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# south african Jewish Report

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## Darkness descends on last night of Chanukah, as terror attack hits home

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a harrowing week of torment for the South African-born parents of the latest terror-attack victim in Israel, who this week described events as “every parent’s worst nightmare come true”.

“Imagine getting that call,” said Chaim Silverstein, the father of Shira Ish-Ran, 21, who was seriously injured in Sunday’s drive-by shooting in the West Bank.

A group of terrorists in a passing car opened fire at Israeli civilians waiting at a bus stop outside the settlement of Ofra, north of Jerusalem, injuring seven people. Ish-Ran’s husband, Amichai, who was shot three times in his leg, managed to call his father-in-law and tell him to rush to the hospital.

In a lifesaving bid, doctors were forced to perform an emergency C-Section on Ish-Ran, who was 30 weeks pregnant, and delivered her baby boy. The baby was immediately transferred to the ward for premature babies at Jerusalem’s Shaare Zedek Medical Centre. Initially said to be stable, his condition continued to deteriorate no matter how hard doctors tried to save his life. On Wednesday early evening the public were notified that baby Amiad Yisrael died.

Sobbing at the baby’s funeral on Wednesday night, Silberstein said his grandson stayed alive until “his wounded parents could meet him, hug him, kiss him and say goodbye”.

This week, Silberstein described to the *SA Jewish Report* the gut-wrenching hours and days following the attack which has rocked the family’s world, and sent shock waves through Israeli society.

“It was a nightmare come true,” recalled Ish-Ran’s mother, Liora, describing how it had been an ordinary Sunday evening at home when her husband told her something was terribly wrong. He had received a call from his son-in-law, Amichai, speaking from an

ambulance informing him that there had been a terrorist attack.

She just remembers grabbing her telephone and her *siddur* (prayer book), and dashing out of the house.

On the way to the hospital, the frantic couple passed police cars heading to the scene of the attack unaware of the details of what had happened moments earlier, describing it all as “surreal”. Shira and Amichai had been married for only nine months. They were at the Ofra bus stop as part of their journey from Jerusalem to their home in Elon Moreh.

Silberstein said he and his wife literally prayed for a miracle as a team of doctors performed the lifesaving operation for more than five hours on their daughter, who was shot in her lower abdomen. Her life was in danger throughout the operation, he said.

Silberstein told the *SA Jewish Report* that “miraculously, the bullet missed Shira’s major organs”, and she survived the surgery.

On Monday, doctors lowered her sedation, allowing her to wake up. As soon as she opened her eyes, she asked for her mom.

A tearful Liora told *The Jerusalem Post* that “she held my hand and squeezed it”.

Chaim told the *SA Jewish Report* late on Tuesday night, shortly after doctors removed tubes and pipes from Ish-Ran’s mouth, that Shira’s condition was improving all the time.

“She is beginning to talk. She weakly told my wife and I that we needed to go home and sleep.”

He said it was “miraculous” that his son in law was only moderately injured after being shot several times.

According to Silberstein, his son-in-law’s face “lit up” when he saw his young bride for the first time earlier that day since the incident.

He said Amichai had been offering Shira so much support on his crutches and in his wheelchair and that it was wonderful to see them together after such a trauma, but

news of their firstborn’s death was soon to crush their spirit.

Silberstein, 58, who grew up in Yeoville and attended King David Linksfield High School, made aliyah almost 40 years ago as a 19-year-old baal teshuva (secular Jew returning to religious Judaism).

In Israel, he was introduced to his wife, Liora, 49, (nee Dubb), who grew up in Port Elizabeth. The couple have seven children, including two sets of twins. Shira, their oldest, has a twin brother Ariel. They were both married within three weeks of each other only nine months ago, said Silberstein.

The Silbersteins visited Johannesburg in August with three of their daughters to see his sister, who lives in Gallo Manor, Sandton, and show the girls where he grew up. “I took them on a *tiyul shoresh* [roots tour],” he said.

One of the places Silberstein arranged to visit was King David Linksfield, where they met his headmaster, Elliot Wolf.

“He took us around the school, and spent about 45 minutes with us,” said Silberstein.

He had met Wolf earlier this year in May, at the 40-year King David Linksfield matric class of 1977 reunion in New York, attended by about 65 Davidians from around the world.

The terror attack has captured the hearts of South African Jewry, who have taken to social media since the shooting.

South African olah Dalya Abadi posted on Facebook, “Breaks my heart to see this horrific act of cowardice terror happening to my incredible madricha (counsellor) Shira, who guided me during my gap year last year. Shira is truly one of the most amazing girls I’ve met. She is so super bubbly, wise, and truly treats everyone with such authentic kindness.”

Abadi, who attended the couple’s wedding, told the *SA Jewish Report* from Israel that Ish-Ran “went

above and beyond” as a counsellor. Even though she was born in Israel, she is “so South African in her ways, including her accent and her incredible warmth”. She described her as intensely private, and found it strange to see her all over the news, including videos of her recent wedding.

The terrorists responsible for the attack fled the scene immediately after the shooting, and remain at large. The military’s search for the perpetrators of the attack entered its fourth day on Wednesday, with troops setting up roadblocks and sweeping nearby Palestinian villages.

Silberstein is no stranger to news and controversy. He is the founder and President of Keep Jerusalem-Im Eshkachech (KeepJerusalem.org) and the Jerusalem Capital Development Fund, organisations which aim to keep Jerusalem united under Israeli sovereignty. They inform public opinion and policy makers about the

**Continued on page 5>>**



Daryn-Lee Cronson hugs her son, Ricky, before leaving for Bnei Akiva Machaneh. See stories on pages 4 and 13

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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an enjoyable and safe holiday

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# EU Council calls on Europe to do more to fight anti-Semitism

MARCY OSTER

European nations must increase their efforts to ensure security for the continent’s Jews in the face of widespread anti-Semitism, the Council of the European Union said in a declaration that one Jewish group called “unprecedented”. The declaration passed last Thursday in Brussels called on the council’s member states to develop a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and their institutions. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, whose country holds the council’s rotating presidency, promoted the declaration. The council is made up of the heads of state or government of the member states. In its declaration, the council acknowledges that Jewish communities in some EU countries feel particularly vulnerable to terrorist attacks following an increase in violent incidents in recent years. It notes that anti-Semitic hatred remains widespread, as confirmed by the EU’s 2018 Fundamental Rights Agency report on anti-Semitism. The declaration calls on member states to “adopt and implement a holistic strategy to prevent and fight all forms of anti-Semitism, as part of their strategies on preventing racism, xenophobia, radicalisation and violent extremism”, according to a statement issued by the council. It also expresses concern that the situation for Jewish people has not substantially improved, and that anti-Semitism



Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz

Photo: Hans Punz/AFP/Getty Images

can be disguised under the cover of political views. The document also calls for an emphasis on the importance of holocaust remembrance and education for all. The European Jewish Congress (EJC) called the declaration “unprecedented” in a statement praising its passage. “This declaration is an important step in the fight against anti-Semitism because it provides a positive and concrete roadmap for the safeguarding of Jewish communities, and strengthens the legislative tools for governments to fight hate and intolerance,” said the EJC President, Dr Moshe Kantor. “Now, we hope that each EU member state will take the required and appropriate action, and that

the European Commission and the European Parliament will monitor the progress made by each state against anti-Semitism. Today, we hope that the implementation of the provisions contained in this declaration will severely restrict the space for hate, and that our Jewish communities will feel more safe in Europe.” The World Jewish Congress said that it had worked for several months with the Austrian government and European institutions, as well as the EJC, to draft the declaration. It praised the council for passing the declaration, and called on the EU to appoint a co-ordinator on combating anti-Semitism. (JTA)

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:31	Johannesburg
19:15	20:32	Cape Town
18:15	19:29	Durban
18:15	19:46	Bloemfontein
18:15	20:04	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:51	East London

Hate’. Let us make the Western Cape no place for hate for all who live and die in it.” Diamond said the board was considering the cost of repairing the stones, and how to future-proof them. The obvious example might be to lay them flat. Diamond has learnt that the tradition of putting headstones upright was brought by South African Jews from Eastern Europe, as flat stones would be covered by snow in those climates.

## Jewish tombstones desecrated in Cape cemetery

TALI FEINBERG

Thirty-nine tombstones were knocked down, damaged, and broken in the Wellington Jewish cemetery last weekend, the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies has confirmed. Wellington is a country town in the Western Cape winelands, about a 45-minute drive from Cape Town. The Wellington Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1902.

While there are no anti-Semitic markings on the tombstones, the fact

that the Jewish section of the cemetery was targeted is a concern, said Cape Board Director Stuart Diamond. The incident has been reported to the local police, and the community will be kept up to date on the findings. “The Cape Jewish community is appalled that such violence and hatred should have been perpetrated by people living in a town renowned as a centre for excellence in its educational and theological studies,” wrote Diamond to the *Bolander* newspaper. “We ask that the Drakenstein local municipality, businesses, and charitable organisations join us in embracing our anti-bias campaign called ‘No Place for

### Torah Thought

## Insular or involved: the two ways of being Jewish

“And Yehudah approached him [Yosef]...”

The showdown between Yehuda and Yosef starts at the beginning of our parsha, and continues for millennia until our day. Yehuda was even ready to wage a tremendous war if necessary. As Jewish people, we have always had two approaches to our place in this world. There is the Yehuda approach, where we see him going to the Land of Goshen and setting up places of Torah ahead of his family’s arrival. Yehuda doesn’t want to mix or get involved in the nitty-gritty negotiations and running of this world. He prefers to be separate from the bad influences that roam outside. Yosef, on the other hand, not only gets involved, but climbs the rungs of power until he can influence the major political decisions of Egypt. His descendants follow his example to this day, with powerful posts

in some of the world’s major countries. It is quite in vogue to aspire to live off-grid. People don’t want to rely on the government for the essentials. People want to free themselves from being reliant on other parties for their most basic needs. The same applies to a Torah lifestyle, where groups of people are convinced that the only way to ensure the continuity of their way of life is to shield their progeny from the allure of the outside. Such groups form their own close-knit, insular bubbles, which protect them from the complexities of modern-day life and its challenges. They have the pleasure of sitting and learning or davening all day long. However, does this work? Does the second generation of bubbled groups retain its purity as a result of protection? Conversely, do those who live outside the bubble all get sucked into the ways

and “joys” of secular life? Is this second generation truly doomed? Or, have exceptional individuals arisen from these greatest of challenges? It comes down to us choosing between two legitimate ideologies: should a Jew cut himself off from the secular world, and live in an insular Torah world, free from TV and the internet? Or should he join the world, and have the opportunity to make a *Kiddush Hashem* and be a light to those who he meets? Obviously, both paths have their pros and cons. The important lesson for us is to accept and tolerate all Jews and their decisions, remembering that so long as the motives are *I’shem Shamayim* (in the name of heaven), everyone is right! Have a safe holiday.



