were going to the Sinai Desert.

“We loved being in the desert and watching the sunset and the moonrise – Tel Aviv seemed so loud in comparison. I drove trucks and we brought back an enormous amount of equipment – everything was used.”

Some of the South African volunteers were also among the first to visit the Western Wall

after Israel won it back in the war – one of their most momentous victories ever.

“I was determined to get to the Wall and two days after I was stationed at Kibbutz Shamir by the Golan Heights, we got a lift with an army Jeep to Jerusalem,” recalled Marcus Orelowitz.

“They opened the gates and we were allowed to go right up to the Wall and touch it. The people started pouring in – religious, non-religious started davening and dancing – there was no mechitza so everybody was mixed and it went on through the day – it was unbelievable. For over 2 000 years, thousands of Jews had longed to get to the Wall and there it was; we got there – I felt so privileged.”

Orelowitz worked in El Arish between Gaza and the Suez Canal, where he helped load Jeeps, tanks and trucks onto flatbed trains and send them back to Israel.

“A lot of that armour was re-used in the 1973 Yom Kippur War,” he said. “I was also sent to Sharm El Sheikh which was basically the cause of the war. When I got down there, I saw that they’d blown their cannons to pieces and they’d opened the Straits and now the ships were going up to Eilat.”

For Hilton Sawitzsky, volunteering was a non-negotiable. “I wanted to serve,” he recalled with tears in his eyes. “My mom had passed away at a young age and they didn’t want to send me to Israel as I was a male child of a single parent, but I fought to go. It meant a lot to me, it really did. My late mom was a staunch Zionist.

“As a South African I knew straight away that I needed to stand on my own two feet – there were no phones or communication. I made lots of friends there and never really wanted to come back to this country, but things changed. It was an outstanding journey. I’ve always been a staunch supporter of Israel.”

• The breakfast was arranged by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and was held at the HOD Centre in Oaklands.



Audience standing up during the singing of the Hatikva



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Young Jewish entrepreneur gives back in Rwanda

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“It started with one coffee and one crazy idea. It culminated in infinite memories in the Land of 1 000 Hills and 1 000 000 smiles.” Dan Stillerman (30), founder of Excel Academy, and his friend Chad Nathan aka Ginger With a Gopro, recently travelled to Rwanda to conduct free Excel workshops.

Stillerman proves that ambition, an unwavering desire to add value, focus and hard work, can lead to untold success. His desire to pay it forward through initiatives like his recent Rwanda trip, makes him that much more impressive.

Recently nominated for a Jewish Achiever Award for the fourth consecutive year, Stillerman, a qualified actuary, is fast building an international training

on Excel and I was nowhere near proficient. I felt clueless,” he says. “I made a decision to find my feet and ramp up my Excel skills, and over the course of my four years there, I took my skills from zero to hero.”

Officially qualifying as an actuary, Stillerman left his job to become an entrepreneur. “While I wasn’t sure what area to focus on, I wanted to find a vehicle to create an impact on people and companies and to achieve financial independence and freedom. I wanted to add value.”

After much evaluation, Stillerman realised that his experience with and passion for Excel and for guiding people to success in inspiring ways, could give rise to a viable business and Excel Academy was born in January 2014.

While he started out alone, Stillerman currently

Sydney. Those who cannot attend workshops can also sign up online and complete the course through online video tutorials. “It’s about tapping into the right opportunities and crossing borders with technology,” he says.

In spreading Excel Academy’s reach further and inspiring others, Stillerman and his friend Ginger With a Gopro recently returned from an amazing four-day trip to Rwanda, where Stillerman conducted free Excel workshops.

“We went, because we believe in telling a story and inspiring people,” he says. “Ginger With a Gopro is a brilliant storyteller, an amazing videographer and a real people’s person. To bounce around ideas, we met for a coffee and he said: “I have a crazy idea for you. Let’s take Excel into



Dan Stillerman with children on the streets of Kigali

“We decided to set up three free workshops,” he says. “We brainstormed about destinations and realised that Rwanda had a great story and amazing people. We know a few people who have been to Rwanda and although it’s a complicated place, the economy’s growing at nine per cent a year and it’s known as one of the safest and cleanest countries in Africa.

“I got in touch with Tali Nates at the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre who put me in touch with key people in Kigali, Rwanda and we flew to Rwanda at the end of August.

“We explored, took a road trip to Lake Kibu, interacted with locals and trained around 75 people over the course of three two-hour workshops,” explains Stillerman. Two workshops were geared towards entrepreneurs at open working spaces, K-Lab and Impact Hub and they also presented at the University of Rwanda to lecturers and students.

“The response was amazing – they loved it. At first, they were a bit shy and hesitant but once we built a rapport, they were eager for more – they still WhatsApp me asking when we’ll be returning!”

