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Businessman asks forgiveness after public anti-Semitic rants

NICOLA MILTZ AND
SAM ANCER

“No wonder Hitler and the Nazis killed your ancestors – because they did not want your gay blood running around Europe.” This horrific email message was sent by Johannesburg businessman Montoedi Seane to attorney Colin Strime, director of Fluxmans Attorneys.

This was just one of many vile anti-Semitic and anti-gay statements that Seane, 33, emailed or posted all over social media about this Jewish attorney, his law firm and the Jewish community at large.

And now Seane, the owner of Uhuru Distributors, is sorry and has asked that the *SA Jewish Report* put a letter of apology in the newspaper. He now says he has had “moments of introspection” and has realised he “should have known better”.

The incessant vitriolic harassment started in July last year and continued into August. It had to do with a business deal to buy the Eastgate and Sandton branches of Stuttafords, which were in business rescue at the time.

Seane’s business associate agreed to pay a R500 000 deposit into the trust fund account of Fluxmans Attorneys. This was the amount required by interested bidders in order to proceed. But their bid was unsuccessful and the money was then paid back into the account from which it had originally been paid.

Seane became irate about this, saying the money belonged to him – despite having no proof of payment. After sending threatening emails to Strime and all the parties involved in the business deal, he stormed into the offices of Fluxmans Attorneys in Rosebank – on several occasions uninvited – demanding a refund. He then turned to social media and embarked on an anti-Semitic campaign.

The well-dressed Seane, who portrays himself as someone with a Bentley-driving, Champagne lifestyle, has in the past brazenly boasted on Instagram that “crime pays”.

He has posted photographs

of himself standing next to a Bentley and also one of him in the driver’s seat of one of the luxury vehicles, as if claiming ownership.

In one Instagram post he can be seen posing for the camera in a swimming pool with a glass of wine in hand. This one says: “Here, Cheers [sic] to crime kids.”

And, in yet another Instagram post, he poses in an expensive pair of shoes and says: “I’m living proof that Crime do [sic] pay kids.”

A few days after hearing he was not going to be paid any money, Seane sent a string of highly insulting and defamatory emails to Strime.

On August 1, Strime received three emails containing threats and curses. Later the same day at 15:49, Seane posted on Instagram: “Actually F*** the Jewish, the Blackman is king kids always remember that, you were not created to be slaves. F*** the Jews.”

The Instagram posts were incessant and ongoing, one ending with “Never, ever use this law firm kids, them Jews are f****ed up for real! Warning.”

A distressed Strime obtained an interim protection order for harassment against Seane on August 2 last year, after being persistently hounded by him. Strime also laid a criminal charge against Seane for crimen injuria with the SA Police Service and has lodged a complaint of hate speech against Montoedi with the Equality Court.

The interim protection order was served on Seane on August 7 to prevent him from continuing with his harassment.

But this did not deter Seane, who responded by posting further anti-Semitic comments on Instagram – and, in so doing, breaching the court order.

The one post ends with: “They say when you are with a Jew, Act Jewish.”

In papers before the court, Strime said Seane’s behaviour had negatively affected him. “He has caused me stress,” he said.

“I and Fluxmans Inc are being defamed, injured, insulted and harassed by Montoedi Seane, who has embarked on a campaign of repeated offensive and insulting

remarks against me, against Fluxmans Inc and against the Jewish people in general.”

Neo Malefane, the man who originally put up the R500 000 deposit on behalf of Uhuru, said he too became the victim of a string of threatening and insulting SMSes after pulling out of the deal when he realised Seane was not the man he claimed to be. “He is a con artist. His life in reality is very far from the image he portrays on social media. He doesn’t seem well upstairs.”

In recent weeks Seane, who claims to be a Christian, seems to have experienced a change of

heart. This week, he told the *SA Jewish Report* that he did not know what overcame him last year, claiming his behaviour was due to “stress and possibly the devil”.

In a seemingly remorseful tone he said: “I have done some reflecting and I realise that I have hurt a lot of people.” He added that he had “consulted with his elders”, who advised him to mend the error of his ways.

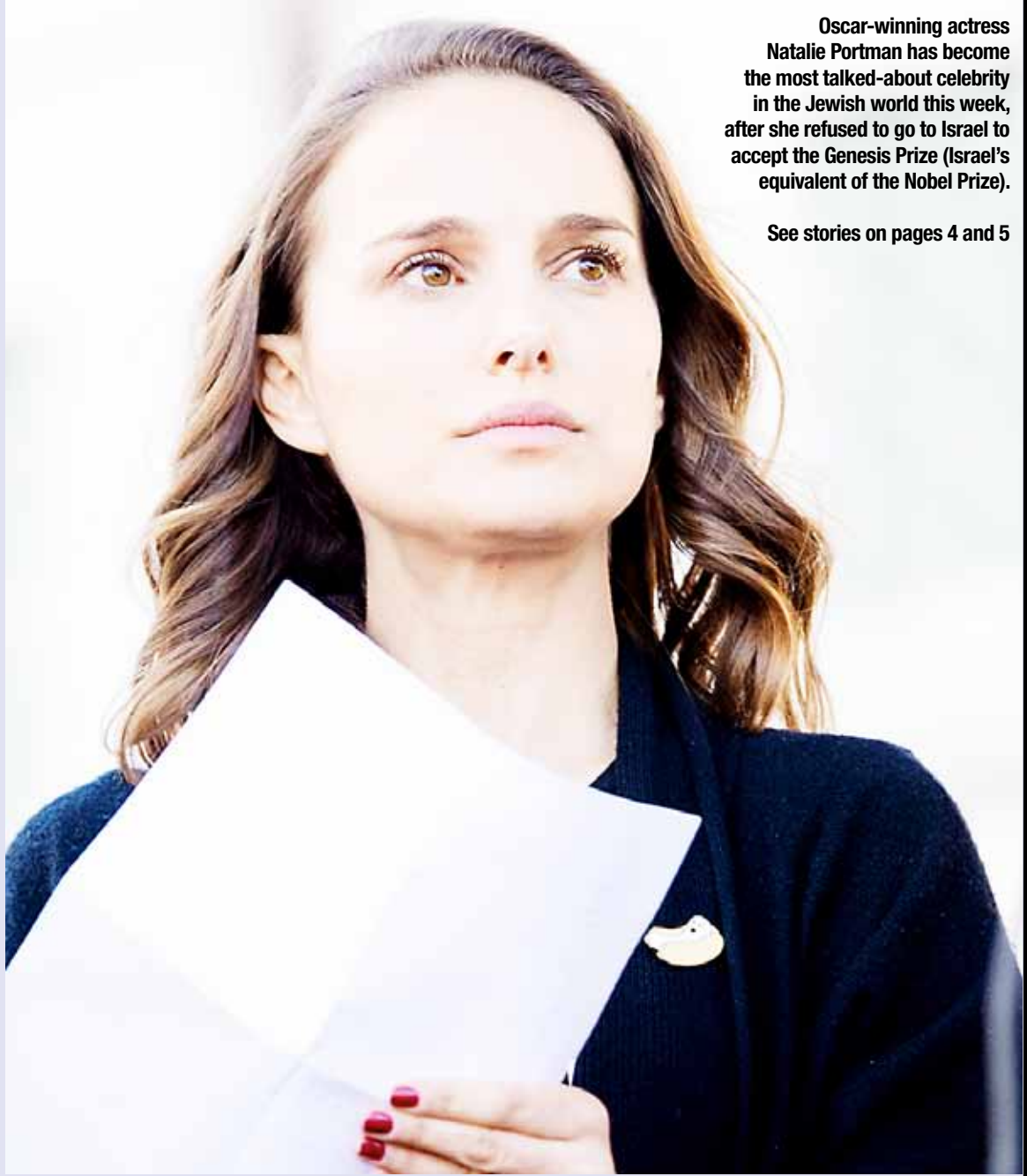
Seane apologised to Strime during a court-imposed mediation session recently and asked for his forgiveness. He also contacted a rabbi in the community asking for

advice. Rabbi Gabi Bookatz of the Waverley Shul said a man had contacted him “out of the blue”, asking for advice. “He said he felt bad because he had apparently offended a work colleague and, after apologising to him, he wanted to know how he could make good and what else was required of him in terms of the Jewish religion,” said Bookatz. He told Seane that if the man he had hurt had accepted his apology, then that was the end of the story; there was nothing else required of him.

According to Bookatz, he was

Continued on page 3>>

Israeli-born star shocks Jewish world



Oscar-winning actress Natalie Portman has become the most talked-about celebrity in the Jewish world this week, after she refused to go to Israel to accept the Genesis Prize (Israel's equivalent of the Nobel Prize).

See stories on pages 4 and 5

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JK Rowling tackles anti-Semitism in the Twitterverse

JORDAN MOSHE

“We must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy.” So says Albus Dumbledore, headmaster of Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry, in author JK Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Clearly, Rowling lives by that credo, as is evident in her recent Twitter stand against anti-Semitism.

A heated tweet exchange started on Yom Hashoah (April 18), when Rowling challenged online anti-Semitic sentiments and assured some of her Jewish Twitter followers that they weren’t alone.

Wading into a debate on the heels of a tense discussion about anti-Semitism and the Labour Party, which took place in the UK Parliament on April 17, she tweeted: “Most UK Jews in my timeline are currently having to field this kind of crap, so perhaps some of us non-Jews should start shouldering the burden.”

Responding to a tweet about Judaism being a religion and not a race (thereby justifying criticism levelled against Jews), Rowling said: “Anti-Semites think this is a clever argument, so tell us, do: were atheist Jews exempted from wearing the yellow star? #antisemitism.”

Rowling, who has 14.4 million followers on Twitter, sounded exasperated when she highlighted this seemingly “innocent” post.

Presumably, the post added, this was a “defence” against being called racist.

Her comments came a day after a searing debate on anti-Semitism in Britain’s House of Commons, in which Jewish MPs described the years of abuse and insults received from both members of the public and their fellow politicians.

Just hours before, British comedian and novelist David Baddiel had received an abusive message in response to his thanking a woman who had enjoyed his one-man show, currently on tour in Durham.

Rowling had seen this online exchange and decided to intervene more generally a few hours later. Posting a screen shot of the comment, which attempted to justify anti-Jewish attitudes, Rowling responded with fervour.

Almost immediately, her post received 2 000

“likes” and hundreds of retweets, many of them from Jewish users of Twitter, thanking her for prompt intervention and support.

The tweet went on to attract further anti-Jewish responses, but Rowling called them all out, challenging anti-Semitic sentiments and explaining why they are offensive. To a Twitter follower who complained that rebutting anti-Semitism is “culturally insensitive” to Muslims, Rowling lambasted those who “only understand bigotry in terms of ‘pick a team”” instead of having empathy and being willing to engage in level-headed debate.

Nevertheless, the author came under further fire from certain Twitter users for daring to oppose anti-Semitism. When one follower complained that Arabs couldn’t possibly be called anti-Semites because they are a Semitic people too, Rowling responded with a verbal eye-roll, using an image of actor Hugh Laurie looking comically exasperated. “The ‘Arabs are semitic too’ hot takes have arrived,” Rowling tweeted, pointing out the bigotry of the tweet.

In an effort to set the record straight, Rowling went on to share a definition of anti-Semitism as: “Hostility to or prejudice against Jews.” She then added a few messages of her own: “Split hairs. Debate etymology. Gloss over the abuse of your fellow citizens by attacking another country’s government. Would your response to any other form of racism or bigotry be to squirm, deflect or justify?” she asked.

Rowling’s connection with world Jewry goes back some years. In 2014, after being questioned on Twitter about the absence of Jewish characters in her books, Rowling announced that there were, in fact, Jews at Hogwarts. Anthony Goldstein, a character who said very little but always did the right thing, was proclaimed to be Jewish. Rowling went on to announce that there were also Hogwarts students of every other religion.

Moreover, last week’s incident wasn’t the first

Torah thought of the week

I’ve got a faribel with.... Me?

Can you imagine a daughter-in-law who never once calls to wish Good Shabbos? Or a rabbi who started a new learning programme in the shul without consulting with the committee? Or every flat dweller in your block getting together for a braai – except for you as you weren’t invited?

I know; you can’t imagine such a thing. But it happens. And the faribels that this creates can last literally for generations.

So, what can protect us from the typically Jewish community’s tragic infighting that has so many beautiful families, friendships and communities in its toxic snare?

This week, we read about the ultimate mitzva – *Ve’Ohavta Le’Rayacha Komocho* (Love your fellow human as yourself). The commentaries explain this selfless love as the ability to look past another person’s faults in the same way that one overlooks one’s own mistakes.

The Talmud tells us: “Al kol pesha’im techaseh ho’ahava” – that self-love conceals every fault. We usually think of this (human failing in) self-love as concealing one’s own fault and abdicating responsibility to repair. The truth is, however, that this can be (positively) applied when it’s your love of another person that conceals their faults instead.

“As yourself” means the ability to look at another person, even when there seems to be



JK Rowling

time that the author has taken a stand against anti-Semitism.

Over a thousand British cultural figures penned open letters in 2015 in a national newspaper which berated Israel and pledged never to “play music, accept awards, attend exhibitions, festivals or conferences, run masterclasses or workshops” anywhere in the Jewish state. Rowling, however, refused to join this movement of letters demonising the Jewish state, instead adding her voice to 150 other British writers and artists who pledged to resist the calls to boycott Israel.

“Israelis will be right to ask why cultural boycotts are not also being proposed against... North Korea and Zimbabwe, whose leaders are not generally considered paragons by the international community,” Rowling and fellow signatories wrote in their letter, adding: “Cultural engagement builds bridges, nurtures freedom and positive movement for change.”

• Sources: Aish.com, Twitter, Ha’retz, Jewish News, The Shmooze

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:23	18:13	Johannesburg
17:52	18:44	Cape Town
17:07	17:57	Durban
17:27	18:17	Bloemfontein
17:23	18:15	Port Elizabeth
17:15	18:07	East London



Rabbi Asher Deren. The Shul of Blouberg – West Coast.

a fault in what they are doing, and yet, because you realise that in your essence you are one, the “fault” that seems to be there is overlooked.

“But I’m not that person,” you say? Well, that’s only on the surface level where your distinct bodies, characters and persona separate you as two unique beings. In the core essence of your soul, however, at the point where our Soul connects with G-d, we are all one composite, one unit, one being... one person. So, if you’re one person, would you get angry at yourself?

It’s true: maybe your daughter-in-law should have called before Shabbos. Perhaps the rabbi should have consulted with the committee. Your neighbour should have invited you to the braai that everyone else went to, etc.

But this mitzvah allows us to take a step back and imagine if we were the very perpetrator of the “crime”. Imagine if you forgot to call your mother-in-law, or consult with the rabbi, or invite the neighbour: would our human nature not instinctively use every excuse in the book to find merit in the mistake?

So now do it for them too... after all, at the core of your soul you are one person.

So then, yes, on some level maybe I’m the one who should have made the apology / extended the invitation / overlooked the insult, etc.

Am I really going to have a faribel with myself?

It doesn’t sound like such a good idea, after all.

Don’t you agree?

South African

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BDS leader gets top award for human rights

NICOLA MILTZ

This week, President Cyril Ramaphosa will honour a man who is at the forefront of polarising South African Jewry and making the community feel unwelcome.

BDS South Africa chairperson Farid Esack is also a prominent University of Johannesburg (UJ) professor and a well-known anti-apartheid and gender equality activist.

He is being awarded the Order of Luthuli (Silver), considered the highest award that South Africa bestows on its citizens who have made a “significant contribution to the struggle for democracy”.

Esack is head of Religious Studies at UJ. An outspoken anti-Israel and pro-Palestine campaigner, he is calling for a complete boycott of Israel. He suffers no fools in his intellectual endeavour to demonise the State of Israel and highlight the plight of Palestinians.

As a recipient of the award, he is being recognised for his contribution to academic research and to the fight against race, gender, class and religious oppression.

“It is regrettable that the President’s Award, which we view with such high esteem, has been sullied by being associated with a man who leads an organisation that has carried out campaigns which, over the last few years, have directly resulted in blatant displays of anti-Semitism,” says Wendy Kahn, national director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.

“The integrity of these awards is undermined when a person with such unsavoury associations is selected as a recipient.”

Esack, a liberal theologian, is no stranger to controversy. He has been accused of anti-Semitism by association with the BDS, and is believed to have been banned from hosting lectures in France and Germany for the same reason.

Last year, he was accused of being sympathetic to Holocaust denial by the Israeli embassy in Germany. He vehemently contested this.

At a 2015 fundraiser, Esack



praised Leila Khaled, who carried out two hijackings for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the 1960s and ’70s, calling her his “comrade”.

But while his academic achievements, along with his anti-apartheid and pro-gender credentials, speak for themselves, Esack’s anti-Israel mission has escalated to fever pitch in recent months.

Ben Swartz, national chairman of the SA Zionist Federation, said BDS SA was having “a massive effect on the psyche of the local Jewish community”.

“If you go back in history, anti-Semitism has never been a major issue in South Africa,” he explained. “Only since the rise of BDS here has it truly come into play. The BDS, with Esack as its strategic thinker, is at the forefront of polarising and isolating Jewry in South Africa. “The ANC is honouring a person who has fomented and cemented division and hatred in the political discourse around South African Jewry.

“It is a fantasy to think you can separate Jews from their national, historical, biblical and cultural homeland, and his trying to convince people you can do that is fantasy.”

With the rise of BDS, Swartz said that Jewish youth were being made to feel unwelcome on university campuses, including at the universities of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Cape Town (UCT).

“You see ‘F**k the Jews’ on Wits campus walls; that’s never happened before. And there are violent anti-Israel demonstrations at UCT.”

Swartz added: “The only tangible output of BDS, beyond the rhetoric, has been hardcore incidents of anti-Semitism.”

Esack has persistently tried to keep his nose clean in the area of anti-Semitism. He posted a statement on the German BDS-equivalent website in 2017 in response to allegations of anti-Semitism because he was “slated to speak in Berlin, Freiburg, Bonn and Hamburg”.

“Neither I nor anyone on the staff or board of BDS SA has ever made any statement that could be

reasonably interpreted as anti-Semitism,” he wrote.

However, considering the behaviour of Muhammed Desai, co-founder, spokesperson and national co-ordinator of BDS SA, this is not accurate. Desai was part of a BDS protest held at Wits in 2013. At that rally, the protesters began to sing *Dubula iJuda* (Shoot the Jew). In 2011, the Equality Court of Johannesburg banned *Dubula iBhunu* (Shoot the Boer), a derogatory song degrading Afrikaners, on the basis that it demonstrates a clear intention to be hurtful, to incite harm or to promote hatred.

Desai initially defended the singing, saying: “The whole idea of anti-Semitism is blown out of proportion.” Esack later distanced BDS from this.

In his 2017 statement in Germany, Esack went on to say: “The horrors of the Holocaust, as with other human disasters, were uniquely horrendous,” he said. “But to elevate one form of racism – in this case, anti-Semitism – to a class of its own, with a special place in hell reserved for anti-Semites, is actually another manifestation of white privilege.

“Those who are genuinely concerned about anti-Semitism as an extension of their opposition to all forms of racism must guard against elevating this form of racism as a crime worse than

others.” And when it came to his sentiments about terrorism, he reacted on Facebook to the Paris terror attacks in 2015 where 132 people were killed. “I am not praying for Paris; I am not condemning anyone. Why the hell should I? I had nothing to do with it.

“I am sickened by the perpetual expectations to condemn. I walk away from your shitty racist and Islamophobic expectations that whenever your chickens come home to roost then I must feign horror.”

Esack has ingratiated himself among certain people within the South African Progressive Jewish community by attending shul services on Shabbos and also during the high holidays. He claims he does this because he is a student of religion.

