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Pandor drops bombshell about Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Science and Technology Minister Naledi Pandor, tipped to become the ANC’s new deputy president, stood up in Parliament on Tuesday and announced: “The majority party has agreed that government must cut diplomatic ties with Israel.”

She said the decision was based on “the absence of genuine initiatives by Israel to secure lasting peace and a viable two-state solution that includes full freedom and democracy for the Palestinian people”.

Pandor’s announcement came as a surprise, given that it was made during the debate on President Cyril Ramaphosa’s State of the Nation Address (SONA) and he had not mentioned Israel-South Africa relations or any foreign policy issues. The idea of the debate is to thrash out issues brought up in his address, which was delivered on Friday evening.

However, Pandor’s statement follows on from the resolution taken at the ANC’s elective conference in December to downgrade South Africa’s embassy in Tel Aviv to a liaison office.

“I got the shock of my life – it came completely out of left field,” says DA MP Michael Bagraim, who was there when Pandor spoke.

“This debate was to respond to SONA, and you would think that Minister Pandor would have followed her president’s lead. Her comments were a radical departure and did not respond to anything in SONA or any comments from the House during the SONA debate,” says Bagraim.

“I think she was looking for trouble, and I am appalled. Her statement has now triggered discussions in the portfolio committee on foreign affairs and, once again, raised this spectre out of nowhere. It is very unhealthy, peculiar and untoward.”

The proposal was applauded and Pandor was given a standing ovation as she left the podium. Her statement that government would definitely cut diplomatic ties with Israel was reiterated on Parliament’s official Twitter account.

However, when Ramaphosa responded to the SONA debate, he did not reiterate Pandor’s statement. Instead, he said: “We were reminded in the House of the responsibility that we have as South Africans to those peoples on our continent and around the world who continue to suffer occupation, discrimination and oppression.

“At this moment, we wish to express our deepest concern at the continued imprisonment of Palestinian children in Israeli jails.

“We reiterate our call to the Israeli government to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Palestinian leaders to find a resolution that affirms the equal rights of both people to self-determination, freedom and security.”

Responding to both leaders’ comments, Wendy Kahn, national director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, said: “We are encouraged by President Ramaphosa’s support for a two-state solution on the basis of ‘equal rights of both people to self-determination, freedom and security’. We also welcome the fact that he emphasised the pivotal role of ‘meaningful dialogue’ in attaining this goal.

“Our president is a man whose own background has demonstrated the efficacy of what dialogue and negotiations can achieve. He played a role in South Africa’s successful transition to democracy through rigorous face-to-face talks between the parties concerned, including his work during Codesa and, more recently, in the visionary and masterful way he facilitated our leadership transformation. Under his leadership, our country can truly play a relevant role in assisting the Palestinians and Israelis to come together at the negotiation table so that they can find solutions.

“Minister Pandor’s comments do not reflect the ANC’s elective conference resolution and, sadly, negates a role that our country could play in finding resolution to this difficult conflict. When diplomatic relations are shut, so too is our ability to influence the process. We have written

to Minister Pandor, requesting an opportunity to discuss this further.”

SA Zionist Federation chairperson Ben Swartz said:

“Pandor’s comments do not seem to be founded on any overt or defined policy of the ANC. She was likely playing to the anti-Israel constituency in the ANC

and Parliament. “What is more telling, though, was President Ramaphosa’s more nuanced approach in his answers

Continued on page 4>>

Winning friends and pushing fitness



Rabbi Pini Hecht was out on his regular morning cycle with friends in Cape Town at the end of last week, when they bumped into our new president, Cyril Ramaphosa, who was also out exercising. The president has extended his inclusive leadership style to the public domain through his fitness regimen. What a way to promote a healthy lifestyle for all South Africans!

See story on page 5

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Cape Board appeals: Keep us in the loop when sending water

JORDAN MOSHE

While the Cape Town Jewish community is extremely grateful to its Johannesburg counterparts for sending water, they ask that they be included in plans to co-ordinate where it's distributed.

The Johannesburg Jewish community has pulled together to send loads of water to Cape Town, but once there, the co-ordination has been somewhat of a headache.

Joshua Hovsha, director of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, explains the challenge: "Water storage is difficult. Bottled water has a lifespan of one year, but this is rapidly reduced with exposure to sunlight and heat. Finding adequate storage solutions that are safe and accessible is an ongoing challenge."

So far, the board has made every effort to co-ordinate the donations of water as effectively as possible, involving a number of local organisations who are able to assist.

Hovsha explains that a high-level task team has been set up to tackle messaging, water plans and disaster management. This includes the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, the Chief Rabbi's Office, the Community Security Organisation, the United Jewish Campaign, Jewish Care Cape, the SA Union for Progressive Judaism and United Herzlia Schools.

He says certain drives to collect water in Johannesburg are being launched without the Cape Town Jewish Board being consulted, and that this water often arrives without any prior notice given.

"Our ability to ensure that water is properly stored is impaired," Hovsha says. "This means



Deputy Mayor Alderman Ian Nielsen addresses the Jewish community of Cape Town

that we have concerns over the safety of this water in the long term. Additionally, we are less able to ensure that the water is sent to those who need it most."

Hovsha is quick to add that all efforts undertaken to help are always appreciated. So, this is not to say that people should stop giving, but rather, that people who are looking to contribute should do so by using the proper channels.

"It is vital for those wishing to help to start their own campaigns to communicate with the intended beneficiaries," Hovsha adds.

"Indications from the City of Cape Town are that schools and facilities for the elderly will not be cut off from water supply. As such, sending water to schools and to these facilities is no longer a priority, but our focus is on helping the vulnerable in our community should we reach Day Zero – specifically, elderly people living on their own and people with disabilities."

Despite the tremendous response to the plight of Capetonians, the board remains

mindful of Day Zero and its consequences. "We have an additional responsibility to remember that our 'nightmare scenario' of a Day Zero is a reality for millions within our country on a daily basis already," Hovsha points out.

"Day Zero can still be averted or pushed back. Already we have reduced our water consumption as a city and moved the date for Day Zero by a further two months."

Hovsha remains optimistic. "We will make it through this crisis and as we do, we must find a way to end the perpetual moral crisis of living in a country where deprivation robs people of their dignity every day.

"The most heartening part of this crisis is about how much responsibility we are taking together. We are reducing our consumption, we are more conscious and are starting to make a difference. Day Zero has been pushed back, but we need to continue to control our own fate in this crisis by sticking to using just 50 litres of water a day each.

"We also need to take care of one another. As such, we as a community have put into place plans to ensure that our communal institutions are secured and the most vulnerable among us will be taken care of, no matter the outcome."

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
18:26	19:15	Johannesburg
19:13	20:04	Cape Town
18:18	19:08	Durban
18:36	19:26	Bloemfontein
18:44	19:35	Port Elizabeth
18:34	19:25	East London

Parshat Zachor Tetzaveh

Heaven and earth – two worlds or one?

On the second day of creation, G-d separated heaven and earth. This was something so uncharacteristic of Him, because in His world the focus is on unity and harmony rather than on separation and division. In fact, it is for this reason that the Torah does not mention the words "and it was good" on the second day of creation, although it was mentioned regarding all the other days – because when there is division, it is not good.

Why, then, did He separate heaven and earth? The answer is that on that day of creation G-d was doing more than just defining borders and boundaries between the upper and lower spheres. By dividing heaven and earth, He was creating two different worlds within this world. One world was spiritual, represented by heaven above, and the other was physical, represented by earth below.

In our lives today, so many years later, we are still affected by this heavenly decision. We are driven by two very different forces in our lives: physical and spiritual. Some of G-d's creations are only physically driven, such as animals. Other creations are only spiritually driven, such as angels. We, however, are positioned right in between the two worlds. Prayer, Torah study, charity and acts of kindness are examples of our spiritual pursuits, whereas work, exercise, marriage and vacations are some of our physical activities.

Are these two worlds aligned? Is there

a synergy that connects these two driving forces in our lives? Often the answer is "no". The spiritual remains spiritual, and the physical remains physical, as shown by the following examples: "What happens at shul stays at shul," we say to ourselves. Or, "This was written for the rabbis or for the religious people, but not for me."

The way we run our business, or what we choose to eat, seems to be unrelated to the charity we give or the regular Torah shiur we attend. They are two different worlds, and that is the way we often keep them.

There is a legend told about Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher who analysed human behaviour and taught about the purpose of man. One day his students found him involved in an act of immorality, and they were shocked. They challenged their teacher with: "How could you, after all that you taught us?"

He replied: "Now I am not Aristotle the philosopher, but rather Aristotle the regular human being."

This, however, was not G-d's plan. Indeed, He separated these two worlds, but His intention was that we would bring them together again. Although He created the physical, He wanted us to transform it back into spiritual. We live in these two worlds simultaneously – so we can be the ones to merge the two together.

This is what the Tabernacle in the desert accomplished. Building a home for G-d in this physical world using wood, metals and materials was part of bringing together the physical and spiritual. And so too today, we must do what we can to make this world into a more G-dly place.



**Rabbi
Yehuda Stern,
Sydenham Shul**

Jewish Report



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So motivated and positive, despite horrific attack

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

There has been an outpouring of support in the wake of the brutal attack on 61-year-old Charles Back, who was assaulted on his Fairview Wine and Cheese farm in Paarl, in the Western Cape, on the night of February 13. During the attack he was beaten with a crowbar, and left for dead in his home.

Back is regarded as one of the most celebrated winemakers in the South African industry. This assault highlights yet again the scourge of violent farm attacks in South Africa. According to the latest police statistics, there were 638 such attacks over the 2016/17 period. However, a measure of the man is that he discharged himself from hospital the next morning and stopped by the office “to show my millennial counterparts what real work commitment looks like”, according to a Facebook post.

Back was attacked while sleeping in his bedroom, which is cordoned off by a security gate. The burglars came in at “an unexpected point” and broke through the security gate, said Back’s personal assistant, Elizabeth Slabbert.

“He woke up after being hit over the head with a crowbar. He fought back furiously. At one point, he said he actually thought that he had them, but they were three people with a crowbar and he was a man by himself.

“They knocked him out with a blow to his left eye which left him unconscious. They rolled him up in a Persian carpet and left him for dead.”

After stealing a number of electronic items, the attackers left. There had apparently been “some activity” at his son’s house on the neighbouring farm earlier that evening which Back knew about. “He thought he’d be prepared because he sleeps with his revolver right next to his bed and also has security cameras outside the house, an alarm system and dogs,” Slabbert said.

“We’ve had quite a lot of incidents on the farm previously and if he was scared every single night, he wouldn’t be able to sleep. He didn’t see it coming.”

However, she added, “His house

is quite isolated on the top of the mountain, so he knew it was coming.

“I wouldn’t say he’s fearless, but he doesn’t lie awake at night wondering who’s going to come and attack him. He loves the farm and he wants to live on the farm.”

“My escape is nothing short of miraculous,” Back wrote on Facebook, “and I feel like I have come back



from the dead. I am so grateful to be alive, and my heart goes out to all the people that have lost their family members in the ongoing farm attacks.”

Slabbert says that Back is “doing fine”. He underwent surgery at the Paarl Mediclinic on Sunday morning to repair damage caused to his left eye socket by the crowbar.

“The operation was a great success,” she says. He is expected to regain his sight in that eye – in fact, it has partially returned.

“He came into the office on Monday morning looking fine and positive and energetic, but the doctors have advised that he take it easy for the next week or so, so he’s spending time at the house on the farm with his wife, just taking it easy.” Back’s wife was at her son’s home in Cape Town on the night of the attack.

There have previously been criminal incidents at his son’s house and the farm manager’s house, but never attacks against Back personally.

Back’s philosophy is to try to create employment to improve the economic situation of individuals such as those who broke into his

house, which will hopefully avert these kinds of attacks.

The community response to the attack was “massive”, said Slabbert. “We could never have expected it. It was just constant phone calls and flowers and messages on Facebook – it was insane! It was totally overwhelming; we’re so grateful.”

Joel Back, a cousin, who is a partner in the KoshersWorld supermarket chain, describes the situation as “a shocking state of affairs that this type of crime actually takes place, that someone of his calibre, or people in general, should have to be fearful in their own home”.

He also finds the attack on Back ironic. “He is a champion of what the new South Africa could, and should, be – the last person I would expect to be the victim of such a crime would be Charles Back.”

While Joel has not spoken to his cousin as yet, he says his Facebook posts are “very positive. He just wants to get back, do what he does

best and make things happen in his business, on the farm and in his community.

Back comes from a long line of winemakers. He is the third generation on the farm that was purchased by his grandfather, also Charles, in 1937. Charles senior had arrived in this country as a Lithuanian immigrant in 1902.

Charles junior joined Fairview in 1978 after completing his winemaking studies at Elsenburg College of Agriculture. The estate is one of the most visited attractions in the Cape winelands.

Commenting on the fact that his cousin was back at the office the day after the attack, Joel says: “That’s Charles. You can’t hold that man down. He’s an absolute inspiration.”

And what of the future? Would the family want him to leave the farm in the light of the attack?

“I can’t really comment on that,” says Joel. “I’m not sure that Charles is the kind of chap that would get up and leave because of such an event, as horrific as it is.

Slabbert agrees: “No, I don’t think they expect that of him.”

“I think he’s going to come back stronger more enthusiastic about the challenges of this country and the future,” Joel continues.

Back has stated that the attack was a random criminal one “by three common gangsters, motivated by their own interests” and not part of the concerted farm attacks that have plagued the country.

“I believe in the values that this country was built on,” wrote Back on Facebook, “and continue to hope for harmony and peace. I am now doubly motivated to come into work every day, and will continue to ensure that I can contribute and try to make even the smallest difference in my community.”

One of the many messages of support on Facebook, from Patrick Fieuw, reads: “I am so sorry to hear what you and your family had to endure during this night of terror. You have been a pillar in this community for so many years and your spirit has been a motivational light for so many.”

Another from Michele King reads: “I don’t know Charles, but your words have revealed a truly unique, courageous and kind-spirited person. Instead of the usual colour-bashing reports we see on social media, you have risen above the racial slurs and portrayed true character. We need more people like you in rebuilding our beloved country for all our people.”



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Joel Harris 082 926 0287 | Marco 082 048 2644

SA expat community reeling after Florida shooting

TALI FEINBERG

While the rest of South Africa was celebrating the resignation of former president Jacob Zuma late last Wednesday night, Stacie Hasson in Cape Town was devastated to hear about the mass shooting at her alma mater in Parkland, Florida.

“Never in a million years would I have imagined this would have happened there,” she said, after hearing that a gunman killed 17 people at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in a mass shooting on Valentine’s Day.

“The school is like a family – that place is ingrained in my heart,” says Hassan, who now lives in Cape Town, although her family is still in Florida.

Her brother, Richard, taught at the school for 14 years, and friends from around the world feared the worst for him when they heard about the massacre. Thankfully, he had resigned from his teaching post a year to the day, and was safe.

But his close friend and colleague, Aaron Feis, was not as lucky – he was killed while shielding others from the bullets. Paying tribute to him on Facebook, Hasson’s brother wrote: “Aaron was a hero long before his actions on Valentine’s Day. He changed lives way back when we were kids and he protected those who weren’t able to protect themselves. At that time, most of us were trying to figure out what life was about, but Aaron already knew his purpose. He was a protector.”

Hasson describes a school where classmates stay close long after graduation and teachers who are heavily invested in their pupils’ wellbeing – a close-knit community similar to what she has experienced in South Africa.

Of the 17 people killed last Wednesday, five were Jewish: Jaime Guttenberg, Alyssa Alhadeff, Alex Schachter, Meadow Pollack and teacher Scott Beigel, heralded for putting himself in the line of fire to save others. There is a huge Jewish community in the area, as well as a large South African Jewish expat community. The latter lives mainly in nearby Boca Raton.

“There is a massive community of ex-South African Jews living here,” says Carol Bard, who emigrated to South Florida more than 20 years ago, and who lives just 20 minutes away from the school.

“Immigrants are mainly from Johannesburg and have been here for a few decades,” explains Bard. “It’s such a significant section of the Jewish community here that Chabad hosts a ‘South African Shabbat’ every few months.”