While only a portion of Excel 101, the first level course, was taught, participants were encouraged

Africa is a hugely exciting space but until you go there, you don’t understand the potential: There’s so much value to be added and it’s on our doorstep

to sign up online to continue their studies. Yet, this comes with the challenges of limited e-commerce exposure, says Stillerman.

“The trip was never to make money – it was to add value, to interact, and to showcase what we’re doing through telling a story. It’s about the vibe and the experience we create

and we thought the best way to do that was to document that in a cool video, showcasing what we’re doing – viewable on our website.”

Stillerman travels fairly regularly, so leaving his business periodically wasn’t a problem. “We have an amazing team. I’ve made it a point to surround myself with superstars who are empowered, understand the business and can take responsibility, run workshops, liaise with clients and keep the business going and growing.

“We also embrace technology; I was sitting having lunch in Kigali and I was on a video call to one colleague in Johannesburg and another in New York and there I was in Kigali. We could see one another on the screen and it was although we were sitting around a table! I can be in another country and still have my finger on the pulse of what’s going on through technology.”

Stillerman is also looking at other African opportunities. “Africa is a hugely exciting space but until you go there, you don’t understand the potential,” he says. “There’s so much value to be added and it’s on our doorstep. It’s just a matter of investigating and using our networks.

“I’m now looking at opportunities to go to major cities in Zambia, Nigeria, Kenya and Botswana. We’re also exploring Mauritius and Madagascar. We have clients with a presence in Africa where there is a need, so we need to go there and leverage our online video platform. It’s about making a positive impact while also growing our business – creating shared value.”



Dan Stillerman conducting an Excel workshop in Rwanba

company. While completing his actuarial science studies, he was invited to join a start-up life insurance company in 2009, but was surprised when his boss asked about his Excel skills.

“On day one my confidence came crashing down because I realised that he had built his business

runs the company with co-MD Darren Lang, a chartered accountant, and together they oversee four employees who run their workshops both locally and with a growing US-based client base.

They’re also investigating opportunities to expand in places like Israel and

Africa. Let’s go showcase what we’re doing and run workshops in an African country and I’ll come along and document the whole thing, which tells the story of what Excel Academy does and of this adventure.” Stillerman, who’s a great fan of crazy ideas, was immediately sold.

‘I love the jellyfish because it’s blue’

STAFF REPORTER

Ask any child - the best way to learn is through fun. Ed Jordan and Alan Glass apparently got this right with their latest children’s book, Underwater Zoo.

The book cleverly plays with those fascinating sea creatures that littlies may have heard of, but may not know much about. Then they offer bubbles of more extensive info about some creatures.

The SA Jewish Report took the book to its target market, six-year-olds, to review the book.

Kara Bass, a grade R pupil at Sydenham Pre-

Primary School, thought the book was “awesome” and said she had “a lot of fun reading it with my mom and I learnt so much about fish”. She was determined to tell all her friends to read the book and, she says, “I want to read it again”.

Tyler Maron, a King David Sandton grade R pupil, liked the book because he likes fish, but he didn’t like the stone fish because

it was poisonous. He definitely wanted to read it again. He said the pictures and stories were “very nice”.

The Minnie Bersohn Nursery School grade R pupils also rated Underwater Zoo highly.

Most of them gave it either a nine or 10 out of 10, for being an entertaining and educational read.

Dylan Zidel only gave it a seven, because she said that she really liked the book because she “liked the jellyfish” and “the dogfish”, but didn’t like the elephant seal, and particularly its “trunk”. She did say, however, that she was going to “remember the dogfish”.

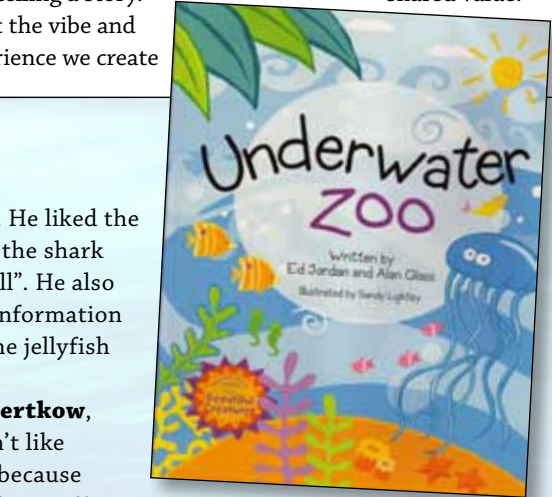
Taye Klein really liked the book, but only gave it a seven because he didn’t like the catfish

or the sea horse. He liked the killer whale and the shark “because they kill”. He also really liked the information bubbles about the jellyfish and blue whale.

Benjamin Chertkow, in contrast, didn’t like the killer whale because he doesn’t like “big stuff killing”.

Sophia Stecker thought the illustrations were “drawn beautifully” and her favourite part was about the starfish because “its feet grow back”.

