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# south african Jewish Report

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## South African emigres deeply shaken by Pittsburgh shooting

TALI FEINBERG

The Tree of Life Congregation community of Pittsburgh was participating in the worldwide Shabbos Project last Saturday when a gunman opened fire and killed 11 congregants in the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in American history. This was confirmed by a number of ex-South African Jews in Pittsburgh, including Dr Marlene Behrmann Cohen, who lives in Squirrel Hill – ‘ground zero’ of the attack.

Joyce Fienberg, and saw her at a lecture the day before the shooting. “On Saturday, we were asking people if anyone had heard from Joyce, and no one had. A few more hours passed, and there was still no word, and so this dread was growing over the afternoon. We heard the news at night, but we all knew deep down, I think. I am stunned, sort of immobilised really,” she says.

The shul complex where the gunman took 11 lives is around the corner from where Behrmann

1986. Her parents always said that the warm, close-knit community where she settled in Pittsburgh reminded them of Johannesburg. Like most other Jews in America, she has always been proudly and openly Jewish, but now wonders if Jews may need to be less visible.

She says the Tree of Life Congregation is in the centre of town, and she passes it every day. Though she cannot imagine going back there, she knows the community will move forward. “We will go to the funerals [which

a police escort. It turned out that this was the ambulance transporting the injured shooter, who was treated by a Jewish nurse and doctor on arrival. “In fact, even the president of the hospital is Jewish,” Buchinsky says.

Buchinsky’s friend’s uncle was victim Melvin Wax, “but I did not know him first hand. I recognised him as one of the faces I saw around Squirrel Hill frequently. There are many one degree and two degrees of separation to some of those murdered.”

place he always saw as “having it together” could be so gridlocked by partisanship, irrationality, and divisiveness. “I could not have predicted that,” he says. “Indirectly, that is what makes things like this possible.”

Tamara Dubowitz left South Africa in 1977 when she was just a toddler, but her South African past remains a guiding force in her life: “I feel safe as a Jew in America. And I feel safe as a Jew in Pittsburgh. However, because of my South African background, I feel especially sensitive to language, rhetoric, and acts of discrimination – whether they be anti-Semitic or anti any other group.

“This is a difficult time for me to feel safe as an American, because our leadership uses language that promotes bigotry, which in my opinion, is the most pressing issue that the US is facing today.”

She describes the Pittsburgh Jewish community as tight knit. “Everyone knows everyone. It’s a true community in so many ways. Everyone knew the victims [of the shooting] through one degree of separation. I knew almost all of them through others.

Dubowitz believes that President Donald Trump’s initial response to the shooting that there should have been an armed guard, was wrong and offensive. “How about: why was there someone who was walking around with an automatic rifle? Why do we need assault rifles? The community is heartbroken, sad, and angry, but at the same time, we will not allow this monster to break us.”

Tali Benjamin Idell left Cape Town with her family when she was nine years old. Now a wife and mother of four children, she previously lived in Parkland, Florida, and knew of some of the victims in that shooting.

So, when the Tree of Life attack occurred, it was surreal. “We heard the news only after Shabbos. We were shocked because none of the many shuls in the city had ever been vandalised by anti-Semitic graffiti, or any similar incidents. It was something we never would have guessed.”

As a religious Jew, she feels that one has to have faith, and that education about diversity is really

Continued on page 11>>



Mourners hold candles in the aftermath of the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh

She said, however, that the number of people at shul was probably no more than normal, as this is a very active community with many shul-goers.

“My deep sense of security has been shaken. I feel sad and angry, but also diminished somehow. It feels personal,” Behrmann Cohen told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

Behrmann Cohen, who grew up in Johannesburg, knew victim

Cohen lives, and she was attending a nearby shul at the time of the attack. “If the gunman had taken a different turn, it may very well have been my shul that was attacked,” she says. While the horror unfolded, her shul was placed on lockdown, and its congregants prayed amidst the chaos and uncertainty.

Behrmann Cohen attended King David Linksfield from Grade 1 to Grade 12, and left South Africa in

started on Tuesday], and we will re-commit to an ethical and moral life.”

Dr Farrel Buchinsky grew up in Cape Town, left South Africa in 1991, emigrated to the United States in 1992, and moved to Pittsburgh in 2001. A paediatric ear, nose and throat specialist, he was just leaving his workplace at Allegheny General Hospital on Saturday, when he saw an ambulance arrive, followed by

Says Buchinsky, “I still feel safe as a Jew in America, but clearly a little less so than before. Anti-Semitism is dangerous everywhere. It’s particularly dangerous when there is a general sense of hysterical fear and hate. When one couples that with a gun culture – almost a fetish – which is strong here in the US, it is particularly dangerous.”

What has surprised him, as an immigrant in America, is that a



# George fires narrowly avoid being action replay

NICOLA MILTZ

“George has been gripped by fear. It has been hell.” These are the words of long-time George resident and former city councillor, Myron Rabinowitz, describing how the raging fires threatened to engulf the town earlier this week.

While the fires are now largely contained, he said, “the mountain is toasted”. Though the Outeniqua mountain range continues to smoulder, George is no longer as smoky, because wind has pushed back the fire. Towns along the Garden Route remain on high alert amid wildfires in the region.

Eight people lost their lives in the fire. More than 65 000 hectares of land have been burnt. Several homes have been destroyed, and many people surrounding George have been displaced. There has been widespread devastation of bush and vegetation.

A somewhat relieved Rabinowitz described

the past few days: “George experienced a horseshoe of fire as flames came within metres of homes all around town. It was very scary, and touch and go at times.” He said some homes outside George had been gutted, and thousands of hectares of bush and vegetation had been reduced to ash.

At one stage, uncontrollable flames licked the edge of town, creating widespread fear. Residents had visions of last year’s devastating Knysna fires foremost in their thoughts.

The difference between this year’s fires and last year was that the fires remained largely in the mountains and bushy areas and did not reach the towns, Rabinowitz said.

“But there was the same feeling, the same fear, as you watched the fire literally touching the road, with gusts of wind pushing fire up into the air, and seeing blue-gum trees exploding before your eyes. That same fear grips you all over again.”

Donald Goldfain, the Chairperson of the Wilderness Ratepayers and Residents Association (WRRRA) told the *SA Jewish Report* that it had been a very scary past few days.

“The first thing that strikes you is the speed at which the fire moves through the bush and scrub. It’s absolutely frightening. Everyone thinks they are going to have enough time, but you basically don’t. People were told to have a grab bag with their ID and other important documents at the ready.”

He said the alien vegetation often explodes from the heat, and if there is a strong wind, the embers fly about 200m in the air, landing in another patch of dry grass and causing yet another fire. It had been a challenging week, as strong winds hampered firefighters’ efforts to contain the wildfires.

“Make no mistake, it is very scary, and not to be underestimated.”

Goldfain, who is also Director of Community Services at the Rotary Club of George, has been working literally around



the clock to organise logistics on the ground.

He said there had been overwhelming support from the community, and it had learnt a lot of lessons from last years’ and previous fires.

Those wishing to help were asked to donate funds to the WRRRA, which he said went towards the George Soup Kitchen, a nongovernment organisation that is responsible for making food for those displaced.

“It can prepare up to 2 500 fully balanced nutritional meals at a time,” he said, pointing out that the NGO itemised what was needed, including the quantities of ingredients and other necessary items.

Over and above feeding the many displaced families, it was also preparing meals for the 300 to 500-strong firefighting brigade, many of whom came from surrounding towns. The community has also been asked to donate

bottled water and energy drinks for the firefighters. And, there have been requests for things like lip ice, chocolate, energy bars, and rehydrate sachets.

Goldfain said that while life was continuing, “we are cognisant of the fact that the flames can jump well over 100m, land on a roof, and cause another fire”.

Rabinowitz said George’s Jewish community, made up largely of elderly residents, had spent the past few days indoors, and there were no reports of breathing difficulties. While George picks up the pieces, he said residents in certain areas were still jittery.

The Garden Route Disaster Management Centre is continuously monitoring and tracking fires in the Southern Cape, and ground teams are maintaining the perimeters of critical areas.

Said Rabinowitz, “You never get used to this. Fynbos is designed to burn. That’s the nature of it.”

## Torah Thought

# Pittsburgh’s Jewry needs us more than ever

In 1943, my great grandfather, Rabbi Sholom Posner, was sent by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to Pittsburgh to secure the foundations of the fledgling yeshiva school.

Since then, the school has blossomed into a burgeoning family of robust Jewish community institutions across the Pittsburgh metro, as my grandparents, parents, and hundreds of cousins, aunts, and uncles across five subsequent generations and six continents look back to Pittsburgh as the home base of our Posner tribe.

But this week, all of us, all 15 million Jewish cousins in the extended family of *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel), from Blouberg to Bersheva, Joburg

to Johnstone, and everywhere in between, stands shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters at the ground zero of our nation this week – Pittsburgh.

When the evil terrorist burst into the Tree of

Life Congregation screaming, “All Jews must die!”, he didn’t specify orthodox or reform, conservative or liberal, or any level of observance, affiliation, or political leaning for that matter. All means all. Yes. He was looking for me – and for you too.

He burst into the room as Jewish people around the world were in the midst of reading Hashem’s challenge to Avraham: “Would you offer your child on the altar even if it meant giving up his very life?”

“*Hineni* (here I am),” Avraham replied. “*Hineni* (here we are),” replied the 11 *kedoshim*, the holy souls whose lives were taken on the altar of Kiddush Hashem – the sanctification of Hashem’s name – in Pittsburgh.

On the one hand, we know that Hashem then tells Avraham that more than dying for our faith, it’s living for it that counts. Don’t sacrifice your son. Yet, even then, there were casualties. Sarah, Avraham’s wife is overwhelmed by the perceived tragedy of her son’s death, and she passes away from a broken heart.

Perhaps, being the prophetess she was, she foresaw that while Yitzchok her son was saved from sacrificial death, many of her other children, including 11 of them living in Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania, wouldn’t be that lucky. And that broke her heart.

And so, this week, we live with Chayei Sara (the life of Sarah) that picks up after her sorrow and death, by reigniting the candles that went out, and reopening her tent that lost its divine lustre on her passing.

As much as the Jewish world is looking to Pittsburgh today, Jewish Pittsburgh is looking back at us as well.

Our matriarch, Sarah’s, family responded to her death by her son, Yitzchok, establishing the first Jewish family and home; the match made between Yitzchok and his cousin, Rivka.

This week, each of us needs to find our “match”, our challenge in the world, and embrace it by strengthening our Jewish pride, faith, and heritage.

It’s no coincidence that Pittsburgh, with its famous three rivers, is known as the “City of Bridges”. Like Pittsburgh, we need to build bridges and make matches, between one Jew and another, and between every Jew and their heritage.



**Rabbi Asher Deren, The Shul of Blouberg West Coast**

| Shabbat times this week |       |                |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Starts                  | Ends  |                |
| 18:07                   | 18:58 | Johannesburg   |
| 18:57                   | 19:52 | Cape Town      |
| 18:00                   | 18:53 | Durban         |
| 18:15                   | 19:11 | Bloemfontein   |
| 18:15                   | 19:23 | Port Elizabeth |
| 18:15                   | 19:12 | East London    |

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# Police affidavit confirms CSO terror fears

JACQUELINE HERBST

A police affidavit in the KwaZulu-Natal mosque attack and multiple-bomb-threat case being heard in Verulam Magistrate’s Court this week provides evidence of a link between the suspects and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

It confirms the concern voiced recently by the Community Security Organisation (CSO) about the threat and presence of the militant ISIS in South Africa.

In his affidavit, Warrant Officer Khwezi Chonco revealed that when he arrested businessman Farhad Hoomer, along with 18 other suspects, in Reservoir Hills in Durban on 5 October, he found “devices” that indicated Hoomer’s support and commitment to ISIS.

Hoomer, whom Chonco identified as the leader of the group, was also in possession of a photo of himself wearing an ISIS beanie. He found ISIS propaganda material that incites violent *jihād* [holy war] and contains instructions on how to carry out home assassinations, manufacture parcel bombs, magnetic car bombs, and a door-trap bomb. There were also ISIS newsletters and magazines, manuals for making a cellphone detonator, and bomb-making plans and recipes, according to Chonco’s affidavit.

The affidavit stated that Ahmed Haffeeje, the brother of Goolam Haffeeje who was released on R100 000 bail, belonged to the same WhatsApp group as Sayfudeen Aslam Del Vecchio and Fatima Patel’s accomplice, Jackson Mussa. The latter two were involved in the abduction, extortion, and murder of Rod and Rachel Saunders earlier this year.

The WhatsApp group shared violent images of a beheading, and its name written in Arabic translates as *Junjullah* which means “Soldiers of G-d”. *Junjullah* is a Sunni Militant Organisation based in Iran which fights for Sunni rights and encourages the destruction of Shia mosques (the Imam Hussain Mosque in Verulam where the attack took place is a Shia mosque). Preliminary downloads from a device confiscated from Ahmed Haffeeje indicate that, like Hoomer, he was also in possession of ISIS magazines and propaganda material.

“I am confident that when the matter is set down for trial, considerably more evidence will be obtained. The fact that the charges all relate to furthering the terrorist objectives of ISIS would in my view be extremely serious aggravating circumstances justifying long-term direct imprisonment,” said Chonco.

CSO Gauteng Director Jevon Greenblatt said the organisation’s concerns were based on an understanding of the environment we find ourselves in now, and what the perpetrators are doing, rather than who they are associated with. He said ISIS was only a label, and people shouldn’t get stuck on their association with the organisation. Rather, they should focus on the kinds of acts being perpetrated to further the cause of radical Islam.

“I believe the aim of the incidents are two-fold,” said Greenblatt. “First, they indicate a financial *jihād* through extorting and stealing money from ‘non-believers’ to fund recruitment and training camps, the purchase of materials which leads to the second aim, which is violent *jihād*.”

Greenblatt is concerned about the South African Jewish community’s vulnerability to attacks from various groups. He pointed to the surfacing



Supporters and representatives of the Imam Hussain Mosque protest outside the Verulam Magistrate’s Court recently

of anti-Semitic comments on social media, calling for attacks on the community. However, Greenblatt assured the community that the CSO was watching the situation closely, and had taken every precaution to ensure the security of the community.

Holding a more sceptical view, Jasmine Opperman, the head of the

Africa desk at the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, questioned the strength of the evidence linking the mosque-attack suspects to ISIS.

“A concerning factor is that the Hawks and police are now stating that South Africa has crossed a threshold [of] violent attacks by organised international terror groups. But, where is the evidence? The Thulsie [Twins] case has already had the state stumbling in putting evidence on the table.”

Opperman said the presence of Islamic State loyalists on South African soil could not be denied, but looking at the kidnappers, the indications were that they fitted into a “wannabe” category rather than being actual members. The wannabe typically seeks instantaneous recognition, credentials and sometimes redemption, and has missed out on a life in a caliphate or training camp in Yemen or Somalia. She reiterated, however, that just because a loyalist is untrained doesn’t mean he is not dangerous.

Because of the reach of social media, terror groups no longer needed to gather at the same physical location to rally for violence, and create a community of like-minded individuals who dislike the West.

“What just does not make sense is that out of ten bomb scares over a short period of time, none exploded. If the house (at which they were arrested) was used as a ‘training camp’, surely one of the bombs would have exploded and killed people. Again, all pointers direct to intense

business competition and extortion, a tactic never propagated by Islamic State.”