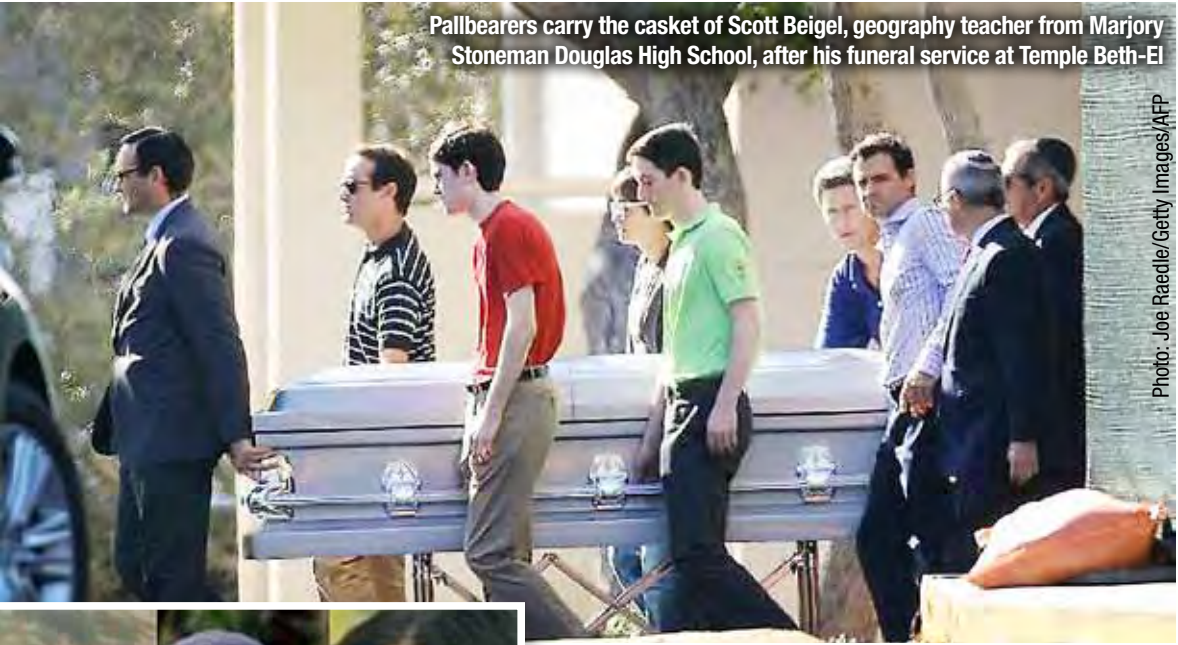
While Bard’s children do not attend Marjory Stoneman Douglas, it is the main public school in the area, and is about 40% Jewish.

“Many children at my kids’ school know those who were killed,” says Bard. When her children’s school reopened on Friday, students were invited to share their grief, and when Bard took her daughter to the doctor last week, a girl who sprained her ankle while fleeing the shooting was being seen to. “She was so pale and couldn’t stop crying.”

Nikki Levy, who settled in the area with her family seven years ago after winning the Green Card lottery, describes an affluent community with great weather, lots of South Africans and a close-knit Jewish community similar to what she left back home in Johannesburg.

She also lives close to where the shooting occurred, and says it has affected everyone around her. “It’s been horrific and really hit close to home. I know someone whose cousin died in the shooting, and reading the texts exchanged between two Jewish brothers really got to me, as my boys are the same age.”

She is referring to Sam and



From left to right, Florida school shooting victims Alex Schachter, Jaime Guttenberg, Meadow Pollack, Scott Beigel and Alyssa Alhadeff

Matthew Zeif, who made public their exchange of WhatsApp messages as they hid from the shooter, saying they loved each other and Matthew writing that his teacher had died.

“It really put it in perspective. Life is short, it turns on a dime, and you had better be appreciative of your loved ones,” she adds.

Describing the tense atmosphere, Levy knows that a school near to where the shooting occurred was put on lockdown for two hours the next

day, as it dealt with a possible copycat attack. At the school attended by Bard’s children, a pupil who recently brought a BB gun to the school was expelled.

Both women are shocked at the easy access people have to acquiring guns in American society. For example, Levy’s colleague says she knows how to use a gun. While they are both happy with the move they have made, they acknowledge that this is a reality of life in the US. “The

world is a small place and what happens here affects us all,” says Levy. “We need a mass resolution. We need a change in society in general.”

Describing the school where the shooting occurred, Bard says: “These are good kids; they’re the ones who are going to change the world. We’ve heard of pupils who held doors open for each other, putting themselves in the line of fire during the shooting.”

While the attack is not seen as specifically anti-Semitic, CNN reported that the gunman, 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, had frequently made hate-filled comments that were anti-Semitic, homophobic and racist on a social media chat group, and called for other races to be killed. He was a member of a private Instagram group steeped in racist content, and reportedly wrote that he hates “jews, ni**ers, and immigrants”, and that

Jews want to destroy the world. “The shooting affected families from all backgrounds, and shuls have become a place of refuge for all. Most of the Jewish funerals have already taken place, and parents of the three Jewish girls spoke publicly of their shock and loss, calling for revised gun laws,” says Hasson.

In an appearance on CNN, a grief-stricken Lori Alhadeff, whose daughter Alyssa was killed, pleaded for President Donald Trump to do something to stop mass shootings: “I just spent the last two hours putting [together] the funeral arrangements for my daughter’s funeral, who’s 14! President Trump, please do something. Do something! Action! We need it now! These kids need safety now!” she cried.

“They don’t want to just be another school shooting statistic,” says Hasson. “They are standing up and saying they will make it happen themselves. If anyone is going to make a change, it is going to be this community.”

Pandor drops bombshell about Israel in Parliament

>> Continued from page 1

to the debate, where substantial focus was placed by him on all conflicts in Africa and around the world. I hope that this more nuanced and balanced approach to international conflicts becomes the principled approach by the ANC to international conflict.

“In so much that the ANC ‘stands in solidarity’ with the Palestinian cause... we need to believe that President Ramaphosa’s approach will be to return ANC policy to one of a constructive, as opposed to a radical and destructive, role in the challenges faced in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians.

“It is also important to note that in the context of the SONA debate, Reverend Kenneth Meshoe of the African Christian Democratic Party made his voice of support for Israel heard very loudly and clearly by all present.”

The Muslim community’s Media Review Network welcomed Pandor’s move, saying her “call for isolating apartheid Israel must not again be relegated to the realm of populist rhetoric”.

While some South Africans on Twitter commended Pandor, others were critical: “What is Naledi Pandor on about? Our Africa strategy, Israel and Western Sahara? ANC speakers today were oblivious to state capture and the shadow state. JZ didn’t exist,” tweeted HuffPost SA’s editor-in-chief, Pieter du Toit.

Another Twitter user, JodiAnne, wrote:

“It’s well known BDS SA worked hard last year to secure big gains at the #ANC conference, equally well known is that the #Israel boycott lobby has captured foreign policy of ANC & state, hence Naledi Pandor’s short-sighted disturbing comments.”

In an article, published in *Business Day* on January 18 under the headline ‘Israel boycott lobby has captured foreign policy of ANC and state’, Political Analysis SA’s managing director, Mzoxolo Mpolase, emphasised this point: “On the face of it, the [downgrade] decision seems a pronouncement to be expected from the ANC – since 1994 the party and its government have had a fractious but stable relationship with Israel. However, on close examination, there are traces of capture... The crowning moment came at the Nasrec conference not because of organic change within the ANC, but due to an orchestrated charade, driven and controlled by BDS.



“This matter is far more important and goes far deeper than the ideological subscription of the ANC. The economy, the rights of South Africans with business interests in Israel, religious pilgrims and students, to mention a few, will suffer not only from an ANC that failed to apply its mind on this issue, but also from the permanent delegation of South African policy on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to BDS – an unelected entity with vested anti-Israel and anti-Semitic persuasions.”

Fitness enthusiasts connect with Ramaphosa



Kim Gershuny, Anne Marie Kaplan, Claire Deegan, Lynne Hirsch, then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, Rebbeztin Natalie Altman and Trevor Manuel greet the new day on Sea Point promenade

TALI FEINBERG

“It was about being in the right place at the right time,” says Lynne Hirsch, one of the runners pictured in a photo, which has gone viral on social media, with then deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa on the Sea Point promenade, the dawn after Jacob Zuma finally resigned from the presidency.

“We were supposed to go for a hike on the mountain, but a last-minute change of plan meant we landed up on the promenade, when we saw Ramaphosa and former finance minister Trevor Manuel stroll past,” continues Hirsch, who is pictured to the left of the new president.

She is part of an exercise group called Train for Gain, run by Kim Gershuny (pictured in purple on the left). It’s an exercise group for women of all fitness levels which allows them to exercise in the safety of numbers while enjoying Cape Town’s beautiful scenery.

They got more than they bargained for when they saw the politicians, and at first were hesitant to approach them. But eventually Hirsch helped everyone to pluck up the courage, and quickly arranged the photo. “This is a moment in history, and we need to capture it!” she told the others.

The two men were “so incredibly humble, gracious and full of humility – one of the people. There were hardly any bodyguards and no flashing lights. They may have been up all night waiting for Zuma’s resignation, but there they were at 06:00, smiling and enjoying our beautiful city,” says Hirsch.



“My family are dedicated South Africans, with a business run by three generations which has been in this country for five decades. While we may have faced tough times, moments like these show hope for the future.”

While the politicians were very interactive, they didn’t mention politics. For Hirsch, it felt like coming full circle, as she had been at the Grand Parade when Nelson Mandela gave his first public speech after being released from prison, while the microphone was held by Ramaphosa. The 28th anniversary of that momentous event was celebrated on February 11.

“My family are dedicated South Africans, with a business run by three generations

which has been in this country for five decades. While we may have faced tough times, moments like these show hope for the future,” says Hirsch.

The moment was extra meaningful as it was the day of her father’s Yartzeit, and she hopes his qualities of menshlikheit and integrity will be the basis of Ramaphosa’s administration.

Rebbeztin Natalie Altman, pictured to the president’s left, says that when she ran past Ramaphosa and wished him good morning, he was relaxed and warm. “I got the feeling that he wanted to be among the people. The Sea Point promenade is accessible to all and in that way is a great leveller. Anyone can meet their new president.”

While she received messages from around the world after the photo went viral, it also left her feeling slightly vulnerable, especially when people on Twitter questioned why she was running in a denim skirt, or when other Jews asked why she allowed a man to touch her shoulders – which she felt was a necessary courtesy in the moment.

“In an interview with Talk Radio 702, I said it was wonderful that the president had ‘come out of his ivory tower’, but someone responded that Sea Point is still the ivory tower,” explains Altman.

A German runner from their group took the photo, so that her South African friends could all be in the frame. The picture was snapped on the first of Adar, which Altman believes was not coincidental. “In life, everything is interconnected. The energy of the month of Adar is that of freedom and literally a change of power, as seen in the story of Purim. It is a time of happiness and purpose, and a season of miracles.”

Rabbi Pini Hecht was in for good fortune when he and his cycling group bumped into Ramaphosa the very next day on the promenade. He was also on his bike, riding just a few hours before his swearing-in as president.

Sharing his excitement on Facebook, Rabbi Hecht wrote: “Had the honour of meeting our new president – what a gentleman! Really approachable and warm. I used the opportunity to congratulate him and offer him a blessing for success on behalf of our community.”

On Tuesday, Ramaphosa walked from Gugulethu Sports Complex to Athlone Stadium with a crowd of jovial fitness enthusiasts. “This walk, for me, is invigorating,” Ramaphosa told Eyewitness News.

“It starts off my day positively. I have positive thoughts in my head. I use the walk to think through the issues that happened yesterday and the issues for the following day.”

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It’s all about exemplary leadership

In a week, it feels as if the whole country has changed and, for the most part, we are all still pretty euphoric. I personally get a kick out of hearing people refer to “President Ramaphosa”. It is exciting having a leader who understands leadership, appears to truly care about this country and its people, and can see a clear way forward.

It remains to be seen how our new president deals with the South Africa-Israel issues, but even then, I believe he tends more towards creating peace between Israelis and Palestinians than cutting off Israel from South Africa. He is that kind of man.

Okay, so some of you may be suggesting I take off my rose-tinted glasses and recognise that this is no easy road ahead and that President Ramaphosa is far from perfect.

I get it, but after what felt like an interminable time under the corrupt leadership of Jacob Zuma, allow me this feeling of euphoria, at least for a while.

I have heard the Ramaphosa doomsayers, who’ve criticised him for having kept quiet about Zuma (whom he clearly knew was corrupt) while in his Cabinet, and having allowed him to keep on destroying this country. This is true, but as deputy president, would it have been better for him to create a ruckus and have to leave his position? I don’t think so, but feel free to disagree.

My own interactions with Ramaphosa have only made me respect him.

In the late 1990s, when I was a reporter on the *Saturday Star*, I heard he had become a volunteer policeman. I contacted him and asked to go out on the beat with him for a story. He assured me that I could, but said the timing wasn’t right for him.

A month or so later, I was at a dinner party one weekend when my cellphone rang. The caller said: “Hi Peta, this is Cyril. I am sorry I am phoning so late.” My head was not in work mode and I had no idea who I was speaking to, so I asked: “Cyril who?” He didn’t miss a beat and went on to apologise to me, saying *The Sunday Times* had found out he was a volunteer cop and would be running a piece that mentioned it. He assured me he had not spoken to that newspaper about it, but he just wanted to let me know before I saw it.

Sure enough, there was a mention in the newspaper the next day and he was true to his word.

That, coupled with a few other experiences I’ve had, showed me his true character. I have been a journalist for many years and, trust me, that is not the way most politicians treat the average journalist.

The question of whether he should have been brave enough to stick his neck out earlier brings me to another leader. Sticking your neck out as a leader is a tough choice because your flock is not obligated to follow you.

I have written in previous columns of how most people choose the path of least resistance because it is easier and they don’t have to be brave and take the criticism when it inevitably comes.

Our own Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein showed courage in publicly standing up against Zuma. While many of us applauded him, he received a great deal of criticism. Other leaders within and outside of the community said he was endangering our future by standing up as our spiritual leader against the country’s president and the government. People said it would make the government turn against the Jews.

The ruling party stopped inviting him to ANC or government events, when he had always been invited before.

In his office, he has photographs with former president Thabo Mbeki at his inauguration as chief rabbi. He also has a photograph of former president Nelson Mandela shortly before he became chief rabbi. He even had a photograph of Zuma, which has long since been taken down. I tell you this only to show you that he has never opposed the government before and had a healthy respect for the country’s leadership.

But when he witnessed yet another blatant act of corruption, he didn’t wait for other religious or faith leaders, or our own communal leaders, to stand up and say “no”. He stood up on a platform and told the world that he opposes the Zuma government. He called on Zuma to step down.

He didn’t just write articles. He didn’t just voice his opinions among the interfaith leaders. He didn’t just say it to our community. He, along with other activist leaders, led a mass public march against Zuma and spoke a few times in front of tens of thousands of South Africans, telling them Zuma must go.

He had no other leader to lean on, but he did it anyway. And it can’t have been easy when those invitations stopped coming. It can’t have been easy to take people telling him he was going to harm us by doing this.

But he didn’t back down.

Now we know that finally, the ANC leadership heard the nation’s cries that we have had enough of Zuma. They witnessed the protests. They heard the loud voices that encouraged the rest. They eventually accepted that the country wanted a corrupt-free leader and a government that would rule out the treachery of state capture. Did they hear our chief rabbi?

I don’t know, but his was one of those loud voices and I salute him for being brave by standing up and demanding a value-based, moral leader to run this country. Here’s hoping he, and all of us South Africans, get just that.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Dateline: Middle East

Can Netanyahu become the longest-serving Israeli leader?



PAULA SLIER

The next Israeli parliamentary elections must be held by November 5, 2019. If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu can remain in office until then, he will be Israel’s longest-serving prime minister, overtaking the state’s founder, David Ben-Gurion. The question is: Can he?

Over the years, Netanyahu has survived many political storms. But now one of his confidantes has agreed to provide testimony on behalf of the state over alleged corrupt dealings the prime minister was involved in. A year-long investigation also concluded last week, with Israeli police recommending that Netanyahu be indicted on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust. The prime minister is accused of allegedly receiving about \$280 000 (R3.3 million) in gifts, in return for political favours, and of making a secret pact with an Israeli publisher for favourable coverage of him and his wife.

Mandelblit, a former Netanyahu ally, is known for taking his time in making decisions – something Netanyahu is banking on because the longer the investigations continue, the more chance he has of seeing out his current term in office.

Netanyahu continues to deny any wrongdoing, insisting that he’s the victim of a “media witch hunt” co-ordinated by the left, the police and those who want him out of office. His supporters have lined up behind him.

But recent polls show that the majority of Israelis believe the police version of events and not Netanyahu’s, and think he is corrupt and should resign. Still, the same polls reveal, his ruling Likud party has not lost support but, in fact, has strengthened.

Despite police having announced in August last year that Netanyahu was a suspect in two cases, he has nonetheless consistently polled as Israel’s favourite candidate for prime minister – a good 10 points ahead of his nearest rival.

The prime minister doesn’t refute the facts published by the police, but it’s the interpretation of those facts that makes all the difference. It begs the question: When is it okay to receive gifts as a prime minister and when does a gift become a bribe?