Siara Glasser loves the fact that the male seahorse



carries the babies and says she loved the “cute” dogfish.

Jordan Kletz loved the jellyfish because “it is blue” and he was going to tell his friends about the dogfish because he says “it isn’t natural that a dog is a fish”. Natural or not, the book was a hit with its target market.



Hatzolah crosses borders

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Wearing strimels, black hats, knitted yarmulkes, shorts, sandals or suits, different Jews from around the world came together to discuss their common purpose – saving lives. A Hatzolah South Africa initiative, the world’s first International Hatzolah Convention was hosted in Johannesburg and the Pilanesberg between October 31 and November 5.

It all started a year ago at a Hatzolah SA board meeting. Legal director David Shapiro said: “There are Hatzolahs serving Jewish communities all over the world; we’re all loosely affiliated but there’s no real co-ordination. It would be great to get together and talk about the things we have in common.”

Ideas snowballed from there and the International Hatzolah Convention was born. “We identified five areas of focus and we said let’s do it, let’s host an international convention right here,” recalls Darren Sevitz, executive general manager of Hatzolah SA. “It’s probably the best thing we’ve ever done – it was absolutely amazing”

During the convention, 50 international Hatzolah delegates, representing 20 different Hatzolahs in eight countries, came together in South Africa. Aside from South Africa, countries represented included the US, Canada, the UK,

Chile, Belgium, Australia and Israel. Delegates stayed in a five-star hotel in Senderwood and sessions were held throughout the week at the Hatzolah base in Raedene. Aside from the 50 overseas delegates, numerous South African responders and dispatchers attended the weekday sessions.

The convention culminated in a special Shabbos weekend hosted at the Kwa Maritane Bush Lodge in the Pilanesberg and attended by some 70 local and international delegates, including Hatzolah’s Rabbi Yechezkel Auerbach, Rabbi Dr Akiva Tatz and Pretoria-based Rabbi Gidon Fox.

The five areas covered throughout the convention were:

1. Medical: Comparing medical protocols and policies
2. Operations and equipment used: How different Hatzolahs operate, what equipment they use, etc.
3. Response and preparedness for mass casualty incidents: In situations of terrorism, etc.
4. Networking: While acknowledging their independence, it was important for groups to get to know each other and create affiliations and relationships.
5. Halacha: Covered on the shabbos weekend away, this specifically addressed Hatzolah’s approach to Shabbos – the halachic approach to issues that arise from responding on Shabbos – what you can and can’t do, and so on. “In the beginning, we had two

days of intense programming,” explains Sevitz. “We had talks from top medical professionals and paramedics in the country, as well as from some international delegates. We also had a number of practical stations for people to practise various skills and procedures and test out equipment.

“There was also a lot of scheduled informal time, where we’d get together in small breakaway tables and just talk about how we all do things – there was a lot of learning and exchanging of ideas.

“We’ve already had requests from other Hatzolahs to share our marketing material with them; we’re happy to share resources, it’s not about money, it’s about saving lives.”

In between the formalities, Hatzolah SA showed their guests five-star South African hospitality. They had gourmet meals, went on a game drive in the Pilanesberg and celebrated a very special Shabbos together in the bush.

“They were literally blown away – we put Hatzolah SA on the worldwide map,” says Sevitz. “We’re going to change the world of Hatzolah; this wasn’t just about coming together for talks – it changed the way Hatzolahs are going to operate worldwide.”

At the Shabbos lunch held at Kwa Maritane, a delegate from New York stood up and spoke about how the convention had humbled him and his team. “We’re from New York and



Photo: Jason Crouse

Local and international Hatzolah delegates at Kwa Maritane Bush Lodge

we invented Hatzolah – we thought we were going to come and teach you something and yet we’ve learnt from you,” he said.

Sevitz also felt particularly proud during a presentation by Hatzolah SA Chairman Lance Abramson. Abramson laid out all the additional projects Hatzolah does in South Africa, aside from providing ambulance services.

“He discussed how we take care of the community through education, AED (defibrillator) boxes in shuls, CPR centres, Hugo’s Heroes and more,” says Sevitz. “To see what we do coming together in one presentation, blew us all away, even internally, because we just realised how phenomenal Hatzolah SA is and how phenomenal the community has been to us to allow us to do this.”

What also struck Sevitz, was that while the delegates were often very different externally – in terms of their Jewish backgrounds and the way they dressed and davened – they

all had a common purpose.

“I realised that these are all just externalities, we’re all the same, we’re all in the business of saving Jewish lives. I made good friends with guys I generally wouldn’t give the time of day to. It was an eye opener to stop being superficial and look at what’s inside a person.”

All delegates covered their own airfares and also had to pay a fee to attend. Funding and donations covered the shortfall, explains Sevitz. He’d love the convention to become a regular event happening every two to three years.