In response to criticism within the community of his attendance at the Beit Emanuel shul, Esack said: “For many in the Jewish community, the State of Israel is synonymous with one’s identity as a Jew, and to oppose Israel and/or its policies is to be opposed to (possibly even be an enemy of) all Jewish people. I understand this position, although I do not agree with it. Understanding this position, though, means that I do not get angry or upset when

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Businessman asks forgiveness after public anti-Semitic rants

>> Continued from page 1

“vague” and never mentioned the nature of the offence. “Had I known the background to this, I would have advised him differently. Obviously, this was far juicier than he made out.”

In his letter of apology to the Jewish community, Seane admitted to having hurt Strime. He admitted that his “comments” not only injured his dignity, integrity and his credibility as a professional attorney of many years, but also caused harm to the Jewish community, of which Strime is a member.

Seane also contacted the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and on Tuesday, visited the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre on its recommendation as part of his rehabilitation process.

Coincidentally, Seane’s sudden about-turn and change of heart follows fresh on the heels of a

severe jail sentence imposed on estate agent Vicki Momberg. She was found guilty of four counts of crimen injuria for uttering racial slurs at a police officer in Johannesburg. She was caught on camera verbally abusing the officer, and used the K-word 48 times following a smash-and-grab incident. She was sentenced to an effective two years’ imprisonment, sending a clear message that racism would not be tolerated in the courts.

Strime said he did not know whether Seane was being genuine in his apology or if he was showing remorse because he suddenly realised that he could face serious jail time if found guilty in a court of law.

“I’m not sure,” said Strime this week. “I will have to decide the way forward.”

Seane’s sincerity will be a matter for the courts to decide.

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Laureen Shalpid 083 789 0229 | 011 622 1820

Does Natalie Portman’s snub of Netanyahu make her the face of liberal Zionism?

RON KAMPEAS

Actress Natalie Portman’s statement explaining why she declined to attend an award ceremony in Israel in her honour was a pointed rebuke, and of a particular individual.

“I did not want to appear as endorsing Benjamin Netanyahu,” she said of the Israeli prime minister.

But it also was an intimate and tactile embrace of her native land, covering its flavours, its images, its vision, even its movement.

“I treasure my Israeli friends and family, Israeli food, books, art, cinema and dance,” the Jerusalem-born director and actress wrote on Friday in an Instagram post, explaining why she would not take part in the festivities surrounding the 2018 Genesis Prize.

The argument that one may love Israel and despise its leaders is as old as the state.

Yet something about Portman’s decision not to travel to accept the Genesis Prize – given to celebrities who exemplify “the core traits of the Jewish character and values of the Jewish people” – has resonated like no similar statement in decades.

JTA’s initial story about her non-appearance is among the most-read in the news service’s online history, and the intensity of the response from Israelis was huge, with government ministers accusing Portman of borderline anti-Semitism.

“Like many Israelis and Jews around the world, I can be critical of the leadership in Israel without wanting to boycott the entire nation,” Portman said.



“Natalie Portman is more dangerous [to Netanyahu] than the BDS movement because she can’t be dismissed as an anti-Zionist Israel hater.”

J Street, the liberal Jewish Middle East policy group, had sustained support for a decade on essentially that principle, and it is one also embraced by Senator Bernie Sanders, a 2016 Democratic presidential candidate. In fact, Sanders anticipated Portman’s case just days before at the J Street annual conference.

“As someone who believes absolutely and unequivocally in Israel’s right to exist, and to exist in peace and security,” he said, “we must say loudly and clearly that to oppose the reactionary policies of Prime Minister Netanyahu does not make us anti-Israeli!”

The J Street crowd ate it up, but the comment went largely unnoticed outside of the conference. Why did Portman’s comment draw such heat?

“We are living in a celebrity media environment. We just elected a reality TV star president,” said Jeremy Ben Ami, J Street’s president. “It means a lot more for the debate when Natalie Portman says it.”

“This is the most prominent figure in American entertainment who has delivered this message,” he said.

Not only has Portman won an



Academy Award (in 2011 for her role in *Black Swan*), but her Jewish bona fides are unassailable. She was born in Israel. She made the Hebrew-language movie, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. And as a Harvard student, she served as a research assistant to attorney Alan Dershowitz for his 2003 book, *The Case for Israel*.

Mik Moore, a strategic consultant to liberal groups, including a number of Jewish groups, said Portman’s fame was critical to advancing the topic because it attached a name and face to liberal Zionists. As a group, Moore said, liberal Zionists have felt squeezed by the pro-Israel right on one side, and on the other by the non- and anti-Zionist left, including advocates of BDS.

“Portman occupies a grey area for many American Jews: hating Bibi while maintaining affection for Israel and Zionism,” Moore said, using Netanyahu’s nickname.

“But this is a space that lacks the clarity of purpose that exists to its left among BDSers, and to its right among love-it-or-leave-it supporters of Bibi and company,” he said. Such clarity, Moore said, “allows people to very quickly identify a point of view that they can claim as their own. And it gives the media a way to categorise this demographic, like ‘Reagan Republicans’ did for many years.”

Jill Jacobs, the director of T’ruah, a rabbinical human rights group, said Portman provided relief from the squeeze that liberal Zionists feel from both sides. “It’s the people on the right and far left who are collaborating to erase this space and to insist on a false dichotomy between pro-Israel and anti-occupation/pro-democracy.”

Libby Lenkinski, the vice-president for public engagement for the New Israel Fund, said her group, which funds liberal Israeli advocacy groups, hoped Portman’s statement would bring attention to its agenda, noting that Portman had stated that she was exploring Israeli charities to support.

“The right celebrity can open up more space on an issue and give more permission to more people to reflect their position,” Lenkinski said. “It can be a catalyst.”

A number of liberal Zionists who praised Portman were upset by the patronising responses she received from the right and the left, particularly the insistence on both sides that she was embracing BDS,

despite her denials.

“While the far left and right are bent on mischaracterising Portman’s stance as pro-BDS, we take her at her word,” said Debra Shushan, the director of policy for Americans for Peace Now. “Natalie Portman is more dangerous [to Netanyahu] than the BDS movement because she can’t be dismissed as an anti-Zionist Israel hater.”

So, like Reagan Republicans, is “Portman Zionism” going to

become a thing? Not so fast, said Lev Gringauz, a student at the University of Minnesota and a reporting fellow for *New Voices*, a Jewish campus magazine.

The viciousness of the response from Netanyahu’s defenders, which included calls for Portman to have her citizenship revoked, might discourage like-minded people, he said.

“When you get attacked quickly on all sides for so much as trying to be nuanced, even if imperfectly so, that means the space for conversation is too narrow for any of us to operate in anymore,” Gringauz said.

For the pro-Israel right, Portman was the latest in a long line of liberal posturers, especially when she decried “the mistreatment of those suffering from today’s atrocities”. Many interpreted those words as referring to Israeli troops, who have killed more than 30 Palestinians protesting along the Gaza border in recent weeks. (An Israeli television station reported on Monday that Portman originally told the Genesis Prize that she was cancelling her participation in the award ceremony over Gaza.)

“She didn’t express love for Israel,” said Ari Teman, an entrepreneur and stand-up comic. “At most, she expressed love for hummus

and dancing. She stabbed Israel in the back for defending itself from Hamas, a terror organisation sworn to kill Jews everywhere, and she knew exactly what message she was sending and how it would be used by Israel-haters.”

Josh Block, CEO of the Israel Project, said there was a lesson for both Portman and her critics: Portman should be heeded as an intimate of Israel, but should also be cautious in how she expressed her criticism. “People ought not to be working overtime to turn an ally into an adversary, and those with special platforms and such deep ties to Israel need to take care that when expressing their legitimate disagreements, they don’t take actions that, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan would say, could be seen as ‘joining the jackals’,” he said, recalling the late New York senator.

“The better approach for her would be to go to Israel and give a speech and highlight the values important to her in the presence of people she wants to persuade.

“The better response is not to disengage and cede the discussion to others, but to engage more deeply, on the ground, in Israel, with the only – and necessarily imperfect – nation state of the Jewish people.”

The quandary of the Board of Deputies’ treasurer

TALI FEINBERG

When community leader Eric Marx stepped down as treasurer of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) six months ago, his position was never filled, and the board’s current national chairman, Shaun Zagnoev, took on the role temporarily.

As this period now comes to an end, there appears to be no new treasurer in sight and Zagnoev is still holding the two key voluntary leadership roles at the board.

Marx stepped down in November 2017 for six months as part of an agreement with the board’s Cape Council and community members, who had questioned his actions when he had been chair of the Cape board.

This led to an independent review panel, chaired by advocate Milton Seligson, investigating the Cape Board elections of August 2017, following complaints from community members. The subsequent Seligson Report told of “a delegate substitution which was engineered by [Marx when he was] the outgoing chairperson of the board and resulted in his son acting as a delegate and casting a vote, which was irregular and unauthorised”.



How will the board assure the community that this is the best option for a leader in this post?

The report referred to Marx’s “misconduct” and said this instance illustrated “the flawed electoral process which characterised the election of the board” under Marx’s watch. It also said that these actions were “clearly irregular and contrary to the constitution”.

Now, as the six months since Marx stepped down

conclude at the end of April, Zagnoev says: “The SAJBD will democratically elect a new treasurer. In so doing, the SAJBD will take into account all the relevant facts and opinions, and has appointed a sub-committee of the board to assist it in this regard.

“We requested three members of our National Executive Committee (NEC), who are lawyers, to review the findings of the Seligson Report and other submissions as they pertain to Eric’s eligibility for election as national treasurer. Their recommendations have not yet been reviewed or discussed by our leadership... we envisage that the NEC will be deliberating over this matter in the near term. When the NEC elects a replacement national treasurer, it will undoubtedly consider all eligible candidates.”

However, Zagnoev would not answer direct questions from the *SA Jewish Report*. These included why the board would consider a treasurer who has acted with misconduct in the elections, if there are any other candidates in the running to be treasurer, and if the community will have a say in the process.

Furthermore, if it is decided that Marx can return to the treasury, how will the board assure the community that this is the best option for a leader in this post?

A long-term national board member said that while he did not condone Marx’s actions of giving his son a vote, this does not undermine his work as a treasurer. “He was one of the best treasurers we’ve had for a very long time, and with his accounting expertise he looked into areas that have never been looked into before.”

The board member concluded by saying he believed the board would do the right thing going forward as they have the community’s interests at heart.

• *Just before going to print on Wednesday, the SA Jewish Report was told by a source that the board was to call for nominations for treasurer, and that members of the NEC will be able to nominate anyone from the community.*

Whatever your view, express it with clarity and conviction

Natalie Portman is not an anti-Semite. She is probably not even anti-Israel. To label her such is stupid. Nearly as stupid as her vague and embarrassing statement about her decision

not to travel to Israel in order to accept the Genesis award. She did no one any favours. Not even BDS, which she very clearly does not support. There were no winners of this prize.

Bringing Israeli cyber security expertise to South Africa

JORDAN MOSHE

In an age of pervasive cyber threats comes the need to keep one step ahead. Constantly developing digital security solutions is essential. Israel is at the forefront of virtual security development and invests much time and resources in mitigating the threats posed by the internet.

“Privacy is important, especially in this technology-driven world,” explains Eyal Balicer, an expert in technology-oriented policy and business development. “Even what seems just negligible information could create a unique prism into someone’s life, habits and environment.”

Balicer is visiting South Africa at the invitation of the Israeli Trade and Economic Office in Johannesburg. He has come to leverage his expertise in cyber security and share it with business counterparts in South Africa. Balicer is helping them find ways to improve their online safeguards and show them how they can tap into Israeli innovation.

Balicer earned a BA, MA and pre-doctoral degree in political science by the age of 22. He then went on to serve in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) for five-and-a-half years before going on to become the youngest officer to join the office of the Israeli prime minister.

It was here that he established the Research Unit of the Israel National Cyber Bureau, where he led a cross-government process to shape Israel’s international cyber security strategy and policy. Two years later, he joined the private sector, and today he heads

Glilot Capital Partners, the best-performing venture capital fund in the world.

The company manages \$125 million (R1.5 trillion) in investment, and Balicer takes his job seriously. “From cyber to finance, health to automotive, we find and invest in innovative Israeli entrepreneurs who offer unique solutions to major corporations in the tech industry,” Balicer says.

Explaining why he believes Israel has come to lead in the technological innovation sphere in such a short time, Balicer says: “Israel has a particular culture in its DNA. We look to undermine accepted convention and find new solutions to problems, which may not have been considered before.

“While different explanations for our prowess in innovation have been suggested – some trace it back to the culture of Talmudic study or attribute it to our philosophies of dialectics and the study of diverse subjects – modern Israel possesses a unique eco-system.”

This ecosystem sees various components of Israeli society working together to achieve something remarkable, says Balicer.

“Government, industry, local and international stakeholders, the academy, the IDF and the various establishments work together in creating the perfect environment

for innovation, which is constant.”

Balicer explains: “The IDF, for example, serves as an organic screening process that promotes the Israeli cyber ecosystem as a whole. When you have the mandatory draft of every 18-year-old in Israel, you can choose the best and the brightest youth, and train them with cutting-edge technologies. You can then delegate enormous responsibilities to them and give them the opportunity to encounter challenges they would never encounter elsewhere.”

Israel may be the ideal environment for this, but it is also forced to engage in innovative development owing to its circumstances.

“Proportionally, it’s a small country,” says Balicer. “Therefore, reliance on its own innovation is a necessity, especially because of its security concerns.

“Together, the culture which celebrates innovation and the fact that its people are security minded creates fertile ground for technological exceptionalism.

Speaking about the current state of cyber technology, Balicer addressed the recent scandal regarding the acquisition of user data by Cambridge Analytica from Facebook, and the social media culture in general. “The nature of the scandal may have

been a violation of terms of use, but this is a breach of privacy more than security. It reminds us that consumers prefer usability over security and need to be aware of what data is being shared and who has access to it.

“Consumers are getting a service without cost and should consider

that perhaps they are the product in many ways.

“Online security is not a guarantee,” he warns. “We should consider ourselves as not safe at all. All consumers need to take steps to safeguard themselves online. They need to implement necessary controls to maintain a healthy usage of virtual space.

“If users are vigilant when conducting transactions online and understand that they are using an open public space, they can protect themselves. The reality is that consumers are not informed enough. Service providers know this, yet they are not producing products that prioritise security.”

Balicer believes that we will continue to see a rapid development in cyber technology.

“The cyber arms race between attackers and defenders ˚will continue escalating. Defenders will always need to up their game and stay one step ahead of attackers by protecting themselves. Attackers need only one opportunity to breach a system and that’s it.

“The potential for attack is always on the rise, putting infrastructure and personal autonomy at risk.

“We need to continue teaching consumers how to approach the virtual space and help them find the ideal security solution they need.”

Some months ago, Zapiro, the well-known and gifted South African cartoonist, sat across the desk from me in the radio studio. We had agreed to discuss the launch of his latest book but not his views on Israel. He is openly critical. I am openly a Zionist. I also consider him to be an enormous talent who has shaped political discourse in South Africa through his gift.

Despite the rules of engagement, I decided to venture a bit closer to the elephant in the room and ask him what it felt like to be a pariah of his own community because of his Israel stance. His pain was palpable and although I disagree strongly with his approach, I felt for him.

I, too, have been on the receiving end. More than once. It is, in fact, safe to say that I continue to receive an equal amount of derision from every segment of society. But the one that hurts. For me, the only one that hurts is that which comes from community. I have been labelled a “self-hating Jew” because I suggested that there needs to be an alternative approach to the egalitarian issue at the Kotel. I have been told I am the cause of anti-Semitism when I raised concerns about supporting a singular cause of “white farm murders”, and I hope to continue to do so with other subjects in which I engage. It is vital to have an authentic view, even if it’s unpopular.

Portman was wrong. Not because she has a view that is inconsistent with ours. And not because she expressed it and risks damaging the united front that we might hold dear. She is wrong because she didn’t.

Instead of a (poorly) crafted explanation that links the birth of the state of Israel



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

to the Holocaust, she needed to engage in real dialogue. Even if she chose not to accept the award because she disagrees with the Israeli prime minister, she could still have gone to Israel, made sure that her information was correct and then debated and engaged the subject properly. Either that or had similar conversations whilst still in the US. Her name carries enormous responsibility and she has to know that. Instead, her statements were at best dismissive, at worst offensive, but most definitely lacking in gravitas.

But that doesn’t make her an anti-Semite and it doesn’t make her anti-Israel.

Portman is entitled to a view, even if it’s not in line with our opinion and even if we would love it to be something different. But with her name comes the responsibility that her fame has awarded her. She needs to understand how powerful her voice is, and she needs to use it carefully. And that means engaging properly, not simply through a pleasant sounding but substance-lacking publicist-worded statement.

Our responsibility is not to react so aggressively when an opinion is different to ours. It’s to curtail the hyperbolic language and to swoon a little less when we hear that thought. We are not likely to die from it. On the contrary, it might even make us a little stronger.



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South African
Jewish Report

Good or bad? That is the question

“What a revolting person she is! And here I was so impressed by her beauty and acting ability, I thought she was a good person. She sure has shown her true colours!” This was a titbit from a conversation I overheard while walking past a restaurant in Norwood this week. This woman was going on about Israeli-born Hollywood actress Natalie Portman. And her friend was agreeing.

I got to thinking about what it means to be a good person. Truth is, we have no idea whether Portman is a good, bad or innocuous individual. And her choosing to take a stand against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by not going to Israel to accept her Genesis Prize (the Jewish equivalent of the Nobel Prize) doesn't define her as good or bad.

No. What it does is show that she is taking a political stand against the leader of the country in which she was born and identifies with. In much the same way as South Africans booed former president Jacob Zuma at political rallies or marched to the Union Buildings calling for him to stand down, she took this stand.

Granted, because she is so famous and loved particularly by our tribe, she has been criticised by the yin and yang for her stand.



But this doesn't make her bad, does it?

In the same week, *Harry Potter* author JK Rowling took a stand against anti-Semitism. While British Jewry are reeling from the debate over the Labour Party and anti-Semitism within its ranks, this world-acclaimed author made her point on Twitter to her 14.4 million Twitter followers. She tweeted: “Anti-Semites think this is a clever argument, so tell us, do: were atheist Jews exempted from wearing the yellow star?”

We love her that much more for doing this, but does this comment make her

good? Well, my already high estimation of Rowling soared, but I can't say it means she is innately good or bad. It is a matter of perspective.

In this week's newspaper, we introduce you to Montoedi Seane, a 33-year-old Johannesburg businessman who came out with the ugliest anti-Semitic comments about a Jewish lawyer who did something he didn't like. He used social media to let rip again and again against Colin Strime, the law firm he works for and Jews in general.

Had we come into the picture then, we would have unleashed all our powers against his hate speech. Instead, the *SA Jewish Report* hears about this from Seane, who sends us a letter of apology he wants us to print.

In the letter, he is contrite and, apparently, so repentant. He doesn't spell out what he said, but that “did not only injure his (Strime's) dignity, integrity and credibility as a professional attorney of many years, but also caused harm to the Jewish community, of which he is a member”.

Seane goes on to write: “I wish to retract any and all the words I used to humiliate and discriminate against him by virtue of being a member of the Jewish community, and unconditionally and unreservedly apologise to all who were affected by my comments.”

And so Seane went on.

On reading the letter initially, I believed this man was really sorry for saying something – although I had no idea what. He came across as a good person who had done something wrong and was feeling very bad about it.

As it turns out, in fact, he did more than write this letter in order to get “redemption”.

