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## Voice note victimisation leads to education and apology

TALI FEINBERG

A Grade 12 pupil at King David Victory Park in Johannesburg received a horrific anti-Semitic voice note on WhatsApp this week from a Treverton College pupil. The outcome, however, has been a very swift process of reconciliation and reflection for the perpetrator and his school.

On Tuesday, a Grade 8 pupil from Treverton College sent Danni Haymann a voice note saying: “We all agree that you should have died in the Holocaust. You know those ashtrays full of Jewish people... maybe they should have added you to that little pile. What do you call a flying Jew?” His friends yelled, “Smoke!”

Haymann, who is writing finals, said that it all began because these boys had been cyber bullying a friend of hers. She sent a voice note to one pupil, warning him that his bullying would have serious consequences. In response, that boy got his friend to send her the anti-Semitic message.

“When I got it, I just started crying. It broke my heart, not only because he made a joke about the Holocaust, but because a 15-year-old was able to say that and not feel any remorse,” says Haymann, whose father’s grandfather was killed in the Shoah. “A child like that is actually so little. How can a boy in Grade 8 have a mind like that?”

Haymann managed to respond to him saying that she was going to share the voice note on social media, and find out the pupil’s identity, but he blocked her on WhatsApp. Her post quickly went viral, and Haymann received messages of support from all over the world, which she found hugely supportive but also overwhelming. In spite of writing finals, she has not slept in 24 hours, and feels that in some ways, the situation has spiralled out of control.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) quickly stepped in to support her, and engage with the school. On Wednesday, Kean Broom, the Headmaster of Treverton College, personally called Haymann to offer his deepest apologies, and discuss the way forward.

He said the pupil would fly from Durban to Johannesburg so that he could apologise to her face-to-face, and that he understood the pain his

words had caused her and the Jewish community.

“We are seeing incidents of hate across the spectrum of society in South Africa on a frequent basis. We hear about incidents in the sporting environment, and within the schooling system,” said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn. “In each situation, we analyse the specific issue and circumstances carefully, and decide how to proceed in consultation with relevant professionals and experts. It is imperative that we do not have knee-jerk reactions, but that we investigate each case carefully and make a considered determination on how to proceed.”

Kahn said that the SAJBD differentiated between “hardened anti-Semites who show no remorse and refuse to take accountability for their actions, and people who make stupid, uneducated, and hurtful comments. Once they understand the seriousness and vile nature of their hatred, they regret their actions, and are prepared to comply with remedies to address them. We approach them differently.

“We have had excellent results

working with schools in terms of education and behaviour change. Our goal is not to punish remorseful offenders but rather to effect behaviour change. We work closely with the Holocaust & Genocide Centres around the country in terms of sensitivity training.”

Mary Kluk, the President of the SAJBD, and the Director of the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre, said she had been in direct contact with the school about arranging visits for all of its pupils to the centre.

“We always reach out to the school in such incidents to try to turn them into a learning opportunity. It is not for us to judge. All we can do with immediate effect is to help change the way schools and learners respond to people who are different. This is especially in the context of building the South Africa we dream of, which will not happen if young people talk this way,” she said.

On Treverton’s Twitter profile, the school is described as an independent, co-ed day and boarding school in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, “providing a balanced, all-round, quality education based on a

strong Christian foundation”.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Broom expressed his deepest apologies to the South African Jewish community for the hurt and pain this incident had caused. He explained that Holocaust education was part of the history curriculum, and those students who took the subject always visited the Holocaust Centre, but that this visit would now be for all school pupils.

In an official statement from the school, Broom wrote, “This is something that is completely contrary to our values as a school, and our dealing with it will reflect our determination to prevent things of this nature occurring in future. Despite our natural desire to want justice immediately, it is equally important that due process is followed, and that the decisions we make are constructive and build towards positive and lasting change. I have been overwhelmed by the grace shown by the Jewish community in the midst of the hurt and anger. This gives me hope that eventual healing and restoration can be achieved.”

After hearing the voice note,

Milton Shain, the Emeritus Professor of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town and expert on anti-Semitism warned, “It would be foolish to assume that such hatred is consigned to history. One wonders if these ideas come from the home or from sub-cultures thriving in social media. We saw the impact of such hateful talk in the recent Pittsburgh massacre. Make no mistake, ideas have consequences. Today, these fantasists are relishing the oxygen provided by the radical and racist right in the United States and parts of Europe.”

Haymann does not want the boy’s life to be ruined, but rather for him to learn from his mistake and understand that words matter. For her, the incident also has a positive side as, “It made me appreciate my people and my religion. I’ve truly felt a sense of pride and belonging, and I am so grateful that I am Jewish.”

She was planning to work in America next year, but the incident has made her reconsider her plans. “I have never been out of the country before, but after this experience, I am going to do everything I can to make my first trip to Israel,” she said.

## Look who’s new in the ZOO...

See story on page 9





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# Democrats win House; Jews step into key roles

RON KAMPEAS

If you thought the first half of Donald Trump’s first term as president was volatile, think about the next two years: his hated opponents, the Democrats, are now weaponised.

Returned to the majority after eight years, Democrats in the United States House of Representatives will now wield the awesome power of subpoena. And. some of the key party figures who will be able to force Trump administration officials to testify are Jewish.

Caucus elections will take place between now and the launch of the 116th Congress, but barring a surprise, these five Jewish Democrats will chair key House committees, including three from New York – Jerrold Nadler, the Judiciary Committee; Eliot Engel, Foreign Affairs; and Nita Lowey, Appropriations. Also, Adam Schiff of California will helm the Intelligence Committee; and John Yarmuth of Kentucky will lead the Budget Committee.

Those committee chairmanships and others will loom large in efforts by the Democrats to stymie what they consider to be a catastrophic presidency.

Impeachment does not appear to be an option for now. Nancy Pelosi of California, likely to regain the Speaker’s gavel, has counted it out, and so has Nadler, whose committee would conduct any investigation into the president. But there are other areas in which the Democratic majority in the House will reshape policy.

Just because impeachment is off the table does not mean investigations are out of bounds. Democrats are furious that the White House and Senate Republicans constricted the investigation into sexual assault charges against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, who was confirmed. Nadler said he may delve further into the Kavanaugh allegations.

Democrats, including Yarmuth, say they want a gander at Trump’s tax returns, which would reveal the extent to which his businesses are in debt, possibly to foreign interests. The Oversight

Committee will want to explore ties between businesses owned by Trump and his family, and interests that have business before the United States, queries that could unsettle Trump’s daughter, Ivanka, and her husband, Jared Kushner.

Schiff, a persistent critic of Trump on cable networks, has been bursting with frustration at what he says are the obstructions placed by current GOP (Grand Old Party) Chairperson Devin Nunes of California on the committee’s investigation of alleged collusion between Russia and Trump’s presidential campaign.

Jewish groups that advocate for immigrants and refugees, like HIAS, will feel a sense of relief, albeit not complacency.

Efforts to kill “Obamacare”, the Affordable Care Act that was President Barack Obama’s signature policy win, are dead. Key protections, including guaranteed coverage for people with pre-existing conditions, remain in place. Expect talk of reform to take a leftward direction, with key Democrats now endorsing contemplation of a single-payer, “Medicare for all” plan.

A Yarmuth-led Budget Committee also would seek to tamp down the deficit by restoring some of the tax cuts that have been Trump’s signature first-term accomplishment.

Trump’s immigration policies, including family separations, and the planned deployment of troops to the US border with Mexico, have mostly been by executive order, bypassing the legislative process. With Democrats controlling the House, however, they will be subject to oversight. Jewish groups that advocate for immigrants and refugees, like HIAS, will feel a sense of relief, albeit not complacency.

Much virtual ink has been spilled analysing what the effect on the Democratic Party will be of the election of a handful of Democrats who have sharply criticised Israel. They include Rashida Tlaib in Michigan’s District 13, the first Muslim woman elected to Congress; Ilhan Omar, the Somali-American winner in Minnesota’s District 5; Ayanna Pressley,

who won her uncontested House race in Massachusetts’ District 7 on Tuesday; and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose primary upset over a 10-term incumbent paved her way to victory in New York’s 14th.

In the long term, it is an interesting question, as more Democrats appear willing to question Israeli policies.

But over the next two years, their election is not truly significant. Staunchly pro-Israel legislators still call the shots. Engel is one of Israel’s most reliable supporters, of either party, in the House, and so is Lowey, who will be the most influential Democrat controlling government spending.

Israel and many of its backers in the Jewish community have been thrilled with Trump’s unilateral and often precedent-breaking moves on Israel, including his decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv; his tepid talk about a two-state solution; and especially his decision to scrap the nuclear deal with Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hasn’t been shy about how pleased he has been with the president and his party.

If there will be a change, it will be in restoring some of the funding to the Palestinians that Trump has slashed. But that’s not funding that Israel necessarily opposes. While relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are at a nadir, Israel’s security establishment still sees a viable PA as critical to keeping the West Bank quiescent.

It’s too late, if it ever was possible, for Democrats to affect the other area of Middle East policy where they have a substantial disagreement with Trump: Iran. Trump’s pullout from the 2015 nuclear deal is pretty much final, with many pre-deal sanctions reimposed on Iran this week.

More broadly, Democrats and some Republicans in Congress have been appalled by Trump’s nonchalance about abuse by US allies, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Expect more oversight related to how the US is intervening on behalf of the oppressed abroad. (JTA)

| Shabbat times this week |       |                |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Starts                  | Ends  |                |
| 18:12                   | 19:04 | Johannesburg   |
| 19:04                   | 19:59 | Cape Town      |
| 18:06                   | 19:00 | Durban         |
| 18:15                   | 19:17 | Bloemfontein   |
| 18:15                   | 19:30 | Port Elizabeth |
| 18:15                   | 19:19 | East London    |

## Torah Thought

### The ultimate blessing

On the first night of Pesach in the Jewish year 2171, Yaakov Avinu, the studious, devoted servant of Hashem, followed his mother’s prophetic advice and tricked his father, Yitzchak, into giving him the blessings of the first born. His older brother Esav, the talented, brilliant trickster and murderer, was furious, and bent on revenge. Yaakov was forced to flee, while Esav resided in comfort.

Thirty-four years later, the two brothers met again. Esav had since acquired vast tracts of land; while Yaakov had lived as a stranger in a hostile environment. Esav had won glory as a successful hunter; Yaakov had spent freezing nights guarding

his wicked uncle’s flocks. Esav had amassed an army with 400 generals; Yaakov had but 11 young sons. Esav enjoyed independence; Yaakov had been at the mercy of his cunning host. Esav pursued wealth and power; Yaakov toiled in Torah and composed Tehillim.

Yet, when they finally met and Yaakov sent a tribute to placate his vengeful brother, Esav could only say, “I have a lot.” Yaakov declared, “I have everything.”

Esav rejected the world-to-come in exchange for indulgence in this world, and still felt lacking. Yaakov dedicated his life to Hashem and, despite his suffering, felt that he had everything.

Esav lived in a meaningless space. Even when he basked in success, he felt inadequate. Yaakov lived in G-d’s world, and saw whatever Hashem allocated to him as perfect.

We Jews are heirs to Yaakov Avinu, and yet, somehow, we are not always cognisant of our legacy. We live in a world of stress and troubles; a world that does not always view us favourably. However, Yaakov teaches us that through Torah one can achieve meaning, fulfilment, and happiness.

Hashem should bless us all with this!



**Rabbi Yonatan Landau, Ohr Somayach Savoy**

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# BDS golf-day antics led to cancelling charity event

NICOLA MILTZ

The Houghton Golf Club has stepped up security in the wake of cancelling a Muslim charity golf day last week that was believed to have been sabotaged by Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa (BDS SA).

Last Wednesday, BDS SA invited people on several social media platforms to join it at the annual golf fundraiser at this club hosted by a Muslim charity organisation called Food for the Soul.

The Houghton Golf Club is made up of members from every community, having both a large Jewish and Muslim membership. It is a popular venue for



functions, including weddings, Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, amongst others.

Food for the Soul held its annual fundraiser at the club last year. It is a non-profit organisation that purports on its website to promote peace and cultural and religious cohesiveness. Food for the Soul is made up of young Muslims who raise money for numerous causes including Palestinians, beleaguered Syria, and local Muslim charities including one for the disabled.

On 31 October, BDS tweeted, “The sun will be out to play and so shall we! Pass by our stall on 11 November at the upcoming charity golf day taking place at the Houghton Golf Course organised by Food for the Soul. Support the Palestinian struggle and BDS boycott of Israel! More details on the poster.” Attached to this is a colourful BDS poster advertising the golf day and boldly displaying its logo.

It sent shock waves through the community, with many club members and non-members alike turning to social media. As news of it spread, so too did the vitriol on Twitter and Facebook.

One person posted on Facebook: “Slap in the face

to all Jewish golfers at Houghton. Should cancel membership.”

One Johannesburg Jewish site even went so far as to block and delete further comments because they were so vicious and inflammatory.

Adrian Diamond, the President of the club, and other committee members were inundated with calls from around the world from curious, troubled, and irate members demanding to know how this could be.

A WhatsApp voice note that circulated on social media added fuel to the fire, sending further ripples through suburbia.

The voice note tries to assure people that “it is not a BDS golf day”, and that the BDS “snuck into the

golf day”, and they did so “without anybody knowing”.

This prompted the BDS to issue a press alert. It declared that the WhatsApp voice note was “disturbing”, insisting that it had been invited to participate, and had not sneaked in.

It said it had “accepted an invitation to sponsor and participate in the golf day... BDS South Africa paid for a sponsorship of Hole 9 as well as signed a contract with the organisers of the golf day confirming our participation.”

To sponsor a hole at the Food for the Soul golf day costs between R5 500 and R8 500, and includes a free four ball. According to the Food for the Soul flyer, all proceeds from the golf day were to be donated to Syria.

It said that the sponsorship entitled it to set up a stall.

BDS went on to state that it was engaging legal counsel as it felt the club had discriminated against the organisation.

Jewish communal leadership has also been in contact with the golf club.

Behind the scenes, frantic meetings were held between Food for the Soul and the Houghton Golf Club in a desperate bid to save the golf day.

With pressure from all sides, the club eventually put out an urgent notice to all its members on 1 November cancelling the golf day, and explaining what had happened.

It said that it had come to the club’s attention that BDS “had engaged in an extensive social media campaign suggesting that the golf day was held under the aegis of the organisation [BDS], furthermore, that BDS invited members of the public to attend the golf course in support of its aims and objectives”.

“The organisation has certain supporters who have historically engaged in acts of violence, including property damage, and as such, the Houghton Golf Club Committee cannot permit the event to take place.”

The statement went on to say that the club had engaged extensively with Food for the Soul, and had suggested that BDS not participate.

Continued on page 13>>

Michael David

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# How George Soros became the target of anti-Semites and right-wing Jews

**ERIC CORTELLESSA**

By now, it has become a familiar pattern: after an event that polarises the country, United States President Donald Trump knows who to pin the blame on. When liberal and conservative America was split over Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation fight last month – and Dr Christine Blasey Ford’s allegations that he sexually assaulted her in high school – the president spread a theory that was sure to inflame that divide.