Willem Els, Senior Training Co-ordinator for the Transnational Threats and International Crime Programme, believes that this case serves as a wake-up call for the government.

“We understand that the capacity of police intelligence and the Hawks has been affected by the situation in government over the past few years. The very fact that the prosecution leans heavily on the ISIS connection, indicates the seriousness in which it views this situation. Every time the court sits, we hear about more and different links between ISIS and the group, and that raises an alarm.”

Els said it was impossible to tell at this stage if there were more cells operating within our borders. He said we should be worried, as linking this cell to the so-called Del Vecchio cell (that kidnapped and murdered Rachel and Rod Saunders), that is in turn possibly linked to the Thulsie Twins cell via the Patel connection, might just be tip of the iceberg.

The possibility of the 11 suspects being granted bail raises red flags. “The rule of thumb is that you need six to seven operatives to effectively place one subject under effective surveillance, and should they be released, it would place a tremendous strain on the recourses and manpower of the state.”

The bail application will continue on 6 November.

World News in Brief

French students rank classmates’ Jewishness

University students in France listed and ranked Jewish classmates according to their level of affiliation as part of a string of jokes online and on campus featuring anti-Semitic hate speech, said an alleged victim of this behaviour.

The medical student at Paris 13 university, a 19-year-old woman identified only as Rose, filed a complaint with police on 20 October, the Europe 1 radio station reported on Monday.

“Jew level 31, involved, but capable of interacting with the goyim,” one remark about a Jewish student read on a Facebook group belonging to Paris 13 students.

“Jew level 75, category 4, will do anything for the community,” another said.

A third one read, “Level 2, aware that there’s a holiday called Shabbat.”

Rose said the list was part of a series of incidents involving anti-Semitic hate speech that she had experienced in recent months.

A few months ago, a group of students began making anti-Semitic jokes about the Holocaust on campus in her presence, she told police, including performing the Hitler salute. To offend her, they also played a game they called “frispa”, in which a kippah is thrown around like a frisbee. She said classmates would point at her and make insults, ignoring her pleas that they stop.

On a student Facebook channel, the same students and others invented a caption contest about her that included “Auschwitz 2019”, “deportation 2019” and “Nazis against Jews” accompanied by a graphics-generated picture depicting a Jewish student on fire.

French Education Minister Frédérique Vidal said, “These acts are profoundly unacceptable. Days after the attack on a synagogue in Pittsburgh, I want to remind everyone that words can kill.” Last week, Sacha Ghozlan, the President of the Union of Jewish Students of France, said that anti-Semitic graffiti was “becoming an almost daily occurrence” in institutions of higher education in the country. (JTA)

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# Farewell Moses, people’s journalist, and staunch defender of Israel

NICOLA MILTZ

The community has lost one of its real-life heroes with the sudden and tragic passing of social activist and pro-Israel lobbyist, Moses Moyo, last week.

Moyo, 39, passed away after a short illness. His untimely death has left an indescribable void for communal leaders who are still in shock.

“He was like a son to me,” said Mark Hyman, the co-Chairman of the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI). “I adored him, mostly for his integrity, commitment, and love for the Jewish people, our values, and our religion. He had an aura of goodwill, and love for all humanity. It shone out of him.”

The kippah and tzitzit-wearing, Zimbabwean-born Moyo, was a member of the inner city Impact for Christ Ministries Church. Moyo hailed from Bulawayo, and lived in Kensington for many years. He was married, and had four children. He was a committed journalist, and the founding editor and publisher of the *Inner City Gazette*, *Tshwane Gazette*, and *RSA Today*.

Moyo was the communal leadership’s go-to man, and was known as a go-getter and a unrelenting pillar of support.

When it came to pro-Israel solidarity marches or even anti-Israel protests, he was there waving an Israeli flag. He would be on Israel’s side, and with the Jewish community at communal art exhibitions, openings, and Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) demonstrations.

He would be seen shedding a tear at events commemorating Yom Hazikaron or Yom Ha Shoah, or celebrating during Yom Yerushalayim or Yom Ha’atzmaut. Moyo never missed an opportunity to demonstrate his belief in Israel, and

his love of the local community.

He was described as “completely fearless” when it came to support for Israel.

A classic “Moses moment”, said Wendy Kahn, the National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, was when he was seen handing out copies of his special edition *Inner-City Gazette* newspaper which included numerous articles opposing the resolution to downgrade the South African Embassy in Israel.

“Amid threats and intimidation, he fearlessly handed out copies at the [ANC] elective conference in December, showing that he was not going to take this matter lying down,” said Kahn.

Those closest to him said this week that Moyo had a passion for causes aimed at uplifting the poor, and those living in inner cities. His love for his fellow man knew no bounds.

Renny Plitt, the former Chairperson of the Johannesburg Property Management Association, said he first met Moyo about 8 to 10 years ago, when he got wind that Moyo was vocalising support for landlords. Plitt said he was initially suspicious of him as “something of a rabble-rouser”.

Plitt’s mind changed once Moyo went to see him about establishing the Gazette. “We chatted about it, and I agreed to back the publication with six-months’ worth of advertising from my company, African Housing Corporation, guaranteeing him an income for six months.” Until today, the company pays for regular advertising, taking up part of the front page, and part of the third page.

Plitt said Moyo regularly attended fora in the inner city, expressing his opinions on the matters discussed, and making positive contributions.

“I worked with him in running pro-Israel adverts, paying for them



Moses Moyo

at a reduced price. He became progressively more pro-Israel as time passed, probably as a result of his faith,” said Plitt.

“He told me that his church group would arrange a protest against the treatment of Israel by South Africa every Friday, making sure never to exceed the amount needed for a group to be considered an illegal gathering.”

A community journalist to his core, he made it his business to turn social activism into a calling, and ultimately

his life’s work.

Known as “the people’s journalist”, Moyo was also described this week by those who knew him as a “defender of the poor” and a “supporter of the underdog”, a “true humanist”.

Hyman, who is also the Chairman of Magen David Adom SA, first met Moyo in 2013 through Prophet Philip Banda, the head of the popular inner-city Impact for Christ Ministries. The ministry donated an ambulance to MDA, and Moyo accompanied the prophet to Israel for the handover ceremony.

Reeva Forman, the Chairperson of the Temple Israel Heritage Centre in Hillbrow, said Moyo often attended functions at the centre, and wrote about them in his newspaper. He would also attend shul services at Temple Israel.

They had common goals. “He believed in and promoted the centre’s core mission, which is to pursue justice, ubuntu, and a better world by fighting all forms of hatred of the other.”

“He believed in building peace in Hillbrow and the inner city. He was our VIP guest at shul on Shabbat Shuva this year, but sadly he was ill, and could not attend. I’ve lost a wonderful friend and a huge supporter of the heritage centre,” Forman said.

Kahn said she first got to know Moyo during IAW campaigns on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand.

“He was always there standing by our students, providing support and friendship. I remember, during IAW 2017, he started a celebratory circle around aggressive Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) members, singing Hebrew songs at the top of his voice. I remember the irate, red faces of the PSC leaders.”

Kahn said he had “fearlessly initiated” and driven regular Friday demonstrations with members of

his church outside the Gauteng Legislature in support of Israel.

During September’s devastating fires in Johannesburg, Moyo called on the community to provide food for firefighters and hundreds of students who had been displaced. “My memory of Moses was charging around town with him in his bakkie to organise KFC meals for the 700 hungry students that night,” said Kahn.

“Moses was always looking out for us. He always had our back. We have lost a true friend.”

The South African National Editors’ Forum posted on Twitter, “The journalism fraternity has lost a committed comrade, but we are certain Moses’s legacy will live on. With his charming smile and quiet demeanour, Moses had an unparalleled passion for covering community news and putting issues that directly affect communities at the forefront. This made him hugely popular among city residents, especially those living in the Johannesburg metro.”

Journalists took to social media to express their sadness.

Former Eyewitness News Editor Katy Katopodis said on Facebook, “I’m so shocked and deeply saddened by the loss of a very good, kind, and decent man.” She said he was someone who was “always there” when needed, with his “warm words of support and friendship”, describing him as a “generous soul”, and a “beautiful spirit”.

**The community has lost one of its real-life heroes with the sudden and tragic passing of social activist and pro-Israel lobbyist, Moses Moyo, last week.**

Jovial Rantao, Group Ombudsman of Independent Media and a former journalist and editor, said on Facebook, “Am gutted. Good old Moses is gone! OMG! Moses was the people’s journalist. Always willing to listen, and always there to tell the story of the small man... His biggest weapons were, among others, his humility and his determination to tell the story of our cities and our country through the eyes of ordinary people. He gave voices to the voiceless.”

Moyo told the *SA Jewish Report* earlier this year why he had decided to take part in the 2018 Jerusalem Marathon. “In remembrance of loved ones who I have lost to cancer, and in support of community members in the inner city and colleagues battling the disease,” he said.

He was actively involved in many community projects, too many to list. He was also busy with the final edit of a book on his Christian Leadership Tour to Israel earlier this year.

A memorial for the late Moses Moyo took place on Thursday, 1 November, at the Catholic Archdiocese of Johannesburg. The community is arranging another private memorial to honour his memory.

• *Additional reporting by Jordan Moshe.*

## Wits SRC calls for exam postponement over suicide rate

JORDAN MOSHE

The University of the Witwatersrand’s (Wits’) Student Representative Council has called on Dean of Student Affairs Jerome September to declare a state of emergency and postpone exams because of the number of suicides and potential suicides among students.

“Mental-health issues have plagued the student body for the most part, but it is not a coincidence that this exam period is seeing the highest suicide rates and attempts,” wrote SRC President Sisanda Aluta Mbolekwa on Facebook when the university turned its call down.

“Ours was to respond to the immediate crisis and seek to prevent a further loss of life. Management met this morning, and unfortunately did not grant our request for a postponement, due to many reasons that they are yet to disclose to us.”

With final examinations looming, South African universities are witnessing a dramatic spike in students taking their own lives in the face of severe depression and stress. With students expressing frustration over a perceived lack of support from university management, the need to address the issue has seemingly become more pressing than ever.

After two suicides at Wits earlier this year, last Wednesday, Mpumelelo Tshabalala jumped from a building in the Johannesburg CBD, and another student was rushed to hospital after attempting to end her life by jumping from the university residence at City Junction – reportedly within 24 hours of each other. Wits is certainly not alone in this regard, with 23 attempted suicides being recorded at the University of Pretoria this year alone.

The situation has resulted in a call by Wits students for greater support from the university, saying that the current programme offered by the institution’s Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) is not enough.

The SRC has also proposed a number of concessions, including applications for deferred exams, the availability of psychologists for consultation, and the hosting of various talks and sessions geared towards dealing with stress and anxiety.

University management said it had received more than 200 comments on this issue, as well as a range of suggestions and recommendation about how it could be addressed.

Management said it was aware of the stress experienced by students, and listed the measures put in place on campus, including an increase in the availability of counsellors at the CCDU over the exam period, the convention of a specialist group to advise on improving the university’s approach to the issue, and allowing exam deferment by individual students.

It could not postpone exams, as this would have an impact on “marking processes; external examination schedules; the dates for deferred exams; venue availability; accommodation – especially students residing off campus who may incur additional expenses; and arrangements made by international students”.

Responding to the problem, psychologist Dana Labe said that the stress students face is always a combination of real and self-imposed pressure. “Pressure produces anxiety, and the feeling of not meeting standards,” she says.

Continued on page 16>>



# Community pledges unwavering support for Parktown boys

NICOLA MILTZ

There was a groundswell of support for Parktown Boys High teens as their abuser appeared for sentencing at the Palm Ridge Magistrates Court east of Johannesburg on Wednesday. This was the first time the boys had experienced such support since their nightmare journey began as far back as 2015.

Numerous members of the Jewish community made a point of being there to show support.

Emotions ran high at the proceedings, as people jostled for space in the packed court house. However, much to the disappointment of the activists supporting the boys, the sentencing of the school’s former waterpolo coach and hostel master, Collan Rex, 22, was postponed until 27 November. Rex was found guilty in September of 12 counts of assault and 144 counts of sexual assault.

Eight of the 23 teenagers who laid complaints against Rex came face to face with their abuser, who stared straight ahead averting eye contact. This time, the boys were surrounded by hordes of supporters who showed up in force to back them.

It has been a long, lonely road to get to this point. The school’s new Headmaster, Malcolm Williams, Deputy Headmaster Kevin Stippel, and a member of the school’s governing body, Kim van Es, were present.

Among numerous activists opposing sexual abuse were members of the Jewish community representing Koleinu SA, Shalom Bayit, and the Union of Jewish Women.

At least 45 minutes away from the north eastern suburbs of Johannesburg in heavy morning traffic, the court sits in the middle

organisation offering a helpline for victims of abuse, where the house mistress of the school had appealed to the community to pledge its support for the boys.

“I was horrified to hear about the secondary victimisation these boys have had to endure. It was bad enough that they had to experience the abuse in the first place, but that their own school did not give them the support they needed is shocking. It’s just not good enough. Society needs to support these boys and other victims of abuse,” she said.

The atmosphere in the court was tense as people waited for the delayed proceedings to begin. The mothers of several of the boys who were abused verbally attacked Steve Mabona, the spokesperson of the Gauteng Department of Education, demanding that more needed to be done to safeguard children at the school.

Some called for the school to be shut down and re-opened with a new teaching body. Others bravely called for criminal charges to be laid against several teachers still employed at the school.

The postponement was a disappointment for activists, including members of Bikers Against Bullies, who were eager for the matter to be finalised.

Wendy Hendler of Koleinu SA told the *SA Jewish Report* that they were hoping that the sentence handed down would be severe, “to send a clear message to perpetrators that abuse will not be tolerated, and that justice will be swift and harsh against those who perpetrate these heinous crimes”.

She said she was pleased by the support from the community.

“We are emboldened by the support from our community, which is showing itself more and more to be a community that supports

victims, and the reporting of these crimes.”

Koleinu, Hendler said, tried to raise awareness about the prevalence of abuse in our country, and the need for proper reporting protocols to ensure that justice was served.

“The victims, as in this case, often get re-traumatised by the system. This is why we felt it so important to be here today to show our unwavering support for

these courageous boys, their families and supporters, who have walked this hard road with them.”

Her colleague, Rozanne Sack, said, “We are here for them, and admire their unbelievable strength during this difficult time. They are our heroes, and epitomise everything we stand for.”

Sack said it was “incredibly difficult” for victims of child sexual abuse to come forward and expose criminal acts that leave them ashamed and humiliated.

“The victims question themselves, and often hold themselves to blame for what was done to them. Most never tell, and carry the secret to their graves. When children do find the courage to stand up for themselves against strong opposition from the powerful adults in the system, we feel obligated as Jews to back them, not just silently, but powerfully and publicly.”



**Bikers Against Bullies raise their helmets in a show of support for the Parktown boys**

of Thokoza and Katlehong. This did not deter social activists in the community from lending their support.

Beverley Milun of Highlands North said, “Every community has issues, and many of us stand up for our own. But if we only do that, then we neglect the community of humanity, and we keep ourselves separated. Because it isn’t our people affected, we don’t get involved.

“But when we stand together for causes outside of our community, then a community of humanity is born; the greater community to which we all belong.”

Michelle Blumenau of Norwood said she felt compelled to lend support after hearing how little support the boys had received after they bravely came forward with their stories of abuse.