“Maybe we started something that will move around the globe, where different Hatzolahs can do something, or maybe we can host it here again. Things change quickly in the medical space and it’s also important to maintain these relationships. It’s vital that this continues – there’s so much momentum that we have to work with now.”

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TORAH FINIALS, MAKER'S
MARK FT., 1921
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Larry David’s Holocaust joke was an offence – against comedy

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL
NEW YORK

In a famous episode of “Seinfeld”, Jerry is upset that his dentist, a recent convert to Judaism, is already telling Jewish jokes. He complains to the dentist’s former priest. “I wanted to talk to you about Dr Whatley,” Jerry says. “I have a suspicion that he’s converted to

Every audience member has every right to decide what is or isn’t offensive. And there is perhaps no subject that can’t be joked about. But it is always a question of intent. A Labour Party veteran in England is being ridiculed there for telling an old Holocaust joke; she was trying, she said, to give an example of a truly offensive joke. And she was right about the joke anyway – it’s obscene because it mocks Hitler’s Jewish

persona: glib, self-involved, wildly inappropriate. “Larry David” is the butt of the joke, so lustful that he can’t turn it off in a death camp. The comedian Judy Gold tells a similar – and to my mind, much better – joke: “If I was standing on line naked for the gas chambers... would I hold my stomach in?” That’s a one-liner about women’s vanity, not the Shoah. And it succeeds where David’s fails because it is better constructed and, well, shorter: She makes her point, lets gasps turn into uncomfortable laughs, and she moves on. But David lingers on the conceit and makes you picture the scene – the barracks, the other victim, the shaved heads. The comic idea collapses under the weight of the images he is drawing. David has used the Holocaust as punchline much more effectively – and humorously – in the past. There was the “Seinfeld” episode where Jerry is caught making out with a date during “Schindler’s List”. In David’s follow-up series, “Curb Your Enthusiasm”, a Holocaust survivor gets into a debate about suffering with a contestant on the reality show “Survivor”. Those bits succeeded where the “SNL” one failed because they were about something, or at least something more interesting than sex. The “Seinfeld” episode was puncturing pieties about Spielberg’s film and reminding viewers, through black humour, that there is a difference between a Hollywood movie and the actual experience of the Holocaust. The “Curb” segment had a similar thrust: The faux suffering on “Survivor”, it suggested, had inured us to actual suffering and debased the notion of what it means to be a “survivor”. Both of these bits were about the Holocaust and how it is talked about. Perhaps David could have pulled off his Holocaust pick-up routine in a club, where audiences are ready for raunch and edge. The present-day “SNL” may feel more politically relevant than it has in a long time, but it hasn’t felt particularly edgy for years. An occasional host – Louis CK and Dave Chappelle come to mind – may come along to shake things up, but the humour, even the political satire, tends to be safe, even tame. Perhaps David deserves kudos for squirting a little bile into the bathwater, but a

Holocaust joke – especially a lame one – seemed bound to spoil the party. I’d also argue that the Holocaust joke wasn’t even his edgiest Jewish joke of the night. That would be the one about Harvey Weinstein in which noted a “very, very disturbing pattern” among the high-profile figures being accused of sexual harassment and assault: “Many of them are Jews.” “And I have three words to say to that: Oy vey iz meer. I don’t like it when Jews are in the news for notorious reasons,” David continues. “What I want: Einstein discovers the theory of relativity, Salk discovers a cure for polio. What I don’t want: Weinstein took it out.” I guess that’s an admirable assertion of Jewish pride. In the face of a lot of bad “Jewish” headlines that might in another era have led to anti-Semitic grumbings, David reminds us about the good Jews out there. But the idea that there is something “Jewish” about the wave of sex scandals has been the stuff of neo-Nazi websites (and the

rare Jewish “think” piece), not the mainstream discussion. Well, not anymore. Thanks, Lar! What may be most interesting about David’s monologue is how completely he embraces his Jewishness – as a comedian, that is. “Seinfeld” was a show by Jews, but not necessarily for or about them. David’s “Curb” character is conflicted, to say the least, about his Jewishness. But taking to live TV on a major comedy stage, David fully embodied the character of the Jew by broaching the two hot buttons of defensive Jewish identity: the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. Which leads us back to Jerry and Dr Whatley in that you see the seeds of David’s defence, if he were to offer one, of his “SNL” performance: “Jews have earned the right to tell Jewish jokes. Our DNA, our culture, our history give us a pass, even when it comes to ridiculing one another or milking our sacred cows.” That’s absolutely true. But that doesn’t mean you can’t be offended as a comedian. (JTA)



Larry David presents his opening monologue on “Saturday Night Live”, last Saturday, including bits on the Holocaust and the high-profile Jews being accused of sexual harassment.