He said that left-wing billionaire George Soros was paying the masses of demonstrators who had descended on Capitol Hill, and who were pushing senators to reject Kavanaugh’s bid for the High Court.

Then this week, the president promulgated an unfounded conspiracy theory that the very same Democratic megadonor was funding a caravan of Central American migrants. “I wouldn’t be surprised,” Trump told reporters.

Those two instances – and the reactions to them – reflect the bizarre role Soros is playing in the American public’s imagination. So, too, do revelations that an explosive device was sent to his house, and that Robert Bowers, the suspect in the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting, was driven by the myth that Soros was behind the migrant caravan heading north in Mexico.

“This latest round of conspiracy theories about Soros, fuelled by tweets by high-profile public officials, are hardly new,” said Aryeh Tuchman, the Associate Director of the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism (ADL). He added that, in a May report analysing anti-Semitic speech on Twitter, the ADL noted that Soros was prominently mentioned in a large chunk of anti-Semitic tweets, often with claims that he directly uses his largesse to fund false flag events.

One noteworthy allegation said that Soros was responsible for August 2017’s deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Other tweets, Tuchman said, “referred to his Jewish heritage in pejorative terms, and claimed that he’s trying to undermine all of Western civilization”.

As many noted after Trump falsely said that Soros was funding the Kavanaugh protests and the migrant caravans, the president was taking a page right out of the anti-Semites’ playbook.

Yet, many of Soros’s fiercest critics are themselves Jewish. The Republican Jewish Coalition often castigates Soros for giving money to left-wing advocacy groups like

J Street, and for his foundation giving to other groups they characterise as anti-Israel, like Israeli human-rights NGO B’Tselem.

Soros brings two divergent tribes together. He has become the go-to bogeyman of both the Jewish right and anti-Semites.

Born in Budapest in 1930, Soros was 13 years old when the Nazis invaded Hungary. He managed to survive the Holocaust, and his family purchased documents that said they were Christians. By 1947, he had emigrated to England to become a student at the London School of Economics.

From there, he started his work in finance through a London bank, Singer & Friedlander, where he was a broker. Over the next several years, he jumped around firms before he founded Soros Fund Management.

His investment management firm was wildly successful. Since 1973, it has generated more than \$40 billion (R567 billion). Soros, who lives in Westchester County, New York, is now estimated to be worth roughly \$8 billion (R113 billion), making him one of the richest people in the world.

With his wealth, Soros has become active in liberal causes. He first became politically engaged, according to *The Washington Post*, after the 2004 election, when George W. Bush won a second term against then senator John Kerry.

Through his organisation, Open Society Foundations, an international grant-making network, he has been a primary donor of the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, and the Democracy Alliance. He also gave large sums of money to the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, including \$1 million (R14 million) to a Super PAC (independent fundraising committee) supporting the former during the 2012 campaign.

Rabbi Jack Moline, the President of the Interfaith Alliance, said that Soros had the unique blend of ingredients to make him the subject of anti-Semitic tropes.

“I think you would need an entire graduate degree in the history of the Jews and their relationship with other nations to pluck out all of the various boxes that he ticks off just by being who he is. He’s a man with liberal – even socialist – politics; he’s fabulously wealthy; he’s reclusive; he’s European by origin, which puts him on the outside of the Hungarian culture he was in because he’s Jewish; and it puts him on the outside of the ‘true Americans’ in this country,” Moline told *The Times of Israel*. “He

has it all.” Soros has become an instrument used by bigots to instil fear in the hearts of their populist followings. He is playing a role that other Jews have invariably played throughout the course of history. In some ways, he is just the latest iteration.

Why him? On some level, it is a simple equation: those on the left don’t like big donors for the right, while those on the right don’t like big donors for the left.

Jonathan Tobin, a conservative columnist who frequently writes for the *National Review* and is editor in chief of the *Jewish News Syndicate*, argues that Soros is to the right what GOP (Grand Old Party) mega donors are to the

intended, casting a Jewish individual as a puppet master who manipulates national events for malign purposes has the effect of mainstreaming an anti-Semitic trope, and giving support, however unwitting, to bona-fide anti-Semites and extremists who disseminate these ideas knowingly and with malice.”

When it comes to Soros’s place within the Jewish community, Moline notes, there is a different dynamic that Soros shares with Adelson.

“There’s always been a love-hate relationship that the Jews have had with the wealthy in their own community,” he said. “When they’re generous for the right causes, they’re lauded, and when they’re generous for the



George Soros speaks during an IMF/World Bank forum in Washington

Photo: Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP

left. “When I look at some of the ways that conservative Republicans talk about Soros, it’s kind of the mirror image of the way Democrats have been talking about the Koch brothers for years,” Tobin said. “Or Sheldon Adelson.”

But while the Kochs and megadonor Adelson are the subjects of intense criticism from the left, they are not often targeted with unfounded theories that they are fomenting instability or controlling major governmental or financial institutions.

“A person who promotes a Soros conspiracy theory may not intend to promulgate anti-Semitism, but Soros’s Jewish identity is so well-known that in many cases it is hard not to infer that meaning,” said the ADL’s Tuchman.

“Even if no anti-Semitic insinuation is

wrong causes, they’re condemned. Adelson is the same way. The people who praise him for Birthright often condemn him for his involvement with the Republican Party.”

But Soros fills such a unique set of check boxes, he has become the bogeyman for more than one corner of the American public. That those corners are often in conflict is evidence, Moline suggests, that the controversies surrounding Soros are often not so much about Soros himself.

“I think that most people who criticise George Soros don’t know very much about him,” Moline said. “Whether it is non-Jews criticising him as a Jew, or whether it is Jews criticising him as a liberal, it says more about the person doing the criticising than it does about the person they’re criticising.” (*Times of Israel*)

# Anti-Semitism comes from right and left

**JULIE LEIBOWITZ**

Modern anti-Semitism, or the “Israelisation” of anti-Semitism, is a curious alliance between the “hard, regressive” left and political Islam. Karen Milner, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, explained this to shul goers at Greenside Shul in Johannesburg last weekend.

“The hard/regressive left have moved from anti-racism to a virulent form of anti-Westernism, and Political Islam – not Muslims or Islam – also has an obsessive anti-Western agenda. At the nexus of this alliance is the Jews and Israel.

Milner was talking about the various forms of anti-Semitism that exist today on the left and the right of the political spectrum, and how prejudice has evolved over time from traditional anti-Semitic tropes and blood libels to include opposition to the Jewish state.

She was speaking in response to the massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighbourhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 27 October, which has been described as the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in United States history.

Outside the Tree of Life Synagogue



This attack, in which 11 people were killed and seven injured, was carried out by a lone gunman, Robert Gregory Bowers, who identified with the far right.

Milner quotes French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy in explaining the three core propositions of modern

anti-Semitism: “First, Jews are detestable, i.e. worthy of hate because they support an evil murderous state. In support of portraying this absolute evil, this red-green alliance uses classic or old anti-Semitic tropes, drawing strongly on the original incredibly inflammatory

blood-libel images – Israeli leaders as vampires, drinking the blood of Palestinian children, etc. We’ve seen this before,” Milner said.

“Second, Jews are even more detestable because their claim to Israel is based either [there are two versions of this] on a huge hoax [the Holocaust], or on oppressing the Palestinians in the same way or worse than they were oppressed in the Holocaust, making the Palestinians pay for the sins of Europe.

“Third, Jews are so protective of their victimhood, and so debased, that they use the memory of their dead for the purpose of legitimising an illegitimate state, and sentencing the rest of the world’s victims to silence [competitive victimhood].”

“Because people still seem to struggle to understand exactly what anti-Semitism is in 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted a working definition of anti-



# Israel to pay attention to diaspora needs

JORDAN MOSHE

Israel must prioritise diaspora Jews’ needs second to its own security. This, says Akiva Tor, the head of Israel’s Bureau of World Jewish Affairs and World Religions, is most important in light of spiking anti-Semitism levels, and the global increase in political extremism.

With political polarisation rising dramatically worldwide, levels of anti-Semitism have spiked accordingly in several countries in recent months.

While Jews everywhere need to pay close attention to these developments, Israel needs to remain as attentive to the needs and realities of diaspora communities as possible.

In South Africa at the invitation of the Israeli Embassy, Tor is on a five-day visit to meet communal Jewish leadership and representatives of other religious groups in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

“My concern is issues of relevance to the Jewish world, from combatting anti-Semitism to the welfare of the community. It’s helpful to see people in their [own] environment when engaging with them. Also, as I’m responsible for Israel’s relations with religious groups, and because South Africa is an overwhelmingly Christian country, I am interested in meeting senior Christian leadership for meaningful engagement.

“If we want countries to engage with Israel as a whole, and not only with its government, Israel must engage with every element of a country’s society, and not merely the government itself.”

Tor says that Israel needs to make sure it listens and is adequately attentive to diaspora Jewish communities’ thinking and needs. “We are concerned about things happening which are the result of political developments, and need to pay attention. On anti-Semitism, we’re seeing things that we haven’t seen in a very long time. Political polarisation in Europe, and the rise of the far right [which, in some cases has parties’ nostalgic for the Nazi period] is something we monitor constantly. These parties can’t come into power.”

On this point, Tor says that though we have seen an emergence of right-wing anti-Semitism, by and large it hasn’t approached political power. What is challenging, however, is what is going on in the United Kingdom today, with the anti-Semitic voices around the leadership of the Labour Party.

“Frankly, it is shocking,” says Tor. “Here you have a radical

left where some voices are absolutely anti-Semitic, and members of leadership are not able to see it. People are blind to their own weaknesses. One of the biggest problems with anti-Semites is that they are not aware of their anti-Semitism. It’s the same with many racists.

“Anti-Semitism will always exist on the margins of society, and we need to be careful not to exaggerate. Social media can exaggerate things. However, in the UK, the Labour Party is where you see strands of deep anti-Semitic thinking entering

mainstream leadership. That’s a deep challenge for Jews and society.”

Tor says today’s anti-Semitism is born in places of political polarisation and economic dislocation. “It is a societal sickness that breaks out when an imbalance occurs. Like a virus, it exploits a particular weakness. Often, political and other social actors seek a scapegoat. It’s not always the Jews, but it often is. Israel is also often perceived as the Jew of nations.”

However, Tor stresses that world Jewry has had a breakthrough in the growing acceptance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, which has been accepted by several countries in the European Union among a growing number of other countries. “It’s an attempt to define anti-Semitism for law enforcement and monitoring,” he says, “but also for understanding. The definition deals with what it means to hate Jews, but doesn’t shy away from the statement that denying the right of the Jews to self-determination is a form of anti-Semitism.

“This definition recognises the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement as a movement whose goals are anti-Semitic. Perhaps its actions and members may not be, but its aims can be defined as anti-Semitic.”

Speaking about the Pittsburgh massacre, Tor says that the attack can be viewed through the lens of other attacks against religious installations in America, including churches, and a mosque. “Different issues are implicated, some of them internal US issues such as weapons control. It’s a large country, and it does have a marginal neo-Nazi presence. I hope that we don’t see a reality in America in which shuls have to be secured behind blockades and fences.”

While Israel’s first responsibility is the security and welfare of its own population, its responsibility to world Jewry comes a close second. “Israel must concern itself with the

Continued on page 19>>



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# Facing growing anti-Semitism together

When I received the sinister anti-Semitic voice note that had been sent by a KwaZulu-Natal private school boy to a Jewish girl in Johannesburg, my blood went cold.

Just listening to the menacing tone of this boy’s voice and his friends laughing at the joke he makes about Jews and the gas chambers made me angry.

This, in light of the recent Pittsburgh shul massacre, was totally unacceptable.

I believe the school’s headmaster and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies did what was right, and that these boys are going to find out why their words and bullying were totally unacceptable. Hopefully, they will never do such a thing again. Who can tell?

I agree with the attitude of the board that 15-year-olds may not understand the significance of what they do and say. I agree that learning about the Holocaust will be hugely positive.

But there is just too much of this anti-Semitism going on.

Since the Pittsburgh massacre, I, for one, have had this disturbing feeling in the pit of my stomach that hasn’t subsided.

It has to do with the horror of someone walking into a shul where people were praying and mowing them down like skittles. But it is more than that.

Around the world, we have always seen the United States as a place where Jews were immensely powerful and respected. We believed that if there was one place in the world that Jews were safe, it was in the US. Also, while we are just a small community of at best 70 000 people, there are about six million Jews in America. I guess, we have always counted on them to hold the Jewish world afloat.

One only has to consider who Israel’s biggest ally is, and it makes it quite obvious. Nobody questions that the US will always support Israel and the Jewish people.

It is for this reason that we are shaken to our core. Our very sense of security as Jews has been threatened by this event.

Then, you look at the United Kingdom, where the leaders of the Labour Party deny their blatant anti-Semitism. There again, we are looking at the free world, where Jews have for so long been able to live lives of total liberty.

As a people, we are feeling threatened in places that we least expected to be vulnerable. It is true, there have always been spots of anti-Semitism. They aren’t going away. They are generally based on ignorance and sheer bigotry – these diseases occur worldwide. However, the mass wisdom has for more than 70 years protected us against ignorance and bigotry.

Has this changed? Marginally.

What has changed is that our blinkers are off, and we are joining the spots, and becoming more aware of the freedom anti-Semites and bigots have in the world.

It has woken us up to the fact that we cannot rely on others to protect us, we need to do it ourselves to be genuinely effective. It has woken us up to the fact that we need to join forces.

Earlier this year, the editors of the three main Jewish newspapers in the UK wrote a combined editorial, standing together against the rising anti-Semitism in the British Labour Party. It was a first.

Last week, the many editors of Jewish newspapers in the United States followed in their colleagues’ footsteps. “We can’t help but be shaken and concerned for the America we have come to know and love,” they wrote in their editorial.

“We therefore join together to unequivocally condemn this brutal act of anti-Semitism, and all deadly acts of hate. We also condemn the climate of hate that has been building for some time now, especially on college campuses and on social media, where the veneer of anonymity has allowed anti-Semitic cesspools to flourish, and from irresponsible political leaders who engage in hateful speech and are abetted by the silence of others.”

They continued: “As journalists, we hold a variety of opinions about politics in this country, and in Israel. The American Jewish community is diverse, and those differences are reflected on the pages of its media.

“In coming together now, we are not erasing those differences, but rising above them to issue a call for solidarity and respect, and asking our political and communal leaders to do the same.”

When I read this, I thought about their power, and how the *SA Jewish Report* is a lone newspaper serving a comparatively small community.

But, unlike the days of old when anti-Semitism struck, and the people who felt it were alone and isolated, we are not alone, nor are we isolated. We are a part of a huge and diverse Jewish world.

And, while the internet and social media has its pitfalls in allowing hate speech and anti-Semitism to fester, it also allows us to be a part of a much larger and more powerful community.

Nothing happens in isolation anymore. While anti-Semitism may be on the rise, like my colleagues in the UK and US and the people they serve, we will work together.

We will not let anti-Semitism get the better of us. We will keep fighting it. We don’t need to fight it with might, but with our brains and pens.