Back to the question of being a good or bad person. Some of the things Seane posted on social media were beyond horrific, based on the ugliest racial hatred. Reading what he wrote made it hard to believe there were any redeemable qualities in such a man. Is he a bad person?

Then, we find out that the chairperson of Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) South Africa, Professor Farid Esack, is to be awarded the South African president's Order of Luthuli (Silver). Considered the highest award that South Africa bestows on its citizens, it is to be given to Esack for his contribution to human rights and research. As people who believe in the State of Israel, and for whom its very existence and success is essential to who we are as Jews, Esack is so much more than a thorn in our side.

He is a man on a mission to see the downfall of the State. While he makes a point of always saying he is not anti-Semitic, only anti-Israel, the two are almost impossible to separate.

But has this man done any good in South Africa? He obviously has. I remember when I was a journalist on mainstream newspapers and he was on the Commission for Gender Equality. He was always very helpful and friendly, and clearly worked hard against gender disparity. But as the anti-Israel lobby gets louder in South Africa, so too does the anti-Jewish sentiment. Who is at fault for this? Is this man good or bad?

These are situations that are probably more clear-cut than most – particularly the last two, but in most people there is both good and bad.

And, as we move into Freedom Day, let's give each other the space to be human, make mistakes and not always do the right thing. Let's give people a real fighting chance before deciding they are pure bad.

Good Shabbos and Happy Freedom Day!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Dateline: Middle East

Is the bromance between Trump and Netanyahu coming to an end?



PAULA SLIER

US President Donald Trump's daughter, Ivanka, and her husband, Jared Kushner, are expected in Israel for the moving and opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem in a few weeks' time.

The president himself will not attend. It does seem an obvious choice to send the power couple – both senior US administration aides – in his place, not least because they are the most ardent pro-Israel supporters in Trump's inner circle. However, it does not detract from rumours that have been circulating for months that Trump is privately considering ousting them from office.

In February, Kushner had his top-secret security clearance stripped as federal investigators zeroed in on business dealings he'd conducted in the Middle East. No surprise, then, that Kushner finds himself increasingly on the defensive. Although people close to him insist his security clearance downgrade hasn't hindered his ability to work on Middle East issues, it's unclear how he can advance the so-called “deal of the century” that Trump has charged him with. Ask most Israelis and Palestinians what they think about Kushner's efforts, and they'll laugh in answer.

And herein lies the worry. Trump might want to save his son-in-law and, in a push to do that, could put pressure on Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to make concessions for a peace deal. This would be a wonderful public relations coup for the American president. It might even explain recent reports which surfaced of a phone conversation between Trump and Netanyahu last year, in which the American president was alleged to have asked Netanyahu whether he seriously cared about making peace with the Palestinians.

Speaking apparently off script, as is Trump's fashion, the comment came after Israeli press reported that the Israeli premier was planning to approve settlement construction projects to satisfy his right wing base.

But Netanyahu has no appetite for making concessions – and certainly not now. Which means if Trump pushes him into a corner, he won't necessarily relent and the so-called honeymoon period between the two could come to an abrupt end. Many argue it already has.

The last time the leaders met was in March, marking five meetings since Trump assumed office more than a year ago. During this period, they've forged a very public camaraderie, often stressing the tight bond between their countries and themselves.

Indeed, one cannot help but think how similar

they are – at least in one respect. Both are embroiled in potentially far-reaching and damaging political investigations. Trump is dealing with a special counsel inquiry into Russian interference in the 2016 elections; Netanyahu faces allegations by the Israeli police that he committed bribery, fraud and breach of trust in his dealings with wealthy businessmen and newspaper publishers.

One question hanging over the excitement of their last Oval Office meeting – which Washington described as “a routine check-in” – was whether they would ever meet there again. As things stand for Netanyahu back home, chances are slim.

Just hours before that meeting, the Israeli prime minister learned that a close aide of many years was turning state witness – the third in seven months. The feeling in Israel is that the prime minister's days are numbered. This is compounded by new rounds of Israeli police questioning and recommendations to indict him and his wife, some of which seem likely to be endorsed by the attorney-general.

The worry is that in his doggedness to remain in office, Netanyahu could significantly harm the Israeli judicial system. Certainly, as the weeks go by, his tenure seems to be coming to an end.

As for Trump, he joked a few weeks ago that the quick White House turnover was good for business. He pondered aloud if his wife would be the next to leave him.

Trump has repeatedly said what a “wonderful thing” his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital is, and that he believes it will lead to peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Nothing could be further from the truth for the latter. Palestinians remain resolved in their fury and are adamant that Washington no longer has a role to play as a neutral mediator.

But Netanyahu is hardly concerned with how the Arab world views the embassy move. He is concerned with making sure that Israeli voters back home, who might possibly be contemplating a future without him, realise that it was on his watch that Washington broke decades of foreign policy and moved its embassy to Jerusalem.

What Netanyahu wants Israelis to remember, and he'll remind them at every opportunity, is that of all Israel's prime ministers, it was he who made this happen.

The truth is that it was, in fact, Trump who did so – with or without the help of his daughter and son-in-law, who'll be in Jerusalem to watch the historic occasion in all its promised pomp and ceremony.

• Paula Slier 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*.



US President Donald Trump and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Looking at Israel on South Africa’s Freedom Day

OPINION

BENJAMIN POGRUND
JERUSALEM

Israel has been brimming over with happiness in celebrating 70 years of existence. Thousands have flocked to staged, lavish events and political leaders have given rousing, populist speeches.

Of course, there is every reason for joy, starting with the mere fact of survival. From the very day of its founding, Israel has had to endure civil war, invasion by foreign armies, plane hijackings, suicide bombers and the terrorist murders of men, women and children.

While overcoming all of this, it has created a new home – a haven – for millions of Jews from around the world. It has become a powerhouse of success, whether in agriculture, the arts, medicine, engineering or hi-tech. It is the Start-up Nation phenomenon because, as David Rosenberg of *Ha’aretz* newspaper says: “Israelis have the rare ability to look outside the box and develop new products and services, which these days means digitising everything from automobiles to insurance.” The economy is doing well and GDP growth is about 3.5%.

The words of self-congratulation have poured out. Jews in the Diaspora, whose devotion and help have played their part, have joined in the plaudits.

A 70th birthday can also be a time for self-examination. That’s when the worry starts. The day after Independence Day, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that since the 1970s, “Israel has fallen behind the rest of the West when it comes to investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure and transportation per capita”.

“At the same time,” added the report, “Israel faces two primary socioeconomic challenges: declining



Israel’s controversial West Bank barrier

labour productivity – which makes it harder to raise living standards – and the many ultra-Orthodox and Arab pupils, comprising nearly 40% of all students, who are receiving a third-world education.”

The report quoted Dan Ben-David, a professor of public policy at Tel Aviv University, as saying that the number of senior research faculty academics in universities per capita has plummeted from 140 professors per 100 000 people (the same as the US in the 1970s) to about 50 per 100 000. Israeli students are next to last in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in tests in maths, science and reading.

Israel has the largest educational gaps in the developed world between students in wealthier areas and those in poorer and minority sectors: “Shining hi-tech is drawing off the cream of the students, while the majority of Israelis are increasingly struggling to keep up.”

The number of hospital beds has dropped from 3.3 per 1 000 people to less than 1.9 today. With hospital occupancy rates at more than 94%, overcrowding has fuelled hospital-acquired infections, more

than doubling in the last 20 years. The mortality rate is the highest in the OECD. Israel has six nurses per capita, compared with 11 abroad.

The newspaper said that when Ben-David sits down with government officials, “many of them leave with their jaws dropping. But change is slow, with ministers citing bureaucratic and political obstacles as a reason for inaction.”

The *Jerusalem Post* report did not say so, but the declines match the start of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after the astonishing victories of the 1967 Six-Day war. There was no mention of the occupation and its consequences in Independence Day official speeches. Yet the occupation and the Gaza blockade have fundamentally altered the nature of Israel, its people and every aspect of the economy.

It is well documented. Over the past nearly 51 years, billions of dollars have been poured into the West Bank, officially called Judea and Samaria. From zero in 1967, there are now more than 400 000 Jews. Tricks and crookery have been used to seize land from Palestinians. Apart from the known official budgets, vast amounts have been illegally siphoned off from ministries to build houses, crèches, mikvehs, roads and fences, and to pay for 24-hour security.

It has been done at the expense of education, health care, social welfare and infrastructure within Israel.

The occupation has also eaten into the soul of Israel. Young soldiers are themselves brutalised as they brutalise the millions of Palestinians who suffer under the tyranny and bureaucratic cruelties of military rule.

Can Israel control another people and also claim to be a democracy? That question is accentuated because there is currently a right wing trend to change traditional democratic practices.

Ending the occupation will not in itself bring peace. The complexities and dangers are immense. But it must be the first crucial step towards peace with Palestinians. The alternative is never-ending hatred and rejection of

each other by both sides and mutual killing without end.

The ugly deeds which inevitably come from suppressing Palestinian anger and resistance provide propaganda ammunition for Israel’s enemies, many already fixated by anti-Semitic hatred for the Jewish state. As though the occupation is not bad enough in itself, they also exaggerate and distort and draw a false analogy with apartheid. They cynically use the cause of humanitarianism to mislead people in the world.

Many in South Africa fall for this. That is deeply unfortunate because the people in both countries are the

losers. South Africans have fought through the worst of racism and are working to eradicate its effects. They have much to teach Israelis, and their experience could give them significant roles in bringing together Israelis and Palestinians. South Africans could learn from Israeli successes and could gain immeasurably from Israeli know-how, from water conservation to hi-tech.

Israel has proved itself to be a country of wonders. Now courage and vision are needed to sustain what has been achieved and to go into an even greater epoch. Might that begin with the 71st anniversary?

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Omar Sharif Jr shatters stereotypes

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

His mother is Jewish, his father is Muslim. He’s the grandson and namesake of a famous Hollywood actor. His maternal grandparents were Holocaust survivors. He was born in Egypt. And he’s the first public personality to come out as gay in the Arab world. Omar Sharif Jr shares his story.

Sharif Jr visited South Africa last month to speak at the Oslo Freedom Forum, which took place in Johannesburg on March 26. The forum is an annual gathering where human rights activists share their stories and promote social justice around the world. Speaking as a gay activist, human rights ambassador and actor, Sharif Jr’s message was one of hope.

“The situation has regressed for the gay community in Egypt,” he told *SA Jewish Report* after his talk. “There’s a particularly brutal crackdown right now, so it’s important for me to speak about it.

“But more importantly, the message I wanted to share with everyone is how important our personal stories are. Anyone who has a story to share can create change and open a mind or a heart. I’m lucky that I have an exponential impact because the media will often tell my story.

“But if every person shared their story with at least five people, the world would be a very different place. We’d all gain a better understanding of the numerous issues we face. Headlines and revolutions won’t do it – there’s nothing more powerful than looking people in the eye and hearing their stories.”

Indeed, it was the need to share his personal story and an ingrained belief in the importance of fighting against injustice that led Sharif Jr to publicly come out of the closet a few years ago. An actor and model known as “Egypt’s favourite son”, his revelation – both about his homosexuality and about his partially Jewish heritage – created shockwaves across the Arab world.

“I didn’t know what the ramifications would be. It was a time of political turmoil in the country and I assumed it would be a footnote in history when I came out, compared to the significant problems that were happening every day,” he said.

“I did it not to speak about gay rights, but to speak out – because the Muslim Brotherhood had just won 70% of the vote. What would happen to women or to religious minorities if they stayed in power? I used myself as a litmus test and spoke out in a way that I knew how to.”

Sharif Jr was floored by the fallout. A media frenzy, death threats and hate speech became part of his daily life. “The problem is that when there are such severe problems in a country, people look for a distraction,” he said. “So the gossip that I provided became fodder – it was a headline story almost for a week on the nightly news.”

The backlash ultimately meant he no longer had a home in Egypt. “It was very difficult. You grow up being referred to as Egypt’s favourite son, and the next thing you’re public enemy number one. So, that hits you psychologically. I fell into a bit of a

depression, but ultimately, human instinct is one of survival.”

Sharif Jr stands by his decision to speak out. “I was building on my grandparents’ legacy – not of acting but of activism, of seeing injustice and speaking out. Of knowing that you have a voice and you have to use it.

“On the one hand, I had my paternal grandparents, Omar Sharif, who always worked on religious tolerance issues, and Faten Hamama, who worked on women’s issues in Egypt.”

Another huge influence on Sharif Jr’s life was the fact that his maternal grandparents were Holocaust survivors. “So, on the other hand, I had those stories from the Holocaust where ‘we didn’t say anything and they moved us to the ghetto, and we didn’t say anything and they loaded

us on the trains, and we didn’t say anything until we were marched into the gas chambers’.

“It was always ingrained into my consciousness that when you see something, you say something before it’s too late.

“I was fully aware of what the Holocaust was from the age of four or five,” he said. “My grandparents

always put into my mind that if I saw any sign of injustice, I had to speak. My maternal grandmother was the most remarkable woman because while my grandfather had a lot of anger and couldn’t speak about those times, she could. She found a way to forgive but not forget, and she had a lot of German friends later in life. “She really believed in the best in humanity, despite seeing the darkest side. She saw her family brutally murdered in front of her, yet she

always retained that belief that mankind is good.”

Inspired by that, Sharif Jr embraced his mixed heritage. Growing up with a Jewish mother and Muslim father, he learned the importance of open-mindedness early on. “It’s never actually been a challenge to reconcile my two religions. I was born to a family that

loves me unconditionally. “My parents divorced when I was very young and the love I received was exactly the same from both of them. I spent time growing up in Cairo, Montreal and Paris, and my faiths combined to give me a more holistic world view. I grew up speaking about five languages and now I speak seven, including Yiddish and Hebrew. “My multicultural upbringing and travels led me to eventually want to

study politics and religion. I’m an actor, too. I don’t think people have to choose only one direction and commit fully to it. People should be able to pick and choose and create the most interesting life that they can for themselves.”

Sharif Jr applies this to religion, too. “I consider myself spiritual – neither side of my family was particularly practising of either religion and I don’t go to any places of worship. Culturally, I identify as both Jewish and Muslim. I consider both sets of religious holidays to be family time – it’s about spending time together.

“I’m a refugee, I suppose, but I’m one of the lucky ones. I have a family that loves me unconditionally – wherever they are is home. I also had the means to leave Egypt, so I did and I started anew. I live in California now, and I’m working again as an actor. I have two films out this year, so I’m grateful.”

While the late Omar Sharif encouraged his grandson’s acting, he told him he had to do it on his own. The younger Sharif’s success is proof of his unique ability.

“My grandfather never saw himself as a celebrity; he just did what he loved,” said Sharif Jr. “He loved people and he saw fans more as friends he hadn’t met yet, wanting to say hello. He also spoke out for what he believed in.”

And, for Sharif Jr, being a public figure also means using his voice. “There are maybe one or two others who have come out in the Middle East since I did, but it’s important for me to retain visibility at this point because for me to disappear back into the shadows would be unfair to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community, who long to see a reflection of themselves in the media. Every community needs that.”



Omar Sharif Jr

‘Schindler’s List’ at 25: How Steven Spielberg’s deeply Jewish story spoke to the masses

>> Continued from page 7

Expected to lose money, *Schindler’s List* was probably greenlighted by Universal Studios because Spielberg was a director’s director. He vowed not to make money on the film, saying his task was sacred, not entrepreneurial.

Yet despite its length of over three hours, it grossed \$321 million (R4 trillion) in its initial release – more than 14 times its original cost. Spielberg donated his share to charity.

The story of Oscar Schindler was cherished by its survivors, but little known even by experts. For years, Leopold Page would tell his story to people who walked into his Beverly Hills luggage store, hoping that one of his prominent customers would bring it to the screen.

Australian writer Thomas Keneally walked in one day. The result was his 1982 historical novel, *Schindler’s Ark*. For decades, two New Jersey developers named a Schindler Drive or Schindler Road in each of their developments, honouring the man who saved their lives. Only later did residents understand who was being honoured.

Schindler, a Sudeten German, was an unlikely Holocaust hero. A philandering Nazi war profiteer, he used Jewish money, Jewish talent and Jewish slave labour to build his metalworks business and his fortune. His transformation was gradual. He saw too much evil and then used the same cunning, and daring, to save his endangered Jews. He moved them from Krakow to Czechoslovakia along with his factory, and they survived the war. More than 1 200 Jews were rescued due to his

interventions. Spielberg resisted the temptation to valorise Schindler. *Schindler’s List* had a monumental unintended consequence. Survivors kept coming up to Spielberg and saying: “Have I got a story to tell you.” The filmmaker listened with ever-growing fascination. As a man who could move millions with his work and who was at the forefront of technological innovation, Spielberg vowed to record the testimonies of 50 000 survivors and preserve them for posterity. The result was what was then called the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, which took the testimony of 52 000 Holocaust survivors in 57 countries and 32 languages, compiling the largest collection of oral history of any historical event.

At first, Spielberg envisioned disseminating the entire collection to five major research centres. In the years since, the collection has not only been disseminated, but community after community has used the testimonies of local survivors to create films and educational material. Related films have been made on death marches and Sonderkommandos, the prisoners who worked in the vicinity of the death camps, areas where documents are few and memories deep. Now housed at the University of Southern California, the renamed Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education is pioneering a video dialogue with survivors using

voice recognition software. It allows conversations with holographic images of survivors, drawing on their actual testimonies. It is taking testimony from other genocides, Cambodia and Rwanda and Bosnia, as sadly, the list grows. And institutions throughout the world are creating educational programmes from this work. Spielberg has become a major moral voice of our generation, making films that grapple with racism, slavery and the courage to take a stand. Spielberg grew more comfortable in his Jewish identity and his ability to embrace that identity without being narrowly parochial. His name is synonymous with excellence and poses a challenge to filmmakers to engage their own tradition. Like the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Schindler’s List demonstrated that a Jewish story could remain deeply Jewish and yet speak to the mainstream. In Krakow last week, I stood in line with hundreds of visitors at Schindler’s factory, where a museum has been created. It attracts visitors from all over, all of whom were drawn to the place because of the story Spielberg told as only he could: of a scoundrel who, over time, became noble. (JTA)

• Michael Berenbaum, professor of Jewish studies and director of the Sigi Ziering Institute: *Exploring the Ethical and Religious Implications of the Holocaust, was president of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation from 1997 to 2000.*

ISRAEL@70: CUTTING-EDGE ANTIDOTES & THERAPIES ARE CURING CRITICALLY ILL PATIENTS

BY KEN STEPHENS



Israel’s top medical innovators are rapidly changing the way we deal with sickness and health.

“Israel serves as a global incubator of innovative ideas for a variety of reasons,” said Dr. Eyal Zimlichman, Deputy Director General, Chief Medical Officer and Chief Innovation Officer at Sheba Medical Center, which is located in Ramat Gan and is the largest facility of its kind in the Jewish State and the Middle East. “First of all, it’s in our genes. Secondly, there is the military aspect, where we are taught to improvise when necessary in the field. These things allow us to be naturally innovative. This has trickled down into the medical field, where we are offering the highest level of medical care and truly believe unique innovations in medicine that will impact the world for the next 100 years, will be developed in Israel.”

While several renowned hospitals across Israel are involved in creating medical innovations, Sheba Medical Center is leading the charge. Several weeks ago, Israel’s Minister of Finance Moshe Kahlon and Deputy Minister of Health, Rabbi Yakov Litzman declared that Sheba Medical Center will be transformed into the country’s first, “City of Health.” The hospital’s talented staff is not only working on cutting-edge medical technologies to cure patients of various maladies but is also investing time, money and manpower in preventative medicine.

