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William Kentridge,
linocut with hand-painted india ink wash
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Ramaphosa: SA has constructive role to play in Middle East

NICOLA MILTZ

President Cyril Ramaphosa this week praised South African Jewry for setting an example of unity to the nation. Ramaphosa was a guest at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Council conference in Johannesburg on 25 November.

He thanked members of the business community for being at the forefront of economic inclusion.

In conversation with business leader Stephen Koseff, former Chief Executive of Investec Bank, the president said, “The Jewish community can teach all of us so many good lessons because you act as a community.”

“We are not sleeping at the steering wheel. We are wide awake. This plane is flying, and it has capable people who are going to fly it.”

“You are able to take positive steps to do things against poverty, to do things against inequality. When certain things are done against what you stand for as a community, you stand together. You stand together against anti-Semitism, against attacks targeted at you as a community, as Jews.”

These lessons, he said, could be “translated throughout the nation”.

“This is precisely what we should seek to engender – that all South Africans, without consideration of where we come from, what racial group we come from, should unite and act against all that militates against the

values that are enshrined in our Constitution.”

The event was attended by numerous members of the diplomatic corps and Cabinet ministers, including Minister of Public Enterprises, Pravin Gordhan. Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, business leaders, and members of the community were present.

There was silence in the auditorium as Ramaphosa spoke about the Middle East.

He acknowledged that the Jewish community was “concerned, shocked, and bewildered” by the resolution to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel.

“What we are seeking to do now is ask, does South Africa have a role to play in promoting peace? Does South Africa have a role to play in various parts of the world, but particularly in the Middle East? Our view is that we do have a role to play, and our foreign policy is going to be directed towards doing precisely that.” This was particularly pertinent, he said, as South Africa took its seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

“So, the conflict in the Middle East is right on my radar screen. It’s an area where we are being called upon to play a role, and we will want to play a constructive role that will bring all parties together so that we find a solution to a problem that seems intractable in the Middle East.”

Community leaders conveyed a strong message of support to the president for his efforts to confront corruption and state capture. They also emphasised the Jewish community’s eagerness to assist government in addressing socio-economic challenges.

Koseff told the president that the Jewish community had the

ability, and was willing to play a continuing role in growing and developing the country and making a broader contribution to society. He asked the president what was expected from Jews.

Ramaphosa replied that the community should imbibe the spirit of Hugh Masekela’s song *Thuma Mina*, (*Send Me*), in other

“They have opened channels, platforms, possibilities, from training young people to enabling black entrepreneurs, and this I’m pleased about. They have been at the forefront of economic inclusion.”

On the contentious issue of land reform, Ramaphosa assured the audience that there would not be “marauding mobs going around

to stay in the country.”

He urged parents to encourage the youth to remain here and work together.

“We must deepen their patriotism so that they stay in South Africa and make a contribution on a non-racial platform where they demonstrate that we are very different from all other people in the world because we



words, to be the kind of people that ask continually how they can make a meaningful contribution to the country.

He gave special thanks to members of the Jewish business community – many of whom were in the auditorium – that had embraced the notion of “broadening economic participation”.

taking people’s properties and grabbing land”.

He admitted he was “troubled” and “pained” when he heard of young South Africans – of all races – seeking greener pastures overseas.

“It may seem to some people that the space has closed for some. The contrary is true. The space is opening for all of us. We especially want well educated and talented young people

are the one country where the non-racialism project can become a true reality.”

The government, he said, was focusing on education, re-building the capabilities of the state, and encouraging young entrepreneurs.

“We are not sleeping at the steering wheel. We are wide awake. This plane is flying, and it has capable people who are going to fly it.”



Stellenbosch University erases Israeli academics from reconciliation conference

TALI FEINBERG

Professor Shifrah Sagy of Ben Gurion University in the Negev found out she had been excluded from attending a conference at Stellenbosch University when she saw that the names of her and fellow delegates from Israel had simply been erased from the programme.

The conference, titled “Recognition, Reparation and Reconciliation: The Light and Shadow of Historical Trauma” is to be held at the university from 5 to 9 December.

Professor Arie Nadler of Tel Aviv University, who was also due to present at the conference, described his experience. “About ten days ago, [conference organiser and chairperson] Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela informed me that there were calls to remove Israeli scholars from the programme, and wished to consult on how to overcome this hurdle.”

The organisations calling for the boycott include the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and South African Jews for a Free Palestine.

Two to three days later, Gobodo-Madikizela had a meeting, “after which she wrote that the issue was resolved, and all Israelis were welcome, and their safety was guaranteed. I made preparations to go to Stellenbosch. I then learned that pressure was mounting, and conference leaders had decided to take all Israelis off the programme. In other words, we were to be silenced due to our nationality.

“Throughout this affair, Gobodo-Madikizela invested in efforts to rectify the situation and not give up to the BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions]-related pressures and threats,” Nadler said. “Yet, it seems to me that she was alone on the frontline, in the unenviable position of having to decide whether to protect her Israeli colleagues, or risk the dismantling of the project.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Gobodo-Madikizela said that the decision to exclude the Israelis went against her personal and professional values. She said she had worked extensively with Israelis in dialogue with Palestinians.

It is clear that the professor was pressurised into making the decision, and she hinted that threats of violence towards one particular academic was the reason she had to capitulate.

Sagy described herself and fellow Israeli delegates as “peace activists”, as they are all deeply invested in reconciliation work in the region. Professor Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, from Al-Quds University, was also disinvited. He is the founder of the Wasatia movement of moderate Islam, and took Palestinian students on a groundbreaking trip to Auschwitz.

Professor Raya Morag of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was to deliver a lecture titled “Perpetrator trauma, current Israeli cinema, and speaking truth to power”, which “deals with current Israeli documentary cinema’s objection to the occupation, and its call to the Israeli government to recognise our ethical obligation to the Palestinians”.

Sagy thinks the Israelis’ work towards reconciliation and dialogue “frightened” those who opposed their visit. “They don’t want normalisation between Israelis and Palestinians,” she said.

Said Nadler, “Science is based on free sharing of thoughts and findings by all. It is a hollow venture when certain people cannot speak in public because of their gender, nationality, colour, or religion. This is discrimination of the most violent kind.”

The Rector of Hebrew University, Professor Barak Medina, wrote to the Rector of

Stellenbosch University, Professor Wim de Williers, to express his concern that “conference organisers have succumbed to [the] political pressure directed against all Israeli academics, violating basic principles of academic freedom and debate. We find this entirely unacceptable and uncollegial.

“Even the so-called Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel



formally recognises academic freedom and freedom of expression, and does not endorse discrimination on the basis of citizenship,” he wrote.

Ironically, Stellenbosch University describes itself as pursuing an “inspiring vision – to be inclusive, innovative and future focused ... This is done through broadening access to the institution.”

In a media statement, the university’s management said it supported the handling of the matter, saying, “Free and constructive academic discourse at the university takes place in the framework of our commitment to justice and healing for all ... The conference offers an opportunity for conversation with academics who find themselves in the midst of a contemporary situation of trauma.”

South Africans expressed their outrage on social media at the decision to exclude Israeli delegates. “As an old ‘Matie’ myself, I am shocked to see how Stellenbosch University is favouring politics above academics. I do not believe that this portraits [sic] the general sentiment of most educated South Africans,” said one man on Twitter.

Brenda Stern wrote on Facebook, “Once again, SA bows to BDS hate and loses an opportunity to contribute to peace and reconciliation ... Shame on you Stellenbosch University, you just silenced academic freedom!”

Describing the boycott as “racist and anti-Semitic”, Ben Swartz, the National Chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, said, “It is unfathomable that not only were Israelis

disinvited, but even Palestinians working in the space of conflict resolution. This shows the anti-peace agenda of BDS that needs to be confronted. We call on Stellenbosch University to uphold freedom of expression and to support – not stymie – efforts to reach peace.”

Wendy Kahn, the National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said that the board had been in discussion with the university’s leadership. “This capitulation to the bullying tactics of the BDS has no place in academia. The organisers of the conference have restricted the narrative of the conference to views that are consistent with their own. This does not bode well for academic values and principles at their institution.”

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:21	Johannesburg
19:15	20:21	Cape Town
18:15	19:19	Durban
18:15	19:36	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:52	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:40	East London

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Torah Thought

Menorah miracle lights up endless debate

Chanukah! Can you smell the latkes? Can you hear the faint echoes of *Moaz Tzur*? Do your fingers already feel a little slippery in anticipation of the impossible-to-remove olive oil? (Or hot from candle wax, if that’s your vibe!)

On Chanukah, we do all of the good Jewish things: celebrate the victory of light over darkness, spend time together in family and community (eating), publicise Hashem’s miracles, and give one hundred involved and complicated answers to a single question!

The question I am referring to is, “Why do we light the candles for eight nights?” Now, lest you respond, “Um, because the miracle was

for eight nights?” the question in its fuller form is, “Since there was enough oil to last for only one night, and miraculously Hashem made it last for eight nights, it seems that the first night was not miraculous, only the

subsequent seven were. So if we’re lighting to celebrate the miracle, shouldn’t we light for only seven nights?”

Before sharing some answers with you, I want to point out some attitudes towards Torah learning. Torah is serious business – as we say in the blessings before the *Shema* each evening, “For they [the words of Torah] are our life and the length of our days.” Torah gives structure and meaning to our lives, regulates societies, and makes the entire world a more fitting home for G-d, therefore fulfilling the ultimate purpose of creation, but it’s also a joy and delectable treat.

King David in Tehillim/Psalms 119:92 calls Torah “my delight” and throughout history, our great Torah scholars have experienced Torah as both a duty and a pleasure. Rabbi Avraham Tanzer tells the story of Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, the Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, who found himself with a guest who was an accomplished and erudite scholar. Rabbi Gifter excitedly called one of his students: “Hey, we have a *Talmid chochom* here, and we’re talking Torah! Come on over and have some

fun!” So in answering this question, our sages were not only trying to solve a centuries-old conundrum, but to bring new light to Chanukah through creative exploration of the topic.

“So, nu?” I can hear you ask, “what are the answers?” Well, I’ll share a selection with you.

- The first night of Chanukah is a celebration of the military victory of the Maccabees, and the miracle of finding even the single jug of oil to begin with. (Meiri)
- Each night, the amount of oil that was consumed was only an eighth of what should have been, thus the miracle began from the first moment. (Beit Yosef)
- The Greeks waged war on Judaism, which they symbolised by the *brit milah* (bris). In celebration of our victory, we celebrated for eight days, just as with a bris. (*Ba’al Hattim*)
- They used very thin, small wicks to conserve oil; nonetheless it burned brighter and more beautifully than ever. (*Chiddushei HaRim*)



Rabbi Sam Thurgood, Beit Midrash Morasha

Board apologises for apartheid-era errors

NICOLA MILTZ

In the presence of President Cyril Ramaphosa and senior Cabinet ministers, Jewish communal leadership expressed deep regret for not having supported Jewish anti-apartheid activists.

Zev Krengel, the National Vice-President of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), showed intense remorse at the Gauteng Council conference held in Kramerville, Johannesburg, on 25 November.

“It wasn’t always our finest hour,” Krengel said of the community’s lack of support for those who fought in the struggle to end apartheid.

In front of Ramaphosa, ministers including Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan, as well as members of the diplomatic corps, business leadership, and members of Nelson Mandela’s family, Krengel admitted that the community had “made a mistake”.

In recent years, the board has honoured Jews who fought against apartheid, at its conferences.

On Sunday night, the board honoured the Coleman family for the role it played in ending apartheid.

Krengel said that when he took up his position, he had invited struggle heroes to meet the board. Colin Coleman met communal leaders at a time when relations between the Jewish community and the ANC “had deteriorated terribly after Mandela left office”.

He said Coleman “used his personal contacts” to help the community to re-engage.

“He brought Secretary-General Kgalema Motlanthe to my house for Friday night Shabbos dinner... and that grew a friendship. I realised through Colin that we didn’t behave the best... we let down the people we should have supported,” he lamented.

He said it was not the board’s role to have fought apartheid, but to have fought for “every Jew who fought apartheid, and we didn’t do that”.

When Krengel met Colin’s parents, Max and Audrey, they told him that it was the first time they had met a Jewish communal leader since their sons had been put into detention without trial and solitary confinement in the 1980s.

“The anger and unhappiness they showed me showed that we had made a mistake,” said Krengel.

He thanked Colin for helping the community to re-engage, and for displaying forgiveness and a commitment to moving forward in rebuilding the nation.

Coleman said he was honoured

Recalling the past, he said, “In our horror at the scourge of apartheid, and in our activism to end it, we were often disappointed by what we saw as the paralysis of much of the Jewish establishment in South Africa to stand up against this constant violation of basic human rights.”

It seemed at the time that the South African Jewish establishment “kept its head down” and “largely closed its ears and said little”.

“In this, the SAJBD failed its own mandate to protect all South African Jews. In fact, for us

Coleman, who has headed up Goldman Sachs SA for 18 years and who works closely with Ramaphosa, said, “It is time for the Jewish community to stand up for the voiceless just as the Jewish community in its darkest moments had the Schindlers to stand up for it.”

During the course of the evening, many members of the board pledged the community’s support to the democratic cause and to social upliftment in the country.

SAJBD Gauteng Chairperson Marc Pozniak said, “We have a

arena, and ordinary day-to-day interaction. He urged the president to address racism in all areas of society.

“It is particularly concerning that instead of setting an example by strenuously opposing these trends, numerous political leaders have increasingly been guilty of exacerbating the situation. The introduction of race and fear of the ‘other’ into our political narrative is something that must be addressed as a matter of extreme urgency, Mr President.”

He urged the Jewish community, likewise, to adopt a “zero-tolerance” approach to all forms of racism.

“As a community, we reject racism, but that is not enough. It is what we do as individuals that will have more consequence than what we ascribe to as a collective. What we teach our children about the ‘other’ is what will ultimately define our success in this regard.”

Pozniak said the community was encouraged by Ramaphosa’s recent statements reiterating the government’s continued support for a negotiated, two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine question, and for South Africa to find ways to help further that goal.

SAJBD President Mary Kluk thanked former Investec Chief Executive Stephen Koseff for his commitment to the community and to building the country.

“Your trademark for me is how in difficult times you are able to find the glass half full,” she said.

She thanked the president for his leadership, for looking after minorities in the country, for his continuous attempts to build bridges, and for his zero-tolerance approach towards any forms of prejudice, including anti-Semitism.

Kluk said she had heard Ramaphosa’s earlier rallying call of *Thuma Mina* (Send Me), the lyrics of the song of the late Hugh Masekela that have become a call to serve the nation selflessly.

“On behalf of the South African Jewish community, we want to expand on *Thuma Mina*, and say to you, ‘*Thuma Nathi* – send us’. We want to support you to build the South Africa we all dream of.”



Looking sharp: President Cyril Ramaphosa, a youngster, and Colin Coleman, head of Goldman Sachs SA

to accept an award from the SABJD on behalf of his parents, and brothers, Brian, Neil and Keith, in recognition of the family’s contribution to ending apartheid and building a non-racial democracy in South Africa.

He said the relationship between the Coleman family and the Jewish community had always been “complex”.

“We are not a conventional family. We argue with each other about many things. We take our politics very seriously. We question. We interpret. In this way, we are a deeply Jewish family.”

Colemans, at the time of greatest need, our telephone went silent, dinner invitations dried up, and friendships were deserted.”

The family, he said, found comfort among the broader community of freedom fighters.

He asked, “Does the SAJBD, in fulfilling its core objectives, see the protection and advancement of the interests of all people in South Africa as equal to its own?” and “Will the SAJBD now and in the future protect all communities who face repression, poverty and prejudice, not just its own?”

In accepting the award,

responsibility to do everything we can to contribute more than we consume, to give more than we take. South African Jewry has much to contribute. We simply cannot be found wanting.”

Pozniak pledged the “unstinting commitment” of the Jewish community to assist wherever it could in addressing the problems facing the country.

He said that South Africa continued to be a deeply divided society, with one of the most divisive factors the prevalence of racism in the workplace, social media, schools, the political

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Alleged ISIS patriots granted bail

JACQUELINE HERBST

South Africa’s Community Security Organisation (CSO) is not overly concerned that 11 alleged ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) patriots have been released on bail. They are accused of choreographing the fatal Verulam mosque attack and a string of firebomb attacks in Durban earlier this year.

“We have been told that the authorities have this cell under control, and we have to believe they would not have been granted bail if the courts considered them to pose an immediate threat,” said CSO Gauteng Director Jevon Greenblatt.

The 11 were granted bail in the



Alleged mastermind Farhad Hoomer covers his face as he leaves the Verulam Magistrate’s Court with one of his wives by his side

Verulam Magistrate’s Court north of Durban on 27 November because Magistrate Ifraan Khalil said the state had failed to provide sufficient grounds for bail to be denied. He could see no evidence before him to indicate that the applicants would not attend the trial if awarded bail.

However, the state is still holding 96 electronic devices confiscated during the arrest of the suspects, and it is downloading content that could identify more suspects and strengthen its argument against the accused. Although the suspects requested the return of their devices, this was temporarily refused.