I agree with the SA Jewish Board of Deputies: we must try as hard as we can to deal with things amicably and educate people. If that doesn’t work, revert to the law courts.

But, we don’t have to fear. We don’t have to accept or deny anti-Semitism when it rears its head. We will face it head on, without fear or favour.

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

# What do the sanctions against Iran mean for Israel?

On Monday, a second phase of American sanctions went into effect targeting critical sectors of Iran’s economy, including its oil exports, shipping sector, and financial institutions.

After being lifted in July 2015 with the signing of the P5 + 1 nuclear deal under former American President Barack Obama, sanctions have now been reinstated almost five months after current American President Donald Trump withdrew from what he has repeatedly called “the worst deal ever”.

Jerusalem has been one of the most vocal supporters of Trump’s actions, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared the reimposed sanctions “an important moment for Israel”.

Tehran must meet 12 demands to get sanctions lifted, including ending its “support for terrorism and military engagement in Syria” and “halting its nuclear and ballistic-missile development”.

Jerusalem is hugely concerned about Iranian expansion and influence, particularly in southern Syria, where the country supports all the organisations on Israel’s northern border, including those of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad.

Iran’s emboldenment of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah mean that there is widespread speculation nowadays that war between Israel and Hezbollah is on the cards. Two months after the nuclear deal was originally signed, the leader of the Islamic Republic declared that in 25 years, the Jewish state would no longer exist. Israeli leaders have taken threats like that seriously.

Dr Soli Shahvar, the Founding Director of the Ezri Centre for Iran and the Persian Gulf, says that in the past three-and-a-half years, Iranian conduct – like supporting opposition movements and creating militia in a number of countries – has contributed more to instability in the Middle East than any other factor. No wonder then that Israeli officials have repeatedly argued that Tehran was using the deal to arm itself with nuclear weapons, and increase its influence in the region. These same politicians are now hopeful that Trump’s new measures will lead to the downfall of the current Iranian leadership.

The idea is that by applying economic pressure, Tehran will change its policy. The White House insists that the sanctions are not aimed at toppling the Islamic Republic, but are rather aimed at forcing Iran to alter her regional policies dramatically, including support for militant groups. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin summed it up best when he said, “The Iranian beast must be starved and not fed. This is the only way to guarantee the stability of the world.”

Since the United States pulled out of the nuclear deal in May, the Iranian rial has slipped to record lows, and the country has plunged into recession. Protests, driven by economic concerns, have erupted in several major cities against the government. The new sanctions will continue to push Iran to boiling point. Should the US,

## DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier

Israel, and other countries provide the necessary assistance to these protestors, they could very likely succeed in overthrowing the government.

But there is no guarantee that this policy will work, and should it trigger a revolution, who’s to say it won’t herald an even more conservative leadership than the one in power?

In addition, the European Union (EU) is not on board. It considers the nuclear deal crucial to its national interests, although it’s far from clear whether it can save it by propping up those European companies financially which are feeling the pinch from American threats. The new sanctions prohibit any EU entities who work in Iran from doing business with the United States. It’s no surprise then that most companies have – or are in the process of – abandoning the Iranian market over the American one. Also, to date, the EU hasn’t managed to put in place an alternative payment mechanism to sidestep the American-dominated banking system.

Jerusalem is outraged by the EU decision not to support the sanctions. It has criticised the bloc for ignoring documents the Mossad, Israel’s national intelligence agency, stole from Tehran last January, and which Netanyahu insists prove that Iran’s nuclear programme is a military one aimed at developing atomic bombs.

Israeli Public Security and Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan has called the bloc “morally bankrupt”. He and others argue that Europe’s position could lead to even more refugees flooding the continent in the wake of a possible major military clash.

But, Europe aside, Tehran still maintains key support from Russia and Asia, including China, India and South Korea, that could save the country’s economy from total collapse. Certainly, the Iranian leadership is keen to engage with these countries as much as possible, although it could pay a high price for doing so.

In the Iranian psyche, Russia, for example, is not much loved. It has taken territories away from Iran throughout the country’s history, while intervening in Iranian domestic affairs. Depending more on Russia is not something the Iranians are desperate to do; but they will do so in order to survive and outlast the impact of Trump’s sanctions.

For now, though, Israel has received an enormous boost to its security. An increasing number of countries are coming on board, and accepting Jerusalem’s position vis-à-vis Tehran. But it’s not all easy sailing moving forward. Trump has signalled his willingness to meet the Iranian leadership, and Israeli officials are worried he might agree to a face-to-face before Tehran even agrees to dismantle her nuclear facilities. From the Israeli perspective, the battle has been won, but not the war. Tehran has been contained for now.





# Do women want a women’s officer?



## OPINION

Adina Roth

“The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer in spite of my 30 years of research into the feminine soul, is, ‘What does a woman want?’”

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, asked this question in the first half of the 20th century, and years later, the women’s movements attempted to answer it.

Yet, in some ways, “what women want” remains elusive. However, if the new project of United Kingdom Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis is anything to go by, what women want is a women’s officer – a newly designated liaison position for a woman on orthodox shul committees. Her role is designed to make the shul experience more “welcoming and inclusive” for women. This is the latest among a number of initiatives by Chief Rabbi Mirvis aimed at nurturing women’s leadership, learning, and general Jewish experience.

Whereas traditionally, female shul leadership was confined to a ladies guild, which oversaw the very important task of feeding the community at the shul kiddush, the women’s officer is concerned with women’s religious and spiritual experience in the space of the synagogue itself.

The women’s officer can help facilitate a woman’s need to bench *gomel*, the blessing recited on deliverance from danger, and can assist a women in reciting kaddish. She can also offer guidance about emergent Jewish rituals

such as the Simchat Bat, celebrating the birth of a daughter, and of course the Batmitzvah. Importantly, should the need arise, she can engage in a process of making seating more inclusive while still adhering to the halachic requirements of a *mechitzah* (separate seating in shul).

On the one hand, I am intrigued by the designation of such a role. It reminds me of Rabba Sara Hurwitz, the first woman to be ordained under orthodox auspices in America. In describing her ordination to a South African audience, she said that because she is a woman, she can support women in shul, unlike her male counterparts. When a woman recites kaddish, she can stand with her and offer her care. If a woman is struggling in the service, she can assist.

I wonder whether this women’s officer role aims to address the oft overlooked experience of women in shul in a safe and non-confrontational manner, while avoiding more provocative territory such as women’s *tefillah* (prayer) groups, partnership *minyanim*, and the still hotly contested area of orthodox women’s ordination.

Therefore, I found it interesting that retired orthodox Rabbi, Jeffrey Cohen, penned an article in the *London Jewish Chronicle* where he questioned this latest initiative of women’s officer, and raised the concern that her role might be nothing more than cosmetic.

He made reference to a women’s *tefillah* group which started in Stanmore about 25 years ago amidst much controversy, and shared that this women’s prayer group had brought its members much closer to Judaism. He then said that perhaps the chief rabbi’s introduction of the women’s officer didn’t go far enough,

suggesting that what is actually needed is the introduction of women-empowered services, where women can become active participants in prayer, and where a Batmitzvah can chant the Haftarah. Underlying Rabbi Cohen’s message seemed to be the question, “why so cautious?”, which brings me back to the question: what do women, or in this case Jewish women, want?

Many women are satisfied with the meaningful roles they find in more traditional and patriarchal settings. However, others are seeking something more. As a teacher of Batmitzvah and Barmitzvah, I meet women all the time who tell me a similar story. They say



they are switched off from the prayer service, they tell me that they no longer attend shul. They also feel as if they do not understand the prayers, do not connect to the style of davening, and most importantly, feel cut off behind what are often very opaque *mechitzahs*.

Do we not owe it to these women to find out what they want? Often, I also find myself behind the proverbial *mechitzah* in shul. I look around to find women not singing or even praying, but disengaged and talking

among themselves. Yet, the greatest spiritual potential of our generation lies on the other side of the *mechitzah*. We need to find ways to engage it.

As Rabbi Cohen alludes, in some parts of the orthodox Jewish world, we are already beyond women’s officers. There are places these days where orthodox Jewish women are “doing it for themselves” – learning the sources in Bible, Talmud, and halacha. No longer in liaison roles, they are halachic decision-makers and masters of their own spiritual destinies.

In other pockets of our communities, there is the need for gradual change. To this end, the women’s officer is a step in the right direction. It signifies that the chief rabbi of England has taken heed of women’s dissatisfaction, and is addressing their concerns, albeit in an incremental way.

But, the larger challenges faced by Jewish women are not going to be resolved by a women’s officer, no matter how efficient or attentive she is. Rather, each (Jewish) woman is responsible for addressing this fundamental question: “What do I want, long for, and strive for in my Jewish life?” The answer, different for each woman, requires that she discover and trust her own authentic voice while bringing it into dialogue with Jewish texts, Jewish history, and other Jewish men and women. The question, “What do women want?” has not yet been fully answered.

• Adina Roth is a Jewish educator who teaches Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah and adult Jewish text classes in Johannesburg. She is also a clinical psychologist in private practice.



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# Addressing the standard of Jewish education in South Africa

JORDAN MOSHE

“There’s a joke often said in London that goes: what is the difference between a pizza and a Jewish educator? A pizza can feed a family of four. That’s been the problem with the value of Jewish education for a long time. We need to stand up for the educators in our community, and value them more than a pizza.”

So said Rabbi Dr Rafi Zarum, Doctor of Theoretical Physics and Dean of the London School of Jewish Studies at a breakfast held at Investec this past Tuesday.

Hosted by the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, the event marked the launch of the National Educators Development Programme (NED).

Geared towards jumpstarting a revolution in Jewish education and educational leadership in the Jewish community in South Africa, the NED seeks to re-emphasise the value of professional Jewish education, and raise our community to the international standard.

Zarum explained that there are three different names by which we Jews have been called throughout history that relate to the importance of education in our faith. He said, “We are known as Ivrim, Bnei Yisrael, and Yehudim – Hebrews, Israel, and Jews. Each one tells us something about

who we are as a people.” Zarum continued, “The first Hebrew, Avraham, was defined by his challenging nature. He developed moral values and challenged the order of his day. Yaakov, his grandson, was given the name Yisrael, meaning honesty before G-d. Yehuda, the name of a tribe and the last Jewish kingdom, contains the name of G-d, and therefore connotes a sense of morality, and trust in the Almighty.”

He explained that these three names by which we are known represent us – our language, our home, and our faith. “They represent us and what we stand for,” Zarum said. “We therefore need to know what we stand for and what our message is. It is only through knowing, through education, that we can secure the future.

“If we know who we are, we have a future. Our teachers, our educators, are Ivrim, Yisraelim and Yehudim – they combine all three through teaching. If we support them, and if we are challenging Hebrews, sincere Israelites, and faithful Jews, we have a bright future ahead.”

Rabbi Ramon Widmonte, the Director of the Academy, then explained the vision of the institution moving forward, and the need which it addresses. “In the wake of the tragedy of Pittsburgh, the time which follows is transformative for us as Jews. In such difficult times, we can employ one



of two responses. We can look inward and reflect on ourselves. Alternatively, we can put our heads down and recommit to what we really are about, and pursue it. We react by committing ourselves to education.

“It is for this reason that we launch NED today. Our aim is to see 30 educators through to a master’s degree in Jewish education in the next five years. Presently, we have only one person with such a qualification in South Africa. There is

no one with a BA in Jewish education. We have no one with a qualification in teaching Hebrew as a second language. It is a communal responsibility to address this. “We want to nurture educators, and see them fill this gap. This type of growth is not instant, but organic. We have to nurture our educators and stop them being eaten up like a pizza. We are committing ourselves to a project that promotes education the way it should be.”

# The post-truth onslaught of fake news

NICOLA MILTZ

United States President Donald Trump is using fake news to stoke fear regarding migrants and “the other”, with dangerous consequences for the spread of anti-Semitism and racial hatred.

So said media expert Professor Anton Harber to the Union of Jewish Women this week in a talk titled “Living in the age of fake news”.

migrancy goes and kills 11 people at a synagogue. It is a real danger,” Harber said.

Harber discussed this issue in the context of the growing fear that truth is becoming less and less relevant in public discourse.

“Fake news is a deliberate attempt to manipulate citizens through the purposeful creation and dissemination of false information,” he said.

Harber, the Caxton Professor of Journalism at the University

in this era, namely the rise of the internet, the rise of Donald Trump, and most recently, the growing threat of cyber warfare.

To illustrate this, Harber told the story of American college student Cameron Harris, the so-called owner of ChristianTimesNewspaper.com and other fake news sites.

A couple of months before the US election, when it looked like Donald trump could never win, Trump began talking about the election being rigged.

Donald Trump, he said, “has taken the use of fake news, the use of falsity, to a new level, and this has been a critical factor”.

Fact checking operations, particularly in America, have been calculating the extent of his lies. “He has made 5 001 lies in 600 days in office,” said Harber.

Apart from Trump, social media has given so much more scope for fake news to get quick traction. The internet allows anyone to access global communications easily and cheaply. It is also a medium that can be so easily abused and used to spread false and damaging information.

Traditional media is losing its audience, losing advertising, and shrinking newsrooms. “This is opening the space for social media to have more impact,” Harber said.

For example, in the small town of Veles, Macedonia, 140 fake websites were created to deal with American politics during the US election campaign, Harber said. “They aggressively published pro-Trump content aimed at conservatives and Trump supporters in the US.”

The people who ran the sites were doing it for money. The best way for their stories to go viral was to publish sensationalist, often false, content that catered to Trump supporters. This played a significant role in propagating false and misleading election information.

At this time, fake news gained traction over factual, sound, investigative pieces, said Harber. The fake sites looked real, but they seldom listed an owner or an editor. They were new sites, and most of them closed a week after the election.

Many fake news sites sprung up in South Africa during the conflict over the ANC presidency and the fight

of former President Jacob Zuma and the Guptas to survive. The Gupta family hired public relations company Bell Pottinger, which Harber said was part of a deliberate attempt to influence the political climate through the systematic and deliberate spreading of false information.

Journalists at the time faced a barrage of bots – robots or fake robotic social media sites and personalities – that spread information.

Many were closed by Twitter, but as next year’s elections approach, they might pick up again, Harber cautioned.

He said it was up to individuals themselves to fact check, and deal with fake news by supporting the work of fact checking operators which are being set up around the world. Africa Check, of which Harber is a Director, is one of them.

The internet provides tools to check facts, and journalists are encouraged to use these tools.

Never share anything on social media, Harber warned, unless it comes from a reliable source.

People should learn how to spot a fake site by checking the URL, the name of the site, and by making sure it’s real. If there are names of writers or editors, Google them to see if they are real.

One should also *Google* to check if the story is on other credible sites like *BBC*, *CNN* or the *New York Times*.

Harber said anonymity is a warning sign. If you can’t see whose site it is, or who has written the content, be careful.

“It requires close scrutiny,” he said, “It is up to us to obey the first rule of journalism, which is to be sceptical.”



In the past week or two, Harber said, Trump had been going on about the caravan of people marching towards America. Trump was “using lies and untruths... saying they are infested with criminals and rapists, and people from the Middle East, none of which has any evidence to back it up”.