In order to accelerate this process, pharmaceutical and tech companies from around the world are working closely with Sheba’s doctors and researchers.

A prime example of Sheba Medical Center’s innovative efforts revolve around combating potentially fatal diseases such as hemophilia with a unique treatment regimen.

Recently, a 1 year old boy, became the youngest patient in the world

suffering from both severe Hemophilia A and an unusual allergy to be treated at Sheba Medical Center with a novel drug that only recently was approved by America’s FDA (Food & Drug Administration). The new drug developed by a biopharmaceutical company in the USA, contained a “bispecific antibody” that was injected into the child. According to clinical trial results published in the renowned New England Journal of Medicine, the new drug has shown a 90% reduction in bleeding in children and a 70% reduction in adults.





“This is a new exciting era with many novel options for improved care and even complete cure of patients with hemophilia,” boasted Professor Gili Kenet, Director of the National Hemophilia Center at Sheba Medical Center. “The child’s mother is so happy with the new treatment. The child had experienced a head trauma, but required no further therapy at all. Usually, this type of injury with a hemophiliac patient would involve hours in the Emergency Room ER with repeated doses of intravenous coagulation factors. However, there were no complications as his hemostasis (blood factors) was completely normal!”

In the coming weeks, Sheba will also become one of the few hospitals in the world, engaged in a clinical trial to thwart and perhaps cure end stage ovarian cancer patients, with a new immunotherapy treatment called TIL (Tumor Infiltrating Lymphocytes), which until now had been used on critically ill melanoma patients. Immunotherapy, also dubbed ‘biologic therapy’, is a treatment that uses substances made by the body or in a laboratory to improve or restore immune system function so that it can fight and/or destroy a cancerous growth.

This is considered to be the “new frontier” of cutting-edge medical treatments and Sheba is on the front-lines to seek out and find a cure for those in need.

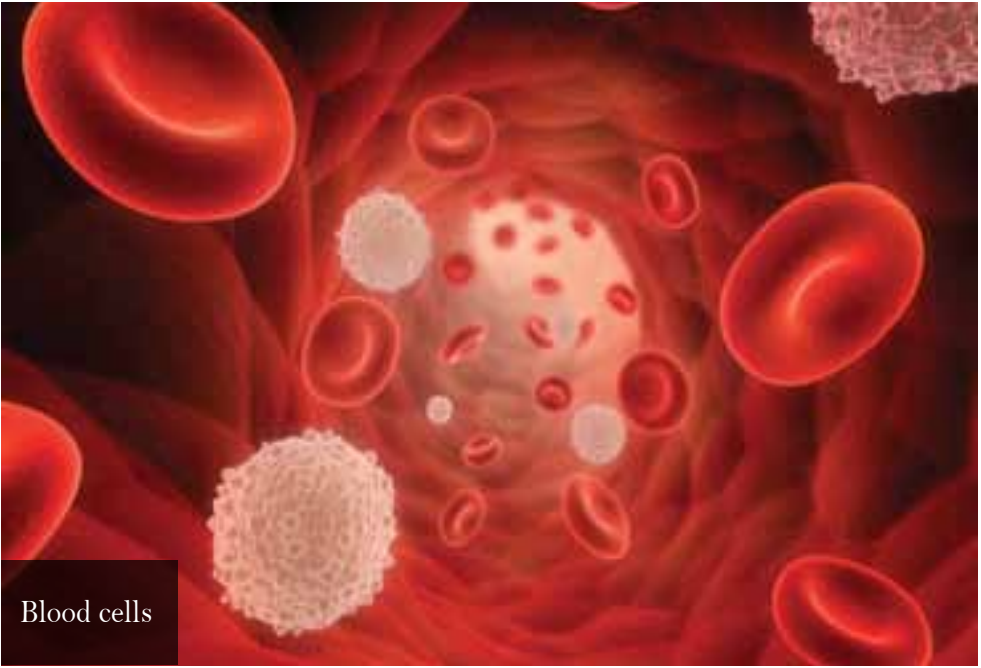
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Building homes and a Jewish life in Namibia

TALI FEINBERG

David Akinin could be described as a wandering Jew. Born in Venezuela, he moved to America and finally settled in Namibia, where he builds affordable housing, uplifts communities and is deeply involved in its small but historic Jewish community.

“My parents were born in Spain and Morocco. They met in Latin America after most Jews emigrated there from Morocco in the 1960s,” explains Akinin.

He grew up in Caracas and when he was 11 years old, “two men came into our home when we were sleeping and took my three brothers and me captive. After several hours of captivity, we managed to escape.

“When the political situation in Venezuela worsened, it hurt not only the Jewish community, but everyone. Our parents left everything behind, packed some bags and looked for new beginnings in America, just as their parents did from Morocco and Spain 50 years earlier.”

Akinin finished high school in the US. “Being an immigrant affects people differently. I think it made me tougher and more passionate about making an impact on my world. In America, we worked every day after school, helping the family business or getting good grades. But it was overwhelming at first.

“My high school had more than 4 000 people. I remember complaining to my father that ‘I am just a number’. My dad, Ysaac, said a number is just a starting point, and a name is what you build for yourself. Four years later, I graduated as the top student in the class.”



David Akinin, right, at a Windhoek Hebrew Congregation Tu B'Shvat ceremony

When he was 16, Akinin started two organisations that would play a huge part in his future. “I co-founded Shoes4Africa, Inc, a non-profit organisation that collected shoes for the less fortunate in Western Africa. We shipped more than 6 000 pairs to Enugu in Nigeria.”

Then, together with two friends, Joel Wiznitzer and Alex Arabov, he started One Jew, One Story, as a non-for-profit campaign that documents, through video, the life stories of Jewish American soldiers and war survivors.

Akinin graduated from the University of Chicago, where he was president of the Chabad Student Board in the South Side of Chicago. In New York, he was a member of the Jewish Latin Center.

This was just the beginning of his story. “I had some great experiences working at Google and Credit Suisse – in technology and investment banking, respectively – for several years. But I was missing a sense of social impact, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Travelling to Nigeria, Angola, Ethiopia and eventually Namibia during his work holidays helped him find what he was looking for. “They were all amazing places, and I fell in love with the latter place.”

On his visit to Namibia, Akinin quickly realised there was a huge housing demand, and the government was not meeting the need. Civil

servants all over the country needed housing. Teachers, nurses, police officers and farmers in the most remote of towns had no one building houses there.

Enter Akinin. “I’ve been here since 2014, building affordable housing all over the country through a company I founded called Atenu Developments. We have since expanded to become contractors, and I build schools and clinics with the Pupkewitz Foundation. It’s a large foundation run by the amazing Meryl

official rabbi, Zvi Gorelick presides over services and does an amazing job. He brings kosher meat and food from Cape Town for locals and tourists.”

Akinin is trying hard to revive the community. He joined the Windhoek Hebrew Congregation’s Board of Trustees last year, and became its vice-president this year. They are planning a Shavuot event and are about to announce a sponsored Oneg Shabbat once a month.

Akinin estimates that there are 60 to 70 Jews in Namibia, counting Israelis. They comprise people working temporarily in the country as well as established members of the community.

“Namibia’s Jewish community is Orthodox,” says Akinin. “The Windhoek Hebrew Congregation dates back to 1917 and built a beautiful, historical shul in 1925.

“The first Jews came to Namibia in the 1800s. Some of the most influential businesspeople and judges in the country were Jewish, and the community has definitely made its mark on the history of the country.”

The congregation recently published a book, titled *History of the Jews in Namibia*. Akin says Namibians are kind and respectful of all religions. “They’re very religious, and so have a deep respect for Jewish culture, despite not knowing much about it. You find names like Naftali, Levi, Samuel, Joseph and Moses all over the place. I share with people in our company about our traditions and they’re always eager to learn.

“We have done Shabbat several times up in the ‘bush’, when we are working on housing projects in Ruacana and Nkurenkuru, both border towns near Angola. The best experience was saying Kiddush in a Himba village called Otjomuru, where I am currently building a clinic. Our team actually camp out in the Zebra



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David Akinin, centre, with his team building a school in Namibia

Barry, a member of our Jewish community.” Akinin is studying part time for his master’s degree in Inclusive Innovation through the University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business.

“Namibia is a beautiful country, with vast landscapes and scenery that is alive; kind people everywhere; animals cohabiting in the most remote spaces; and a melange of local cultures that today I call home.”

He says that while it isn’t easy living a Jewish life in Namibia, “if there’s a will, there’s a way. We are a small Jewish community, operating out of one shul in Windhoek. Sometimes I drive up to 10 hours from the very north of the country where we may be building housing in a new town, so that I can make it to Shabbat services in the capital, Windhoek.

“It’s a surreal feeling, waking up at 6am in a very rural town where you’re laying a cornerstone, and come 6pm, you’re saying the Shema with other Jews in another corner of the country. It’s refreshing, fulfilling and inspiring.

“On a typical Friday night, we get four to six Jews for prayers. And on some holidays, if we plan ahead and prepare, we can get a minyan. This past Pesach, we had about 30 people for a community Seder. Although we don’t have an

Mountains, and since there is no electricity, no cellphone network and no shops, I could safely say our entire team kept Shabbat that weekend!

“This year, I proposed to our board that we should create and refurbish the marriage and cemetery registries of the Jewish community in Namibia. I plan on raising funds to also tidy up the graveyards, as so many of these haven’t been looked at for years. There should be five Jewish cemeteries around Namibia.”

Akinin emphasised that Jewish values can be taken anywhere: “I grew up in a home with strong Jewish values in Venezuela, brought from old Moroccan-Spanish traditions. Moving taught me that staying strong to my Jewish values would guide me in life. These values always help me find a family wherever I plant my roots and keep me spiritually connected.

“No matter how small a community we are, we must always work hard at keeping the flame going, like the Maccabees did in the Temple. For me, being Jewish and pursuing my life goals are not exclusive of each other. I am thankful to the Namibian people for making me feel at home, but more so to the Jewish community for allowing me to continue being myself in the most remote of places.”

With restaurants like Machneyuda in Jerusalem and The Palomar in London, Yossi Elad has emerged as a key figure in Israel's recent gastronomic revolution, relying heavily on seasonal ingredients.



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THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Israel scraps deportations of all African asylum seekers, extends visas

TAMAR PILEGGI

The Israeli government informed the High Court of Justice on Tuesday that it had scrapped its controversial plan to deport thousands of African migrants from the country, after Israeli authorities failed to cement an emigration deal with a third country.

“At this stage, there is no possibility of implementing involuntary deportations to a third country. Therefore, as of April 17 2018, [the state] has ceased to hold hearings as part of the deportation policy, and no more deportation decisions will be made at this time,” the state said.

The admission marked a dramatic setback for the government in its years-long attempts to expel the asylum-seekers, most of them from Eritrea or Sudan, and a triumph for activists who appealed to the court against the government plans.

The government said existing deportation orders were cancelled and that migrants with expired temporary residency permits would be able to get their visas renewed.

The High Court has demanded the government present a deportation plan that would safely resettle the migrants in a third country, or set them free from detention.

Last week, after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s special emissary to Uganda returned without a signed agreement after 11 days of negotiations in Kampala, the court ordered the release of 200 African migrants from the Saharonim Prison, where

they had been held since refusing to leave Israel voluntarily.

Earlier in April, 58 migrants were freed from Saharonim after a similar reported deal with Rwanda fell through.

A wide coalition of critics, both in Israel and in the Jewish American community, had called Israel’s deportation plans unethical and a stain on the country’s image as a refuge for Jewish migrants. Several mass protests against it have taken place in several Israeli cities in recent months.

The initial deportation plan, which offered each migrant \$3 500 (R44 000) and a plane ticket to third-party countries, was condemned by the United Nations. Asylum seekers previously deported to Uganda and Rwanda told *The Times of Israel* that they faced serious danger, and even imprisonment, after arriving in Africa without proper documents.

The expulsion policy drew further criticism after Netanyahu last month bowed to coalition pressure and nixed his own deal with the UN whereby half of the migrants would have been resettled in the West and others absorbed in Israel.

Israel considers most of the 35 000 African migrants to be job seekers and says it has no legal obligation to keep them. The Africans, nearly all from dictatorial Eritrea and war-torn Sudan, say they fled for their lives and face renewed danger if they return.

The Africans started moving towards Israel in 2005 after neighbouring Egypt

violently quashed a refugee demonstration and word spread of safety and job opportunities in Israel. Thousands crossed the porous desert border before Israel completed a barrier in 2012 that stopped the influx.

Israel has struggled with what to do with those already in the country, alternating between plans to jail and deport them and allowing them to work in menial jobs.

Thousands are concentrated in poor neighbourhoods in south Tel Aviv. Their presence has sparked tensions with working-class Jewish residents there.



Asylum seekers protesting at the Holot detention centre in the southern Negev Desert

NETANYAHU VOWS TO REOPEN MIGRANT JAILS AFTER DEPORTATION PLAN FAILS

TAMAR PILEGGI

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to pass legislation to reopen asylum seeker detention centres, overriding court rulings. This statement comes hours after his own government scrapped its controversial plan to forcibly deport thousands of African migrants from Israel.

“After several third-party countries refused to receive the infiltrators according to the conditions Israel demanded, I decided, together with Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, to immediately prepare to reopen jail facilities for infiltrators, to advance [legislation allowing the Knesset to override the High Court] so that we can operate [the prisons], and to advance other means for solving this problem,” the prime minister said in a tweet.

In November 2017, ministers approved a plan to shut down the Holot detention facility as Netanyahu announced an agreement to deport about 40 000 Africans who’d entered the country illegally.

But on Tuesday, state officials told the court there was “no possibility” to forcibly deport the asylum seekers to a third country. They announced that existing deportation orders would be cancelled. The state said migrants with expired temporary residency permits would be able to get their visas renewed.

The High Court had demanded the



government present a deportation plan that would safely resettle the migrants in a third country, or set them free from detention.

The officials’ admission on Tuesday appeared to mark a dramatic setback for the government.

Netanyahu’s government is now seeking to advance legislation that would allow 61 out of the Knesset’s 120 members to re-approve a law struck down by the Supreme Court – in effect, giving any government the ability to quash rulings from Israel’s top court.

The coalition Kulanu party has objected to a sweeping High Court of Justice supercession law, but has said it will support a bill to override the court on the issue of migrants.

Netanyahu’s tweet, later on Tuesday, was praised by Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennett, who said he “welcomed” the prime minister’s plans to reopen the detention centres.

WILL NEW CONVERSION BILL HELP 400 000 ISRAELIS OF ‘NO RELIGION’? NOT LIKELY.

AMANDA BORSCHER-DAN

Some 600 recent converts to Orthodox Judaism are caught in the crossfire as the Israeli government drafts legislation aimed at outlawing the Orthodox rabbinical court – endorsed by the High Court of Justice – that converted them.

The converts, mostly children of immigrants from former Soviet Union countries, are among the 400 000 Israelis currently held in limbo in the Jewish state. Categorised as having “no religion”, they cannot marry or be buried according to the faith of their fathers.

According to a recent Haaretz report, a bill drafted by Moshe Nissim, a former justice, finance and industry minister, would make conversion a uniform process under the auspices of a stringent state-authorised Orthodox body. This law would directly oppose a 2016 High Court ruling, which decided that the conversions of private rabbinical courts should be officially recognised by the state.

One of the “more troubling” clauses in the draft legislation also addresses how conversions may be revoked, according to a source close to the issue. It is still unclear whether this clause would be used against the hundreds of Israelis who have been converted in private Israeli Orthodox courts.

The language of the bill is not final and Nissim, who served an MK on and off from 1959 to 1996, mostly for the Likud party, is continuing consultations with major Jewish thinkers, including Jewish Agency head Natan Sharansky, whom he is set to meet in the coming days.

The law, one of several attempts to legislate conversion, comes on the heels of several High Court cases. These have slowly broadened the state’s definition of who is a Jew – and therefore, who is eligible to become an Israeli.

In March 2016, the High Court decided that non-Israelis who were converted in Israel by private, mostly ultra-Orthodox rabbinical courts outside of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate could seek Israeli citizenship.

The case paves the way for recognition of private conversion courts, as well as domestic Israeli conversion as a path to citizenship.



Convert ‘Katya’ and her daughter sit before the independent Giyur Kahalacha conversion court, led by Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitch, centre, in 2015

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Minister vows to help Ethiopian Jews

MICHAEL ATSBEHA

Israel’s justice minister has vowed to help Ethiopia’s Jews immigrate to Israel as soon as possible during a rare visit to Ethiopia.

Ayelet Shaked visited the synagogue in Addis Ababa on Sunday.

“These programmes that will eventually reunite Ethiopian Jews with their families in Israel are not generally easy,” said Shaked to the group gathered in the synagogue. “But I will try everything within my power to work with relevant offices to make this happen in the shortest time possible.”



Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked

Shaked, on what is reported to be her first official visit to Africa, said she came to find out more about the situation of Ethiopia’s estimated 8 000 remaining Jews.

Ethiopian Jews at the meeting told her that they want to move to Israel, where many of their family members moved years ago.

“We know aliyah for Jews that are descendants in other countries happened so swiftly that sometimes even their dogs were also included as they moved to Israel. Are we less important than these dogs?” asked Meles Sidisto, the community head of Ethiopia’s Jews in Addis Ababa.

In an emotional speech, Sidisto reaffirmed that members of Ethiopia’s Jewish population plan to stage a mass hunger

strike should Israel fail to reunite them with their families.

“We are unhappy here. We have had enough here. If our situation is not resolved in a very short time, we will hold a momentous mass hunger strike that will help us present our voice to Israel and the world,” he said.

The Ethiopian Jews met with Shaked in the small hall, decorated with Israeli flags and scriptures. Some said they have been separated for decades from close family members who moved to Israel.

Tigabu Worku, one of the synagogue’s most active members, read a letter to Shaked in which he complained that he has been separated from his family for years.

“I have been torn from my younger sisters, Leah and Sarah, for 18 years,” said Tigabu. “Eighteen years I have missed them. Eighteen years I have waited to see their faces that I no longer remember.”

Ethiopia’s so-called Falashmura are descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity generations ago, often under duress. Ethiopia’s Jewish people mainly live in the Amhara and Tigray provinces.

Thousands of Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel during Operation Moses in 1984 and Operation Solomon in 1992. Since that time, 50 000 more Ethiopian Jews have made aliyah to Israel, at a rate of about 200 per month.

About 140 000 Ethiopian Jews live in Israel today, a small minority in a country of over eight million. Their assimilation hasn’t been smooth, with many arriving without a modern education and then falling into unemployment and poverty.

Although many of those remaining in Ethiopia are practising Jews, Israel doesn’t consider them Jewish – meaning they are not automatically eligible to immigrate under its “law of return”, which grants automatic citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent. Instead, the government must approve their arrival.

Ethiopian community members have been permitted to immigrate over the past two decades in limited bursts that have left hundreds of families torn apart.

The Israeli government did not approve the funding for the movement of the Ethiopians in its new budget, but said a special ministerial committee would discuss the issue. A date for that meeting had not been announced.

• *Melanie Lidman contributed to this report.*

Palestinians fly swastika kite with petrol bomb across Gaza border into Israel

TOI STAFF AND JUDAH ARI GROSS

Palestinians at the Gaza border flew a kite marked with a swastika and carrying a petrol bomb into Israel on Friday. The Israeli army posted photographs of the kite in the air and on the ground inside Israel.

An Israel Defence Forces (IDF) spokesman, Jonathan Conricus, wrote: “Moments ago, terrorist Hamas sent a Molotov cocktail over the Gaza border into Israel. They flew it with their true colours.”

April 20 was Nazi leader Adolf Hitler’s birthday.