Judaism just for the jokes.” “And this offends you as a Jewish person,” the priest says. “No,” Jerry says. “It offends me as a comedian.” Larry David, the co-creator of “Seinfeld”, did a Holocaust bit on “Saturday Night Live” over the weekend, and a lot more Jewish persons than comedians were offended. In his opening monologue, David wonders if, as a prisoner in a concentration camp, he would have continued to hit on women. “I think I would!” David says, and then imagines the dialogue with a woman in the neighbouring barracks. “How’s it going? They treating you OK?” he asks. “You know if we ever get out of here, I’d love to take you out for some latkes. You like latkes? What? What did I say? Is it me, or is it the whole thing? It’s because I’m bald, isn’t it?” The “SNL” audience was... polite. Twitter less so. The Anti-Defamation League’s chief executive, Jonathan Greenblatt, summed up the disapproval: “He managed to be offensive, insensitive and unfunny all at same time. Quite a feat.”

victims and takes delight in their suffering. Normally I’d say that’s the test of whether a Holocaust joke should be told: Who’s the butt of the joke? Both Ricky Gervais and Sarah Silverman have told jokes in which the teller seems to minimise the horrors of the Holocaust. But the audience is meant to laugh at, not with, the comic personas they have created.

Perhaps David could have pulled off his Holocaust pick-up routine in a club, where audiences are ready for raunch and edge.

You are meant to understand that Gervais and Silverman are stand-ins for the self-confident morons who like to share their opinions about things they don’t understand. On those grounds, David’s joke was fair game. The “SNL” joke wasn’t “about” the Holocaust at all – it was a joke about the male libido, as personified by the “Larry David”

- Friday (November 10)**
 - UZLC hosts Mo Skikne on “Achievements by Our First Generation in South Africa”. Venue: Our Parents Home. Time: 12:45 - 14:00. Contact: Gloria 072-127-9421 or (011) 485-4851.
- Sunday (November 12)**
 - Big Band Music Appreciation Society meets at Beit Emanuel Slome Auditorium in Parktown. Programme compiled by Dave Goldstein. On Frank Sinatra. Time: 14:15 sharp. Enquiries: Marilyn 072-243-7436 or Jack 082-450-7622.
 - Jewish Genealogical Society of SA will host visitors from Lithuania, Milda Jakulyte-Vasil who has specialised in Lithuanian Jewish history and culture and Sergey Kanovich, poet and essayist, on “Lithuanian Jewish Culture – our Heritage”.

- Venue: HOD. Time: 10:00. Cost: R25 (incl tea and refreshments). RSVP: Hannah (011) 485-2188, jgssa16@gmail.com
- Second Innings hosts Reeva Forman on “My work For The Jewish Community And Israel”. Time: Tea at 10:00. Meeting starts at 10:30. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors (incl tea and light refreshments). Contact: Linda Fleishman (011) 532-9701.

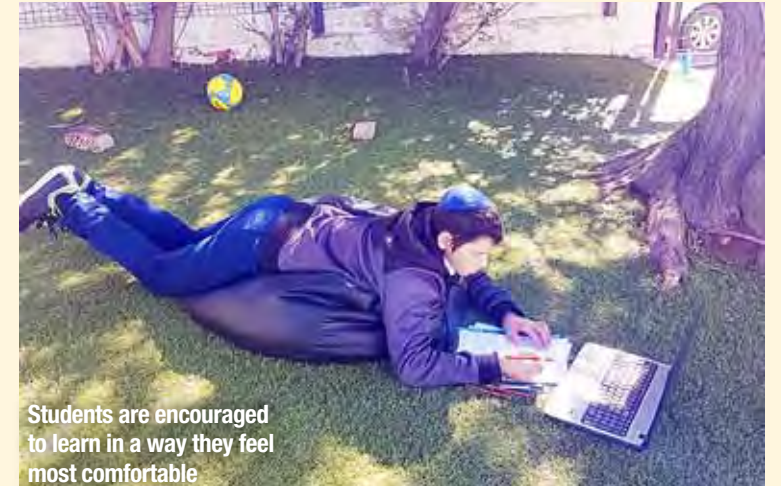
- Monday (November 13)**
 - UJW hosts Ayellet Black, deputy ambassador of Israel on “An Israel Update”. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Time:

- 10:00. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW Office (011) 648-1053.
- Wednesday (November 15)**
 - Hebrew Order of David International, Lodge Negev, hosts an “Even Bigger Bingo Bash”. Beneficiary: Kosher Mobile Meals. Venue: HOD Centre in Olaklands. Time: 19:30 for 20:00. Cost: R200 for 5 Big Games for great prizes. Refreshments will be provided. Contact: E-mail stanklaff@gmail.com or call 083-963-4028 to book.