Rabbi Ryan Goldstein, West Street Shul

South African

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# Top musicians pay tribute to Johnny Clegg

**TALI FEINBERG**

"I'm holding on as best I can, and living my life as fully as I can," says iconic South African performer Johnny Clegg, who has been battling pancreatic cancer since 2015.

Clegg recently slowed down his legendary musical performances, but his legacy has been in the spotlight over the past week, as thousands of people have watched and shared a video of his song, *The Crossing*, sung by more than 50 South African musicians in his honour.

As he stepped down from the world stage, local and international musicians felt it was time to celebrate the path he has blazed as an artist, activist, and educator.

“What makes the video and the song so significant, profound, and poignant is what it does not explicitly say – that Clegg, our elder, is growing weaker, having lived with pancreatic cancer for several years, and that soon he will have to say goodbye. He will be ‘crossing over those dark mountains where we will lay down our troubles,’” singer Karen Zoid told *Daily Maverick*.

As he stepped down from the world stage, local and international musicians felt it was time to celebrate the path he has blazed as an artist, activist, and educator.

"It's not only this gentle goodbye that threads through the song and the video, but also the sheer joy, energy, and celebration of Clegg's artistry and music, how it will always be part of South Africa's DNA," she said.

In September, more than 50 artists flew to Cape Town to record a unique version of *The Crossing* at Mothership Studios. It may be the biggest South African music collaboration of all time. International artists included Peter Gabriel, Dave Matthews, and Paul Rutherford.

Although Clegg was not told many of the details of the project, he was asked to choose the song that would be covered. He told the *SA Jewish Report* that he chose *The Crossing* because “education is critical in our crossing over into an inclusive and internationally competitive country. Our education system is in many respects hollowed out, and apart from small pockets of excellence, the system is in crisis.”

The special version of the song was produced by Theo Crous, and mastered in Los Angeles by Lurssen, a multi-Grammy award-winning studio. It was performed for Clegg at a private function at Ellerman House in Cape Town on 5 December 2018, five years to the day after the passing of Nelson Mandela.

On the same evening, the Friends of Johnny Clegg was launched, a fund created in his honour to help alleviate the education crisis in South Africa. All proceeds from downloads of this version of *The Crossing* will go toward this fund, and be distributed by the Click Foundation.

“The Click Foundation teaches 58 000 pupils and operates in 105 schools across South Africa,” said Clegg. “It teaches literacy to learners from Grade R to Grade 3, which are the critical foundational years for language comprehension. The goal is to have one million learners in these early grades reading and comprehending English by 2022.”

Clegg is currently writing his autobiography. He was born near Manchester, England, in 1953, and grew up in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa. His step-father, a crime reporter, took him into the townships at an early age.

As a teenager in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, he encountered the city's Zulu migrant workers' music and dance. Under the tutelage of Charlie Mzila, a flat cleaner by day and musician by night, Clegg mastered the Zulu language and the maskandi guitar and isishameni dance styles of the migrants while still in his mid-

teens. Through these, he also gained a profound understanding of Zulu culture.

Clegg's involvement with black musicians often led to arrests for trespassing on government property, and for contravening the Group Areas Act. Undeterred, he immersed himself in the world of Zulu migrant labourers, and was soon entering hostel dance competitions at the head of his own team.

album was nominated for a Grammy Award for best world music album. King Sobhuza II of Swaziland named Clegg an official “royal minstrel”, and his alma mater, Wits, conferred on him its highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Music *honoris causa*, saying that, “Johnny Clegg’s life and productions give meaning to the multiculturalism and social integration South Africans yearn for.”

To young people wanting to succeed in the music industry, he says that today, it is one of the hardest professions to pursue. “You need a lot of stamina and endurance to go with whatever talent you have.” As someone who has integrated deeply into other cultures, his advice to fellow South Africans who want to build such bridges is to learn an African language.

Regarding this new version



In the early 1970s, Clegg and Sipho Mchunu, a migrant worker and guitarist, formed an acoustic Zulu musical duo called Juluka (meaning sweat). He also studied social anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and pursued an academic career for four years, lecturing at Wits and the University of Natal, and writing several seminal scholarly papers on Zulu music and dance.

Clegg's record-breaking and award-winning musical career followed, including his cross-cultural band Savuka selling more than a million copies of its debut album. He was declared a *Chevalier des Arts et Lettres* by the French government in 1991 – an order of merit that recognises significant contribution to the arts.

In 1993, Savuka's last trademark

“Johnny Clegg’s life and productions give meaning to the multiculturalism and social integration South Africans yearn for.”

Indeed, Clegg believes in the healing power of music. “All artistic and cultural expression elevates our sense of self, and puts us into a different quality space,” he says. “This can be momentary, or last a lifetime, like a life-changing book or a song that captures a moment in the listener’s life and presents it back in a new way, forever linking them to that time or moment.”

of *The Crossing*, he says, "It's a wonderful validation by my peers, and gives new life to a song which will support a cause bigger than us all."

On social media, South Africans expressed their appreciation of the project. Mike Abel said that it was, “An incredibly moving tribute by South African musicians to the iconic Johnny Clegg, the White Jewish Zulu who has brought so much African magic and cultural crossover to our beautiful country and the world, especially during the dark days of apartheid.”

Wrote Jesse Brian Micheal Harvey, "A fantastic song with a beautiful message. South Africa has so much potential. I'm sure 'the tide is turning', and we will eventually make that crossing to what South Africa truly can be as a nation."

The image is a promotional banner for Jawitz Properties. On the left, the Jawitz Properties logo is displayed in a black box. Next to it is the 'Leading Real Estate Companies of the World' logo. The central text reads 'REAL LIFE' in large, bold, black letters, with 'Real Estate.' in a smaller, italicized font inside a white box with a black border. To the right is a photograph of a woman and a young girl in a kitchen, with the woman sitting on a stool and the girl standing next to her. In the bottom right corner, there is a grid of 24 location pins arranged in 4 rows and 6 columns. The bottom of the banner contains contact information: a phone icon with the number '011 880 3550', a globe icon with the website 'www.jawitz.co.za', and social media icons for Twitter (@JawitzProp), Facebook (@jawitzproperties), and Instagram (@jawitz\_properties).

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# Morasha shul rises from the ashes

TALI FEINBERG

Flames and smoke billowing from the roof, seven Sifrei Torah scrolls burned in the inferno, and a crumbling, burnt-out synagogue. These are some of the images that have haunted the Cape Town Jewish community and beyond since a fire destroyed much of Beit Midrash Morasha last Tuesday night.

Although it happened on the third night of Chanukah, candles were not left out overnight, and the cause of the fire is still to be determined. But, like Jews did in the Chanukah story, the congregation and the larger community have picked themselves up from the destruction and have begun to rebuild.

In less than a week, the shul has already raised more than R2.5 million towards its recovery, with a goal of R5.5 million under the campaign #MorashaChai. “This month marks 18 years of our community – our year of *chai* (life). With your help and the will of Hashem, we will bring renewed life to our community,” says Rabbi Sam Thurgood, who has led the congregation with his wife Aviva since 2012.

As last week came to a close, the Cape Town community rushed to ensure that Morasha would still be able to have a full Shabbat together. Herzlia Weizmann offered the use of its school hall, the Sephardi Hebrew Congregation sponsored the kiddush brocha, and all services and children’s programmes ran on time.

The theme of Shabbat was victory over adversity. The celebration included welcoming firefighters

and members of the Community Security Organisation (CSO) to the Friday night service, a community walk beginning at the Morasha Shul, and a musical Havdallah ceremony.

“We have just come out of an incredibly inspiring Shabbat with our beautiful Morasha friends and family,” wrote congregant Ma’ayan Sevilya Jowell on Facebook. “One of the highlights was having the opportunity to thank our brave firefighters and CSO crew, who risked their lives to try save our shul, our books, and precious Sifrei Torah. They joined us for our Friday night service, and were really appreciative of the gratitude that we showed them.”

Morasha also partnered with the Sephardi Hebrew Congregation in hosting a Chanukah carnival, with record attendance. There, Holocaust survivor Ella Blumenthal lit a channukiah that survived the Holocaust.

The shul has managed to continue its daily minyanim, first at other shuls, and now at the Bnei Akiva Bayit across the road from Morasha.

Financial and moral support has poured in from around the world. Bnei Akiva created a video with messages of hope from *chaverim* (friends) around the world, many of whom have experienced the warmth of the Morasha congregation.

Replacing the precious Sifrei Torah that were lost in the fire has been top of the agenda of the Jewish community throughout South Africa. The Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation (Marais Road Shul) loaned the Ichikowitz Family Tefillin Bank Torah, known



Photo: Beit Midrash Morasha

Cape Jewish Board of Deputies Director Stuart Diamond, Cape Board Chairman Rael Kaimowitz, and Rabbi and Rebbetzin Thurgood thank firefighters and the CSO

as “Kevin’s Torah”, indefinitely for Morasha’s use.

A Sefer Torah from the Lichtenburg community in North West Province was also delivered to Cape Town for Morasha’s use. This Torah, entrusted to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) for safekeeping when the community closed down many years ago, has been on loan to the Ohr Somayach community in Sandton.

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft

went to collect the Torah from the Ohr Somayach Shul, and carefully wrapped and prepared it for its journey to Sea Point. A representative of the SAJBD flew with it to Cape Town, and delivered it to the community in time for Shabbat.

United Herzlia Schools (UHS) started the process of writing a new Sefer Torah for Beit Midrash Morasha, as a gift from the Jewish children of Cape Town. On 10 December it hosted a “unity

assembly” for all pupils from Herzlia, Phyllis Jowell Pre-Primary, Cape Town Torah High, and the Sinai Academy.