Friday marked the fourth weekend in

succession that thousands of Palestinians have demonstrated at the border, in mass protests encouraged by the Gaza Strip’s Hamas rulers. Originally declared to be non-violent “March of Return” protests, the demonstrations are being encouraged by Hamas, which seeks to destroy Israel and erase the border and liberate Palestine.

The Israeli army says it has faced “terror” at the fence during the weekly protests, including a shooting incident, numerous efforts to breach the fence and stone- and bomb-throwing. In recent days, Gazans have flown kites carrying petrol bombs across the border, and these have caused fires in Israeli fields close to the border.

Gazans filmed the kite crossing the border and starting a blaze, in a video shared on social media.

The kites seem to be the latest phase in the ongoing clashes on the Gaza border, as Palestinians have rioted and protested along the security fence almost daily since March 30.

Fridays have been by far the most active days, with over 40 000 people taking part in the first protest, nearly 30 000 taking part in the second and about 10 000 participating in the third according to the IDF’s figures. Friday’s fourth protests involved 3 000 people.

These violent demonstrations have often included the burning of tyres and Israeli flags.

Palestinian flags, combined with swastika flags, have also been seen.

As this month also marks the beginning of Israel’s dry season, an IDF spokesperson on Friday said the military was prepared for the possibility that fires might break out and had therefore co-ordinated with local fire departments and put firefighting planes on standby.

However, when asked earlier this week about the low-tech threat posed by kites carrying incendiary devices, the army offered scant details about its ability to combat the threat.



A kite marked with a swastika, carrying a petrol bomb

On Monday, the local Eshkol regional council issued a stark warning to residents, telling them to be on alert for these airborne arson attacks.

“In the last 24 hours, there have been several cases of kites flying with Molotov cocktails from the Strip to our territory,” the council said.

Last month, the UN Relief and Works Agency organised a “Kites of Hope” festival for over 1 000 Gazan schoolchildren from Khan Younis.

The National Forum for the March of Return, one of several Palestinian groups behind the weekly demonstrations, moved its protest tents closer to the border ahead of Friday’s protests, in order, it said, to “affirm our right to return” – a reference to the Palestinian demand that Israel allow thousands of refugees and their millions of descendants to return to their former homes inside Israel. Such a demand would mean the end of Israel as a majority Jewish state.

The protests in Gaza are expected to continue until mid-May, around the time the US is set to inaugurate its new embassy in Jerusalem.

Mid-May will also mark the anniversary of what Palestinians call the Nakba, or catastrophe, which saw thousands of Palestinians flee their homes during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence.



News and views from the Fed Happy birthday, Israel

REVEREND KENNETH MESHOE

On behalf of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), I wish to congratulate the State of Israel for achieving its 70th birthday with great success, in spite of enemies who have continued to vow to annihilate it. This great achievement is classic proof that the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is well able to keep and protect His people.

The ACDP wishes to thank the democratic State of Israel for making the world a better place.

The exceptional creativity, innovations and ingenuity of Israelis have been acknowledged by industry and world leaders time and time again. Israel is in the top 15 countries with the most number of Nobel Prize laureates per capita, a remarkable feat for such a small nation.

The compassion and love for life by Israelis is unparalleled in the Middle East. Israeli doctors treat and save the lives of Arabs from Palestinian territories and Arab states in the Middle East on a daily basis. They do so because they have chosen to love even those who want to permanently remove them from the land that G-d gave to them as an inheritance forever.

Since its modern establishment in 1948, Israel has created a state with a vibrant economy that exports hi-tech innovations, vegetables, fruits, flowers, water and so much more to its neighbours and the world. Israel has caused the desert to bloom and serves as an example that nothing is impossible to those who believe.

We salute you, the people of Israel, for all your great achievements against all odds. Thank you for all that you have given the world. Thank you for showing us all that it is possible to love one’s enemies and to do good to those who hate you. May G-d continue to watch over you and protect you.

Happy 70th birthday!

• *Reverend Kenneth Meshoe is an MP and president of the ACDP*

Top cop says he won’t give up his values to keep his job

TOI STAFF

Following rumours that the prime minister and police minister will not extend his term as head of Israel’s police force, Roni Alsheich has reportedly said he will not compromise on his values to hold onto the job.

For months, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under investigation in three separate cases, has railed against Alsheich, accusing him of leaking information to the press and of conducting a “witch hunt”.

Recently, reports have spread that Netanyahu and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan are not planning on giving Alsheich a customary fourth year when his three-year term ends in December.

In response, Alsheich said that he would not give up his own morals to stay in the job.

“If, to get an extension, a fourth year, I have to give up on my values, or the value of the rule of law, that’s not for me,” *Hadashot* news quoted him as saying.

But, he added: “The good of the police, the good of the public, requires and deserves four years, to complete the job.”

In a clear message to Netanyahu and Erdan, Alsheich reportedly ended his comments by saying: “If they have other considerations, let them look for someone else.”

The TV quoted police sources as saying that during his term of office, there has been a marked reduction in crime, so there could be no professional excuse for not giving him a fourth year.

Alsheich’s term is set to end on December 3. By then, it is expected that the police will have finalised their recommendations in the cases involving Netanyahu to the state prosecutor, so if Alsheich leaves, it will have no effect on the outcome of the investigation.

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German Jewish leader advises against wearing yarmulkes in cities

AP

Germany’s main Jewish leader said on Tuesday that he would advise people visiting big cities against wearing Jewish skullcaps, following a street assault last week on an Arab Israeli young man wearing it.

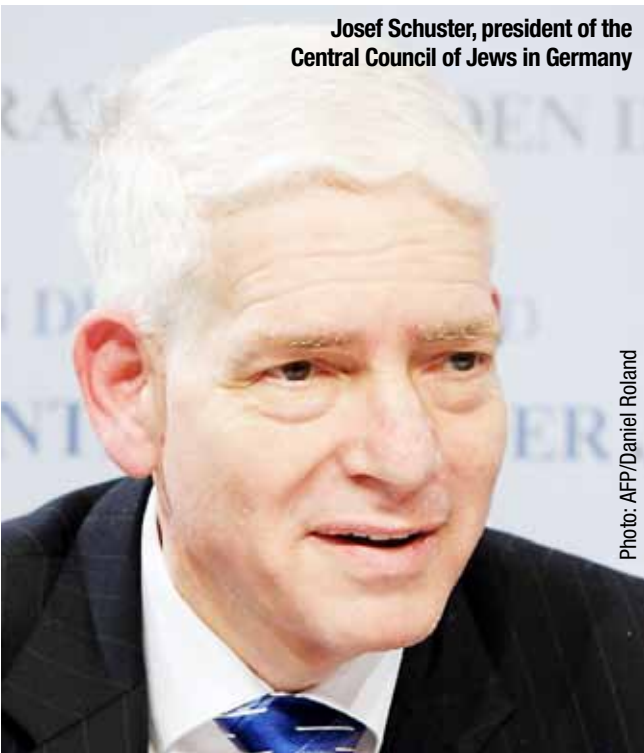
The attack in Berlin, in which a 19-year-old Syrian asylum-seeker of Palestinian origin is a suspect, has added to growing concern in Germany about anti-Semitism.

Josef Schuster, the head of Germany’s Central Council of Jews, told broadcaster *Radio Eins* on Tuesday that wearing a yarmulke is right in principle, but that he was advising individuals “against showing themselves openly with a kippah in a big-city setting in Germany, and wear a baseball cap or something else to cover their head instead”.

Schuster suggested three years ago that Jews shouldn’t wear skullcaps in areas with large Muslim populations. But, he stressed, there’s increasing anti-Semitic sentiment among non-migrants.

The young Syrian man assaulted his kippah-wearing victim with his belt last week and repeated the Arabic word for Jew, “Yahudi”, in public in the trendy Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood.

The victim, Adam Armush, 21, filmed part of the incident and posted it online. He later told German news media that he is a non-Jewish Israeli from Haifa, and that he had donned the kippah to prove to another



Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany

Photo: AFP/Daniel Roland

friend that Berlin is not as anti-Semitic as rumour would have it.

His video was shared widely by the Berlin-based Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Anti-Semitism. It went viral.

Meanwhile, the Berlin Jewish community is organising a demonstration against anti-Semitism in response to the attack. A broad coalition from interfaith, political, academic and pro-Israel circles is backing the “Berlin wears a kippah” protest. It was scheduled to take place on Wednesday evening in front of the Jewish community centre in the German capital.

On the same day, a similar demonstration was planned for Erfurt, the capital of the former East German state of Thuringia, organised by ACHAVA Festspiele Thüringen, a private cultural organisation. The event was scheduled to take place on Wednesday morning and conclude at the New Synagogue in the centre of the historic city.

“If you can’t make it to Erfurt, then wear a kippah wherever you happen to be at that time,” the announcement said.

The attacker handed himself in to the State Criminal Police Office on Thursday, accompanied by his lawyer. He has been identified as “Knaan S.” in news reports.

The incident has sparked heated discussion on social media.

In Berlin, 40 individuals gathered on Sunday for a “kippah flashmob”, starting from the Alexanderplatz and ending up at the Brandenburg Gate.

“Today we were 40, and next time we’ll be 100,” one of the organisers said in a Facebook post.

• JTA contributed to this report.

French personalities protest against ‘new anti-Semitism’



Photo: AP Photo/Thibault Camus

A woman carries a poster reading ‘I am a Jew’ at a silent march to honour an 85-year-old Jewish woman who was stabbed to death in her Paris flat

AFP

More than 300 French dignitaries and stars have signed a manifesto denouncing a “new anti-Semitism” marked by “Islamist radicalisation” after a string of killings of Jews. The manifesto will be published in *Le Figaro* newspaper on Sunday.

The country’s 500 000-plus Jewish community is the largest in Europe. However, it has been hit by a wave of emigration to Israel in the past two decades, partly due to the emergence of virulent anti-Semitism in predominantly immigrant neighbourhoods.

“We demand that the fight against this democratic failure that is anti-Semitism becomes a national cause before it’s too late. Before France is no longer France,” reads the manifesto co-signed by politicians from the left and right, including ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy and celebrities like actor Gerard Depardieu.

The signatories condemned what they called a “quiet ethnic purging” driven by rising Islamist radicalism, particularly in working-class neighbourhoods. They also accused the media of remaining silent on the matter.

“In our recent history, 11 Jews have been assassinated, and some tortured, by radical Islamists because they were Jewish,” the declaration said.

The murders referenced go as far back

as 2006 and include the 2012 deadly shooting of three schoolchildren and a teacher at a Jewish school by Islamist gunman Mohammed Merah in the southwestern city of Toulouse.

Three years later, an associate of the two brothers who massacred a group of cartoonists at satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* killed four people in a hostage-taking at a Jewish supermarket in Paris.

In April 2017, an Orthodox Jewish woman in her 60s was thrown out of the window of her Paris flat by a neighbour, who shouted “Allahu Akhbar” (G-d is great).

The latest attack to rock France took place last month, when two perpetrators stabbed an 85-year-old Jewish woman 11 times before setting her body on fire, in a crime treated as anti-Semitic.

Her brutal death sent shockwaves through France and prompted 30 000 people to join a march in her memory.

Condemning the “dreadful” killing, French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated his determination to fighting anti-Semitism.

“French Jews are 25 times more at risk of being attacked than their fellow Muslim citizens,” according to the manifesto.

It added that 50 000 Jews had been “forced to move because they were no longer in safety in certain cities and because their children could no longer go to school.”

Footage emerges of violent anti-Semitic assault in Brooklyn

MICHAEL BACHNER AND JTA

Footage emerged of the violent anti-Semitic attack on an ultra-Orthodox Jewish man who was beaten and choked while walking home from Shabbat services in New York.

In the video, the attacker jumps on the victim, 52-year-old Menachem Moskowitz, from behind in the Crown Heights neighbourhood of Brooklyn, sending his hat and glasses flying. The attacker beats him, pushes him up against an iron fence and attempts to strangle him.

“I turned around and I see that he’s right behind me and he jumped me. And then he said: ‘I hate Jews,’” Moskowitz told CBS late on Sunday. “He put me in a headlock... and I’m screaming ‘Help!’”

“He says: ‘You don’t need help. I’m going to kill you right here.’”

Moskowitz sustained a cracked rib along with a black eye, swelling, bruising and scratches over his body.

“There’s a lot of fear. The thing we know is that, unfortunately, there are people out there who want to kill us for one reason – because we are Jews,” said his wife, Channah Moskowitz.

The Jewish man was walking home from prayer services at about 13:30 on Saturday afternoon. He told the CrownHeights.info news website that he said “good afternoon” to a man who was smoking a cigar on a street corner.

“As soon as [I greeted] him, he began yelling at me: ‘You fake Jews, who are you saying hello to? You’re fake Jews and you stole all my money and robbed me... I want to kill you!’”

Moskowitz said he walked away from the man quickly, but the assailant caught him and put him in a chokehold and threatened to kill him.

Two people eventually separated them and told Moskowitz to run. He called the Jewish ambulance service from his home, which



Photo: Screen capture: Twitter

Menachem Moskowitz after having been assaulted and choked in Brooklyn, New York

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notified police.

The assailant can also be seen in the video being held back by the two good Samaritans while threatening Moskowitz.

Police have opened an investigation into the attack.

It was the second attack against Jewish men in the neighbourhood within a week.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) announced on Sunday that it is offering \$5 000 (R61 000) rewards for information leading to the arrests of those responsible for both attacks.

Said Evan R. Bernstein, ADL New York regional director: “We appreciate the leadership of the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force, who are investigating these assaults as hate crimes.”

ADL tracked 11 incidents of assaults motivated by anti-Semitism across New York State in 2017. State-wide, incidents of anti-Semitism jumped over 90% in 2017.

Scotsman who taught pug to do Nazi salute fined £800 (R14,000)

TOI STAFF

A Scottish man who was convicted of a hate crime for teaching his girlfriend’s dog to do the Nazi salute was fined £800 (R14 000) in the Airdrie Sheriff’s Court, in Scotland, on Monday. Mark Meechan, 29, was convicted last month for posting a “grossly offensive” video to YouTube.

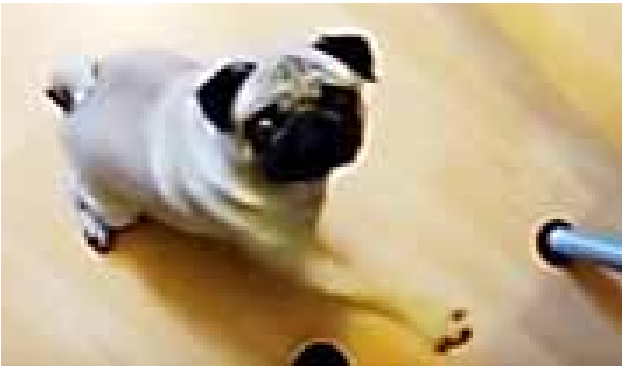
Meechan taught the pug, named Buddha, to respond with the Nazi salute when prompted by statements such as “Heil Hitler” and “Gas the Jews”. He said on the video that he trained the dog to annoy his girlfriend. “The centrepiece of your video consists of you repeating the phrase, ‘Gas the Jews’, over and over again as a command to a dog, which then reacts,” Sheriff Derek O’Carroll said in his sentencing, according to British media. “‘Gas the Jews’ in one form or

another is repeated by you 23 times within a few minutes,” he added.

“On the whole evidence, including your own,” O’Carroll said, “I found it proved that the video you posted, using a public communications network, was grossly offensive and contained menacing, anti-Semitic and racist material.”

Meechan said he would appeal the ruling. “I’m not going to pay the fine because we are going to appeal,” he said. “This sets a very dangerous precedent because the court is deciding what people can say.”

Meechan’s lawyer, Ross Brown, said: “This court made Mark Meechan a criminal. Up until this point, he was a man who had no involvement with the law. He considered himself a liberal man. To be branded a criminal is a punishment.”



Buddha, a Scottish dog whose owner taught it to raise its right paw to the sound of the phrase ‘Sieg heil’

Brown said that even the police had not initially seen the prank as a crime.

“The difficulty, it seems, is that he was someone who enjoyed shock humour, both giving and receiving it, and went about his life under the impression that he lived in a jurisdiction which gave him the right to fully express himself,” he told reporters. “This was not the perception that Scottish police had on receiving a notice that the video had been

posted online.”

Former far-right leader, free-speech activist and self-proclaimed Zionist, Tommy Robinson, who accompanied Meechan, said the decision made the Jewish community look bad.

“I think the police have used the Jewish community in this instance to silence

people and they’ve actually tried to tarnish the Jewish community as though they can’t take a joke,” he said. “At worst it is distasteful humour. It is not inciting religious hatred against Jews.”

British Jewish comedian David Baddiel wrote earlier this month that he was conflicted as to whether he should support Meechan, because he was attempting comedy, or whether it was a textbook case of anti-

Semitism taken straight from the web pages of the neo-Nazi site, Daily Stormer.

The original video, posted in September 2016 on his YouTube channel, Count Dankula, was viewed more than 2.8 million times before it was removed for violating YouTube’s policy on hate speech.

“My girlfriend is always ranting and raving about how cute and adorable her wee dog is, so I thought I would turn him into the least cute thing I could think of, which is a Nazi,” he said.

Meechan later posted a video in which he apologised for the original dog clips, saying it was a joke and that he has no such political leanings.

“I am so sorry to the Jewish community for any offence I have caused them. This was never my intention and I apologise,” he said.

• JTA contributed to this report.

Israel researchers use electronic nose, urine test to detect early breast cancer

SHOSHANNA SOLOMON

Researchers at Israel’s Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Soroka University Medical Center in Tel Aviv say they have developed a new way to screen for early breast cancer – using an electronic nose to analyse breath and a urine test analysis.

In their study, published in the journal *Computers in Biology and Medicine*, the researchers said the methods they used allowed them to isolate relevant data and, in so doing, more accurately identify breast cancer biomarkers.

The study showed that the researchers managed to detect breast cancer with more than 95% average accuracy, using two inexpensive commercial electronic noses (e-noses) that identified unique breath patterns in women with breast cancer.

In addition, they used gas-chromatography mass spectrometry (GC-MS) to analyse substances found in urine. The statistical analyses of urine samples

submitted by both healthy patients and those diagnosed with breast cancer yielded an average of 85% accuracy, the researchers said.

“Breast cancer survival is strongly tied to the sensitivity of tumour detection,” said Professor Yehuda Zeiri, a member of Ben-Gurion University’s Department of Biomedical Engineering.

Accurate methods for detecting smaller, earlier tumours remains a priority, he said. “Our new approach, using urine and exhaled breath samples, analysed with inexpensive, commercially available processes, is non-invasive, accessible and may be easily implemented in a variety of settings.”

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women globally, with nearly 1.7 million new cases diagnosed in 2012, according to World Cancer Research Fund International, and the fifth-most common cause of cancer fatalities among women.

The widely used mammography screenings, which have been proven to significantly reduce breast

cancer mortality, are not always able to detect small tumours in dense breast tissue, the researchers said. In fact, mammography sensitivity, which is typically 75% to 85% accurate, decreases to between 30% to 50% when the breast tissue is dense.

Diagnostic imaging detection methods currently used for smaller tumours have significant drawbacks, the researchers said. Dual-energy digital mammography, while effective, increases radiation exposure, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is expensive. Biopsies and serum biomarker identification processes are invasive, equipment-intensive and require significant expertise, they said.

“We’ve now shown that inexpensive, commercial electronic noses are sufficient for classifying cancer patients at early stages,” Zeiri said. “With further study, it may also be possible to analyse exhaled breath and urine samples to identify other cancer types as well.”