Greenblatt said that regardless of the ruling, the CSO would continue with its work. There might be additional threats from many other fronts, and it was the organisation’s responsibility, together with every community member, to ensure that everything necessary was done to remain safe at all times.

Willem Els, Senior Training Coordinator for the Transnational Threats and International Crime Programme, expressed concern about the police’s ability to keep tabs on the accused and secure public safety. He previously told the *SA Jewish Report* that six to seven operatives were required to place one subject under successful surveillance, and the accused’s release would therefore put tremendous strain on state resources

and manpower.

Khalil found that being in possession of ISIS flags, propaganda material, or belonging to extremist WhatsApp groups could not be used as a basis for denying bail. He said that although it created suspicion, it was not solid evidence of criminal activity or ISIS membership.

This sentiment is shared by Jasmine Opperman, the head of the Africa desk at the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium (TRAC). However, Opperman highlighted that ISIS social media propaganda often gave advice on how to outwit law enforcement.

She is not entirely convinced that the cell operating in Durban is indeed an ISIS cell, pointing out that ISIS



Ahmad Haffejee leaves the Verulam Magistrate’s Court after being released on R150 000 bail

while the defence built its case on alleged weaknesses of the state’s case, and won. Khalil found little value in the identification parades, pointing out that they are generally accepted as unreliable, were not carried out properly in this case, and that the victims had erroneously pointed out people who were not involved in the case, rendering them unreliable.

In addition, with many of the suspects linked to the mosque attack and bombings only by their presence at the house in Reservoir Hills,

Durban, when it was raided by the Hawks on 5 October, and considering their close emotional, family, and business ties locally, Khalil could find no reason to decline bail.

Farhad Hoomer, believed to be the mastermind, was released on R200 000 bail, while Ahmad Haffejee – fingered in a formal parade as the stabber in the Verulam mosque attack – had to cough up R150 000 for his freedom.

Thabit Mwenda, Seiph Mohamed, and Amani Mayani are the only three applicants who were not identified in any parades. They were released with warnings. Mohammed Akbar, Abubakar Ali, Abbas Jooma, Mahammed Sobruin, Ndikumana Shabani, and Iddy Omari were released on bail ranging from R3 000 to R5 000 each.

Within minutes of the judgement and applicants exchanging hugs, bags of cash arrived and bail amounts were settled. Applicants will have to hand in their passports, check in at the Durban Central police station every Wednesday, and are not allowed to leave KwaZulu-Natal without written consent from investigating officer Warrant Officer Khwezi Chonco.

The case has been postponed for further investigation to 22 February 2019.

Equal Education leaders cleared of wrongdoing

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

An independent panel of inquiry has cleared Equal Education Co-Founder Doron Isaacs, and former General Secretary Zackie Achmat, of any wrongdoing or cover-up in a storm over sexual harassment.

“This is not about vindication,” Isaacs told the *SA Jewish Report* in response to the inquiry’s findings. “I have given up public life. I am happy for my family that there is an outcome. I hope that Equal Education thrives in the new year.”

The independent inquiry was initiated by the social justice organisation in response to a media storm that erupted in May 2018, when the *Mail & Guardian* published a series of articles accusing Isaacs of sexual harassment, and Equal Education – particularly Achmat – of covering up for him.

Equal Education, it claimed, had created an “organisational culture of intimidation”. The independent panel’s findings were released this week. Its report focused on the claims levelled against Isaacs and Achmat, and contentions that the findings of a 2011 internal inquiry into similar accusations were biased in Isaacs’ favour.

In its 142-page report, the panel found no evidence to support any of these claims. However, the report did criticise the 2011 internal inquiry, saying that panel members could have “given more careful regard to those issues raised” and “could have been more open-ended in their recommendations to the board on further action

which might have been taken as regards the organisation itself”.

The panel notably criticised the *Mail & Guardian* for “gutter journalism”. Retired Judge Kathleen Satchwell, who chaired the inquiry, was scathing in her criticism. “What has been published using words and ideas and information from anonymous persons appears to constitute an attempt to destroy good names and reputations without even a hearing



Doron Isaacs



Zackie Achmat

or a fair opportunity to confront the substance of any allegation.”

The leaders of the panel did not reach consensus, however. University of Cape Town Law Professor Rashida Manjoo, resigned, distancing herself from the report. Among her concerns detailed in an email to Satchwell, and published in the report, Manjoo wrote, “This report reads like a judgement, and makes findings which include exonerating individuals – despite us not hearing the victims (by their choice)...” Wits Psychology Professor Malose Langa also led the panel.

• *This article is partially sourced from an article published on Daily Maverick.*

Orlianski case to be transferred to High Court

TALI FEINBERG

It has been more than two months since Zalman Orlianski (71) died after a fight over a parking place at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, but the case has been postponed numerous times, and will now be transferred to the High Court.

“Plenty has been done on the case, and the South African Police Service has been excellent, especially the investigating officer. The case is moving, and all delays are due to the defence,” says Orlianski’s son-in-law, Daniel Witz.

Former Uber driver Tebogo Makhalemele, who allegedly caused the head injuries that killed Orlianski, was due to appear in court on 23 November. His previous appearance was postponed because his lawyer did not arrive in court. Now, it has once again been postponed until 6 December, for transfer to the High Court.

“The High Court needs to accept the transfer through the National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP),” says Witz. “The transfer is because it is a murder charge, and the High Court is better equipped to handle

this type of case.”

He confirmed that Makhalemele was still in custody, and that Orlianski’s family was still coming to terms with his untimely death as far as it was possible.

In paying tribute to Orlianski’s impact on the electronics industry, electronics publication *Dataweek* recently described how his funeral was attended by people from all walks of life, including Supreme Court judges, friends, and rabbis. “Particularly poignant is the fact that many of his company’s customers, and even competitors, also attended to pay their final respects to one of the longest serving members of the industry.”

It reported that his business, Zetech, will be continued by his wife Inna, who will take the reins of the company as per his wishes.

In a personal message, Inna said, “Zalman was a man of integrity, a brilliant engineer, a loyal husband, and a dedicated father. He will always be remembered by me and others for his laughter, and his sense of humour. I am grateful for the insights I got from him, and feel empowered to continue his legacy as one of the few female business owners in this male-dominated industry.”



Zalman Orlianski

Netanyahu calls on South African Jews to tell BDS ‘the truth’



Photo: Howard Feldman

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Nitzan Chen, Director Israel Government Press Office

PETA KROST MAUNDER

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said South African Jews should tell the defenders of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) “the truth – BDS is distortion and lies”.

“Who is BDS defending? They are attacking the only democracy in the Middle East, in the service of annihilationist ideologies and people who support terrorism,” he told the *SA Jewish Report* at a press conference in the Knesset in Jerusalem on 28 November.

He was addressing an international Jewish Media Summit that took place from Sunday to Wednesday this week.

Netanyahu was responding to a question from the *SA Jewish Report* about the fact that it was situated in BDS “ground zero”, where Israel is lambasted all the time by BDS supporters. He was asked how Israel would help South African Jews in countering this.

“You shouldn’t defend Israel, you should attack and delegitimise the delegitimised,” he said. However, in terms of the South African government’s support of BDS, he said, “We will speak to your government too.”

“It might be the last government in Africa that doesn’t recognise that the world has changed. Even the Arab governments are coming to Israel. They no longer view Israel as their enemy. They view Israel as their indispensable ally in the battle against militant Islamists,” he told the international Jewish media.

“Maybe some vestiges in Africa will realise what other African leaders have realised – that the future belongs to our camp.”

Netanyahu went on to repeat that, in no uncertain terms, BDS are “liars and slanderers who support terrorism and radicalism” and that South African Jews should be diplomatic, but tell them what is what.



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What does being at ground zero mean for us?

Why is it that we so often don't see the full reality of the situation we are living in until it is reflected through someone else's eyes?

This week, I am in Israel for the international Jewish Media Summit, and it has been an eye-opener on many levels, not least of all for how our community's situation is viewed by Jewish people elsewhere.

During the conference, I met media folk from all over the world, including the Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, Russia, Italy, Hong Kong, Spain, England, and the United States. I met people from countries I had no idea had Jewish communities, but they mostly knew about us.

They were aware that we had a very close-knit and Zionist community. Many were aware that we were mostly orthodox, although our orthodoxy was more open-minded than most. In other words, our secular Jewish community was also orthodox, which for some was quite strange.

Many told me how concerning it was that we were at "ground zero" of the BDS problem, and that South Africa was leading the anti-Israel campaign.

I would have been far more astonished by this repeated claim – and would have wondered who was putting out this misinformation – if I hadn't been faced with this very issue a few weeks earlier.

Let me backtrack to the initial scenario. I heard about the formation of an organisation in Israel called the South African Israel Policy Forum that consisted mostly of South African *olim* and one or two political experts sympathetic to our community.

I was intrigued, and so approached one of the experts, Dan Diker, Project Director of the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs Program to Counter BDS and Political Warfare, to write an opinion piece about it. I wanted him to explain why this group felt there was a need for such an organisation, and what it planned to do.

They agreed. The piece spoke of how the South African ruling party was "BDS-captured", and that "BDS SA, and ANC offices have today transformed South Africa into the world's leader of boycott warfare against Israel".

I went back to Diker, and suggested that this was a tad exaggerated, and things weren't so bad. Surely, I said, there are places that are far more anti-Israel.

I went on to say that as South Africans, we are sensitive to those who have emigrated and enjoy lambasting what they have left behind. We are aware of the Shabbos table South Africa-bashing that takes place in some countries by some ex-South Africans.

I thought I could almost hear Diker sighing in disbelief as he retorted, "Your answer reveals why the article and forum are important. South Africa is BDS ground zero. The worst country for BDS in the world. Israel apartheid is South African branding, and it is the heart and soul of the international BDS movement."

It made me sit up, listen, and start asking questions. Turns out he was not wrong, unfortunately!

Now, being in Israel, with all these people reiterating what he was saying, made me realise just how easy it is to be in the thick of things and not see the bigger picture.

On the other hand, I met media folk from



France and other countries where traditional anti-Semitism is rife. They cannot walk the streets of Paris wearing *kippot* or a *magen david* without being under threat. Their lives as Jews are being made intolerable. To my mind, they have real problems.

However, I find it hard to compare our situation to theirs.

Just this weekend, we had President Cyril Ramaphosa

address the SA Jewish Board of Deputies conference. He spoke about his admiration for us as a community. There is nothing in what he or any member of government said that would have a negative impact on our lives as Jews.

He mentioned the resolution taken in December to downgrade the embassy, and how we were upset about it, saying that the government was intent on being involved in garnering peace talks with Israel.

It sounds fantastic, and I believe that is what he wants to do. However, there are so many ANC members and BDS-supporting ministers who are way too anti-Israel to be involved in orchestrating peace in the Middle East.

It brings me back to the question whether being critical of Israel is anti-Semitic? It isn't. Israelis criticise their government and various aspects of the country all the time – as do so many Jewish people around the world. They are not anti-Semites.

However, there is a clear distinction. BDS supporters see Israel as all bad, the oppressor, and don't believe it has a right to defend and protect its people. They are anti-Semites. What exactly is Israel supposed to do if not defend itself and protect its people? Should it sit back and let its enemies – people who want to drive Israel into the sea – destroy the country?

There are a great number of such people in South Africa, and they stand strongly behind BDS. There are indeed many such people in the top echelons of government.

It is clearly problematic as it alienates South Africa from Israel, and puts South African Jews in a very precarious situation. Hence, Lindiwe Sisulu, the Minister of International Relations and Co-operation, calling on South African Jews to condemn Israel's actions a while back.

No other country outside of the Arab world has a governing party that so clearly supports BDS. The ANC has welcomed Hamas leaders to its conferences, and apparently doesn't believe Israel should use force to protect its people.

And so, those journalists at the conference looked sympathetically at me as if we had much to be concerned about.

I am still not convinced the situation is as bad as that. Perhaps I know more than they do, or perhaps I am an ostrich with my head in the sand.

I trust Ramaphosa, and do believe he will do his best to do the right thing. Will he triumph? I can't say.

Does being at BDS ground zero mean we are in trouble? Just how will this play out for us? I cannot say.

It is clearly murky ground that hasn't been traversed before. We live in a country where our right to be Jewish in all its glory is sacrosanct, and in that we are safe. We go forward step by step because this is our country.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Golan Heights rises from international backburner

For months now, all eyes have been on southern Israel and Gaza. Less attention has been focused on what's happening in the north of Israel, and more specifically along the Golan Heights.

It explains why a recent call by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the international community to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the area didn't really garner much attention. Neither did Washington's opposition two weeks ago – for the first time ever – to an annual United Nations resolution calling for Israel to end its presence there.

But the Russians took note. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov insists that any change in the status of the Heights can happen only with the approval of the UN Security Council, otherwise, "it would constitute a violation of existing accords". Russia, along with most countries in the world, considers the Golan Heights to be occupied Syrian territory.

And yet for Israel, it is an integral part of the country's security, now more than ever because of the turmoil and instability across the border on the Syrian side.

Long considered a "sleeper issue", as Gaza takes a backseat (temporarily) and the war in Syria winds down, the status of the Golan Heights is likely to take front seat again.

Every year since 1981, a UN non-binding resolution called "Occupied Syrian Golan" comes before the General Assembly. It states that Israel's jurisdiction of the area is "null and void", and constitutes "a flagrant violation of international law".

In years gone past, Washington abstained from voting. But this year, alongside Israel, it voted "no" – the only two countries to do so. A total of 151 states voted in favour.

Washington criticised the resolution for being "extremely biased against Israel", but did not provide an American position on sovereignty over the Golan Heights. In spite of excitement in many Israeli circles, the new US position does not necessarily mean that American President Donald Trump is getting ready to recognise Israeli claims over the area.

Still, the abstention is hugely symbolic, and something Jerusalem has long been lobbying for. The Netanyahu government has been pressing the White House in recent months to recognise its annexation of the area. After Washington moved the American embassy to Jerusalem, many Israeli legislators called for an acknowledgement of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan. But American Ambassador David Friedman responded at the time that the legislators were "ungrateful", and did not understand US global interests unrelated to Israel.

However, the shift in the UN vote does acknowledge the changing reality on the ground, and the fact that the chances of Israel returning the Golan Heights to a Syria

DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier



devastated by years of war are less than they were before the war began. It's also not clear who exactly Israel would be returning the area to, should that day even arise.

What's more, there are different messages coming out of Washington. In August, Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton, said that a formal US endorsement of Israel's control over the Golan Heights was not under discussion. But the next month, Friedman said he expected Israel to keep the Golan Heights "forever". Netanyahu has repeatedly said Jerusalem will never renounce the area.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in the closing stages of the 1967 Six-Day War. Most of the Syrian Arab inhabitants fled, an armistice line was established, and the area came under Israeli military control. Almost immediately, Israeli citizens began to settle there.

Damascus tried to retake the area during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, but was defeated. An armistice was signed in 1974, and since then, a UN observer force has been in place.

In 1981, Israel unilaterally annexed the area in a move that was not recognised internationally. Today, 20 000 Israelis and about 24 000 Druze live on the Israeli side of the Golan. Only 12% of the Druze population holds Israeli citizenship, and they are much less integrated into Israeli society than the Druze living in the Galilee. But, for the first time ever, this past October, they participated in local elections.

Damascus' position has always been that it will revive peace talks with Israel only if there is a full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border. This would give it control of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee – Israel's main source of fresh water. In principle, Israel supports returning territory for peace. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered to return most of the Golan to Syria during the 1999-2000 talks, but would not agree to returning all of it. This is likely to remain the main stumbling block moving forward – should the opportunity for talks ever arise again.

Most Israelis want to hold onto the Golan Heights and not return it to Syria. The area gives Israel an excellent vantage point for monitoring Syrian movements, and provides a third of the country's water supply. Trump's pro-Israel foreign policy and past actions have left many Israelis believing – and hoping – that although the US, for now, says it's not about to officially recognise Israeli sovereignty over the area, it could still happen.



We can't help but care



OPINION

Rozanne Sack

The recent support from the community for the boys who were sexually assaulted at Parktown Boys High School was a game changer, moving activism into the wider South African context.

It calls into question whether Jews should be reaching beyond the needs of our community and getting involved in these cases. For victim support groups Koleinu SA and Shalom Bayit the answer is a clear, “Yes, we can, and we should”.

Recently, the house mother and some parents from Parktown Boys High attended a seminar for the Jewish community on child abuse hosted by Koleinu SA and Shalom Bayit.

The parents approached the organisers, expressing their admiration for the work being done in the Jewish community to combat child sexual abuse.

They appealed to our community to support their boys at the sentencing hearing of Collan Rex. He’s the former Parktown Boys water polo coach found guilty of sexually assaulting numerous boys at the school, 23 of whom had come forward.

The Jewish community sprang into action, and headed en masse to the Palm Ridge Magistrate’s Court on 31 October. Their presence made a huge impact on the boys, who reported back that “they had

never felt so loved”.