She had attended a recent gathering on sexual abuse hosted by Koleinu SA, an



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**Shabbat Shalom!**  
**Peta Krost Maunder**  
**Editor**



As long as the prime minister can hold off the hawks in his coalition, and the Egyptian negotiations continue, he can buy time, and decide on his terms, and on his clock, when the next Gaza war will erupt.



# The PR client no-one wants to talk about



## OPINION

Janine Lazarus

Let’s call it like it is for once, shall we? No tiresome beating around the bush. Governments generally don’t want you to know that they have Big Boy public relations machinery working for them. Bell Pottinger is one repugnant South African case in point. So, the major media outlets in Saudi Arabia cast the disappearance and murder of Saudi dissident and *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi as a foreign conspiracy to denigrate the image of the kingdom. I would have to concur grudgingly with American President Donald Trump when he described this Saudi public relations debacle as “the worst in the

history of cover-ups”. And, let me hasten to add that I’m loathe to sing off the same hymn sheet as Trump. But, he’s surprisingly on the button on this one. This is nothing more – nor less – than the public relations fiasco of all fiascos. The 59-year-old journalist walked into a Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October, hoping for a permit to marry the love of his life, never to be seen again. His disappearance has since been characterised by fake news, unnamed sources, fabrication, and blatant bias. When the murder was so clear, why were so many inconsistent statements made? Why, for weeks afterwards, was Khashoggi’s dismembered body nowhere to be found? To add further insult to injury, media accounts disseminating from outlets run with the backing of Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf monarchies, took it a step

too far. They tried spinning the news coverage of the journalist’s disappearance as a plot by rival governments and political groups to hurt the kingdom. Let’s face facts: it’s an open secret that the Saudi government pays millions of dollars to American PR firms to burnish its image to a high gloss to global policy makers and the public via the news media. And, it’s not just the Saudis who want to have a good image. Every country does. But, it must be asked whether any amount of money could protect Saudi Arabia’s hell-bent attempt at image-building? I’d argue – hotly, I might add – that I doubt there’s enough dosh in the world that could find its way round even attempting to justify this country’s massive reputational hit. Like many other consultants, I’m self-employed. Turning down work is not something I make a habit of

doing. I work with governments and corporates increasingly in the media advisory space on some seriously sticky issues. But I’ve learned the hard way that the smelly brown stuff sticks. The request – even for bucket loads of bucks – to work on the image of one of the world’s most autocratic regimes and human rights abusers is something anyone with a smidgeon of integrity would flatly turn down. It serves no purpose for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to project an image of a “softer” Saudi. There’s nothing soft about cracking down on dissent, of dropping bombs on Yemen, of throwing human-rights bloggers behind bars, or of ordering – even at “arm’s length” – the grisly murder of a journalist. The Saudi government is reeling – and deservedly so – from an ever more vitriolic backlash over the murder of one of the most influential Arab journalists in the world. To my

mind, what needs to be put into place is some serious action on the ground. It’s the only way to win the hearts and minds of the global village. Clean up your own backyard before you go outside and play in the traffic. Action always speaks louder than words – even words that are spun to absolute perfection. And talking about words, Khashoggi wasn’t one to mince his. He was more often than not harshly critical of the Saudi regime. It’s taken his murder to make the world wake up to Saudi brutality. Perhaps this is his final legacy. Unspoken, but overwhelmingly powerful. Sometimes no words are necessary.

• *An ex-newshound turned media trainer, Janine Lazarus uses her 34 years of experience in mainstream media to give her clients a real understanding of the media and how it works.*

# To feel safe, Jews need a government that says and does the right thing

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL

On Saturday morning, a friend was in from Israel, and I took him to one of the many synagogues in my neighbourhood. He was surprised by the police car parked out front, the bollards protecting the main entrance, the congregants with walkie-talkies keeping an eye on the door. “What does this say about American Jewry?” he asked. I didn’t know what to tell him, only that a lot of synagogues in town have beefed up their security in recent years. Some people call it overkill; others insist you’re better safe than sorry. A few hours later came news of the horror at Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh, where 11 people were shot dead during morning services, and a 46-year-old white male with an apparent anti-immigrant beef and hatred of Jews had been taken into custody.



**Rapid reaction SWAT team members leave the scene of the shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh** In a week in which a crazed Trump fan was arrested for sending pipe bombs to liberals and CNN, and a year in which there were more than 150 mass shootings, I am not sure what any of this says about “American Jewry”. The Anti-Defamation League called the synagogue shooting the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in United States history, from which it is possible to derive a measure of comfort. Until now, American Jewish institutions were spared the kind of mass tragedies that have invaded the sanctity of churches, universities, high schools, elementary schools, country music concerts, fast food joints, and municipal buildings. The Pittsburgh shooting isn’t evidence that America has a Jewish problem, or even a far-right problem, although it has both. But there is no doubt that we have a mass shooting crisis, amplified by the ease of obtaining assault weapons.


When it comes to reducing political divisiveness and healing national divisions, it also has a leadership problem, starting at the top. I think it is premature to draw a straight line between President Donald Trump’s fear-mongering and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and the Pittsburgh shooting, or his repeated demonisation of his critics and the mail bombs sent to several of them last week. But the fact that the alleged perpetrators echoed some of the president’s most passionate attack lines should be enough to give his supporters pause, and perhaps get him to modify his language and behaviour. Saturday’s response to the shooting was a good start, when he said in a prepared statement that the massacre was “pure evil” and “an anti-Semitic act”. He added that “anti-Semitism and the widespread persecution of Jews represents one of the ugliest and darkest features of human history”.

Vice-President Mike Pence also gave a strong statement. They were remarks that Jews need to hear, to know that they are not alone in fighting hatred, and have an ally in the White House. It’s easy to get burned when encouraging Trump, considering how often he’ll send a tweet or rile a rally crowd with a quote that contradicts the normal and measured thing he said even a few hours earlier. Many Jews will demand consistency in words and deeds in the fight against anti-Semitism. And they’ll also demand consistency when it comes to the fight against all kinds of hatred, whether directed against women, or transgender people, gay people, or Hispanics. On the Tree of Life website, the synagogue’s rabbi, Jeffrey Myers, has used his blog to advocate for the rights of immigrants, justice for the victims of clergy abuse, and heartbreakingly, sensible gun control and mental healthcare. In the past year, there has been a cottage industry of books and essays mocking the liberal American Jewish impulse for *tikkun olam*, or social action, suggesting that the religion of American Jews is not Judaism, but liberalism. Defiant in the face of such criticism, time and again synagogue social-action committees like Tree of Life’s are about building coalitions with minorities and the marginalised. They sense, rightly, that attacks

on one religion or group give license to and normalise attacks on others. What will many Jews – not to mention many Americans – want in the wake of Pittsburgh? An administration that stops othering people, for starters. Will that stop the next attack, whether it is on a synagogue or a mosque or the home of a liberal politician? There are no promises. But respecting the dignity of all Americans,




all religions, and all people isn’t a law-enforcement technique. It’s an ethos, and one that honours what is best about America. Many Jews will feel safer if the White House somehow becomes a kinder, gentler place. But until then, security is going to dominate the Jewish communal conversation. (JTA)

• *Andrew Silow-Carroll is Editor in Chief of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.*





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# Sderot: a city of rockets, bomb shelters, and rock music

JORDAN MOSHE

Israel may be a country under constant threat, but Sderot – a city on the Gaza border – is under constant attack.

Its residents are so accustomed to spending prolonged periods in bomb shelters, that the city has unique underground playgrounds so that its children will have fun in the long hours spent in shelters.

For these people, there is never any post-traumatic stress, simply because there is no “post” to the trauma from which they suffer.

This is according to a documentary, *Rock in the Redzone*, screened by the South African Zionist Federation last Thursday at Nu Metro Hyde Park in Johannesburg. It tells the story of the southern town on Israel’s periphery that has been the target of Qassam rockets for the past 14 years.

Established in 1951, Sderot is populated mainly by Jews of North-African and Middle-Eastern backgrounds who settled there during waves of mass immigration to the state in the 1950s. A city far from the Israel’s centre, Sderot not only lacks economic and educational opportunities, but has been hit by rockets more than 2 500 times since 2012.

Its citizens not only persevere, but thrive on hope, determination, and a great deal of rock and roll.

In 2007, Los Angeles filmmaker Laura Bialis arrived in Sderot to better understand the everyday reality of its residents, and capture their reality on film. The documentary took more than seven years to make, and it tells the personal stories of the people Bialis encounters. It also goes into what it feels like to have only 15 seconds to find shelter when the *tzeva adom* (code red) missile alert siren sounds.

In Sderot, Bialis doesn’t find a defeated population, but courageous youth, a bomb shelter music studio, and Avi Vaknin, a rock musician who eventually becomes her husband.

It is through the lens of music that Bialis studies the people of Sderot, a western Negev city in the southern district of Israel. She strives to get to the heart of what people feel by understanding how they use song and rhythm to express their fear and defiance.

What she finds is that music is not treated lightly, but is the life-blood of Sderot, empowering adults and children alike as they struggle to lead normal lives. Said Bialis, “I figured I could tell the story through the experience of the musicians. It was the music you’d imagine, the music that comes from really hard places.”

Sderot is a musically prominent locale, and has produced contemporary Israeli and North African rock influences, including Eurovision 2007 competitors Teapacks, Knesiyat Hasechel (Church of Reason), and Sfatayim (Lips).

Even the home of a bomb shelter turned music studio called Sderock, the city continues to make its mark on the entertainment scene in Israel, and on music trends globally.

What becomes clear as the documentary progresses is that there is more to the country than just Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. “Sderot,



United Hatzalah on the scene of a rocket that fell in Sderot

as much as it’s in the periphery, is a symbol of Israel,” said Bialis. “The way Israel acts toward Sderot is, in a way, the way the rest of the world acts toward Israel.”

Seemingly ignored by greater Israel, Sderot remained the sole target of rocket attacks until 2008, when neighbouring city Ashkelon was hit with three rockets. It was only then that the Israeli government responded, launching Operation Cast Lead, a military incursion into Gaza with the goal of dismantling terrorist infrastructure.

It was at this point that the residents of Sderot, who for years had tried to bring their plight to the attention of their government, became enraged. Watching the news coverage of the military operation, Vaknin, Bialis’s husband, said, “Now the government feels that we are under attack, not when we in Sderot faced this every single day for years. Are we less than the rest of Israel? Am I not a person?” Others expressed the same feelings, vocalising a sense of betrayal at the hands of their fellow Israelis.

This is just one dimension to the complex personalities of the people of Sderot. “Sderot is kind of like a parallel universe, a crazy existence, and it’s amazing and crazy that people keep on with it,” said Bialis.

We meet Vaknin’s bandmates and their roommates, the owners of the local restaurants and shops, as well as Hagit Yaso, a young Ethiopian-Israeli who ended up in the national Israeli talent show, *A Star Is Born*.

Bialis weaves in the events of seven years, marked by rockets and army incursions, incalculable damage and

emotional upheaval, the departure of friends for other cities, even her own wedding, held in Sderot itself.

In 2014, the range of Hamas missiles launched from Gaza increased significantly, and the entire country effectively became Sderot.

Vaknin and Bialis agreed that they wouldn’t leave Sderot because of the rockets, but ended up leaving for Tel Aviv that same year to help boost Vaknin’s career and ease Bialis’s aliyah process. Shortly after the move, Vaknin was invited to join a studio as well as contribute to the albums of other musicians, including Shlomo Artzi and Kobi Oz.

Although the couple and their five-year-old daughter still visit Vaknin’s family almost every shabbat, Bialis remains unsure about whether they’ll move back to Sderot.

Irrespective of where they live, however, she and her husband remain connected to the city, its people, and its courageous culture. “There’s a defiance [about the people of Sderot, a sense of] of this is who I am, this is who I’m going to be, and it’s reflected in their music,” said Bialis. “If you live in a place where nothing can be taken for granted, every minute matters more.”

## Astronomy expert wins Lifetime Achievement Award

TALI FEINBERG

Dr Bernie Fanaroff is a South African Jewish achiever extraordinaire, but too few people know why. He is an award-winning radio astronomer, and a quiet, humble man who has never sought the limelight, preferring to put other people first. However, he is the man at the helm of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the world’s largest radio telescope and the world’s largest public science data project.

At the beginning of October, Fanaroff was awarded the 2018 lifetime achievement award by the National Research Foundation. This award is given to individuals who have made “extraordinary contributions of international standard and impact to the development of science and in South Africa over an extended period of time”. The manner in which their work has touched and shaped the lives and views of many South Africans is also considered, according to Committee Chairperson Lindiwe Maseko.

Fanaroff was also awarded the National Order of Mapungubwe in 2014, which is South Africa’s highest honour and granted by the president himself. This award is for achievements in the international arena which have served South Africa’s interests. On the award it is written, “He served in all these positions with the single focus of making South Africa stand out in the global community.”

While Fanaroff believes these awards are a great honour, “It is not something I have done on my own. I’ve just led the teams who have done the actual work,” he told the *SA Jewish Report* in a rare media interview. “You’ve got to make sure that you convey to people that you appreciate what they’ve done... One of the nice things about leading teams is that you learn a lot from them.”

His story begins, like many South Africans, with his grandparents coming to South Africa from Latvia and Tzarist Russia. His parents wanted to work in the sciences, but could get bursaries only to study teaching, which they did most of their lives. But they passed an interest in science on to their son, as well as a strong connection to his roots. “I’m extremely proud of my Jewish heritage, especially the values of humanism, social justice, and equality. We have a great reverence for learning and knowledge, and very close families,” Fanaroff says.

It is these two sometimes opposing forces of science

and humanism that have guided the course of his life. “I decided to study radio astronomy at Wits, a relatively young subject at the time,” recalls Fanaroff. “After World War II, equipment from the war was salvaged to study radio waves, which are signals outside of our solar system and Milky Way galaxy.”

He explains in layman’s terms that he studied the energy and events around black holes in space, and he was fortunate to go to Cambridge in the United Kingdom in 1970 to do his PhD. There, he worked with other young scientists who were competing to make the next big discovery. He and fellow PhD student Julia Riley were the ones that found it – they wrote a paper that would revolutionise the way astronomers understood these radio waves.

“We noticed there were two kinds of pictures of jets emerging from black holes, shining brighter at different points. We were able to class these as type one and type two,” explains Fanaroff in simple terms. He says finding relationships and patterns in this work is vital but rare, which is why this was such a breakthrough. The two classes of radio sources now bear their names – Fanaroff-Riley class I, and Fanaroff-Riley class II, and they are still used today.

On his return to South Africa, Fanaroff began teaching physics at Wits, but he was increasingly drawn to join the struggle against apartheid. He threw himself into the trade-union movement, seeking out those that were non-racial and not aligned to party politics.

Eventually, he dedicated 19 years to being an organiser and national secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union, and in 1994, he became deputy director-general in the office of former President Nelson Mandela. During all this he was not able to return to the sciences, but found it extremely rewarding to work on building a better South Africa.

Between 1997 and 2000, he served as deputy director-general in the Ministry of Safety and Security, and as chair of the Integrated Justice System Board and the Steering Committee for Border Control. In 2000, Fanaroff set up his own consulting business outside of government, and he did not expect to play any more major roles in either astronomy or activism.

“But then, I was approached to manage South Africa’s bid to host the world’s biggest telescope,” recalls Fanaroff, referring to the SKA. He led the conceptualisation, development, and construction of its precursor, the MeerKat.