Still, the police can only recommend. It’s the attorney-general, Avichai Mandelblit, who has to decide whether to indict Netanyahu or not. For most of last year, protestors gathered outside Mandelblit’s Petah Tikva home, calling for the prime minister’s resignation. Those protests have since moved to Tel Aviv but, to date have failed to attract huge numbers.

Mandelblit, a former Netanyahu ally, is known for taking his time in making decisions – something Netanyahu is banking on because the longer the investigations continue, the more chance he has of seeing out his current term in office.



Here opinions are split as some Israeli observers insist Netanyahu will be able to survive until the next elections, while others point out that the attorney-general has overseen every step so far and could therefore make up his mind quite quickly.

All of this is taking place against the backdrop of rising tensions on the Israel-Syria border. When war looms, Israelis rally around their government, especially the tough-talking Netanyahu, who has positioned himself as the only Israeli leader capable of protecting the country against the Iranian nuclear threat.

No doubt Tehran and its growing influence, particularly in Syria, is of real concern to Israelis, but it is also likely that Netanyahu has been hyping up the Iranian threat so as to deflect attention away from the growing list of corruption charges he faces.

Even among those Israelis who don’t support him, he is seen as a tried and tested leader so that, should Israel suddenly find itself embroiled in a new war on its northern border – a scenario that is steadily becoming all too real – most of the population would feel more secure having him at the helm.

For now, the prime minister’s right wing coalition partners are sticking with him, and they’re unlikely to budge for as long as their political future is secure. Recent polls show they have nothing to worry about and that if elections were held today in Israel, the coalition government would still have the majority.

Within the Likud party itself, no one is openly challenging Netanyahu’s leadership, so politically he is not worried.

The timing also plays into his hands because, should Netanyahu end up being brought to court, a very lengthy trial will distract him from dealing with the affairs of state – a situation which no one in Israel wants to see, particularly when the security situation is so delicate.

Still, there are those who argue that the investigations are taking their toll on the prime minister and making it tougher for him to focus his attention and run the country. Even so, it is difficult to prove that Netanyahu’s decision-making skills have been affected by the endless corruption scandals that have dogged him, in particular over the past two years.

If there is good news in all this, it’s that Israel’s democracy functions. Should Netanyahu ultimately be found guilty, he’ll be the second Israeli prime minister to be sent to jail, after Ehud Olmert spent 16 months in jail, from February 2016 to July 2017.

Netanyahu will, of course, do everything he can to prevent this, but even if he manages to buy a little more time as prime minister, it’s far from clear how his current tenure will end – in prison or back in office.

• *Paula Slieber is the Middle East Bureau Chief of Russia Today (RT), the founder and CEO of Newshound Media and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Woman in Leadership Award of the South African Absa Jewish Achievers.*

Hope is restored for our nation

OPINION



**CHIEF RABBI
DR WARREN
GOLDSTEIN**

We are witnessing history. South Africa, as a young democracy of just more than 20 years, has for the second time in our short democratic history removed a sitting president from office.

What is so significant is that the two presidents have been removed from office through democratic processes in a peaceful, legal way. This is how a true constitutional democracy functions. In particular, the removal of former president Jacob Zuma was brought about by the combined forces of a free society: an independent judiciary, a feisty press, robust opposition parties and an engaged citizenry. We can be proud of, and inspired by, the vibrancy and strength of the democratic and constitutional processes of our country.

What is even more inspiring is that Zuma was removed as president because of the horrific corruption and ghastly state capture which he and his cronies have presided over. His removal is a great victory for the forces of ethics and decency.

President Cyril Ramaphosa was democratically elected as the president of the ANC. He was favoured over

Zuma’s preferred candidate after openly campaigning on a message of rooting out corruption, bringing integrity back to South Africa and prosecuting all those guilty of the heinous crimes of attempting to steal the country and all its resources from its people. There is now a spirit of hope and optimism for the future of our country.

During the past two years, as more details emerged of Zuma’s corruption and state capture, I agonised over what to do. As Jews, given our long history of persecution, we always feel vulnerable when criticising government.

There were community members who counselled an approach of neutrality. After weighing up all the factors, I decided that, as the Jewish community of South Africa, we needed to fight against the corruption, and openly called for Zuma’s removal from power.

Morally, it was the right approach to speak out for justice and integrity, but it was also clear that unless corruption and state capture were defeated, the future for all – including the Jewish community – was bleak.

And we have the blessing of living in a free and open democracy, which gives us the opportunity to be involved in national issues.

And so, I joined in the protest movement against state capture and encouraged our community to do so. Many of us joined the protest

marches to the Union Buildings and to Parliament and other places.

We made our voices heard, and so we should have. That is what it means to live in a truly free democracy. We must never be afraid to speak truth to power. We must never be intimidated. We can never take refuge in apathy.

On the other hand, we cannot descend into cynicism and narrowness. Let us embrace our role as a vibrant and proud community



within the broader South African society, committed to positively making a difference to our society.

During this time, we also changed the prayer for the government which is recited in our shuls – because it was impossible to pray for the welfare of a corrupt president. And so we prayed that G-d should bless South Africa with “a president who is morally worthy of this nation of heroes”.

We can now, as a community, revert to the original wording of the prayer for the government, and can, in good conscience, pray for the welfare of the

president.

But that doesn’t mean that the struggle for justice and integrity is over. It doesn’t mean that all the problems of South Africa have been solved. There is a long journey ahead.

There are many pitfalls and obstacles, but finally, we are moving in the right direction. We must give our full support to Ramaphosa, but also hold him accountable.

We have a moral duty to continue

us apply this lesson to what we have just experienced in South Africa.

The overturning of reality is breathtaking and one can feel the hand of G-d in these events. The situation has been transformed from one of darkness and despondency to one of hope and optimism.

The country is awash with relief and elation at the turn of events. A short while ago, the Guptas were the most powerful people in South Africa. Now Ajay is a fugitive from justice. Zuma and his cronies presided with impunity over the looting of state assets – now he is out of power and awaits his legal fate.

Cabinet ministers will no longer be appointed to sign off on deals to enrich a few families, but rather on who is best qualified to serve the people of this country, according to Ramaphosa.

This overturning of reality began with a handful of votes. The fate and future of our country turned on such a small margin of victory.

Hashem guided us through these weeks to an outcome which is so full of hope. Let us give thanks to Him for this.

May Hashem bless President Ramaphosa to lead this nation of heroes with abounding success, and may He bless us that this be a new dawn for South Africa, heralding a future filled with prosperity, dignity and opportunity for all.

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Sexual abuse and the concept of teshuva

OPINION

WENDY HENDLER AND ROZANNE SACK

A sexual offender is held to account. He or she has molested numerous children in their teaching position. The community shouts “Can’t the offender be allowed to do teshuva?” Hearing this, the victim feels a pang of guilt and thinks: “Am I a cruel and vengeful person? Should I not believe in the principle of teshuva? Should I just let this go?” There is an automatic assumption by the community that a person will have done teshuva. It follows, then, that the offender should be welcomed back into the community and fully reintegrated with a clean slate.

But what is teshuva and how often is it completed in its entirety, as mandated by Jewish law?

The steps of teshuva require the offender to:

1. Acknowledge that he or she has committed a wrong and to acknowledge the specific details of the wrong they have done;
2. Feel remorse;
3. Confess publicly;
4. Ask for forgiveness from the victim;
5. Make restitution to the extent that it is possible to do so; and
6. Refrain from committing the wrongful act the next time the opportunity arises (Rambam).

This is not an easy task for anyone to accomplish, especially when it involves deeply-rooted, recurring behaviour. However, the accused must go through these steps to be accorded the renewed status of being in good standing with the community. Being punished by the civil authorities is not sufficient, and the essential requirements of teshuva remain in place. The point is not just about punishment but also about justice and deterrence.

Let’s look at the case in London of Mendy Levy, a man convicted and jailed for three years in 2013 for sexual assault on a teenager. Levy recently donated a Sefer Torah to Chabad in Golders Green. How do we think about teshuva in relation to this man?

According to Dr Shira Berkovits, director of Sacred Spaces, a cross-denominational initiative to create systemic solutions to abuse in Jewish institutions. “Humans cannot know what is in another’s heart, but we can look for signs that the teshuva is insincere, incomplete or being used as a manipulative tool to gain sympathy or access.”

So, we can – and must – take stock of the external signs. In the case of Levy, the following is apparent:

1. He did not ever acknowledge that he repeatedly sexually assaulted a young girl from the age of 14 to 20;
2. He denied all responsibility for his misdeeds, claiming it was a consensual affair;
3. He did not confess publicly;
4. He did not ask the victim for forgiveness;
5. He was extremely reluctant to make restitution, only offering small amounts after intense pressure was put on him by his

rabbi; and

6. He did not manifest any signs of remorse, denying any wrongdoing on his part.

In failing to adhere to the very clearly stipulated steps to teshuva, Levy showed himself to be undeserving of re-acceptance into the community. And his donation of a Sefer Torah was nothing more than a highly manipulative attempt to raise his status in the community. It should never have been welcomed.

Says Berkovits: “The principles of admission and accountability articulated by the Rambam are at the core of sex offender treatment. True repentance and relapse prevention in cases of abuse means taking full responsibility for one’s actions, which may include turning oneself in to the authorities, apologising to victims and seeking qualified assistance to prevent relapse.

“A private apology to a clergyman or a perfunctory declaration of teshuva is simply insufficient. If individuals minimise prior actions, blame the victim or otherwise justify the abuse, they have not accepted responsibility.”

Berkovits highlights the typical behaviour of offenders who refuse to accept responsibility: “They are not on the professed road to recovery, for if they were, they would be the ones advocating for safeguards and support to help ensure that they



never again harm another victim.”

While it is a noble quality to want to be forgiving and to give second chances, especially in light of the fundamental Jewish principle of teshuva, the sexual predator is a completely different animal.

In 2012, an essay titled *Sexual misconduct and the question of rehabilitation and teshuva* was posted online by Nachum Klafter, a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and

director of psychotherapy training at the University of Cincinnati in Ohio. He made mention of the following characteristics displayed by a sexual predator:

1. Severe arrogance and lack of regard for others in general;
2. Absolutely no remorse – they often feign remorse, but their behaviour – for example, continuing to lie, and threatening and intimidating their victims – reveals that, in fact,

they feel no remorse;

3. Make no attempt to stop their behaviour;
4. Fabricate allegations against their victims;
5. Threaten victims with retribution, humiliation and lawsuits in order to intimidate them and prevent them from reporting the situation;
6. Extremely self-righteous and indignant;

Continued on page 16>>

How do you feel about our new president?

JORDAN MOSHE

With President Cyril Ramaphosa now in the hot seat, there is a sense of the dawning of a new and positive era in the country. The SA Jewish report canvassed members of the community in various provinces to see what they were feeling about our new leader and what they expected from him.

“I now have revised hope to achieve the dream and potential South Africa had at the dawn of democracy and to achieve the country we all hoped it would be. We all wish him the best of luck as no one would like to see South Africa fail. I am excited and optimistic!” – **Lisa Schewitz, East London**

“I am much happier with Ramaphosa as president, but I have certain reservations regarding his attitude towards Israel and BDS.” – **Mike Levy, Johannesburg**

“As our South African Jewish population constitutes a tiny percentage, we maintain steadfast positivity of a Ramaphosa rescue. Severe corruption exists, municipal malgovernance exists, economic failure and insecurity exist. A complete swing to rescue our country of all these ills needs decent, honest governance which will lead to stability and prevent young Jews from fleeing to greener pastures.” – **Megan Kotzen, Bethal, Mpumalanga**

“I am nearly as excited to see Ramaphosa elected as I am to see Zuma’s presidency come to an end. I will be looking to the new president to rebuild confidence in South Africa’s vibrant and

strong democracy, and to ensure that the rule of law is respected, and would like South Africans to be feel proud to be South African again.” – **Rabbi Greg Alexander, Cape Town**

“His election has been the long-awaited multivitamin that a lethargic South Africa has been waiting for. This is the first time in a long time that I feel proud to be a South African and I am hoping to continue to hold my head up high.” – **Michelle Rosenthal, East London**

“It feels as if we now have hope in abundance after an era of hopelessness. President Ramaphosa’s leadership is our chance to rediscover hope and optimism in our beautiful country. Our expectation should be that integrity will be the norm and not the exception.”

– **Beverley May, Cape Town**

“I’m feeling very positive about his election. I expect him to root out all those connected to the Zuma-Gupta corruption saga. I’m looking forward to positive growth in our economy.” – **Lorna Falkson, Johannesburg**

“President Ramaphosa offers a new wave of optimism for a country that has suffered so heavily at the hands

of Jacob Zuma and his corrupt cronies. I want to see him appoint trustworthy ministers, focus on economic growth, put measures in place to reduce extremely high levels of youth unemployment and stand by his promises made in the State of the Nation speech.” – **Nicole Lee, Cape Town**

“This is a positive move for the country. Apart

from some of his past indiscretions, it seems to me that Ramaphosa has the best interests of the country at heart. His ascent should certainly be gratifying to those who have disparaged the administration in the past.” – **Kevin Levy, Johannesburg**

“It’s early days, but he seems a gutte mensch. I’d like to see our currency stabilised and education and employment improve. I hope he brings back faith and confidence in a country we love so very much.” – **Rochelle Winer, Durban**

“Ramaphosa’s election as president is a great thing. He is one person, and we are the people. It is now, more than ever, necessary for us to take responsibility for the state of our nation. I would like to see his government ensuring that all South Africans are safe and secure, regardless of skin colour, gender orientation, faith or cultural identification, or political belief.” – **Jacqui Benson, Cape Town**

“My thoughts on Ramaphosa are less about the man than that his inauguration as president is an overt and deliberate victory for democracy in South Africa. By expelling a corrupt system and giving way for a potential great leader, supported and championed by the nation, we have affirmed our democratic institutions.” – **Gregg Horwitz, Johannesburg**

“This is a good thing. Given his close ties to Nelson Mandela, along with his known value system and attitude to big business, I believe he is going to do the most amazing things for this country. I want to see him fire and prosecute the corrupt, put capable and moral people in the right positions and attract foreign investment.” – **Mark Sebba, Cape Town**

“Drastic times in our country call for drastic measures, so I am very pleased that Ramaphosa has replaced Zuma. I hope he dismisses all corrupt MPs and replaces them with only trustworth, qualified individuals.” – **Clifford Bernitz, Middelburg, Mpumalanga**



‘My sister was abducted when my parents made aliya from SA’

TALI FEINBERG

When Basil and Riva Sandler made aliya in 1949, they left comfortable lives in South Africa to help build the Jewish state. Basil, from Worcester near Cape Town, and Riva (nee Kretzmer), from Johannesburg, settled near Hadera. Later, they built a house and were expecting their first child.

But their new life was shattered when Riva gave birth to her daughter, whom the family call Ilana, at a maternity home in Hadera in June 1951. “Doctors told my mother that the baby was ill, and the next day they said she had died. They told my parents: ‘You are young and will have more children,’” says Orna Sandler Klein, who was born five years later, and who, as an adult, has taken up investigating her family’s story.

Shocked and frightened new olim who believed in the inherent goodness of the Jewish state, Basil and Riva left the maternity home without their daughter, a birth certificate or a death certificate. They went on to have a son – Riva travelled specially to South Africa for the birth because of her trauma with Ilana – and then two more children.

This story is not unique – it is part of what is known as the “Yemenite children’s affair”, which continues to be discussed and debated by the Israeli public and press.

Growing up, the children were told about Ilana, but their parents never looked further. However, when the child would have turned 18, army call-up officers came looking for her. The family started investigating



Orna Sandler Klein with her mother, Riva (since deceased) at her book launch

why this would have happened and Basil’s brother, a doctor, found Riva’s medical record booklet.

However, the history of the pregnancy, birth and supposed death of the baby were missing – torn out. All the information before and after was there. Dr Sandler was told that records of the maternity home were transferred to the Hillel Yaffe hospital in Hadera but had been lost in a “fire”.

As an adult, Orna has taken on trying to find out what happened to her sister. She even wrote a fictional account of the story, in which she meets her sister, who had been taken to America. But in reality, Orna has found no trace of her. “There are no records, no name, no documents,” she says.

This story is not unique – it is part of what is known as the “Yemenite children’s affair”, which continues to be discussed and debated by

the Israeli public and press. Just three weeks ago, *The Times of Israel* reported: “Israeli authorities approved a request by families of children who went missing decades ago in the so-called Yemenite children affair, and will issue a warrant allowing the exhumation of remains from 17 graves for the purpose of genetic testing.”

The article goes on to explain that since the 1950s, more than 1 000 families – mostly immigrants from Yemen, but also dozens from the Balkans, North Africa and other Middle Eastern countries – have alleged that their children were systematically kidnapped from Israeli hospitals and put up for adoption, sometimes abroad.