It began a whole new chapter in supporting victims of sexual abuse in the wider South African context. At the same time, it raised the question whether we should be getting involved in these extra-communal cases. Do we not have enough of our own issues to deal with, our own internal crises, debates and threats to our very existence?

There is nothing easy or comfortable about this. Learning the details of the sexual abuse these boys suffered is emotionally agonising. Should this hold us back?

Believe it or not, Judaism is a religion of protest. We see this in the history of our forefathers. Avraham and Moshe were chosen by Hashem because they did not easily accept evil or suffering, they challenged Hashem and protested its presence.

As Jews, we should never accept evil and wrongdoing. When we see evil, we are commanded to protest and take action to right the wrongs. This is our calling. To ignore it is to deny our very Jewish identity.

Unfortunately, when it comes to abuse, we often do not live up to these ideals. We tend to behave as bystanders, watching passively, hoping and expecting someone else to stand up for the victims, and take real action.

Very often we go straight into denial. We very quickly point fingers at other communities and faiths, asking how they could allow this abuse to happen under their noses. But how different are we?

In my experience, not very different at

all. Unfortunately, we cannot hold ourselves up as great role models in dealing with abuse and exposing it in our community.

Judaism insists that we have a religious duty and a moral obligation to protect all members of our society. These include

could benefit from our care.

Our community is starting to change and acknowledge this problem. Clearly, the first step is to protest against the injustice of sexual abuse wherever it may happen. Every single act that we do to right a wrong brings the world closer to its ideal.

We want to see a world where predators are unsafe, and where each and every one of us steps up and plays our part in creating a safe society. This means acknowledging that this crime exists in all facets and sectors of society, including our own.

I was so proud to see the response of our community members, who took out days of their lives, and continue to do so, to support total strangers.

I feel privileged to witness the cycle of goodness and reciprocity this has brought about, with the Parktown parents coming to support our community at a recent rally against child abuse. What a *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d’s name)!

When Jews step out of their bubble, whichever shul or *shtibl* (little house) they may be part of, and shoulder the burden of suffering with their fellow man, they bring light into our world.

I appeal to you all to get educated, become an advocate for the prevention of abuse, and build on this incredible start. We are the chosen people. Let’s make Hashem proud.

• Rozanne Sack is the Co-Director of Koleinu SA, a helpline, education, and advocacy organisation offering support for victims of abuse in the Jewish community.



Supporters outside the Palm Ridge Magistrate's Court

children and adults who are victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and violence.

This is why it makes perfect sense to support not only Jewish victims, but also these innocent Parktown boys whose lives have been so damaged. I would like to undertake to be there for all those who



Stanley Pinker, Puzzle Picture, 115 x 63 cm, Estimate: R900 000 – 1 500 000

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Home sweet pod: a Jewish family’s minimalist adventure

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Abigger house. A better car. The latest gadgets. In a world increasingly governed by possessions, selling most of the contents of your home – and the house itself – seems crazy to some. Yet for Simone Penn and her family, embracing minimalism has been a joyful journey.

Research shows that a “no-frills” lifestyle makes way for the more important things in life, giving you the freedom to focus on the people you love and a lifestyle that brings the most fulfilment. That’s why minimalism has become a popular way of life, especially as an obsession with things increasingly reveals itself to be a recipe for dissatisfaction.

Penn has always been attracted to a simpler way of life. When she decided to sell her house, most of her furniture, her kids’ toys, and other possessions, most people thought she was a little crazy. But she got her husband on board, and now the couple is preparing to move into their very own EcoPod with their two kids – Judah Abraham (almost four), and Ayden Hannah (16 months).

“Our home is not a place for ego. We don’t want to host people for Shabbos within the paradigm of showing off or keeping up with the Jonesbergs.”

“I’ve been following a minimalist way of life for about 10 years now in one way or another,” says Penn. “It’s been a process over many years and phases of my life, from being single, newly married, and now with two beautiful children. This most recent move does seem like the most drastic change, though. We sold our four-bedroom cluster and the majority of our furniture. We’re building what I’ve termed an EcoPod on my in-laws’ property in Fairmount Ridge – basically a cottage.

“I’ve been fantasising about doing something like this for years. I love the feeling of being cosy and totally in control of my life and my stuff. Once we made the decision to go ahead with the project, I went into full research mode to find out exactly how we could create my dream home.”

The family won’t be completely off the grid, but they do plan to embrace a green lifestyle. “We’re implementing many ‘green’ systems



The Penn’s EcoPod under construction

to emancipate ourselves as much as possible,” says Penn. “These include a grey water recycling system, regular waste recycling and composting, rain water collection for the swimming pool and garden, a gas stove and kettle, a sun oven – the coolest invention ever – a wood burning fireplace, and low-voltage lighting.”

They’re keeping their new home small. “For the moment, the EcoPod has one bedroom with a main en-suite bathroom,” says Penn. “My kids are little, and have never been great sleepers, so we’ve always been a co-sleeping family. It started out as a way for us to survive the exhaustion, but is now our most sacred family tradition. There’s nothing better than lying next to the ones you love most in the world every night. Research also shows this comes with many health benefits, including increasing serotonin and reducing cortisol.”

The Penns will still be able to entertain in their new living space, which includes an open-plan kitchen, dining room, and lounge. While they will eventually need additional rooms for the children as they grow older, the family’s long-term plan is to live this way.

So what exactly did the Penns sell? “It’s easier to list what we didn’t sell – kitchen essentials, a fridge, a washing machine, a dishwasher, plus our clothes, a dining table/desk, and seven chairs. We also kept our custom-size family bed and linen, and one box of my kids’ favourite toys. Other than that, we sold the entire contents of our house.”

Rather than feeling a sense of loss for what she once had, Penn says



Simone Penn and her family

the process of selling most of her possessions was liberating. “Once everything was gone, there was a great feeling of relief and clarity. I felt totally free. We don’t intend to sit on the floor in the EcoPod, but once we move in, we can hand-pick each item of furniture to ensure that it’s the most useful and beautiful to us.”

The financial benefits of embracing a minimalist lifestyle are undeniable – something that helped Penn get buy-in from her husband.

“All I had to say were the words, ‘debt-free’ and ‘your parents’ house’, and my husband was on-board,” says Penn. “He’s a chartered

accountant, so a lot of our lifestyle is about making sound financial choices and investing in our children’s future. We’re very excited to experience some level of financial freedom. Educating our children is our number one priority in life, and one of our greatest motivators for this change was to be able to have that luxury and privilege going forward. Especially if we want to have more children, please G-d. We would never want to be in a position that we couldn’t afford school fees.”

For some, moving onto the same property as their in-laws may seem a daunting prospect, but for the

Penns, it’s a major drawcard. “My in-laws have been amazing,” says Penn. “They’re so excited to have us living with them, and are extremely hands-on with my kids, which is a huge blessing.”

Aside from saving money and being closer to family, it’s the lifestyle itself that appeals to Penn. “I’ve already gained immeasurably from living this way over the years. I can see how it benefits my children just to be with me and hang out, as opposed to being surrounded by toy clutter. My husband and I have less to manage, and we aren’t constantly under pressure to acquire the next ‘thing’, be it a car, appliance, or decor trend item.”

Penn says the road to creating their EcoPod has been a happy one. They’ve even had a rare, conflict-free building process. “We have just found great joy and pleasure in selecting and nurturing each tiny nook and cranny of this tiny home.”

Penn believes that living minimally not only ties in with

her family’s religious lifestyle, it exemplifies Torah teaching. “The entire lifestyle of a yid is about *seder* (order), clarity, hierarchy, and routine,” she says. “Like anything in Judaism, the physical creates an opportunity for the spiritual, an opportunity to merge that which seems rudimentary and functional with that which is infinite and holy.

“Our home is not a place for ego. We don’t want to host people for Shabbos within the paradigm of showing off or keeping up with the Jonesbergs. Everything we own needs to have an element of meaning and purpose. Anything else must find its place elsewhere.”



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Jewish tradition thrives at Zimbabwe school with no Jews

NICOLA MILTZ

Yiddishkeit is alive and well at Zimbabwe’s Carmel School, in spite of the fact that there isn’t a single Jewish child or Jewish teacher at the school.

Every Friday at the 200-strong primary school in Bulawayo, a *kabbalat shabbat* (receiving the Sabbath) takes place. The formal assembly opens with a rousing prayer, *Modeh Ani* – the Jewish prayer recited daily upon waking – and concludes with the belting out of the Israeli anthem, *Hatikvah*.

Young girls smartly dressed in their school uniforms take turns to light the Shabbos candles while reciting the traditional blessing. This is followed by the blessing over a covered *challah*. The boys, wearing *kippot*, likewise say a prayer over wine and partake in the ceremonial washing of the hands.

Carmel is a Jewish primary school, says its mission statement, one that “provides quality education in a multi-cultural environment”. It is owned by the Bulawayo Jewish community, and even though there are no Jewish pupils left at the school, it remains true to its founding ethos and traditional values.

Principal Crispin Eley told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that the children love maintaining the traditions upon which the school was founded.

“It gives us a feeling of unity and tradition, and we feel special and different,” he said.

“It is a totally multicultural environment with a lovely mix of religions and cultures. The fact that it is a Jewish school adds another wonderful dimension,” said Eley.

“We are the only Jewish school in Bulawayo, and we do not have a single Jewish child – or even a white child.”

The slightly larger sister school in Harare, Sharon School, operates on much the same lines, with Jewish traditions forming part of school life. Currently, two Jewish pupils attend the school. It is also owned by the Harare Hebrew Congregation, and the lay spiritual leader there, Yosi Kabli, offers some insights on the weekly *parsha* (portion) on Fridays.

Both schools are closed over Shabbos, and on Jewish *chagim* (festivals). No pork is allowed on the property, and they remain largely meat free, with a milk tuckshop and kitchen.

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, rabbi to country communities at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, makes regular visits to both schools over religious festivals. He said both schools were “special, unique places fostering an understanding of *yiddishkeit* in a respectful atmosphere of learning”.

“This is how one should teach people what Judaism is all about – in an interactive, meaningful way. It does so much more than the usual giving out of sandwiches and soccer balls.”

These children, he said, have cultivated a genuine understanding and deep respect not only for Judaism, but their own religious practices at home.

There are about 65 Jews living in Bulawayo, and about 140 Jews in Harare. In its heyday in the 1960s,

Zimbabwe had about 7 000 Jews.

“In spite of the dwindling numbers, these highly respected and sought-after schools are upholding Jewish traditions in a spirit of unity and respect, and this is what makes it so important to maintain, said Silberhaft.

He fondly recalls one year on Purim at Sharon School.

“There was a Purim play, and a Muslim boy took the part of Mordechai the Jew, and a Jewish child played the role of Hamman. It was amusing and touching.”

Silberhaft will visit Sharon School next week to do a Chanukah presentation at the end-of-year prize giving ceremony, where they will light the menorah.

During Rosh Hashanah, Silberhaft visited Carmel School with cantor Eric Wener of Johannesburg, who regularly spends the high holidays with the Bulawayo community, acting as its spiritual leader.

Said Wener, “I was amazed when I heard the children singing in perfect Hebrew with smiles on their faces and joy in their hearts. It was extremely moving and emotional to see the traditions being so strongly adhered to with such love and respect. It gave



Carmel School children reciting the blessing on the Shabbat candles

me goosebumps.”

Following the visit by Silberhaft and Wener, the school posted on its website that it had been an “honour and a privilege” to share Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with them. They “took time to visit the school, address the children, and give them a deeper understanding of the sacred traditions” of the holidays, it said.

Wener said the Bulawayo Jewish community is dedicated, warm and welcoming.

Carmel, which opened its doors in 1958, recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. Local historian and archaeologist Paul Hubbard made a presentation at the Diamond Jubilee Dinner on the history of the school and the Jewish community in Bulawayo.

He ended by saying, “With its continued emphasis on aspects of Judaism for students of such diverse faiths and backgrounds, Carmel serves as a model of multiculturalism. The vision and mission of the school have created the type of environment which, to me, is more or less a setup of how we want Zimbabwe to be. Your students, your children, those whose minds and values have been shaped within the confines of this great school so totally dedicated to tolerance, harmony, and respect, will be the ones to restore this country.”

How to escape for the high holy days

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

As Chanukah approaches, the beach beckons as many head off for their annual year-end getaway. But what about escaping for *chagim* not associated with the secular holiday season? Enter the increasingly popular *yom tov* getaway.

Kosher catering. A beautiful setting and stimulating *shiurim*. Full *yom tov* services led by esteemed rabbis. Kiddies programmes, and the chance to meet and mingle. That’s the appeal of the *yom tov* getaway. And, with more local and international holiday offerings, spending weeks preparing a feast for a myriad of *yom tov* guests need not be your reality – if you have the budget.

Many organisations tailor-make shabbatons, kosher getaways, or hotel stays over the high holy days. Yet, Pesach headlines the most heavily planned and promoted yom tov getaways. It may be months away,

Interestingly most tours on offer, especially those in South Africa, don’t rely on massive marketing budgets – a fact that ultimately adds to their profits. Across the board, social media and word of mouth have proved to be the most effective way of advertising.

“For two years I didn’t spent a cent on marketing,” says Rabbi Ari Kievman of Sandton Central Shul, who directs Chabad’s Goodness & Kindness Centre together with his wife, Batya. Over the past five years, the two have become known for Chabad’s annual Pesach retreat at luxury hotels in and around Gauteng, which benefits Chabad’s seniors’ programmes.

Attendance between 2017 and 2018 increased from about 230 to 350 people, says Kievman. There’s generally a 50/50 split between local and international guests. “We try to keep costs down, but while affordability is important, this is ultimately a luxury getaway, we’re not cutting corners.

“We do our marketing completely through

Facebook, other social media channels, and mostly by word of mouth – it’s been quite effective,” he says.

“Even this year, I’ve been getting many enquiries for our 2019 Pesach programme, the details of which haven’t been finalised yet. People that have had a good experience are obviously sharing it with others – word of mouth has certainly been powerful. Last year, we put a little budget towards marketing just because we went with a bigger hotel and didn’t want to risk selling out. We’re also a global organisation, so we do get lots of interest through the Chabad network and

Thailand's five-star Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa



places that we’re known.”

Cape Kosher, a business that offers tailor-made luxury kosher tours locally and around Africa, also offers an annual Glatt Kosher Pesach programme at top Western Cape hotels. Its figures also show an increase in popularity, reflecting how much people crave comfort, luxury, and relaxation over the otherwise hectic high holy days. Marketing here is also largely online, with the company advertising on the *Totally Jewish* website and on social media, with a focus on Facebook and Instagram.

Digital marketing is also a priority for Israeli and international travel organisation Royal Club Kosher, which specialises in planning kosher vacations around the world. Its annual kosher for Pesach getaway in 2019 will take place in Thailand at the brand new, five-star Renaissance Pattaya Resort & Spa.

While it has a decidedly larger budget, its marketing is also largely focused on Facebook. Here sponsored posts include videos which garner thousands of likes and shares, driving sales. Nadav Lipner, who manages the company’s digital marketing department, says that it’s ultimately their amazing offering that has led to increased popularity.

“We’re solving the problem of finding kosher food in places like Thailand. People come for Pesach because they want to meet people from around the world, and have kosher food at an all-inclusive luxury hotel that offers amazing programmes.”

The family *yom tov* experience is maintained, even if you are celebrating with a wider community. Most programmes offer the chance to enjoy seders privately with your family, together with the group in the main dining room, or with the rabbis and their families. Being close to major cities, the getaways also allow attendees to go to work during *chol hamoed* (the weekdays of the festival).

Rabbi Kievman says that luxury *yom tov* getaways offer the best of both worlds. “Pesach is about freedom. It’s about celebrating liberation from our bondage in Egypt. If you can experience Pesach without the hassle – not to undermine the experience of preparation for Pesach – but if you can afford to experience Pesach at a hotel where you can enjoy time with family and relax in a luxurious atmosphere, with meaningful learning and purpose, you are getting the best of both worlds. You can attend shiurim or activities, and you don’t need to worry about cooking the food or any other plans.”

Classic British ‘chippy’ could have Jewish origins

JORDAN MOSHE

Enjoyed in Britain for well over a century, fish and chips has long been considered an English staple, but it may have been a Jewish invention. By 1935, there were about 35 000 fish and chip shops in business on the island, and at the height of World War II, the dish was even exempted from rationing by Winston Churchill himself. But, according to recent research, fish fried in batter is not inherently English but the creation of Jews maintaining culinary custom.

Fish prepared “in the Jewish manner” was sold on the streets of London every day of the week.