“We tend to laugh at Trump... but he is stoking fear around migrants... And worryingly, linking this fear of migrants and ‘the other’ to anti-Semitism by pointing to George Soros as the funder of the caravan. “It is not surprising, then, when a crazy man so worked up about

of the Witwatersrand, said people have been known to create false information, but “when it’s deliberate, and it’s for reasons of political or personal gain, that’s what we mean these days by fake news”.

“Politicians using untruths to achieve their aims is not a new thing,” he said reminding the audience of Richard Nixon’s statement, “I’m not a crook”; or Bill Clinton’s “I did not have sex with that woman”.

“This is the post-truth age,” said Harber, in which emotion and personal beliefs override objective facts. Three things have changed

Harris, newly graduated and needing cash, sat down at his kitchen table with his laptop, and wrote a headline which said that tens of thousands of fraudulent Hillary Clinton votes were found in an Ohio warehouse. He published it on the ChristianTimesNewspaper site alongside fake pictures of ballot boxes. He then shared this on social media, and it went viral, eventually being seen by six million people.

“He did it for a simple thing, he needed cash,” said Harber. Every time someone clicked on his site, he earned money. In the end, he earned \$100 000 (R1.4 million).



# Israeli apes draw the crowds

PETA KROST MAUNDER

There are four young Israelis living in Pretoria who have caused quite a stir – not least of all because they are housed at the National Zoological Gardens of South Africa (NZG). Three of them hail from Tel Aviv, and one from Jerusalem. And, their every move is monitored as they are on constant display, with people coming from all over to see them.

The reason is simple. Two of them – Louie and Asali – are huge, beautiful male Western lowland gorillas from Ramat Gan Zoo in Tel Aviv. They arrived at the NZG in 2010, and have set up home with two Swiss nationals.

The other two, Joran and Abshalom, are young male chimpanzees. They are more recent immigrants, one from Ramat Gan Zoo, and the other from the Tisch Family Zoo in Jerusalem. They arrived in South Africa in December 2015, and the zoo has had quite a challenge getting them acquainted as they had never met before.

“We had to be very cautious because chimps can be vicious, and hugely competitive if they don’t know each other,” says Craig Allenby, the acting manager director of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) at NZG. “So, they got acquainted through bars until this year, when we let them interact with each other and live together.” It was best friends at first sight, according to Allenby.



“From the moment they were allowed to be with one another, they have been great pals. They get on famously, playing with each other all the time. This will be the first holiday season that people will be able to see them together.”

Abshalom loves to groom Joran and himself when they are outside, says Allenby. Joran prefers dry leaves for his nesting material, steering away from fresh banana leaves. As for nourishment, Joran prefers fresh food, while Abshalom is fonder of boiled vegetables.

Of the two, Abshalom is the dominant one, and is the first to go into the night rooms. He will fetch Joran if he doesn’t follow him.

While they both love cold yoghurt and ice lollies filled with raisins, neither are fans of rain and thunderstorms.

The Israeli gorillas were placed at the NZG by the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums eight years ago, and form part of their studbook. Louie and Asali are both big boys, with Louie weighing 260kg and Asali 200kg.

They are doing very well at the NZG, and are great pals with each other and their Swiss mates, Bonsi and Binga, who also arrived in 2010.

While Louie is attempting to become the dominant male, it is Asali who likes to play and beat his chest. They both love boiled eggs, oranges, celery, and yoghurt. They also have a penchant for peanut butter in cones, and use twigs to dig it out from the cones. They dislike onions, but love popcorn.



“They make nests in the night rooms, and don’t want to be separated from each other,” says Allenby. “They have access to each other throughout the night.”

The gorillas understand commands, and respond to being called. “We are able to call the gorillas to come into their night rooms,” says Allenby. “They have a close bond, which means that they don’t hurt each other.”

Having said that, Asali enjoys bathing, playing with water, and splashing Louie. Louie, however, is a bit like a naughty child, and can be destructive. He likes bamboo to eat and play with, and enjoys banana leaves and stems.

These four young sabras have captivated NZG zoo goers, who make a beeline for the adorable Middle Eastern apes.



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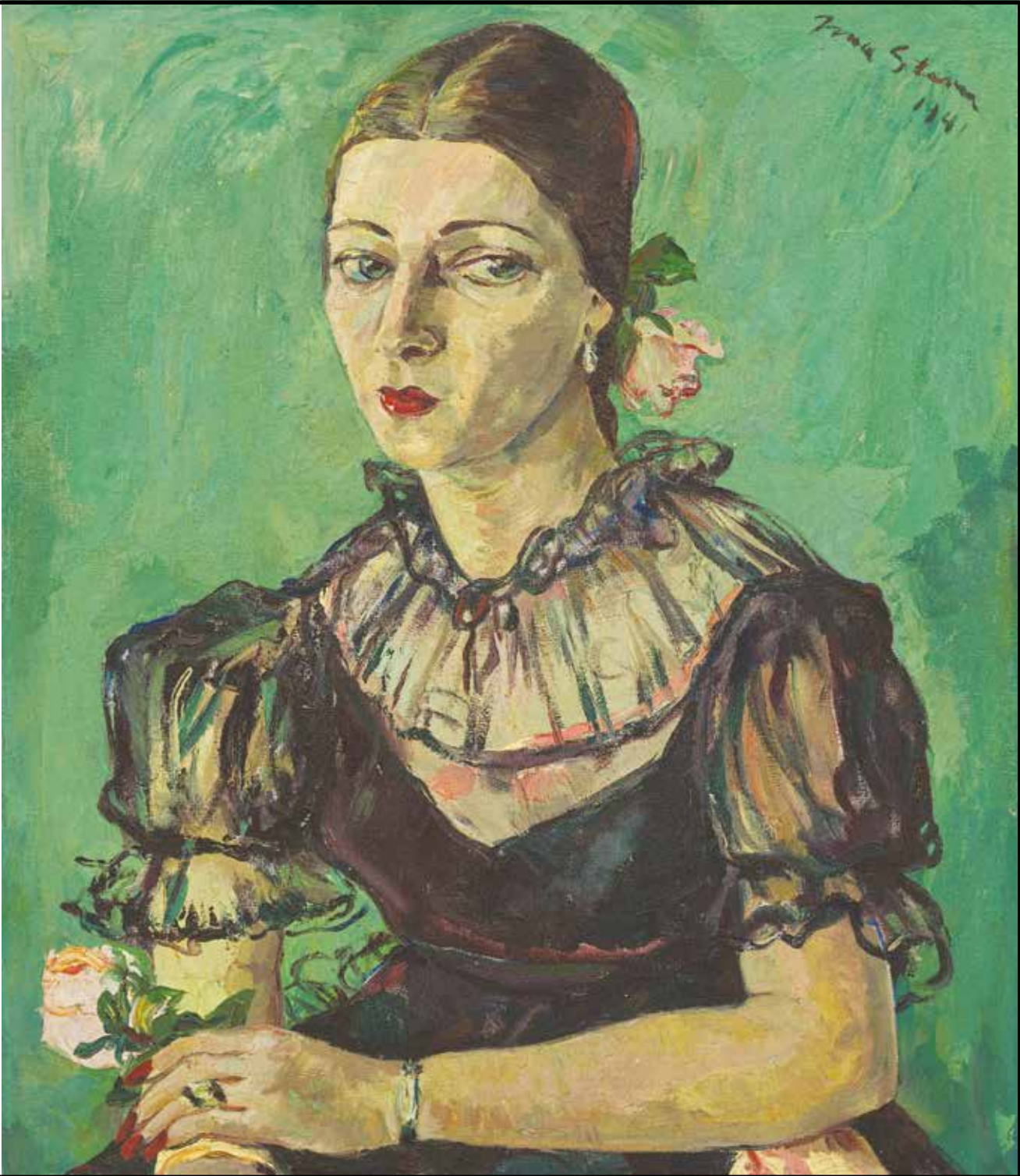
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# Mayfair’s Muslim subjects resonate with film’s Jewish director

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

A local gangster movie that delves into family relationships and moral ambiguity in the Muslim community is already sparking international attention. So, too, is Sara Blecher, the film’s acclaimed Jewish female director.

“It’s funny, I’ve done all these movies about all these different things, and this is the closest to being about me,” Blecher says, of the movie, titled *Mayfair*, which features a father and son in conflict with one another and with themselves.

“You’d think it would be the one that would be the furthest away. But in making *Mayfair*, I learned that Jews and Muslims are not so foreign to each other. The way families operate in Jewish society is exactly the same way families operate in Muslim society. The way they think, their world view, and the way they love is the same. This is a story about family, about the relationship between a father and son. They’re exactly the same as us.”

Having already been invited to participate in three global film festivals, including the prestigious BFI London Film Festival, *Mayfair* is putting the South African film industry in the spotlight. For Blecher, the director behind such critically acclaimed films as *Otelo Burning*, *Ayanda* and *Dis ek, Anna*, *Mayfair* is the film that most strongly resonates with her own experiences.

Blecher hasn’t had the typical South African Jewish experience, however. “My family emigrated to the United States in 1981, when I was 12,” she says. “I went to high school in New York, and then to NYU film school, which was such a privilege.

“Growing up in New York in the ‘80s is a little bit different from growing up in Greenside in the ‘80s. I think my life took a completely different trajectory because I grew up in New York. It gave me a much more worldly perspective.”

Yet, even after spending her formative years overseas, Blecher chose to come back to South Africa to build her life and career. “My identity and my heart is completely South African,” she says. “I chose to come back and live here because I love this place, and I want to be part of it.”

“Yet recently, Blecher’s been struggling with her South African identity. “It’s all very well to be part of somewhere when that place accepts you, but when you feel rejected, it becomes difficult,” she says. “I’ve been feeling like being white means you’re no longer part of this country. That’s quite difficult to grapple with – especially for a person like me, who came back. The feeling that you’re no longer valid.”

For Blecher, this feeling of displacement was heightened when she was selected to represent South Africa as part of a group of BRICS filmmakers. “I was selected as the woman to represent South Africa, and there was a huge backlash against my selection on the basis that I was white. People felt they shouldn’t select a white woman. It suddenly made me think, if I can’t be South African, who am I?”

Having already explored her

Lithuanian roots when she directed the South African version of the BBC genealogy series, *Who do you think you are?*, Blecher was disillusioned by the home of her ancestors.

“It was the first time I’d ever gone to Lithuania, and it was so awful,” she recalls, “hearing the stories and seeing what had happened to the Jews there. My whole life, I’d kind of felt like that was where I was from, and when I got there, it just wasn’t. So I’m definitely not Lithuanian, I certainly don’t feel American. South Africa is where I’m from.

“But recently, I’ve been asking, ‘Where should I be? What am I?’” A mother of three, Blecher says her two older children have both left South Africa. “They both felt like there was no place for young, white people to get work here. My daughter lives in London, England, and has a fantastic job and my son is working for SpaceX in Los Angeles. For them, it was like, ‘If you don’t want me, I don’t belong here.’ But I’ve got blood here. It’s not so simple.”

For Blecher, being a filmmaker was more of a calling than a logical decision. “You have to have perseverance to succeed in film here, because it’s a very tough industry. What it costs to make films versus what films can earn in South Africa doesn’t match. I keep asking myself why I don’t go and do something else? Why I don’t have a nine-to-five

career? But, there’s something in me that has to come out, and the only way to do that is to make films. If I could do something else, I definitely would,” she laughs. “You do it because you can’t not do it.”

As the founder and chairperson of

need women to show women taking control of their own lives, not always being victims or objects of sexual pleasure for men. Showing women in a different way is how things change. This country can’t carry on the way it is.”

that raises the children.”

Blecher also speaks of the struggles that come with three children living on different continents. “That’s the way of the modern world. I can’t limit their opportunities, so I’ve got to find a way to be in all those places.”



Ronak Patani as Zaid Randera in *Mayfair*

Sara Blecher

SWIFT (Sisters Working In Film and Television), Blecher is dedicated to empowering other women in the industry. “That’s critical

if you live in a country like this, with high levels of violence against women,” she says. “We need more women in the industry, and the only way to accomplish this is to make the industry safer for women.

“People become what they see represented on screens and on TV. We

While her two older children live overseas, Blecher’s younger daughter is still at school. She credits her husband for the parenting support he provides while she pursues a demanding career with frequent travel.

“I wouldn’t manage without him,” she says. “I think for all women, balancing a career and kids is just about how good you are at juggling. It’s not actually possible, but everyone does it because you have to. A marriage needs to be a partnership. That’s got to be the way of the modern world, it can’t be an expectation that it’s just the woman

Blecher also emphasises of the importance of family in Judaism. “I’d never do anything to jeopardise my family,” she says. “Being Jewish is my worldview, so of course it has an impact on everything, just like being a woman has an impact on the way you see the world and what you find interesting. So does every part of your life experience, really. The melting pot of all those things come into play.”

“I really do hope I do a film that delves into being Jewish one day,” she says. “Maybe the next one, who knows?”

• *Mayfair* is in cinemas now.

## Israeli legislators debate American anti-Semitism without American input

SAM SOKOL

In the wake of the deadly shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue on 27 October, Israeli legislators gathered for a special meeting to discuss anti-Semitism in America.

It was dialogue that at times grew heated. Politicians yelled at each other, and argued about the definition of anti-Semitism, the occupation, and the movement to boycott Israel, or Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. What they didn’t do was hear from the American Jews at the hearing.

The murder of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Congregation prompted not just anguish here and in the United States, but a series of debates between and about Israel and the diaspora. Some accused senior Israeli officials who attended commemorations in Pittsburgh of using the occasion to support President Donald Trump. The officials suggested in response that American Jews were being unfair in holding Trump, a close ally of Israel, responsible for the climate in which the shooter became radicalised.

American and Israeli Jews also disagreed among themselves and with each other about what represents the biggest threat to American Jews: anti-Semitism on the far-right, or virulent anti-Israelism on the far left.

That was the backdrop to the Knesset’s Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee’s meeting on Monday.

At one point, Mossi Raz of the left-wing Meretz party angrily asked Committee Chair Avraham Neguise, who had spoken about anti-Semitism in the BDS movement, if he thought that Raz was an anti-Semite because he supports a settlement boycott.

While representatives of the Jewish Federations of North America, the American Jewish

Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League attended the session, none of them addressed the Israeli legislators.

Instead, the committee heard from the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, which largely raises funds for Israel among evangelical Christians, and the Israeli Jewish Congress, or IJC.

“I don’t have any answers and moreover, if I did, do not think it is appropriate for me, for us, as Israelis, to dictate or offer solutions,” IJC Executive Director Arsen Ostrovsky told the lawmakers. “We need to be here first and foremost to show our unity and solidarity. When I spoke with colleagues, partners, and other Jewish leaders in America, asking what message can we convey to you here today, the response was a resounding, ‘Listen, listen, listen. Please listen to us’.”

While the legislators did not hear from their American co-religionists, several, including Nachman Shai of Labor, issued calls for Israeli action against anti-Semitism, stating that “the state must act and protect Jewish communities around the world”.