A thousand children came together to watch *sofer* (scribe) Rabbi Avi Shlomo inscribe the first *pasuk* (passage), and each child was able to contribute R18 towards a letter of the new Torah. It will be completed in Israel over the coming year.

“It is a tribute to our Cape Town community that in times of adversity, we rally together to assist and offer whatever help can be given,” said UHS Director of Education Geoff Cohen at the event. “I know that Rabbi Thurgood has been deeply touched by the incredible letters of support and solidarity that he has received from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities.”

The Beth Din declared 13 December a fast day to mourn the destruction of the *Sifrei Torah*. Members of Beit Midrash Morasha were encouraged to fast.

• To contribute to the #MorashaChai campaign, visit [www.charidy.com/morashachai](http://www.charidy.com/morashachai)

# What about tech and security at machaneh?

JORDAN MOSHE

Technology and security are two defining issues that make Jewish youth camps different to the camps of 10 years ago.

These two issues are among the greatest priorities of parents and children when considering whether or not to attend camp. Parents want to know that their children will be safe while not in their care, and youngsters want to know that they will still be able to access technology. Parents also want to know that their children will not be on their devices all holiday, but will still be able to communicate with them if they need to.

## Technology

The all-pervasive need for smartphones is true in any space today, and it is no different among Jewish youth at camp.

Both Habonim and Bnei Akiva do not allow *channichim* (campers) to bringing laptops or tablets with them to the campsites.

Although smartphones are permitted at Habonim for all ages, their use is strictly monitored and regulated. “We make sure that kids

cannot use them during any of the camp activities,” says Habonim Shaliach Danny Adeno Abebe. “[These activities] are crucial to the experience, and they need to pay attention.”

He recognises, however, the need for parents to remain in touch with their children, and says that the use of smartphones is permitted at certain times. “Jewish mothers will always be Jewish mothers” he laughs. “They want to make sure that their children are safe and enjoying themselves. They need to check in with them from time to time, and this we allow.

“Kids know that we have the power to confiscate their tech from the day camp starts. We explain to them at the outset that the camp time is for them, and that they need to make the most of it. Ultimately, it’s their time, and only if

# Nice people, shame about the beliefs

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

What was most unnerving about the Palestinian Solidarity Alliance’s (PSA’s) sunset march against Israeli “occupation” in Johannesburg on Saturday was the sheer gentility of all involved.

Chanting “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”, more than 500 ambled through the leafy surrounds of Emmarentia Dam on 8 December, in a broad circle from Orange Road to the Greenside Mosque and back again.

To all intents and purposes, the “Great Return March” looked like an everyday peace protest. Everyone from mothers with strollers, kids, teenagers, parents, and grandparents was there, and the crowd was well

behaved.

It was only when you took a closer look at their t-shirts and listened to what they were chanting that you got a sense of their intent. Many were wearing t-shirts with the Google logo and the entry “Israel”, with the question, “Do you mean Palestine?”. Others sported shirts saying, “Stop Israeli baby killers”, “Boycott apartheid Israel”, or “South Africa will never be free until Palestine is free”. Their smiling faces and friendliness only added to the overall sense of cognitive dissonance.

It was a genteel march through one of the city’s most beautiful suburbs by the most bourgeois people in Johannesburg calling for the obliteration of the only peaceful, democratic state in the Middle East. Go figure.



Photo: Julie Leibowitz

The PSA marchers in Emmarentia

they can disconnect from their tech and connect with themselves and those around them will they take anything from the machaneh experience.”

Bnei Akiva allows Grade 8 and older to bring cell phones to camp, but they are not allowed to be used at mealtimes or during any formal activities, according to Milan Levy, Rosh

Logistics at Bnei Akiva.

“We understand that we can no longer exclude cell phones totally from camp, but we are aware that phone calls and messages to parents causes homesickness. Also, when children send a message to their parents that they have a sore throat, parents worry, even though we have medical experts at camp.” Because of this, the youngest three *shichvot* (age groups) are not allowed to have phones with them.

“We have come to a stage where we embrace rather than push away technology,” he says. “We use technology to enhance our *tochniot*, and even our mealtimes, by creating interactive videos or using

projectors.”

Netzer adopts a more stringent approach. According to Camp Head Jason Bourne, *channichim* are not allowed to have their phones on camp for the duration of machaneh. “Phones are to be handed in on the first day, and will be given back to the *channichim* when camp ends,” he says.

Bourne believes that the camp experience can be fully utilised only if technology is absent. “*Channichim* are discouraged from bringing technology as we believe they need to be fully immersed in the camp experience and what is going on around them,” he says.



The Bnei bangle



# Gaza border may be scary, but it’s home, visiting Israeli teens say

TALI FEINBERG

“Even when it’s scary, we don’t want to leave our kibbutz. It’s our home,” say Chen Belkin and Rotem Goldman, two Israeli teenagers who live close to the Gaza border. They are part of a group of Grade 10 learners from their area who have just arrived in South Africa to attend Habonim machaneh as a respite from living under the constant threat of terrorism.

Shortly after they arrived in Cape Town, they were whisked off to a braai at the home of Tamar Lazarus, where they were indulged with breathtaking views of the city and harbour while chatting about their adventures in South Africa. They felt a million miles away, literally and figuratively, from the threat of rocket fire to their homes, schools, and environment.

The teens hail from kibbutzim in the Gaza envelope. “The kibbutz I was born on is on the fence between Gaza and Israel, and we are always exposed to burning tyres,

fields that have been burned by these devices. All the teens emphasise that they are used to being under constant threat of rocket attacks, and some shrug their shoulders, saying, “It’s no big deal. We are used to it. We’ve learned to handle it.” But later, one admits that even in South Africa, a sudden noise at night will scare her.

The teens are excited to be in South Africa, but some of them feel nervous about speaking Hebrew or displaying their Jewishness for fear of anti-Semitism. They are also anxious about being put on the spot by their South African Jewish peers, who they feel will force them to “take a side” in the conflict or ask them why they choose to live so close to the border. They re-iterate that they could never leave their communities.

“There are two sides to every story. We want peace. Hamas could turn Gaza into a thriving place, but it doesn’t want to. Whatever we give them, they use to attack us,” says Goldman.

Israeli teen visitors with their Habonim hosts



shouting, and windows breaking from the rockets,” says Belkin. “Before the tunnels were discovered, [Israelis have discovered numerous Hamas-built tunnels underground to get into and attack Israel], friends on the kibbutz heard people knocking and talking under their floor.” Being so close to these threats forced her family to leave that kibbutz, but the place they relocated to is still under threat of attacks. Gil Rahaf, from a different kibbutz, says that a man from Gaza was once found wondering around inside his kibbutz, and that kibbutz livestock have been killed by rockets, one of which landed 10 metres away from his house. “Sometimes we hear the ‘boom’ before we even hear the siren,” said his friend, Regev Shoshan. “On a bad day, we run to the shelter 16 times a day,” says Goldman.

Their madricha, Sapir Efraim, who came with the teens from Israel, emphasises that the area Goldman is talking about is not a constant war zone. In fact, it’s incredibly beautiful and peaceful. “My husband grew up there, and we moved back to the kibbutz six years ago as we want to raise our children in a close-knit community,” she says. However, she explains that calm can quickly descend into chaos, and then back to calm again. “A few weeks ago, we had 400 rockets in a day, then the next day was quiet again. We are used to it, but the stress does build up in our minds.” For example, an incendiary balloon sent from Gaza landed in her garden, but it did not catch alight, unlike the acres of kibbutz

## Darkness descends on last night of Chanukah, as terror attack hits home

>> Continued from page 1

importance of keeping the city united, and fostering Jewish population growth. Silberstein also holds regular guided geopolitical tours of Jerusalem and its borders. A personal friend of Silberstein, Michael Freund, who is the Chairman of Shavei Israel (an Israeli-based international Jewish outreach organisation) told the *SA Jewish Report*, “The Silbersteins are a warm and loving family, filled with Jewish and Zionist commitment. A former senior advisor to Israel’s Tourism Minister, Chaim has devoted himself to strengthening Jewish life throughout all parts of Jerusalem. He tirelessly takes members of Knesset, foreign dignitaries, and groups on informative tours of the city through his organisation, KeepJerusalem.org.

“Together with his wife, the Silbersteins volunteered to serve as an adoptive family for one of the young Chinese Jewish descendants from Kaifeng, China, that Shavei Israel brought on aliyah two years ago. And now they are grappling with a painful and difficult tragedy.” Silberstein told the *SA Jewish Report* that his family was truly grateful to the South African community for its prayers. “We believe your prayers have helped, and we send our blessings back.” The family have also thanked the community and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein for their multiple heartfelt messages of support, saying, “We are deeply humbled and grateful for the love shown by the South African community.”

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# Friends where you didn't know you had any

When the world seems like a dark place, there are always pockets of light and love.

Last weekend, I was away with my extended family in Wallmansthal, on the other side of Pretoria. It was a delightful and relaxing family time.

On Saturday in the late morning, there was a strong-man demonstration at the lodge we were staying at, and some of us went along to see what it was about. The strong man was a devout Afrikaans Christian, who made comments relating to his faith as he bent metal and gave his audience an interesting show.

Later, the strong man and his family overheard us saying kiddush, and his wife came over while we were sitting outdoors having lunch. She asked us how we knew Hebrew. Astonished, we weren't quite sure where she was going with her line of questioning. Eventually, we told her it was because we were Jewish.

She became quite emotional when she heard this, and told us how she was so excited to meet "G-d's chosen people", and felt blessed to be in our presence.

She said she loved Jewish people because we were so special, and was grateful to have made our acquaintance.

I found it a little overwhelming to be called "the chosen ones",



because I don't believe anyone is better than anyone else, and it sets us apart in a somewhat uncomfortable way. I guess that in my head, it sets up expectations of us being a true light unto the nation. I know that we try, but I, for one, certainly don't always live up to that expectation.

However, I loved the fact that while we have so many enemies and people who dislike us just because we happen to be Jewish, here were some people who genuinely appeared to

love us for exactly the same reason.

In our chat with this woman, we found out that she and her husband were very involved in their church, and it was through the church that they had found their love for Israel and the Jewish people.