Opinion on the origin of the dish is divided. According to one theory, the recipe for fried fish arrived in the United Kingdom with Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe in the 1800s. In a recently aired BBC programme, historian Denise Phillips explained that these enterprising Jews founded small eateries, which became known as fried fish warehouses, where an original recipe for fish coated in breadcrumbs and cooked (a dish popularly eaten cold on Shabbat) was adapted slightly for the British public. These establishments gained considerable popularity, even appearing in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*

in 1837. According to another theory, the dish is, in fact, the legacy of Portuguese Marranos. Considered the ultimate authority by some, Claudia Roden’s 1996 *The Book of Jewish Food* maintains that certain nominal Christians who were secretly practising Jews fried their fish on Friday (the Christian world’s fish day) and ate it cold on Shabbat. There is a wealth of references to support this theory. From Manuel Brudo, who wrote in 1544 that “the favourite diet of Marrano refugees” was fried fish, sprinkled with flour, dipped in egg and breadcrumbs; to Lady Montefiore, who anonymously wrote the first Jewish cookery book in English in 1846; and even American founding father Thomas Jefferson, whose niece collected his favourite recipes, including instructions in 1855 for “fish fried in the Jewish manner”. British-born food and travel author Simon Majumdar supports this theory. In his podcast, *Eat My Globe*, Majumdar says that *Peshkado frito*, one of the culinary treasures founded in Sephardic cuisine, is the dish we know today as fish and chips – though without the chips. The dish of white fish, typically cod or haddock, fried in a thin coat of flour, was a favourite among Sephardic Jews, who allegedly maintained that the batter preserved the fish so it could be eaten cold and without losing too much flavour the following day. Its popularity was immediate. Fish prepared “in the Jewish manner” was sold on the streets of London every day of the week. Moreover, eating fish on Friday was a part of religious custom for Jews and Catholics alike, with fish being a traditional



preference for Jews on Friday nights since the days of the Talmud, and Catholics avoiding consuming warm-blooded animals on that day for centuries. Though both groups were religious minorities at the time, fried fish gained popularity as a secular dish as well. As for the addition of potato chips, it wasn’t until the late 1800s that the fruit of the earth itself became a recognised food. There are as many theories of how the potato came to England as there are competing theories about who paired it with fried fish. Some maintain that Jewish Eastern European immigrant Joseph Malin was the first to serve fish with chips in his warehouse in London’s Bow neighbourhood in 1860. Others, however, credit John Lees,

an Englishman who ran one of the first fish and chips huts in Lancashire in 1863, and offered “chipped potato” alongside fried fish. Regardless of the origins of this famous pairing, the combination known as “good companions” by Churchill soon became every Englishman’s dish. Locals and immigrants alike quickly took to slathering their cod in batter, and frying up thickly cut potato chips. Industrialisation in the 19th and early 20th centuries propelled the iconic dish to even greater heights, making it a favourite for factory and mill workers in London and further afield. While its murky history and religious connotations continue to be explored today, admirers in Britain and elsewhere alike remain devoted to this beloved English dish.



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Gelato puts one-woman business on the map

JORDAN MOSHE

Chani Lavine’s gelato business is fuelled by two passions: love for her family, and a drive to make people happy.

It’s a powerful combination that has helped her succeed in a challenging market, with some tough competition.

“I created this place for my children,” says Lavine, the owner and manager of Glenhazel-based gelato parlour Gelatissimo. “I wanted to build something special that they could be a part of and which I could hand over to them one day. At the same time, I wanted to make authentic gelato that would make people happy. The two just came together.”

One of 17 children, Lavine was born in Milan, Italy, to a Canadian father and American mother who established a family that was close-knit and loving. “There were never any *faribles* (grudges),” says Lavine. “My siblings and I were

always close, though there are so many of us. It’s thanks to them that I would eventually start my business.”

After studying in the United States and qualifying as a kindergarten teacher, Lavine taught in Italy and the US, and eventually returned to Italy and married at 19.

Tragically, her husband was killed in a car accident five years later, leaving her with three children and wondering what to do. Says Lavine, “Thank G-d I had my family at the time. I don’t know what I would’ve done with the children if not for them.” Four years later, she met and married a South African, moved here and took up teaching. It was at this point, however, that she chose to do something different for the sake of her children.

“I woke up one morning, and decided, ‘I have to create something for my children. Nobody else will.’ It had to be something I’d also enjoy doing but that I could give to my children when I was through.”

Given her passion for cooking, gelato seemed a good



choice. “I realised there was no gelato in Johannesburg,” Lavine says. “Gelato is not ice cream. There’s a big difference. Ice cream is full of preservatives and junk. Gelato is made fresh daily. After two days, I will not serve it. It must be perfect.”

Lavine says gelato is a part of the Italian gene. “It’s a cultural thing,” she says. “It can be freezing, and with your gloves and hat on, you go out and have your gelato. Cold doesn’t matter – it’s a priority. Italians believe you need to have milk every day. In Italy, if your child hasn’t had their quota of milk for the day, people will tell you, ‘Lady, bring your child here for gelato. He needs it.’”

When Lavine set out to establish her business five years ago, she encountered considerable apathy and scepticism. “People said there was no market here for what I wanted to offer,” she says. “They said I would get bored and close up in a few months.

“When I met a local supplier who brings in gelato from Italy, he didn’t even look at me. All he said was ‘very nice, very nice’ when I told him I wanted to make gelato.

“When I told him I wanted to use Carpigiani, which is the Ferrari of the gelato machines, he stopped writing, looked at me, and said, ‘Oh, you’re serious about this?’ I was nothing but serious.”

Seeking the ideal gelato-making education, Lavine went to Italy and lived in an ice-cream shop for two weeks, loving every moment.

She returned to South Africa ready to begin her journey, but had no money. “I went around asking people I knew for a loan. Many of them were sceptical of the idea. So, I went to ORT for business training, and was assigned a mentor. I came home fried every night.

“I suck at numbers and am terrible at accounts. That part of the training was really difficult for me,” she laughs. “In their assessments, my mentors all agreed: she’s clueless, but she has passion and a willingness to learn.”

Thanks to the efforts and contributions of her many siblings, Lavine raised the necessary capital to start her business, and has never looked back.

“I was determined to make authentic gelato Italiano, and it just happens to be kosher. Also, my product is proudly Chalav Yisrael. I wanted people to see that even something made according to the strictest kosher standards can be more than good, perhaps better.”

She continues, “I’ve had Italians come here and say it’s better than what they have in Rome. I’ve had people say that the gelato here is better than non-kosher versions they’ve had elsewhere. That makes me happy. I want to give people a reason to eat kosher without compromise.”

Today, Lavine has six children, some of whom work in her shop. Lavine remains passionate about her work, even though she is on her feet for more than 12 hours each day. “Did I think I’d be successful as I am?” she asks. “No. It’s a blessing!

“No matter how many ice-cream shops open, I put my head down and work. If Hashem wants me to succeed, I will. If it works, it works. If it doesn’t, I know it’s not meant to be.”

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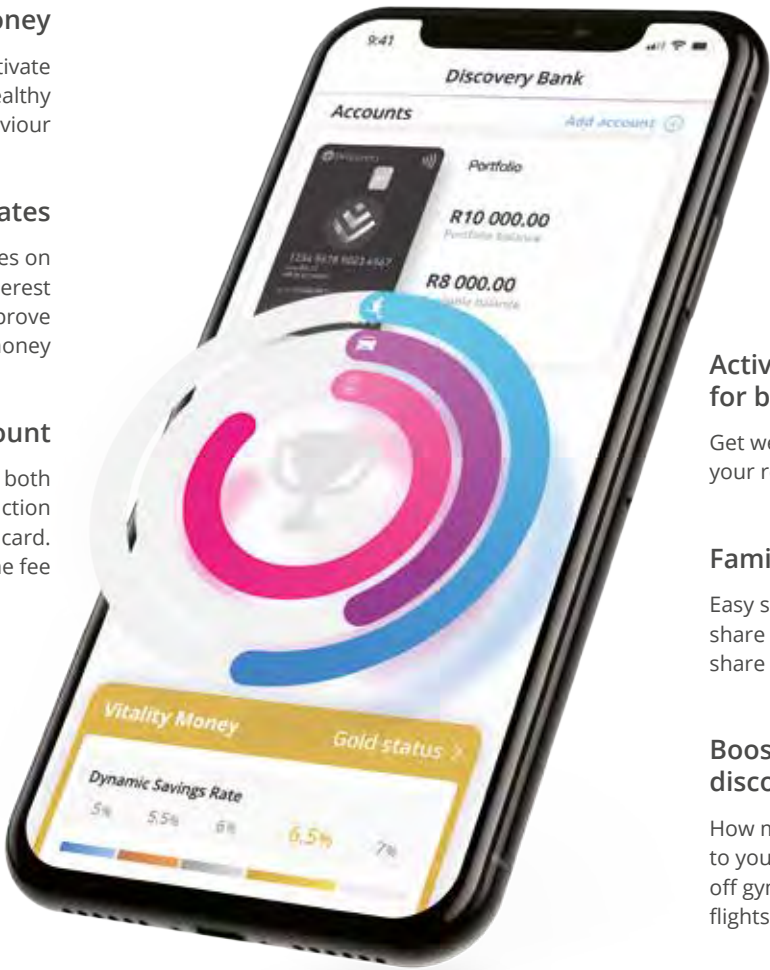
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Heavenly multiplier effect found in a jar of oil



OPINION

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

One of the great heroes of the Holocaust was Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky, the spiritual leader of the Kovno ghetto. Until the outbreak of the war, he had been Rosh Yeshiva of the famed Slabodka Yeshiva and one of the leading sages of his generation. Later, amid the horrors of the Kovno ghetto, people would attest to the open, friendly countenance Rabbi Grodzinsky carried at all times, perfecting the trait of “receiving every person with a friendly face” (Pirkei Avot, 1:15), which was a source of hope and great comfort to all those who encountered him.

In the years of the ghetto, when the situation was at its most dire and most of its inhabitants had either perished from the horrifying conditions or been carted off to the death camps, he formed a group of 10 of his former students from the Slabodka Yeshiva. They would meet every Shabbos to discuss what spiritual and physical actions they could take to improve the plight of those around them. This eternal optimism in the face of hopeless odds – this faith in the power of the few – is an idea that goes right to the heart of Chanukah.

Actually, Rabbi Grodzinsky took his initial inspiration from an earlier source than the Maccabees. In the Torah portion a few weeks ago, we read of Abraham’s tireless negotiations with G-d to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. After a few rounds of negotiation, G-d eventually agrees to save the cities if 10 righteous people can be found within them. From here, the Gemara learns the foundational spiritual principle that 10 righteous people can have a decisive impact on an otherwise hopeless situation (Sanhedrin 99b). The Gemara goes even further, stating that a person who doesn’t believe in the power of 10 righteous people to save the world is guilty of heresy.

In other words, the belief in the power of even a small group of righteous people to change the world and overturn the natural order of things is no less than a fundamental principle of Jewish faith.

We see a powerful illustration of this principle in the story of Chanukah. The mighty Greek empire, which had conquered most of the known world at the time, had invaded the land of Israel and was pursuing a relentless campaign to remove all vestiges of Torah living from the society. The situation seemed hopeless. There were even many Jews at the time who were abandoning their faith due to both the existential threat and the enticements of Greek society. It was at this point that a small group of people – Matisyahu and his brothers – banded together to try and do something about the situation. What began as simply an act of defiance became a miraculous military defeat of the mighty Greek army, allowing the Jewish people to reclaim the land, reclaim the Torah, and reclaim the Holy Temple at the heart of both.

Centuries later, in the depths of the Holocaust, Rabbi Grodzinsky drew on the Maccabees’ example, recruiting 10 righteous men of his own to bring hope and strength to the inhabitants of the ghetto, and spreading light at a time of unimaginable darkness.

The prayer we read describing the great miracles of Chanukah describes how G-d delivered “the many into the hands of the few”. And, indeed, the smallness of the Jewish people and our outsized impact on the world is the story of Jewish history. As the Torah says, “Not because you are the most numerous of the nations did G-d want you and choose you – for you are the fewest among the nations.” (Devarim 7:7).

Why is that? Why is it that the Jewish people, so small in number, are able to have this seismic effect on the world? Part of the reason is that we, the Jewish people,

are a living testimony to a fundamental truth about the nature of reality – that the physical world is just a smokescreen for a deeper spiritual reality. Overcoming the odds, subverting the natural order of things, testifies to the primacy of the world of spirituality over the world of materialism, to the fact that G-d, who is the creator of all matter and the source of everything, is the one in control.

So, what we see in the story of Chanukah, and in many other instances in which the Jewish people have defied their small number, is how the impact of the few is multiplied through G-d’s intervention, defying all rational predictions and overturning empirical reality as we know it.

This idea is symbolised by the defining miracle of Chanukah – the small jar of halachically pure oil the Maccabees found when they recaptured the Temple,



Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky

which burnt for eight days when it should have burnt for one. This is why we celebrate Chanukah by lighting candles for eight days.

Why is this miracle so central to the festival? Surely the great military victory of the Maccabees over the mighty Greek empire was just as remarkable? The reason is that the miracle of the oil burning for longer than it was supposed to encapsulates all of the other miracles. It symbolises this multiplier effect that we’ve been discussing – that through G-d’s direction, through the mysterious workings of a deeper, essential, spiritual realm, outcomes in the physical world can be amplified beyond their input. And a small jar of oil that was meant to burn for a day can burn for eight.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the great Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood, New Jersey, points to the fact that it was the oil’s halachic spiritual purity that imbued it with the miraculous power to burn for eight days, to transcend its physical limitations. Similarly, it was the righteousness and uprightness of the 10 Maccabean leaders that enabled them to defeat the great army of the Greeks. Both are small in physical quantity but potent in spiritual quality.

And this is the great lesson of Chanukah for the Jewish people – that irrespective of our numbers, if we remain upright and loyal to our divine heritage, then we will always survive and thrive. Rabbi Kotler’s personal life story bears this out. One of those fortunate to escape Europe before the Holocaust swept everything away, he went to America and established a small yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey. In the 1940s and 1950s, few people held much hope for the prospects of a classic Torah institution in the heart of the new world, yet, starting with a handful of students, and in defiance of all rational predictions, the yeshiva grew to become the largest centre of Jewish learning in the diaspora, with more than 6 500 students. He started small, battling the odds, but his vision had the power of purity behind it.

This message of the few over the many, of G-d’s multiplying effect of our actions, is the story of Jewish history. Israel is such a small country, and yet its impact is so great. Wherever Jewish communities have found

themselves, their impact on wider society has been out of all proportion to their small size.

But the real secret ingredient to transcending physical inputs is spiritual purity. Purity is the yeast that makes our efforts rise. It’s all about the purity of the oil, of the energy, and intentionality we put into our work in this world. Purity is about sincerity, about kindness, compassion, and decency, about spirituality and faith in G-d, and dedication to His will, His Torah. With this we can truly achieve great things, supernatural things. We can go beyond the numbers.

This seminal message of Chanukah, this heavenly multiplier effect, applies no less to our personal lives. A person may feel that they will not be able to earn a living if they close their business on Shabbos, but Chanukah teaches us that G-d can multiply all of the week’s work to more than make up for it. A person may feel that dedicating themselves to absolutely scrupulous business ethics may cost them money, but ultimately G-d has the power to bless all our efforts and multiply them. The same goes for *tzedakah* (charity) for which the Torah itself promises multiplied returns.

On Chanukah, a small group of righteous people made a big difference, overcoming a mighty force. If good people with pure hearts and sincere intentions band together, even in small numbers, they can bring light and blessing into the world. G-d’s blessings can multiply the effect of the limited physical world like that small jar of oil that burnt so much longer, thereby shedding so much light in the world. This is the message of hope and optimism of Chanukah.

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Low GI inspiration

Either I am a very good mother or a very bad one. Every day, I take my 14-year-old daughter to school, and on every school morning, we stop and buy coffee en route. Two skinny flat whites.

This is a very precious and special ritual, and recently, we both admitted that it is often the highlight of our day.

The thought of that delicious hot coffee and that short drive to school together is what gets us out of bed so early. Because on that drive, we share very rare and precious bonding time. Luckily for us, her school is not very close, and our time together lasts about 15 minutes.

But the most special thing about it is that even though the drive is relatively short, it happens daily. On Thursday, she said, “Mom, we are so lucky that we are so close, I hope we always are.” Together, we hoped to have coffee together every single day for the rest of our lives, even for just 10 or 15 minutes, because it is this daily touch point that makes us so close.

“Because”, she explained, “it’s not only the big things and the big events we share, it is knowing the small things, the daily grind, the seemingly mundane details about each other.”

I understand. It’s the consistency, it’s the regularity, it’s the “everydayness” of this coffee-drive we share that makes it so precious, that makes us love and



enjoy it so much.

Often, I listen as she points things out to me with so much insight. She says that these 15 minutes every morning are far more valuable than if we met weekly for a big “special” date.

I began to think about other relationships in my life, how they would benefit so much from a daily touch point, a daily valuable quality moment or two. I think about Hashem, and why the Jewish people emphasise daily learning and daily prayers.

One of the questions we are asked when we reach the world to come is, “Did you set aside time for learning Torah?” Interestingly, the question is not how much time or how much learning, but whether there was definite time set aside.

And, our rabbis emphasise that time should be set aside daily for prayer and learning because it is this consistency, this regularity, this commitment, this reliable touch point that builds a relationship.