However, few if any concrete proposals were put forward. Several attendees, including government and civil society representatives, described the meeting as a waste of time, noting a few issues that did not come up: Trump’s divisive rhetoric, his failure to appoint a White House Jewish liaison, and the long-promised and still delayed appointment of a US special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism.

Under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli government has been “very shy of criticising the administration”, opposition Knesset member Ksenia Svetlova complained. She called on Netanyahu to be more outspoken on the tenor of the discourse in the US and other countries, especially in Eastern Europe.

“We have to be more firm in our statements regarding what is happening, what we expect,” Svetlova said. “Our government is just shutting up.”

While Israel cannot be expected to provide physical security for Jews abroad, it can use its good relations with counterparts to “pressure the relevant governments to provide more security, not only by putting armed guards and more weapons at these places, but by providing the sense that we are not going to let these maniacs continue what they are doing”, she told *JTA*.

While he was unable to attend, David Friedman, the US Ambassador to Israel, sent the committee a letter calling the Trump administration “fully committed to combating anti-Semitism wherever it exists”. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, he wrote, was co-operating with the Israelis to “identify and stop those who would terrorise or threaten Jewish people in the US, whether those threats come from within the US, from here in Israel, or elsewhere in the world”.

Former Knesset member Dov Lipman was at the Israeli discussion, and said he was taken aback by the lack of American speakers. He told *JTA* that the way for Israel to become involved should be by asking, “How can Israel help you?”, not projecting and suggesting what is needed. There needs to be a dialogue.

Dan Shapiro, the former US Ambassador to Israel, who recently wrote an op-ed in the *Forward* telling Israelis that their “job is to listen”, did not attend the meeting, but agreed with this general idea.

“The events of Pittsburgh, and the aftermath, underscore the importance of a dialogue between Israel and American Jews that is respectful and characterised by listening in which Israelis don’t insert themselves into American politics,” he said.

Continued on page 16>>





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# Battle stories a way of preserving the memory of those who served

JORDAN MOSHE

At eleven o'clock this coming Sunday – the 11th day of the 11th month – communities around the world observe a moment of silence in memory of members of their armed forces who have died in the line of duty. Remembrance Day is dedicated to all those who have fallen in armed conflict, among them many Jewish soldiers.

While South African Jewish soldiers certainly made their mark, Lt. Col. William Bergman is concerned that the rich history of Jewish servicemen may die out if the South African Jewish Ex-Servicemen's League becomes obsolete.

“We must find a way to preserve these stories. It's our history, and our heritage. We can't let them disappear,” says Bergman, the Chairperson of the Johannesburg branch of the league.

At 82, this highly decorated and respected war veteran and recipient of the South African Military Merit Medal, admits that the league's days are numbered because there are fewer surviving war veterans. But, he says he would rather the group faded completely than add members as the result of further conflicts. “If the league is gone because there is no more war, I'll be happy,” he says, just as long as the memories survive.

Bergman, who regularly gives presentations on Jews in the South African forces, says that the presence of Jews in the armed forces dates back as far as the era of Jan van Riebeeck. From the Boer Wars to World Wars, South African Jews were very involved in war efforts and took up arms for their country.

Regarding World War I, Bergman says, “From a population of 50 000 Jews at that time, 3 000 volunteered for the Union Defence Force. This was 6% of the Jewish population.” These staggering statistics were replicated in the subsequent conflict, World War II. “Ten percent of the Jewish community volunteered, while the South African National average was 7%,” he says. “The Jewish community was very much a part of the war effort.”

The stories which emerge among those who served paint vivid portraits of wartime experience and the mark made by Jewish servicemen.

One such individual is Capetonian Solly Zuckerman, whose tale is recorded in the journals of the league. When World War II broke out in 1939, Zuckerman was lecturing anatomy in Oxford. The author of about 90 scientific papers, he was approached by the British government, and authorised to investigate the physiological and economic effects of bombing, helping the British forces to improve their strategy, and make their raids against the axis powers more effective.

Working closely with the air force, Zuckerman helped plan the bombing and capture of Sicily (the outcome of which was successful); devised a secret operation to hamper German advancement in France; and effectively brought the axis movement to a halt. His reputation became so great, his plans came to the attention of the highest levels possible, including Winston Churchill,

Dwight Eisenhower, and Arthur Tedder, Eisenhower's deputy, with whom Zuckerman worked closely. His plans were so effective, British Judge Lord Scarman wrote in 1993, “The Zuckerman/Tedder partnership was, in truth, a war winner.”

In another account, fragments of a Sefer Torah found in Tunisia brought together two air force pilots who shared not only history, but their names. Jack Friedman and Jack Friedman, both South Africans, discovered in 2000 that they had served alongside one another in the Western Desert during World War II, but had never met, and were brought together by a desecrated Tunisian shul.

Unbeknown to each other, both had discovered fragments of a torn Torah scroll in Nazi anti-aircraft gun pits, “mementos” carried there by soldiers after they had desecrated a nearby shul. These soldiers had subsequently been killed by a British air raid on the site, and both Friedmans individually came across



A group of Russian volunteers, including a number of Jews, during the Anglo-Boer War

the fragments, and kept them. Although one of the men lost his set of fragments during operational travel, the other brought his to Cape Town, where they remain housed in a glass case in Temple Israel.

Still others recount details of a subject seemingly not relevant to wartime – shopping. Willie Mann, who joined the forces at Touws River in 1940, gathered souvenirs as he and his company advanced across Africa. From a lion skin to silk stockings, Mann spent his army pay on mementos and gifts to send home to his family as the war progressed.

“We were on a buying spree,” he writes. “In Nairobi, I bought a magnificent lion skin. In Egypt, silk stockings for my sister. Deep in the desert, I had a magnificent sleeping bag bought in Cairo, made up of silk and genuine feathers.” However, every time the company had to move at a moment's notice, all these surplus goods had to be left behind, and the buying would begin anew when they next set up camp. “Everything we own, have borrowed, or lifted, gets left behind,” writes Mann. “Lost property? There's a stack of mine scattered about Africa and Europe.”

These are just some of the unique Jewish personalities whose names appear throughout the narratives of the conflicts South Africa engaged in. Even Bergman's own father, Warrant Officer Jack Bergman, served in the Rand Light Infantry during World War II.

“He was very much a military

man. He was one of the first South Africans to leave to go up north,” says Bergman. “He served in Africa, and Italy. He never spoke much about the war to me, but when all his pals congregated after the war, they would often reflect on what happened. I was only three years old when he left, and so didn't quite know him when he came back.”

Says Bergman, “I was brought up in an almost military fashion. While he was fair and warm, he liked things in order. He very much believed in proper behaviour, and how to treat others. You stand when a woman walks into the room. No question.” With this strong army influence, Bergman would go on to join the South African National Defence Forces himself a few years later, bringing his expertise as an engineer to his service, and serving in the force during the South African border war with Angola.

“Being a soldier is about comradeship,” he says. “We do our duty, but serve alongside one another as people. The army is a group, but it is made up of individuals. Each one has a story.”

## Dr Boudnitski: a war heroine in our midst

JORDAN MOSHE

Dr Tsipra Boudnitski served as a military doctor in the Red Army during World War II and its immediate aftermath. The Russian government has given her numerous medals for her work in the war. In fact, 15 medals adorn a red shirt which is kept on display in her room in Sandringham Gardens.

Boudnitski is 94, and few of those around her in the home for the elderly have a real understanding of who this woman really is. Other than her medals, she has been repeatedly recognised as a top-rate doctor, professor, radiology consultant, and teacher.

At the outset of her discussion with the *SA Jewish Report*, she stresses that her advanced age has left her quite delicate. “I'm not really well. I have weakness. I remember plenty *tzorres* (troubles). But I drink the tablets the doctors give me, and I can still feel my heart and my brain. That helps me.”

In spite of the challenges ageing has brought, Boudnitski's story speaks of a woman who is larger than life.

Born in the Ukraine in 1923, Boudnitski recalls a childhood spent swimming in the Dnieper and Desner rivers, of helping her mother keep house, making borscht, and playing soccer in the street with local boys. Although she learnt about Judaism from her parents, none of them dared to disclose to anyone that they were Jewish.

While studying medicine, Boudnitski volunteered to be one of 12 students that Moscow University would send to work in hospitals as members of the Red Army. She says, “When they told us they needed students to work, I put my hand up. When I came to my parents and told them, they argued with me. They told me, ‘You have a brain! Why did you choose to do this?’ But I couldn't say I wouldn't do it. I had to.”

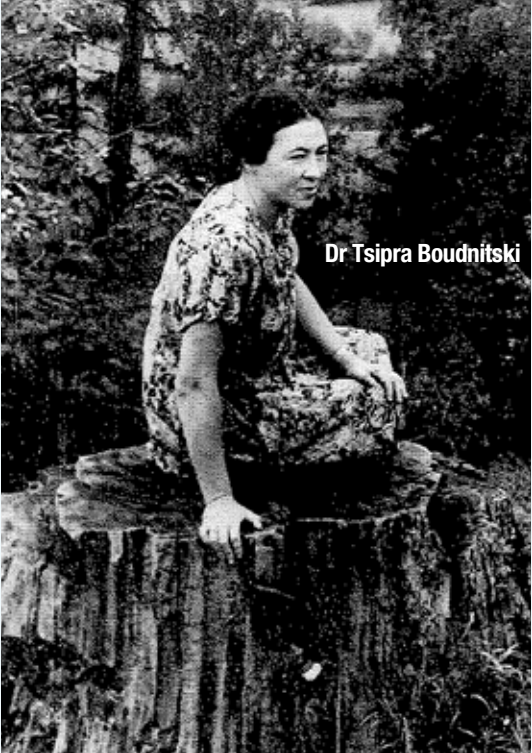
In 1941, her enthusiasm led her to a hospital in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, where she helped treat wounded soldiers, many of whom could not be rehabilitated. “There were about 75 of them,” she says. “I worked with doctors and other students to look after them. It was hard, and I worked even at night.”

She served in the Red Army for five years, and recalls this time with little fondness. Hardly surprising, considering that Germany broke its pact with Russia, and launched air assaults against the country. “The time in the army was not good,” she

says. “So many people were hurt, sick, and dying. There was sometimes nothing we could do for them. So many suffered. So many.”

Still, she remained in Kazakhstan until the end of the war, studying in the morning and working in the afternoon. Towards the war's end, Boudnitski contracted malaria, and was advised to return to Moscow. “I went back to my parents, and I finished my studies in four months.” She qualified as a physician the year the war ended, and shortly thereafter as a radiologist.

Boudnitski threw herself into aiding her countrymen who had been affected by the Nazi invasion of Russia, and the famine which gripped the country following the war. Together with her



Dr Tsipra Boudnitski

medical colleagues, she administered medical treatment to war survivors. She witnessed the horrific scenes of newly-liberated death camps as the Russian forces rooted out remaining Nazi forces, all the while saving the lives of sick and malnourished survivors.

Boudnitski then met and married her husband, Joseph, an eminent scientist and academic who was involved in the development of classified technology and engineering projects, including the Kosmos rocket. They had two children, and

remained devoted to their respective professions for decades to follow. Boudnitski practised as a medical doctor, radiologist, and professor of medicine until she was pensioned at the age of 60. Her husband continued his work until the age of 71.

It was at this point that their son, Vladimir, urged his parents to emigrate to South Africa, a country to which he had been sent through work for Microsoft Los Angeles. “He said that Johannesburg was very nice,” says Boudnitski, “and that we should come here because it is beautiful and better than the difficult life in Russia.” She and her husband submitted applications for the necessary visas, and though hers was approved within a month, it took five years for her husband to receive approval.

The couple arrived in South Africa in the late 1990s. Although neither of them spoke a word of English, they strove to make the most of their new lives.

Because she was not English-proficient, Boudnitski was unable to obtain a licence to practice medicine. Yet, no matter what she faced, Boudnitski was determined not to return to Russia, a country for which both she and her son felt intense dislike. “Russia, I don't miss,” she says. “It's very hard there. The *tzorres* there is too much, and there was always hunger, poverty, and sickness.”

After her husband died of a heart attack in 1993, a close friend and fellow countrywoman, Bronia Talesnick, suggested that she move into Sandringham Gardens. It was there that she found an opportunity to put her medical training to use, checking the blood pressure of staff and fellow residents regularly and voluntarily.

Despite her age, Boudnitski remains as active as possible, and continues to be recognised for her lifetime of achievements.

“The Russian ambassador has met me many times,” she says. “The Russian government has given me medals for my medical work, and for serving in the war.” She has attended several local memorials and Russian events, and is one of only a handful of people still around to be part of them.

Boudnitski will turn 95 next month, but is determined to prevent too many people from finding this out. “It's a secret. I don't want anything, not a party. Every year the Russian embassy fetches me, and has a party for me. I don't want it.”

“I am a doctor,” she concludes. “But now I'm almost 95, and I feel it. I use a walker, and my life is difficult. But I am a doctor, and I share my story.”



# British Parliament honours South African-born rabbi on retirement

JOE MILLIS AND NICOLA MILTZ

Popular South African-born Rabbi Barry Marcus of Central Synagogue in Great Portland Street was honoured recently to mark his retirement. The well-known rabbi retired from his iconic London shul after 25 years, and stepped down from pastoral duties. He was honoured at a reception at the House of Commons.



Rabbi Barry Marcus with Michael Grove MP

At his side on the day were his five daughters, all of whom were born in South Africa, and their spouses. British Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Gove, formerly Secretary of State for Education, hosted the event, and led the tributes to “a truly wonderful man”. He said Marcus had led the way in “opening the eyes and awakening the conscience of the next generation” through his educational programme. Marcus, who was awarded an MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 2015 for his work in Holocaust education, is well-known to a generation of non-Jewish school children for leading more than 200 trips to Auschwitz, describing to 30 000 students the horrors of the Shoah.

The *SA Jewish Report* tracked him down this week on route to Auschwitz, accompanying a large group of students. He said he may be retired, but his Holocaust Educational Trust (HET) work would continue. Born and bred in Cape Town, Marcus stepped down from his shul role this month, becoming an emeritus rabbi. He said he would continue leading HET lessons with Auschwitz trips, 20 years after he pioneered the model. His sister, Ruth Rozowski of Sydenham, said he visited South Africa whenever he had a chance, and stayed with her each time. “He has strong connections to South Africa, and comes fairly often to visit. He was here in July.”

Marcus was rabbi of Waverley Shul before he and his family made aliyah in 1986. He was instrumental in setting up the Waverley Crisis Centre many years ago. Dozens of people gathered at the Houses of Parliament to bid farewell to this long-serving senior rabbi. The reception was attended by Lords Pickles, Howard and Polak; Ian Austin MP; and family and friends from the UK, Israel, the United States and South Africa. Gove paid warm tribute to Marcus, who said he would divide his time between the UK and Israel. Gove reiterated the importance of Marcus’s Holocaust education work at a time when, he said, “unfortunately, anti-Semitism has returned to our streets, social media, and on the continent”. “No one has brought home to the next generation the importance of Holocaust education as Barry has through his work with the Holocaust Educational Trust,” he said. “He is opening [the] eyes and ears of the next generation by organising visits to Auschwitz and arranging talks in schools by Holocaust survivors.” One of those survivors, Harry Olmer, was among the guests at the reception in the Churchill Room of the House. Said Gove, “Rabbi Marcus may be retiring, but he is not retiring by nature, and he will ensure that HET’s invaluable work continues.”