Dr Bernie Fanaroff

“Thankfully, we were able to ask the right questions, and make the right decisions,” he says humbly. This was a reason, he believes, that South Africa won the bid.

The SKA is an international project to build a radio telescope tens of times more sensitive and hundreds of times faster at mapping the sky than today’s best radio astronomy facilities. It will be powerful enough to detect very faint radio signals emitted by cosmic sources billions of light years away from Earth, those signals emitted in the first billion years of the Universe (more than 13 billion years ago) when the first galaxies and stars started forming.

The SKA will be used to answer fundamental questions of science and about the laws of nature, such as: how did the Universe, and the stars and galaxies contained in it, form and evolve? Was Einstein’s theory of relativity correct? What is the nature of ‘dark matter’ and ‘dark energy’? What is the origin of cosmic magnetism? Is there life somewhere else in the Universe? But, perhaps, the most significant discoveries to be made by the SKA are those we cannot predict.

Says Fanaroff: “We have a cohort of young engineers that are as good as or better than anyone in the world,”, pointing out that he and he believes young South Africans can play a key role in the fourth industrial revolution.

He hopes that the government will invest and commit to projects similar to the SKA, which will offer opportunities for research, jobs, investment, and make South Africa a global player. He envisions a future where the digital revolution will not only boost the coffers of our country, but its people too. “There is scope to do as much as you want to do, as long as you have respect for other people – then they will work with you.”



# SHEBA MEDICAL CENTER’S INT’L SUMMIT: A BLUEPRINT FOR THE HOSPITAL OF THE FUTURE ATTRACTS INFLUENTIAL HOSPITAL EXECS

BY KEN STEPHENS

(Ramat Gan, Israel) As technology forges ahead at a dizzying pace, hospital and healthcare system executives from North America, UK, EU and S. Africa are working overtime to integrate cutting-edge digital health innovations into their medical playbook, so they can offer a continuum of first-class care, while streamlining costs in the paperless, big data era.

The challenge to start injecting these concepts today into the hospitals of the future spurred the first-ever Sheba Medical Center International Summit: The Future Hospital-Setting Strategies for 2030, where some of the world’s most renowned hospital and healthcare system CEO’s (Chief Executive Officers) came to Israel recently in order to create a cogent strategy for their facilities.

Summit Co-Chairman, Charles N. Kahn III, President and CEO of the Federation of American Hospitals, which represents more than 1,000 investor-owned or managed community hospitals and health systems throughout the USA said, “We all agree we can’t predict the future but we know digitalization and medical science is advancing very quickly. And while digitalization and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are going to change the way we address patient care, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the essence of healthcare is compassion with a human touch. Digitalization will transform patient care for physicians and health care professionals, as they will become translators of data for their patients as well as caregivers. We also agreed that the hospital of the future will have to go beyond the 4 walls and become a virtual care-giver to patients and communities alike. Additionally, hospitals, in order to meet the demands of care in the future, will have to be flexible. The sharing of these challenging ideas at the Sheba International Summit, will now serve as a powerful foundation for on-going discussions between us going forward.”

A forum such as the Sheba International Summit also enabled some of the world’s most forward-

thinking hospital and healthcare executives to speak about how they are already transforming healthcare, yet relish the idea of constantly sharing and exploring new ideas.

Dr. Daniel Kraft, Faculty Chair for Medicine & Neuroscience and Chair of Exponential Medicine at Singularity University in California (USA) said, “It’s incredible and exciting for me to see my colleagues come to Israel and Sheba, which is fertile ground for them to discover what is going on here. Technology is converging in many areas, like genomics, Artificial Intelligence, IoT (Internet of things) and VR (Virtual Reality). The challenge is how to use these technologies to promote top medical care via clinical trials etc. Sheba is already doing clinical trials with these technologies.”

Dr. Paul B. Rothman, the Dean of Medical Faculty and CEO of the Johns Hopkins Medicine reiterated the need to train today’s doctors and medical professionals for tomorrow’s challenges today. “Healthcare is evolving rapidly and academic medical centers such as ours and Sheba must respond by transforming how we educate the next generation of medical practitioners. We must incorporate new models and methods to ensure that we continue to provide the highest level of care to our patients.”

Wright Lassiter III, President and CEO of the Henry Ford Health System in Michigan (USA) added, “As our international interests expand we remain committed to fostering relationships who share our passion for technology and innovation. Israel continues to be a leader in solutions that have the potential to improve care and reduce costs. Both are essential to us to achieve for our patients and customers.”

Prof. Mordechai Shani, Director General Emeritus of Sheba Medical Center and Co-Chairman of the Summit, divulged, “Medicine parallels life in that it’s in a constant state of change. Hospitals must offer an orchestra of care across the board using the latest technologies, mobile,



Sheba Medical Center’s Int’l Summit: Blueprint for the Hospital of The Future. Attracts Influential Hospital Executives

virtual etc. in order for people to not only live independently well as they get older. I predict that within 15 years, robots will be introduced to not only provide clinical care but also will perform procedures on patients.”

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- Dr. Fabrice Brunet, President and CEO, University Hospital of Montreal (CHUM) and CHU Sainte-Justine, Canada, Montreal, Quebec
- Mr. Nigel Edwards, Chief Executive, The Nuffield Trust, UK, London
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# Defy anti-Semitism, communal leader tells South Africans, and #ShowUpForShabbat

JORDAN MOSHE

The South African Jewish community emerged from the Shabbos Project weekend to shock and horror at the news of what had happened to fellow Jews at a shul in Pittsburgh.

The sentiment was most keenly felt at what was to have been a Havdallah concert in the Kosher World parking lot in Glenhazel, Johannesburg. Instead of a celebration, it turned into a poignant memorial to the 11 lives lost in the anti-Semitic attack on Shabbat.

“We stopped our celebration. Our legs stopped dancing, and stood still. We stopped singing, and turned to the timeless words of King David’s *Tehillim*. We prayed together for the victims and their families. And we were not alone,” wrote Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein this week. Goldstein informed those gathered about what had happened, changing the flavour of the evening.

“At Havdallah ceremonies and concerts all over the world, the focus shifted from joy and celebration to pain and sadness. We were reminded once more that we are ‘like one person with one heart’. That we feel so deeply for one another. The shots were fired in Pennsylvania, yet they were heard so clearly here on the streets of Johannesburg, and all over the world.

“As the powerful words of the Havdallah were being sung – ‘for the Jews, there was light, happiness, joy and honour’ – I looked at the faces of the crowd gathered under the stars. I reflected on the enormous power that human beings have to bring darkness into the world, to bring hatred, and suffering. But, at the same time, I reflected on the infinite human capacity to bring light, hope, and love into the world.

“Our strongest and most powerful response

to the darkness of the Pittsburgh haters is to boldly and courageously spread light in the world. We cannot be intimidated, frightened, or paralysed by the darkness. We mourn and we pray, but we are not defeated or afraid. We have faith in G-d to work with us to ensure it is the light that will be victorious. In the words of the Havdallah itself, ‘I trust and will not be afraid.’”

Later in the week, Goldstein added, “It is an outrage that for murderers like these, nothing is sacred, not human life, nor a synagogue, nor a time of prayer.”

In the wake of the attack, the South African Presidency put out the following statement, “President Cyril Ramaphosa has sent a message of condolence to the government and people of the United States of America following the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue.

“The attack, which was targeted at the Jewish community, shows extreme levels of intolerance. South Africa condemns in the strongest possible terms the violent attack targeted at the community.

“President Ramaphosa has stated that, ‘We must excise from our society any manifestations of anti-Semitism. We must respond to anti-Semitism with the same resolve as we respond to any act or statement that seeks to demean any faith, race, gender, or ethnic group.’”

Israel’s Ambassador to South Africa, Lior Keinan, said, “It is unfortunate that anti-Semitism still exists today, and people are still the victims of such hate crimes.

“This is the worst anti-Semitic attack in US history. We hope that law enforcement will deal with this with the utmost importance. We are thinking of the Pittsburgh Jewish community during this difficult time as we all mourn with you.”

The South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation added its voice: “The senseless act

of hate which led to the murder and injury of members of the congregation attending a baby naming ceremony on the Jewish Sabbath contradicts all that Holocaust centres around the world stand for,” its statement read. “All congregations, no matter their faith, should be able to worship in safety.”

On behalf of the South African Association of Progressive Rabbis, Rabbi Sa’ar Shaked stressed that though this hate crime was performed by an individual, it had a wider context. “It aims to spread fear and distress, to keep different groups apart,” he said. “Our answer to this act of hate will be to fortify our efforts to reach out to one another. We call upon all educators, religious, and community leaders to invest in creating an atmosphere of respect, where all voices are heard and appreciated, and where diversity is acknowledged as a source of strength.”

It is this sense of unity in the face of tragedy that the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) promoted in its response to the attack. After condemning the act of terror and paying respects to the fallen in a post on social media, the SAJBD shared an online call to the local community to be part of a global initiative this coming Shabbat, #ShowUpForShabbat.

“As part of the global campaign spearheaded by the American Jewish Committee, this coming Shabbat, we call on the Jewish

community to flock to synagogues throughout South Africa in support of this powerful initiative,” the statement reads. “Through #ShowUpForShabbat, we will join world Jewry in expressing a united stand against hate and anti-Semitism, and our determination not to allow such horrific attacks to prevent us from affirming our Jewish identity.”

Goldstein rallied behind the campaign, saying, “Like one people with one heart, we share in each other’s joy and in each other’s pain. We are a global family of brothers and sisters. And for family – we show up. That’s why I call on everyone to join the global call to show up for Shabbat this week in protest and defiance of the worst attack on Jews in America’s history.

“Haman came to destroy the Jewish people. Mordechai refused to bow down. He was fearless, unwilling to submit to the intimidation and hatred [shown by] our enemies. Let us follow his lead, and let the word go out that we will not bow down, and we will not submit to fear tactics. We will not be chased from our houses of prayer, from our values, and our mission. On the contrary. We will emerge from this with more resolve than ever to defend our divine mission and destiny.

“Let us join hands with our brothers and sisters around the world, and support this movement. Join me, and let us all show up at shul this Shabbat and make a difference.”



Tammy Hepps, Kate Rothstein and her daughter, Simone Rothstein, 16, pray a block away from the Tree of Life Congregation after the shooting

## Pittsburgh tries to see the future through the darkness

RON KAMPEAS

The day after the killings, a man who brings Jewish boys into the covenant and escorts the Jewish dead to their final resting place finally got to fulfil the mitzvah of *shmira*, keeping watch over the bodies.

The day after the killings, women gingerly entered a popular café, and hugged first responders taking a cappuccino break.

The day after the killings, congregants asked their rabbi whether it would be safe to let the kids out to play next Shabbat.

The day after the killings, Pittsburgh’s Jews opened umbrellas to drive off a rain as cold and cutting as steel. They filed into halls that have never been associated with Jewish worship, and they prayed because one of their houses of worship had been profaned by a killer swearing that he would kill every one of them.

The day after a gunman entered the Tree of Life Congregation complex in Squirrel Hill and killed 11 people belonging to the three congregations it houses, there were persistent, nagging questions.

“So G-d, why us?” asked Rabbi Jeffrey Myers of the Tree of Life-Or Simcha Congregation, who was the last to speak at the memorial ceremony. “Why couldn’t he turn his car in a different direction?”

The rabbi asked the question every clergyman asks at each worship service: why do congregants sit at the back of the sanctuary? The stage was packed with an interfaith array of Pittsburgh’s clergy.

The laughter faded as Myers explained the

deadly consequences: of the 12 worshippers in the sanctuary at the time of the shooting, the eight at the back were easy targets. Seven died, one was wounded. The rabbi was able to pull the four at the front to safety.

“Seven of my congregants were shot dead in my sanctuary,” he said, his voice thick with the guilt that haunts survivors.

The questions flew at a meeting earlier in the day bringing together local rabbis, Jewish community professionals and officials from law enforcement, as well as the state and municipality.


“Is this a trend?” the Jewish leaders asked, according to an official in the room. “Was the gunman a lone wolf? Can we expect copycats? What do we do when Jewish schools open tomorrow? Will there be extra police?” (For now, it appears, yes. A police guard was set up across the street from the Jewish community centre in the Squirrel Hill neighbourhood, blocks away from the shooting, the deadliest attack on Jews in United States history.)

Rabbi Yisroel Rosenfeld, a Chabad rabbi who attended the briefing, said key questions were unanswered – they were too open-ended to answer in the short term.

His congregants wanted to know what to do next Shabbat, a time that the Orthodox tend to allow their kids to run free in the neighbourhood. Was that safe now? Was it reasonable?

“That needs to continue,” Rosenfeld said of the free play the kids enjoy. “What do you do to make sure that fear doesn’t prevail?”

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# How the Pittsburgh shooting unfolded

BEN SALES

Here's how last Saturday's tragedy happened. (This account has been reconstructed from *JTA*, *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *The New York Times*, and the *Today Show*. Some of the times are approximate.)

Before the shooting

- Robert Bowers, the alleged gunman, is a truck driver from the Pittsburgh area who lives in a one-bedroom apartment about a half-hour's drive from Squirrel Hill, the diverse neighbourhood that has long been the centre of the city's Jewish community. Acquaintances described him to *The Times* as a loner, "pretty much a ghost", with few people close to him. His next-door neighbour would see him occasionally, but had forgotten his name.
- But that quiet exterior obscured Bowers' hateful beliefs, which he expressed on Gab, a social media platform for the far right. Bowers would post bigoted and anti-Semitic comments. Shortly before the shooting, he vilified HIAS, the Jewish refugee aid group, for its work resettling Middle Eastern refugees in the United States.
- "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people," he wrote on his website. "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

**Saturday, 09:45:** Services begin at Tree of Life Congregation, a synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighbourhood that houses three congregations: Tree of Life-Or L'Simcha, a merger of two Conservative synagogues; New Light, a small

Conservative congregation that draws about 20 worshippers weekly; and Dor Hadash, a Reconstructionist congregation.

- At the entrance, Cecil and David Rosenthal, brothers with intellectual disabilities who are active members of Tree of Life, are handing out prayer books. There is a table with challah, wine, and whiskey for a *bris*, or circumcision ceremony, being held that morning. In the kitchen, two other community members, Daniel Stein and Richard Gottfried, are preparing lox, cream cheese, bagels, and eggs.

**09:50:** The gunman enters and begins shooting. His first victims, according to a *Times* account, are the Rosenthal brothers, aged 54 and 59. He then enters New Light, where Melvin Wax, 88, is leading services.

- 09:54:** The first call is placed to 911, apparently by Rabbi Jeffrey Myers of Tree of Life. Barry Werber, of New Light, also calls 911 around this time.
- Rabbi Myers told *Today* that when he first heard the gunshots, he assumed it was an elderly person who had grabbed onto a coat rack for balance and knocked it over.
- Seconds afterward, after a second round of volleys, Myers realises he is hearing gunfire.
- Myers takes the four congregants at the front of the sanctuary out of an entrance at the front of the room that leads to a labyrinth of hallways and an exit from the building. He hides in a balcony from which he can hear the gunshots. He is unable to access the eight remaining congregants sitting in the back of the sanctuary.