I call it “low GI” sustainable

inspiration. Small healthy meals must happen often, consistently, and we should have slow-release energy three, four, or five times a day. So too should our prayers and learning be consistent with slow-release inspiration every day.

We learn Torah that can percolate in our minds and provide wisdom released slowly over time. We say *Modeh Ani* every morning, and *The Shema* every night. Maybe that’s how you build a relationship with G-d.

Just as we cannot eat a whole

OPINION



Gina Goldstein

chocolate cake on our birthday, and hope it will sustain us for the year ahead and we will not need meals for the rest of the year, so we cannot hope that an annual visit to shul will provide inspiration for the whole year ahead.

In the “once-a-year quality time versus quantity time” debate, relationships require quantity as well as quality of time, built up over years to bring rich closeness. My daughter and I discussed this aspect as I dropped her outside her high school.

I had to shoo her out the car because she didn’t want to end our chat! In the end, she hopped out with all that caffeine pulsing through her bloodstream, and bounced off for the day.

She was a few minutes late, and I know we spend too much money on coffee. As I said, maybe I’m a really good mom, maybe I’m not!

• *Gina Goldstein is the wife of the chief rabbi of South Africa, and has an honours degree in psychology. She has been speaking, teaching, writing, and working in the South African Jewish community for more than 20 years. Together with her husband, she co-founded The Shabbos Project, Sinai Indaba, and Generation Sinai.*

What do we want our children to know about Chanukah?



OPINION

Rabbi Pini Pink

Let’s start at the beginning. The story of Chanukah in a nutshell. During the time of the second *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple) the Holy Land was ruled by the ancient Greeks. They were not very kind to the Jewish people, they stole their property, and even set up idols in the Temple. No one could stand up against them, until Mattityahu and his sons rose up, together with a small army of Jews called the Maccabees. They managed to overcome the Greek army, and drove it from the land.

The Chanukah lights remind us of the great miracle, that a small band of Jews defeated the mighty Greek army. When the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple, they wanted to rekindle the menorah, however they could find only enough oil to last for one day. G-d made a miracle, and it lasted for eight days.

Throughout our history, the Jewish people have been persecuted and harassed. However, in the Chanukah story, it was different. The Greeks were philosophers. They accepted the Torah as a book of wisdom, but not as something holy that connects us to G-d. In the end, they made Torah learning illegal, and outlawed mitzvot like Shabbat and *Brit Milah* (bris). The Greeks, unlike the Persians in the story of Purim, were not out to annihilate the Jewish people through physical

destruction. The Greeks were after our souls. So, the battle we fought in the story of Chanukah was not just physical, it was also spiritual.

How did we overcome the mighty Greek army? The Jews of that era had to re-educate themselves, and strengthen their resolve to learn Torah, and perform G-d’s commandments. The word “Chanukah” shares a root with the word *l’chanech* or *chinuch*, which means “to mould” or “to educate”. Education, especially the education of children, is the foundation of what we celebrate on Chanukah.

This is relevant to the times we live in. We live in a world filled with darkness. We live in times where anti-Semitism, terrorism, crime and corruption are all too prevalent. We can see from the story of Chanukah that with a strong belief in G-d, and a connection to his Torah and mitzvot, we will have something to be proud of and to stand up for. We are blessed in South Africa with many amazing Jewish schools. We have the opportunity to educate our children to be proud of our roots, proud of our ancestors, and to stand up as happy and proud Jews.

The fifth Chabad rebbe taught that joy has the power to overcome anything negative, and break any evil decree. Hence we have Chanukah parties, with dreidels, latkes, and Chanukah gelt or gifts.

Each night of Chanukah, we add another candle until all eight candles of the menorah are shining. By adding a candle every night for eight days, we charge ourselves up with light, so that we will constantly be adding in Torah and mitzvot (which are compared to light) throughout



the year to come.

But what does all this teach us? We may think that this is a story of old, with little or no relevance to our lives today. It took place at a time when the Temple stood; now we are in a bitter exile. We live in a time when it’s not so easy to keep the mitzvot. This is exactly what the Chanukah story is teaching us, a lesson we can impart to our children, too. We need to add even more light, more light than in the story of Chanukah. What’s more, in the Temple, only the *kohen gadol* (high priest) could light the menorah. Today, we all can. We all have the ability to bring light to the world.

The rabbis teach us that the candles of Chanukah will never disappear. Yes, the temple was destroyed and the candles

extinguished, but we, the Jewish people, live on, lighting our Chanukah candles, and being a beacon of light to the world.

The miracle of Chanukah occurred at a dark time when there were harsh decrees against Jews. But, the Maccabees had courage, and never lost hope. Their *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) turned the darkness into light! Today too, our *mesirut nefesh* for Torah and mitzvot will light up the world.

If there is one lesson we can take from Chanukah and pass on to future generations, it is to be proud Jews, and to shine a little light that will dispel a lot of darkness.

• *Rabbi Pini Pink is the Rabbi of Chabad, Greenstone and the youth director of Chabad House, Johannesburg.*

Chanukah – the battle for Jewish identity

How quickly the Jewish year slips by! One minute we are enjoying Purim; next we are agonising over Pesach; suddenly, the frantic timetable of the *Yamim Noraim* (the High Holy Days) and Sukkot is upon us!

And now – Bingo! Chanukah with its candles and gifts is here!

It is interesting to note that almost all our festivals emphasise women power. There is Esther over Purim, Miriam over Pesach, Ruth over Shavuot, and on Rosh Hashanah, there is Hannah, the mother of Samuel. We know them well. But the Chanukah story introduces us to two women of a different kind, not Biblical but apocryphal. Some even say that the story of Judith is not even “scripture” as such, but a tale written so that communities for years to come would learn the history of those times.

Judith and Hannah lived in the eras of successive Emperors Antiochus and of Nebuchadnezzar. It was a time when the Greco-Syrian empires were campaigning to destroy Judaism so that all the people under their power would be forced to think and believe alike and accept their rule, their ideology, and their way of life.

These two women exemplified the proverbial woman of valour in a personal and physical way. Hannah encouraged the sacrifice of the lives of her seven sons rather than watch them give up their Jewish way of life. Judith tricked and beheaded the Greek general Holofernes, who was intent on obeying the dictates of his imperial master and destroying Jewish communities and villages.

Different times, different ways of life! We look back at these two stories, apocryphal or not, with horror and disbelief. Were women

(and men) driven to go to such lengths to preserve their faith and tradition?

It is hard for us to understand. More than two centuries on, the Jewish world is still plagued by controversy and danger both inside and out. What has Chanukah to tell us about that?

Since it is the festival that teaches us most about Jewish Identity, there are many lessons to be learned. In the time of the Maccabees, the only way to keep Judaism alive was by faith in G-d and by fighting. But in today’s sophisticated world, battered as we are by media and politics, we need to consider our problems carefully, and plan our responses.

There are probably as many manifestations of Jewish identity as the number of our fingers and toes. What is it that actually makes each of us feel Jewish, and how can we strengthen those feelings? Is it really just chicken soup and “oi vey”?

There is in some quarters an erroneous belief that Jewish identity can be measured only by a person’s level of observance of our laws and customs. How we live our religious lives is a very personal matter, and difficult as it may be, we all need to learn to be judgemental of ourselves, and not of others.

However in the public and communal domains, our standards of religious life, in particular, the authenticity of our personal religious status, needs to be of the highest level, so that we can hold our heads high in the Jewish world. In addition, our standards of kashrut need to be without blemish so that those who wish to keep kosher are fully protected.

The Jewish identity of the South African Jewish community, and indeed those communities still remaining outside our

borders, is greatly motivated and supported by the traditions of their founders. Our continent-wide communities have a very proud history. These may not always have been based on orthodox religious principles, but their roots in family and community will not easily wither away. We owe it to them to support that identity.

For many Jewish people, identity is fuelled by time spent learning and teaching. We are blessed with a large number of educational establishments both for children and adults.

If the Jewish identity of future generations is to be nurtured in this part of the southern hemisphere, there is a heavy responsibility on parents to educate themselves, and to be constructively involved in the Jewish life of their children. There is a huge variety of Jewish knowledge to be learned – something for every interest, and many willing instructors to show the way.

One of the strengths of our community is the number and variety of organisations involved in every aspect of Jewish life. They all have their challenges and problems, and some are already losing their way. We all have our Jewish identity to offer, and can contribute time and expertise to our communal bodies. We should stand up and be counted.

For many for whom Jewish identity is a vague optional extra, our love and support for the state of Israel should be a motivating and unifying factor. At the present time, that is not necessarily the case.

Our two major enemies are the media war and global anti-Semitism.

We have to come to terms with the fact that our community is no longer an unquestioning

OPINION

Ann Harris



supporter of Zionism. We all think, we all read, and often we all say too much.


The solution lies in ongoing, unbiased education at every necessary level, so that we can all put the case for Israel’s position. This is a necessary task for the organisations mandated to get on with it.

For those of us who live outside Israel, an important factor in the preservation of Jewish identity is our relationship with our fellow citizens.

There are several levels of such contact. Start with courteous contact with members of other communities. Next, we need to search our souls to deal with the hate and fear many of us still feel for the other. Finally comes the recognition of our privileged position, and what the ethical and moral teachings of Judaism tell us to do about it.

It is our tradition not to work during the short time that the Chanukah candles are burning. Perhaps we can find a few quiet minutes then to define what our Jewish identity is, and to consider ways to strengthen it.

• Ann Harris is the widow of the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. She practised as a solicitor in the City of London before she and her husband came to South Africa, where she worked at the Law Clinic at the University of the Witwatersrand.



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The ultimate Jewish symbol

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Religion and religious practice is studded with symbols – and Judaism is no different. For millennia, these symbols have been used to convey meaning, build identity, and declare faith to outsiders.

In an age of emojis and instant communication, symbols are more important than they have ever been.

Chanukah is arguably Judaism’s most overt festival in terms of symbols. A chanukiah lit up in a window is a simple and direct statement that’s difficult to ignore.

The chanukiah has the closest resemblance to Judaism’s oldest symbol, the menorah. In fact, the menorah is acknowledged as the oldest religious symbol in Western culture, and it is still the official emblem of Israel and its government entities.

The seven-branch candlestick dates back thousands of years. It is mentioned in the Torah. It was first found on the Tabernacle of Moses and existed in the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, where it was kept alight 24 hours a day.

Though there are different ideas about what the original menorah looked like, it is widely agreed that it was about 1.8m tall, made of solid gold, with all seven branches of exactly equal height, and connected to one stem.

The picture of what it looked like – with three circular, half-moon-shaped branches, and a centre branch – comes from a carving

in the Arch of Titas, located on the Via Sacra in Rome, which represents the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Recently, another carving of the menorah has been found that predates the Arch of Titas. However, because Titas was based on an eyewitness account of the sacking of the temple, that interpretation is given priority.

“The menorah symbolises G-d’s creation of the world in seven days, and G-d’s constant involvement in the world,” says Rabbi Mendel Rabinowitz of Greenside Shul in Johannesburg.

“For Jews, the menorah represents the light of G-d, the divine presence, the divinely given Torah, the rabbis who interpret it, and the people of Israel itself,” says cultural historian Steven Fine, the author of the book, *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel*.

Interestingly, there is a replica of the menorah standing today in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, overlooking the Temple Mount. According to the Temple Institute, which was responsible for its construction, it “was created exclusively to be used in the new Holy Temple”.

Described as containing 45 kilograms of 24-carat gold, and worth about \$3 million (R42 million), the institute’s website describes this menorah as being “painstakingly crafted after years of extensive research by the Temple Institute’s full-time staff of researchers”.

Batya Bricker, an adult educator at the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, describes the menorah as “a



The Hurva Menorah

quintessentially Jewish symbol, described in specific detail in the Torah”.

By contrast, she says, a lot of other Jewish symbols, such as the *shofar*, the olive branch and dove, even the conical *Judenhat*, do not originate in the Torah, and their meaning has changed over time with use and context, sometimes moving from being an emblem of pride, to shame, and back again.

The Magen David is another example of a symbol that has changed over time. The Star of David is actually a fairly recent representation of Judaism and the Jewish people. It became a Jewish symbol only in the Middle Ages, although it has appeared in religious and cultural practice for millennia.

It was adopted by the Zionist movement at its 1897 Congress, giving it international prominence. It was also used to identify Jews for persecution during the Holocaust. Most recently, it became part of the flag of the state of Israel.

Which brings us back to the chanukiah, which although it may look like a menorah, differs from it in many respects. First, its

structure is different – it has eight branches and one raised branch, called a *shamash*. Second, it uses candles, whereas a menorah burns oil. Third, the chanukiah can be constructed of any material, whereas the menorah is made of solid gold.

Its meaning is also different, Rabinowitz points out. There is a prohibition on exactly replicating elements of the temple while the temple does not exist. The chanukiah, unlike the menorah, is a “rabbinical invention” to remind us each year of the miracle that occurred in the rededicated Second Temple – the fact that the menorah stayed alight for eight days although there was enough oil to keep it burning for only one day.

Bricker says the chanukiah also differs from symbols like Shabbat candles in that it is a public symbol, meant to be placed in the window to publicise the miracle of Chanukah to people passing by, whereas Shabbat candles are more private.

So, who needs emojis when you have a symbol this public, this powerful, and this beautiful?

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World News in Brief

Israeli army investigating blown Gaza operation that led to hundreds of rocket attacks

The Israel Defence Forces is investigating the blown covert operation in Gaza that led to hundreds of rockets being fired into southern Israel.

One Israeli soldier was killed and another seriously injured when a special operations force was discovered on 11 November in Khan Younis, leading to a shootout between the soldiers and Hamas operatives. The dead soldier was not publicly identified, except by his first initial, due to the sensitivity of the operation. The soldiers from the special forces unit were in Gaza to gather intelligence, according to reports, though details of the mission have been blocked by the military censor.

In the wake of the incident, terror groups in Gaza fired hundreds of rockets on southern Israel over two days, killing one person, and damaging buildings.

Military intelligence is looking into the operation.

Last week, Hamas published photos of the eight Israeli soldiers it says were part of the covert operation. Israel’s military censor did not allow the photos to be republished in the Israeli media and, in an unusual move, called on Israelis not to share any information they have about the raid, no matter how mundane.

Meanwhile, the army’s chief of staff, Lt-Gen Gadi Eisenkot, ordered a general assessment of the army’s special operations. Maj Gen Nitzan Alon, the former head of operations for the Israel Defence Forces, will head that probe. (JTA)



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Shining light on Chanukah’s ‘love me’ message



OPINION

Adina Roth

One of my favourite bedtime stories for my children is *The Love-Me Bird* by Joyce Dunbar. It’s a wise tale about a little bird who longs for someone to love her, and so she coos, over and over, “Love me, love me”.

A wise old owl tries to help the bird find love, but as long as she sings, “Love me, love me”, no one seems to come. And then the owl has an insight: “Sing a different tune,” he says, “how about, ‘Love you-ooo! Love you-ooo!’”

The Love-Me Bird changes her tune, and suddenly is surrounded by others, and finds love.

The central message of *The Love-Me Bird* is for children and adults alike: when you make it about yourself, people aren’t that interested. But show interest in another, and they will be drawn to you like bees to honey.

I believe Chanukah offers a similar message to grapple with. Light is the central theme of Chanukah and indeed, light is a very powerful metaphor. Light itself can be used in different ways. We can “be” the light, and proudly shine our light outwards, or we can offer our light as a way to encourage others to discover their own illuminations.

I once heard a rabbi talk about the deeper meaning of placing his chanukiah in his front window overlooking the street. The traditional understanding of placing the chanukiah in a prominent and public place is for the purpose of *pirsumei nisah* (publicising the miracle) of Chanukah.

Growing up, I had always understood this as a kind of “they tried to beat us, we won, and look at us now!” kind of message. But he said something very different.

According to the rabbi, when we place light in our windows in dark times, we communicate the most profound message; the very possibility of light! For him, the publicising of the light is not to brag, but to offer all people hope, to remind people (who might have forgotten) that their light too can shine.

I was very moved by his explanation. It was a simple interpretation of the mitzvah *pirsumei nisah*, but instead of the focus being on our story, it was about offering our story so people could remember and kindle their own light.

This rabbi’s message was a Chanukah version of our very own Nelson Mandela’s words “And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”

There is a subtle but crucial difference between being a light for others to stare at and admire, and being a light that humbly models the very possibility of light itself. Perhaps this is why the term *ohr lagoyim* (a light unto the nations), mentioned by our prophet Isaiah, can be interpreted in different ways.

I have heard Jewish people say,

“We are so amazing, look at our Nobel Prize winners, look at our Israeli innovation, look at us, look at us!” We know this!

But, as any psychologist might gently remind a client, the way to be liked is not to say, “Look at me, look at how amazing I am, love me, love-me!”

In a similar way to the rabbi’s interpretation of *pirsumei nisah*, can we conceive of *ohr lagoyim* as a way to offer our contribution to humanity humbly, and to seek, indeed demand, that same light in all people.