In this newspaper, we invariably have stories about people disliking us or simply finding fault in us because we are Jewish or because we support the state of Israel. However, we rarely look around us to see who is on our side, who supports us, and wants to be our friend. Just writing it sounds trite, but it is true.

The strong man and his wife are part of a massive group of Afrikaans Christians who love us – albeit putting us on a bit of a pedestal.

Then, there are literally millions of African Independent churchgoers and African Zionists who love Israel and the Jewish people. We truly have the support of millions and millions of Christians in South Africa.

Hard to believe, isn't it? That is, especially when we have a ruling party that is so anti-Israel and anti almost anyone who supports the Jewish state. We also have a strong anti-Israel lobby that makes a big noise and tries to turn as many people against Israel as possible.

Because of that, it sometimes feels like we are on our own here, with many against us and what we believe. However, in the overall scheme of things, there are more people who are on our side than against us.

But it doesn't look this way in Parliament or in government, where the Boycott Divestment Sanctions-aligned voice is loud and strong. While the Democratic Alliance does its bit to make sure that things are fair, the honourable Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, President of the African Christian Democratic Party, always takes a stand against the anti-Israel lobby.

When I told my little story to Benji Shulman, the Director of Policy at the South African Zionist Federation, he clarified things for me.

He explained that most Christians who support us in Africa see, "the Jews and Israel as the biblical root that supports the Christian tree. They take seriously the biblical view that, 'those who bless Israel will be blessed, and those who curse Israel will be cursed'."

And so, as the year draws to a close, and we all take time out to reflect and reconsider, or simply just veg out for a few weeks, it is worth acknowledging that we are not alone on the southern tip of Africa.

We do have friends who support us and the Jewish state.

May your holidays be filled with peace, love, and laughter, and may you start your new year refreshed and ready for anything.

# What does the UN vote on Hamas mean to us?

In the Middle East, everyone declares victory regardless of the results. So, it's no surprise that the recent United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution against Hamas was praised by both Jerusalem and Hamas. If it had passed, it would have condemned the Gaza-based movement for the first time ever in the world body.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called it a "principled stand" of the "sweeping majority". Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zahri tweeted that "the failure of the American venture at the UN represents a slap to the US administration and confirmation of the legitimacy of the resistance".

Both are correct. For Hamas, it was a success because the resolution failed. For Israel, it was the first time a resolution like this condemning the Palestinian group nearly passed in the assembly.

The resolution was called "Activities of Hamas and Other Militant Groups in Gaza" and, among other things, condemned the militant group "for repeatedly firing rockets into Israel and inciting violence, thereby putting civilians at risk". It also denounced the movement's construction of terror tunnels and incendiary kites.

But before members could vote, Kuwait put forward a preliminary motion requiring a two-thirds majority for the American-sponsored resolution to succeed. Observers have criticised the move as underhanded. What it did effectively was ensure the failure of the resolution.

Had only a simple majority been required – as has been the norm for past votes – the resolution would have passed. Eighty seven countries voted in favour of it, 57 against, and 36 abstained.

What Israel needs to ask herself now is why so many states supported its position against Hamas, but still voted for the two-thirds majority needed to pass the resolution.

It suggests that the message they were imparting to Jerusalem is, "We can support you, but only if the resolution is meaningless." These countries want to condemn Hamas, but at the same time, they empathise with the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza. Their message to Israel is, "Yes, we support you against Hamas' aggression, but the violence is also happening in a context." In other words, Israel is not blameless.

It's a far cry from how Arab countries voted. It should come as no surprise that they all supported the two-thirds motion, and voted in support of Hamas, as did South Africa.

This, in spite of a concerted effort by the Trump administration to ensure they wouldn't. Even those Arab countries who have warmed up to Israel recently, such as Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, voted against denouncing Hamas on the world stage. The same was true for Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan.

In recent weeks, Netanyahu has made a lot of noise about Jerusalem's warming ties with Arab countries, but he would do well to remember that when it comes to taking a public stance against the Palestinians – even if it means only pointing fingers at Hamas – none are prepared to do so.

Most Arab populations are sympathetic towards the Palestinian struggle, and so naturally support Hamas in its fight against what they perceive as an Israeli occupation of Gaza.

Even Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas who heads the rival Palestinian faction, Fatah, hailed the resolution result. He said that under no circumstances would he "allow for the condemnation of the Palestinian national struggle".

For more than a decade, his Ramallah-headquartered government has clashed with Hamas, but, still, when it comes to Palestinian unity, they stand together on the international stage.

However, votes at the UN are not always reflective of what Arab governments really think, and what is going on behind the scenes. One should be careful not to put the whole Arab world into one basket. A case in point is Cairo.

Whenever I report from the Egyptian street, I interview ordinary people who inevitably tell me that they dislike Israel and do not support the 1979 peace treaty between the countries. This is far from the government's position, but it still needs to reflect public sentiment in its

## DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier



international positions.

States like Qatar, which are close to Hamas, are in conflict with countries like Saudi Arabia with whom the US and Israel have a good relationship. Saudi Arabia has accused Qatar of supporting terrorism.

So, while Riyadh voted against the anti-Hamas resolution, it faces the quandary of not backing Hamas too closely because that would mean it endorses similar movements in its own backyard. Yet, in spite of the contradictions, in international arenas, Arab countries inevitably vote as a block, especially when it comes to Israel and the Palestinians.

Russia is another case in point. It voted in favour of the two-thirds requirement, and then later voted against the resolution. Moscow and Jerusalem have strong bilateral and diplomatic relations and yet whenever there is a vote at the UN, Russia invariably stands with the Arab world. It's politics after all.

As for Africa, only seven of the continent's 54 countries – Rwanda, South Sudan, Eritrea, Malawi, Liberia, Lesotho, and Cabo Verde – voted with Israel and the US in support of the resolution. Ten abstained, another 10 did not vote, and 28 voted against the measure.

What is ironic is that while Nigeria and Zambia were voting against the resolution, representatives from their respective countries were in Israel learning how to improve agriculture production.

Also striking is that the Nigerian government is in a bloody battle against the Boko Haram terrorist organisation, but still chose to vote against the anti-Hamas resolution.

Experts point out similarities between the two organisations in terms of their extremist religious views that are waged against civilian populations.

Netanyahu has been pushing for the past few years for improved ties with Africa by offering Israeli technology, expertise, and counter-terrorism intelligence.

The goal, in part, is to stop African nations from voting reflexively against Jerusalem in international forums. To some extent, it's succeeding – but not enough. Israel has close relations with Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia – but they voted for the two-thirds majority. Had they not, then the anti-Hamas resolution would presumably have passed with a simple majority.



In the bigger picture, the resolution does not affect the reality on the ground, and it makes no difference whether it passed or not. UN resolutions seldom do. They are, rather, an indicator of public sentiment and world opinion. Netanyahu and Hamas can claim as many brownie points as they want, but nothing has changed.

It begs the question why there was even an attempt to get the UN to vote on the issue. It seems like outgoing United States Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, wanted one last major vote to seal her legacy. She will be replaced at the end of the year after announcing her resignation in October.

For real change to be affected, there will need to be a split among Arab states (and, to a lesser extent, African ones) in the international arena.

For this to happen, Sunni states will need to lead the way. They will always have much more influence on Hamas than the UN, other organs, or governments.



# Humus with Hamas: what is the ANC thinking?



OPINION

Benji Shulman

South Africa woke up last week to yet another delegation of Hamas in the country. South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC) has always been the world’s “rogue democracy”, engaging with all manner of dictators and autocrats. But why the specific interest in the Gaza-based Palestinian terrorist organisation? The ANC has a long history of co-operation with the Palestinians. However, it has been with the Fatah faction connected with the Palestinian Authority (PA) located in the West Bank, which is Hamas’s rival.

The South African government supports the Palestinian Authority materially and diplomatically. It even recognises the Palestinian embassy here, which is funded in part by South African taxpayers.

Several years ago, the South African government invited PA President Mahmoud Abbas for a full state visit to the country, bilateral agreements were signed, and a commission of joint co-operation was established.

Although the ANC has had an informal liaison with Hamas for a long time, an official visit to the ANC in 2015 signalled the ramping up of the party’s relationship with the movement.

It wasn’t an official state visit, but Hamas leader Khaled Mashal received red carpet treatment during his stay. He was introduced to many of the important players in the country’s

political matrix, including then President, Jacob Zuma.

This latest visit to the ANC’s parliamentary caucus and Hamas’s presence at the party’s policy conference last year suggest an expansion in ties.

ANC Party Whip Jackson Mthembu cast the visit as a discussion about humanitarian aid, and was careful to say that the ANC was not choosing one Palestinian faction over another. Clearly, however, there has been a shift in ANC thinking, which is being driven by a number of factors.

While the PA co-operates with Israel on security behind the scenes in the West Bank, Hamas’ frequent violent confrontations with the Israeli state have enhanced its reputation in the ANC’s eyes as a defender of Palestinian people.

The PA has international standing at institutions like the United Nations (UN). This means that it cannot be ignored, but the view inside the ANC seems to be that Hamas should also be given a seat at the table. This is important for Hamas, which is trying to avoid international isolation, having recently lost a condemnation resolution at the UN.

This development also dovetails with a trend in ANC foreign policy of growing the country’s relationship with Iran. When sanctions on Iran were initially lifted, several high-level delegations visited the Islamic Republic. Guests on these tours have included Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the then Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, as well as then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa. The strengthening of Hamas, which Tehran supports, can be seen as a natural result of these engagements.

Apart from international concerns, there



are also strong domestic factors driving the Hamas visit. The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, and particularly its more Islamist affiliates, has never been particularly enamoured with the more secular-minded, even conciliatory Fatah.

As a result, it has been pushing for better relations with extremist groups like Hamas for nearly a decade. It has been abetted in this process by the extreme left wing of the ANC, which would like ties between Israel and South Africa to be severed in their entirety.

The Hamas visit helps to fuel already strained relations between Pretoria and Jerusalem, and strengthens extremist attitudes inside the ANC.

With a national election coming up next year, the move also plays well with conservatives in the Muslim population who live in the Western Cape. The province is run by the Democratic Alliance, and is the only one in the country not controlled by the ANC. Since the ruling party’s loss of control of the Western Cape in 2009, provincial officials of the ANC have ramped up anti-Israel sentiment. This is used as a means to gain the support of this constituency. At times,

the strategy has become ugly, and several ANC officials have had cases brought against them for inciting anti-Jewish hate speech.