Photo: Jeff Swensen/Getty Images  
**Police respond to the mass shooting at the Tree of Life Congregation in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh**

- 09:55:** After hearing the gunshots, several congregants of New Light – Barry Werber, Wax, Rabbi Jonathan Pearlman, and Carol Black – hide in a storage closet. They are unable to find the light switch, leaving the room pitch black.
- The shooting subsides, and Wax opens the door. He is shot and killed.
- The gunman then enters the storage closet and begins to fumble around in the dark, with the three other congregants still inside. Unable to see them, he leaves.

**09:57:** The gunman goes upstairs to the Tree of Life Congregation, where a number of congregants remain, and begins shooting. Seven are killed, one injured.

- "I couldn't save those eight people," Rabbi Myers told *Today*. "I went up into the choir loft and heard him execute my congregants."
- Stein, 71, and Gottfried, 66, are among the murdered. The remaining victims

are husband and wife Sylvan Simon, 86, and Bernice Simon, 84; along with Jerry Rabinowitz, 66; Joyce Fienberg, 75; Rose Mallinger, 97; and Irving Younger, 69.

- Two others, including Daniel Leger, 70, are injured.

**10:00:** The first police officers arrive on the scene, and begin to engage with the gunman. He returns fire from the front of the building.

- "We're under fire, we're under fire,"

an officer reports. "He's got an automatic weapon, he's firing at us from the synagogue."

- The shooter then retreats into the building, and barricades himself on the third floor.

**10:12:** The SWAT team arrives. Police set up a perimeter around the building.

**10:29:** SWAT officers begin to escort congregants out of the building. The SWAT team moves through the building.

**10:47:** The SWAT team encounters the gunman on the third floor, and begins exchanging fire with him. One officer is critically wounded.

**11:03:** The gunman begins talking to the officers. He identifies himself as Robert Bowers, age 46, from Baldwin Borough.

**11:08:** Bowers, who is wounded, crawls toward the officers and surrenders. Five minutes later, he is taken into custody. According to an officer, as Bowers crawls toward the officers, he is "talking about [how] all these Jews need to die". (JTA)

## South African emigres deeply shaken by Pittsburgh shooting

>> Continued from page 1

going to make the difference going forward. "What South African Jews can do to help is to bring light into this world by doing mitzvahs in honour of the 11 souls that perished," she says. Rabbi Avi Shlomo, who lives in Cape Town, wrote on Sunday, "The Tree of Life Congregation, where my cousins had their Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah celebrations, is literally two minutes from my childhood home, on streets where as I child I never experienced any hate, fear, or danger.

"I walked innumerable times down Murray Avenue on Shabbos, dressed visibly Jewish, and never received a negative comment. The community I grew up in was a safe and supportive environment for everyone who lived there."

Behrmann Cohen remains hopeful after seeing the response from numerous non-Jewish friends and colleagues who have taken the time to commiserate and identify with the Jewish community as a fellow minority.

She is a university professor, and was deeply touched when one of her African American students wrote to her offering his condolences, saying, "As an African American, I tend to lose sight of the hate that so many other minorities face in this country, so if it offers any kind of emotional support, I want you and your family to know that I will do my part, no matter how small, to contribute to the well-being of all citizens, not just those who look like me."



**Members of the Squirrel Hill community come together for a candle vigil in remembrance of those who were killed earlier in the day**

## Pittsburgh tries to see the future through the darkness

>>>Continued from page 10

"I just hope we continue to be as welcoming," a man said. How do you recover? Sunday morning was silent at first along Murray Street in Squirrel Hill, a neighbourhood packed with kosher eateries and favourite cafes. Laura Horowitz, a congregant at Dor Hadash, greeted friends at the 61C cafe as they walked in. They checked on one another. ("Where were you" when it happened?) and exchanged hugs. Two women hugged two policemen taking a coffee break. "The cliché is that you come out stronger," Horowitz said. "But I don't know how you recover from the loss of place. That was where we were safe." Myers, the Tree of Life rabbi, drew a line to recent toxic political rhetoric. "It starts with speech," he said to a standing ovation. "Words of hate are unwelcome in Pittsburgh!" But minutes earlier, there was another moment, one of recognition. Wasiullah Mohamed, the Executive Director of the Islamic Center of Pittsburgh, said to cheers that the city's Muslims had, in less than 24 hours, raised \$70 000 (R1 million) for the families of the dead and wounded. Then, like so many others throughout the day, Mohamed described what he felt when he heard the news. "I couldn't see the city anymore," he said. "I could just see its dark corners." (JTA)

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# Denmark’s Jews caught in a net of conformity

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Observant Danish Jews are concerned about their future in the Nordic country because, aside from an increase in anti-Semitic incidents, the country is proposing and introducing intolerant policies.

In June 2018, the Danish Parliament announced that Denmark was considering becoming the first country to ban nonmedical circumcision of infant boys. This announcement followed a citizens’ petition by the group Intact Denmark that called for a minimum age of 18 for circumcision to protect children’s rights. It also states that parents who had their children circumcised outside Denmark should be exposed to legal action in Denmark.

The petition reached the threshold of 50 000 signatories, following which it becomes imperative for it to be discussed in Parliament, possibly by November.

Though the bill is not expected to become law because ruling parties are opposed to it, Danish teenager Hannah Bentow, told the *Jerusalem Post* in June that the debate “makes me feel like I don’t belong, and like Denmark doesn’t want me to belong, either”.

“This [debate on circumcision] is sucking the marrow out of wanting to be Jewish,” Mette Bentow, her mother, told the *Post* in the same article, titled, “Denmark considering a ban on circumcision. Will the Jews stay?”

Denmark has an unusual “righteous among the nations” status, which recognises the collective effort by its citizens to evacuate the country’s minority Jewish population to safety in neutral Sweden during World War II.

Historians have highlighted the fact that at the time, Danish Jews were almost entirely assimilated into Danish culture, making them indistinguishable from other Danes, and this partly accounts for their protection by fellow citizens.

The push for integration in Denmark is relevant today, as what is seen as xenophobic policies, with negative ramification for Jews, is apparently part of the country’s increasingly overt methods to assimilate foreigners into Danish culture.

Jews appear to be caught in the crossfire of Denmark’s reaction to Muslim extremism and separatism, made more acute by populist, right-wing political parties. Denmark currently has about 8 000 Jews and about 200 000 Muslims.

The circumcision debate was preceded by an announcement in March that the Danish government would pursue a new set of laws to deal with “parallel societies”, and abolish “ghettos”.

These policies to impose quotas on schools and other punitive measures are intended to compel non-Western immigrants to integrate into Danish society.

The policies, to be implemented in 2019, include graver punishments for crimes committed in Denmark’s poorest urban areas, a limit on public housing in these areas, lower benefits for people settling in government-



Danish soldiers place the police guard outside the Synagogue and Israeli Embassy in Copenhagen on 29 September 2017

defined ghettos, and compulsory 25-hour-a-week teaching in Danish values at government preschools for children in these areas, without which welfare can be rescinded.

Added to this is the recent passing by the Danish Parliament of Law 18, known as the radical Imam or hate-preacher law, which has criminalised certain types of statements from religious preachers.

“To many immigrants, the plans feel like a thinly veiled way of telling them that they are not welcome in

Denmark,” said a recent article in *Time* magazine.

An article in the Spanish language daily, *El Pais*, says, “Denmark is used to immigration – 10% of people in the country have an immigrant background – and to Islam. But the feeling among people is that the arrival of new immigrants or refugees has taken root in the political class and the media as a threat to the country. And from there, it’s only a small step to discriminatory discourse.”

Aside from discriminatory laws, Denmark is said to have some of the most restrictive immigration policies in the European Union, having accepted nine times fewer refugees in 2015 than its neighbour, Sweden, which was ironically the refuge for European Jews so many years ago.

Denmark’s Chief Rabbi, Jair Melchior, points out that none of the new laws are aimed at Jews, although some are motivated by an anti-Muslim bias – which doesn’t make it any less of a serious concern.

## Habonim SA bringing Gaza-border youth to machaneh

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Fourteen Israeli children – who live in a conflict zone on the Gaza border – will be coming to South Africa to attend Habonim camp in Hermanus at the end of the year.

These children, who are in Grade 10, hail from 11 different kibbutzim close to the Gaza border.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for these kids, who have been subjected to the constant attacks and endured trauma for most of their lives, to have the opportunity to travel to South Africa and be part of the Habonim experience,” says Habonim South Africa Shaliach Danny “Adeno” Abebe.

“More than 50 agricultural communities, most of them kibbutzim, dot Israel’s 51km border on the east and north of the Gaza strip. Some of them sit right on the edge, where they have little to no warning of Hamas rocket and mortar fire [at best warning sirens give them 15 seconds to find shelter]. They are also in easy range of the flaming kites that have destroyed thousands of hectares of agricultural fields and nature reserves over the past two months.

“These children are living under constant threat. It is something that our South African kids have no understanding of. Their stories need to be heard, and we feel that it would be both beneficial to South African kids as well as the Israelis to meet and interact with one another through the camp experience.”

Habonim Dror South Africa is bringing them out for 10 days at camp to give them a break from the enduring conflict in the region. It is also meant to promote integration and learning in South Africa.

The trip forms part of the South African Zionist youth movement’s tradition of reaching out to kids beyond South Africa’s borders to further Jewish and Zionist identity. It is funded by Habonim South Africa, World Habonim Dror, and the World Zionist Organisation.

It is being organised in memory of the late Gideon Prodgers, a 19-year-old Cape Town Jewish boy who died 10 years ago of cancer while on a gap-year with Habonim Dror in Israel.

“Gideon was the most amazing child,” says Shiri Madar, the Chief Executive of World Habonim Dror. “As we are bringing the children out on Chanukah, we are calling it ‘Light to Light’ in recognition of the support communities can give each other.”

Habonim’s end-of-year camp has always been available to children who live in African countries north of South Africa’s borders. This tradition continues, in spite of the challenges caused by emigration from countries like Zimbabwe, and a lack of support in some countries.

In addition, every year, children from countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia go to Habonim camp in Hermanus. “Normally, we get about 12 international kids,” says Habonim South Africa Manhig (Honourary President) Errol Anstey, “but this year’s intake is particularly high, at about 20.”

He says these children’s parents are mostly South African expats who have emigrated, and want their children to have the same experience they had.



“As an Israeli, and an African, these initiatives are close to my heart,” says Abebe, pointing out that making Habonim accessible to international *chanichim* (campers) helps to promote Zionist identity, and enrich the camp experience for South African youth.

Abebe himself hails from Ethiopia, and made the journey to Israel as a small child in 1984 in the mass exodus of Ethiopian Jews known as “Operation Moses”.

Abebe points out that it is not just an important gesture of support for these communities, it offers an ideal opportunity for cultural exchange and learning.

Gili Sayag, a co-ordinator in Israel’s Leisure and Community Department, who lives on Kibbutz Kfar Aza close to the Gaza Border, describes the area as a war zone, saying the residents live morning, noon, and night with the sound of bombs, shooting, and sirens,

with many children showing the symptoms of post-traumatic-stress disorder.

“The sound of birds is almost drowned out by the sounds of buzzing drones, and large fires caused by the ‘flaming kites’ sent from Gaza have closed some roads. Our area is burning. Everything is black,” she says. Sayag, who has been involved in the project, believes that a break and a fun holiday will be wonderful for these children, but emphasises that they must take part in a meaningful way, bringing Israeli culture to Habonim.

Anstey puts the heightened international involvement in South Africa’s Habonim camp down to increased activity on social media around Habonim’s 90th anniversary in 2020. In particular, the Facebook sites Habo 2020 and Habonim Dror Machaneh Onrust Forever are experiencing increased traffic and testimonials about camp days. The 2020 site already has 2 700 subscribers.

“The Habonim experience is unique,” he says. “The size and intensity of the end-of-year camp [at Onrust] is unrivalled by camps in other countries.”

A few expat families have sent all their children to Habonim, many of whom come for more than one year, testimony to the fact that they have had a good experience.

Though the airfare is expensive, there is the advantage of a favourable exchange rate, making camp fees cheaper, and the children often have cousins and extended family in South Africa, making it more attractive to go to camp here.

“Habonim’s methodology in running youth programmes is well known,” Anstey says. “The deputy director of the UJA Federation of New York and New Jersey is a graduate of Habonim, and South African Habonim madrichim are paid double the going rate at its summer camps because they are seen to be so reliable. Locally, even some nongovernmental organisations come to Habonim at the end of the year to see how we operate.”

- *The flights and camp fees for the Israeli children have been funded, but Habonim is still seeking funding to take them on a three-day tour of Cape Town while there. Please call Melissa Bennun at Habonim’s Joburg office for more information: 011 786 7046.*



# Rabin’s death should unite, not divide, Jews


GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“I have always believed that the majority of people want peace, and are ready to take risks for peace. For Israel, there is no path that is without pain. But the path of peace is preferable to the path of war.”

These words, uttered by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a peace rally on the night he was assassinated 23 years ago, are just as relevant today.

Rabin was shot dead by a right-wing religious fanatic and settler, Yigal Amir, on 4 November 1995. He was never able to properly realise his dream of peace.

The need for a united peace effort in Israel was highlighted at a memorial ceremony for Yom Rabin, hosted by Habonim Dror South Africa at Beyachad in Johannesburg last week.



Yitzhak Rabin

Rabin would never have wanted his death to cause division between the Jewish people, said Ben Swartz, the National Chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, as he recounted his personal struggle with Rabin’s death.

“I’m sharing my journey with you, which is indelibly tied to this experience,” he said. “In November 1995, I’d just returned from living in Israel. I’d been back for about three months, and I’d lived there for five years. Yitzhak Rabin had been my inspiration. In a sense, he was a father figure. He represented, for me, everything I held dear. He was a Jewish warrior, a Jewish leader, and a Jewish peacemaker.”

**“Rabin’s greatest dream was to see peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and as the South African Jewish community, we cannot let that dream die with him. We need to keep pushing for lasting peace in Israel.”**

Swartz recounted his experience of the 1992 Israeli elections when he lived on Kibbutz Tzora, a labour stronghold, that was approached to participate in the election campaign. “To know that we were part of developing, building, and changing the system, standing in the streets debating with the *Haredim* (ultra-Orthodox), was life shaping.” Swartz and others on the Kibbutz stayed up through the night watching the election results come in, and celebrated Rabin’s win with hugs, singing, and dancing. “It was incredible to be part of it,” he said.

“We were drafted into the army in 1993, and were in the midst of it all. We felt we were a part of the history that was unfolding.” Stationed in Gaza when the Oslo Accords started to kick in, Swartz was one of the

soldiers who were evacuated out of Gaza.

“We were marching, two columns stretching for thousands of soldiers. You would look behind you, and you couldn’t see the end of the column, and you would look ahead, and you couldn’t see the front,” said Swartz. “We marched out of Gaza, and there was this incredible tension, as everyone moved. This was the realisation of the dream that Gaza was going to find its hope, its independence, and its sovereignty to find its way. By sharing this, I’m sharing the sentiment under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin. It was so relevant, it was so exciting.”

Swartz recalls hearing about Rabin’s assassination on CNN. “When the news broke, I was absolutely devastated. Within 24 hours, the devastation had turned to anger. Being so far away from my home, Israel, I went to Oxford Shul, where the central memorial service for Yitzhak Rabin was held.

“The only way I could vent my anger, sadly enough, was at the religious establishment. [What was perceived to be] a religious man had just assassinated Rabin. I remember walking through the shul, and I looked at every rabbi I could find as if he had pulled the trigger. I continued to carry that feeling for a couple of years after that. The pain of the consequences of having left Israel, of not being in Israel, and going through this process set me in that space.”