Among the HET projects Gove noted was the collaboration with Chelsea Football Club, which has taken more than 140 supporters and staff on a trip to Auschwitz as part of its “Say No To Anti-Semitism” programme. A clearly emotional Marcus said that it had been a “privilege to engage with pupils and teachers up and down the country”. When he started working on Holocaust education 20 years ago, some in the community had reservations about the one-day trips to Auschwitz he was arranging. But now, he said, “only yesterday the 200th one-day trip to Auschwitz took place”. Marcus – who describes himself as an “optimist” – recalled that when he travelled to Northern Ireland for the first time 18 years ago to accompany a school group to Auschwitz, “at Belfast airport, there were two groups of pupils, one Catholic, the other Protestant, and they didn’t mix”. “When we came back, at Kraków airport, they all stood together. This shows what can be done through dialogue.”

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## BDS golf-day antics led to cancelling charity event

>> Continued from page 3

“Sadly, despite the best efforts of the officials of Food for the Soul, they have been unable to obtain the requisite commitment from the organisation [BDS], to the satisfaction of the Houghton Golf Club Committee. “The committee has accordingly made a decision to cancel the golf day to ensure the safety of its members and the security of its property.” Diamond told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that the whole incident had been “very painful”. The club and its committee have not commented further. Food for the Soul said, “As a small charity fundraiser, we would like to be respectful to all parties and reserve our comment.” This week, patrons of the prestigious golf course, one of South Africa’s premier golfing venues, are facing extra security checks upon entering the club. Organisers of golf days are having to provide client lists for security purposes at the gate. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies said it was “encouraged by the decision of the Houghton Golf Club not to surrender to the crass intimidation and

unscrupulous misrepresentations on the part of BDS SA”. National Chairperson Wendy Kahn said, “Its typically underhand tactic of representing itself as the organiser of the golf day in its social media posts again highlights the shameless dishonesty of this organisation, which was so brazen as to display its logo on the advertisement for the event, concealing the name of the real organiser by printing its own name over it. “This flagrant misrepresentation should be exposed as yet another of its manipulative attempts to attract attention regardless of whether a bona fide charitable or human-rights cause is undermined in the process. She said the board had for years publicised the “aggressive, abusive, and cynically dishonest manner” in which BDS acted against members of the community, and “anyone else who declines to endorse its radical anti-Israel ideology”. “The saddest thing about this debacle is that worthy recipients of this golf day have been deprived of the prospect of receiving much-needed funding,” Kahn said.

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# Magda Wierzycka reveals Polish Jewish connections

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Growing up in Poland, outspoken anti-corruption billionaire businesswoman, Magda Wierzycka, had no idea that her father and grandparents were Jewish.

“I heard only when I arrived in South Africa and my father decided to break the huge family secret,” the chief executive of asset management company Sygnia said at a Bnoth Zion WIZO Gilah branch personality tea at the Hellenic Sports Club in Cape Town on Tuesday.

The country’s leading businesswoman, who arrived as a 13-year-old refugee in the 1980s, now runs a fintech company with R1.8 billion in assets under management and administration.

Born into a prosperous family in Lvov in 1970, Wierzycka regarded her first 12 years as “fairly idyllic”.

In spite of having Jewish family, she learnt about Judaism through her first boyfriend. “He was a very observant Jewish guy, and I learned everything about keeping separate in the kitchen, the rituals, and the merging of religious and national identities, which is fairly unique,” she told the gathering.

Wierzycka related that most of her father’s family perished during World War II, aside from her father, his sister, and their parents. Her grandmother, Helena, had been in a concentration camp. She died two years ago at the age of 95.

Not long before she passed away, Wierzycka and her siblings went to Poland and taped the grandmother’s oral history. “Everyone who survived the Holocaust has a story, and every story deserves a book,” she said. “She’s probably the person I respect the most, and would like to emulate the most.”

Her paternal grandparents, who had escaped to Russia, wanted to go back to Poland after the war, and opted to stay in spite of the country “even today” being openly anti-Semitic. “In Poland, if you switch on the TV, within half an hour something anti-Semitic is said. This pervasive anti-Semitism against a people who are no longer there, is completely incomprehensible to me. That’s why I don’t go back,” she said. “I’d rather fly my aunt and cousin here, or meet them in London.”

In the early 1980s, the Polish economy started deteriorating, and the country began running out of food. “We were all issued with postage stamps allowing, for example, a kilogram of meat per month per family member, or sugar.

“We had to queue in front of empty shops for two days waiting for food to be delivered,” she recalled. It was then that her father decided that it was time to leave.

This could be done only illegally and at night, and without telling anybody, as during that period, only one family member was allowed to leave at a time. “My father decided to cross the border in the middle of the night. We took a train, and landed up in Vienna.

The family spent eight or nine months in military barracks while applying to various countries for admission. It was there that they spotted an advert by the South African government offering jobs.

Her parents, both doctors, decided that, in spite of not knowing anything about the country, they would at least be employed in their professions. Arriving with \$500 (R7 000) and a couple of cases, it took them five years to rebuild their lives.

“They didn’t speak any English. They didn’t have a lot of time to dedicate to our lives, so we had to get on with it very early on,” she recalled.

But Wierzycka was determined and smart, and made her way in the business world.

Displaying the fearless outspokenness for which she has become renowned in recent years, as a young actuary two months into her first job, Wierzycka demanded an investigation into the sexual harassment that was prevalent in the company.

“They agreed to it, but said that if I didn’t stop talking, they would make sure that I never worked in South Africa again. That was not really the sort of company I wanted to work for,” she said.

Turning her attention to current events, Wierzycka expressed her disappointment in the business community, and the fact that it does not involve itself in politics. “I’ve never perceived myself or Sygnia



as being a big part of the business community – no-one’s ever done us any favours.

“It wasn’t difficult to be a little bit of an island. I’m still the majority shareholder in the company, so I don’t have to bow down to other shareholders.”

When Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan was fired by former President Jacob Zuma in March 2017, she felt it was time for business to take a stand. “I decided to write an article [in *Daily Maverick*] on what we should do as a nation.

“Suddenly, I discovered Twitter and the power of social media,” she recalled, “so I started writing more.”

At one point, Business Leadership South Africa invited her to a meeting, and told her, “You’re on your own – you’re naïve.

“Business will adapt to whatever environment we’re in, so if there’s an

environment of paying bribes, we’ll do so. No-one will take the ethical, moral stand that you’re taking, but you’re welcome to join us.”

“I decided not to,” said Wierzycka. Speaking of the rampant corruption during the Zuma years, she said Zuma made it an “acceptable way of doing business”.

“What I think caught a lot of people by surprise was the participation of the private sector in Project Zuma. None of it would have happened without some large global companies, some with South African roots, actively participating.”

Commending President Cyril Ramaphosa as “methodical” and “doing the right things”, she cautioned, “Things are happening, but you can’t underestimate the amount of pushback in the ANC and the municipalities because so many were on the take.”

On the land question, she maintained that, “No-one’s going to be invading farms or confiscating land – not on Cyril’s watch.” There would, however, be no “soft landing” for the economy.

As for the Guptas, Wierzycka opined that they should be extradited from Dubai, but not in the next two years. “Before we touch them, we have to have a rock-solid case, solid prosecutors, solid evidence.

“It’s a process you’ve got to run with competent people, which the NPA doesn’t have at the moment, so there’s no point in touching them now.”

In spite of the country’s problems, she said, “I am an optimist. I still think Cape Town is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else. There are a lot of opportunities here.”

## Freedom, depression, and history – all in one Jewish novel

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

What started as a salve for depression has become an all-consuming passion for businessman and author Hugh Liebenthal.

Liebenthal, in conversation with his son, Jayson, took us on the journey that became his fifth book and first novel, *Ticket to Freedom?* at its launch at the Jacob Gitlin Library in Gardens, Cape Town, recently.

“My writing career started about 10 years ago,” he says. “I recognised that it is the best therapy. The only escape from the depression was to write down my feelings.”

His book, he says, only partly factual, is the story of South African Jewry arriving in this country, not knowing the language, and settling in small towns.

*Ticket to Freedom?* revolves around the fictional story of a young couple, Morris Froman, 20, and Bertha Levin, 19, who had entered into an arranged marriage. It begins in the late 1800s in Russia, a time when the political situation in Eastern Europe was explosive, and things were very bad for the Jews. “Everyone was in a panic, and trying to get out,” says Liebenthal.

“They were introducing the May Laws, which stipulated what Jews were and were not allowed to do. There was very little they were allowed to do. This part of the story is 100% factual,” he says.

The May Laws included the forced removal of hundreds of thousands of Jews to rural areas. Only those considered useful to the government were permitted to reside in the two major cities of Moscow and St Petersburg.

“Everyone assumed that Morris was a ‘klutz’,” says Liebenthal, “but he wasn’t. In fact, he was secretly making plans to leave Russia.”

The couple made their way to the Baltic port

of Libau (Liepāja), and boarded a ship to London, where they stayed in the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter among 1 400 other hopefuls. They had to find their own way to Southampton, and wait for a cargo ship to arrive.

The community decided that it would club together, and give the young couple the opportunity to go to what it called Zuid Afrika.

Liebenthal, 63, was in fact born in Vryburg, in the then Northern Cape. The family relocated to Klerksdorp in 1969, and after matriculating in 1972, he attended Wits Technikon, where he was the only student studying plastics technology.

He subsequently started his own company, and was in the plastics industry for 20 years. He has been in the printing industry for the past 27 years.

Liebenthal relates that at the age of 45, he suffered a heart attack, followed by severe depression. He underwent the electroconvulsive therapy treatments (ECT) that were given at the time to manage the illness. Between six and eight treatments were given per episode. Liebenthal says he had a total of 33.

A chapter at the end of the book is based on his experiences with ECT, when a female character, Kate, undergoes the treatment.

Liebenthal says that he writes late at night, and carries on “until my head is empty. It feels like the ink just flows from the pen”.

The best part of the process is creating the various characters. Surprisingly, his first order of business is to decide on the title, and things progress from there.

Liebenthal’s favourite character in this book is



Gattoos, the servant who, with his wife and family, was given to Morris after he was offered the

opportunity to start farming in Kaalfontein, a small town in the Little Karoo.

“They become the best of friends,” says Liebenthal. “Morris knows nothing about farming – he’d only ever been an office-worker in Moscow. Gattoos knows from Shabbos wine – of which there’s a never-ending supply.”

Gattoos becomes Morris’s financial advisor and mentor.

“There’s nothing he doesn’t know or can’t do – he just needs the lubrication of

Shabbos wine and he’s on his way.” Between the two of them, they manage to build an empire.

The Froman family become the largest ostrich farmers in Oudtshoorn until disaster strikes and the feather market collapses, coinciding with World War I.

The next generation of Fromans is not as fortunate as the first, with a series of unfortunate events occurring.

Lieberthal is under no illusions about the profitability of writing in South Africa. “It is not about money because the market is so small. To me, it is an achievement and a hobby.”

He says the book is not autobiographical in spite of the fact that his grandparents were named Morris and Bertha, and hailed from Russia.

What is the central message of the book? “As life goes by, it catches us all,” Liebenthal says. “The real message is the consequences of taking that ticket,” says Jayson, “and whether, in fact, it was a ticket to freedom.”



# Irma Stern’s *Mary* paints a thousand words

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

If a portrait sits somewhere on the spectrum between idealising the sitter and giving a true picture of who they really are, Irma Stern’s *Mary*, on auction by Strauss&co, sits in the latter category.

The painting, to be auctioned at The Wanderers Club, Illovo, on 12 November, is of Mary Cramer (nee Ginsberg 1912 to 1988). She was the younger sister of Stern’s friend, confidante, and patron, Freda Feldman.

The painting is interesting on a number of levels, not least because it is an important work by Stern, born of a German Jewish family, and to date, South Africa’s highest grossing artist.

Stern’s works sell for much more than other famous local artists like Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef and William Kentridge. A whopping R347 million worth of the artist’s work has been sold by Strauss&co in the past decade alone, making Stern one of the globe’s most bankable artists.

The auction price for this painting, set between R5 million and R7 million, puts it into the category of serious art.

This painting, which has been in the possession of the Feldman family since it was painted in 1941, offers a snapshot into early 20th century Jewish Johannesburg. The Feldmans, who lived in Houghton, were hugely important patrons for Stern, who was a frequent visitor and guest at their home during the 1940s and 1950s.

Art historian and artist Professor Federico Freschi paints a picture of those visits. He writes in Strauss&co’s auction

catalogue, “Freda [Feldman] would go to considerable lengths to ensure that the artist’s considerable physical and practical demands were met, including painting the dining room walls a specific shade of emerald green at her behest, the better to offset her paintings.

“In 1941, Stern spent an extended time at the Feldmans, during which time, as Mona [Berman, Freda’s daughter] recalls, ‘She painted many subjects including the portrait of my mother in her model French hat, and the portrait of Mary in her stylish black dress... Freda hung the work in pride of place in the emerald green dining room with the portraits that Stern had painted of her.”

Strauss&co Art Specialist Dr Alistair Meredith describes it as a very important work, painted during the prime of the artist’s career. He says its tone is muted for a Stern painting – Freschi describes it as “uncharacteristically restrained” – possibly because it was painted during the war.

It also has a “Spanish air”, intensified by the flower behind Mary’s ear and the puffed sleeves, and gathered, black collar of her dress. Freschi says this is evocative of Spanish painter Goya’s pictures of noblewomen.

“The Spanish references in these paintings may reflect something of Stern’s nostalgia for Spain at the time (her travels had been curtailed by the war in Europe, and she had not visited the continent since 1937),” he writes. Stern was well travelled



in Europe and Africa, and her works are considered an important part of the German Expressionist movement.

Mary is described as a “complex, secretive” woman by her niece, Mona Berman, Freda’s daughter, and the work offers a fascinating insight into her personality. Though beautiful, “something about her always remained a mystery, clouded in conjecture and uncertainty”, Berman recollects.

“To the outside world, Mary appeared to lead a charmed life. She was beautiful and married to a successful man who adored her. She lived in a lovely home with a fine

garden, and was a gracious hostess renown for her attention to detail and exquisite taste,” Freschi writes. “Yet inwardly, it seems that Mary was driven by passions and torments of which she never spoke.”

The portrait captures this dichotomy well. Freschi describes a “pensive aloofness in Mary’s expression, that speaks also of a certain pathos”.

“While the slight exaggeration of her limpid eyes immediately draws the viewer, this is deflected by her refusal to return the gaze; she stares instead into the middle distance beyond the frame. While she is certainly poised, she seems somehow emotionally tense, the pearl earring a metonymic displacement, perhaps of an invisible tear.”

Oscar Wilde wrote that, “Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter”. Perhaps the complexity of

this portrait is equally a representation of Stern’s mixed emotions. It was painted at a time of comparative luxury for white South Africans, yet a time of deprivation, fear, and uncertainty for South African Jews, even though they were far from the battle front.