Israel-Hamas shadow war follows Palestinian expats to Malaysia

AVI ISSACHAROFF

It isn’t surprising that Israel’s intelligence agency the Mossad was immediately declared the prime suspect in the assassination of Fadi al-Batsh. The mysterious Palestinian electrical engineer hailed originally from Gaza and was assassinated in Malaysia on Saturday morning. Only after his death was he revealed to be a member of Hamas’s military wing.

Most of the Palestinian factions have rushed to pronounce the Israeli spy agency the culprit. It’s hard to tell if they have anything to go on, except the question: Who has an interest in removing Batsh?

Batsh was born in the Gaza Strip. He was considered a genius in his electrical engineering studies and had close ties with several Hamas leaders in Gaza.

He had lived with his family in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur for the past eight years, and even served as an imam in one of the city’s mosques. In fact, it was during his early morning walk to dawn prayers that unidentified assassins riding a BMW motorcycle fired 10 bullets at him, killing him instantly.

It is not immediately clear what projects



Gunmen from the Hamas terror group’s Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades

Batsh was involved in as a member of Hamas’s military wing. It is probable that his work involved research and development of new weapons systems.

Batsh’s decision to move to Malaysia may seem surprising, but not a few Palestinians, especially students, have relocated to the country in recent years, sparking intensive efforts by Hamas on Malaysian campuses to recruit them to its cause.

According to a 2015 article in Malam, an Israeli journal that deals with intelligence and terrorism, Hamas once used Malaysia as the setting to train operatives for an audacious terror attack involving parachutists. In the same period, the Israeli daily Haaretz reported that Hamas had recruited 40 Palestinian students to work as its operatives on Malaysian campuses. Batsh himself worked as a lecturer at a private university in the country.

The anti-Semitism controversy over NFL prospect Josh Rosen, explained

GABE FRIEDMAN

For most of last year, many predicted that University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) quarterback Josh Rosen would be the first player chosen in the 2018 National Football League (NFL) draft.

The sturdy 6-foot-4 signal-caller has racked up an impressive array of statistics since his freshman year in 2015, and analysts have praised the right-hander’s throwing mechanics, accuracy and poise.

The Cleveland Browns, the beleaguered franchise that holds the No. 1 pick this year, badly need a quarterback. The Jewish kid from Manhattan Beach, California, was set to make Jewish sports history at Thursday’s draft.

But over the past few months, Rosen’s stock has begun to drop.

The reason for the slide? Apparently, it has nothing to do with Rosen’s physical health or ability, but rather involves who he is and what he has said off the field. And for at least one prominent sports TV personality, the conversation about Rosen has dipped into anti-Semitism.

Rosen has not just made headlines with his grid skills. He has criticised the college football system, arguing that the high level of play required by the sport and

schoolwork don’t mesh.

This put him at odds with UCLA coach Jim Mora throughout Rosen’s tenure with the Bruins.

After criticism about Rosen’s off-the-field opinions, analysts were left wondering how teams would evaluate him. Some chose to dig into other factors, such as his identity.

“According to my source, he’d rather be in New York [on the Giants]. He’s Jewish, there’s a stronger Jewish community, he’d rather be in the New York market than the Cleveland market, blah blah blah, we don’t know,” Stephen A. Smith, a prominent ESPN commentator, said on a recent radio show.

Is this anti-Semitism?

What seems to have hit Rosen’s draft hopes the hardest came earlier this month, when Mora questioned whether he is “fit” for the NFL. After praising his skill and intelligence on the field, the veteran coach told Sports Illustrated that Rosen needs to be challenged intellectually, so he doesn’t get bored. He’s a millennial.”

For Tony Kornheiser, the sports writer and TV personality this was the last straw.

“There’s no such thing as too smart ... [T]his is anti-Semitism in its most blatant form. It’s like, ‘We don’t want this guy.’” (JTA)

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The making of a rabbi

Three South African rabbis talk about their personal journeys – the highs, the lows, the joys and challenges

NIA MAGOULIANITI-MCGREGOR

“Do you see yourself as a victim of circumstance or an agent of change?” These are the words that Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, now the rabbi of Great Park Synagogue, heard when he was just 16. He’d arrived at a yeshiva in Kfar Chabad, near Tel Aviv. They resonated deeply with him.



Rabbi Dovid Hazdan

The idea, he says, was “bold and unfettered”. It fired up this teenager from Warmbaths (now Bela Bela), who had just finished school and come to Israel to study Torah. “We could list forever the pain and blood-stained pages of our history, but to what end? I’m not a victim. I can affect the world.”

And this is where Hazdan put his energy. His father, Rabbi Israel Hazdan, was an inspiration in this regard. “He experienced the demise of his family by the Bolsheviks and Nazis, yet he picked himself up from the ashes of everything he’d endured. He was a positive, happy person. He never saw himself as a victim or behaved that way.”

So, despite thoughts of studying law, Rabbi Hazdan went to Kfar Chabad to learn the intricacies of the Talmud as well as the subject of philosophy: “This dealt with soul and journey and purpose – with the why.”

Hazdan had another father figure in his spiritual life, who he shares with so many: the late Lubavitcher Rebbe. “He promoted a vibrant, energetic Judaism. Reaching out to touch souls – even in Alaska or Vietnam – was deemed a sacred mission.”

Hazdan learned about the value of acceptance. “Acceptance is more than tolerance. It’s an embracing of life.”

While at the Yeshiva, Hazdan was encouraged to head for the Tel Aviv central bus station on Friday afternoons (while everyone else was relaxing) to look for soldiers and offer to put on tefillin with them or just connect. “We encountered

people very different to ourselves. People have asked me over the years: ‘How could you stand there, with all kinds of distractions?’”

But Hazdan describes it as formative: “I wasn’t there to be influenced but to influence. It armoured me.” For him, it was about engaging with the world, trying to make a difference: “My belief was unshakable.”

It stood him in good stead when he spent two years in New Haven in Connecticut, interacting with Yale University students. Perhaps it helped foster a sense of humour when he became a camp counsellor for Californian kids who thought Moses was “a hero of a Hollywood movie”.

After six years studying Torah abroad, Hazdan returned to South Africa with his new wife, Feige, in 1983. “I couldn’t have fulfilled this role without a life partner who believed in what we were doing together. We have four kids and 10 grandchildren.”

In 1989, Hazdan was approached to assist as rabbi at the Great Synagogue when it was still located in Wolmarans Street, Joubert Park in Johannesburg. The decline of this old synagogue was perhaps the most challenging time for him and was his motivation for it being rebuilt in Glenhove Road. “Is there a need for it?” some asked. “Foolhardy,” others said. “We moved there in 2000. Today it’s vibrant and dynamic, serving 850 souls. We breathed life into it.

“We aren’t defined by our clothes or our cultures. We’re defined by a journey of soul. We’re all part of the same Breath of G-d,” says Hazdan.

And that is what he brings to his congregation. “It would be arrogant to say I’ve never questioned my path. Humans aren’t immune to challenges. But we win the battle. I have grown with this community and they have grown with me.”

For 31 years, Rabbi Mendel Rabinowitz of Greenside Shul has tried to infuse his community with what he calls the “integral beauty” of Judaism. This, he says, is a combination of wisdom and deed. “Judaism tells us it’s not just what you say, it’s what you do. What you say, you must do, and what you do, you become.

“When the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, the Jews responded with the words, ‘We will do and we will learn.’ That is the essence of Judaism.

“I come from a long line of rabbis, so religion resonated with me. My vision was to try to share that Judaism can be relevant to all

parts of life. If Judaism is going to continue to be passed down from generation to generation, it needs to come with a love, with a beauty.”

Rabinowitz studied for six years – in Jerusalem and at the Yeshiva Gedola in Johannesburg – and then found himself in a community with a high number of academics. “Greenside is not a congregation of predominantly observant people, but they resonate with learning and understanding. It’s practically a Wits reunion here!”

So, he says, “Judaism has to be stimulating. You cannot say: ‘Do this because I say so.’ I have to engage on an intellectual level. Anyway, critical thinking is an important part of Jewish life.”



Rabbi Mendel Rabinowitz

Aviva, his wife, is very much his partner. “It’s important to be complemented by a wife in this world. I’ve been blessed.”

This is not a job, says Rabinowitz. “I’ve known some of these people for 30 years, so you become a member of the family. When someone is in hospital, I want to be there. When I go to a wedding, I want to be there.

“If I have to think of ways to improve the qualification for rabbis, I’d advise introducing more knowledge on psychology, on counselling. You pick it up intuitively along the way, but it would be valuable to include this.”

He believes in imparting the human side of Judaism – “that’s the ethics, the morals, the compassion that it requires of every human



being. Morality is not an optional extra in Judaism. These are not add-ons. These form the very fabric of Judaism.”

Rabbi Sam Thurgood of Beit Midrash Morasha in Arthurs Road, Sea Point, says his three great loves in life are Hashem, the Jewish people and teaching – and rabbinic life exists in the intersection of these passions.

“You have to love people,” he says. Growing up in a traditional South African Jewish home in Durban North, Thurgood was set on studying actuarial science. He thought he’d go to Yeshiva for one year to enrich his Jewish learning. “There, things clicked together. I saw I could give in a way that is personally and spiritually satisfying without it ever feeling like a sacrifice.”

So, he thought he’d stay for two years.

“Learning Talmud was fascinating. I knew I would never get that through being an actuary. Although I had made the decision to become an actuary and become fabulously wealthy, it just couldn’t compete.”

He carried on teaching throughout what became seven years of rabbinic studies.

He also married after six years of Yeshiva. “My wife and I were 23 years old. I wouldn’t say I ever went looking for a rebbetzin, but I certainly found one.”

When the post opened in this Sea Point community, Thurgood took it on, aged 28. “We moved here with an eight-week-old baby. A member of the community cornered me, saying: ‘Someone told me there’s a rabbi coming, who’s under 40 years old?’ So, I said: ‘But every day I’m getting closer to 40.’”

There were challenges: “I had

people in their 60s coming for life advice. The real challenge was giving advice about teenagers!”

He finds great motivation from the resurgence of observance in Jewish life and the wisdom of the Torah. “You’re given this responsibility and I think Hashem helps.”

He’s inspired by 16th-century Talmudic scholar the Maharal of Prague, who “shows what anger does spiritually and its ramifications”.

He says kindness and humility are powerful counterforces: “Kindness is the goodness of your soul overflowing to others.”



Rabbi Sam Thurgood

Thurgood’s primary role lies in creating a spiritual home for people. “What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be Jewish? What responsibilities does that impose upon us? There are so many people who live in beautiful houses but don’t have a space where they can talk to G-d. Here they can.”

These three rabbis are just a fraction of the many homegrown spiritual leaders in this country who live their truth and are inspired to guide and care for their communities.

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A holiday to SA inspires Israeli cancer patients with hope

NICOLA MILTZ

Due to a fault in their stars, two Israeli girls became soulmates when they met for the first time as cancer patients sharing the same ward.

When it felt like life was slipping away from them during brutal treatment for their illness at Dana-Dwek Children’s Hospital – located in the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center – Noa Azulay, 18, and Rotem Gelbart, 21, grew to understand each other without even uttering a single word. A mere glance was enough to explain 1 000 words of pain and suffering.

For the past two weeks, these two best friends joined a host of other seriously ill Israeli cancer patients – some of them in wheelchairs – in South Africa as part of the Chaiyanu Hope Tour.

Chaiyanu is part of Chai Lifeline International, a Jewish community-based organisation that helps sick children and their families. For the past eight years, the South African Jewish community has hosted the Hope Tour of the Israeli division of Chaiyanu.

It is an annual, mammoth endeavour involving countless volunteer hours and logistical arrangements – the aim being for each child, in various stages of their treatment, to experience a wonderful, life-affirming trip.

From the moment that travel-weary patients touch down in the country, they are treated to a thrilling, non-stop, adventure-filled journey that, in the words of organiser Elad Maimon, “leaves them ready to tackle all of life’s difficulties when they return home”.

Chaiyanu alternatively run separate trips for boys and for girls. This year, 18 girls between the ages of nine and 21 – all requiring special doctors’ approval and medications –experienced everything from riding elephants and patting lion cubs to

enjoying helicopter flips and quad biking. “I have seen these girls change from frail flowers when they touch down in South Africa into sunflowers by the time they leave, with a renewed energy that is hard to believe,” said Hope Tour volunteer Ronit Beleli.

“The activities are life changing. These are out-of-the-ordinary experiences that they would never imagine doing in their wildest dreams.”

Beleli said she went on a helicopter ride after one of the girls noticed her fear and insisted that she accompany her.



Rivky Kornut going for a flip in a helicopter

fear. Imagine the fear that she has had to overcome in her life and there she was, helping me,” said Beleli.

The girls have been on an open-air bus tour of Cape Town, followed by a sailing trip on a yacht. They’ve been driven around in fancy sports cars and stayed at upmarket hotels. They danced at the Yom Ha’atzmaut 70th birthday celebrations at the Ratanga Junction amusement park in Cape Town, visited the Montecasino Bird Gardens in Johannesburg and Lesedi Cultural Village

in Broederstroom, and, of course, went on a safari excursion.

Chana Yitzhaki, 21, who has Hodgkin’s lymphoma, said the safari drive in Zebula, in Limpopo, was the highlight for her. “I’ve never seen animals like that before; we don’t have them. I’m so excited to be here, it gives us a lot of happiness. We really need it. It has been tough.”

Last Friday, the girls were treated to a pamper spa day. It was hosted at one of the volunteer families’ homes, which was turned into a beauty salon for the day. Beauticians gave them manicures, pedicures, mini facials

even had their ears pierced. “I loved it,” said Azulay, “especially the massage on my leg, which was so sore from all the walking.” Her cancer, Ewing’s sarcoma, presented in her leg.

Ayala Moffson, a madricha on the programme, said the girls go from party to party and at each event they are “spoilt rotten” with party bags and hampers full of goodies.

Tziporah Birnbaum, 21, of Jerusalem, who was diagnosed with leukaemia one

week before Rosh Hashana, said her illness has opened her eyes to “what’s important in life”.

“It’s the real things in life that talk to me more now. Life is about caring for others and giving. When I’m well, I want to spend my days helping others. It is the right thing to do.”

Full-time nurse Shulamit Amar said the Chaiyanu Hope Tour spreads joy and hope for patients who may have lost hope during their daily struggle to survive: “There is no place in the world more hospitable and warm than South Africa. You can see the girls’ health improving each day.”

She said the tour also offers a holiday for the families back home who have a “real vacation from the sickness”.

“It gives them time to spend with other members of the family who often get neglected because the cancer is all-consuming,” she said.

Maimon, who is CEO of the organisation, which is based in Johannesburg, said this week that the tour is made possible because of the generosity of the South African Jewish community. “People open their hearts and homes every year, and every child is treated like family, like one of their own.”

Each of the girls expressed their gratitude to the local families who make the tour possible, agreeing that it has given them hope and strength to continue their fight for life.

Tziporah Birnbaum said: “Life is hard for us. It is not a regular life. Being here gives us an escape and fills our batteries with hope. Despite our illness, this allows us to live life to the full.

Chaiyanu brings hope to lives devastated by cancer by combining hands-on care with emotional support to families facing the challenges of paediatric illness.

“When we see the smiles on these girls’ faces, we know that our work at Chaiyanu is worthwhile,” said Maimon.

Feigels joins the fabulous 50s brigade

SUZANNE BELLING

It was a family’s love of Jewish food that inspired the birth of Feigels delicatessen 50 years ago. It is now the oldest and most traditional kosher eatery in South Africa.

It all began in 1922, when Feigel Hadassin, then in her early 20s, stepped off a ship that arrived in South Africa, from Lithuania, with her family. They brought a wealth of traditional Lithuanian and Polish cooking with them. Feigel was the daughter of Solomon Hadassin, a chazan, shochet and mohel.



The Feigels’ team today. From left: Neil Pollock, Patsy Dakes, Tamar Dakes, Jos Zaslansky

They came to Johannesburg, where she met and married Mully Zaslansky, who was the greatest fan of her cooking and “her big heart”. They had four children. Feigel

found work in 1966 at Judy’s Deli in Rockey Street, Yeoville and when Judy’s closed down, Feigel decided to fulfil her dream of creating her own deli.

She immediately sent a letter to two of her children, Jos and Patsy (young adults by then) who were in Israel, having volunteered to make a contribution in the Six-Day War. “Come home,” she said.

And so they did, both joining the business in the year it opened. The family signed a lease with Julian Kleft, who owned a building in Rockey Street – then the heart of Jewish Johannesburg. For rental,

Tamar Dakes, Patsy’s daughter, now a member of the third generation of the Feigels deli family.

With marketing and cooking skills inherited from her grandmother and mother, Tamar now plays a key role with her business partner, Neil Pollock. Earlier this year, they purchased Feigels from Patsy and Jos.

“Fritz Oppenheimer, the owner of Rand Kosher Meat Market, agreed to supply Feigels with meats on consignment,” Tamar says. “They did a deal with Table Bay Fisheries to provide additional stock.”

Then they went to Freddy Hirsch near Fordsburg to purchase their very first scale and meat slicer, and a polony rack for the wall. With this equipment, plus their family kitchen table and a small gas stove, they were nearly ready for business.

Jos and his brother Solly spent a few nights laying new flooring. Mel Miller (the comedian), who in those days worked as a sales representative helped with the design of the original blue Feigels logo.

In April 1968, Feigels took delivery of the fridge and filled it with salmon, snoek and cream cheese. On April 18 1968, Feigels opened its doors for business.

Since its inception, Feigels’ traditional recipes have prevailed,



Filled with Jewish *gerichten* (traditional fare), there is no traditional dish that Feigels doesn’t stock. And the kashrut is of the highest standard.

Feigel passed away in 1979, her influence having created a “home from home” kitchen, expanding, but never changing over the years.

“The following year, Rockey Street became a haven for drugs, so in 1980 we moved to new premises in Raleigh Street, Bellevue,” Patsy said.

“At the beginning of 1992, a new deli opened in Glenhazel.

In 1996, the Bellevue branch of Feigels moved to the Bramley shopping centre – and then to its current location in Lyndhurst.

Before he emigrated in January this year, Alan Bender was Feigels’ executive chef. Now former Open Flame restaurant owner Eric Stern is contracted to Feigels. “He

specialises in meat dishes, whereas Alan’s forte was fish,” Patsy said.

Recently, Feigels introduced Shabbos specials – three-course meals for four people at a cost of R360. The deli has also introduced frozen “heat-and-eat” meals.

Many staff members have been part of the Feigels family for more than 30 years. “We have second- and third-generation staff members from the same families,” said Jos.

Since the 1980s, Feigels has been supplying supermarkets with meals. Within the next few weeks, a deli will open at Blubird Shopping Centre and there’ll also be a new deli section at Kosher World.

“The beauty of Feigels is that the meals are essentially homemade as my grandmother used to make them – and one doesn’t tire of them,” Tamar concluded.

Competing to become ambassador for her school

SAM ANCER

Isabella Savva, an eight-year-old King David Linksfield pupil, is a finalist in the Miss South Africa Schools pageant. On May 26, she will compete against 29 other girls from schools around the country in the finals. The winner will become an ambassador for her school and represent it at charity events.



This is no ordinary beauty pageant, but rather, one that shows who is the best fundraiser and marketer for her school. Isabella – who was nominated by her modelling and acting agency, Little Charmers – raised R4 800 more for charity than

the R2 000 that was required to be a part of the pageant. She held a challah bake, where she invited other pupils to bake challah for families dealing with cancer. About 60 pupils showed up to the event and they managed to raise R2 500. She also organised a Slipper Day at her school, where the pupils paid to wear slippers to school.