Receding from Israel and the South African Jewish community, Swartz felt he had no-one to turn to, and nowhere to go. Yet, as he started to establish himself in business, he began to reconnect and get more involved with the community. “I got involved in the Chevrah Kadisha, and Zionist Federation,” said Swartz. “I got involved in the religious establishment, and I got re-involved in Habonim. Through this process, I started to realise how misplaced my anger actually was.

“For me to vent my rage on other Jews for the actions of a fanatic or a small group of fanatics around him, was totally wrong, and totally misplaced. There are fanatics on every side of the coin.

“I’m certain of one thing. This is the message I want to share: Rabin would never have wanted his legacy to be based on creating a wedge in the Jewish world. No matter how he died, that would never have been his desire.

“Let us take this thought away with us, that the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin as a Jew, a warrior, a peacemaker, and a human being, belongs to each and every one of us in the Jewish world. If we ever forget that, we are dishonouring Rabin.”

Habonim Dror representative, Erin Gordon, echoed Swartz’s call for unity. “We need to remember that the past demands of us to be active and to stand up against the hate and incitement that led to Rabin’s untimely death,” she said.

“Rabin’s greatest dream was to see peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and as the South African Jewish community, we cannot let that dream die with him. We need to keep pushing for lasting peace in Israel.”

The poignant memorial ceremony was punctuated by touching musical performances by King David Linksfield pupils, and included speeches by Israeli ambassador, Lior Keinan, and leaders of the Habonim and Bnei Akiva youth movements.



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At the Johannesburg Challah Bake

# Desperately seeking Shabbos

RAHLA XENOPOULOS

There are a lot of things in this world that make no sense to me.

The presidency of Donald Trump, the popularity of the Kardashians, why 16 minus one doesn’t equal 6, and what possible reason my *verkakte* dog could have for his incessant barking. These things make no sense.

But there are things that make intrinsic sense: my husband’s eyes, books, the songs of Leonard Cohen, my children’s humour, and Shabbos. Shabbos makes absolute sense to my soul.

The introspection, the examination, the collection, and the connection of Shabbos, all resonate for me. In an ideal world, my family would be shomrei Shabbos. We would walk to shul on a Friday evening, the kids skipping five steps ahead as Jason and I meditate on the events of our week. In an ideal world, we would have guests every Friday night, and every single Saturday would be spent with the family, pottering about, physically close to one another, but engaged in our separate thoughts.

The final essay of renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks was published in *The New Yorker* two weeks before he died. It was a deeply personal account of his own experience with Shabbos. I remember reading it to my family. We were driving home from a weekend in Stanford. It was dusk, the car was winding over Sir Lowry’s Pass.

Sacks was 82 when he died. In this exquisite piece, he wrote about his religious upbringing, his mother’s response to his sexuality, his love, loss, and final return to the ritual of Shabbos. It made me cry because I felt that thing, a sort of nostalgic longing for something I had never had. I, too, wanted to be shomrei Shabbos. “That’s it, this is our year of keeping Shabbos.” I announced to my family, who gazed nervously out at the sunset. “We have to do this; this means more to me than anything else!”

You see, my family have dabbled with keeping Shabbos. We seem to do it once every few months, but never consistently.

It feels like some of our happiest memories are of the times when we have been keeping Shabbos, not super strict, but just no driving, sometimes no electricity, no money spent and most, most important of all, no screens.

There was the Shabbos in Stanford, when the moon got so bright, midnight looked like midday, and the sky was kind of silver. We sat outside in front of a fire, laughing, slightly perplexed, kind of like when you have jetlag or you’ve seen a horror film.

There was the hot summer’s night when all the electricity in our road went off. We took the dinner candles out to the garden, and swam in a pool that was half empty because, you know, Cape Town had forgotten to rain. Our faces were half obscured by the darkness, but it felt like our souls were illuminated by the water flickering in the candle light. And also, mostly, by one another. We laughed a lot. It was so pretty, do you know, I think it was perfect.

As a child, I remember my mother and brother doing Havdalah with a plaited candle. For some reason, that ceremony felt more romantic and serene than the Friday night lighting of candles. Maybe because we didn’t do it every Shabbos, maybe because it wrapped everything up. We got closure, as it were.

I think what I love most about

Shabbos is the window out of our chaos. Our constant chatter stops for those few minutes, between the lighting of candles and the serving of bread – hush! – even the *verkakte* dog seems meditative for those few minutes.

This year has been a big year for me. My husband calls it his “year of being Jewish”. But the thing that has felt the most Jewish about it is the distance. We are in the process of moving. In August, Jason started working in New York, so I’ve been mostly in Cape Town with our children.

I’ve thought often about our ancestors; my late grandfather who was sent as a young boy to South Africa, everyone whose late grandfather was sent ahead, alone, as a boy, to South Africa, to London, to New York. There is always one representative of the family sent out ahead.

We are travellers, immigrants, refugees, adventures. We have traversed the world entire, and we depend on our traditions to hold us true, to calm the waters of our journeys.

My family didn’t become shomrei Shabbos after I read the Oliver Sacks piece. Maybe once or twice, but otherwise we went back to our own derelict ways.

As I board a plane to New York, I wonder, who will our Shabbos guests be? I wonder if we will finally become shomrei. There’s a part of me that thinks, maybe like Oliver Sacks, I’ll do it only when I’m in my eighties. Maybe we do that, we save the things we want the most for the end.

• *Rahla Xenopoulos is an author of numerous titles and mother of triplets. She gives talks on mental health and empowerment as well as writing workshops to under provided children.*

# The Chronicles of a Bad Jew

MARION ISAACS

I’m just going to come out and say it: I’m a bad Jew. A very bad Jew. A colleague who is the daughter of a priest made this observation last week. When someone of a different faith – albeit one who works in a predominantly Jewish office and is familiar with the particular neuroses and psychoses of the Jewish way – is able to recognise your shortcomings in the religion and culture of your birth, you know they are a speaker of truth.

I was asked to keep Shabbos – and commissioned to write a piece about it. But I failed. I did not successfully “honour the Shabbos *kween*”. And so, in a bid to avoid

editorial panic and professional discord, I proposed that I write a piece about my failure to keep Shabbos.

What would my angle be, I was asked. Apathy? Defeat? Negligence? Disappointment? Internal strife? Angst? The flabby human condition? All worthy literary themes to be sure – just ask all the old white men who have enjoyed celebrated writing careers over millennia. But, the answer in large part is to be found elsewhere.

In other words, in bearing my apathetic soul on the pages of this publication, I am going to evade personal responsibility, because my reasons for failure speak to the very essence of our times. In short, the demands of the modern world of work render Shabbos-like rest so necessary, and yet simultaneously so difficult to indulge.

Why did I fail? Deadlines. I am a freelancer with a sizeable workload. Time always runs out. I spend my waking and sleeping hours juggling a billion daily demands from a motley and marvellous crew of clients. And, I frequently find myself wrestling with existential angst over the much vaunted work-life balance the millennials would have us believe is the hallmark of a good life well lived. But freelancer or not, this is the zeitgeist of the day. Work is king; personal pursuits are secondary. The profit machine of the latter-day capitalism cookie monster must be fed. (I will now stop short of leading the readers of the *SA Jewish Report* into a socialist revolution with my mixed metaphors.)

Here’s what I realised this Shabbos – or

rather, saw with the sharpened clarity that only earthly human failure can bring. All of this toil and personal neglect leaves us impoverished. Mandated rest recognises the very essence of what it is to be human: the failure to truly self-moderate is built into us all as mere mortals. But we need rest – intellectual, psychic, emotional, spiritual, physical repose. And the more institutionalised it is, the more likely we are to honour it.

Now, I know I’m not revealing anything new here. So many before me have made this observation. Entire movements are built around this understanding, and Judaism and its forefathers couldn’t be clearer on the matter. But yet, the inner cultural workings of most of our contemporary societies still fail to budge, in spite of the fact that most of those who populate its structures from bottom to top recognise this gaping hole. (Again, we have arrived at a call for socialist revolution. Oops!)

While I failed to keep Shabbos, I did manage to take part in some Shabbos-like behaviour. This mainly took the form of a generous round of Shabbos meals in the company of old and new friends. These provided a sturdy reminder that hospitality and social connection also provide respite.

And so, in summary, the revolution will not be televised. Because I didn’t lead you into revolution. And it’s Shabbos, so the TV should be off.

• *Marion Isaacs is a writer, researcher, documentary producer, and curator who lives, works, and eats (well) in Johannesburg.*

At the Durban Challah Bake





# Just ‘being’ on Shabbos requires some ‘doing’ beforehand

SIMON SHEER

Rather than entering a state of passivity, I found that “keeping” Shabbos involves constructing the conditions in which the world comes to you differently.

A couple of years ago, I travelled to India with an itinerary consisting of a single bullet point: anywhere but Goa. Naturally, I spent the next two weeks on various hammocks dotted around Goa’s beaches and backpackers.

I thought I might have more control over my destiny in the more familiar climes of Joburg’s north eastern suburbs, but I was very quickly disabused of my naivety. Consequently, I present entries from the one and only Shabbos Project piece I was determined to avoid writing – that irresistible cliché, “Diary of a day without my smartphone”.

There’s no avoiding it. The absence of my scratched, two-year-old matte black iPhone 7 was overwhelming, colouring every Shabbos moment.

There I was at shul on Shabbos morning, just after Mussaf, sitting with an Artscroll Chumash cracked open to the appropriate parsha. In the right corner, a scholar was carefully working through a knotty section of Talmud. On the left, a young rabbi gave a shiur on the finer points of halacha. Through the window, I spotted a mountain range of confectionery, piles of waffles and pancakes and cinnamon bulkas. And my overriding thought was, “I wonder what @ Updog420\_ is tweeting about right now.”

And, when my gracious hosts unveiled Friday night’s pièce de résistance, decadent creamy (or at least Orley Whippy) handmade peanut butter ice cream, I was so preoccupied with a strategy to preserve the frozen dessert’s structural integrity for a Havdalah Instagram photograph, I barely tasted the icy goodness in my bowl.

I suspected it would take a week of Shabboses before the experience of just taking things as they came became normal again. For someone tasked with writing about his Shabbos, this raised an obvious problem. How was I to describe my Shabbos if I was too distracted by imagining that it wasn’t Shabbos to notice what was going on?

Or so I thought. After lunch, I walked home in the hope of lazing under a tree with a paperback. I thought I was departing from the tumult – the site of hollering children and inexhaustible bowls of herring and kichel and clamorous *zemirot* (songs) – towards a shady idyll.

In fact, released from the structured chaos of a *shomrei Shabbos* (observant) home, I found not peace, but agitation. Here was an electric gate that needed closing and opening and closing. The silence was disturbed by the drone of talk radio, and down the road, a pothole demanded a kvetching Facebook post.

I had undertaken to remember the Sabbath day, and keep it at least a little holier than usual. Now, the effort was starting to give me a headache. Yet at my hosts’ house, it had been so easy, I barely noticed I’d been doing it.

Had I stopped to think about the idea of “keeping Shabbos”, it would have seemed weirdly narrow. Shabbos was just a thing that was happening. Earlier, I perceived my Saturday social media musings as evidence of absent-mindedness. Now, I saw that it had been a hyperfocus on the possibility inherent in each moment.

This year’s Shabbos Project, under the tagline “Stop doing. Start being.”, sounded paradoxically so simple, but also unattainable. Just halt everything all of a sudden for half the weekend. I hadn’t realised, until I experienced it, that the stopping wasn’t about simply turning off, it wasn’t cessation. Rather than entering a state of passivity, “keeping” Shabbos involves constructing the conditions in which the world comes to you differently.

Through the week’s stringent preparation, we achieve a state in which we are focused on the here and now, on what’s right in front of our eyes. Focusing on that which, without a framework for understanding, is the hardest thing in the world to see.

For me, the overriding lesson of Shabbos was that we can perceive another world, but first, we have to make it. That, and the even more shocking revelation that it’s possible to make a satisfying parev ice cream.

• Simon Sheer is a writer and editor based in Johannesburg.

# In search of equilibrium

MICHAL MULLER

This past weekend, I did something that scared me. And, to my surprise, I was acutely reminded of past moments filled with love and sacredness. It seems Shabbat truly does speak to our higher selves. In fact, Shabbat is actually what drew me towards Judaism in the first place. And as an outsider encountering the Jewish day of rest for the first time as a young adult, I simply couldn’t remain indifferent. Shabbat demanded my attention.

The first time I experienced Shabbat, I remember thinking to myself, “Oh, so this is what it’s about.” That was in Israel roughly nine years ago. I had just finished high school, and I had a gap year in which I could go and do just about whatever I wanted – so I went to Israel.

It all started a year earlier, when I read a book about a young girl who had survived the Holocaust. It sparked something within me, took hold of me, and wouldn’t let go. I couldn’t fathom the events that had trespassed upon such recent history. My family have been in South Africa for more than 200 years, yet the fact that we have German lineage probably had something to do with the way it affected me.

I continued to grapple with the Holocaust as I devoured any book I could find on Jewish history, Judaism, and Israel. I became fascinated with this whole other world I hadn’t known about before; a world that seemed out of my reach yet always in my eye-line. The more I learned, the more I saw Jewish names, kosher stamps on food labels, and headlines about Israel.

Offhand remarks my father had made in admiration of his Jewish employer suddenly gained an intense significance. Verses in the Bible suddenly became real, and not simply metaphoric. My attention had been seized.

Hunter S. Thompson once wrote, “When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.”

Among my family and friends, I had become an



eccentric, and it would become a valuable lesson for me not to judge others, and their choices in life. For whatever reason, Judaism became my new world. I couldn’t explain why or how, but I just knew I had to follow its call.

I went to Israel wide-eyed and hopeful. Upon arrival, I was welcomed by friends of my parents who had made aliyah from South Africa a few years before. Over the next two years, I became close to this elderly couple who welcomed me into their home and made me feel as if we were family – and in a way, I suppose we are. Even though we had almost half a century between us, they became my dearest friends, and to this day we remain close.

I finished converting to Judaism about four years ago, and soon after that made aliyah. I must say that after the conversion, I felt fragile. My acceptance of Judaism felt conditional, and emotionally, I wasn’t in a good space. The entire process had equipped me with the knowledge and practical experience to live as an observant Jew, but the scrutiny and suspicion I’d been subjected to during the conversion process left a mark. My initial enthusiasm and clarity of purpose had given way to waves of self-doubt. I had become reclusive, and I didn’t feel the connection I once did.

I’d thought that after converting to Judaism I would feel whole and happy. After that deep inner peace failed to materialise, I thought that making aliyah would get me there. It didn’t. After all this time, all the striving and struggling, I realised I had to allow myself to just be. To stop agonising about how I thought I should be feeling at any given moment, and simply surrender myself to the journey.

I am no longer fully observant. The fire that fuelled me on this crazy journey is no longer blazing. But I believe it’s still there, and on this Shabbos of 26/27 October, I felt its faint glow.

This Shabbos, the first I have kept for two years, I allowed my thoughts to wander. As I did so, I found myself levelling out, discovering an equilibrium in my Jewish identity I’d long since despaired of finding.

One of the most precious gifts we can give to someone is our time. And, what a profound opportunity we have every Shabbat to slow down and give the best of ourselves to the moment, to the people around us, to our creator.