This is not a small number of families, so how is it that this controversy is not known about or understood in the Jewish world, and could this accusation of a state-wide operation of “stolen children” be true? Furthermore, could the child of South Africans Riva and Basil Sandler have been abducted?

In his research on the topic, Daniel Barnett, who has had a long-time interest in these events, explains the context: “It’s 1948 and the new State of Israel is created. It is in the middle of fighting for its very existence. Israel begins a co-ordinated programme to receive 700 000 Jewish refugees from these Arab countries. At the same time, the state absorbs thousands of Holocaust survivors, and sees its population almost double over five years.

“It is not easy. The refugees speak a wide array of languages, and, in addition to suffering trauma in almost all cases, they come from a variety of countries with widely varying customs. Many are poor, illiterate and unaccustomed to the bureaucracy of a modern state. It is in this context that we find a complicated and difficult episode in Israel’s history – the disappearance of thousands of Jewish babies in the 1950s, possibly at the hands of other Jews, and possibly at the encouragement or even with the co-operation of the Jewish state.”

Just like in the Sandler story, “the most common version of what happened is that, soon after arrival

in Israel, a baby or toddler was taken from their parents to be put in a nursery or hospital, under the guise that these stone buildings were healthier than the tents and shacks of the Ma’abarot (refugee camps)”, explained Barnett.

“Later, the child’s parents were told that their child had died or was simply no longer there. And in almost all cases, the parents never received additional reliable or official information about the fate of their child.”

Among Israeli Yemenites, it is difficult to find a family that does not have a story of a missing child. Many of these families believe – and, in a number of cases it has been proven through DNA tests or paper trails – that their children were taken and given to childless Ashkenazi Jewish Israelis of East European descent (who possibly couldn’t conceive babies themselves), including Holocaust survivors.

“The families of the missing children, who now would be between 65 and 70 years old, will not give up.”

In his extensive research, Barnett found abundant testimony to back up this version of events. For example, Naomi Giat, who is now 92, came to Israel via Operation Magic Carpet. When her plane landed in Lod in central Israel, it was dark, cold and hailing. As Naomi reached the tarmac at the bottom of the stairs, a waiting nurse told her she needed to take her baby, Yosef. Naomi protested but the nurse insisted, saying the baby was ill and needed tests. It was the last time she saw her son. Later, the nurse came to her tent and told her that Yosef had been taken to another transit camp. Two months later, Naomi and her husband Yehiel were told he had died.

There was no death certificate or grave. Naomi pined for Yosef, keeping and washing his nightgown for years. She still lights a candle on Friday

evenings in his memory. “I just want to know what happened to him,” she says in lilting, Arabic-accented Hebrew.

There are other testimonies of children who have found their birth parents. Tziona Heiman confronted her Ashkenazi parents with suspicions that she was adopted. They admitted that she had been selected from a Jerusalem hospital. Their neighbour, Yigal Allon, a famous Israeli general, had – in their words – given them the girl as a “birthday present”. Heiman later found her biological parents.

Just like the Sandlers, almost all the parents of the children who disappeared were given a recruitment order from the Israel Defence Forces when they would have been 18. When this started to arise in the mid 1960s, it suggested that the state was unaware that the children were dead – or, the parents say, actively knew that they were alive.

Stories such as these can tear a society apart, and indeed, they have rattled Israel to the core. But there is still no official version of events. “In brief, the official line from the Israeli government was, and has always been, that it’s all an elaborate hoax. Their argument is that through heroic self-sacrifice, a small community of mostly European Jews took in a very large number of Jewish immigrants, mostly from Muslim countries.

In response to public anger, the Israeli government established three different commissions of inquiry between 1967 and 2001. However, by law, these commissions had no subpoena power, were closed to the public and had no public oversight to ensure balance.

About two years ago, a prominent TV journalist, Rina Matzliach, took up the story. She conducted a lengthy interview with Orna Sandler Klein, who went on to meet President Reuven Rivlin to discuss the issue.

There is hope. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has met the families and may soon announce the missing children as a fact. And only last week, two sisters were reunited – one had been adopted in the 1950s. “The families of the missing children, who now would be between 65 and 70 years old, will not give up,” says Orna.

“My view is that the state would never cover up a scandal for private people,” she adds. “Which means that with the level of secrecy we have seen, something very bad happened in Israel.”

She knows of at least one other South African family who are looking for a son.

Her mother, Riva, passed away some months ago, never knowing what happened to Ilana. Basil, who is now 90, says it gets harder, not easier, as he now wonders more often about his lost daughter, and wishes he had questioned what happened at the time.

Orna’s message to the South African Jewish community and the whole diaspora is this: “Wake up and say: ‘Something bad happened.’ Let’s find out what it was and end this. If you adopted kids from Israel, check it out. You don’t have to be family or friends with these families who lost their children, but you need to help us find closure.”



THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

State witness and editor testify in Bezeq case said to involve Netanyahu

MICHAEL BACHNER

Several people testified on Wednesday in the Bezeq corruption case, dubbed Case 4000, including the editor-in-chief of a major Israeli news site and communications ministry director Shlomo Filber, who had signed a deal the day before to turn state witness and possibly incriminate Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the affair.

Filber has reportedly agreed to testify that he was instructed by the premier to provide regulatory benefits to telephone company Bezeq in exchange for Bezeq's chief shareholder, Shaul Elovitch, giving Netanyahu and his family positive coverage on the Walla news site, which he owns.

In exchange for his testimony, Filber reportedly demanded that he not serve time in prison – a provision that the police approved.

Filber, who has been remanded until Thursday, arrived at the Lod headquarters of Israel Police's anti-fraud unit Lahav 433 to give his first testimony as a state witness.

Meanwhile, Aviram Elad, the editor of Walla, gave testimony at the Israel Securities Authority (ISA) over the alleged tilting of the website's coverage in favour of the prime minister.

Other senior figures at Walla, including news department head Michal Klein and former chief editor Yinon Magal, testified at

the ISA office on Tuesday, Ynet reported.

Netanayhu and his wife, Sara, are also expected to be questioned in the probe, reportedly as suspects.

Netanyahu was acting communications minister at the time that several allegedly illicit deals were made with Elovitch. One of these included helping Bezeq buy the satellite cable provider Yes, overriding anti-trust issues raised by ministry officials. The prime minister, who is reportedly suspected of furthering that deal, denies any wrongdoing.

Last week, police recommended that Netanyahu be indicted for fraud, breach of trust and bribery in two other cases.

In Case 1000, Netanyahu and his wife are alleged to have received illicit gifts from billionaire benefactors, notably the Israeli-born Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan, totalling NIS 1 million (R3.3 billion). In return, Netanyahu is alleged by police to have intervened on Milchan's behalf in matters relating to legislation, business dealings and visa arrangements.

Case 2000 involves a suspected illicit *quid pro quo* deal between Netanyahu and *Yedioth Ahronoth* publisher Arnon Mozes that would have seen the prime minister weaken a rival daily, the Sheldon Adelson-backed *Israel Hayom*, in return for more favourable coverage from *Yedioth*.

The prime minister has also been linked

indirectly to Case 3000, a large investigation into suspected corruption surrounding a multibillion-shekel purchase of naval vessels and submarines from a German shipbuilder. While Netanyahu has not been named as a suspect, close associates of his, including two personal aides, have been arrested or questioned.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing in all the cases.



The communications ministry's director-general, Shlomo Filber, arrives for a hearing at the Rishon Lezion Magistrate's Court this week

EGYPT'S PRESIDENT SAYS COUNTRY 'SCORED A GOAL' WITH ISRAEL GAS DEAL

AP AND TOI STAFF

Egypt's president says his country "scored a goal" by signing a \$15 billion (R175 billion) deal with an Israeli company to get natural gas that will help turn Egypt into a regional energy hub.

Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said on Wednesday that the project "has a lot of advantages" for Egyptians.

Delek Drilling and its US partner, Noble Energy, signed the agreement on Monday to sell a total of 64 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas over a 10-year period to Egyptian company Dolphinus Holdings. The gas is expected to start flowing next year.

On Monday, the partners in Israel's Tamar and Leviathan natural gas fields, including a unit of US Noble Energy Inc and Delek Drilling LP, signed \$15 billion in deals to export natural gas to Egypt over 10 years.

In a filing to the Tel Aviv Stock

Exchange, Delek Drilling LP announced that Noble Energy Mediterranean and its partners in the fields signed accords with Egypt's Dolphinus Holdings Ltd. for the sale of some 64 BCM of natural gas from the two fields.

One accord calls for the sale of 3.5 BCM of natural gas annually from the Leviathan field, for a total of 32 BCM, the filing said, with the partners estimating the total revenues from the sale to reach \$7.5 billion (R88 billion).

They signed the same accord for the sale of natural gas from the Tamar field.

Supply from Tamar will start as soon as the infrastructure for its transport is in place, the companies said, while that from Leviathan will start as soon as production starts from the well. Supply will continue until the amounts agreed upon are supplied or until December 2030, whichever comes first, the companies said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the deal "historic" and said it would yield billions to benefit education, health and welfare.

Delek said the partners were considering various options for the supply of the gas to Egypt, including via a Jordanian-Israeli pipeline that is currently being built or the use of the existing East Mediterranean Gas pipeline.

Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, in 1979, but popular support for Palestinians runs high in that country.



HALEY TO ABBAS: US WANTS A PEACE DEAL BUT WILL NOT 'CHASE AFTER YOU'

ERIC CORTELLESSA

US ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said on Tuesday that Washington would not "chase" the Palestinians to the negotiating table with Israel, following Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas's speech to the UN Security Council.

Speaking in front of US President Donald Trump's top two Middle East peace negotiators, Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt, Abbas excoriated the US president's decision last year to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and set in motion plans to move the US embassy there, calling it "unlawful".

Abbas then called for a multilateral international effort to secure Palestinian statehood, thus removing the US from its traditional role as the key mediator in negotiations.

The White House, however, said shortly after his remarks that it still planned to push ahead with finalising its peace plan and presenting it at a later date.

Haley also addressed the UN Security Council on Tuesday. Although Abbas left the chamber after his speech, Haley dedicated a sizeable portion of her time addressing the PA leader.

"The US stands ready to work with the Palestinian leadership," she said to Abbas. "Our negotiators are sitting

right behind me, ready to talk. But we will not chase after you. The choice, Mr President, is yours."

Earlier in her speech, she made reference to the top Palestinian negotiator's admonishment of her earlier this month to "shut up".

"I will decline the advice I was recently given by your top negotiator, Saeb Erekat," she said. "I will not shut up. Rather, I will respectfully speak some hard truths."

Haley told the Palestinians they had a choice: either go on a "path of absolutist demands, hateful rhetoric and incitement to violence" or on a "path of negotiation and compromise". The latter, she said, "remains open to the Palestinian leadership if only it is courageous enough to take it".

"You can choose to denounce the US, reject its role in peace talks and pursue punitive measures against Israel in international forums like the UN. I assure you that that path will get the Palestinian people exactly nowhere towards the achievement of their aspirations," she went on. "Or, you can choose to put aside your anger about the location of our embassy and move forward with us towards a negotiated compromise that holds great potential for improving the lives of the Palestinian people."

Israel's ambassador to the UN also castigated Abbas for his speech.

UN chief warns that Israel-Hezbollah war would be ‘worst nightmare’

TOI STAFF

UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres warned this week of the devastating consequences of a fresh war between Israel and Hezbollah, calling such a scenario a “worst nightmare”.

The statement came as tensions between Israel and the Lebanese terror group have ramped up in recent weeks over Iran’s efforts to entrench itself along Israel’s border, as well as over a maritime dispute regarding offshore gas fields.

“The worst nightmare would be if there is a direct confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah... the level of destruction in Lebanon would be devastating, so there are major points of concern around

this situation,” *Reuters* reported Guterres as saying.

Guterres said that while both sides had said they were not seeking a conflict, “sometimes a spark is enough to unleash this kind of a conflict”.

“I am deeply worried about hard-to-foresee escalations in the whole region,” he added.

The UN chief’s warning came just a day after Hezbollah threatened to target Israel’s Mediterranean natural gas rigs in a future conflict, the latest in a string of such threats.

The Iran-backed terror group, which has sought to position itself as Lebanon’s vanguard against Israel, released a video that showed what appeared to be drilling platforms floating above

Israel’s gas fields, with targeting sights superimposed on the images.

The video, aired by Israel’s *Hadashot* TV news, also included quotes from Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah, who warned on Friday that the group would retaliate against any Israeli strike on Lebanon by attacking Israel’s offshore platforms.

Last week, Lebanon issued an offshore oil and gas exploration tender for two areas along the country’s maritime border with Israel, prompting a war of words with Jerusalem, which has laid claim to one of the fields in question.

Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman called the move “very provocative” and suggested that



Israel and Hezbollah fought a month-long war in 2006.

Israeli officials have warned that in a future conflict, the army may not differentiate between Hezbollah and Lebanon. Hezbollah, regarded as a terror group by Israel and the US, is a major player in Lebanon’s government.

Tensions with Lebanon have also escalated over Israel’s construction of a border wall with Lebanon and its warnings that Iran, through Hezbollah, is turning the country into a forward base against the Jewish state.

Israeli authorities allege that Iran is setting up plants to manufacture advanced missiles in Lebanon to be used against Israel. It has vowed to act against the factories.

Palestinians denounce PA over meetings with Israeli officials

KHALED ABU TOAMEH

Recent meetings between Israeli and Palestinian Authority (PA) officials have drawn sharp criticism from Palestinian factions and activists, who are accusing the PA leadership of reneging on its pledge to “disengage” from Israel.

Last week, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted Israel’s economy minister, Eli Cohen, and his Palestinian counterpart, Abeer Odeh.

Initiated by the French, the meeting at the Elysee Palace was aimed at bolstering economic co-operation between the PA and Israel.

Another meeting sparking Palestinian anger also took place last week, when PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah met with Major-General Yoav Mordechai, government activities co-ordinator in the territories.

The UN’s special co-ordinator for the Middle East peace process, Nickolay Mladenov, participated in the meeting, which focused on ways of helping to solve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

Both meetings came on the heels of decisions taken by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Executive Committee and the Fatah Central Council to suspend ties with Israel.

Earlier this month, the PLO Executive Committee endorsed a resolution by the Fatah Central Council to take a series of measures to begin “disengaging” from Israel “at the political, security, economic and administrative levels”.



Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah

US Jewish leaders gush about visit to ‘tolerant’ United Arab Emirates

RAPHAEL AHREN

The United Arab Emirates is becoming increasingly open to embracing Israel and Jews, the heads of a large delegation of American Jewish leaders said on Sunday, after a recent four-day visit to the country.

“It was a very important and interesting visit,” said Stephen M. Greenberg, chairperson of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

“We met with everybody at the highest levels,” Greenberg said, adding that he was asked by his Emirati interlocutors not to name names. “We talked about Iran, Yemen and Qatar; we talked about extremism and they made it very clear to us that they’re very anxious to see support for the Saudis.”

At a press conference on Sunday, ahead of the conference’s annual Israel Leadership Mission in Jerusalem this week, Malcolm Hoenlein, the conference’s long-time executive vice-chairman, described a very warm welcome for the delegation, adding that the Emirates is keen on presenting itself as fighting Islamic extremism.

“The clear drive now is to a more open society, more moderation. There were places where we walked with yarmulkes and people didn’t take them off. There was never one comment, not one look at anybody at any time during the week.”

Hoenlein, who also recently visited Qatar, stressed that the Conference of Presidents made it clear to its interlocutors in the UAE that it represented neither the US administration nor the Israeli government. At the same time, he said that his organisation was being courted by many Muslim and Arab countries that are interested in improving ties with the Jewish world.

“There is a shift. This is not something people could have imagined 10 or even five years ago, how an open Arab Muslim country, almost without exception, wants to meet with us and wanted us to come. We have several invitations outstanding.”

Arab leaders are warming to the idea of engaging with Jerusalem, but feel they cannot do so publicly before an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is reached, fearing negative reactions from their citizens.



News and views from the Fed

Israeli expert on Cape Town crisis: ‘You have to go beyond natural water supply’

ILANIT CHERNICK

Israeli water expert Dr Clive Lipchin has encouraged countries facing water shortages, including South Africa, to treat water as a “stock”.

Lipchin is the director of the Arava Institute’s Center for Transboundary Water Management. He spoke at a water symposium in Johannesburg last week that was organised by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish National Fund of South Africa and the Wandile Zulu Foundation.

This week, the Cape Town Municipality announced that Day Zero – the day when water reservoirs across the city are expected to hit 13.5% of capacity and taps will be turned off – has been pushed from May 11 to July 9.