So what does this visit mean for South African policy regarding Hamas in the future? In the short term, Hamas’ supporters will hope it goes a small way toward reducing the group’s isolation in the international community.

They will also hope that it starts to erode the ANC’s connection with Fatah positions. The memorandum of understanding signed between Hamas and the ANC supports, for example, a full boycott of Israeli products, which is not a public Fatah position.

In the long term, however, they will hope that this visit serves as a basis for the ultimate goal of getting the South African state to adopt Hamas’ maximalist positions by ceasing diplomatic ties with Israel, and removing South Africa as potential supporter of peace in the region.

• Benji Shulman hosts the ‘New Blue Review’ on 101.9 ChaiFM focusing on Jewish current affairs and culture.



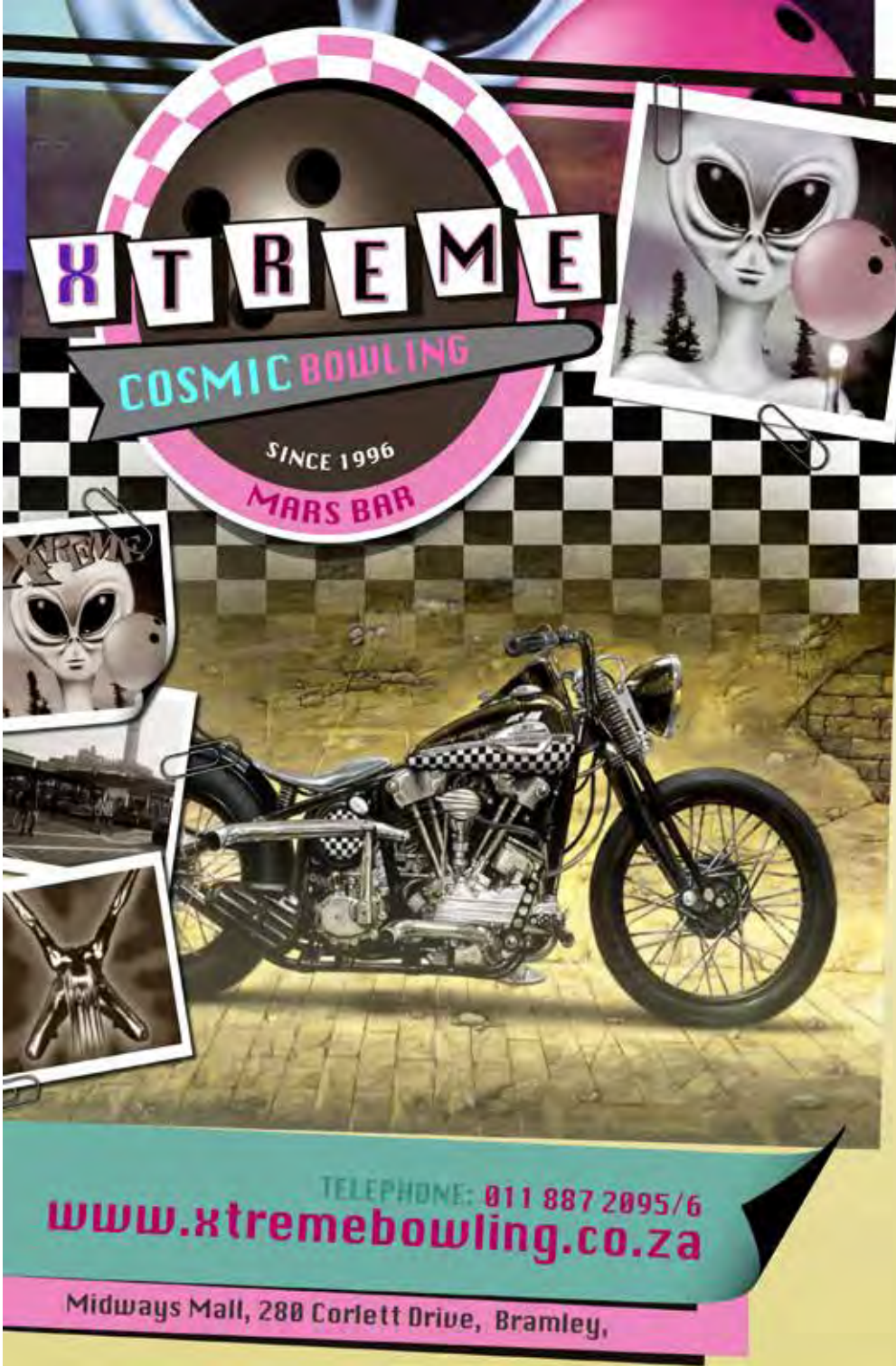
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# What to watch out for in 2019



OPINION

Steven Gruzd

As the curtain comes down on 2018, what might 2019 bring for South Africa, Israel, and beyond?

Next year, there will be celebration and some introspection as South Africa celebrates 25 years of freedom. We commence our third two-year stint on the United Nations Security Council, and the country’s sixth democratic elections for national and provincial leadership since 1994 is expected in May 2019.

Had Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma won the party leadership in December 2017, the African National Congress (ANC) would have faced a tough test in the 2019 polls. But I cannot now see the party dipping below 50%. President Cyril Ramaphosa has shrewdly avoided a major split by keeping all factions on side, albeit retaining much dead wood in his Cabinet. This is in spite of widespread disappointment with the ANC’s delivery record, deep-set corruption, and apparent impunity for the politically powerful (Malusi Gigaba aside).

What damage has been done to the Democratic Alliance (DA) by Helen Zille’s colonialism tweets; Johannesburg Mayor

Herman Mashaba’s gaffes; and the drawn-out battle with former Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille? The vote will show whether the DA can continue its incremental growth.

Besides the Western Cape, I don’t expect good results for De Lille’s new party, Good. She’ll prove as disappointing as Dr Mamphela Ramphele’s Agang SA was in 2014.

Perhaps the biggest question is how strong the populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) will emerge after the vote. Gauteng will be the tightest provincial race, with an ANC loss possible. Will the DA and EFF join forces again to oust the ANC as they did in several key cities in 2016? Or has the EFF moved irrevocably closer to the ANC, as shown by the land-expropriation-without-compensation question?

Ramaphosa will continue to face Herculean economic and social problems in his first elected term: low growth, lack of business confidence, fears about property rights, a volatile currency, crippling unemployment, and rising crime.

His rousing calls to the Jewish community to support job creation and put their skills to work for the good of the country are likely to be offset by bitterness and despondency if the ANC finally gets the government to downgrade diplomatic ties with Israel. At this stage, there is no indication that South Africa will send a new ambassador to replace Sisa Ngombane in Tel Aviv in 2019. The recent Hamas-ANC memorandum of understanding

similarly bodes ill for any warmer Israel-South Africa relations.

Israel’s security concerns will continue into 2019, on both its southwestern and northern flanks. Another military incursion into Gaza cannot be ruled out, especially if Iran-sponsored Hamas steps up its rocket attacks on southern Israel.

The recent discovery of tunnels burrowed into Israel from territory controlled in southern Lebanon by another of Iran’s proxies, Hezbollah, may well prompt Israeli military action inside Lebanon itself. Israel’s attempt in 2006 to destroy Hezbollah in Lebanon ended inconclusively after 34 days of vicious fighting. The Syrian civil war is winding down to a costly and bruising victory for Bashar Al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian backers. Instability will persist on the Israel-Syrian frontier, where Hezbollah has been active. And will President Donald Trump’s vaunted Middle East peace plan materialise, and succeed?

Israel faces Knesset elections in 2019 – the only question is when. They must be held by 5 November, or earlier if the government collapses. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud-led coalition now holds the narrowest possible majority: just 61 of 120 Knesset seats.

In this climate, I believe the incumbent strong-man Netanyahu is likely to prevail in the election – if he can continue to fend off his legal problems. Beset by scandal and

looming corruption charges, will Netanyahu survive? There is no obvious heir-apparent within Likud, though little-known ministerial names like Gideon Sa’ar, Israel Katz, and Gilad Erdan have been bandied about. Further afield, other party leaders Naftali Bennett, Avigdor Lieberman, or Yair Lapid are unlikely to muster enough support to become prime minister. The once-mighty left that dominated Israeli politics from 1948 appears rudderless and out of ideas. Smaller ethnic or religious parties will continue to be kingmakers, squeezing heavy concession from coalition partners.

Gazing elsewhere, it is unclear exactly how Britain’s departure from the European Union will unfold. If Theresa May’s Conservative government falls due to Brexit, a win for Labour under the anti-Semitic Jeremy Corbyn will send shockwaves through British and international Jewry. Globally, anti-Semitism, sadly, shows no sign of abating.

Finally, I’ve lived through the agony of every spectacular South African exit from the Cricket World Cup since our readmission in 1992. I dare not dream for next year. I do, however, confidently predict a Springbok win in the Rugby World Cup in Japan in November. We triumph at 12-year intervals: 1995 and 2007, so we’re due. Shana Tova!

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

# Next year depends on three ‘E’s

This year opened on a euphoric note after the election of Cyril Ramaphosa to President of the African National Congress. It raised hopes of a turnaround in South Africa’s economic fortunes.

The year is closing on a more sober note, as the economy emerges from recession, Eskom enters its fourth week of load shedding, and the rand is back down to more than R14 to the dollar after its bounce to about R12.30 at the start of this year.

question mark over the tentative revival in economic growth. It has also dampened the hopes that were raised by Ramaphosa’s successful investment conference in October, and has cast a shadow on the other initiatives his government has undertaken to restore investor confidence and boost investment, growth, and job creation.

If load shedding is sustained into 2019, and Eskom cannot guarantee a reliable supply of power, all those promises of new, job-creating investment will be unlikely to

risk to South Africa’s national budget and its credit rating.

As it is, South Africa’s economic growth rate is way below what the country needs to address its so-called “triple challenges” of unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

Over the past five years, the economy’s average annual growth rate has been hardly more than 1%. Given that the population is growing at about 1.7%, that means average living standards are declining. The pain of slow growth is also evident in the unemployment rate. This rose to almost 28% this year – at a time when the global unemployment rate has fallen to a 40-year-low of about 5%.