- Thursday (November 16)**
 - Cape Town Holocaust Centre, Gardens, hosts “Paradise”, a film screening. Light refreshments. Time: 18:00. RSVP: Dianne (021) 462-5553 or admin@holocaust.org.za

Cape Town Torah High – a school unlike any other

>> Continued from page 10



Students are encouraged to learn in a way they feel most comfortable

In addition, outreach work and extramurals are a priority. “The community provides many diverse volunteering opportunities, leadership programmes and skills development. We are very fortunate that Herzlia, a large Jewish school, allows us to join them for their extramural activities,” says Valentini. CTTH is certified as an Independent School by the Western Cape Education Department. The Junior High General Studies follows the CAPS curriculum, but is not limited to it. The Senior High General Studies pupils matriculate with the American State Senior Certificate through an online platform hosted by the University of Nebraska High School (UNHS). Additionally, they write the SATs in accordance with the Matriculation Board requirement for a matric with exemption. The University of Nebraska model was chosen after extensive research into various online high school programmes. “It best suited our learning ethos. With over 60 course offerings, in addition to core classes, students can choose to pursue something challenging, enjoyable, and flexible. In addition to the course content being provided by UNHS, the projects and tests are all submitted online and graded by the highly accredited teachers of UNHS. “This allows the CTTH teacher in the classroom to teach multiple subjects, to multiple students, across multiple grades, and proves to be the key to sustainability in a small high school spanning six grades each in two divisions,” explains Valentini. The school even established its own SAT Centre that functions on a Sunday, to allow its observant students to write these exams. Challenges remain, including the number of pupils, and teachers who are trained or are willing to be trained in the school’s education methods. “We actually have vacancies for two teachers next year in case anyone is interested in teaching in this method!” says Valentini. Success has been abundant, such as one boy achieving in the top one per cent of the SATS in the world in 2016. Most importantly, “we have happy students who are proud of their education and make a difference in the Cape Town Jewish and broader community”.



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Creating dialogue through Instagram



SIMON SHEER

It is a paradox of travel that as we adventure into exotic distant lands, what we really want is to feel at home.

For South African Instagram star Alexi Portokallis, an invitation from a stranger became the defining moment of his first visit to Jerusalem. “We went to a Shabbos dinner. A guy we’d never met invited us to his home and gave us kneidlach and told us funny jokes.”

“It’s a joyous culture; people want to share,” added fellow Instagram sensation Miklas Manneke, who was doubly surprised when a second stranger invited the duo to dinner on their way to their scheduled rendezvous.

Portokallis and Manneke were in Israel as part of an Instagram exchange programme organised by the Israeli Embassy and the South African Friends of Israel. Two prominent Israeli Instagrammers – Ella Uzan and Sasha Rozenson – were given a chance to come to South Africa.

The idea is to create photo dialogues that explore the diversity in the two countries and the similarities between South Africa and Israel, Israel’s Deputy Ambassador to South Africa Ayellet Black, explained. With around 250 000 followers between the Instagram stars, the exchange is a high-impact way to share their discoveries.

Selecting locations conducive to meaningful visual storytelling, presented a unique set of challenges, as Benji Shulman – who shepherded the photographers through Israel – soon discovered. Shulman explained that many of the usual tourist spots are interesting, but not necessarily visually exciting. His challenge was to find places that presented strong



narrative interest that were also visually compelling.

The itineraries were carefully curated to enable the photographers to make connections and experience the diverse people, religion, culture, food and landscape of each country. They also wanted them to observe the differences between them, but also to discover similarities.

Sometimes similarities only become apparent when you step back and compare perspectives, which is one reason an open-ended dialogue can be so interesting. To the South Africans on their first visit to the Holy Land, a spontaneous Shabbos invitation from a stranger was a revelation.

But Uzan said that in South Africa there were clear echoes of home, a warmth and a friendliness in the people that you don’t see everywhere. “It was different

from Europe; everyone is smiling and happy.”

Both countries are famously diverse, but the scale of the Israeli landscape, just how much culture and contrast were packed into a tiny geographic area, impressed the South Africans.

“Travelling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv to Haifa was a wild journey,” Portokallis told me, a rush of colours and opinions, “a melting pot of ideas”. Gazing at the ocean in Haifa, he couldn’t quite believe that he’d only just been in Jerusalem, standing “on the holiest soil in the world”, and now he felt like he was in California.

Even a single city could feel like a world. Manneke was amazed at how the streets of downtown Tel Aviv were packed even on a weeknight.



The energy felt like Los Angeles. Then you would walk to Jaffa and experience something completely different, a meeting of cultures in a neighbourhood that looks a bit like Italy in the Middle East.

Though struck by Israel’s diversity, the South Africans were also fascinated by the unique feeling of Jewishness.

For Manneke, seeing people go about their business on a Sunday as if it were a Monday in South Africa, reminded him of how profoundly Christian culture has influenced South Africa and the West generally.