“You have to manage water as stock,” Lipchin said. “You have to think about managing water as a flux, and you have to think about water as a commodity... We want to see water as a basic human right, something that cannot be denied to people, because water is life.

“But we must also understand that water is not free, it costs a lot – not for the water, but managing water costs money, treating it, storing it, pumping water. All of that costs money.

“Without thinking of water in this way, we cannot get to a point of figuring out all the solutions that are out there... We cannot rely solely on natural water.”

Lipchin, who was born and raised in South Africa,

said: “In the mid-1990s, Israel was where Cape Town and many places are. We were in a very significant drought and all of our stocks – the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, groundwater aquifers – were all collapsing. This was a turning point for Israel.”

He said that this is when desalination came into play in Israel, adding that there are other options. “You have to go beyond natural water supply. Seventy to 80% of Israel’s drinking water supply comes from the sea [and is desalinated], but that’s not enough. You have to value every single drop of water and put it into productive use.”

Addressing the Cape Town crisis, Lipchin said he does not doubt that South Africa will be able to find a solution.

“It is happening all around the world. You can look at Israel, Australia, Spain, Singapore and Hong Kong – there are many good examples out there, and Israel is just one of them.

“It’s not a water scarcity crisis but a crisis of water management,” he added.

Other experts who addressed the conference included Dr Anthony Turton, a professor of the Centre for Environmental Management at the University of the Free State, in Bloemfontein. He said the right technology, governance and policy programmes could vastly change the situation in South Africa.

“With climate change... it’s not so much that we’re getting less water but it’s that we are losing more to evaporation.”

Dr Jeunesse Park, a visionary who pioneered greening, climate change action and permaculture food security initiatives in South Africa, highlighted the role of being a citizen and how active citizenry can be effective in saving water, like using metering. Well known environmental scientist Simon Gear addressed how messages about water – in terms of understanding and saving it – need to be communicated.

- This edited article first appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* with permission from the author.

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IDF reveals it thwarted attempted IS bombing of Australian flight

JUDAH ARI GROSS

On Wednesday, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) revealed its Military Intelligence Unit 8200 foiled an attack on a flight from Australia attempted by the Islamic State (IS) group

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in August.

“The unit provided exclusive intelligence that led to the prevention of an air attack by the IS in 2017 in Australia,” a senior IDF officer said.

“The foiling of the attack... proved Unit 8200’s position as a major player in the intelligence fight against the IS.”

Ordinarily mum on the operations of the secretive signals intelligence unit, which is similar to the American National Security Agency, the army also revealed on Wednesday that it had thwarted an Iranian cyber-attack against Israeli public and private systems, though it did not provide additional details on what was targeted and when.

“This foiling was possible thanks to the close tracking of the Iranian network’s activities,” the officer said, on condition of anonymity.

In August, Australian security forces arrested two men suspected of trying to place an



improvised explosive device on an Etihad Airways flight out of Sydney in a plot directed by the IS.

According to Australian authorities, when that attack failed, the suspects then planned to release highly toxic hydrogen sulfide gas in order to poison people. But they were arrested before their plot could advance significantly.

“This is one of the most sophisticated plots that has ever been attempted on Australian soil,” Australia’s federal police deputy commissioner, Michael Phelan, told reporters at the time.

“If it hadn’t been for the great work of our intelligence agencies and law enforcement over a very quick period of time, we could well have had a catastrophic event in this country.”

The components of the device they planned to

use, including what Phelan described as a “military-grade explosive”, were sent by a senior IS member to the men in Sydney via air cargo from Turkey. An IS commander then instructed the two men on how to assemble the device, which police have since recovered, Phelan said.

According to Australian authorities, no specific targets had been chosen for the planned hydrogen sulfide attack, though an IS member overseas had given the men suggestions about where such devices could be placed, such as crowded areas or on public transportation.

Police had no idea of the plans that were in the works until they received a tip through intelligence agencies on July 26, Phelan said. They arrested the men on July 29.

On Wednesday, the IDF said its efforts were the main reason behind the attack being foiled, which “saved dozens of innocent lives”.

Intel earmarks \$5 billion for investment in southern Israel plant

SHOSHANNA SOLOMON

US technology company Intel plans to invest a massive \$5 billion (R60 billion) to expand its Kiryat Gat chip manufacturing plant by 2020, the ministry of economy and industry said on Wednesday.

The investment plan comes on the heels of a \$6 billion (R70 billion) upgrade of the same plant in southern Israel announced by the company in 2014, to enable the production of Intel’s most advanced next-generation computer chips, reportedly the 10 nanometer chips. In return for that investment, Intel got grants of up to \$600 million (R7 billion) from Israel, as well as major tax breaks through to 2023.

The plans for the new \$5 billion (R60 billion) investment were presented to Economy Minister Eli Cohen by Intel’s management team on Wednesday. Intel intends to apply for tax benefits and grants under the Encouragement of Capital Investments Law, and a committee to review whether the firm will be eligible for benefits under the law is expected to meet in the next month, the ministry said.

“Intel’s choice to continue to significantly invest in Israel is an important sign of faith in Israel and in its economy,” Cohen said. Intel’s research and development, as well as its advanced manufacturing activities in Israel, are in line with the ministry’s strategy to increase exports and create high-quality jobs in Israel, he said.

The US chipmaker’s decision

to invest in Israel comes amid growing competition among nations to attract foreign investment – and amid concerns that a new tax reform implemented by US President Donald Trump will make it more attractive for businesses to set up and expand their activities in the US.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu set up a panel of experts earlier this year to weigh up the impact of the reform on local investments. There are 320 foreign companies operating in Israel today, according to the economy ministry.

“We see Intel as a partner on our journey,” Cohen said, adding that the company’s decision to once again invest in Israel “strengthens our economy” and employment levels. Cohen added he expected the partnership to continue in coming years.

Portugal says it wants Jews and Jewish investment in the country

TOI STAFF

Portugal wants to encourage more Jews to emigrate to the country and is encouraging Jewish investment, its secretary of state for tourism said in the US on Tuesday.

“We want a Jewish presence in Portugal,” said Ana Mendes Godinho, “and we look to Jewish investment.”

On her visit to the US, Mendes Godinho spoke with dozens of Jewish organisations, including the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the American Sephardi Federation and the Anti-Defamation League, and discussed the long historic connection of Jews to Portugal.

“As we have a vast Jewish heritage and a very ancient and profound connection to Jewish communities – we have evidence of a Jewish presence in Portugal

since 390 AD – we have identified as a priority the promotion of the Jewish legacy and of the Jewish routes in Portugal,” she said.

In 1497, following the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition, Portugal gave its Jews the choice of conversion or expulsion. The Portuguese inquisition did not officially end until 1821, by which time thousands of Jews had been killed, including 2 000 in a pogrom in Lisbon in 1506, and thousands more were forced to leave the country.

Many Jews who converted remained crypto-Jews, and today 20% of the population claims Jewish ancestry.

Mendes Godinho spoke of the impact that Portuguese Jews had throughout the world after their expulsion.

“The Jewish communities have had crucial roles in Portuguese history. For instance, Pedro



Álvares Cabral discovered Brazil, and the oldest synagogue in the US, Shearith Israel, located in New York, was founded by Portuguese Jews. This is why we have created a special law to grant Portuguese nationality to descendants of Sephardic Jews, and we have been experiencing a very high demand.”

In 2013, Portugal passed a Law of Return for Sephardic Jews and their descendants to encourage Jews to return to the country.

Last year, Portugal’s President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa told a group of Jewish leaders in New York: “Your history is our history.”

Danish petition appears likely to force vote on banning circumcision

CNAAN LIPSHIZ

Danish anti-circumcision activists have collected nearly 20 000 signatures out of the 50 000 they need to create a bill proposing to ban non-medical circumcision for boys.

With another five months to collect the remaining 30 000 signatures, the petition by the group, Denmark Intact, appears likely to reach its goal of forcing a vote in Parliament that would set 18 years as the minimum age for the procedure.

The petition, which Denmark Intact is promoting on social networks, was launched on February 1.

It proposes a punishment of up to six years in prison for any person who “physically assaults, with or without



consent, mutilates or otherwise removes external sex organs in whole or in part” from children younger than 18.

It describes circumcision as a form of abuse and corporal punishment, equating it with female genital mutilation. The petition states that parents who have their children circumcised outside Denmark would face legal action in Denmark, which has 8 000 Jews and tens of thousands of Muslims.

Members of both faiths circumcise male boys.

Last month, lawmakers from four parties in Iceland submitted a bill proposing to ban the non-medical circumcision of boys, in what the leaders of the Jewish communities of all Nordic countries said would prevent a Jewish community from establishing itself there. Iceland has fewer than 250 Jews, but this year will receive its first resident rabbi in decades. It also has a few hundred Muslims.

Rabbi Andrew Baker, director of international Jewish affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said Danish Jews are concerned both by the petition in their country and the Icelandic legislation “because they fear it will set a precedent.” (JTA)

DC Comics’ newest writer is set to make Superman Jewish again

MARCY OSTER

DC Comics’ newest writer says the choices he has made for his new Superman comic-book series are “deeply connected to [the character’s] origins”.

And those origins are very Jewish.

Brian Michael Bendis, who recently jumped ship from Marvel to DC Comics, will start drawing new comic books with the iconic superhero in May. He happens to be a product of a strictly Orthodox Jewish day school in Cleveland, Ohio.

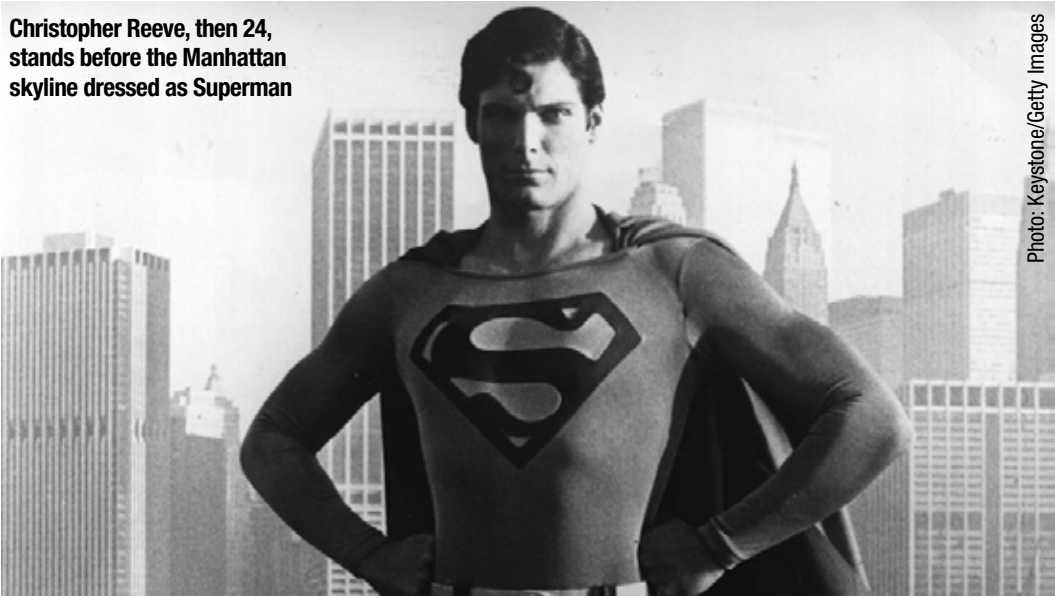
“I’m a little Jewish boy from Cleveland and my connection to Superman is very, very deep genetically,” Bendis told US business magazine Forbes earlier this month.

Bendis’ personal background could have implications for the Superman character. From his given name, Kal-El, to his exodus from his home planet, Superman exudes the Jewish sensibilities of his creators, immigrants Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, also Clevelanders.

“El” is a Hebrew term used to designate G-d. And just as Moses was nestled in a little basket for his trip down the Nile, Superman’s parents placed him in a rocket ship so he could escape his dying planet of Krypton. Instead of Pharaoh’s daughter lifting a crying baby out of a basket, Superman’s adoptive parents opened the rocket to discover a crying baby. The character’s transformation from mild-mannered, glasses-wearing Clark Kent to an avenging strongman has also been seen as a sort of Jewish immigrant’s wish fulfilment. The list of Jewish connections goes on.

Bendis told Forbes that it took some cosmic convincing to leave his long-time perch at Marvel for DC. While he was considering what to do, he said, he returned to Cleveland for his brother’s

Christopher Reeve, then 24, stands before the Manhattan skyline dressed as Superman



wedding. He went to visit a friend who runs the Cleveland Public Library, and when he walked through the doors he ran into a Superman exhibition.

“It was like the universe was speaking to me, telling me: ‘Oh you’ve got to do this!’ And it flooded back to me in the biggest way possible, and here we are,” he told Forbes.

Bendis is perhaps best known from his days at Marvel as the

man who killed off Spiderman – or at least his alter-ego, Peter Parker – in order to replace him with a new half-black, half-Hispanic character who gets bitten by a genetically altered spider. He said he was trying to make the comics look more like the real world.

Bendis was raised by a single mother in Cleveland and discovered comic books as an adolescent.

“I studied them like the Torah,”

he told JTA in a 2013 interview.

He said the rabbis at his school did not enjoy his drawings, in particular the sketches of men in tights. He frequently got sent home for his artwork.

Bendis told Forbes that his new Superman “is a reflection of where he came from and the world we live in now”.

“Writing Superman in today’s day and age is such a powerful experience. We live in a world where we’ve

heard ‘truth, justice and the American way’ our whole lives. But this is the first time those things are really not to be taken for granted,” he elaborated.

“Now I think it’s time Superman stand up and give us that hope we always want from him. It’s a great thing to be writing a character who exudes hope at a time when people really need it.” (JTA)

Beard traditions shape the face of Jerusalem

IAN DEITCH

Facial hair is trendy worldwide these days, but in Jerusalem beards have never gone out of style.

For men of all faiths in the holy city, a beard can be an important statement of religious devotion or reflect one’s political views.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Jerusalem’s Old City, where bearded ultra-Orthodox Jews, Christian clerics and devout Muslims all come into contact in a densely packed mix of some of the world’s most sensitive holy sites.

For Eitan Press, 40, growing a beard is a spiritual journey that embodies ancient concepts of Jewish mysticism, while challenging modern perceptions of masculinity.

His beard balm company, Aleph Male, is more than a clever wordplay on the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. He says it expresses Jewish values that stand in sharp contrast to the tough alpha male narrative often associated with facial hair.

“Rather than being a man at the top of the pyramid, it’s the image of a man who is lifting his brothers up,” said Press, who has a full beard.

“When a man grows a beard, it is incumbent upon him to act with greater kindness toward the world because he is now wearing on his face a divine quality,” he said.

At Jerusalem’s bustling Mahane Yehuda market, he demonstrated his unique blends by “anointing” bearded shoppers with balms inspired by Jewish festivals and rites.

One conjures up the citrus notes of Sukkot, the festival that commemorates the desert wandering of the Jews during the Exodus. Items like myrtle branches and the etrog, a fruit resembling a lemon, are used in ceremonies.

Another blend has aromas of clove and cinnamon, spices used in Havdalah, the ritual marking the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week.

“Jewish beard culture is literally thousands of years old. Moses had a beard. King David had a beard,” he said. “The custom for Jewish men to anoint their hair and beards with sacred oil goes back to the Bible.”

The custom of religious Jews wearing beards is rooted in a passage in Leviticus that forbids “destroying” beard edges and prohibits shaving with a blade. While Jewish law permits the use of electric razors or scissors to trim beards, some sects don’t shave at all.

Michael Silber, a professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem who has researched beards, said some Orthodox Jewish communities, leaning on Jewish

mystical texts, consider facial hair so holy that men refrain from even combing their beards, fearing they will pull hair out. Strands that fall out naturally are sometimes placed in prayer books for preservation, he said. And beards cross religious lines.

Zuheir Dubai, an Islamic scholar and imam in the West Bank city of Nablus, said that while Muslim men grow beards for religious reasons, moustaches are rooted in popular culture.

Some grow moustaches to emulate powerful leaders like Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, he said, while some autocratic governments in the Middle East were known to shave off a prisoner’s moustache as a form of humiliation.

Muslim beard traditions stem from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who in the 7th century urged his followers to wear beards and “shorten the moustache as a sign of modesty”. They regained popularity with the rise of political Islam about three decades ago.



Eitan Press of Aleph Male, a beard balm business based on Jewish masculinity, in Jerusalem’s Old City

Among Orthodox Christian priests, long bushy beards are as common a sight as their long, flowing robes. They see a beard as a sign of devotion to G-d and homage to Jesus, who is traditionally portrayed with a beard.

In Jerusalem, wearing a beard can also reflect political sentiments. “In the 1980s, religion begins to be intertwined with political orientations. This is reflected with the rise of the beard among the more right wing and religiously oriented, both Jews and Muslims,” Silber said.