The latest official statistics show that the economy put in a positive performance in the third quarter of this year after two negative quarters. This

next year’s elections.

South Africa needs sustained growth of at least 3%. However, improvement in employment levels and living standards will depend on whether the Ramaphosa government can implement reforms to make the economy more competitive and attractive to investors.

It made a start in 2018 with changes to leadership at key ministries and public entities and measures to fight corruption. It also finalised the Mining Charter, and made promising changes to damaging visa regulations. However, much more can be done to stop the rot in the economy and get it growing again.

The question is whether Ramaphosa has the political support to implement controversial reforms. This is where the second “E” – elections – comes in. Many in financial markets are looking to the elections in May in the hope that Ramaphosa and his party will gain a clear majority. This will give him the political firepower to implement investor and business friendly reforms.

Others are sceptical as to whether the elections will change much at all. They also question whether there is the political will to do what’s necessary to halt South Africa’s slow economic slide.

Assuming the will exists, it will take time. South Africa cannot rely any longer on the favourable global environment for emerging markets that ensured a steady flow of foreign money in recent years.

After the rand’s “Ramaphoria” rebound early in the year, it has been highly volatile, mainly reflecting shifts in investor sentiment towards emerging

OPINION

Hilary Joffe



markets.

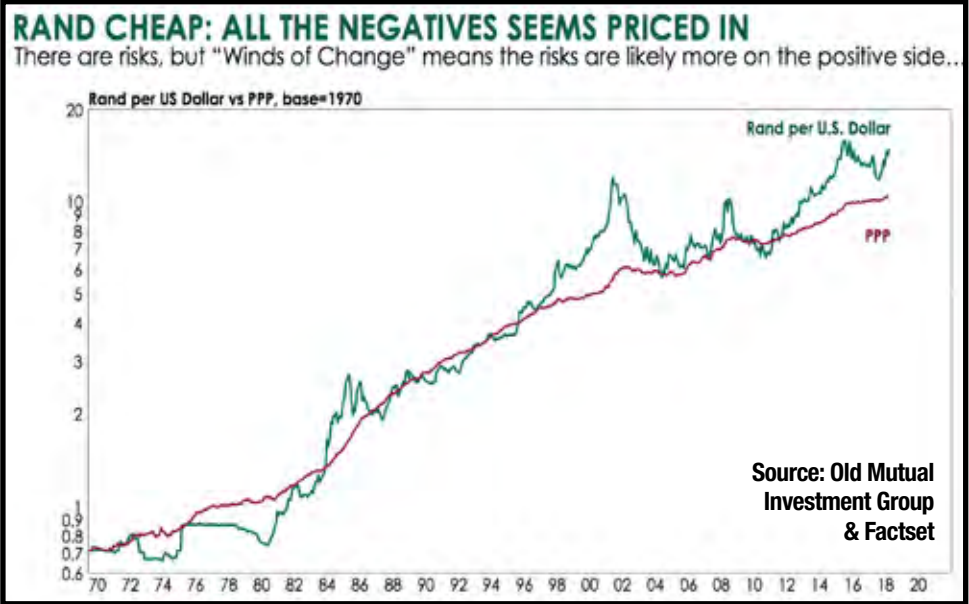
Higher interest rates in the United States and the prospect of a US-China trade war have tended to make global investors more risk averse and less likely to put cash into higher-risk emerging markets. So, too, have crises in countries such as Argentina and Turkey during the year, which had an impact on the rand in one way or another. The rand exchange rate in turn affects South Africa’s inflation rate, and the Reserve Bank’s interest-rate decisions.

The Reserve Bank is being super-cautious in the face of an uncertain global environment, and in November, it hiked interest rates. Whether more hikes will follow in 2019 depends on the rand exchange rate as well as factors such as international oil prices, and local electricity and food prices.

Els believes all the negatives are already priced into the rand, and it could strengthen to R12 to the dollar next year. Others are more sceptical, with NKC African Economics forecasting the rand at R14.50 to the dollar by the end of 2019.

For South African households, the message is that 2019 is likely to be somewhat better than 2018, but recovery will be slow, and there will be risks. It’s a time to exercise caution and patience, and hope that the three “E”s go right.

• Hilary Joffe is a columnist for the Sunday Times Business Times.



Will 2019 be a better year, one in which the economy at last begins to deliver the growth and jobs South Africa needs? That will depend in part on three “E”s – Eskom, elections, and perceptions of emerging markets.

The crisis at Eskom highlights the extent of the damage done to the economy and its institutions by the Zuma years of corruption and state capture. It also shows just how hard the ailing state-owned enterprises will be to fix.

Load shedding has put a big

materialise, and growth will probably falter again.

Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan has promised speedy action to address Eskom’s severe short-term operational challenges, as well as to put plans in place to restructure it over the medium term. Whether he can fix what needs to be fixed will be crucial in shaping the economic outlook for 2019 and beyond. This is not only because keeping the lights on matters for consumers and businesses, but because Eskom’s financial crisis is arguably the biggest

means that growth for the year as a whole is still going to be below 1%.

The South African Reserve Bank’s latest forecast for 2018 is 0.6%, rising to 1.9% in 2019, and 2% in 2020. Some economists are a little more optimistic, however.

Old Mutual Investment Group Chief Economist Johann Els reckons that growth could reach 2% next year, rising to 2.5% in 2020. This will happen with lower inflation, interest rates moving sideways, and a revival in business and consumer confidence after



# Issue of enforceability puts halachic prenup on hold

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

The development of a halachic prenuptial contract intended to put an end to the problem of “gett” refusal and the resultant status of *agunot* – chained women – has been put on hold for the moment. This is because the senior advocates and attorneys who have been working on the issue for well over a year are divided on whether the monetary payment that the husband has obligated himself to pay on separation would be enforceable by the civil authorities.

“There’s no point in having it if it can’t be enforced,” says Dayan Dovid Baddiel of the Johannesburg Beth Din, who has been driving the process together with Rosh Beth Din Rabbi Moshe Kurtstag and Dayan Shlomo Glikberg.

The gett is a divorce document in Jewish law, without which individuals cannot remarry according to Jewish law. An *agunah* is a woman whose husband refuses her a gett, resulting in her being “chained” to him and living in limbo.

Women are not the only victims of the scourge, the rabbi points out. They may refuse to accept a gett, which would likewise prevent an estranged husband from remarrying according to Jewish law.

Michelle Blumenau, the co-founder of Go Getters, the South African gett network which was set up to guard against gett abuse, says, “There was some debate amongst the legal fraternity about the viability of a halachic prenup in South Africa when we looked into it this year.

“Our Beth Din is not opposed to it, but the legal advice was that it was going to be difficult to enforce. In South Africa, currently the primary protection is section 5A of the Divorce Act. If one or both of the spouses will not be free to marry post-divorce, the court may refuse to grant the order of divorce.

“It is essential to remind your lawyer and the judge of this,” she stresses. “We believe that ideally, the gett should be finalised prior to the civil divorce. If not, there should be a clause in the civil divorce agreement that both parties agree to be reasonable and if necessary to give or accept the gett within 30 days.

“If this is not done, and a party is found to be in contempt of court, they are to go to prison for a period not exceeding 90 days, suspended for a period of 30 days, to allow the defaulting party to comply with the court order.”

The idea of the prenuptial contract was that the husband would pay a certain agreed amount in maintenance to his wife after their separation if he refused to appear before the Beth Din. The maintenance obligation would stand for as long as he did not appear before the Jewish Ecclesiastical Court.

The purpose was to motivate him to appear before the court to avoid running into “deep debt”, Baddiel says.

But, he hastens to add, “We don’t want to just rush into a gett. The Beth Din explores all avenues, for instance, sending the couple to appropriate counselling.

“At the same time, once it’s clear that the husband or the wife wants to get divorced, we’ll pursue it to the very end, making sure that they’ll be divorced – and we’ll try all means possible.”

It was envisaged that the prenuptial contract would be incorporated into the regular antenuptial contract, be made an order of court, and enforcement would take place through attachment of the defaulter’s assets. “But a senior attorney’s view was that it would not be enforceable,” says Baddiel.

“Going through all this, amending everything, and requiring every couple to do it when we’re not even sure it’s going to gain anything, is not worth the effort.

“Coupled with the fact that in Israel there was a minority of one or two dayanim in whose opinion the gett would be a coerced one, and they wouldn’t recognise it. That is definitely

not our opinion, however we wish all our gittin to be recognised internationally by all the Batei Din.”

Baddiel says there are not “that many” recalcitrant husbands. The Beth Din is nevertheless determined to see that justice is done, earlier this year pursuing a gett refuser who had relocated to the United Kingdom.

“We took the matter up with the London Beth Din, and we were eventually able to get the husband to give a gett,” he says. In another dramatic case, Kurtstag, through the Israeli Beth Din, managed to stop a non-compliant husband from leaving




Dayan Dovid Baddiel

Israel until he had granted his wife a gett.

In Israel, the problem doesn’t really arise because gett refusers can be imprisoned by the rabbinical courts. Even so, there is a case of an individual who has been in jail for close to two decades for refusing to grant his wife a gett.


Baddiel says that the fact that there is one Beth Din in South Africa is a distinct advantage in this regard, and gives it leverage. “If, for example, a person wants to go and live in Israel, he needs a certificate of Jewishness from the Beth Din, and we wouldn’t give him any certificate until he

complied.” In other countries where there are several Batei Din, if one refuses their services, the individual can go to others in the hope of obtaining what he needs. While the Beth Din is not pursuing the prenup issue at the moment, Baddiel says it tries to do what it can, and is committed to seeing things through “to the fullest extent”. For the time being, he believes that the Jewish Ecclesiastical Court has sufficient leverage to ensure that justice is done to both men and women who find themselves in the dead-end situation of being at the mercy of their estranged spouses. “We’ve found Go Getters to be helpful as well,” he says.



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# Board cuts funding for Jewish Studies at non-Jewish remedial schools

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

The South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) has cut funding for Jewish Studies classes at non-denominational remedial schools, citing the costs of funding its new remedial school, King David Ariel, as the reason.

Bellavista is able to absorb costs, meaning Jewish Studies classes will continue there. Yet Crossroads lacks the resources to do so, meaning parents will now be charged for lessons.