In some ways this is about the democratising of light. No one person or nation has the monopoly on light, wisdom, and illumination. But we shine our light as a reminder to all people that everyone has light, and is responsible to make it manifest.

This idea is mirrored in another



Torah discussion about light. In *Parshat Be’ha’alotcha*, when Aaron is instructed to light the Menorah in the *Mishkan* (tabernacle), Rashi explains that Aaron was to hold the flame at a distance from the candelabra. By holding the lighting lamp in proximity to the cup but without actually touching it, the

flame would then arise by itself. The depth of this idea is profound: the lighting lamp simply holds its own light to reveal to the Menorah’s lamps the very possibility of their own generativity. Then, they create their own illumination, all by themselves. As the Jewish people, we face

forms of anti-Semitism from the right and the left. These are tough times in the world, with very few clear answers. But, as much as our defending impulse might be to croon like the Love-Me Bird, “Love me, love me, look at my light!”, the message of Chanukah is deeper and more subtle.

It applies to us as parents, as educators, as friends, and as a people. We shine light, not for admiration or triumph, but to offer the very possibility to every person to shine their own light, everywhere. Let’s croon, “Love you, love you” and see what happens.

- *Adina Roth is a clinical psychologist in private practice and a teacher of Jewish Studies. She runs an independent Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah programme in Johannesburg, and she teaches Tanach to adults.*

The big power of small stories

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie famously speaks of the “danger of a single story”, in the TED talk by the same name.

The problem, she explains, is that hearing only one kind of narrative restricts us to only one version of possibility. In her case, growing up, she believed that girls in books (which were largely of the Western British and American variety) played in the snow, ate apples, and talked a lot about the weather.

Never mind that she lived in Nigeria, had never left Nigeria. She ate mangoes, not apples, and she never spoke about the weather. Although she acknowledges the magic of worlds opened up for her by these stories, she acknowledges, too, their stifling bonds.

She never imagined that girls like her could exist in books, “girls with chocolate skin and kinky hair that didn’t fit into pony tails”.

It’s not only that hearing certain stories limits our world view, though it is true that we seldom get the “full story” because the same account can change fundamentally depending on the storyteller, the audience, the agenda, or the context. However, when particular stories don’t get told, either because they don’t suit the storyteller or the global narrative, we miss powerful opportunities for connection and identification.

Judith Rosenbaum, the Executive Director of the non-profit Jewish Women’s Archive, concurs. “Public stories are incomplete, and often leave out the stories of women,” she says. “Whenever we restrict someone to a particular role” – and this is important – “even if it is a celebrated one”, we limit them and us. She uses the example of Serach bat Asher to illustrate.

Serach bat Asher was the daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob, and is unusual in that she is mentioned outside the usual context of the biblical female role of homemaker. Even more unusual is that she is mentioned twice, albeit in passing, in the Tanach. She is mentioned first in Bereishit 46:17 – among the generations who go down from Canaan to Egypt. Then later, she is mentioned in Bamidbar 26:46 – among those who left Egypt and entered the Promised Land hundreds of years later.

The repetition of the name so many generations later catches the rabbis’ attention. How could the same person live so long? Why does some “minor” character get two mentions?

The midrashim explain: through all the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people, it is she who whispers to Jacob that Joseph still lives. It is she who identifies Moshe as the redeemer

of the Hebrews. It is she who remembers where Joseph’s bones were hidden, so they can be taken with the Hebrews and buried in Israel. It is only through her that the sweep of Jewish narrative, Jewish history, and legacy is kept alive during the many years of Egyptian enslavement... She is the carrier of communal memory.

Of course, there are big dramatic stories here – 10 plagues, splitting sea – but if Serach were not there, the course of Jewish history could not move forward.

Sometimes, the big story may not be the one that endures, that speaks to generations later, that resonates or provides much-needed perspective on realities yet to be imagined.

Take the story of Chanukah – a story of brave Maccabees in the fight for religious freedom. Big story. One jar of oil that should have provided a day’s worth of light but miraculously lasted for eight days. Big story.

But perhaps the more powerful tale is about the unnamed person, who amid the civil war, religious



persecution, homelessness, and bloodshed, had the foresight and faith to hide a small vial of oil, believing that one day it would be needed again... Perhaps that message of how a small gesture can be heroic might resonate more with a contemporary Jew in a way that the bow and arrow of the Maccabee may not.

We need to be vigilant that the small stories don’t get lost in the noise that is the 21st century. What stories are in danger of being lost today that we should ensure are told? What futures could those small stories make possible?

OPINION

Batya Bricker



We need to seek alternative stories, welcome them, even if it may put into question our own. There are multiple perspectives that all contain truths. There are 70 faces to the Torah. The Talmud itself records both majority and minority opinions.

We shouldn’t overlook anything that may enrich our understanding, broaden our perspective, or create new meaning. We need to do our best to include a wide range of perspectives in our storytelling.

In a messy, complicated, complex world, we use stories to impose order on the chaos. It is our way of remembering, connecting, finding meaning in the things that happen to us and around us.

But if the narrative is too simple, too conveniently “good versus evil”, it is unlikely to allow layers of stories beneath the surface of the big headline.

And reading between the lines sometimes reveals the most powerful story of all.

- *Batya Bricker has a degree in architecture and 20 years’ experience in the book industry, acting as a programme director for various book fairs and a freelance publisher. She is also an adult educator in Jewish education.*

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The mist and the snake



Jerusalem has always been the eye of the universe. Since time immemorial, the city, and particularly the Temple Mount, has always been a place of profound spirituality and prophecy.

Our rabbis teach that the *Even haShetiya* (the foundation stone) of the world is found here, and from it, the rest of the world was created. It's the place where earth was gathered from all four corners of the world, and Adam was formed. Our forefather Abraham brought his son Isaac to this sacred mountain to be sacrificed. Our two holy temples rested on this mountain for more than 800 years. Consequent to their destruction, our eyes and hearts have always looked towards the one remaining wall, known as the Kotel, the Western Wall of the Temple Mount.

Throughout the generations we have prayed towards this wall, and we recognise, soulfully, that there is an element of holiness that rests there. So, it comes as no surprise that any untoward incidents at the Kotel will be scrutinised and explored. They always seem to make news headlines.

In the past two months, such incidents have been reported with increasing frequency. During *Hoshana Rabba* (this past Sukkot), at sunrise, a *Facebook* blogger, Josh Wander, who is a Mount of Olives resident, was facing his camera towards the Temple Mount when a large white cloud seemingly rose up out of the ground from the Temple Mount.

His reflections and video went viral, and speculation abounded. Wander himself wrote, “I am certainly not the kind of person who sees signs in nature. But this was too out of the ordinary to ignore. It looked eerie, and the location, the site of the Holy of Holies, is too significant.”

It indeed looked eerie, and perhaps it rings true of the verse in Isaiah (44:22) “I will wipe away your sins like a cloud, your transgressions like mist... Come back to Me, for I will redeem you.”

Just over a month later, news sources everywhere described the appearance of a snake that slithered out of a crevice of stone in the women’s section of the Kotel.

The coin snake, which is common to the area, is not venomous, but is similar looking to a deadly viper also found in Israel. It was probably looking for a meal of pigeons (that live among the crevices) or perhaps their eggs. Thankfully, a skilled snake catcher was summoned, and it was removed safely from the area.

Coincidence or divine providence? To a believing Jew, who understands that nothing is orchestrated without the hand of G-d, this again begs the question, “What is this all trying to tell us?” And again, many suggestions have been put forth.

The snake made its appearance during a week in which the mayoral candidacy for Jerusalem was hotly contested. Some postulated that the snake’s appearance at the Temple Mount, was to remind us that divisiveness and hatred destroyed the Temple, and that we should be aware that such actions today will only bring destruction upon us.

In the Kabbalistic work the Zohar, we are taught that the word for snake in Hebrew, *nachash*, has a numerical value of 358, the same numerical value of *Mashiach* (the Messiah). Postulating contended that the snake came to remind us that we are, in fact, experiencing the birth pangs of *Mashiach*, and very soon, the world will experience the revelation of the Messianic age.

Continuing further, the Zohar explains that the Hebrew word for snake, *nachash*, can be rearranged to spell out the word “*choshen*”, the breastplate that the high priest wore, during Temple times. It was from this breastplate that kings and leaders would seek the word of G-d.

Hence the parallel derived here was that the snake suggested that very soon, we will witness the rebuilding of our temple, the restoration of the divine service in the temple, and the use of the breastplate as a guide to all things spiritual.

It would be remiss if we also overlooked the fact that the snake was found in the women’s section! Immediately, the story of the Garden of Eden comes to the fore, and the saga of how the woman, Eve, ate of the Tree of Knowledge, good and evil, only because she listened to the advice of the serpent (Genesis 3:1).

Again here much speculation abounds. Women are intricately involved in correcting this primordial sin. Many Jewish works describe the foundational and important work that needs to be done by Jewish women in not only rectifying the repercussions of the original sin, but in playing a primary role in advancing and bringing about the final redemption.

Perhaps, one can say that the snake appeared to remind women of the task at hand, and that soon, the evil brought into the world as a result of eating from the Tree of



Knowledge will be reversed.

Undoubtedly, there is much to learn here. It may all be unnerving and somewhat uncomfortable. One may also dismiss it with a cynical wave of the hand or a disbelieving frown.

I like to frame it in the context of much bigger things. The snake and the mist are not the only signs that foretell of Messianic times. Our world as we know it currently is fulfilling many, many prophecies of the Bible, too many to fit into one article.

Ultimately, it’s good advice and prudent to err on the side of caution – if all that is said

above is true, what should we do?

I venture to say, hop on board and make it happen! Do a random act of goodness and kindness, take on another *mitzvah*, learn what Judaism says about this era of redemption.

Because after all, who doesn’t want to look forward to a Messianic world, which ushers in an era of peace, health and harmony?

• *Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host, and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah and applies it to contemporary times.*

How to be Jewish in a non-Jewish world



Unlike a generation ago, the walls of the ghetto no longer sequester us from the rest of society. We fraternise, shop, and do business outside our own immediate community all the time. We are all part of the dominant western culture. The contemporary question, then, is how do we strike a balance between retaining our Jewish identity while being citizens of the world, especially when that world may be indifferent or even hostile to our Jewishness? Especially at this time of year, when trees are dwarfing menorahs, and Santa Clauses outnumber rabbis.

Chanukah has an answer.

Chanukah celebrates the miracle of the oil, when only one day’s supply lasted for eight days. My revered teacher the Lubavitcher Rebbe OBM once taught that oil holds the secret formula for how to live a proud Jewish life in an environment that may often not be Jewishly conducive.

Oil, you see, is a paradox. It contains conflicting characteristics and puzzling properties. On the one hand, it mixes easily and spreads very quickly, seeping through and permeating whatever material it comes into contact with. Ever try drying the excess oil off a fried potato latke? Good luck. Your serviette will be very oily indeed in no time at all.

On the other hand, when mixed with other liquids, oil stubbornly rises to the surface and refuses to be absorbed by anything else. I remember in my student days in yeshiva, one of my roommates had no menorah for Chanukah. Rather ingeniously, he collected eight empty cold drink bottles, filled them almost to the top with water and then poured some olive oil into each bottle. I was quite intrigued to see

how the oil was clearly distinguishable from the water as it remained afloat above the water. He then added the wick, lit it, and his makeshift menorah worked like a charm. A modern-day Chanukah miracle!

Like oil, Jews today find themselves mixing in a wide variety of circles – social, business, civic, communal, even political. The challenge is to retain our identity in the process. We don’t have to mix to the point of allowing our Jewish persona to be swallowed or diluted.

When in circles outside our comfort zone, we often feel the pressure, whether real or imagined, to conform to the norms around us. Few among us enjoy sticking out like a sore thumb. The fact is, however, that other people respect us more when we respect ourselves. If we are casual and cavalier in our commitment to our own principles, then our non-Jewish associates might worry that we might betray them next.

Provided we do it honestly, respectfully, and consistently, our adherence to a code of values will impress our associates and inspire them with greater confidence in our trustworthiness in all areas of life.

There have been times when on international airline flights, I have had no choice but to daven on the plane. I mean *Shachris*, the morning service, complete with *talis* and *tefillin*. To be honest, I really don’t enjoy those situations, but when the schedule of the flight leaves me no option, *nu*, a Jew’s gotta do what a Jew’s gotta do! But, I confess to feeling rather self-conscious. (Of course, I always make a point of going up to the flight attendants first to make them aware that I will be praying and not strapping explosives to my body!)

But, afterwards, to my pleasant surprise, I almost always get some curious fellow passengers who are intrigued by it all, asking me questions about Judaism and its traditions. And I always get the sense that they have a deep respect for our faith. Even on local flights, when I pull out a Jewish book in Hebrew to study on a flight, it arouses many questions by my non-Jewish neighbours, which always lead to friendly and enlightening discussions. Last year, I was sitting next to an influential member of parliament from the ANC, and it gave me an opportunity to state Israel’s case in the context of a friendly conversation.

Or another example. Most major cities in the world have any number of kosher restaurants filled with Jewish business people entertaining non-Jewish partners, clients, or would-be clients. Some establishments may be more upmarket than others, but everyone seems to manage, and the deals get done. We can be perfectly sociable without giving up our principles. Most people are quite happy to accommodate individual needs and sensitivities. It seems to me that it is the Jews who complain more about kosher food than the non-Jews. Our apprehensions about stating our religious requirements are often exaggerated and unfounded. Provided we do it honestly, respectfully, and consistently, our adherence to a code of values will impress our associates and inspire them with greater confidence in our trustworthiness in all areas of life.

Compromising our values and principles is a sure way to lose the respect we crave from the world around us. Dignity, pride, and self-respect earn us esteem and admiration, whether from Jews or non-Jews. It is a time-tested, proven method. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks famously said, “Non-Jews respect Jews who respect themselves.”

Learn from the oil. Spread around and socialise. But remember your uniqueness. Be distinctive and proud, and know where to draw the line.

The chanukiah – history and mystery



OPINION

Rabbi Greg Alexander

December rolls around, and the shopping malls of South Africa are filled with Christmas merchandise and song. You are lucky if your local Pick n Pay or Woolworths pops up a “Happy Chanukah” sign, but it’s no comparison to the huge bling that is thrown at Christmas shoppers.

That’s just in the shops – what about neighbours who are putting up ever-more elaborate Christmas displays in their gardens, and on their roofs, with full-sized Santas and reindeer? And snow scenes – in the December heat!

So what are Jews doing? We are sitting at home around a little chanukiah, lighting candles! Hardly a comparative act! Or is it? I think that the powerful symbolism of these little lights has significance that is not fully appreciated until we see it in its full history.

First, let’s find out more about this little chanukiah. Some people call it a menorah, some a chanukiah – so which is it? Well, the menorah was a spectacular golden candelabra that graced the Temples (both of them) until the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70CE. And it has not been seen since, although there are lots of theories as to where you can find it today – think *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*. But there is one important difference between the menorah and the chanukiah. The menorah had seven branches, the chanukiah has nine. Why?

Well, going back a couple centuries before

the Romans, the Maccabees revolted against their Hellenistic oppressors, and succeeded in rededicating the Temple from a shrine to Zeus to its original purpose. Only, they needed oil for the menorah to last eight days, and had enough only for one. They lit it anyway, and a miracle occurred – it lasted eight days! That’s the reason for the eight branches, plus one for the shamash – the helper candle.

Only, in talmudic times, they didn’t have candles. They had little oil lamps, and they just lined them up. In medieval Europe, they used a star-shaped oil lamp for Shabbat and Chanukah called a Judenstern (Jewish star) with eight separate compartments. The shamash originally wasn’t a candle for lighting, it was a separate lamp for giving light. You see, you can’t use the light of the Chanukah candles to see by, so you needed another source of light (that was before electric lights, duh!).

Only in the 16th century did they switch to wax candles, and so evolved the modern chanukiah. Only then did the shamash start to have the fixed place on the candelabra you see today. That’s when the modern chanukiah came into its own – a portable metal, wood, or clay candelabra that had the shape of a tree of life, and worked perfectly.

Let’s see the deeper meaning of this mitzvah. Ostensibly, it’s to remember the miracle of the oil. And what better time in the world to think of miracles? In South Africa, Chanukah falls in the middle of summer, but in Israel, this is the darkest, coldest part of winter. And Chanukah always falls over the new moon of Tevet, which

is the darkest part of the month. So, in the dark of night, in the darkest part of the month, in the darkest part of the year, it’s no wonder that it’s a great time to light lights and eat oily comfort food! The light not only reminds us of the miracle of the oil, but also of the need to light a candle in darkness.

The number eight symbolises infinity – G-d created the world in six days, the seventh was



completion and rest, so eight is seven plus one. More than complete, it symbolises eternity and infinity. Why so? I mean, oil lasting for a few extra days is a cool miracle, but what does it have to do with infinity?