Many bearded men, of course, often have simpler motives and just like the style.

Two Israelis impress in Olympic men’s figure skating

TOI STAFF AND AP

Israeli figure skaters Alexei Bychenko and Daniel Samohin made an impressive showing at the Olympic finals on the weekend, with the veteran Bychenko racking up a rare top 10 finish in a strong field.

Bychenko finished with 172.88 points in ninth place, sneaking in one place above US fan favourite Adam Rippon. Bychenko has been in 13th position after the short programme, skating to *Hava Nagila*.

Samohin finished in 11th place with 170.75 points, up from 18th after the short programme.

Both Israeli athletes posted personal best scores. Israel has never won a medal in the Winter Olympics, but has fielded more athletes in recent years, partly thanks to an influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Its 10 athletes competing in Pyeongchang this year is a record for the country in the Winter Games.

The gold was won by defending Olympic champion, Japan’s Yuzuru Hanyu, who also leaped into the figure-skating history books, becoming the first man to defend his title of Olympic champion since Dick Button in 1952.

“Just happy. I can’t say anymore, just happy,” Hanyu smiled. “I just did my best today. I don’t know if this is the best of my skating life, but I can say from my heart that I skated my best today.”

He held off countryman Shoma Uno and Spain’s Javier Fernandez in the free skate event.

American Nathan Chen surged from a fiasco of a short programme, where he was 17th, by winning the free skate event to wind up fifth. He did it with an historic routine featuring six quads.

Uno might have won the gold if not for his magnificent countryman. His energy throughout, particularly in the back end of his routine to *Turandot*, permeated the arena, and he pumped his arms wildly when he finished.

Fernandez, skating to *Man of La Mancha*, was a worthy medallist, finishing just 1.66 points behind Uno.

“It means a lot for my country,” Fernandez said. “We’ve never had a figure-skating Olympic medal.”

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It all started with a knock on the door...

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

At 85 years old, Audrey Coleman still exudes a steely determination that she displayed at the time she and husband Max’s names were synonymous with the Detainees’ Parents Support Committee (DPSC). They were founder members of this organisation of parents that was formed to provide food, clothing and legal assistance to detainees under apartheid, as well as to monitor and publicise state repression. Audrey’s memory is sharp and her speech unhesitating as she recalls those dark days in our country’s history.

In 1981, the notorious apartheid security police arrived at their home at 05:00 with a knock on the door. They were looking for their 21-year-old son Keith, who was working on SASPU National, one of two political newspapers produced by the SA Students Press Union.

“He was away for the weekend with his girlfriend. We knew where he was but we said we didn’t,” Audrey remembers. “After they left, we phoned Keith and said: ‘They’re looking for you, you must come home.’

“He did and we asked him whether he wanted to leave the country. He said: ‘Absolutely not.’ We knew the security police were looking for him to detain him and he made the choice.

“My husband and our other son, Neil, helped him pack his stuff and escorted him to John Vorster Square, where police said they were only going to ask him a few questions. They immediately detained him under section 29 of the Internal Security Act.”

Keith was held in solitary confinement for five months and placed under a two-year banning order on his release.

This is part of the history of the DPSC, which was formed in the wake of Keith’s detention. The full story is told in a new book, *The Knock on the Door*, which was launched on Tuesday.

It is a story of ordinary men and women across the social and economic spectrum who mobilised to make a difference, and contributed in no small measure to the downfall of an evil system.

Max Coleman’s bravery in standing up to the authorities is referred to, initially when his son was detained by a Captain Struwig, described in the book as “notorious for his cruelty as an interrogator”.

“If you touch a hair on my son’s head, you will have to answer to me,” Max had said.

“He was quite shocked and appeared quite afraid of my husband,” Audrey relates.

Keith recalls: “I was proud of my father; I think that the position he took as the strong parent was clearly felt by the security police. They were scared of him, and I felt that offered me a degree of protection.”

Far from feeling despair and loneliness at Keith’s detention, Audrey says it made her and Max “very angry and determined that we would reveal what was happening in this country. We knew that Keith had done nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, we were very proud of him.

“My husband used to go to John Vorster Square every single day for months, demanding things.

“He kept a diary every day of what he saw and who he saw. The man who had coffee with the security police and was trying to be nice – his son was badly tortured.”

And was there any support from the Jewish community for the family? “Not at all,” Audrey shoots back.

“I was very sad. I actually phoned a rabbi and I said to him: ‘I’m embarrassed that out of all the religious organisations, you’re the only ones that don’t give us support.’ His answer to me was that his duty was to study the Talmud.

“The churches were absolutely fantastic. The diplomats were there, the media were there and those were our protection at times of mass meetings and standing in the streets with posters.”

Keith laments his parents’ alienation from the white community at the time. “Many friends, including in the Jewish community, stood apart

from them once I had been detained and they’d got involved in the DPSC.

“But they carried on nonetheless. They were brave, not only in taking on the state but also when it came to the price they paid at a personal and social level.”

Audrey didn’t know what had happened to either of her sons, while she supported others who were in the same situation. “When you become committed to something, you forget about yourself,” she explains.

“As time went on, you realised that there were other people who didn’t have the standing in society that we had, nor the money or knowledge of how to go about the whole thing. So, you broaden your commitment to helping others.”

Audrey feels a sense of satisfaction that the DPSC helped bring about a new dispensation.

“It was an amazing organisation and an example of how civil society can get together and fight repressive laws or human rights abuses. I think we’re all far too docile.”

Terry Shakinovsky, who co-authored the book with Sharon Cort, says writing it was difficult. In going through the DPSC archives and reading accounts of the torture of women and children,



she found it “very hard to confront the worst excesses that the human species is capable of”.

It comes as no surprise to Shakinovsky that the DPSC, which was established in 1981, was banned only in 1987. “It was partly because some of the prominent people were white,” she states.

“Its founders knew that they were given a space to operate that parents from other races would not have been granted. The great strength of the DPSC was that they were able to take the space awarded to them by a deeply racist regime and extend the gains that they made to South Africans of all races.”

In solitary confinement, without access to news, Keith had “very limited” information about his parents’ involvement in the DPSC

during his five-month detention. After his release, he recalls feeling “proud of them that they had taken on the security police and campaigned for my release and the release of other detainees”.

“I knew that the state was dangerous, but also that my parents had the strength and the canniness to campaign in a way which judged the degree of danger. To a certain extent, I felt that they were protected by the fact that they were white, middle-class people and that the state wouldn’t take them on in a physical way,” he says.

“But once the state of emergency was declared and the DPSC itself became a target, once the third force and the death squads were started, I then became scared for my parents – particularly after the assassination of academic David Webster, who was with them in the DPSC.”

Despite it being 36 years since his solitary confinement, in some ways the experience is still with him. “There are times when I remind myself that no matter what is going on, I have my freedom, I can see the sky, I can walk out of an unlocked door – all little experiences which we take for granted but which are wonderful and meaningful.”

Ariel: Ensuring every child gets a Jewish education

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“Everyone has their skills and expertise, and everyone has their challenges and deficits. There should, however, be a place for each and every one of these people. Everyone should be embraced because all are essential to the community.” So said Rabbi Craig Kacev, director of the SA Board of Jewish Education (SABJE), at the official launch of King David Ariel, South Africa’s first Jewish remedial school.

“In building Ariel, we’ve incorporated this message. The building is beautiful and modern, yet the dashes of the different colours inside shout that message of inclusion, of being welcome and supporting to all,” added the rabbi.

“We are proud at the SABJE and King David Schools to have reached this point, and upon the opening of the school, we acknowledge Hashem for bringing us to this point,” he told the King David staff, donors, board members, trustees and parents at the event, which took place on February 15.

It was a fortuitous day, falling as it did on the same day that Cyril Ramaphosa was inaugurated as president.

As with our country, the launch also served as a celebration of a brighter future.

The modern building is situated on the King David Victory Park campus and boasts exceptional facilities and equipment.

The school opened its doors in January this year with 34 pupils and three classes – Grades 1, 2 and 3. Next year will see the intake of a second Grade 1 class, as well as the opening of the school’s first Grade 4 class.

Paying tribute to members of the SABJE for their decision to invest in a Jewish remedial school, Kacev said: “Just as we benefit from those who came before us, so too must we build and invest for those who come after us.”

Steven Joffe, chairperson of the SABJE, spoke about some factors that led to the building of Ariel. “More than 200 children have left King David over the past eight years to join remedial schools. Many return, but sadly, many don’t. Through Ariel, the

SABJE has drawn a line in the sand – you don’t have to leave King David to give your child an excellent remedial education, and you don’t have to compromise on giving your child an excellent Jewish education. Ariel meets all our strategic objectives of excellence, sustainability and community.”

Joffe thanked the hard-working remedial subcommittee, led by Hilton Kellner, which oversaw the development of Ariel. He also thanked the King David Schools Foundation and its donors for the financial means needed to make the dream of Ariel a reality.

At the launch, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein said: “We’re celebrating the fact that as a community, the statement that comes from the opening of this school, King David Ariel, is a very special and important one. It says that every child in our community is entitled to a Jewish education. It doesn’t matter who they are, where they come from or what their particular learning skills are or are not – and it’s that inclusion that we’re celebrating at this opening.”

Sally Ann Knowles, King David Ariel’s principal, spoke of her personal commitment and passion for what Ariel stands for. “My vision is of a community-based remedial school carefully designed to meet the individual learning needs of each pupil, with all the added benefits offered by the curriculum and facilities of a mainstream school.

“My vision was to walk into classrooms and therapy rooms in my dream school and observe happy, confident pupils who were fully engaged and excited by what they were learning every day. For me, that is what success looks like.”

She thanked the school’s “pioneering parents” for entrusting their children to Ariel’s care. Rooted as it is in Jewish heritage and values, in the holistic



nurturing and development of pupils, as well as in excellence in 21st-century remedial teaching and learning strategies, the school is poised for success, she said.

“The generation we have the privilege of teaching need to be the generation of lifetime learners, given the constant change to which they are exposed,” she continued.

Referring to her time at Wits Business School, Knowles quoted from a lecture given by education expert Dr Jane Hofmeyr, who had said: “The twilight of schooling as we know it is the prelude to the dawn of education as pupils need it.” To which Knowles added: “I’m exceptionally proud to be able to stand here this evening and say that I believe that King David Ariel embodies her prophetic words.

“When I see those gorgeous, happy children every day, it makes coming to work an absolute privilege and a pleasure.”

In concluding the formalities, Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the principal of King David Victory Park Primary, hung a mezuzah on King David Ariel’s front door.

The idea behind the two schools sharing a campus is to facilitate integration between them. Pupils already share assemblies and play sports together; it’s all about extending the King David family.

Tackling our education concerns

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Is our education in crisis? Is the cost of sending our children to Jewish day schools justifiable? And once they matriculate, do we still send them to South African universities – especially after the havoc wreaked by the #FeesMustFall protest movement?

Professor Adam Habib, the vice-chancellor of Wits University; Elliot Wolf, director of the King David Schools Foundation and a former King David Linksfield High School principal; and Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, the dean of Torah Academy Schools, tackled these and other issues at Sydenham Shul’s 2018 Learning Launch, which took place this week.

That Fees Must Fall had a strong case was undeniable, said Habib. “In 1994, we had about 420 000 students in South African universities. Ten years later, there were 1.1 million. We more than doubled our numbers, yet the money from government didn’t increase – the per capita investment had begun to decline.

“At Wits University in 1994, 70% of the university budget was paid for by the state. In 2015, it was paying half of that.”

The only way to keep standards high was to start increasing fees, sometimes even from 10% to 12%, he said. By 2015, if you had a child living in residence, accommodation and fees would cost you R110 000 for the year.

“Student fees were completely unsustainable for lower- and middle-

it’s rankings, explained Habib. “In every one of those indicators, Wits has steadily improved since 2013. In 2016 – at the height of the protests – results plateaued, but in 2017 they rose again. If you look at the indicators, we’ve never done as well as we’re doing. But if you look at the headlines, that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

“I strongly believe that the success of the school should not be solely assessed on matric results.”

For parents who send their kids to overseas universities, Habib advised caution due to the sheer volume of options available overseas. “I’ve seen students go to universities in the UK or US that are ranked lower than any of ours.”

Racism, anti-Semitism and sexual harassment are just as evident in overseas universities, he said. And there you’ll be paying more than R1 million. “Comparatively, at our top 10 universities you’re getting a class education at an incredible price.”

Speaking of the viability of the ANC’s promise of free education for lower-income students, Habib said it all depends on government’s ability to turn the economy around. “The scenario is not doom or gloom. We have to collectively fight for the future we want – if we do that, then we have a chance.”

that the success of the school should not be solely assessed on matric results. The hidden curriculum of values, decency, integrity, tolerance and gemilut chesed – the fundamental principles of our Jewish heritage – are just as important.”

There’s no denying, though, that academic results speak for themselves and the quality of a King David education cannot be denied.

Speaking of what’s on many parents’ minds, Wolf said: “The costs of Jewish education inevitably escalate every year. All private school education is expensive. There’s been no government support since 1994. Our schools are community schools, so we have a responsibility to offer a Jewish education to all deserving students whose parents don’t have the means to afford the fees.

“Subsidies are based on stringent criteria. With many government schools in crisis, private school education is largely the only option, with Jewish day schools the natural choice. We’re proud that over 500 students are subsidised in our schools.”

Yet quality cannot be compromised, he argued, which is why fundraising is so important.

Rabbi Hazdan stressed how education, especially Torah learning, is at the heart of Judaism. “Nationhood begins with asking and answering questions,” he said. “Through all the horrors the Jewish nation had to endure, they maintained energy and strength to survive and endure through their Torah studies.

“Historically, education was about information, but with time we needed the skills to apply the education. Skills are needed because of the unprecedented rate of change. We have no idea what the workplace will look like even five years from now – we need to adapt.

“Beyond information and skills, the most important element of education is the imparting of values – man’s search for meaning needs to be part of our schools. The moral fibre of our society is unravelling... and we have to

redefine and rethink what it means to educate children.”

Acknowledging the exorbitant fees around which our education crisis is centred, Hazdan suggested a different outlook. “Every crisis affords us an opportunity for introspection, to think about our attitudes towards education and its relevance in our daily lives,” he said.

The answer is not to diminish the value of Jewish educational institutions, or of a secular and Torah education. It’s a challenge for schools to work together to pool resources, share a vision and consolidate efforts to reduce costs without adversely affecting education – something Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is working to do with small Torah schools, he said.

“Our grandparents saw paying school fees as their first priority, not as an afterthought. Education should be the first place we want to put our salaries.”



Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Professor Adam Habib and Elliot Wolf

income groups. The students had a legitimate cause. But this does not give you the right to violate the very ethics of struggle. How you conduct that struggle is important. You can’t say you believe in free education and then want to burn down the university and stop lectures and exams. You can’t say you want to create an inclusive society and then resort to racism.”

Habib also spoke of the need to look at other options as university isn’t for everyone. The future world of work will be fundamentally transformed and our education needs to reflect this, he argued.

Speaking of the current standard of South African universities, Habib painted a bright picture. “Too many people see protests, yet at the height of the movement there were actually only four days of violent protest at Wits. There was gross media misrepresentation.”

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Revealing the hidden aspects of SA Jewish history

TALI FEINBERG

Did you know that the first Jewish document in South Africa was written in the Eastern Cape town of Grahamstown?

For years, it was assumed that the first organised Jewish document recorded was written in Cape Town in 1841, but it was discovered by Emeritus Professor Howard Phillips that the Grahamstown document preceded it.

This document, written in October 1838, was a request for a small piece of ground to be allocated to start a Jewish cemetery in Grahamstown. In this request, the signatories “were re-enacting the first duty of many fledgling Jewish communities arriving in a new environment”, says Phillips.

“As another historian points out: ‘Observing the correct procedures of a Jewish burial is a basic duty of every Jew, and this explains why the first development in every Jewish community... was the consecration of a Jewish section of the cemetery.’”

This is just one of the many facts uncovered by Phillips, who worked as a historian at the University of Cape Town (UCT) from 1974 to 2014. His new book, *Cemeteries and Synagogues: The Foundation of Organized Jewry in South Africa*, was launched last week at an event hosted by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies (UCT) and the South African Jewish Museum.

Phillips’ link with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation – also known as the Gardens Shul – is long. His grandfather, Joe Phillips, became a member of the congregation in 1920 after coming to South Africa from Lithuania, and he continues that membership to this day.

Rabbi Osher Feldman said it was appropriate that the book was launched under the auspices of the Gardens Shul because it is based on essays written to mark the congregation’s significant anniversaries. Also, Feldman says, “in Biblical Hebrew, there is no word for history, only the word *zachor*, which means memory. This is because memory is alive – it informs our future, guides us and inspires us.”