Angry Crossroads mothers are voicing their discontent. Says Shereen Sheer, “My assumption is that the SABJE is meant to look after the interests of all Jewish kids, not just King David kids. I think it’s a disgrace for a rabbi to suggest that in order for our kids to get a Jewish education, they have to go to Ariel.

“The Jewish community is very strong at Crossroads, and the school has always supported our beliefs. We need our kids to have access to yiddishkeit.”

Rabbi Craig Kacev, the General Director of the SABJE, explains the decision. “We initiated and provided these Jewish Studies classes over the years because we felt that was our ‘in-reach’ Jewish community initiative. We knew that we didn’t have the capital for our own remedial offering, so we funded teaching in these schools as far as they allowed us to.”

Yet, with King David Ariel opening its doors this year and more than doubling in size to accommodate 76 kids in 2019 in classes up to Grade 4, the SABJE’s focus has shifted. “Now, we believe we’ve responded to the community with a huge investment. There’s no way that a school like that is going to run at break-even point for many years,” says Kacev. “A remedial offering for Jewish kids with full-time Hebrew and Jewish Studies teachers is a huge investment for us. That’s what’s informed our decision to fully invest in that offering for the Jewish community so it gets off its feet successfully.”

King David parents have been paying to help fund teachers at remedial schools for the past eight years, says Kacev. “The SABJE is an umbrella association of the Jewish schools. It doesn’t have any of its own independent funding. All funding comes from King David schools. Now that King David has its own remedial school, it wouldn’t be correct to move that funding out of that environment.”

Addressing concerns that remedial kids above Grade 4 can’t go to Ariel, Kacev says, “That’s okay in the sense that we’ve managed to create a good mind shift at Crossroads and Bellavista. They’d never paid for it, they’d never done anything towards it, other than making space.

“Those schools have now recognised that they should be offering something at their own cost to help their Jewish kids, not just accept somebody else bringing in teachers and paying for them.”

Crossroads’ Jewish Studies classes have formed part of its extra-mural offerings, many of which are already paid for by parents. “Depending on the term, 20 to 30 children attend the Jewish Studies classes,” says

Crossroads Principal Val Witt. “Two half-hour classes are offered for the different age groups – foundation phase and senior phase.”

Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk and his wife Laia teach these classes. “Classes have been received positively by kids and parents,” says Rabbi Uzvolk. “Sometimes it’s necessary to put a child in a remedial school, and it shouldn’t take away from a positive exposure to Judaism.”

Mom Elise Levin speaks of the value of being able to expose all her kids to Jewish Studies, with both her son at Crossroads and daughter at

King David bringing home menorahs, for example. “Children at Bellavista and Crossroads aren’t different, they feel the same, they still feel part of the community, even though they’re at a non-Jewish school.

“I can’t take my son to Ariel, they don’t have his grade. Even for parents of younger kids, to put them somewhere else when you’ve finally got them happy, isn’t easy.”

“Crossroads parents have been given the option of continuing at a cost,” says Uzvolk. “This comes with a message to them that no kid will be turned away if they can’t afford the

lessons.” If 20 or more kids decide to continue, classes will be about R570 per learner per term. With less than 20, the price will increase.

Witt put this option to parents in a newsletter. Eighteen responded, with 15 indicating they’d love to attend the classes, and three not wanting to attend. “Eight out of the 15 indicated that they were willing to pay for this, whilst the rest said they didn’t want to, or weren’t in a position to pay,” says Witt. “Presently Crossroads isn’t able to fund Jewish Studies.”

“School fees are crippling enough,” says Crossroads’ mother Carla

Gruskin. “When my son joined Crossroads this year from a religious Jewish day school where he was perpetually immersed in Torah, it was a great comfort knowing he’d still be exposed to Kodesh in a meaningful way. He has a love for all things Jewish, and has seeped up all he’s gleaned from Rabbi and Rebbetzin Uzvolk. Shouldn’t we help foster that connection to Judaism?”

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein declined to comment, saying he would be addressing the issue independently with the schools concerned.

## Home away from home: memories of King David Hostel

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Operational for about 30 years, the King David Linksfield School Hostel became a home away from home. Largely accommodating children from South Africa’s farming communities, the hostel offered a warm, holistic, Jewish boarding experience, playing an important role in the history of King David.

Louis Sachs, one of King David’s founders, suggested opening a hostel on the school’s premises. “There were many Jewish children in country districts who were denied the opportunity of a Jewish education because of where they lived,” says Elliot Wolf, the Director of the King David Schools’ Foundation and the former principal of King David High School Linksfield. Built in 1966, the hostel was named Sachs House.

At its height, the hostel accommodated 130 to 150 kids. They came from far afield, from the Mpumalanga area, Bethel, Dawel, and other farming districts. “We also had people from Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, Vereeniging, and Carletonville,” recalls Wolf. “When Rhodesia experienced its difficulties, a whole group came into the hostel. We also had people from Dar es Salaam and the Belgian Congo during difficult times there. The kids were wonderful. Always on the property, they created a great school spirit. They were one of the school houses, Sachs House. I’m not saying they didn’t get up to mischief because they did, but they were always more courteous and respectful than their Johannesburg counterparts.”

Arnold Altshuler, who served as head of the hostel for many years, recalls the family feel it fostered. “I first came to the hostel in 1975,” he says. “In those days, there were 110 girls and boys. I realised I was entering a family where everyone looked after each other. Yet, all was controlled and on time. It was an active, vibrant, and successful entity. Respect, compassion, and assistance were the hallmarks. The boarders were so well-behaved because they came from loving farming families who had brought up their children in the most positive way.”

Known for their sporting prowess honed by constant access to school facilities, the boarders excelled in soccer, cricket, and table tennis. “Sports injuries, although not usually serious, were quite common, and we had our own GP on call,” says Altshuler. He recalls two serious incidents. One was when a senior got kicked in the chest. He fractured his rib which pierced his lung. “Fortunately, he recovered well.”

“I’m a bit embarrassed to mention that as house master, I probably suffered the second most serious injury,” he says. “When playing cricket with the boys, I hooked the ball into my nose, dislodging and breaking it. After an operation – and a nose guard – I also recovered well.”

While the kids were generally well behaved, there were the typical incidents of teenage rebellion. On one occasion, Altshuler and a colleague checked the senior rooms for smokers. “We found none, but later, a matric boy came to me to admit that he had his lit cigarette under his body when I came into the room. He was in distinct pain from a burn!”

Jacques Tariqua, lived at the hostel between 1967 and 1968, his last two years of high school. “My dad was working in the DRC – then Zaire,” he recalls. “Perhaps the best part of hostel living was the close camaraderie all the kids built in spite of coming from different backgrounds and regions. This was easily seen on the sports front where, in spite of being the smallest house, we were by far the fittest – we banded together.”

Among his memories of misadventures is the night four matric boys sneaked a bottle of alcohol into their room after a Barmitzvah. “Two of our roomies consumed the entire bottle on their own, with the resultant after effects. In spite of our best efforts to hide the evidence, news of our escapade spread like wildfire. The next morning, we were called into the office by ‘the boss’, Headmaster Mr Sandler. My fate? Six of the best – caning was still allowed then.”

Harold Kahn, a student at the hostel between 1969 and 1971, came from Koppies in the Free State, where his father owned a general dealer store. “I attended an Afrikaans school – the only school in Koppies. My parents sent me to King David School Hostel to give me a Jewish education. I left the hostel at 15 when they moved to Johannesburg.”

Kahn remembers the familial atmosphere and the friendships he made there. “Friday night Shabbat dinners were special,” he says. “It was the weekend, and there was a warm, fun atmosphere.” Things weren’t always easy though. “The worst part of hostel

my parents wanted a Jewish education for me and my older siblings. I was in the King David hostel for nine years between 1975 and 1983, from the age of eight. My father had to fight for them to accept me so young. At eight, it was really tough for me. I missed my parents.

“However, there was a lot of positivity. The hostel kids were like family. I’ll always have a link with those people. Hostel life was quite regimental though, there were set mealtimes, benching, Mincha and Ma’ariv every night, and designated prep – homework – time. There was chill time though, and I remember us gathering around the TV in the lounge to watch *Dallas*.

“Food was important to me,” she says, “although it was quite good, you got the same meals all the time. Once a week we had steak and chips, that was the best. There are certain foods I still refuse to make in my house though, like jelly and macaroni and cheese.”

Boys and girls found ways to mingle that were often quite innovative, recalls Cooper. “On a Friday night, the boys came over after lights out. They used screwdrivers to unscrew the burglar bars and get in. You never really had privacy though. You had to go into the school grounds and sit outside to get away from people.”

By 1996, the influx of students had diminished almost completely, with only eight students remaining in the hostel. The farmers had bought townhouses in the area, with farmers themselves usually



life was being homesick for my parents and family. Not having your freedom was especially hard. There were restrictions only hostel kids faced like having access to treats in the ‘tuck room’ for only one hour an afternoon.”

Yet there are many happy memories. “The night before we were due to go home for the much anticipated school holidays, there would be wholesale raiding of dormitories – ‘apple pie-ing’ each other’s beds and other shenanigans. Saturday night movies in the school hall – with a projector and film reels – was another highlight.”

For Debi Cooper (nee Jocum), hostel life was challenging. With her parents living on a farm in the Northern Cape, Cooper had been at a boarding school in Kimberley. “I experienced anti-Semitism there, and

commuting. The Jewish population in country towns had also diminished, recalls Wolf. “It was no longer economically viable, so we closed the hostel and housed the remaining students with people living in the area.”

Over the years, attempts were made to house small classrooms in the hostel rooms. A computer laboratory and the Elliot Wolf Media Centre were later installed. “About three years ago, we had a major transformation as the other parts of the building had been left as is,” says Wolf. “The King David Schools’ Foundation got involved, knocked out the interior walls, and created 14 new magnificent classrooms, now called the S block. The dining room has also been converted into an indoor gym. The hostel has been completely transformed.”



# The bald truth about Jewish men’s obsession with their hair

JORDAN MOSHE

A shiny bald pate. A mess of curls untouched by a hairbrush. A finely-cropped carpet of bristles to which a kippah miraculously clings.

From the follically challenged to the tastefully tressed, the true story of Jewish men and their hair is not to be trifled with.