Portokallis, who has dated a Jewish woman and was already a veteran of numerous Shabbos dinners, says that his visit deepened his appreciation for Judaism and his understanding of its culture and traditions.

Speaking from South Africa, Rozenson was similarly startled by Johannesburg’s strange

juxtapositions, encountering places that “looked like heaven” a few kilometres from areas in desperate need of renewal.

Rozenson and Uzan’s most meaningful human connections in South Africa were made at a school in Inanda, Soweto. When they arrived at the school, the kids noticed Rozenson’s camera and started running toward the visitors, to ask to be photographed or simply to play with Uzan and Uzan.

The visit to the school, the site of a Jewish project to assist the schoolchildren, overwhelmed Uzan, who said her eyes teared up to the point that she could hardly take photographs. If Uzan and Rozenson were moved by the human beauty they encountered on their visit, they were hardly insensitive to South Africa’s natural majesty.

While the SA Jewish Report contacted Rozenson on the phone on his first morning in Cape Town, he let out a loud gasp mid-sentence. What had happened? “I just looked up and saw the mountain,” he explained.

The Instagram exchange will culminate in a joint exhibition, which will offer a chance to compare and contrast each photographer’s visual story. In the meantime, you can follow the photographers’ journeys on Instagram using the hashtag #yallayebo.



A column of Habonim Dror SA

Habonim Machaneh – a summer like no other

There is perhaps no better way to encapsulate the Habonim Machaneh experience than with the popular song our campers sing every December – “Habonim Machaneh makes my life so beautiful!”. That’s because what each and every channich/ah (student camper) experiences and gets out of our incredible three-week machaneh, is truly unique and life changing.

Maybe it’s because of the beautiful Onrus beach (only a 30-second walk from their tent); or maybe it’s the unforgettable memories and friendships they make with like-minded Jewish youth from across South Africa; or perhaps it’s even the incredible variety of educational activities and inspirational guest speakers which the channichim get to interact with on a daily basis.



ROSH MACHANEH 2017 David Schwartz

to change the world for the better.

With peulot (educational activities) ranging from equality, Jewish identity, SA challenges and how they can help, to democracy, Zionism, and how to be a powerful youth. With all of these, the education at Habonim Machaneh is well-rounded and inspiring. Our madrichim start planning three months before camp, in order to keep up the internationally high standard of peulot.

Our beautiful Onrus campsite has also recently seen great upgrades, such as our action-soccer court, upgraded ablutions, state-of-the art kosher kitchen, and brand-new luxurious tents for our campers. Not to mention the Zula which is constantly filled with different arts and crafts, Israeli music, and delicious snacks.

And did I mention the breath-taking Onrus beach on our doorstep? With over five hours of beach time each day, channichim get to spend time with all of their friends, soaking up the summer sun and swimming in the warm ocean, all under the supervision of our dedicated lifeguard team and CSO, of course.

I could go on and on about Habonim Machaneh, with its beautiful campsite and facilities, inspiring peulot and guests, fun and relatable madrichim, and everything else that the Habonim Machaneh experience uniquely gives our campers.

And that’s because I have been to 12 Habonim Machanot and cannot wait for my 13th this December. Habonim Machaneh is a place to grow as a person, make new best friends, fall in love, and strengthen your Jewish identity. Most of all, it’s the safest fun a Jewish teen could have this December.

This year Machaneh17 Na’aleh is from December 8-27, with shorter options available for grade 3-5 children.

• For more information please visit www.habo.org.za or e-mail david@habo.org.za

This column is paid for by the South African Zionist Federation



Dr Seuss comes to Sydenhamville!

The atmosphere was electric as the children of Sydenham Hebrew Pre-Primary celebrated their theme of Dr Seuss with a “Dr Seuss comes to Sydenhamville” day last week.

The parents and children embraced the theme wholeheartedly and came to school creatively dressed as characters from their favourite Dr Seuss books. The whole morning centred on the theme including Cat in the Hat baking and smoothies, Green Eggs no Ham science experiments and green slime messy play.



Dressed to impress are: Kayla Hanson, Anna Rubin, and Erin Katzman

From a Limpopo village to top Investec job

Setlogane Manchidi came to Torah Academy Boys’ High School last week to share his inspirational life story – from growing up in a village in Limpopo to heading up Investec Bank’s corporate social investment department today. With him are: Daniel Glasser, Rabbi Berel Rodal, Yoni Glassman and Adam Shaw.



KDVP mosaic depicts skyline of Jerusalem

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Jerusalem in May this year, the whole of King David Victory Park undertook a special project to illustrate their love of the Holy City in mosaic. This, the school believed, would truly commemorate the day with a sense of unity and work together to create a vibrant monument and testament to the pupils’ love of Jerusalem. And the work is finally done. The school created a beautiful mosaic, depicting the skyline of Jerusalem, and a Magen David in the vibrant colours of sunset.