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Kaplan Centre, explains: “Phillips has uncovered and interpreted material that adds colour and nuance to our portrait of the foundation of Jewish communal life in South Africa.

“Sometimes these documents – synagogue minutes, correspondence, maps – have redrawn that picture entirely... his goal has been to illuminate and reveal.”

While it is written in a scholarly manner, the text of the book is accessible to all, and this history can clearly be divided into different periods, explains Phillips.

Describing the very earliest Jewish settlement in South Africa as “precarious”, he writes that this was the time when British

and German Jews took the first tentative steps to make the country their home and begin to organise Jewish life here. They did so by setting up cemeteries and synagogues – hence the book’s title – as these were usually the first two institutions put in place wherever Jews set down roots.

The next stage of settlement would be “permanent” – this was when the first synagogue was established and when Jews began to feel at home. That first shul was the St John’s Street Synagogue, or Tikvah Israel congregation, now part of the larger Great Synagogue of the Gardens Shul.

Referring to a picture of the opening, Phillips pointed out the British leadership of the community, including the formidable Reverend Bender, while in the background is John Kent, the caretaker of the shul. Kent’s son and grandson would continue this role, and he paid tribute to the last man of that line, who only recently passed away.

The book also examines the “prestigious” period from the 1890s onwards, when Jews were accepted by the local population and seen as part of the city. This is

demonstrated by the induction of the first Jewish mayor of the Cape in 1904, Mr Hyman Lieberman, the building of the Great Synagogue, and the public presence of the Jewish community in Cape Town and beyond.

would soon change as more Litvaks began to arrive, importing the South African Jewish culture that we know today.

Phillips also illustrated this point with a story of how Reverend Bender asked a child when his birthday was. “It’s on Purim,” the boy replied. The reverend, with his dominant English background, told the child that from now on, his birthday would be on ‘the Ides of March’ – and so it was!

The book concludes with a detailed look at how the Great Synagogue was built, which would fascinate historians, architects and congregants alike. Phillips closes with an explanation of how this soaring synagogue set the tone for the success of the community ahead: “It was strengthened decade by decade through the commitment of the faith of the congregation and its leaders... becoming

the pillar of Jewish faith which the building represents locally, nationally and internationally. As Winston Churchill once remarked: ‘We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.’”

• *The richly illustrated Cemeteries and Synagogues: The Foundation of Organized Jewry in South Africa is available at the South African Jewish Museum gift shop.*



Rabbi Osher Feldman, Professor Howard Phillips and Professor Adam Mendelsohn at the launch of Phillips’ book

The book also explores the shift from the Anglo-German dominance to “the rise of the Litvaks”, which is reflected in Phillips’ own family story.

His grandfather, Joe, was a member of the more English congregation in St John’s Street, and also of the more hamisha Ponevez Shul a few roads away, “which allowed him to keep one foot in ‘De Heim’” while he adapted to a new environment. But that

Letters

NO REGRET ABOUT SIGNING THE MAHLABATHINI DECLARATION WITH SCHWARZ

Thank you for your enquiry about my memories around the Mahlabathini Declaration of Faith and Mr Harry Schwarz, the then leader of the United Party (featured in the SA Jewish Report, January 26 issue).

I had the greatest respect for Mr Schwarz, not least because of the hardship of his childhood which led him to South Africa. Once here, he poured himself into the work of transforming our country and, in so doing, left an indelible mark on South Africa’s history. His intelligence, talent and natural bent for politics made him a great activist.

I admired his integrity and vision, and the courage it took to join me in 1974 in signing the Mahlabathini Declaration. He was always a man to act on his conscience.

The declaration was significant because it was the first agreement signed between black and white political leaders in South Africa that committed to underpinning principles for a negotiated settlement. It was a blueprint for racial peace.

I accepted Mr Schwarz’s integrity even though one of my liberal friends kept on trying to warn me not to do so. In retrospect, I have no regret about having signed the Mahlabathini Declaration with Mr Schwarz. In fact, the pen we used in signing it is lost amongst so many pens and things amongst my possessions. I used to come across it until recently.

We agreed in the declaration on the importance of material and educational advancement, consultation in constitutional planning, a federal system, the safeguarding of cultures, and a bill of rights. We also committed to pursue political change through non-violent means.

The following year, I established Inkatha yeNkululeko yeSizwe, which subscribed to these very principles.

Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi MP
President of the Inkatha Freedom Party

LET RAMAPHOSA'S EXAMPLE OF SOUND JUDGEMENT PREVAIL

There’s a saying: “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” However, the Torah says we Jews are a stiff-necked people who complain a lot.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism has made many of us bitter and argumentative. It is almost as if we enjoy wallowing in negativity. Furthermore, we live in a society which is also full of complainants. It is hardly surprising, then, that we struggle with stress.

When our newly ordained President Cyril Ramaphosa was engaged in discussions with his predecessor, Jacob Zuma, regarding his exit from the presidency, there were demands that Ramaphosa act more decisively.

Rushing into conflict, or to arms, should be a last resort. It is better to be level-headed and consider the bigger picture instead.

After the ANC recalled former president Thabo Mbeki, it led to a split in that organisation and the formation of Cope. And when former ANC youth leader Julius Malema was expelled, it caused a bigger rift within both the ANC and greater society. Expelling Zuma ran the risk of greater splits and even a possible civil war.

NETANYAHU, THE ARCH BETRAYER

I applaud Danny Adeno Abebe on his article last week, titled *Have we forgotten our Jewish morality?*, in which he lambastes the administration of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for its inexcusable approach to African migrants. I would like to add that this is part of a long series of betrayals by that administration.

Netanyahu betrayed the Arab community by scaring Jews, telling them that the Arabs would go to the polls in droves, and so should they. He thus kept Likud in power.

No true leader will pit one group of citizens of his country against the others, as Netanyahu has done.

He also betrayed the Jews when, in 2013, he released 26 terrorist murderers of Jews in an attempt to keep the sham peace talks going with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. (This is not to be confused with the justified 2011 release in exchange for Gilad Shalit.) A message was thus sent that Jewish blood is cheap.

And to appease his uber-corrupt coalition partners in United Torah Judaism and Shas, Netanyahu gutted the Kotel expansion programme, betraying the Progressive and Masorti communities.

He also betrayed the ultra-Orthodox community and the Haredim by gutting efforts to improve the quality of education in Haredi

Hot-headedness usually creates more problems than it solves. Rushing for the divorce courts or quickly firing people without resolving problems peacefully only increases instability.

The Talmud speaks of a man who is divorcing his wife with a view to marrying another woman. He thinks that the other woman will be better in all ways and there will be nothing about his first wife that he will miss. Regretfully, he discovers that he was mistaken.

Similarly, firing a competent and loyal employee during a moment of anger means having to employ and retrain an inexperienced person who may not be as good. Not only is this unfair, it will also negatively affect morale in an organisation.

Only once all diplomatic options have been exhausted would it make sense to stand firm and fight the good fight, but with wisdom this would hardly ever be required.

Martin Zagnoev
Johannesburg

schools. In so doing, he and his coalition partners perpetuate the cycle of poverty and dependence that afflicts these communities.

He has betrayed the Christian community by cutting funds for Christian schools and diverting them to the failing ultra-Orthodox ones – without improving the latter. This, at a time when Christian Arabs are enlisting in the army in record numbers.

The betrayal of African refugees is only the latest in a series of betrayals by this unworthy so-called leader, who now also faces corruption charges. It is laughable to suggest that 38 000 African refugees would pose any demographic threat to a nation with a 6.5 million-strong Jewish population.

Do not allow the Likud propagandists to fool you with the myth that there is no better leader than Netanyahu. Yes, he has had many foreign policy successes – so, make him minister of foreign affairs, where he can do what he’s good at without any of the damage. It would be wise for the Israeli people to elect a better leader – be it Lapid, Kahlon, Sharansky, Bennett or Rivlin.

Jared Joel
Johannesburg

What to do about Auschwitz?

ROBYN SASSEN

Should there be a pizza vendor at the entrance to the Auschwitz museum? Should it be a place where visitor decorum is mandatory and the taking of selfies is forbidden? These are some of the issues raised in Jonathan Hayoun’s film, *Saving Auschwitz?*, which was screened last week at Johannesburg’s Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

Documenting the complex of concentration camps collectively known as Auschwitz from the time of its liberation, this French film with subtitles presents complex, unresolvable questions.

“The atrocities only happened over a four-year period,” argues one Polish citizen, attempting to justify the existence of her home, which, complete with ducks and young children in the garden, is built on the land. “We have lived here for over 50 years.”

It isn’t only about domestic roots, however. Soon after the camp’s liberation, on January 27, 1945, pillagers moved in. They were digging for gold, prompted by an anti-Semitic belief that if there were Jews here, gold would be too. It was a surreal time, explains the museum’s director, Piotr Cywinski, as survivors were still living there. In 1947, a territorial confrontation between former prisoners and gold diggers led to Poland declaring it a state museum.

But this did not solve the problem. Rather, it represented a quest for Polish brownie points. The idea of a museum supported Poland’s post-war regeneration. It pitched Auschwitz as a place of pilgrimage, to generate Polish tourist income.

Oswiecim, where Auschwitz is located, then boomed economically due to a quest for

normality on the part of its citizens, explains Cywinski, adding that the town was established in the 13th century. Before the war, its Jews numbered 7 500 souls, who nicknamed it “Ushpizim” (“guests”).

Furthermore, the museum carried an unspoken agenda. In its promotional material, until the 1970s, the word “Jew” was absent. Does this “airbrushing out” the Jewish reality of Auschwitz reflect the psychology of trauma? Either way, the enormity and specificity of atrocities committed on this soil was erased.

This was to change in 1979, when the then Pope, John Paul II – who was Polish-born and a former bishop of Krakow – came to Auschwitz on an unprecedented formal visit. He said: “Never forget your spiritual freedom” and spoke about Edith Stein, a Jewish-born Carmelite nun who was murdered in Auschwitz.

Stein’s story was touted in Auschwitz-related material, leading to a Carmelite convent being built on the grounds. Was this an attempt to “Christianise” Auschwitz? Discord was sewn, necessitating a papal intervention in 1989. He said Auschwitz must be returned to its dead and shouldn’t be exploited for political or religious reasons.

As the 1980s drew to a close, Holocaust denialism raised its ugly head. Under Robert Faurisson, pseudo-scientific reports were published, aiming to wipe the slate clean of Auschwitz veracity. The March of the Living was then initiated to counter Faurisson and his followers.

As an educational tool, the march took on international momentum, embracing the quest to find the remains of Birkenau I, where the gas chambers had been located. It was a more difficult task than anticipated; the



The entrance to Auschwitz

team eventually located Shlomo Dragon, a Sonderkommando Jew who was tasked to aid the Nazis in the disposing of Jewish remains, and who remembered how to get there.

What they discovered took things to a different level of horror: the gas chamber, where millions of Jews were killed, was now a domestic house. Richard Prasquier, president of Yad Vashem, bought it and made it a part of the Auschwitz museum. The house was demolished; a memorial of three columns was erected in its stead.

Auschwitz’s status shifted over the years. In 1979, it was declared a UNESCO world heritage site, but the area’s 50 000-strong community complained about the number of tourists and the restrictions this status represented with regard to domestic and commercial growth.

In 1999, protests by civilians of Brzenzinka – the village where Birkenau was located – came to a head. They wanted a shopping mall.

And the uncertainty and inflammation continues – UNESCO attempted to re-establish its zone of silence status again in 2010, but failed.

Today, it remains one of the world’s most visited museums. Father Patrick Desbois, founder of Yahad In-Unum, an organisation dedicated to the discovery of unmarked mass graves in Europe, says the popularity doesn’t serve it. You need time to reflect on the atrocity when you’re there, he says. Because it is so popular, the curatorial decision to limit visitors’ time has been forced.

He also says the museum “sanctifies the machinery of death, making it very difficult to focus on the victim”.

Auschwitz still bears no plaque with its victims’ names, and the arguments rage on: Is it just history? Should it be about Jewish identity? Now, more than 70 years after its liberation, it’s uncertain as to what the next generation will do with Auschwitz.

The impact of tracing family roots

MIRAH LANGER

Ever wondered who your great, great, great-grandfather might have been? South African-born Eli Rabinowitz did and embarked on an intrepid genealogical journey to find out. It culminated in the discovery of the astonishing life and legacy of Rabbi Avraham Shlomo Zalman Tzoref.

Tzoref, born in Keidan in Lithuania in 1786, was determined to begin an Ashkenazi return to Israel.

Rabinowitz spoke about his ancestor earlier this month while delivering a talk to members of the Jewish Genealogical Society of SA in Orchards, Johannesburg.

The first hurdle Tzoref had to overcome when arriving in Israel, in 1811, was a dead man’s unpaid debt. “Zalman went to the Old City and had to disguise himself as a Sephardic Jew. This was because there was a story that 100 years before, an Ashkenazi Jew had come to Jerusalem and borrowed money from the Arabs, and then died. Thereafter, anyone who came from Lithuania was told: ‘We want the money.’”

Tzoref then embarked on various negotiations to lift the embargo on the debt. In doing so, he paved the way for Ashkenazi Jews to return to their homeland. And, said Rabinowitz, “in 1836, he got permission to establish a settlement.”

After making aliya, Tzoref and his family became significant contributors to rebuilding the holy land. However, in 1851, he was murdered by those opposed to the work he was doing in re-establishing the Ashkenazi presence in Jerusalem.

“He was recognised as the first victim of terror,” explains Rabinowitz.

The impact made by Tzoref continues to be heralded, most recently with a huge celebration held in Jerusalem a few years ago that was attended by 15 000 of his descendants from all



Eli Rabinowitz

over the world.

“There are stories like mine everywhere,” muses Rabinowitz. “You just have to look for them.”

After discovering his Keidan roots, Rabinowitz returned to the area and made contact with a school in the area. He taught the non-Jewish students there about what, until then, had been a ghost culture of a long-forgotten past.

“There is not one Jew in this town,” remarked Rabinowitz.

He noted how many South African families had contributed to putting up memorials in towns in Lithuania to mark the areas in which Jews were murdered. “We need to show the Lithuanians that we know what the history was.”

Referring to how transformative genealogical research can be, Rabinowitz explained how the students used a database from a genealogical website and created a tree artwork in their classroom, commemorating all the Jewish families who once lived in Keidan.

“This is what you can do with your information – you can make it powerful,” said Rabinowitz.

“And there is a bigger message. The message is: continuity for the Jewish people.”

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TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

Will the new spirit of hope brought to South Africa by President Cyril Ramaphosa inspire any of the South African expats living in London, New York and other cities around the world to consider coming back?

South Africans overseas have often felt smug looking at the country’s decline during the catastrophe that characterised former president Jacob Zuma’s rule, when the country hurtled towards becoming yet another failed African state. They, after all, had been smart enough to leave and were far from Africa’s problems.

The huge emigration of many whites and others started during apartheid, particularly after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, continuing until Nelson Mandela’s release from jail and his ascendancy to the presidency. Amidst the euphoria, emigration slowed as South Africa seemed again a place with a future. There was talk of expats coming back.

This country’s story is about cycles of betrayal and hope, betrayal and hope, again and again. Can it now return to the spirit of hope?

Today the newspaper headlines on the street poles proclaim “goodbye Zuma” and “a new dawn begins”. Addressing the nation from Parliament, Ramaphosa quoted from a song by legendary musician Hugh Masekela – known as the father of South African jazz – about everyone lending a hand.

Masekela’s life is a metaphor for this country. He left after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, helped by anti-apartheid activist Archbishop Trevor Huddleston and international friends such as Yehudi Menuhin and John Dankworth, going to the UK, then to the US.

He married another South African icon, jazz singer Miriam Makeba. Masekela wrote well-known anti-apartheid songs, such as *Bring Him Back Home*, about the movement to free Mandela. He returned to South Africa in the

1990s after Mandela’s release and continued to compose and perform locally and on the world stage. The muso, affectionately known as Bra Hugh, died last month. A line from one of his songs, *Thuma Mina*, goes: “*I wanna be there when the people start to turn it around.*” Indeed, he was.

There are not many Masekelas, and it is unlikely that many expats will return, no matter how rosy the South African dawn sounds. They have put down roots elsewhere; their children were raised as Canadians, Americans or with other identities. And the changes in South Africa are not yet solid enough. Can Ramaphosa pull off this gigantic task of renewing the country? It is not yet certain.

One consequence of this past decade is that the ANC – Mandela’s glorious liberation movement turned government – has tainted itself by supporting Zuma. Its hands are dirty. Can Ramaphosa cleanse it? Whether he succeeds or not, the manner in which Zuma was sent off into the wilderness according to strict constitutional principles, shows South African democracy’s solidity.