Thanks to these activities, along with Isabella approaching private individuals and corporates for sponsorship, she raised R6 800. While R2 000 will go to the Miss South Africa Schools organisation, the remaining R4 800 is being donated to DL Link, a Jewish cancer support organisation. Isabella, who has been acting and modelling since January, has discovered a love for doing charity work. She discovered this after filming an animal anti-cruelty advertisement. “She was in an ad for Dotsure (pet insurance) when she developed her love for charity work,” said Isabella’s mother, Victoria Savva.

Prior to her work for the pageant, Isabella participated in two charity fashion shows in December 2017 for the Candice Abrahams Foundation (formerly Mrs World’s organisation to empower abused women and children). One of the shows was for an event celebrating women and the reason for the other show was to raise funds for victims of domestic abuse. King David Linksfield has supported its pageant hopeful, despite having initial trepidations about it. “The school was very cautious in the beginning, but once staff saw her charity work, they warmed to it and even helped with the Slipper Day,” Victoria told the *SA Jewish Report*. Victoria is aware of the controversial side of pageantry, where it’s seen as objectifying women, but said: “I haven’t had any experience with that. I think my kids have gained a lot of confidence from it.” Victoria added that although she does “worry about the exposure for Isabella, like on social media”, she hadn’t had any instances to worry about. “Overall, it has been a positive experience,” she said.

BDS leader gets top award for human rights

>> Continued from page 3

others are unnerved at my presence at a shul. “I acknowledge that it is difficult for some in the larger Jewish community to separate my identity as a believer and scholar of religion from that of my work as an activist in the movement for justice for the Palestinian people. “I also believe that some in the leadership structures of the community deliberately refuse to acknowledge this because it means a diminishing of their political control over the community life of the Jewish people. It is no different in my own community of Muslims. Genuine concerns are utilised in the service of power, control and authority.” Esack criticises those who blame the BDS for not concentrating on other international human rights causes. In an opinion piece in the *Mail & Guardian* on February 28, he wrote: “Whataboutism’ is a virus that afflicts most apologists for apartheid Israel when they come into contact with someone who supports the BDS... The major symptom is a sudden onset of sympathy for other causes (typically, Syria, North Korea, Tibet, Zimbabwe – almost never Guantanamo Bay, or white racism).” He went on to say the intention of “whataboutism” was to “damage support for the Palestinian struggle by deflecting attention from it while masquerading as a benign virus concerned with infecting other struggles in the world with compassion and peace”. In response to the Luthuli award announcement, Esack said in a BDS SA statement: “Our generation who resisted and overcame apartheid with the support of activists throughout the world have no option but to live out our debt to the international working class and oppressed communities throughout the world, from Black Lives in the USA, to Kashmir, to the Dalits in India, to the people of Cuba, the Christians in Muslim majority countries, and the Palestinians living under the yoke of Israeli apartheid.” The award ceremony will be held on Saturday at the Sefako Makgatho Presidential Guesthouse in Pretoria.

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1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000



30
1923 to 1964 = R4
1931 = R10 000 Up to R50 000

Educating Bedouin women to enhance lives

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Never underestimate the power of a woman. This is the thinking behind the Mauerberger Foundation Fund’s (MFF) sponsoring of scholarships for Bedouin women at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) since 2004.

“The key reason for doing so is that we recognise that women play a very important role in community development,” explains Dianna Yach, chairperson of the fund. “Very often, if a woman is educated, she plays a major role in uplifting the lives of the wider community.

“When I’ve talked to the Bedouin scholars, they have identified how, because of their studies, they’re able to help their families and friends to access state services that they are entitled to, which include things like education and health.”

The Mauerberger family was involved in the establishment of BGU in 1969. Their tradition of striving for social justice through several upliftment programmes, both here and in Israel, dates back to 1938. That’s when the family patriarch, leading South African industrialist and philanthropist Morris Mauerberger, established a clinic for workers on the Cape Flats who had difficulty accessing state hospitals because of transport problems and poverty.

His granddaughter, Dianna Yach, is herself no slouch when it comes to pursuing social justice. She says she was “always devoted to, and passionate about, human rights and equality, and making these a reality”.

She left South Africa for London in 1976 because of apartheid and returned here in 2012. In addition to taking up the reins of the MFF the following year, she is adjunct professor of law at the University of Cape Town (UCT), a member of the UCT Council and chair of the UCT Alumni Advisory Board.

Yach has adopted a hands-on approach to doing good, visiting the BGU students



Dianna Yach with some of the Bedouin students that the Mauerberger Foundation Fund supports

are a major minority group who deserve an education just like everyone else. It became one of our social goals to facilitate their integration into the modern Israeli economy.”

Rosen says there’s been a “huge change” in the general perception of education in this community. “This is a traditional society and there was a lot of opposition to women studying 20 years ago. We’ve made major inroads there – I think most of the Bedouin parents are quite proud that their daughters

attend university. This is seen as something to strive for.”

While there are no restrictions on what the students can study, in the past few years BGU has tried to direct those students who show an aptitude for the sciences to go that route as they end up making a much greater economic contribution to the Bedouin community, says Rosen.

“The students we receive are the cream of the crop, but you have to understand the obstacles that these kids have to overcome.

Their high schools don’t give them adequate educational tools to be able to function well in the university.

“They’re lacking in English, mathematics and quantitative analysis, and for many of them, their Hebrew isn’t up to par. So, we have academic programmes that are designed to address those problems in their basic education.”

The first female Bedouin doctor in the world (now a gynaecologist) graduated from BGU’s medical school. The former chairman of its computer science department was a Bedouin, as was the former chairman of its department of pharmacology.

Among other programmes that the MFF funds is the One Voice movement in Israel and the West Bank that trains Arab and Israeli leaders for peace-building in their respective communities.

Another MFF-supported initiative is situated at Tel Aviv University and sees Palestinian physicians enhancing their skills in areas of need in Gaza or the West Bank – for example, in emergency medicine or paediatrics. And at Hebrew University, the MFF funds an international programme for African women at the agricultural faculty.

Herby Rosenberg, former chairman and vice-president of the SA Associates of BGU, said that it was “important to record the outstanding contribution of this very generous Cape Town family. I hope that their example serves as an inspiration to others to do likewise.”

What’s in a street name?

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

When visiting Israel and driving along a street with an interesting name, it is hard not to wonder who the street was named after and what they did to merit the honour. If the name of the street is Rechov Jabotinsky or Sderot Rothschild, it’s easy enough to find out. But if it is Aaron Aaronson, it is not so simple.

Ex-South African Peter Bailey, who made aliyah from Johannesburg with his wife, Jeanne, in 2013, has written a book on the very topic called *Street Names in Israel*. In it, Bailey presents a series of biographies that detail the background to many of the street names commonly found throughout Israel. He and Jeanne left to join their three sons, along with their wives, and six grandchildren in Israel.

The book was launched at the Jacob Gitlin Library in Cape Town last month. Bailey, who grew up in Brakpan and now lives in Hod Hasharon, did painstaking research on the street names. He is a former national chairman of the SA Jewish Ex-Service League, having served as a major in the old SA Defence Force.

Bailey says he was motivated to write the book by sheer curiosity. “I actually discovered that a lot of people in Israel know all these streets that they pass every day, but they didn’t really know who the people were that the streets were named after.

“I felt there was a need to educate people about who these people are, so that their deeds live on.”

Bailey realised that Israel’s history was reflected largely in its street names, and since Jewish history is one of his passions, putting it all in a book was a no-brainer. The book took three years to write.

Objects, places, organisations and events of significance to the Jewish people throughout their history have a separate chapter dedicated to them – after the listing of individuals.

Maish Isaacson, chairman of Telfed, writes in the foreword that the book “unlocks the sizzling stories of many individuals involved in the Zionist movement and in founding the fledgling State of Israel”, and contains “many surprising revelations of Jewish history”.

“It gives us a voyeuristic glimpse into the lives of people from all walks and professions that have left an indelible mark on our nation,” he adds, “...

introducing you along the way to spies, agronomists, authors and heroines.”

Speaking of spies, we meet Rumanian-born Aaron Aaronson (1876-1919), an agronomist and spymaster. In 1882, he made aliyah with his parents.

As an adult, he lived on a farm which became the centre of activities for NILI, an espionage organisation that he and his assistant, Avshalon Feinberg, had set up to spy on behalf of the British during World War I.

Bailey writes: “He was able to compile maps and information on troop displacements. This information assisted the British commander, General Allenby, to mount the surprise and highly successful attack on Beersheba.”

Aaronson died in an aircraft accident in 1919. Aaron Aaronson Street is in Zichron Yaakov, Hadera, Netanya, Hod Hasharon and Kiryat Ono.

His sister, Sarah (1890-1917), was also a spy and helped to found NILI. She was known as Israel’s Joan of Arc. Sarah and Aaron Aaronson Street can be found in Beersheba, while Sarah Aaronson Street is in Raanana, Petah Tikva, Ramat Gan, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Zichron Yaakov.

Also featured in the book is Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon, a crew member of the ill-fated space shuttle Columbia, which disintegrated upon re-entering the earth’s atmosphere in 2003, killing the entire crew. Ilan Ramon Street can be found in Ness Ziyonna, Beit She’an, Beersheba and Hatzor HaGlilit.

These are but three lesser known personalities who’ve formed part of the state’s rich tapestry. Well known names are covered as well.

South Africans will be surprised to come across streets named after former prime ministers Jan Smuts and DF Malan. We learn that Smuts was “an avowed Christian Zionist who firmly believed in the right of the Jewish people to their homeland in Palestine”, and that he played “an influential role in the drafting of the Balfour Declaration” and was “a firm friend” of Chaim Weizmann.

Smuts Boulevard in Tel Aviv-Yafo, and Smuts Garden in Jerusalem and at Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan in northern Israel, are named for him.

The honouring of Malan is more intriguing. In the 1930s, he was instrumental in introducing quotas limiting Jewish immigration to South Africa and “had voiced many anti-Jewish sentiments”. Not



Peter Bailey at work on the book

surprisingly, his election as prime minister in 1948 caused “great trepidation” amongst the Jewish community which proved to be largely unfounded.

However, he was one of the first national leaders to officially visit Israel in 1953, and Malan Street in Tel Aviv was named for this visit.

Bailey says that, while books on the topic have been published before, they lack the detailed biographies that his publication offers. Particular emphasis has been placed on founders of the Zionist movement and heroes of the struggle to establish the State of Israel.

“Most of the streets are named after the early Zionists,” he explains, “as well as after many who fought in the various wars to maintain the independence and freedom of Israel as a home for the Jewish people.”

Because of certain political realities, many of these names only came to the fore after Likud came to power in 1977, he says. “A lot of the people in Lehi and Etzel – Zionist paramilitary organisations in Mandatory Palestine – weren’t recognised to the same degree until Likud came in.”

The book has been “very well received” by the South African community in Israel, Bailey says.

Bailey is already at work on his next book, which will focus on the 40 Israeli soldiers who have won Israel’s top military award, the Medal of Valor.

- *Street Names in Israel can be obtained by emailing peteyb4@gmail.com*

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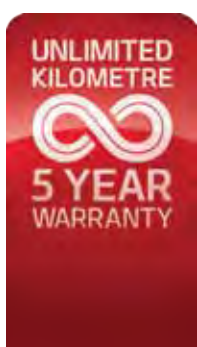


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Cape Town’s festive salute to Israel at 70

JULIE BERMAN

As the clock struck 2 o’clock, the gates to Cape Town’s iconic amusement park, Ratanga Junction, opened for Israel’s 70th Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrations. Children rushed through the walkways into the walled city, beneath a sky of blue and white umbrellas and to the pulsating sound of Israeli music. They headed straight for the theme park rides.

There was something for everyone, young and old, to enjoy as every effort was made to appeal to each person’s sense of fun.

Bnei Akiva, together with Rabbi Sam Thurgood of Beit Midrash Morasha, conducted the mincha and ma’ariv service.

The opening ceremony was choreographed by Roxy Levy and Martine Kawalsky, together with pupils from Herzlia Primary Schools,



Children enjoying Yom Ha’atzmaut

Cape Town Sinai Academy and Phyllis Jowell School. They were led in by our esteemed Machalnik, Leslie Marcus, who carried the Israeli flag along with Jake Kaimowitz.

They were followed by the Israeli ambassador, Lior Keinan; deputy

ambassador Ayellet Black; the Israeli consul, Yaffa Mendel; and Aaron Diamond, who brought in balloons decorated with the number 70.

The procession entered the arena to the fabulous sounds of the Herzlia Vocal Ensemble, headed by Cantor

Ivor Joffe. The atmosphere was electrifying as the audience clapped and sang, while the primary school children danced in the formation of a 70 in the main arena.

After a resounding *Hatikvah* was sung, people broke out into

communal dancing.

Stalls selling food and various products added to the theme of 70 Years, 70 Faces, 70 Stories.

A candle was lit to mark the past 70 years, and another was lit to symbolise the light that will ensue in the years to come, representing Israel’s continuity into the future.

One of the highlights of the evening was a performance by Israeli band The Solomon Brothers. They had the crowd on their feet, singing and dancing. The ruach was joyous and energised.

The event culminated in an announcement of the winner of the raffle: Dana Silva.

We thank our community for coming out in their droves to honour our beloved Israel and show their support for one of the main events on the calendar of our Cape Town community.

Yom Ha’atzmaut at the Israeli embassy

DIANE WOLFSON

Israeli ambassador Lior Keinan was excited to mark Israel’s 70th birthday with his first Yom Ha’atzmaut in South Africa, he said at the embassy’s annual celebration.

“Seventy years have passed since David Ben-Gurion’s emotional and historical declaration of the creation of a state in the land of Israel,” he said. “We have accomplished so much since. We have built a unique country, turning the desert into green fields, and absorbed an incredible three million Jews from 100 different countries. The most amazing thing is that we managed all this without a single day of peace and quiet.”

Keinan said he could only imagine what could have been achieved without needing to invest such a big part of Israel’s resources in the defence of its borders and citizens. “I would have said that ‘the sky’s the limit’, but even that would be an understatement as Israel reached outer-space a long time ago.”

Looking to the future, Keinan said the world was going through dramatic changes and Israel was standing in front. “Just over a decade ago, eight of the 10 largest companies in the world were banks and energy companies. Unlike the Arab world, Israel never had, and never will have, money reserves or fuel, so the last place in the Middle East you would have invested in would have been Israel.



Ambassador Keinan with Ambassador Zanele Makina

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Israel craves nothing more than peace with them.”

Keinan went on to describe how Israel’s relations with the African continent had improved. “Trade between Israel and South Africa is strong and stable, reaching almost \$1 billion (R12,3 billion). Direct flights between the countries will rise, leading to an increase in mutual tourism.”

Among the guests were numerous diplomats, representatives of the South African government and civil society, and Jewish and other religious leaders.

Zanele Makina, chief director of the Middle East in the department of international relations and co-operation, addressed the gathering on behalf of the South African government.

She spoke of a growing warmth between Israel and South Africa which began in 1972, prior to Israel having an embassy in the country. She also referred to the many members of the South African Jewish community who were involved in the liberation struggle.

Makina said South Africa remained Israel’s main trading partner in Africa.

“Tourism is an important mainstay of our bilateral relations,” she said, adding: “In South Africa, Israeli technologies are widely

used in agriculture and in the telecommunications industries. Between January 2003 and December 2015, three foreign direct investment projects were recorded which resulted in large job creations.

“South Africa has the greatest potential to benefit from economic co-operation with Israel as an important trading partner.”

She concluded by congratulating the State of Israel on its 70th national Day of Independence and wishing the people of Israel the best for the future.

Guests then drank a toast to friendship, co-operation and success between the people of Israel and South Africa.

Klerksdorp pays homage to Israel at 70

The Jewish community in Klerksdorp, North West, held a special evening of remembrance and celebration last week, in observance of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut.

On Yom Hazikaron, the Israeli flag was lowered and raised by Jack Franks, the oldest member of the congregation, while Tamir Samovich recited the Hazkara.

Starting off the Yom Ha’atzmaut event was emcee Marlene Waks. Sarah Samovich then presented an overview of important dates and mentioned the remarkable achievements of Israelis over the past 70 years.

A list of 70 fun items was read out by various members of the community as Marlene lit the 70 candles on the birthday cake. Sarah sang *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* and the community joined in. Hatikvah was sung to the accompaniment of a pianist and violinist, who then provided background music while a delicious Israeli supper was served.

Kol Hakavod to the Klerksdorp leadership branch of the Women’s International Zionist Organisation for organising this outstanding evening.



Tamir and Sarah Samovich

Pretorians make merry at Yom Ha’atzmaut shindig

DIANE WOLFSON

The Jewish community in Pretoria celebrated Israel’s 70th birthday in style with a delicious Israeli supper at the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation centre. Wonderful entertainment was also arranged for adults and children alike by Rabbi Levi Medalie and Batel Shina.

People sat at tables and socialised. A stand-out activity was the Magen David challenge, which went like this: On each table were 12 pieces of raw spaghetti and five marshmallows, and people had to try to create the tallest freestanding Magen David using these goodies. The activity generated much laughter and concentration, and the results were surprisingly good. A memorable evening was enjoyed by all who attended.



Andrew Abramowitz and Sharon Yuter putting their skills to use

Songs to live (or die) by



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

What is it about words sung that have the power to inflame? Traditionally, the Yom Hashoah ceremony is built around song. Songs sung by women, by chazzonim, by the crowd. Arguably, the most potent kind of song is the anthem. It is invested with the power of ideology; it can make people change the world for good or for bloodlust. We, as South African Jews, have a particularly complicated relationship with our anthems – *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, *Hatikva* and the *Partisan Song*, which have always been part of the Yom Hashoah programme. The singing of the South African anthem still evokes nervous glances from white people in the crowd, looking to see if the black people present are offended that they don’t know the anthem’s words – as if this casts their patriotism into doubt. The lyrics employ five of the most widely spoken of South Africa’s 11 official languages – isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and

English. These were incorporated into the anthem as an attempt at South African reconciliation after apartheid. Still, most white adults only know the English and Afrikaans parts of it; they generally will surreptitiously hum along to the main refrain. The African part was composed as a hymn in 1897 by Methodist school teacher Enoch Sontonga. It became a symbol of anti-apartheid defiance. The title means “G-d bless Africa”. Sadly, most white South Africans still cannot speak any African language or even understand what black people are saying to each other. The Jewish world has its own very special anthem, in some ways a Jewish counterpart to *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*. Called *Partizaner Lid* (the *Partisan Song*), it is a defiant Yiddish song considered an anthem of Holocaust survivors. It is about Jewish resistance and survival: after numerous attempts to destroy them by the Nazis and others, the Jews “are still here”. The lyrics were written in 1943 by Hirsh Glick, a Jewish inmate of the Vilna Ghetto who was inspired by news of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Should Israel’s national anthem, *Hatikva*, be sung at such events? Some say it is essential – to celebrate the fact that the

Community Column

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to bigotry in all its ugly forms

“A house divided against itself cannot stand,” former US president Abraham Lincoln once said (paraphrasing a verse from the Christian scriptures). While he was relating this to the deteriorating situation in his country in the years immediately preceding the American Civil War, his words could just as easily be applied to any society struggling to maintain cohesion in the face of bitter divisions within the ranks of its citizenry. Such polarisation can easily culminate in all-out war, but even if it does not, its effects are always destructive. Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since South Africa’s transition to non-racial democracy, but ours continues to be a deeply divided society. One of the most divisive factors is undoubtedly the persistence of racism, be it in the workplace, on social media, at schools and universities, in the political arena and, indeed, in all ordinary day-to-day interactions between people of different backgrounds. Jews, sometimes as individuals and at other times as a collective entity, are frequent targets of such prejudice. It is normal for people to quarrel with one another from time to time, but unfortunately, race is all too often arbitrarily brought into such disputes, resulting in heightened feelings of offence and anger. A high proportion of anti-Semitic incidents reported to the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) involve a Jewish person being subjected to gratuitous anti-Semitic insults by a non-Jewish party with whom he or she is having a dispute (usually over monetary matters, although squabbles between neighbours and even allegations of inconsiderate driving habits are not uncommon). There is, nevertheless, another side of the equation that we always need to remember: as much as we are sensitive to the way others relate to us, so should we be just as scrupulous in how



Above Board
Shaun Zagnoev

we relate to, and speak of, our fellow South Africans. It cannot be denied that racist attitudes continue to persist within our own ranks. How often, for example, do we still hear black people being disdainfully referred to as “shochs” or “schwartzes”? We need to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to the use of such expressions, which run counter not only to the anti-racist ethos of South Africa but go against the fundamental values of Judaism as well. It sometimes also happens that community members are provoked by anti-Semitic comments into responding in kind. However, no matter how gross the provocation might be, it is never a licence to be bigoted, racist or hurtful. We all have to exercise common decency and avoid being provoked into saying or writing things that denigrate entire communities, whether defined by race, ethnicity, religion or other such grounds. Together with the duty we have to respect the fundamental right to dignity and equality of all those with whom we interact in the wider society, so do we need at all times to show consideration and respect to those within our own community. South African Jewry is not homogenous. Whether involving questions of religious belief and practice, gender relations, politics, issues relating to Israel and Zionism, or other areas, there is – and has always been – a broad range of views and modes of behaviour. The SAJBD strives to be an all-inclusive organisation, where differences of opinion and religious practices are respected and where the common denominator uniting its members is a shared commitment to promoting the well-being and ensuring the security of the South African Jewish community.