• *Mary is available for pre-auction viewing at The Wanderers Club, Illovo, from 9 to 11 November, 10:00 to 17:00. Walkabouts will be held on 10 and 11 November at 11:00. The auction will be held on 12 November. Contact Strauss&co on 011 728 8246 for more information.*

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## Tackling teen antisemitism – who’s to blame?

Most of Tuesday was consumed by United States politics, and the South African Parliamentary circus. In the US, name calling had reached crescendo, and personal and hurtful insults were traded and dismissed as standard electioneering. In South Africa, a fight almost broke out in Parliament. Guards needed to be called after Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba waved his baby finger at the Economic Freedom Fighters, crudely suggesting that their “manhood” was somewhat underwhelming. Gigaba, of course, had provided documentary evidence of his own.

Late on Tuesday evening, my focus shifted. I was sent a voice note by a listener. A young, happy, educated voice was heard speaking in a group of friends. The voice note was directed at a Jewish student, and made numerous references to the fact that the Jewish recipient should have been killed in the Holocaust, and should have become an ashtray. He ended with the joke, “What do you call a flying Jew?” Answer: “Smoke!” The crowd of boys laughed, and the note ended.

Needless to say, I was speechless. Floored. Gobsmacked. My show starts at 06:00. By 07:15, Wendy Kahn, the National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, was in studio, urging caution while they gathered the information and decided how best to deal with it. By 07:40, I had spoken to Treverton School Headmaster Kean Broom, who had heard of the incident only roughly when I had.

He had called the victim to arrange for a discussion later in the day; he had spoken to the perpetrator’s family; and he had already conducted an assembly. He had spoken to Jewish organisations; and was trying to find a way to deal with the fall out. His approach was to create a learning experience for his students.

But he didn’t say sorry. And listeners, for the most part, didn’t accept that. Some defended it by suggesting that he didn’t send the voice note, but for the most part, they were completely dissatisfied with what they perceived to be a lack of empathy.

They claimed that I was too soft on him. I am somewhat conflicted. I was impressed by what he had done so far, all the more so that he was prepared to

### INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



talk to a Jewish radio station about the event before having had real time to gather the information. He had acted, and that needed to be acknowledged. But I did get the feeling he was making sure to distance himself and the school from the event.

- The dilemma I posed to listeners was as follows:
- How important is punishment, which might risk turning the 15-year-old into a Jew hater forever?
  - What responsibility does the school, and of course his parents, own in all of this?

I continued to remind listeners that he is a child, and that children do stupid things. He is not Adam Catzavelos or Vicki Momberg, who are adults.

What I didn’t ask, but should have, is what responsibility do we own in this? Not in the “victim blaming” sense, as this is appalling, and there is never a justification for such a vile and hurtful communique. Rather, I wonder, what examples do we set for our children?

As adults, we wave our pinkies in Parliament to taunt someone about the size of his penis; we call everyone who disagrees with our political view a racist or a fascist; TV shows called “roasting” are the norm; and we humiliate and embarrass others on Twitter or Facebook. Why would we be shocked when a 15-year-old takes it one step further? And, how would he know that this crosses the line? I am not condoning what he did in any way, but I do wonder how surprised we should be by it.

I know little of the voice noter’s family. I don’t know if he learned this at home, or at school, or at rugby club. I know little of what the unwritten rules of the school are, and if this type of bullying and irresponsible social behaviour is tolerated.

All I know for certain is that if we open our eyes to what we accept as normal behaviour from the adults around us, we should hardly be shocked when our children do the same.

## Starting to learn violin at 106

LANA JACOBSON

Harry Fransman, a former Johannesburg businessman, turns 107 on 25 November. He hasn’t made firm arrangements for his birthday celebration. He just knows he wants his family to celebrate with him.

A year ago, at 106, he fulfilled a lifelong dream, learning to play the violin. He began violin lessons, but unfortunately, due to severe arthritis in his fingers, he had to give up on this dream.

Violin aside, Harry has another calling – taking regular cruises by ship to escape the harsh English winters. This he did until his late nineties, once travelling the world alone and unaided.

Undaunted on being advised by doctors that long trips were no longer viable, he is arranging a cruise around the Norwegian fjords with his two daughters.

Harry was born to Dutch parents, Jacques and Judith, on 25 November 1911. His parents immigrated to South Africa in 1920 when he was eight years old.

Harry was one of four boys, but is the only remaining live sibling. He still reminisces about Johannesburg before World War II.

He loved being a member of the Wolmarans Street Shul choir, and excelled at maths at Forest High School, which he clearly remembers.

He obtained his degree in chartered accountancy at the University of the Witwatersrand, and married Helen Bernstein, also an émigré from England, at the Yeoville Shul in 1936.

Harry and Helen followed their three daughters, and emigrated to the United Kingdom when he was 75 years old. After Helen died in 2011, Harry lived alone in his London apartment, but when two falls resulted in hip replacements, he had to move to a private residential home.

He says he is always surrounded by friends or family, and is never lonely.



## Israeli legislators debate American anti-Semitism without American input

>>>Continued from page 10

Israelis, Shapiro said, should not get involved in criticising specific policies, like the White House’s decision last year to remove the scrutiny of white supremacist groups from a government programme designed to counter violent extremism.

“These are issues Americans have to work out for themselves,” Shapiro said. “What is most helpful after Pittsburgh is solidarity, support and sympathy.”

Asked why his committee did not hear from the American Jewish community, Neguise replied that “whoever requested to speak” was given a platform, noting that at the end of the hearing, an ADL representative had declined to make any remarks. Neguise’s request seemed to take the ADL representative by surprise, suggesting that the Americans had not been invited ahead of time.

Lipman, however, thinks that the silence of the Americans may just be a

sign that “they prefer not to be having this discussion with us right now, and that is also fair. I just think it’s critical that we be sensitive to follow their lead, and not impose ourselves on them in any manner”.

Asked about the Israeli response to the Pittsburgh attack, Rebecca Dinar, a spokeswoman for the Jewish Federations of North America, told JTA that American Jews had “just experienced the worst attack in our history, and we cannot be distracted from the very real issues we are dealing with”.

“Our elected officials and good people everywhere must work together towards the day when no community is vulnerable to such attacks,” she said. “Anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia are contagions that infect societies, and end in tragedy, not only for Jews, but for all humanity. No one in America should rest until the last remnant of such hatred is eradicated.” (JTA)

### Letters

#### EXCESSIVE EXPOSURE CAN BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

A few months ago, I expressed my view on what I considered to be excessive exposure on the front page of the *SA Jewish Report* of a medical practitioner and his re-instatement after being struck off for despicable, unprofessional conduct.

I write once again, ‘cause you’ve done it again. This time, in the paper dated 26 October, it’s about the front page and the prominence given to Wits student leaders and their alignment with BDS. You have given them prominence and space they do not deserve. And, by appearing so “in your face”, they have achieved their aim... public prominence. You erred here, I’m afraid!

As if that wasn’t bad enough, on page 3 of the same issue, the full page devoted to the “Hitler-loving activist” and his tweets was more than over the top. We (the greater community) have only ourselves to blame for the obsession we have with using electronic gadgetry to comment and speak our minds so freely and – as is all too frequent – so carelessly and recklessly without any regard for the consequences .

The power we have in the palm of our hands is devastating. We perceive ourselves as experts in every field, as commentators on social, political, and other issues. Do we realise that once we press the “send” button, the damage is instant? How much careful thought (otherwise known as brain power) has gone into rushing to tweet, Instagram, or whatever? Apologising after the fact certainly does not indicate sincere remorse by the perpetrator when the error is pointed out or lands them in hot water.

There are people around like Mcebo Dlamini, but don’t give him or his ilk exposure like this. – **Albert Glass, Johannesburg**

## Anti-Semitism comes from right and left

>>>Continued from page 4

Semitism, which, quite honestly, should have put an end to the matter,” Milner said.

“It is worth mentioning here that the IHRA definition does not say that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitism, only criticism that treats Israel differently or demonises Israel for its very existence is anti-Semitism, but this was intolerable to many members of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom.

“For a year, the Labour Party in Britain has remarkably been debating how anti-Semitic it wants to be. It has been fighting tooth and nail not to have some components of the definition included in its policy. As you all know, it’s those components relating to Israel that it so objected to.”

Coming back to Pittsburgh, Milner addressed the “other face of anti-Semitism”, namely right-wing anti-Semitism. “This isn’t any less prevalent or dangerous – as we have just recently established all too tragically,” Milner said, “but it bears far more obvious similarities to the classic anti-Semitism that we are all too familiar with. There are, however, a few very modern twists to this old classic which were very evident in the Pittsburgh atrocity.

First, the association with white supremacy. Milner talks about “a fascinating dynamic” in terms of how the ways white supremacy, racism, and anti-Semitism work together.

“Blacks, migrants, and so on are looked down on as a kind of lower life form, but they are [considered] too stupid and incompetent to be a real threat – that’s where the Jews come in,” she said. “We use our slyness and global power to facilitate these sub species into breeding and ascending to power, leading to mongrelisation and white downfall. Bizarre, I know, but that is what animated the Pittsburgh killer.”

Milner relates how the last information we have about the Pittsburgh shooter is the message he left on the online right-wing platform, GAB,

in which he said, “Can’t stand by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics. I’m going in...”

She talks about how conspiracy theories are given new power online. For example, the original anti-Semitic conspiracy *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has found new life online. These theories, “have tremendous power to terrify and breed hate. Their proliferation through online, right-wing platforms is a very real challenge we have to face.” In fact according to research by Professor Raphael Cohen-Almagor, Jews are the third biggest target of online hate – after blacks and homosexuals.

In answer to the age-old question about what we can do about it, Milner said:

“We need to have zero tolerance for anti-Semitism from both the regressive left and hard right. We tend to see anti-Semitism as being on the opposite end of the political spectrum to ourselves, and ignore it on our own side. What we can see quite clearly is that these versions have become indistinguishable.

“We should be aware that what starts with Jews, never ends with Jews. We are the proverbial canaries in the coalmine. This uptick in hatred is not just aimed at us, but at all who hold democratic values.”

Last but not least, Milner said, we should “look for the helpers”.

“Through this terrible time, we have also experienced unbelievable support for Jews: the first responders who ran in to save Jews, knowing that they would probably get shot; the Muslim crowdfunding initiative which raised more than over \$70 000 (R992 000); the outpouring of support globally.”

Milner refers to a recent talk by Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre Director Tali Nates, who spoke about the four types of people in the Holocaust: perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and upstanders. “The helpers are the upstanders,” she said. “We must find them, and we must be them.”



# The arts: not yours to fiddle with

Three weeks ago, Israel approved a draft law giving Culture Minister Miri Regev the authority to cut funding from cultural institutions that “contravene the principles of the state”. This is known as the “loyalty-in-culture bill”.

Because of Israel’s condition of perpetual threat from its neighbours, politicians argue that the arts must show loyalty to the state and its institutions.

Accordingly, Regev could reduce budgets to arts institutions for denying Israel’s existence as a Jewish, democratic state, incitement to racism, violence or terrorism, and supporting armed struggle or terrorism against Israel. She can also drop budgets for marking Independence Day or the establishment of the state as a day of mourning, desecration of state symbols, and other criteria.

At first reading, it sounds reasonable to a patriotic Israeli or Jew as a way to prevent terrorism or the undermining of the state. But, like everything in politics, motives must be questioned.

Some politicians think she is trying to gag artists from criticising her party, the Likud. Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai, for example, not regarded as a left-winger, supports the artists’ stand against the legislation. He has pledged to compensate any cultural establishments hurt as a result of her loyalty law.

Historically, powerful people everywhere have tried controlling artists to make them produce works matching their political and cultural views. But for art to thrive, artists must be free to produce beautiful works as well those which make people angry.

The arts have thrived in Israel in music, literature, visual arts, and other genres. Is Regev trying, for political reasons, to rein them in? Many Israeli artists and intellectuals think so. Dozens of respected cultural figures have produced a manifesto against the legislation, including author David Grossman, the celebrated winner of the 2018 Israel Prize for literature.

Artists say Israel is a strong society which depends on being able to conduct multi-faceted discussions embracing wide-ranging views. Public funds, they say,

## TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



must not be used to prevent varied views in the public space. It’s about politics versus freedom of expression.

Israeli artists are particularly vulnerable compared to colleagues in America, where art is generally not state-funded, but operates in an open market, with artists beholden to wealthy patrons, private individuals, and foundations.

Thus, their work is almost completely uncensored by the state. It is evaluated through appeal to those institutions. In the European and Israeli model, however, artists often receive state funding for certain activities.

Regev’s new bill grants her authority to cut funding to an institution whose politics she doesn’t like, such as one that publicly calls for a boycott of Israel or the settlements.

South African artists are familiar with this issue from historical experience. For decades, severe censorship was imposed by the government on newspapers and literature to make them conform to a particular view. Contrary to Israel, however, the South African government wanted racism, not nation-building. And in many ways, Israeli public debate is freer than it ever was in South Africa. Accordingly, its arts history is very different.

Nevertheless, art is like water, inexorably flowing to the sea. If you try to suppress it in one way, it tends to come out elsewhere. The work of satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys during apartheid is a South African example. Since the 1970s, he’s been unrelenting in lampooning the government with a smile on his face, and its censors on his tail.

So, where should the axe fall? Should Israeli artists capitulate to the security argument? This is an eternal question without a final answer. Ultimately, good art cannot be evaluated for its utilitarian value. It would go against the soul of great art, including Israeli art.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Save the date – SAJBD Gauteng Conference

As previously reported, this year’s Gauteng Council conference is being held in two parts. The first took place on 7 October. In order to comply with the constitutional requirement that conferences must be held no later than 24 months after the previous event, the second conference will take place on 25 November.

The first conference dealt with formal procedural matters like the election of the new council, the outgoing chairman’s report back to affiliates, and amendments to the constitution. The second, taking place on a day on which President Cyril Ramaphosa is available to participate, is aimed at South African Jewish Board of Deputies’ (SAJBD) affiliates, and the wider Jewish public.

Since Ramaphosa already formally addressed the Jewish community in Cape Town earlier this year, it has been decided instead to stage a dialogue between him and eminent local business leader Stephen Koseff on the issues facing South Africa today, and how they see these playing out in the future. We look forward to what should be a fascinating exchange on questions that will be uppermost in virtually everybody’s minds.

This being the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, the second part of the conference will look back and celebrate the Mandela legacy, including the noteworthy part that many Jewish community members played in his life and career. It will include the screening of an updated DVD presentation originally made for the launch and marketing of the SAJBD’s acclaimed

2011 book *Jewish Memories of Mandela*. In my next two columns, I will provide further updates about the upcoming conference and its programme. There is already been considerable interest in the event, so those wishing to attend or find out more are encouraged to visit our website on [www.sajbd.org](http://www.sajbd.org).

## Joining hands in the fight against global anti-Semitism

At the end of October, the SAJBD’s Diplomatic and Parliamentary Liaison, Chaya Singer, was part of a World Jewish Congress (WJC) Junior Diplomatic Corps delegation to the Russian Jewish Congress conference in Moscow.