Perhaps the miracle is not the oil lasting eight days, but the fact that the Maccabees had the

faith and courage – even the chutzpah – to light the menorah at all. They had infinite faith that there just HAD to be a miracle. Perhaps miracles happen every day. Jewish tradition urges us to seek the miracles hidden in plain sight.

Chanukah teaches us that it’s not just light that brings salvation, but darkness too. We should not think that just because we are having a hard time, that life seems dark, that we have been abandoned, and there is no hope. In the biblical account of creation, G-d does not eradicate darkness when light is created. Rather, darkness receives its place – night, and light its place – day. The interplay between light and darkness is key to understanding our physical and spiritual world.

This is a message that should give us hope in the darkest times. And, that’s why we need to do what’s called *Pirsum Nes* – we need to advertise this miracle. Our chanukiah should, ideally, be placed outside on the street or in the window overlooking the street, so we can share the message of courage and hope with the world.

South Africa is a land of extreme opposites – rich and poor, beauty and horror, kindness and brutality. It’s also a land of miracles. This December, let us add our chanukiah to the darkness that some feel out there, and know that we are the bringers of light, the agents of change, the ones who produce miracles. May we have a transformative year. *Chag Urim Sameach!*

• Rabbi Greg Alexander is part of the rabbinic team at Temple Israel in Cape Town. In December, when he’s not lighting Chanukah candles, look for him at machaneh or on the beach.



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The elixir of olive oil

JORDAN MOSHE

Think of Chanukah, and you almost always think of olive oil. Beyond being a key ingredient in fried latkes or doughnuts, oil is traditionally used to light Chanukah candles, though these days most of us are accustomed to lighting wax candles. But, regardless of the time of year, the story of olive oil is illuminating, flavoursome, and worthy of appreciation.

“Much like the Jewish people, the olive tree is resilient,” said Fotini Balassis, the owner of the Olive You deli. “From plagues to war, they have literally lasted thousands of years, and continue to produce fruit today.”

Balassis was giving a presentation at the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning’s recent Chanukah Fest at Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg, which included an olive oil tasting.

“The olive trees of Crete, which are 3 000 years old, have been declared monuments, and still produce olives,” she said. “There are trees in Lebanon that are 6 000 years old, and the locals consider them a living miracle. They have survived changing climates, disease, and war in the region.

“Bethlehem boasts trees about 4 000 years old. An analysis of the area has found amphora containing

oil that dates back 8 000 years. Olive oil has been around since time immemorial.”

According to Balassis, the tree species itself is said to have been in existence for 20 to 40 million years in the Middle East, Persia, and the Mediterranean basin. The plant we know today first appeared about 7 000 years ago, and the oil its fruit produces has been considered valuable since then.

“Olive oil was traded as a commodity, and still is today,” said Balassis. “Olive leaves were used in ancient Olympic games to crown athletes, and a jug of olive oil was given to them. This was the highest accolade one could receive.”

The oil continues to be valued today, with the ubiquitous use of olive oil in our kitchens, and the high prices we pay for quality oil. Said Balassis, “Sometimes we think that extra virgin olive oil is really expensive. But when you realise that it takes a whole six kilos of olives to produce one litre of the oil, it really makes sense. A good rule of thumb is that price is often an indicator of quality. Expensive, extra virgin olive oil has no substitute. If you want quality, you have to pay for it.”

“Olives are taken from the tree, gathered as quickly as possible, and hastened to the press. The olive is a fruit, and it starts to decompose as soon as it’s picked. The vitamins



start to fade as soon as this happens. Between 24 to 48 hours is the ideal time for pressing to ensure that all the benefits are not lost,” she explained. The smaller the farm, the better the quality of the oil. This is because the fruit doesn’t need to travel as far to the press, and can be pressed and bottled much faster.

Because extra virgin cold pressed olive oil is pressed as close to the source as possible, it has no opportunity to become contaminated by being exposed to anything else. Therefore, according to the Beth Din of South Africa, cold-pressed olive oil requires no kosher certification. Additionally, any type of olive oil is acceptable for

use in lighting Chanukah candles.

These days we press the oil mechanically. The more it is processed and refined, the less pure it becomes. “Many people think that light olive oil is lighter in calories, and therefore healthier. This is not accurate. It is called light because it is lighter in colour and flavour because it has been processed more,” Balassis said.

Sip it like whisky

Taking up the glasses in front of us, we warmed the samples by cupping them in our palms and covering them up. Sipping the oil like whisky connoisseurs, we were told to line our tongues with the oil,

and breathe through our mouths to air it. The different flavours were discernible, and the potency of the various samples immediately apparent.

While sipping from our glasses, Balassis outlined the health benefits of the oil. Not only is it effective externally on the skin, it can assist in treating internal issues including diabetes, depression, earache, heart issues, and obesity. The purer the oil, the greater the benefits for health and cooking.

Although this means that extra virgin olive oil is ideal for cooking, it is important to remember that exposing it to high heat will cause minerals to be lost. It is therefore better to use more oil or a lower heat for frying food.

Olive oil flavours are categorised as mild, medium, or robust. The best way to test olive oil is by using your senses, Balassis said. Your eyes, nose, and mouth are the best tools to test its true quality. As with wine tasting, she recommends looking out for certain notes, colours, and smells.

“In Italy, 20 commercially available olives oils were tested, and 11 of them were found to be less than pure when the belief was the opposite,” Balassis said. “You really need to be careful. Train yourself, and you’ll be able to make the call.”

Chocolate babka doughnuts the best of both worlds

CHAYA RAPPOPORT

Babka is nearly a weekly occurrence in my house, and I can think of few things better. But it’s not just me: Babka has really been getting the recognition it deserves all over the country, making appearances everywhere from artisanal bakeries to Jewish delis, even high-end restaurants.

Both doughnuts and babka are time-intensive kitchen projects. Usually, it’d be either-or – and that choice would be pretty hard to make. But with these doughnuts, both are possible. And if that isn’t a Chanukah miracle, then I don’t know what is.

Please note: You want to make the dough the night before you will fry, so plan accordingly.

Ingredients:
For the doughnut dough:

- 3/4 cup whole milk
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 stick unsalted butter at room temperature, cubed

- 3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

For the chocolate pastry cream:

- 4 large egg yolks
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons corn starch
- 4 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, broken into pieces
- 1/2 stick unsalted butter, cubed

For the cacao nib sugar plus frying:

- 6 cups vegetable oil, for frying
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 tablespoons cacao nibs

Directions:

- To make the cacao nib sugar: in a food processor, grind the cacao nibs until fine. Combine the pulverized cacao nibs and sugar. Transfer to an airtight container until ready to use.

- The next step is to make the pastry cream, since it needs to set before you fill the doughnuts. Whisk together yolks, vanilla, sugar, corn starch, cocoa powder, and salt.
- In a heavy saucepan, bring milk just to a boil over moderate heat, and in a stream, add 1/4 cup to egg mixture, whisking until smooth.
- Transfer the milk-and-egg mixture to the pan with the rest of the milk, and bring to a boil, whisking (the mixture will look curdled but will become smooth as whisked).
- Boil the mixture, whisking vigorously for 1 minute, and remove from heat. Stir in chocolate and butter, stirring until melted and combined well. Transfer to a heat-proof bowl and chill, surface covered with plastic wrap, overnight, or until ready to fill doughnuts.
- To make the doughnut dough: heat the milk until warm to the touch, around 110 degrees fahrenheit (43 degrees centigrade). Add the eggs to the warm milk mixture, and whisk gently to combine.
- Butter a medium bowl and set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the flour, sugar, yeast, and salt. Add the milk mixture and mix just until combined. Switch to the dough hook and knead the dough on low speed, about three minutes. The dough will be sticky – this is perfectly fine.
- Increase the speed to medium, and add the butter, a piece or two at a time. In the mixer, let the dough mix until completely smooth and elastic. To test the dough’s readiness, try stretching a piece of it. It should stretch easily to a point where it becomes translucent but doesn’t rip.
- Put the dough in a buttered bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for minimum of 12 hours, or overnight.
- The next day, when ready to make the doughnuts, line two baking sheets with

- parchment paper. Dust the paper well with flour. Tip the cold dough onto a lightly floured work surface and roll it into a 9.5 inch by 12.5 inch (24cm by 31.7cm) rectangle. It should be about 1/2-inch (1.2cm) thick.
- Using a 3-inch (8cm) round cookie cutter, cut out 12 dough rounds and set them on the prepared sheets. Lightly cover them with plastic wrap, and set in a warm place to proof for about 1.5 hours. After proofing, the dough should look puffy and spring back slowly when pressed gently.
- When you’re ready to fry, line a rimmed baking sheet with paper towels. Prepare the cacao nib sugar in a bowl nearby. Spoon the pastry cream into a pastry bag fitted with a small round tip.
- Add the oil to a medium, heavy-bottomed pot or to a deep fryer. Heat the oil to between 350 and 365 degrees fahrenheit (176 to 185 degrees centigrade).
- Carefully add two to three doughnuts to the oil, and fry them until golden brown, two to three minutes per side. Using a slotted spoon, put the doughnuts on the paper towels. After about one minute, when the doughnuts are cool enough to handle, toss them in the cacao nib sugar. Repeat with the remaining dough.
- To fill the doughnuts, put the pastry cream in a pastry bag. Using a knife or a chopstick, poke a hole into one side of each doughnut. Be careful not to poke through the other side. Insert the tip of the pastry bag into the hole and gently squeeze to fill. Makes 12 doughnuts. (JTA)
- Chaya Rappoport is the blogger, baker, and picture taker behind retrolillies.wordpress.com. Currently a pastry sous chef at a Brooklyn bakery, she’s been blogging since 2012. Her work has been featured on *The Feed Feed*, *Delish.com*, *Food and Wine*, and *Conde Nast Traveler*.





Is the Chanukah dreidel just a children’s toy?

JORDAN MOSHE

Central to every Jew’s childhood memories of Chanukah is a game of dreidel and a stash of gelt. It is true to say that after the chanukiah, the dreidel is Chanukah’s most iconic symbol. However, according to Rabbi Yehuda Stern, there is far more to this spinning top than we may think.

“We are all familiar with the story of how the dreidel was used by Jews to study Torah in secret while under observation by the Greeks,” says Stern, “but the truth is that this is a superficial understanding of something that has profound significance to us as Jews.”

Stern was one of the speakers at Chanukah Fest at Sydenham Shul on 4 November, a morning programme devoted to unlocking the deeper significance of Chanukah, hosted by the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning.

Stern outlined the rules of the dreidel game, which most of us are quite familiar with. “We all know that the four letters – *nun*, *gimmel*, *hey*, and *shin* or *pei* – stand for *nes gadol haya sham/po* – a great miracle occurred there or here, depending on whether you’re in the diaspora or in Israel.”

“These letters also stand for different Yiddish words according to which the game of dreidel is played. *Hei*, or *halb*, allows you to take half of the pot. *Gimmel*, or *gantz*, let’s you take it all. *Nun*, for *nisht*, means you take nothing, and *shin*, meaning *shtetl arayn* (put in), means you have to put one of your coins into the pot.”

So far, so good: the meaning of the letters doesn’t deviate from what most of us know. However, Stern said the top related not only to a children’s game, but to the four components of a person.

“Man consists of soul, body, mind, and an element of G-d. In Hebrew, these are *neshama*, *guf*, *seichel*, and *Hashem* – *nun*, *gimmel*, *shin* and *hei* – the same letters as those which appear on the dreidel. Not only that, but these four components all relate to particular aspects of Chanukah itself.”

He explained that Chanukah, which celebrates the triumph of the Maccabees over their Greek conquerors, forms part of the Jewish history of exile. The four exiles which the Jewish people have undergone have essentially made us who we are today, and all are captured in the four elements of a person.

“The Babylonian exile caused the spiritual ruin of the Jew, which relates to

the soul. The Persian exile threatened our physical existence, meaning it is connected to the element of the body. The Greek exile of Chanukah involves the mind, because what troubled them most was our ideals and philosophies. Lastly, the Roman exile, which marked the beginning of our current exile, affected us in our totality. Because Hashem is contained in everything, this implicates the element of us which is G-dly.”

It heightens the relevance of the four letters of the dreidel, because it suggests that in spite of our exile, we maintain hope in redemption. Even when we’re in exile, said Stern, we continue to celebrate the miracle of the past, and thereby show that we believe in future redemption.

Stern then explored the numerical significance of the dreidel, adding another dimension to the top’s significance. “The total numerical value of the four letters is 358, the same value as *mashiach*. The very belief in our redemption is hinted in the dreidel. The three *brachot* (blessings) we recite when we light candles on Chanukah place emphasis on three different words: Chanukah, *nissim* (miracles) and *she’hecheyanu* (that Hashem has preserved us until now).”

“The first letters of each of these words – *chet*, *nun* and *shin* – can be used to spell *nachash* or *snake*, the numerical value of which is also 358. This suggests that perhaps sin, which is represented by the snake, will be atoned for by our redemption. We therefore transform exile into redemption through Chanukah, and express our hope for the future.”

Stern concluded by exploring the shape of the dreidel itself, relating it to the two life approaches it represents. “The dreidel features two shapes – a square and a circle. These are two aspects of Torah. The square represents rigidity, structure, the world of law. The circle has no end and no beginning, no rigidity, no one definition. This is the individual experience, complete with all of the unique emotion and feeling of one person.”

This, he said, is a true reflection of the Jewish experience. “If you function with law only, there is no true purpose to life. If you function with emotion only, it is completely unchecked and also serves little purpose. If we want to change, grow, and develop, we need to use the two approaches simultaneously. If we operate with firm guidelines alongside an emotional sensitivity, we can achieve meaning and purpose in life as people.”



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South Africa a lightning rod for fair reporting on Israel

It is a remarkable privilege to be writing this week’s column on a bus somewhere between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Today is day three of the Jewish Media Summit, and this morning, we are on our way to visit Tel Aviv to get a sense of the start-up, entrepreneurial culture that has come to define Israel.

The Jewish Media Summit 2018 is a gathering of about 100 Jews from around the world. It seeks to address some common concerns about fairness in reporting news from the region, the issues faced by those who are supportive of Israel, and to give participants an understanding of the complexities as well as the beauty of Israel.

Participants are guests of the Israeli Press Office, and are treated to an intense, non-stop programme that is designed to showcase all aspects of Israel relevant to those in the media.

Incidentally, and as an aside, it seems that Jews don’t control the global press (but I, for one, would love to).

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



The summit is fascinating. Each participant brings their own perspective and experience. Each participant sees every conversation through the prism of their background and experience.

Whereas the Americans in the group might focus on the treatment of the Reform or Conservative movements by Israel, the Hungarians are struggling to understand if one can be supportive of Israel and an anti-Semite at the same time. The food bloggers, on the other hand, care nought for this theme, and seem to focus on the coffee breaks, not the sessions. I might tweet, others are on Facebook Live, and others are Instagramming everything.

Even more fascinating is the uncomfortable and

adversarial relationship between the members of the Israeli press. On a panel made up of *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*, it was clear to see that even in trying to understand and define what the “new anti-Semitism” is, political standpoints and approaches to the settlements became central to the conversation. It ended with panellists shouting at each other, and calling each other liars. It was enthralling. I couldn’t get enough of it!

What I have found particularly noteworthy is that as small as the South African community is, we are on the cutting edge of the conversation around the Jewish world, whether it is because of the fact that we are ground zero for the “Israel apartheid” myth, or because we look outside and inside South Africa for our news.

I have found the challenges we are facing in the country to be no different to those of others. The difference is that we are prepared to engage with them and address them. South Africans are often

accused of avoiding conflict, but my experience at the summit is that, to the contrary, we are active, engaged, and confident about our ability to speak our minds.

The recent Herzlia incident, the anti-Semitic voice note, the BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanctions) movement, a corrupt government with a bias against Israel, and the role of the Jewish community in the country, are subjects we have not shied away from. We have these conversations time and time again, and in doing so, we have dealt with many of these challenges. It is important to give ourselves credit for that. We are often hard on ourselves. That might be a good thing, but it is equally important to give credit when it is due.

What is clear is that Israel has not figured this out either. It understands the importance of a sympathetic press, and it acknowledges how vital it is that Israel is reported on fairly. But it is not yet clear how this can be achieved.

Maybe that is what day four is about.

Community Column

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Reaching out to Ramaphosa

When President Cyril Ramaphosa agreed to speak at the conference of the Gauteng Council of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, we decided to use the occasion as an opportunity to demonstrate our community’s commitment, in the past and today, to helping build South Africa.

Since assuming the presidency, Ramaphosa has worked tirelessly to address the damaging legacy of the previous administration. It was important for the Jewish community to hear from Ramaphosa himself regarding his vision for the country, while at the same time showing that it supports his efforts to deal with the challenges facing our country and is willing and able to assist in that regard.

When introducing the session in which Ramaphosa and eminent business leader Stephen Koseff exchanged views on how to get things right in South Africa, I alluded to how Ramaphosa – when addressing our community in Cape Town – stated that his government continued to regard the Jewish community as “valued partners in building a better society for all”. I reiterated that he could rely on the wholehearted support of South African Jewry in his endeavours to achieve those goals. Coming at this particular time in South Africa’s history, when so much hangs on whether or not we, as a nation, succeed in getting the country on the correct path, we believe that these were the core messages that we needed to communicate.