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

The passion and patriotism of anthems inspire people to do great things, but equally, evil.

horror of the Holocaust was followed by the joy of Israel’s creation. A few people have reservations, however, saying that including it inappropriately politicises the event, since the Holocaust was a specifically Jewish trauma, not an Israeli one. Hitler targeted Jews of all stripes – Zionist and anti-Zionist, religious and non-religious. Another white ethnic group experiencing similar issues to the Jews about anthems and belonging are the Afrikaners, who during apartheid passionately sang their own anthem, *Die Stem van Suid Afrika* (The Call of South Africa). Many Afrikaans farmers may soon be singing another national anthem – Australia’s – following a statement by its home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, that he would fast-track visas for white SA farmers because of the “horrific

circumstances they face”. What’s in an anthem? Is it still a unifying symbol for which people will live or die? When Israeli writer David Grossman told bereaved Israelis and Palestinians on Memorial Day this month that “fortress Israel” is not yet a home for Jews because it is not “stable and relaxed” – among other things – it raised questions for South Africans about their own country. Are South Africans relaxed and feeling at home after the political earthquakes that have numbed and traumatised their society during apartheid and after it? Grossman’s son, Uri, died as a soldier in the 2006 Lebanon War, fighting for his country and, by implication, for its anthem’s words. Words, which in Israel too, are sullied by controversy: not all Israelis will sing it. The passion and patriotism of anthems inspire people to do great things, but equally, evil. Don’t forget: the Nazis too had their anthems.

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

Sunday (April 29)	Monday (April 30)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Jewish Genealogical Society of South Africa is hosting Ray Pagir, a pharmacist and curator of SA Pharmacy Museum on “Medicines in the Bible”. Time: 19:30. Venue: HOD. Cost: R30 including refreshments. Contact: Hannah on 011 485-2188 or email jgssa16@gmail.comOpen Ongoing Nechama – Growth from Grief Support Group. Time: Tea from 9h30, group starts promptly at 10:00 to 11:30. Venue: Jossel Card Room, Ground Floor, Golden Acres. No need to book. Look forward to seeing you. Men and women welcome. Contact: Linda Fleishman on 011 532 9701.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">UJW hosts Audrey Coleman, co-founder of the Detainees’ Parents Support Group (DPSC). She will speak on the recently published book <i>The Knock on the Door</i>, which tells the story of the DPSC in the 1980s liberation struggle and of how the anti-detention movement became part of the mass uprising that brought down apartheid. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW Office on 011 648 1053.



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Crawford science whizz-kid to compete in world Olympiad



Tomer Melnik

Tomer Melnik, a Grade 12 student at Crawford College Sandton, has been selected to represent South Africa at the 50th International Chemistry Olympiad, to be held in Prague in July this year.

Tomer came first in the country in the recent final-round examination, which was based on first- and second-year university-level chemistry.

Dr Denise Hudson-Lamb, senior Physical Science teacher at Crawford College Sandton, praised Tomer with these words: “The US author Robert Collier said: ‘Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.’ This quote sums up Tomer beautifully. A conscientious student, he works at his science every day. All his daily efforts have paid off and he has achieved success at the highest level.”

KD Victory Park stages festive Yom Ha’atzmaut tribute

MRS H. BEN-MOSHE

King David School Victory Park celebrated Yom Ha’atzmaut last week with entertainment galore. The student representative council, along with a few pupils from Grades 1 to 11, performed for the rest of the school in the high school hall, showcasing their varied talents. It was a fantastic celebration, which included guest speakers Ben Swartz, chairman of South African Zionist Federation, and Ayellet Black, Israel’s deputy ambassador to South Africa.

After the assembly, the entire campus created the shape of “70” on the top field in tribute to Israel’s 70th year of independence, and enjoyed cupcakes.

KD Victory Park students and staff form “70” for the 70th anniversary of Israel’s independence during Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrations



KD Schools share their 70th milestone with Israel

King David Linksfield pre-Primary and Primary Schools held a joint ceremony to celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut. It was especially significant as King David Schools and Israel celebrate their 70th birthdays this year.

Rabbi Craig Kacev, director of the South African Jewish Board of Education, addressed the pupils, who enjoyed a beautiful flag ceremony. The children sang and did Israeli dancing, among other fun activities. It was a memorable occasion, balancing reflective moments with absolute joy and merriment.

Grade 1 students Jaron Riesnik and Adam Gewer having fun at the King David Linksfield Primary School’s Israel at 70 celebration



Torah Academy Primary School launches campaign for IDF soldiers



Holding up their letters are, from left: Clara Stein, Elisheva Slotow, Huvi Kagan, Tzippy Kievman and Liora Arenson

“Thank you for protecting Israel. I am very grateful that we have you in our army and you have protected Israel for 70 years. And Moshiach will come now. Love, Yehuda Tzvi Mandelberg.”

This was a letter, among many, written by pupils of Torah Academy Primary School as part of a special campaign, launched on Yom Hazikaron, to benefit soldiers in the Israel Defence Forces. Together with the letters, the following items will be delivered to an army base by one of the Torah Academy teachers: Toothpaste, toothbrushes, bars of soap, deodorant and socks.

‘Yom Huledet Sameach to Israel’ from Rosabelle Klein

Pupils at Rosabelle Klein Nursery School in Waverley had a wonderful time celebrating Israel’s 70th birthday with a party. They iced cakes in the colours of the Israeli flag, marched in their very own Israeli parade, waved Israeli flags and sang Hebrew songs.



The Grade R class with teacher Lisa Klaff and assistant Vicky Moroe

Sydenham pre-schoolers celebrate Israel’s 70th

Celebrating Yom Ha’atzmaut is an annual highlight at Sydenham Pre-school as they honour and appreciate their heritage. The school was a sea of blue and white as everyone dressed in the colours of the Israeli flag.

The children marched into the garden to the beat of popular Israeli music and sang and danced to Hebrew songs. This was followed by a picnic outdoors comprising pita bread with hummus and tachina. The celebration ended with the singing of Hatikva.



Enjoying the festivities are Sam Pearlman and Mikah Meyerowitz

This is no deranged prophet, but a strong and courageous artist

REVIEW

DR DANNY SHORKEND

It’s been a long journey for Max Wolpe. His father, Joe, and grandfather, Max, were renowned art dealers, and this may have ignited his passion for the visual arts. As I walked around the *Max Wolpe’s 11* exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town last week, my initial impression was indifference. There seemed to be an almost depressed colour scheme, a certain heaviness and lethargy. But as I spent more time on the

works, they began to grow on me. Before I had time to analyse the portend of the subject matter, I began to sense the impression the artist creates via his hand. Most of the work is in oil on board or canvas, but Wolpe is equally adept at watercolour, etching and aquatint, woodcut, aquarelle and ink on various kinds of paper. And as the skill of the craft, particularly his drawing, emerged, so the soggy, dusty, all-over sameness began to transform. Some of the paintings even began to sing,

with light becoming apparent. Then I noticed in many works a playful, musical, almost humorous quality as faces – caricatured and yet humane – peeked out amidst a turbulent, almost claustrophobic space. Yet this is not stifling. One can breathe as texture, line and semi-abstract – an almost reductive, child-like quality – give Wolpe’s work a sense of witty charm.

The somewhat “unfinished” quality of the work (its congested flurry), what some have erroneously dubbed as naïve, contains and harmonises a contradiction in his work which is the source of its beauty – namely, that his work can be defined as rough, direct, expressive, “impatient” and yet be simultaneously subtle and resolved. This contradiction, what one might call its simple complexity, means that somehow my initial depression is yet charged with a certain mindful energy. It is perhaps the energy of the artist as “outsider”, as merely an observer, as not complicit with conventional rules. I take exception to the exhibition blurb on the gallery wall that defines such a position further, such that the artist is mad, as some sort of deranged prophet. It’s a definition debunked as untenable by much contemporary art theory and history. Such ideas need not be taken lightly. Perhaps the highlight of the show is Wolpe’s “Ox” (1990), a sculpture in corrugated cardboard and cold glue. It is testimony to his strength, endurance and courage, for there is a price to paid for following the muse(s) of art. The ox stands resolute and poised. Perhaps, if one were to concede the outsider



CECIL SKOTNES ‘Meeting the Ancestors’ 2005
Acrylic on wooden board. Some engraving.

definition, Wolpe often seems to be looking at societal structures and personality types with a keen eye for cityscapes, the carnival and the hum of crowds. At the same time, there is introspection, loneliness and solitude. Perhaps the artist is a kind of social scientist. Wolpe’s methods are alive with a human touch, a human lens and an open heart. In shunning contemporary digital technologies, his voice ought to be heard against the tremor of potential clinical coldness and the transformation of every human feeling and idea into a brand, product or service. Art has, for much of its history, a bitter-sweet relationship with institutional systems of control and coercion, as well as with commerce. Art has itself not always been innocent in that power game. Perhaps Wolpe has managed to circumvent the system.

• *Max Wolpe’s 11 is on display at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town until June 10*

Letters

PROMOTING JEFF SHULL IS A NO-NO

I am somewhat amazed, disappointed and taken aback by your front-page story of April 13 (“Life goes on’ for Jeff Shull”). While I don’t wish to condemn him prior to the outcome of the forensic inquiry being instituted by the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS), I certainly do not think it appropriate that you have chosen to give him “koved” and free advertising by promoting his new, non-kosher catering business called Salt and Peppa, as well as his new-found venue – that of “his brother-in-law, the global defence and aerospace mogul Ivor Ichikowitz” (as per your article). You start the article by informing your readers that Shull’s kosher catering business was forced to shut down “under a cloud of controversy”. Controversy is being extremely kind, considering the seriousness of the allegations being made

WE ARE ALL JEWS

I was disconcerted by the arguments put forward in Rabbi Greg Alexander’s article, “Who represents South African Jewry?” in your April 20 edition. We Jews are, of course, a people born and bred in argument and debate. Obviously, this piece is a thinly veiled attack on the person and position of the Orthodox Chief Rabbi and what he represents. In Alexander’s words: “He is not my ‘chief’.” As a ba’al teshuva who has searched deeply for spiritual meaning for more than 25 years, I have been able to find something in what Alexander would label “Orthodoxy”, but ultimately, it’s simply “Judaism”. You don’t have to be a big Talmud chochum to know that at the basis of all Jewish learning are excruciating debates about every facet that affects our lives, trying to consider every angle. These debates and arguments ultimately result

against him. You then go on to praise him, saying that it has not stopped him “from doing what he does best: catering for lavish functions”. I would like to suggest that what Mr Shull has done best over the past number of years is deceive not only the UOS, but all his Jewish customers too, and by extension, the entire SA Jewish community. I would expect a publication such as yours to, firstly, refrain from giving the tainted owner of Salt and Peppa koved, and secondly, to not give a non-kosher establishment nor its new venue free advertising. – **Ian Hertz, Pretoria**

We most certainly did not give him advertising, we simply and honestly told our readers what has happened to the man at the centre of a massive controversy and international investigation into kashrut. - Editor

in halochas. There was a Beis Shamai and a Beis Hillel. They debated and argued and brought diametrically opposed views and philosophies, but ultimately, there was a halocha. It wasn’t as if the guys on the side that the halocha went against were like Alexander and thereafter turned around, saying: “That doesn’t represent my belief or practices.” Beis Hillel accepted the halocha if it went with Beis Shamai, and vice versa. I’m pretty sure Alexander has learnt a bit, so he knows this, or else the Judaism he has learnt is just idealistic dogma, deserving of another label. We are all “Jews”, given the Torah on Har Sinai, and a part of Hakodesh Baruch Hu Himself. To debase the debate of who has the so-called “religious right” to represent us by appearing at some political rally only shows where our religious head is at. – **Mordechai Zlotnick, Johannesburg**

ORGANISATIONS NEED TO ACT WITH ISRAEL’S BEST INTERESTS IN MIND

I refer to a letter in the April 20 edition of *SA Jewish Report* (“Israel government crossing the line”) from Save Israel – Stop the Occupation (SISO) SA. I agree with its comments on the African migrants issue, which has been handled abysmally by the Israeli government. Not only is it morally wrong, but to a layman it seems to be anti-Halachic and plays into the hands of Israel’s detractors. Many of SISO SA’s comments are valid. The use of live ammunition against the “protesters” in Gaza was, again, morally wrong and indefensible. However, there are reports that some protesters were armed and identified as Hamas operators. There have also been reports about attempts to breach the security fence. Given the recent spate of car rammings in Israel, and before that the knife attacks on Israeli civilians by children as young as eight (I don’t recall any criticism from SISO for these atrocities), how can a sovereign state allow such an invasion by hordes of hostile people who pose a real risk to Israeli civilians? Only last week, an assault tunnel penetrating deep into Israeli territory was destroyed by the Israeli army – certainly no peaceful protest. The Hamas leadership knew that this land

invasion would result in violence and death, yet they send children into the forefront of the rioters. This is nothing new; the currency they use to garner world sympathy are the lives of little children! Instead of calling for “a day of rage” or “a day of return”, wouldn’t it be refreshing to hear a call from the Palestinian (and Israeli) leadership for a “day of peace and negotiation”? Whilst the New Israel Fund (NIF) may well support some civil society organisations within Israel, it has at times expressed hostile statements against Israel. A 2015 excerpt in *The Jerusalem Post* reads: “NIF notes they are against ‘global BDS’ – and that’s because they support ‘limited BDS’ – a boycott of all things that come from the settlements. As Israel’s former ambassador to the US Michael Oren (and current Kulanu MK) said: It is absolutely wrong ... Some... do so out of a... misplaced sense of caring about Israel.” He’s right. Many NIF members are Zionists and have their hearts in the right place. Sadly, the organisation they support does not always act with Israel’s best interests in mind, and in fact, often acts against Israel’s interests. – **Allan Wolman, Johannesburg**



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Twin chess champs at 7



JACK MILNER

When Shaun Levitan decided to teach his six-year-old twin boys how to play chess, he had no idea that they were natural chess champions.

Judah and Caleb, Grade 2 pupils at King David Primary Sandton, took an immediate fancy to the game. Less than 18 months later, they are the highest rated seven-year-olds in the country.

Shaun took the plunge because they were the same age as he was when he learned how to play chess. "They quickly learned the moves and the rules, then started to understand the strategy of the game," said Shaun. "The benefits of having a twin brother with the same interest is that they started to play against each other – often."

The boys were improving fast. Shaun contacted Clyde Wolpe, a former South African chess champion and coach, and asked him to work with the twins. When they first started the lessons, they were the youngest kids in the class. They felt intimidated when asked to suggest a move for a game because they thought the older kids would laugh. Within six months, they were the best two in the class and they now beat all the others.

As things stand, Caleb is the higher ranked of the pair with a rating of 1 175, but Judah is not far behind on 1 020 points. But it is worth noting that Caleb performs at his best when he has his brother sitting next to him. In fact, the pair devote as much time to analysing each other's games as they spend on their own.

The twins learned to record their own moves using chess notation before they could even write properly.

In June 2017, at the age of six, they played their first rated tournament. They were placed first and second in a draw of 30 children. They went on to earn their provincial colours after being selected to play for the Under-8 Johannesburg Metro A team in the SA Junior Chess Championships.

This annual event is one of the premier junior sporting events in the country where 2 500 children, representing their regions, play in teams against one another.

This year's event took place in January. Caleb played Board 1 (the strongest board) and Judah played Board 3.

Both boys were undefeated over seven rounds and Johannesburg Metro won the Under-8A Championship division with a clean sweep against all other regions, and each won best player on their boards.

The tournament everybody wants to play in is the SA Junior Closed Chess Championships. At this prestigious chess event, the top 30 youngsters are selected, with the top 22 getting automatic places. The others play off in a wild-card competition for the final places. Caleb got in automatically, but Judah narrowly missed the cut. He played in the wild-card tournament, finishing in the top three, and joined his brother at the boards.

This year, the tournament was played in Benoni and during the event Caleb and Judah played 11 rounds of chess over six days. They sat side by side, occupying Boards 1 and 2 throughout the tournament, and dominated the event. They remained undefeated and their results confirmed them as the top two chess players in their age group in the country. For this, they became the only two recipients of their National Junior Chess Colours.

They will now be invited to represent South Africa at the Commonwealth Chess Championships in India, at the Africa Youth Chess Championships in Kenya and at the World Cadets Championships in Spain.

The one they could miss out on is the Commonwealth Chess Championships in New Delhi as it would mean missing too much school time. But the other two are definite possibilities.

"At this stage, we're not sure what their level really is," said Shaun. "But to be competitive in Spain, they would need to get their rating up to about 1 600."

Their highlight was playing in a chess simultaneous exhibition against super grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura. Nakamura played against 100 kids at the same time and after four hours, 20 players were left. Caleb was one of them. "It was getting later and later, and Caleb was exhausted, but he kept going. After four-and-a-half hours, we forced him to resign," said Shaun.

Despite their brain power and ability to focus for long periods, these youngsters are not only chess players; they play sports and have piano lessons as well. Right now, though, chess – and school – are their main focus.

"Eventually, I want to be a grandmaster like Magnus Carlsen, (the 27-year-old world champion from Norway) and Nakamura," said Judah. When I play, I need to work out whether it is positional or tactical. I need to plan my end game. I try to get a win, otherwise I try to find a way to force a draw.

"I never look at my opponent because he could try to do something to distract me. I don't care what he's doing."

Caleb said he was excited to learn chess. "When my dad taught me, I learned a new culture. My goal is to be the best chess player in the world. My heroes are Magnus Carlsen, Bobby Fischer, my dad and my brother. "When I play, I keep telling myself I'm going to win. I want to dominate in the game and with my brother next to me. I also hope he's going to win."

But what the twins are also learning to do with their coach is play "blindfold chess", where the players do not see the positions of the pieces or touch them. This forces players to maintain a mental model of the positions of the pieces. Moves are communicated via a recognised chess notation.

That would be hard enough for older players, but it's a remarkable feat for a seven-year-old.