Above Board  
Shaun Zagnoev

The theme of the conference was “Combatting anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia”, and Singer gave a presentation on the work of the SAJBD as a case study in combatting anti-Semitism.

She also attended a meeting at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Russian Council of Young Diplomats, and her report on our recent collaboration with the Russian Embassy in South Africa regarding the screening of the film *Sobibor* was received

with enthusiasm. Such engagements are important in ensuring that our community, despite its relatively small size, continues to play a meaningful role in global Jewish affairs.

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

## Letters

### MAISELS, NOT KENTRIDGE, LED DEFENCE IN TREASON TRIAL

Robyn Sassen’s article on William Kentridge was interesting and, as a great admirer of William and his work, I enjoyed reading it.

However there is one major inaccuracy in the article.

It was my late father, IA Maisels, who was leader of the defence team in the treason trial. Sir Sydney Kentridge, an esteemed colleague and friend of our family, was a member. Other members of the team that my late father led included Bram Fischer and Chris Plewman.

The 156 accused in the original charge sheet included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Albert Luthuli, and Helen Joseph, all of whom were visitors to our home both at the time, and after 1990.

When Nelson Mandela came out of prison in 1990, he wanted to re-establish a relationship with the Jewish community. He called my late father or “Isie” as he was known, who arranged an historic meeting for him with the then Jewish leadership.

Isie occupied a unique position in South Africa. He enjoyed the respect of the Jewish community, the ANC, the wider community, even the government of the day, which he opposed so vigorously, both in the famous treason trial and other notable political trials, including the Ahmed Timol enquiry.

He held leadership positions in the Jewish community for more than 40 years. These included the roles of president of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, chairman of the Israel United Appeal, and president of the Wolmarans Street synagogue.

He was equally well known and respected by international Jewry as a governor of the Jewish Agency, and a governor of the Weizmann Institute for Science. – Helen Maisels Trisk, Johannesburg

### JEWISH WELFARE KEPT ME OFF THE STREET

My name is David Mrost. I am a middle-aged gent who is supported by Jewish welfare at Sandringham Gardens in Johannesburg.

Due to mental illness, I am not able to work. Jewish welfare has supported me through thick and thin, and has been there for me when I needed it the most.

I would like to thank the following people for

being there for me: the chief executive, my financial social worker, Dorit Gold, my social worker manager, Gerrard, of Sandringham Square/Lodge, and in general, all the staff of Jewish welfare. Without them, I would be on the street by now. A special word of thanks to Rabbi Jonathan Fox, who I have always been able to speak to when needed.

– David Mrost, Johannesburg



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# Stark reality amid celebrity at Afrika Tikkun fundraiser

“There is a golden thread running through this ‘new dawn’ – it is not our second chance, it is our last chance,” Business Leadership South Africa Chief Executive Bonang Mohale told a collection of celebrities, leaders, and captains of industry at the inaugural Afrika Tikkun Icons Gala Dinner at Room Five in Rivonia recently.

“Why does poverty still have a black face? It is precisely because of the choice of leaders we make,” Mohale said. “Ethical leadership is what we do when no-one is watching. We have lost our moral compass. We have lost our way because we have forgotten that sons learn from looking at the backs of their father’s heads. Africa needs more selfless leaders.”

In regard to land reform, Mohale said South Africa had an important opportunity to be the first country in the world to confront the issue in an orderly and constitutional way. “As business, we must support land reform, and take the subject out of the mouths of the populists.” There is a constitutional obligation on South Africa and on South African business to recognise past injustices with respect to land – and fix them – Mohale said. Land is central to the struggle of South Africa, going back as far as the Freedom Charter.

The evening’s guests included Small Business Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu; Advocate George Bizos; business executive Phuti Mahanyele; Asnath

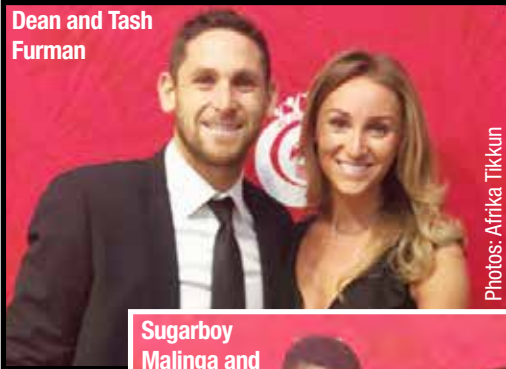
Mahapa, the first black female commercial pilot; Captain of Supersport United and Bafana player Dean Furman; celebrated designer Gert-Johan Coetzee; Loyisa Bala, Afrika Tikkun ambassador and performer on the evening; KK Fumba, Tutu Fellow and Financial and Risk Technologist; Yaseen Valli, talented young cricketer for bizhub Highveld Lions; child musical prodigy Danno

Petersen; John Adams, a talented artist and supplier of a performance art piece for auction on the night; and former World Boxing Champion Thulani Sugarboy Malinga.

Several high-value items were auctioned off, including two lithographs of artwork by former President Nelson Mandela; three unique Gert Johan Coetzee bowties; and jewellery. The final item for auction was an iconic Mandela portrait created live by John Adams.

The final words belonged to Afrika Tikkun Chief Executive Marc

Lubner, who said, “A country never dies. It lives on forever. But the health of the country is vested in its youth. We have an incredible opportunity to unlock value in our township youth, and embrace them because of their potential.”



Photos: Afrika Tikkun



# Sydenham Pre-primary School book reading causes jumbo excitement



Elaine Macdonald and Vanessa Mearns, a mother and daughter, author-illustrator team, delighted the children of Sydenham Pre-primary School with a book reading of their recently published book, *I See an Elephant*.

Elaine captivated the children with her story, which is about a gentle elephant who wishes he was a bird, and Vanessa treated them to a step-by-step class on how to draw an elephant.

# Torah Academy boys become Hugo’s Heroes

Four Torah Academy Boys’ High School students, Avi Cobb, Akiva Rosen, Dani Schwartz, and Avi Smith, graduated as Level 3 first-aiders last week. They became known as Hugo’s Heroes, which is the title of the training course that was named after the late Hugo Paluch. Hugo died in a tragic accident at Yeshiva College

in 2017. Hugo’s father, Dov, initiated the training, which is run and managed by Jewish medical rescue organisation Hatzolah. Boys from five Jewish schools took part in the programme: Torah Academy, Yeshiva College, Hirsch Lyons, Shaarei Torah, and Maharsha.



Representatives of Hatzolah and Torah Academy Boys’ High School

Photo: Jason Crouse

# WIZO market collects the crowds

The amazing “team collectables” and many volunteers gathered early at Norwood Mall on Sunday 4 November to unpack and display hundreds of items to sell at WIZO’s (the Women’s International Zionist Organisation’s) Collectables Market.

They spent many hours collecting, sorting, marking, cleaning, packing, schlepping, and pricing in preparation for this highlight on WIZO Johannesburg’s calendar. This was followed by enthusiastic selling and equally willing buyers.



Andrea Wainer, Nava Gonen, Yvonne Jawitz and Brenda Trope

# KDVPHS one of Wits’ top feeder schools



Andrew Baker and Sershin Naicker

Photo: Yael Gordon

Sershin Naicker, the University of the Witwatersrand School Recruitment Manager recently visited King David Victory Park High School. This school has been identified as one of the university’s top feeder schools, based on undergraduate first-year enrolments in 2018.

Headmaster Andrew Baker was presented with a certificate in recognition of this outstanding achievement. Naicker applauded the school’s efforts in preparing Grade 12s to excel in higher education.

# Braiding with bobba at Chabad Sandton



Gill Levy, Sandy Balkin, Alexa Balkin, Daniel Lurie, and Kira Balkin

In a *nachas*-filled morning, bobbas, grannies, and significant others enjoyed learning Shabbat songs and braiding challah with their grandchildren at Chabad of Sandton Pre-School.



# Jewish boys fly SA flag high at Futsal World Cup

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Four years ago, neither Jordan Arelisky nor Aaron Isserow could have imagined that that they would be competing in a World Cup. Yet, in just over a week, they will be representing South Africa at the AMF Boys U/20 Futsal World Cup in Valledupar, Colombia. Herzlia High School Grade 10s, Arelisky and Isserow (both 16) are good friends, and are two of the 10 boys selected for the squad that will be playing in the tournament from 17 to 26 November.

Both teens began training with Maccabi soccer when they were seven-years-old, but later their then coach, Ronen Cohen, encouraged them to play futsal. To succeed in futsal, the teens say, you need to train harder and longer because you need to be very fit, even more than an outdoor football player. Futsal is an indoor version of soccer played on a hard surface. It is played on a smaller court than a soccer field, and has very different rules to soccer. Quick movement and quick thinking are essential criteria to succeed. There are only five members per team on the court, so the players have a lot of ground to cover. These two have made their mark in this sport, and now train every Sunday with Maccabi. Arelisky and Isserow have both captained



the under-16 Maccabi futsal team that won bronze in the Maccabi games last year. Isserow, who plays right forward, scored six goals during the tournament. They now also play futsal at their school, Herzlia. If fact, it became one of the school’s main sports due to the drought in Cape Town preventing the upkeep of outdoor soccer fields. Byron Cottle, the boys’ futsal coach, who is taking them to the World Cup, is a member of the national team. Arelisky also plays with him in the men’s league on a Monday night. Arelisky and Isserow also attribute their futsal success to Reon Siyaya and Ronen Cohen, who are both part of the Maccabi coaching team. At the World Cup, they will be competing against a diverse range of countries as South Africa was drawn in Group

B alongside India, Australia, and hosts Columbia. Gary Waldrugh, the General Secretary of the South African Futsal Federation, is optimistic about the team’s chances. “We have a very good chance of getting through the first round. We also stand a good chance against Australia and India,” he said. However, Waldrugh said the boys’ biggest challenge will be when they play the host nation in the first round in front of what is sure to be a capacity crowd in the 12 000-seater stadium. “These boys are not used to playing in front of crowds like that, but the boys are strong, and they have been selected based on their ability and discipline.” Isserow said their opponents were “top-quality”, but he is excited about the tournament nevertheless. Arelisky is particularly weary of the threat that the South American teams pose. “The South Americans are very quick, and they are very good at the sport,” he said. Isserow and Arelisky are following in the footsteps of Jewish futsal player, Russell Goldstein, who was a part of England’s futsal team when it won the Four-Nations tournament in 2017. Arelisky’s mom, Vanessa, said: “Going to the World Cup is a great opportunity and experience for the boys, and it is an honour. It was a very difficult decision for Jordan to make, because he is in Grade 10, but the school has been unbelievable, allowing the boys to write exams in the core subjects before they leave.” In the meantime, the boys are packing, and getting ready to make their international debut.

# Selwyn Segal family day a special treat

The Selwyn Segal’s family day was full of “laughter, noise, and precious family time”, said Lee Unterslak, who together with Tanya Azoulay and the Selwyn Segal team, organised the event on Sunday 4 November. Selwyn Segal residents invited their families for a day of activities and lunch. More than 180 people attended. The dining room was decorated in festive balloons and colourful tablecloths. Each person was given a biscuit and edible paint, with instructions to paint the biscuit creatively before eating it. Everyone pitched in, with family members and care workers helping residents. “Fabulous days like these are made possible by Selwyn Segal’s Club 360NE annual raffle,” Azoulay says. “It provides the extra funds needed to give our residents treats, special outings, and activities during the holidays that are not covered by our annual budget.” The raffle is running until the end of November. Three great cash prizes will be drawn from amongst the entries. Go to club360ne-jhbchev.co.za to enter and make it possible for Selwyn Segal residents to enjoy many more days like these. For information, email LaurieG@jhbchev.co.za



| Sunday (11 November)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Big Band Music Appreciation Society hosts a programme compiled by Tjerk Damstra: audio, Frank Sinatra’s earliest numbers to his classics, and a DVD, <i>Sinatra in Japan – Live at the Budokan Hall in Tokyo</i>. Time: 14:15. Venue: Beit Emanuel Slome Auditorium, 38 Oxford Road, Parktown (entrance in Third Avenue). Enquiries this month to Tjerk Damstra on 082 777 1773 or 012 329 2584.</li><li>The Johannesburg Holocaust &amp; Genocide Centre (JHGC), in partnership with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and Goethe-Institut, hosts a commemorative lecture in honour of the 80th anniversary of the Kristallnacht-November 1938 Pogrom. Time: 15:00. Venue: Goethe-Institut, 119 Jan Smuts Avenue, Parkwood. Free admission. RSVP essential to dawi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.</li><li>Profeti della Quinta, sacred music from the Italian Renaissance. Time: 19:00. Venue: Gardens Shul, Cape Town. Book online at tinyurl.com/profeti. Contact Di on 082 338 4462.</li></ul> | <p>Bible. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053.</p> |
| Wednesday (14 November)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>JHGC in partnership with the Professional Journalists’ Association hosts a film screening and panel discussion on <i>Acting in time: intervention and the Rohingya crisis</i>. Time: 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Free admission, donations welcome. RSVP to dawi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.</li><li>Profeti della Quinta, sacred music from the Italian Renaissance. Time: 20:00. Venue: Great Park Shul. Book online at tinyurl.com/profeti. For more information, contact Di on 082 338 4462.</li><li>Join the Womens International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) every Thursday for a <i>Lunch &amp; Learn</i> shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Contact: WIZO office 011 645 2515.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p>WHAT’S ON</p>                                                                                           |
| Monday (12 November)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Union of Jewish Women hosts Raymond Pogir, Curator of the National Pharmaceutical Museum, on herbs and medicines used in the</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                            |

# Israel to pay attention to diaspora needs

>> Continued from page 5


diaspora,” Tor says. “That doesn’t mean we infringe on the sovereignty of other countries, nor do we impinge on the loyalties of Jews to their various countries. “Still, we need to find a way to strengthen Jewish identity. Jews are an ancient people, older than most. They have a right to form a national framework, both for their safety and to maintain their values. Anyone who says that the Palestinians have this right and that Jews don’t is an anti-Semite.” Considering the recent election victory of the BDS-aligned Progressive Youth Alliance, which took 13 of 15 seats on the Student Representative Council at the University of the Witwatersrand, Tor says the way in which this narrative has taken over spaces such as universities is particularly troubling. “In the past, the university campus was recognised as a place of study. No one feared students taking over student government and hijacking the institution for political agenda broadcasting. “When I was a student, we could arrange an interview with the primary spokesperson

of the Palestinian Solidarity of the US, Professor Edward Said, for an engaging discussion. This would not happen today. Students’ political agendas undercut almost any such engagement” Yet, in spite of the challenges posed by reality, Jewish communities – including our own – continue to achieve remarkable accomplishments. Tor praised South African Jewry, saying it must be recognised for the strides it has made, and continues to make. “This community needs to receive high marks for maintaining vibrant Jewish life,” he says. “One example is the continued enrolment of Jewish youth in formal Jewish education, the rate of which is about 90%. This is true nowhere else outside of Israel. Australia is considered the closest, at 40%. “Jews here are invested in broader society and its aspirations, helping to shape its future and dreams. They are committed to making South Africa a success, and are devoted to the goals shared by all decent world citizens, including Israel itself.”

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