There is a great deal of anxiety in the Jewish community over the current state and future prospects of the country, and whether Jews still have a place in it. Such sentiments are understandable in view of the

increasing racial polarisation in our society, which has been exacerbated by the divisive and confrontational rhetoric on the part of certain political leaders. As Jews, we are under additional stress because of uncertainty about the future of the South Africa-Israel relationship.

Our conference went a long way towards addressing these concerns. Ramaphosa’s insightful, reassuring observations were warmly received by the capacity crowd, as were the other items on the programme, including the celebration of the Mandela legacy, and honouring the Coleman family for the courageous stand taken by its members against the apartheid regime.

A memorable evening closed with a special award to our remarkable National Director, Wendy Kahn, who, as previously reported, has received the signal honour of being included in *The Jerusalem Post’s* annual list of the world’s 50 most influential Jews. As with previous board conferences, Wendy oversaw every detail of the complex process, while somehow keeping on top of a host of other pressing issues that the board has had to deal with.

Her achievement is well summed up by the following extract from the citation we presented to her: “It would not be an exaggeration to say that you have rewritten the manual in terms of what it means to be a successful Jewish communal professional, setting a standard that both your counterparts and your successors can only strive to emulate, but can hardly expect to exceed.”

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



Above Board Shaun Zagnoev

Sunday (2 December)

- The Big Band Music Appreciation Society hosts a programme compiled by Harry Fidler: *Fred Astaire and his other dancing partners. Excerpts from the movies – a tribute to the swing era and John Wilson and his orchestra.* Time: 14:15. Venue: Beit Emanuel Slome Auditorium, 38 Oxford Road, Parktown. Enquiries: Marilyn 072 243 7436 or Jack 082 450 7622.
- Breindy and Matt host a unique Women’s Unity Evening with a live performance – *The sound of Jewish music you’ve never heard before.* Come relax, have a glass of wine kindly sponsored by Norman Goodfellows, and enjoy the music together with a guided meditation that promises to captivate and inspire.

WHAT’S ON

Time: 19:30 for 20:00. Venue: 22 St John’s Road, Sea Point. Cost: R100 at door/R80 online. For women and girls. For bookings and information: www.breindyandmatt.com or 060 343 6953.

Monday (3 December)

- Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) hosts its annual Christmas party on the International Day of People with Disabilities. Sponsor a child. There are 50 kids, many with cerebral palsy, autism, and hydrocephalus. Time: 10:30. Venue: Sithandiwe Disabled Care Centre, 84 Shakespeare Road, Lombardy East. Just R90 can make a child’s day extra special. Banking Details: WIZO Johannesburg; Nedbank Balfour Park; Branch code: 151105; Account number: 1511028858; REF: XMAS + your name. Email proof of payment to: wizojhbaccounts@beyachad.co.za. Call 011 646 2515 or Andrea: 083 677 8999 for more information.
- The Union of Jewish Women hosts its *Adult Education End of Year*. Join it for a happy morning to end term four with snacks and entertainment. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R50. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053.

Thursday (6 December)

- The next meeting of Hebrew speakers will take place at 10:30. Venue: Second floor, Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.
- Join WIZO every Thursday for a *Lunch & Learn* shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad. Contact: WIZO: 011 645 2515.

The continent you called ‘home’ that you never even knew

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

Think of Rwanda, and what comes to mind is grotesque mass killings and villages filled with the detritus of the Tutsi genocide at the hands of the Hutus.

But tiny Rwanda, a country of 10 million that has dubbed itself the “Switzerland of Africa”, is the continent’s fastest growing state, surrounded by arable countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania – with countless hectares of good land they can hardly use.

This ironic sub-text pervaded last week’s seminar at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre about changing narratives in African war reporting, 25 years after the genocide, which killed 800 000 people in 100 days. The African roller coaster is largely quiescent now, but with memories of what happened when tribalism went wild. Veteran global journalists spoke at the seminar.

Do we know Africa? Jean-Philippe Remy, Africa correspondent for French daily paper *Le Monde*, has been living and working in Africa for 20 years. He says Westerners still think of the continent as one country. But it is 74 diverse countries, each with its own character.

Amazingly, in the Rwandan genocide era, even good journalists used to say smugly, “we know Africa” – just like good French colonialists. It was the era of parachute journalism, where French foreign reporters would arrive, do minor investigations, and write through French eyes. In a welcome change, this attitude has lessened as cellphone journalism from locals has become a news source, leaving commentary and analysis for major media.

Before the present era, journalists had to cover a continent overwhelmed by conflict in Ethiopia-Eritrea, Congo, Somalia, Sudan, and elsewhere. Then, in the 2002 Kenyan elections, President Daniel Arap Moi retired after a 24-year rule. Nairobi’s

celebrations attracted the largest crowd ever. Remy says everything changed. Later, to integrate better into the region, Rwanda even changed its alignment and language from French to Kenyan English.

What about literature? Is it still “Western”? Unfortunately, that’s the narrow way most of us see it. But from the early 2000s, new African voices have emerged in countries such as Somalia and Nigeria. It has raised interest in African writing in countries such as Germany. Martin Hielscher, a specialist in fiction at a German publisher, said we can’t simply call things “African” anymore, as if it’s all the same. Africa must speak for itself. African literature tends to be structured less around the linear plot associated with Western literature, but a mix of different voices.

Given the violent history of the continent, journalism must inevitably deal with African suffering. The journalist Salim Amin, who addressed the seminar, is the son of renowned Kenyan photojournalist Mohamed “Mo” Amin, who in 1984 revealed to the world the Ethiopian famine that threatened to starve seven million people.

Mo’s pictures inspired British musician Bob Geldof to organise Live Aid, a 16-hour concert for Ethiopia featuring Queen, and others. It was watched worldwide by 1.9 billion people. In a stunning success, it raised millions of dollars, and is what many adult Westerners remember about Ethiopia. Salim showed the seminar a film about Mo’s work in conflict zones, which kept the audience spellbound.

When President Cyril Ramaphosa appealed to Jewish youngsters at Sunday’s South African Jewish Board of Deputies conference not to leave South Africa, but help rebuild it after a ruinous decade, he knew many had already gone to places with secure futures. Most had lived here in capsules of privilege in an Africa opaque to them. They will make their new homes in America and elsewhere without being able to say, authentically, that they “know Africa”.

Perhaps South Africa will flower once again like Rwanda? Sadly, those emigrants won’t see it.

Letters

HERZLIA BOYS' INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS MUST BE BALANCED AGAINST OBLIGATIONS

The incident at Herzlia in Cape Town involving two misguided boys kneeling during the singing of the Jewish national song, *Hatikvah*, is just another instance of the post-modern dictum of “anything goes”. In a world where values are relative, every individual sees himself as a moral beacon.

For those who don’t know, *Hatikvah* translates as “The Hope”. It is the anthem of the state of Israel, but it is much more than that. The words were written in 1878, 70 years before Israel was established, and it reflects the Jews’ 2 000-year-old hope of returning to the land as a sovereign people.

It is the song of the Jewish heart, yearning for a second exodus from the persecution and suffering of the diaspora

In short, *Hatikvah* expresses Jewish identity as well as nationhood. In 1944, as Czech Jews were being led to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau with the accompanying Waffen-SS guards beating and humiliating them, they sang *Hatikvah*. It was the last thing they did.

Hatikvah represents a sacred value. To use it as a means to an end is to commit an act of desecration which plunges a metaphorical knife into the Jewish heart. Acts of desecration are the very opposite of respectful discussion and gentle argument, and are the province of those who believe their truth is unassailable (the Taliban spring to mind).

Of course it was a setup. The boys had hardly risen to full height when others rushed in to demand their right to free speech be respected, the respect they deny to others.

But free speech is a strawman argument and in any case, besides the point. It’s a strawman argument because no one denies them the right to speak freely in the appropriate forum. And it’s beside the point, because even if they were denied this right, it is still not permissible to desecrate values held dear by millions. Our rights as individuals must be balanced against our obligations to others. Rights are individual and man-made, our deepest values are communal and derived from our nature as social beings. It’s called *ubuntu*.

Some have called them courageous, but there’s nothing courageous about Jew-baiting. Would they have dared juggle a crucifix in a Christian Church to protest the behaviour of priests, or banged a drum in a mosque during Ramadan to protest against suicide bombers? Not a chance!

They would do well to remember that Jews stand in the shadow of a long history which includes the delegitimisation of their religion, the delegitimisation of their race, and now the delegitimisation of their nation state. No Jew, not even these two, can step outside that shadow. – **Chuck Volpe, Sydney**

Disclaimer: The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not reflect the views of the *SA Jewish Report*. The editor is not obliged to use every letter and will not publish vitriolic statements or any letters with inappropriate content. Letters will be edited and – if need be – shortened. **Guidelines:** Letters are limited to 400 words. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. Letters should be emailed to editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

AIRING FRUSTRATION WITH AIRBNB

I find the Airbnb website a perfect solution to my needs when travelling. Not having to stay at hotels but rather select a hospitality experience which suits my needs is really innovative.

The ability to grade hosts and have them grade you keeps both sides on their toes, while maintaining globally acceptable standards in hospitality and behaviour.

I am fully supportive of Airbnb keeping all shades of racism and discrimination out of the business arena. This is a difficult task, which until now has been well achieved.

It is therefore hugely disappointing to see Airbnb take a stance on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Of all the global conflicts, this is the one that Airbnb has decided to take sides on. What about Iran/Syria/Yemen/Myanmar and others?

Airbnb’s decision to remove accommodation offered in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) from its website shows which side of the political map it has chosen to support.

As Airbnb has taken a religious and political stance, and it is diagonally opposed to mine, I do not feel that I can support it any longer.

Should Airbnb return to being an apolitical, space renting organisation, then I would reconsider my decision to leave Airbnb. – **Etienne Taitz, South Africa**

Taitz says he sent the above letter to Airbnb management to put pressure on the company to stick to doing what it is good at, namely renting properties and not getting involved in regional conflicts.

HERZLIA INCIDENT HIGHLIGHTS COMMUNITY DIVISIONS

The “taking the knee” incident at Herzlia recently has inflamed the community. If ever there was a divide within the community, this regrettable incident has highlighted it. The glue that kept the community cohesive – the land of Israel – lost its traction. Suddenly, everyone who thought they were an “expert” was having their two cents worth, for or against the actions of the two pupils.

In my humble upbringing, I learnt at home and as a pupil at Herzlia the phenomenon called *derech erez* (right and wrong). A time to toe the line on certain occasions, and a time to express opposing opinions on others. And that upbringing I have continued throughout my life, be it at home with my family, in my professional practice, or in the community. There are times one must show respect for others or society in general, and there are opportunities when one can/should express one’s opinion for or against an issue.

The action of the two pupils, regrettably, shows the silos that exist in the community. The family and its inculcating values should feed into the school silo. This did not appear to work. Then, the school silo with its mandate to educate and shape young minds to think and be aware, but retain *derech erez* in the actions of tomorrow’s adults came under severe pressure. And then the community silo, which should continue the cycle for the future in its relationship with its fellow citizens wherever they may be also came unstuck.

We are our own worst enemies! – **Albert Glass, Cape Town**

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60
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1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000



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

Matric final gesture of generosity

Grade 12s at King David High School Linksfeld have finished their final exams, but they still have the generosity and thoughtfulness to consider others. They have donated their school uniforms to the disadvantaged, as well as all their old stationery, and have given past papers to a fellow matric student so that he can recycle the paper.



Matric pupils with their donations

All lit up for Chanukah

King David Rosabelle Klein Nursery School in Waverley has spent the week preparing for Chanukah. Children have been learning about the oil that lasted eight days, the Maccabim, and the light of the menorah that shines for all of us at this time of the year. They have made their own menorahs, and are looking forward to lighting candles with their families next week.

Jake Lang, Jamie Levy, Mila Krug, Talia Boner, and Ariella Hackner beam with pride in front of their menorah artwork.



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- ❖ Strong process implementation skills
- ❖ The ability to work under pressure while multitasking, with attention to detail an absolute must
- ❖ A team player with the ability to work with the rest of the team to render a professional service



Houghton Golf Club honours caddies

Many golfers depend on caddies, yet these staff members have little job security, recognition, or support. Caddies are seldom employed as permanent staff at golf courses. This means that they are unable to access the benefits of full-time employment, including a regular pay cheque.

“Many caddies go home without any payment if they are unable to find a job for the day – in spite of the fact that they arrived at their place of work, ready and willing to perform,” says Marc Lubner, the son of the late businessman and philanthropist, Bertie Lubner.

In recognition of the work done by caddies, Johannesburg’s Houghton Golf Club held the first Bertie Lubner Caddies Day on Sunday 18 November.

The occasion was the brainchild of Yvonne Johnston, the club’s Ladies’ Captain. It was sponsored by Marc, who also sponsored a trophy named for his father to commemorate Bertie’s big-hearted spirit. Marc said he and his family would continue to fund the event every year as an example for other clubs to follow.

“My father was known to all the caddies at almost every golf course he played at,” recalled Marc. “He championed the interests of caddies, making sure they received recognition for their work.”

Bertie, together with his brother Ronnie, set out to address the plight of caddies by establishing Caddie Foundations at several golf courses throughout South Africa, including the Houghton Golf Club, River Club Golf Course, Goose Valley Golf Estate, and Plettenberg Bay Golf Club.

These foundations are tasked with looking after caddies’ interests. For example, they provide social security in the event of a crisis which may leave a caddie unemployable. Bertie also motivated for the imposition of rules which would ensure better job security and regular work. For example, he suggested that it be made



Marc Lubner, Isaac Gamede and Hilary Lubner

obligatory for four-balls to employ the services of a caddy.

Marc has taken the good work of the Caddie Foundation one step further. Through Afrika Tikun, a youth development organisation which Bertie founded and of which Marc is Chief Executive, a computer lab has been built to create a facility where caddies can develop skills that not only improve their services, but equip them with competencies that will perhaps lead to other forms of income.

Johnston said Caddies’ Day saluted the hard work of caddies. As part of the proceedings, caddies were treated to a celebration meal in the clubhouse. In addition, the Houghton Golf Club’s lady members organised a tournament, partnering caddies and members. A prize giving was held for the top-10 performers, and each caddy taking part received a corporate gift pack, including a golf shirt and gift bag. The caddies also received food vouchers.

“It was a truly fabulous day,” Johnston said. “A huge amount of fun was had by all, and Bertie was honoured as he should be.”

Complementing Johnston on the initiative, Marc said it was an example of living Mandela’s values, and was true to Bertie’s heart.

“If we want South Africa to be an integrated society, built on mutual respect, we can’t wait for the Mandelas and Tutus of the world. We can be ordinary people, like Bertie, who treat individuals – all individuals – with appropriate levels of regard and respect, and in this way bring out the very best in each other,” he said.

Israeli embassy celebrates skills sharing platform

Guests from South Africa and Swaziland attended a networking forum hosted by the Israeli Embassy on 25 November for more than 60 alumni of Mashav (Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation).

The event was held to celebrate the Shalom Club, which is a forum for Mashav alumni to participate in professional and social activities, and which has been inactive for more than 10 years.

Israeli Ambassador Lior Keinan opened the ceremony, followed by Professor Eilon Adar, the Director of Ben Gurion University’s

Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research. Adar is one of Israel’s leading researchers in water sources, use, and technology. Music maestro Nir Brand, who has been performing in Johannesburg over the past week, also played for the guests.

The event concluded with previous Shalom Club President Pastor Gaolathe Regina Molokomme speaking about Mashav and her experiences in Israel, the skills she developed on the Mashav course, and how she has used those skills to make a difference in her field of expertise.



Israeli Ambassador Lior Keinan speaking at the ceremony



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Swims like these are not performed without some back-up. Support staff, accompanied by South African emergency physician Dr Sean Gottschalk, were there to rescue the swimmers should anything go wrong.

Then it was time for Gottschalk to do his bit. Normal body temperature is 37°C, but the core body temperature of some of the swimmers measured only 28°C in recovery after the swim. Recovery involved quickly accessing the



Photo: Daily News

"From what I have seen, the organisers and ice swimmers are as knowledgeable and experienced in the cold as they are responsible and safety-conscious. This sport attracts truly driven and unique individuals who are well-prepared physiologically and

South African swimmers included Barkai, Jean Craven, Samantha Whelpton, and Clinton Le Sueur. Others were from Poland, Russia, Australia, Argentina, Italy, China, Bulgaria, and Spain.

Asked about his craziest swim, Barkai said, “I guess it was swimming in Tyumen, central Siberia, in 2012, when the air temperature was minus 33°C. As I swam, people were sweeping the water surface ahead of me to stop it from freezing.” It wasn’t just the swim that was challenging. Taking his clothes off fast enough to get into the “far warmer” 0°C water without suffering frost-bite was a major challenge, as was getting out of the water to get dressed.

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