The elegant simplicity of withdrawing from the busyness of daily life – in Shabbos Project parlance, to “Stop Doing. Start Being”. Not forcing anything, but just enjoying the time we have been given with those we love.

Now, as I write this, I am inside, sitting at my computer desk. An air conditioner is whirring gently, and everything feels fine. But when I go outside, there is fresh air, and I can really breathe. That is how Shabbat feels to me – intentionally slowing down. Not just giving the best of yourself, but allowing your best self to emerge. Not simply being swept away by whatever life may bring.

• Michal Muller is a graphic designer based in Johannesburg.

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# Moral courage isn’t easy, but it’s right

I am a member of a gym that offers its patrons fruit and vegetables at no charge. The idea is that after a workout (or before), they will be able to snack on an apple, banana, or carrot. It’s a great idea, and encourages healthy eating.

And, nice to eat before a donut. Tuesday morning, prior to my workout, I was sitting in the area near where the bowls of fruit are kept, and I was talking to my brother on the phone. During the time that I was chatting, a woman in her 60s walked up to the glass bowls and started the process of selecting what I assumed was to be the perfect banana. I was amused at the care she seemed to be taking, and I became intrigued by which one she would consider the most appropriate for her after-gym snack.

After what I considered to be an unreasonable amount of time to spend on a single fruit, I notice that she had selected not one, but at least six specimens. She was well prepared for the heist, and smartly popped them into her leopard-print bag. Having done so, she neatly zipped up her booty, and glided back to join her breakfast companion at the restaurant area as though nothing had happened.

I was flummoxed. It was clear that she could very clearly afford to buy a hand of bananas. I know, because she was a member of that specific gym, she was ordering breakfast at the coffee shop, and thanks to my wife, I happen to know that leopard-print is the new black, and her bag was not old.

But that didn’t concern me as much as my own reaction did. On seeing her “bag” the bananas, I turned away and continued my conversation on the phone. I avoided making eye contact with her, and pretended that I hadn’t seen her pilfering. I was feeling uncomfortable, whereas she was the one who should have been.

Instead, I should have stood up and

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



(politely) told her that what she was doing was unacceptable and shameful. I should have given her the opportunity to return the stolen loot. If she didn’t see the error of her ways, I should have called the gym’s management, and reported what I had seen. I should have made sure that those bananas were used in the manner that the gym had intended them to be used.

But I didn’t. Instead, I did nothing. And then went to work out.

I don’t consider myself lacking in courage. Often, I take on subjects, and have conversations that are uncomfortable, and that I know will cause aggravation and stress not only to me, but to those around me. But in this case, I most certainly lacked the moral courage to stand up to someone who was not violent or dangerous.

South Africa is a cesspool of corruption. One can hardly keep up with the amount of enquiries and investigations that are currently in play. An Excel spreadsheet is not enough to keep track of them all. Every citizen is paying the price for the squander and theft of resources. The stark reality is that we are not going to win this unless each of us finds the strength to stand up for what is right, and to transform our very good intentions into action.

It was so much easier to allow the banana thief to get away with her handful. But, I am hopeful that next Tuesday, should she try to pilfer the pears, I will be waiting for her and I will have the moral courage to tell her that it’s time her leopard-print bag changed its spots.

-----A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies-----

# Attack on Pittsburgh shul is attack on Jews everywhere

Last Shabbat, the United States Jewish community suffered its worst-ever anti-Semitic attack, when a lone gunman invaded a synagogue in Pittsburgh, and fatally shot 11 worshippers. The perpetrator, Robert Bowers, is a far-right white supremacist who blames Jews for the influx of refugees into the country. The cyber-sphere is awash with like-minded individuals who regularly post material accusing Jews of seeking to bring about the demise of the white race by promoting miscegenation, multiculturalism, and unrestricted immigration. What made Bower different was that he eventually took it upon himself to do something about it.

In the wake of the tragedy, the World Jewish Congress led a delegation to Pittsburgh to show solidarity with the community. The delegation brought messages of support from Jewish communities throughout the world. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) stressed that what occurred in Pittsburgh could just as well have taken place anywhere else in the world. The crime was one entirely driven by hatred for the Jewish people, and as such, it was an attack on all Jews, everywhere. In mourning the victims of the atrocity, we also pledged anew “our unstinting commitment, in partnership with global Jewry, to combating the scourge of anti-Semitism, as well as all other forms of prejudice”.

Terrorists aim not only to kill and maim their chosen victims, but to spread feelings of fear and insecurity within the

targeted group. In recognition of this, the American Jewish Committee has launched a #ShowUpForShabbat initiative, whereby Jews everywhere are urged to attend synagogue services this coming Shabbat. The SAJBD is driving the initiative in South Africa, and I urge as many of our community as possible to support it. Through it, we will express a united stand against hate and anti-Semitism,

while at the same time showing our determination to affirm our Jewish identity publicly, regardless of those who mean us harm.

While refusing to be intimidated, we also need to take another lesson from the Pittsburgh tragedy, namely how crucial it is for Jewish organisations everywhere to be security-conscious and to take sensible steps to ensure the safety of their installations.

In this area, the Community Security Organisation is playing a critical role, but it is reliant on the support and co-operation of the greater Jewish community. Those volunteers who stand outside our shuls and schools perform a critical role. By maintaining a visible presence, being constantly aware of their environment, and reporting all suspicious or unexplained activity that comes to their notice, they ensure that anyone who means our community harm will not be able to take us unawares, and that in the event of an attack, there are appropriate procedures to deal with it.

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



Above Board  
Shaun Zagnoev

# Beware the danger at the gate

South Africans may see something of their own history in Robert Bowers, the killer of 11 Pittsburgh Jews in their synagogue on Saturday. He shouted that he “can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered”. For him, Jews are outsiders coming to take over his beloved America.

Adult South Africans will remember the alarmist cry the Nationalist government sounded about the *swart gevaar*. This was the “black danger” they claimed was at the gates waiting to come in and slaughter white people. Whites collectively had to man the barricades, it said.

South Africa’s painful history is based on the horrible things you can do when you define another people as malicious outsiders. The whole structure of apartheid was built on seeing blacks as a danger to white society.

Robert Bowers saw Jews as outsiders who had to be stopped by any means. His comments on the right-wing GAB website, which regularly features conspiracy theories and extremists, include, “Why hello there HIAS! [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]. You like to bring in hostile invaders to dwell among us?”

For Bowers, the equivalent of the South African *swart gevaar* was an American “Jew-threat”. His hatred of Jews was not about individuals. When he opened fire, he shouted, “All Jewish people must die.”

He was probably influenced by statements by United States President Donald Trump, who has referred to African countries as “shithole countries”, and has stigmatised Mexicans, refugees, Muslims, and Africans. Trump claims Americans are under threat from outsiders.

Nobody has accused the president of being an anti-Semite, but amid the resurgence worldwide of hate speech and authoritarian regimes, his rhetoric fills people with resentment and fear.

Where does South Africa stand on an issue like this? An undercurrent of xenophobia exists, aimed at Indians, Muslims, as well as Africans



## TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

from other countries such as Somalia. It has, at times, surfaced violently and chaotically. People have been killed in their homes, shops, and in the streets. Xenophobia is an ongoing threat simmering under the surface.

For Jews, there have been unpleasant anti-Semitic incidents, particularly on social media, but no direct violence or anything like what Bowers did.

On Sunday, President Cyril Ramaphosa condemned the Pittsburgh attack, and called for society to refrain from anti-Semitism. But that doesn’t exclude the possibility that an extremist might see Jews as representative of the white establishment, and try to do something similar to Bowers.

Being an outsider is the most tragic theme in Jews’ long history, leading indigenous populations to turn on them, including sending them to gas chambers.

Some people are more positive about this condition, believing that being an outsider is a source of Jewish genius. They believe that not being allowed to truly “belong” in a society gives you perspectives others don’t have.

Why do bigots like Bowers get so enraged at Jews? One thing which makes them seem sinister to him is that from the outside, they look just like others in mainstream society. The same goes for homosexuals who, on the surface, appear like anyone else. So, the bigot becomes outraged at discovering it, as if he has been hoodwinked by some subversive being.

On the other hand, blacks, Asians, Indians, as well as people with disabilities are immediately apparent.

America has been the most Jew-friendly country in history, although it feels a little less friendly now. South Africa too, has been good to its Jews. But if America could produce a Robert Bowers, South Africa could also do so.

## Wits SRC calls for exam postponement over suicide rate

>>Continued from page 4

“This produces despair. Suicidal thought is always a possible solution to this conundrum. When added to a history of family instability, mental illness, and possible trauma, the possibility of completed suicide is heightened.”

She said it could be subtle at first. “It is important to recognise that often there are no obvious signs of suicidal intentions. There is sometimes nothing that can be done or could have been done to prevent suicide.” Regardless, she says, families should always be on the alert for excessive withdrawal, irritability, or sadness.

“If one suspects a student is suicidal, ask directly, and get help. It is important that if a person feels suicidal, they have access to a loving support system. Fostering good communication and relationships is protective against depression, and can provide a lifeline for suicidal people.”

The need for such support to come from the home environment is crucial, particularly because there is little chance of the university lending additional assistance.

Said Labe, “The universities are cash strapped, and their psychosocial services are overstretched. The academic-support services have largely changed focus from student mentoring to training staff to teach more effectively. Having said this, I don’t think that it is the primary duty of the universities to provide support and psychosocial care. The paucity of

state mental-health services is a huge problem. Services in the private sector are available, but costly. The medical aids vary in their responsiveness to mental health issues.”

Dr Yael Kaddish, principal psychologist at Tara psychiatric hospital in Johannesburg, said these issues had different causes at various levels of society.

For middle class South Africans, parental expectations might be internalised in such a way that failing, or even not getting a distinction, is experienced as an utterly unthinkable, catastrophic situation. “Too much pressure is being put on all our children to achieve academically, and then to choose high status, high-income careers, regardless of their passions and interests,” she said. “This rubric is being sold as the only and true pathway to a happy life”.

Recent student suicides and breakdowns are merely the tip of the iceberg, she said, alerting us to a more insidious global malaise of mental illness. If it is to be addressed, she said, there needs to be far more emphasis on the importance of good-enough parenting, starting at a school level.

“There needs to be far more parenting courses offered. Each school should employ two mental health workers per grade. And yes, the universities should have much bigger, more developed, and better-resourced psychological services.”





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Letters

PREJUDICE OF ORTHODOXY IS DIVIDING SOUTH AFRICAN JEWS

I refer to the outstanding article in last week’s paper which asks who will follow in the steps of Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

With the unfortunate growth of anti-Semitism in the world, the time has come for all Orthodox Jews to follow his lead. The official attitude to non-Orthodox communities, their rabbis and leaders, is not correct, and causes a rift between Jews in South Africa.

We have enough anti-Semitism – we don’t need this anymore. I am not just referring to prejudice against LGBT+, the “ban” on Orthodox rabbis attending Limmud must also be lifted. Chief Rabbi Mirvis attends Limmud in London!

If there is a Conservative speaker, or a subject that the rabbis don’t want to hear, so be it. There are another 140 interesting subjects presented over the weekend. All food is strictly kosher, and there are Orthodox services over Shabbos. There are signs all over that out of respect to those observing Shabbos, no smoking or cell phones are allowed in communal areas.

We are one Jewish nation in South Africa, irrespective of how we pray or don’t pray. By the way, all Reform/ Conservative/Liberal services have *Shema Yisroel* in their liturgy.

All the Jews in South Africa, irrespective of our ways of praying to Hashem, came together, led by our chief rabbi, after the tragic murder of 11 fellow Jews at the Tree of Life Conservative Temple in Pittsburgh.

Let’s continue to be one Jewish nation in South Africa.  
– Steven Meltzer

THE HYPOCRISY OF DIRCO

With more revelations emerging about the alleged murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by agents of Saudi Arabia, the South African government has vacillated and delayed issuing any reliable comment. Nor has it followed those countries who have not only sharply criticised the Saudis, but suspended arms sales to that country.

Both the United Kingdom and United States, predictably, have not suspended arms sales. In fact, the US under Trump has failed to issue any strong language against the Saudis. But where does the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) stand on this issue?

Very recently, the Saudi government made overtures to South Africa about buying a controlling interest in South African arms manufacturer Denel. This, in the light of the latest obscenity of the murder of Khashoggi, and the terrible bombing of school children in Yemen, where the civilian death toll has reached hundreds of thousands, and the United Nations has labelled the war as the worst human rights disaster facing the world today.

Yet, South Africa has remained silent in the face of these obscenities, and has announced that no decision has been made thus far about the proposed sale of Denel to the Saudis (which must read as, yes, we are seriously considering such an acquisition).

Our hypocrisy doesn’t end there. We still maintain a diplomatic mission and ambassador in Syria where to date, well over half a million civilians and counting have been butchered by a demented dictator. There are no calls for recalling our ambassador, nor for downgrading our mission in that country, and no similar calls for the same action against the Saudis. But the ANC government continues to lobby for recalling its ambassador from Israel, and the downgrading of diplomatic ties with that country. Is this the South African way of claiming the moral high ground? More than half a million murdered in Syria and a few hundred thousand in Yemen, but it’s only Israel that Dirco can point its finger at.

The catastrophe of the Arab world, with not only dead and wounded, but human-rights deprivations in almost every Arab country in the Middle East, seems to have bypassed our foreign affairs ministry in its quest to blacklist Israel as the only abuser on the globe.

– Allan Wolman, Johannesburg

Tykes with toiletries



Mina Lopato Nursery School Grade R pupils in special graduation T-shirts pack boxes with toiletries brought in by parents for distribution to people in and around the community.

Grade 5 does Sandton Sinai proud

Sarah Orkin, a pupil at Sandton Sinai Primary School, made the school proud by winning the Grade 5 section of the Malcolm Gooding Speech Competition on 16 October.

The school was entered into the competition for the first time this year by Grade 5 English teacher Sofia Caripi.

SAUJS sweeps leadership awards

The South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) won best student society at the annual Leadership Awards Ceremony at the University of the Witwatersrand last Tuesday. Moreover, 2018 SAUJS Chairperson Yanir Grindler was runner up for best leader of a community organisation.

SAUJS wishes a massive mazeltov to him and the entire SAUJS Wits 2018 committee for this major achievement.

Yanir Grindler and Ariel Goldberg



Photo: Naadirah Mayet

SHABBOS PROJECT OVERDONE

It was interesting to receive news from the chief rabbi about the Shabbos Projects in Weldon, Tel Aviv, Florence, Darmstadt, San Luis, Spring Valley, Prague, and hundreds of other cities and towns.

This may be exciting, but I and many others believe that people have lost interest in the project.

When it started, everyone was excited. Houses got together, and arranged a communal Friday night evening. Trestle tables were laid, and the house owners, their family, and friends all came to celebrate. There were street parties. I went to a street party in Glenhazel, where there were about 20 trestle tables, and at least 250 people.

This year, I have not heard of a single street party, and after celebrating Shabbos dinner and viewing the streets in Glenhazel, I did not see a single party going on. Many shuls in the first few Shabbos Projects had massive dinners for congregants, family, and friends. This year, I did not hear about a single shul dinner.

Let’s talk about the Challah Bake. In the early years, there were thousands of participants. This year, every one of the girls I spoke to said it was disappointing, with many empty places and bowls.