Many expat South Africans look down their noses at this new multiparty African democracy from the comfort of their mature European and American democracies. But maturity is a relative thing. The Parliament building in Cape Town, from where Ramaphosa spoke so elegantly to the nation last week, is the same place in which the apartheid rulers formulated the brutal racial policies of their time, and also the place where Zuma sat as president while his cronies looted the country’s coffers. Has betrayal turned to trust again? Can expats in London see it or not?

Ramaphosa was jogging last week along the Sea Point beachfront in Cape Town with former finance minister Trevor Manuel, and encountered some young Jewish women also jogging. A warm, happy selfie of all of them is circulating. Hopefully, it will also reach the expats in London. He’s going to need that warmth and trust from everyone if he’s going to untangle the mess of this country.

• Read Geoff Sifrin’s regular columns on his blog sifrintakingissue.wordpress.com

Community Column

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

A hopeful new era?

Much hard work lies ahead, but the appointment of Cyril Ramaphosa as South Africa’s fifth president has undoubtedly injected a renewed sense of optimism and purpose into our society.

After years of economic stagnation, scandal and mounting social unrest, there is a feeling that South Africa is once again poised to go forward. Our democratic institutions – from the courts to the media, civil society, the office of the Public Protector and, ultimately, Parliament itself – have come under severe pressure over the past few years. But they have proved resilient enough to withstand it all and ensure an orderly, constitutional change of leadership.

Despite fears to the contrary, fuelled in large part by experiences elsewhere on the continent, South Africa is emerging as a robust democracy where the rule of law and the wishes of the people are having the final say.

We can be hopeful that our country’s miraculous post-1994 journey is now back on track, and that in future we will be able to look back on the events of the past decade as a temporary aberration.

We congratulate Mr Ramaphosa on his election and wish him all success in the crucial role he has been chosen to play at this pivotal time in South Africa’s history. It has been reassuring to note the constructive approach adopted by the opposition parties, who have (with obvious provisos) placed party political interests on the back burner and committed themselves to working with the new administration.

Our own role as a Jewish community is also clear. We have a responsibility, at both



Above Board Shaun Zagnoev

the collective and the individual level, to do whatever we can to make South Africa a better place for all who live in it, particularly when it comes to addressing problems of socio-economic inequality in our society.

In expressing gratitude for living in a country where all fundamental rights and liberties are rigorously upheld, we should always remember those freedom fighters whose courage and sacrifices made it possible.

We are proud that so many veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle came from the ranks of our own community. Today, only a few of these brave men and women are still with us.

Last week saw the passing of AnnMarie Wolpe, whose husband Harold was one of those arrested in the wake of the notorious security police raid on Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia in 1963. She herself was involved in a range of social

justice initiatives, both in South Africa and in the UK, where she spent many years in exile.

In 2013, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the Liliesleaf Trust co-hosted a discussion on the Jewish role in the struggle against apartheid, in which Mrs Wolpe was one of the panellists. The Liliesleaf Trust is headed by the Wolpes’ son Nicholas, who has played a pivotal role in making this historic site a dynamic centre of heritage, memory and learning.

We have had the opportunity of working with him on various projects over the years, and will hopefully have further opportunities to do so in the future.

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

Sexual abuse and the concept of teshuva

>>Continued from page 8

7. Superficially impressive;
 8. Pretend they are in love with the victim and that these loving feelings are unique and unprecedented, while in reality they are abusing that person – and may be doing the same to multiple victims;
 9. Have skilfully avoided numerous allegations and complaints of sexual misconduct over time through skilful lying and aggressive tactics; and
 10. Typically, there have already been multiple attempts at rehabilitation, all of which have failed.
- While teshuva is available for every Jew, we need to know that sexual offenders have a very high rate of re-offending. The community’s obligation is, first and foremost, to protect its members. While we may cautiously allow the offender back into the community, we need to ensure our loved ones’ safety.
- The consequences of the offender’s behaviour demand that there be strict conditions for re-integration. For example, a child molester can never be given access to children, a predatory doctor can never be given access to patients, an offending rabbi should not be leading communities, and a bar mitzvah teacher or sports coach should no longer work in any field where children are involved.
- Measures taken by a community to safeguard its members from possible future incidents are not meant to be punitive, but are simply the necessary consequences of offending behaviour. These measures should involve a comprehensive plan formulated by a team of experts and concerned parties including a psychologist, social

worker, community leader and others.

It is crucial for institutions to have robust policies and procedures in place around this issue. This will determine how they respond in these cases.

Re-integrating an offender into the community rests on two vital components. The first is overt compliance with the mandated steps of teshuva, which is generally easily identifiable. Where doubt exists, this would require some research. Secondly, the offender must be willing to fully co-operate with the task team and function within very strict parameters under careful supervision.

While it is our default mode to want to be forgiving, kind and compassionate, the primary principle guiding the actions of our Jewish community must be to protect the vulnerable among us. There is an explicit directive in the Torah to look after the victim, as it says in Kohelet (Ecclesiastes): “G-d seeks out the pursued.”

Sexual abuse victims are among the most vulnerable members of our community. It is our sacred task to ensure the safety of our community and prevent future offences against new victims. A community that goes beyond the norm and takes a fearless approach to prevent future cases of sexual abuse is a community that stands proud before Hashem. Let us be that community.

• Hendler and Sack are co-founders of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation supporting victims of abuse in the Jewish community. The helpline number is 011 264 0341.

Friday (February 23)

- UZLC hosts Benji Shulman on “Israel and the water crisis”. The luncheons are held at Our Parents Home, 12:45 to 14:00. Contact: Gloria on 072 127 9421.

Tuesday (February 27)

- JHGC hosts Holocaust historian William Meinecke (USHMM) for a public talk. Time: 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town.

RSVP to Shirley on 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.

WHAT'S ON

Thursday (March 1)

- The next meeting of Hebrew speakers will be held at Beyachad, second floor at 11:00.

PURIM EVENTS

Yad Aharon and Michael

- Visit the Yaddies Bayit (21 Main Road, Rouxville) on Purim Day between 08:30 and 17:00 to enjoy the festivities. Donate monies at their Bayit and all funds will be distributed on Purim Day to their recipient families. Clients will receive Matanot L’evyonim; enjoy delicious Hamantaschen and be surprised with Mishloach Manot, beautifully decorated and donated by valued sponsors in the community.

Sydenham Shul

- On Wednesday night, February 28, the shul hosts Around the World with Sydenham - Your Passport to Purim. There’ll be a carnival for kids at 17:30 and Megillah reading at 19:00. (Carnival continues after Megillah reading.) Kids passport R50. Book through the shul office on 011 640 5021. Food and drinks will be on sale.

The Base

- YJP Purim Party. Wednesday, February 28 at Hash#Tag Kitchen and Bar, 345 Jan Smuts Avenue. 18+ with ID. Doors open at 20:00. Megillah reading at 20:15. Dress Code: superheroes.

The Base

- Purim Party. Thursday, March 1 at 3pm. 32 Sunny Road, Glenhazel. Amazing rides, fun activities and food available. Adults R120, kids over 4 years old R50, kids under 4 free. To book, email sunnyroadbase@gmail.com

Chabad of Strathavon

- Mexican Fiesta Purim Party. Thursday, 1 March at 16:00 at the Jewish Life Centre, Strathavon.

Chabad Centre Cape Town

- Purim in New York. Thursday, March 1 from 5pm at Chabad Centre. Food and entertainment available. Adults R120, children R70. RSVP 021 434 3740.

Ohr Somayach Cape Town

- Enchanted Purim Party at the Castle of Good Hope. Thursday, March 1 from 17:50. Food and entertainment available. Adults R220, children R80. To book, phone 021 434 6772.

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The Power to Surprise

A mutually enriching outreach project

Habonim shaliach Danny Adeno Abebe recently initiated a programme in which Jewish youth go to Kliptown, Soweto, to offer their time and skills to youths there, and receive the same in return.

This project, called Your Neighbour Makwelwane, was launched this month when Habonim and Bnei Akiva youth and teachers, along with pupils from King David schools, joined the Israel Centre and Abebe at the Cultural Centre in Kliptown.

Their goal is to enrich the education of pupils in Kliptown one Sunday every month. The Jewish youth will tutor them in maths, science, English and other skills needed to pass matric exams. In return, the Kliptown youth will teach their Jewish counterparts Zulu, tribal dance and their local culture.

The idea behind this is to activate the idea of “Love thy neighbour as thyself” by closing the gap between cultures and sharing skills.

• *Anyone wanting to get involved can contact Abebe on 064 984 0622.*



WIZO welcomes new leaders

At the WIZO Johannesburg’s 104th annual general meeting, members bid farewell to their co-chairs of three years, Lee Joffe and Andrea Wainer, and welcomed their newly elected chairperson, Janice Leibowitz, and her vice-chairs: Mandy Bernstein, Bev Gamsu and Raya Ravid.

“To say that they [Joffe and Wainer] have led us in noble style through choppy fundraising waters these past years, would be an understatement,” says Lauren Phillips of WIZO South Africa. “The world undergoes drastic change almost every week – and sometimes every hour! It is sometimes difficult for average individuals to keep up with this fast pace. Those of us attempting to steer a ship where our passengers rely solely on us have a truly weighty responsibility.

“But our two captains led us with dignity and poise, evident in the report delivered by Wainer. She departed from the norm, and instead shared with us the many lessons she’d learned in her term of leadership. It was entertaining and informative. “

Ben Swartz, chairperson of the SA Zionist Federation, was the guest speaker. He showed slides from his recent trip to Israel with a delegation of highly influential local religious leaders. “He reminded us that what we see in the media is not always a true reflection of people’s attitudes and feelings towards our Holy Land, and it was extremely uplifting. I’m sure that everyone in the room was left feeling inspired and hopeful for South Africa’s future relationship with Israel.”

Nicci Raz from the Zionist Federation, Aviad Sela from the Israel Centre, Bev Goldman from the Combined Women’s Organisations and Moonyeen Castle from WIZO South Africa brought messages of support from their respective organisations, such as this one: “We wish our newly elected chairperson, her vice-chairs and their incoming executive the best of luck for their term of office. May we all continue to work together towards positively empowering women, youth and children in Israel.”



Letters

WHO KNEW “NEVER AGAIN” HAD AN EXPIRY DATE?

Poland’s controversial bill, outlawing the term ‘Polish death camps’, has been signed by the Polish president.

Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel has “no tolerance for the distortion of the truth, the rewriting of history and the denial of the Holocaust”.

Napoleon Bonaparte once said: “History is a set of lies agreed upon.” Poland’s deputy ambassador to Israel, Piotr Kozlowski, claims that the bill is not intended to “whitewash history”, and Poland says its intention is merely to indicate that it was not officially involved with the building and running of camps.

However, the complicity of many Poles during the Holocaust has been documented in many books, including the well-known book by Professor Jan Gross titled *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Gross highlights the many times ordinary Polish citizens murdered Jews and blamed it on the Nazis.

We can already see the effects of the proposed bill. On a recent popular Polish TV show, Rafal Aleksander Ziemkiewicz used the bill to mock Israel’s opposition to it. He said because Jews were forced to clear the gas chambers and take bodies to the crematoria – in exchange for a prolonged death, which he does

not mention – the camps should be called “Jewish concentration camps”. This ignorance is exactly why this bill is dangerous.

Whether Poland is purposefully forgetting or just saving pride is impossible to tell. It’s a far cry from the formal apology given in 2001 by Poland’s then president, Aleksander Kwasniewski.

If “Never again” becomes “Just wait until they forget”, every minority group is at risk of persecution.

We should oppose this bill and tell the world that “Never again” means “Never again”. The Holocaust was an atrocity which shall never be repeated, but the only way to enforce this is to remember.

Poland must make changes to this bill, or at least hold a day of learning in which Polish citizens can study the Holocaust and learn about the complicity. As Lemony Snicket puts it: “Those unable to catalogue the past are doomed to repeat it.”

We have a choice: forget and “get on with it”; or remember the painful times and embrace our hardships, ensuring no one else will ever have to experience a holocaust. I say remember; I say embrace; I say never again.

Jonah Kollenberg
Grade 10, King David High School Victory Park

Montagu’s Jewish community revisited

The Western Cape town of Montagu has a small Jewish cemetery, but who knew Jews had lived in this small town?

The Montagu Historical Society, which meets regularly to visit places of interest or discuss various historical topics, decided to find out.

Its members set about gathering information on Jewish families who settled in Montagu in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It turns out that the town had a very active Jewish community.

Family names, identified from various sources, include Abramowitz, Ansell, Buirski, Brown, Fernandes, Friedman, Goldblatt, Idelson, Koonin, Millin, Moss, Philips, Plax, Raisers, Sandler, Schachat, Schlesinger, Stein and Vanger. People with these family names resided in Montagu at one time or another.

The historical society’s members are researching where these families lived in Montagu and how they earned a living. They are appealing to anyone, particularly the descendents of the former residents, with more information to contact them with stories and/or photos.

Of course, there may well have been other Jewish families residing there, about whom the historical society is unaware.

Once the project is complete, members of the society plan to display and store the information gleaned in the Montagu Museum.

One of the society’s discoveries was that in the 1800s the Millin family settled in Montagu. They had four children: Nathan and Barnet and their sisters, Maria and Gertrude. A member of the historical society found a box of old photographs in the loft of a house he recently purchased. Further research led him to believe that the home was built by Nathan. The society is appealing for help in identifying people in the photos that have been found.

• *Anyone with information or with family roots traceable to Montagu is requested to contact Rudi Allmayer on 023 614 3388 or 083 354 4311*

Rabbis, faith leaders pray for SA



Cape Town Orthodox Rabbi Pini Hecht and Progressive Rabbi Greg Alexander along with other interfaith leaders from the SA Faith Communities Environment Institute, gathered outside Parliament two weeks ago to protest against the nuclear deal and former president Jacob Zuma’s leadership. Much has changed since then, but they offered prayers for the environment, for rain and for the good governance of the nation. May their prayers be answered.

SOLUTIONS TO THE POLISH DEATH CAMPS BILL

As a white South African Jew who lives in a country with a history of discrimination, and whose religion has been looked down upon over generations, I would like to share my opinion about why it is wrong to outlaw the term ‘Polish death camps’ and propose a compromise.

To most people, the “Polish” part of “Polish death camps” refers to the location of the death camps, rather than the people who were responsible for them. Although we cannot change history and we have to remember that there were many Polish perpetrators during World War II, we must also acknowledge the Poles who helped to destroy the Nazi regime. Therefore, to allow those responsible to take responsibility, and to allow the names of those people who fought against the Nazis to go untarnished, I propose using the phrase ‘Nazi death camps in Poland’ as an alternative to ‘Polish death camps’.

This rephrasing is crucial so that Polish youth, who were not alive at the time of the Holocaust, will be made aware of the atrocities committed on their soil. Similarly, although my generation – particularly the white youth – was not around during apartheid, we should ever deny what happened. Every South African should accept responsibility for what happened.

Likewise, Poland and its people need to accept responsibility in order to move forward.

Ruby Kapeluschnik
Grade 10, King David Victory Park High School

Torah Academy High's Purim fundraising drive



JACK MILNER

For the first time, she opted to ride in the road race as well as the time trial – and ended up winning that event too. She competes in the 45 to 49 age group.

"It was unbelievable. After 100km on the road, it came down to a hair's breadth at the finish."

This race covered 30km and Zulberg completed it in a time of 46 minutes, 51.675 seconds.

“What I didn’t see was that she was right next to me all the time. There she was, launching herself at the finish and I nearly gave the gold medal to her.”



"It is very competitive between

Zulberg is also the current Maccabiah road race champion and was runner-up in the time trial in her age group. "The Maccabiah covers 20km [for the individual time trials] and the road race, 67km. I was actually planning to go

Why does Zulberg put herself through all this? "It's part of who I am. It makes me happy. I get to travel and have fun. Right now I enjoy every moment on the bike. When I wake up one morning and I'm no longer enjoying myself, I'll know it's time to quit."

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1kg

MONTAGU WALNUTS
74⁹⁹
250g

KOSHERIFIC CRUNCHY FISH STICKS
49⁹⁹
709g

BAKERS GOOD MORNING ASD.
26⁹⁹
300g each

COCA COLA
14⁹⁹
2L

NOLA SUNFLOWER OIL
14⁹⁹
750ml

SUNFOIL SUNFLOWER OIL
39⁹⁹
2L

Offers valid until **28 February** or while stocks last

Actual offers may differ from visuals shown. We reserve the right to limit quantities. While stocks last. E6OE

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Hours: Mon-Thurs 7am-10pm | Fri: 7am-4pm Sat: 1/2 Hour After Shabbos -10pm | Sun: 8am - 10pm