High School art teacher Kelsey Smith designed the artwork of the skyline of Jerusalem with the Magen David. Each child was then given one tile to paint in a specific colour, which would eventually make up the finished mosaic.

Once completed, Marcelle Oliver, a parent of the school who also runs



extracurricular pottery classes at the school, glazed the tiles and did the firing. The process involved two firings of just under 1 000 tiles, before they could be tiled onto the wall to depict the Magen David and the skyline of Jerusalem.

It was a morning to remember and savour, Doll...

It was an awesome pamper party with a difference, when at least 90 little girls arrived at the Selwyn Segal Toy Shop on Sunday morning, October 5, each with their own “Our Generation Doll” for the #ourgenerationdoll #hairstylingevent.

There were hairdressers, manicurists and make-up artists, who created matching hairstyles for them and their dolls, and treated the pretty young girls to manicures and “little girl make-up”. There were smiles and styles all round as a photo booth was on hand so that the girls could take pictures with their friends and dolls, creating a lasting memory of a fabulous, exciting event.

Reports on Facebook were glowing and “Our Generation Doll South Africa” said: “We were totally proud to be associated with such an all-round brilliant event. Thank you! Thank you!”

A mom posted: “The event today was beyond anything I have ever seen; the little girls were made to feel so special, it far exceeded anything I could have imagined.”

The event, at which delicious party-fare was served, was to promote the Toy Shop and to thank the community for their support.

All at the Selwyn Segal Gift Centre were very happy to see such a lot of excited, happy faces and are grateful to everyone who helped to make this such an unforgettable event.



Letters

MORE BACKGROUND ON THE HISTORICAL BALFOUR DECLARATION

In further comment, Britain’s current foreign secretary, Boris Johnson. (Ahead of Balfour 100. UK enshrines Churchill’s headstrong case for Israel – Times of Israel – SA Jewish Report November 3) writes: “[The Balfour Declaration] was really a letter from AJ. Balfour to Lord Rothschild, dated November 2, 1917, and contained this exquisite masterpiece of Foreign Office fudgerama...

“His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done

which may prejudice the civil and religious communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in any other country.

“Another way of putting it might have been that the British government viewed with favour the eating of a piece of cake by the Jewish people, provided that nothing should be done to prejudice the rights of non-Jewish communities to eat the same piece of cake at the same time.” (The Churchill Factor – How one man made history, 2014, p 319.)

Ralph Zulman Johannesburg

SHABBOS PROJECT TOUCHED OUR HEARTS HERE IN AMMAN IN JORDAN

I am Erene Schwarz. Me and my husband Bernhard have been here in Amman in Jordan for the past 10 months, helping at a small “unofficial” guest house.

We are a retired couple who enjoy the unusual.

The Shabbos Project has really touch our hearts and we are so excited at what is happening around the world as Jewish people come together to celebrate and rejoice. There is a song on YouTube called Jewish Pride, and this is what we see. In the face of much anti-Semitism, Jews around the world are standing tall and proud in their faith and sharing with each other in this special festival, Shabbat.

We read about the Shabbos Project on the Internet and got updates when we registered

with the Shabbos Project about a year ago. We have been following the Project and are very excited about what is happening.

Baking challah each week brings much joy and we even get kosher salt here.

We keep Shabbat each week and believe it is an important spiritual activity in this area where there is much darkness and misunderstanding of the significance of Israel and her place and purpose among the nations. We are very humbled to be here.

Many blessings to you and thank you to Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein for his great idea for this project.

Erene Schwarz Amman, Jordan

JACK MILNER

"It is a real privilege that my sports souvenir collection, which reflects and



Abraham Klein and some of the soccer memorabilia he donated to the Fifa museum in Zurich

Klein's rare collection includes over 1 000 items like balls, whistles, red and yellow cards, flags, emblems, ties, referee uniforms and more. Klein is not a professional collector, but he didn't throw anything away.

In his Story of the World Cup, Brian Glanville said the game was “admirably refereed by the obscure Israeli referee Abraham Klein, an inspired appointment”.

Klein was not supposed to be a referee. He loved football and wanted to be a footballer, but was not up to that standard. In his autobiography, *The Whistle Artist*, he

The decision to allow Klein to referee the important Brazil v England match at the 1970 World Cup, was the subject of much

"It changed my life."

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KELLOGG'S
CORN FLAKES CRUMBS

18⁴⁹
200g

ALL GOLD
TOMATO SAUCE
TAMATIE SOUS

21⁴⁹
700ml

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6⁹⁹
55g

JELLY TOTS
A TASTE ADVENTURE
ORIGINAL

11⁹⁹
100g

NATURE VALLEY
GRANOLA BARS
ASSORTED FLAVOURS

6⁹⁹
2's

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