SEEKING ROODEPOORT SHUL MEMORIES

I am compiling a history of the Roodepoort Florida Hebrew Congregation, which hopefully will become a book. I would like to hear from anyone who has – or has had – a connection to the old shul, and the now sadly diminished Jewish community living there now.

Some of the names of people that come to mind include Morris Hochman – the shul hall was named after him, as well as Harry Benjis; Sandra and Barry Geffen; and Herman Klein, a renowned orthopaedic surgeon. They include Reverend Orenstein, who died in Israel but had a daughter, Nechama; Reverend Friedman; Rabbi Kaye (Kwaitovsky); the Blumson brothers; Ackerman, Bernstein; Hilton, Shirley, and Zena Jacobson – the latter, I believe, is an optometrist in Johannesburg; the late Boya Jacobson nee Levine; the Simon family; Arthur, a vet in America; Glenda and Ethne; the Kabs, who owned a bicycle shop in Roodepoort; Samuel – they had a son, Hesse, who died after a passenger in a train threw a stone at him at the Krugersdorp railway station – and a son, Joe. Then, there is the Tannenbaums, who had a son, Brian, a lawyer, and a daughter, Eleanor; the Spiro family; the Osrin and Stone families; the Hersons; Kaplans, Shubitzes; and Schutzes; the Stoppelman and Josman families – one son, Gerald, was a respected judge, to name just a few. At one stage, the late Eddie Keizan’s family also lived in Roodepoort.

I would also like information about one man, I never knew his name, who attended services regularly, but was never given an *aliyah*. He was already quite old at the time, and used to sit at his *shlenter* in the corner.

Any information about the history of the shul would be welcome, as well as memories, both happy and sad. All contributions should be accompanied with pictures in JPEG format, and will be acknowledged. If you have any questions, email me at: jossfam@mweb.co.za, or call me on 021 552 3773.

– Brian “Joss” Josselowitz, Cape Town

DON’T LET THE VICTIMISED BECOME THE VICTIMISERS

The attacker of the Pittsburgh synagogue last weekend told the policeman who arrested him that he wanted to kill Jews because he believed that, “They’re committing genocide [against] my people.”

At a recent Neo-Nazi march, also in America, marchers chanted, “The Jews will not replace us.”

If you analyse right-wing ideology, there is at base a sense of fear and distrust of the other, bordering on paranoia. If a Jew, or a Mexican, or a black person does anything wrong, it is taken as “proof” that the entire nation is bad. Negative stereotypes are exaggerated.

Taken to an extreme, it then seems “logical” to persecute the other. But, instead of protecting their own race, as intended, greater shame and destruction is often brought on themselves.

We saw this in Nazi Germany, and in apartheid South Africa.

We Jews have suffered so much as a result of such distorted thinking. Yet, there is a saying that if you feel victimised, you are likely to victimise others. Even though we have suffered, we should not be tempted to take on similar right-wing views.

It is sometimes said that anti-

Semitism is getting worse, without any evidence to support this. A study by the University of Cape Town’s Kaplan Centre showed that the majority of black South Africans are not anti-Semitic. In America, we are the most favoured minority, and in England, Jews are also viewed favourably by the majority. Gone are the days when the Tsar or a priest could get up and instigate a pogrom. The churches, which caused most of our past problems, have now befriended us.

At first, the majority of nations supported Israel, when more than two thirds of countries voted to establish a Hebrew state. In the early years, much of the world enthusiastically supported Israel’s David versus Goliath struggle for survival. Unfortunately, the positive sentiment began to change after a right-wing government came to power in the Holy Land in 1977, leading to a deterioration in relations with the Palestinians.

While the right has the best of intentions with its emphasis on security, this will not bring peace. Unfortunately, many cannot see a peaceful solution, and believe that we have to fight in order to survive. Nevertheless, it was the right-wing Menachem Begin who made peace with Egypt (formerly our biggest enemy).

– Martin Zagnoev, Johannesburg



Adina Centner and Rychel Klawansky dough it right

Photo: Naadirah Mayet



## Diller Teen leaders share stories of growth

Graduates of the 2018 Diller Teen Fellows programme shared stories of personal growth and learning with their proud parents and King David leadership at Beyachad in Johannesburg last Thursday.

The event, held to pay tribute to the 2018 graduating Diller Teen Fellows and welcome the incoming group, was about celebration, exchanging



The graduating group of the Diller Teens

experiences, and giving advice to the 2019 group. Parents, and the heads of the King David High Schools, Lorraine Srage, and Andrew Baker, as well as Rabbi Kacev, the General Director of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) attended.

The Diller Teen Fellows programme is a premier Jewish leadership programme, which invites a

select group of 11th Graders to join in a year-long journey of growth and development in building the next generation of Jewish leaders. The South African Zionist Federation is the custodian of the programme in Johannesburg, with the SABJE as partners.

Principals Srage and Baker highlighted how fortunate these teens are to be part of such a prestigious project and an international network of young leaders.

The programme bids farewell to Gilad Spitalnik, the outgoing Co-ordinator of four years, and welcomes incoming Co-ordinator Ari Chipkin.

## WIZO Garden Day draws the crowds

The much anticipated Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO’s) Etgar branch’s Annual Garden Day is always one of WIZO’s most successful events, and this year did not disappoint.

A large crowd arrived on Sunday 28 October to spend a glorious morning enjoying the sunshine and meandering through three exquisite gardens in Sandhurst.

Helen Maisels Trisk introduced the guest speaker, designer and landscaper Steven Venter, and told the audience about WIZO’s work in empowering women through programmes and projects, from providing shelters for abused women, to the establishment of day care centres, schools, and training colleges for children and young adults.

Lee Joffe and Helen Maisels Trisk



## Esrechowitz family reunites after 50 years

The grandchildren of Solomon and Janie Esrechowitz held a reunion in Johannesburg on Sunday 21 October after 50 years apart. There were 11 Esrechowitz children, resulting in 26 grandchildren.

The cousins are based in America, Australia, Singapore, England, Scotland, Israel, KwaZulu-Natal, the Garden Route, and various places in Johannesburg. Unfortunately, not all of them were able to make the journey.

In what was a special day, they remembered their parents and grandparents fondly, exchanged family stories, and tales about the family tree.



Members of the Esrechowitz family



### Sunday (4 November)

- Jaffa morning market. Enjoy different stalls, food, second-hand books, and tombola. Time: 09:00 to 12:30. Venue: 42 Mackie Street, Baileys Muckleneuk, Pretoria. Contact: 012 346 2006.
- Second Innings hosts Fiona Capstick, sworn translator in the High Court, on *The Annusim: the saga of the hidden Jews*. Time: tea at 10:00. Meeting at 10:30. Venue: Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres, Sandringham. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors, includes tea and light refreshments. Contact: Linda 011 532 9701.
- Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) Collectables Market. A bumper selection of high-end vintage goods and bric-a-brac. Time: 10:00. Venue: Norwood Hypermarket Mall, centre square (near information desk). Enquiries: 011 645 2515.
- The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts the 5th South Africa-Poland History Conference, exploring the history of the Siberian deportees during World War II. Time: 14:00 to 17:30. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Suggested donation of R50. RSVP: dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.

### Monday (5 November)

- The Union of Jewish Women hosts Professor Anton Harber, the Caxton Professor of Journalism, University of the Witwatersrand on *Fake News*. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053.

### Wednesday (7 November)

- Second Innings hosts its Movie Morning At The Military Museum, showing *Miracle at Midnight*. Time: 09:30 for 10:00. Venue: The Military Museum, Saxonwold. Cost: R110 per ticket, includes tea. Book with Ivy Grushkin and Jewel Gold, or contact Linda: 011 532 9701.

### Thursday (8 November)

- Hebrew Speakers meet from 11:00 at Beyachad building, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.
- Join WIZO every Thursday for a *Lunch and Learn* shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad. Contact: WIZO office: 011 645 2515.

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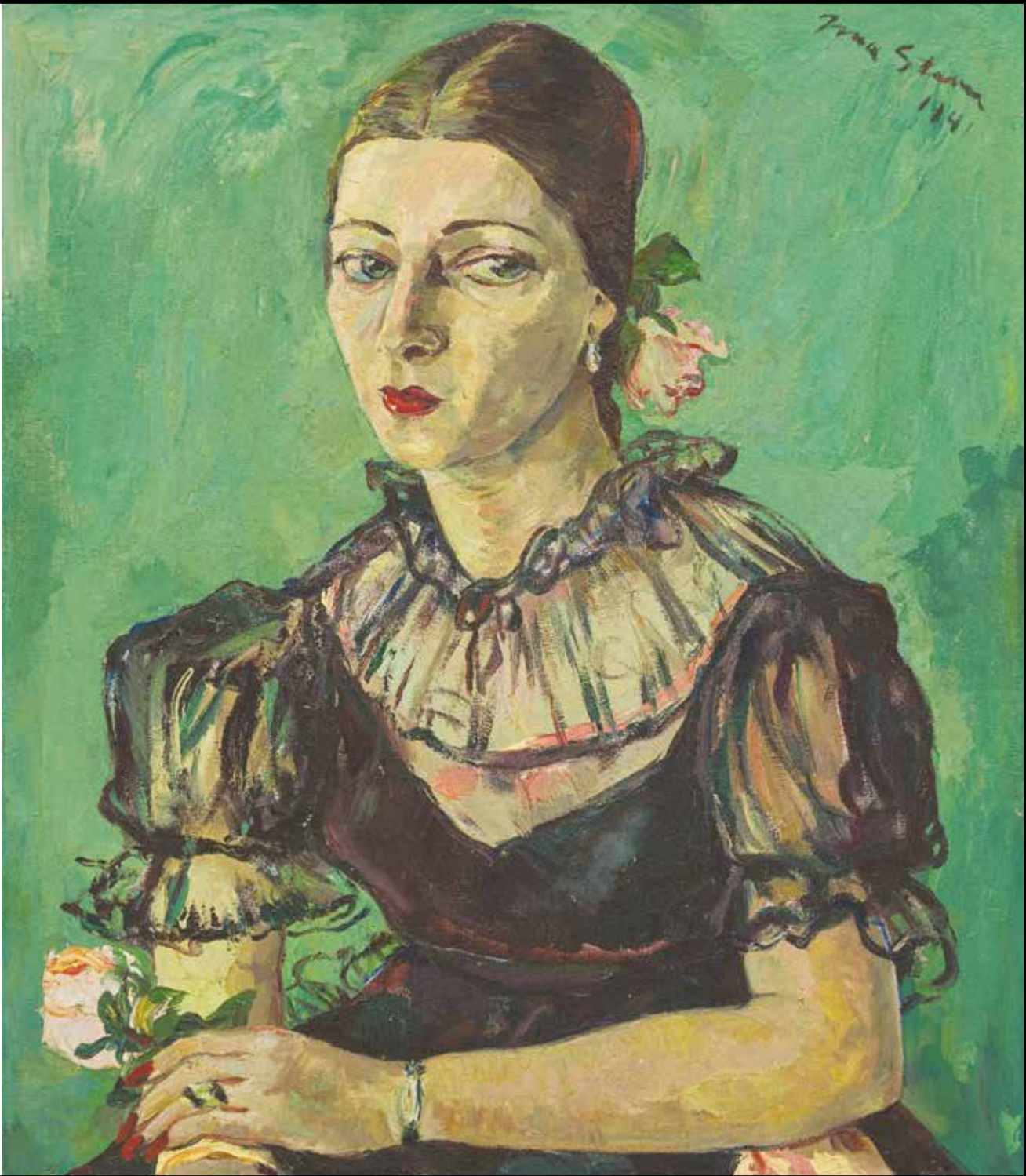
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*The subject of this elegant portrait is Mary Cramer (née Ginsberg, 1912-1988), the younger sister of Irma Stern's friend and confidante, Freda Feldman.*

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# Hatikva completes victory for Israeli team in Gulf

JORDAN MOSHE

Former South African Steven Cohen felt pride as he watched his daughter, Gili, compete in the International Judo Federation (IJF) Grand Slam in Abu Dhabi last weekend. Then, when *Hatikva* was played twice, making history for Israel, his pride quadrupled.

Israel won two gold medals at the international competition, resulting in the Israeli national anthem being heard at a Gulf state sporting contest for the first and second time ever. Israelis Peter Paltchik and Sagi Muki won gold medals, while Gili Cohen, Baruch Shmailov, and Timna Nelson Levy each took home bronze medals.

The fact that Israelis were allowed to compete as representatives of their own country made this competition particularly noteworthy.

Aged 27, Gili is a multiple-competition-winning Israeli judo champion. Winner of the European silver at the U23 event in 2013, she also took bronze at the European Championships in Montpellier in 2014, and has won World Cup medals in more than 10 different cities including the Grand Slam in Baku in 2016.

This week, she competed along with the other Israelis in the first official Israeli team ever to appear at the event. “Gili has been doing judo for years,” Steven says. “But no matter how many times she competes, I feel the same stress come over me every time I watch her.”

“Every time she does well, it’s a true joy,” Steven says. “But knowing how determined she is to succeed makes me stress for her, and I know she actually thinks it’s quite amusing how much I stress. Of course, she doesn’t stress about it the way I do.”

The fact that Israelis were allowed to compete as representatives of their own country made this competition particularly noteworthy. Although participants knew that *Hatikva* would be played at the award ceremony, the occasion was emotional.

“In previous years, the Israeli competitors had to compete under the flag of the IJF,” says Steven. “The story is that the IJF said to the organisers in Abu Dhabi that the competition would not take place if an Israeli team would not be recognised.”

Indeed, when the organisers stated they would not change their way of doing things as they did not recognise Israel, the federation suspended the Grand Slam from its schedule. However, the tournament was reinstated in September, after United Arab Emirates (UAE) organisers promised equal treatment for Israeli athletes.

“This was a good change,” says Gili. “I’ve competed in Abu Dhabi twice, and this was the first time we could be there as Israelis. We knew how much of an effort the federation had put into making it happen, so we wanted to put on our best performance as a team.”

Gili says the change also brought about an increase in Israeli security, and sense of isolation from the other competitors, but she felt it all vanish when she took to the floor. “Once I went up, it felt as though



Photo: International Judo Federation

Portugal's Joana Romos (left) and Gili Cohen from Israel

I was competing in any other competition,” she says. “I’d had my doubts, but they disappeared when I saw that things were normal like any other event.”

The sense of achievement was heightened when *Hatikva* played during the awards ceremony.

“I could see the emotion of the face of the Minister [of Culture and Sport, Miri Regev] at that moment,” says Gili. “It was very special. It felt real, and it clearly had an effect on many people who were there.”

Regev credited the IJF’s President, Austria’s Marius Vizer, for persuading the organisers to change their policy on Israeli

symbols. “I cried as the anthem was played. Marius Vizer stood

The sense of achievement was heightened when *Hatikva* played during the awards ceremony.

next to me, and also shed a tear. It was so moving to see that he was touched by our ability to express our emotions,” Regev told Israel Army Radio in an interview.

Steven says that though he doesn’t believe this change indicates a sudden shift in the political reality between Israel and the UAE, it’s a positive step in the right direction. “It was nice to see our own minister standing there, and though I don’t think this will bring us sudden peace, it could lead to positive things.”

In spite of her victory, Gili is already gearing up for her next competition, due to take place next week in Uzbekistan. “The judo calendar never stops,” Steven says. “There are events every week. Gili is gearing up for the 2020 Olympics, and makes the most of every opportunity she has.”



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