While men seem to have become more concerned with the state of their hair in general, Jewish men seem particularly devoted to maintaining a particular hairstyle.

A few years back, my family gently pointed out to me that my hairline seemed to be receding “ever so slightly”. This is an unwelcome reality for a male of any age, but it is particularly unnerving when you’re only 20.

Glances in the mirror became appointments with my reflection, involving copious flattening of my fringe to conceal the swathes of growing forehead. Fortunately, the receding has since stopped, and I make the most of what remains (though my family often thinks differently).

Let’s be honest, there are few things more terrifying than a bad haircut. We all seem to accept the possibility that our doctors, dentists, and plastic surgeons may botch a procedure, and sign away the right to lodge complaints. Considering how strongly we feel about the

appearance of our hair, it’s a wonder hair stylists and barbers have not yet implemented the signing of indemnity agreements before agreeing to snip off a lock of someone precious hair.

I have witnessed a Jewish man throw a temper tantrum over the cut he received while in the chair of a barber. I don’t believe there was much hair on his scalp to begin with, but when he launched himself from the chair beside me, cast off the apron, and yelled about his hair being “all gone”, it was clear he felt differently.

Sometimes I think that women, for all their complaints about the endless hours of toil required to perfect their hairstyles, have it relatively easy. Even those who sport hats or sheitls have an unfair advantage over men.

Whether a woman’s hair is immaculate, slightly windswept, or even resembles a bird’s nest, they are safe from even remotely critical comments. No one would dare say anything to a member of the fairer sex about the state of their hair. Instead, they may opt to praise a look as “all natural” rather than suggesting that it looks like the result of a night’s sleep involving a wrestling match with an octopus.

To be frank, men cannot make a hair piece of any kind look good, though there are innovations that allow men to affix synthetic hair to their balding heads with water-soluble glue, and hats are reasonably popular.

A toupee can be spotted miles off, and hair treatments are time-consuming and often costly. For a man to keep a hat on his head is considered less than civil, to say nothing about impractical. A bald head can also bring on quite a chill. The challenge is, as they say, real.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that men – Jewish ones in particular – pay keen attention to their hair. Don’t be fooled by those who seem indifferent to the windswept locks on their heads. They spend hours perfecting the look, and locking every hair into its disarrayed place.

When you’re next in a shul or brocha area, look around at the various specimens of the male hair spectrum. Don’t be fooled into believing the uniformity that a sea of kippot seems to suggest.

The “Jew-fro” has always been, and probably always will be fashionable. Unlike the standard afro, the Jew-fro is famed for its unique ability to appear carelessly brushed while in fact being painstakingly arranged.

With a small kippa typically floating atop a sea of curls, this style is traditionally preferred by younger men. However, it is not uncommon to see older men who’ve been fortunate enough to keep their hair flaunting their grizzled manes.

Others who are equally gifted with longer hair may not boast curls,



head’s centre that they are forced to rely on the hair on top. This hair is often left to grow a little, and is then drawn across the top from the sides or “swirled” around the top and clamped down with a large kippa to prevent any movement.

Reluctant to move more than necessary, these are the men who try to keep to their seats and avoid any extraneous movements of the head.

Whether they are blessed with some hair or no hair, there are certain men who prefer to replicate the bristles of their chins on their heads. Sometimes almost invisible, these hairs are kept extremely short, but ever-present. By some miracle, they are able to keep kippot locked in place atop the bristles.

Perhaps even more miraculous, however, is the bald-headed look. Coming in either matte or gloss, these heads fascinate young and old alike because they possess the ability to hold a kippa without slipping. Also, they are often accompanied by a full-bodied beard which completely contradicts the nakedness of the scalp above it.

The confusion I’ve seen on the faces of children fixating on a man enshrouded in his tallit, with his beard protruding from the folds of fabric while the edge slips on the bare scalp, is a sight to behold.

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# Modern day medical miracles

TALI FEINBERG

“We tried not to ask why this happened, but we believe it was Hashem’s way of bringing the community together, and showing his miracles,” says Aviva Glassman, whose daughter survived a dangerous head injury earlier this year.

In light of the miracle of Chanukah, we spoke to community members who have experienced medical miracles when all the odds seemed stacked against them.

The last time the *SA Jewish Report* interviewed the parents of Aaron Lipschitz in February, they were desperately searching for a bone-marrow donor to save their son, who has a rare primary immune-deficiency.

In July, a donor was located in Germany. “It was a ten out of ten match, which is very difficult to find,” says his mother Taryn.

The blood was flown to Cape Town, but the transplant caused Aaron to become critically ill with a rare phenomenon called a cytokine storm.

Aaron was rushed to the Red Cross Children’s Hospital. There, doctors found a dormant infection in his lungs. “They told us that if this infection got into his blood, he wouldn’t survive.” However, the infection did not spread, and he was given injections of an experimental drug that stopped the cytokine storm in its tracks.

Soon after, he was allowed to go home. To his parents, “he really is a walking miracle”.

Na’ama Glassman slipped on the tiles in her Johannesburg home, and



by the time she reached hospital, she was unconscious. A CT scan showed she had a skull fracture and a massive bleed on the brain.

Her parents were told their daughter needed brain surgery, so Dr Richard Friedland arranged a helicopter to fly Na’ama to Netcare’s Waterfall Hospital in Midrand.

“By now, we had rolling *tehillim* (psalms), a hundred people had turned up at the hospital, and people around the world were davening for her,” says her mother.

Na’ama survived the surgery. Yet the road to recovery was just beginning – when she woke up, she couldn’t see. The *tehillim* continued, and soon after, her sight came back.

She made an astonishing recovery, and hardly needed any rehabilitation therapy. Her doctor, who is Catholic, told Aviva that her daughter’s life was saved “by those books you read”, referring to the *tehillim*. Other children in the ward with Na’ama also made miraculous progress.

“When we showed the orthotist the



CT scan, he couldn’t understand how she had recovered, never mind the fact that she is still alive,” says Aviva. “He said medically, it was a miracle.”

Jamie Katzen of Cape Town, was born at 30 weeks because of a dangerous condition called pre-eclampsia. Left untreated, this can lead to serious – even fatal – complications for mother and baby. The most effective treatment is delivery.

Jamie weighed just 1.07kg at birth,

and was in hospital for eight weeks, but every moment of his journey has been miraculous in some way, says his mother Kirsten. “We never had any close calls in hospital. He gained weight. He was never sick. He has reached every milestone, and is on par with children his age. He is tall, healthy, and strong – an absolute miracle!”

They say life begins after 40, and for Sam Nadelman of Cape Town, this rings true. In 2010 at the age of 37, she had a double mastectomy and chemotherapy. She never expected to have a child, but at the age of 40, she found out she was pregnant. She was monitored closely, but all went smoothly. In March 2014, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Until the age of 30, Talia Farber of Johannesburg did not have any health problems. But one day, she woke up feeling extremely lethargic, had blisters in her mouth, and was short of breath.

After a few weeks, Talia went to hospital. When she woke up the

next morning, her diaphragm and neck collapsed. “I stopped breathing completely. If I hadn’t been in hospital, I definitely would have died.”

Talia was in intensive care on a ventilator, and doctors diagnosed her with Myesthenia Gravis, an autoimmune disease.

She was released from hospital, but during a routine check-up, a ten centimetre tumour was found in her abdomen, very close to her aorta.



Despite it being an extremely risky surgery, the tumour was removed and, miraculously, it was benign.

Talia began to get back to normal life, but was again short of breath. Doctors diagnosed her with chronic degeneration of the lungs. The only solution? A lung transplant.

After four months in hospital, during which she stopped breathing twice, Talia got the call that her lungs were on their way.

The surgery went smoothly, but just as she had almost fully recovered, a high temperature revealed an acute rejection of the new lungs.

She deteriorated again, but the rejection was treated.

Finally, Talia was able to return to normal life. “Miracles do happen. I was ventilated and therefore near death about three to four times. I have defied doctors’ assumptions that I would not make it, yet here I am,” she says.

## Building a community of Jewish change-makers

TALI FEINBERG

Jews have always been deeply involved in improving the lives of fellow South Africans, but until recently, there hasn’t been a network to bring all of these “change-makers” together to support each other and heighten their impact. In addition, many Jews in civil society don’t promote the fact that they are Jewish, while those who do often limit their activity to the Jewish community.

This is where Mensch steps in. “It is a space to be proudly Jewish and promote diversity at the same time,” says the organisation’s founder, Gina Flash, who started Mensch as the Mensch Network, a project of South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council) when she was employed there.

Flash was tasked with looking at how Jews are involved in transformation in the country, and it was then that she realised that a network to bring these people together would be valuable for their work and our community.

Mensch has now evolved into a fully fledged independent organisation. “It is a registered South African non-profit organisation and public benefit organisation with Section 18A status (for donations purposes),” Flash says. “It has two full-time staff members, its own governing board, constitution, budget, fundraising, and donor base.” Needless to say, the organisation prides itself on upholding the highest standard of governance.

Underlying Mensch’s vision is a “theory of change”. “Our overarching aim is to engage the Jewish community in creating social change in South Africa. We do this through capacity building, networking, profiling and community engagement,” Flash says.

On the ground, this has meant engaging the community in acts of “doing good”. On Mandela Day in July, Mensch invited the Cape Town Jewish community to a day of fun activities hosted by non-government organisations so that they could interact with them directly and hopefully build long-term relationships. For example, people of all ages could attend a yoga session with the Earthchild Project, which teaches yoga to children in the townships.

Mensch also joined the global Mitzvah Day in November, inviting community members to roll up their sleeves and help others in any way they see fit. “We’ve found that people really get what we are trying to do when they attend one of our events,” says Flash. “It’s all about exercising that ‘muscle’ of doing something, instead of feeling paralyzed.”

As an umbrella body, Mensch is open to any Jewish person who is involved in making a difference in South Africa, or anyone who wants to

contribute to wider society but isn’t sure where to start. It’s an inclusive space that has drawn people back towards their Jewish roots while at the same time allowing others to reach out beyond their comfort zones.

“We’re a proudly Jewish space for people to take part in transforming wider South African society,” says Flash. “We’re focusing on South Africa and the role we have to play as Jews according to our Jewish values.”

Mensch offers extensive support to its members, including interaction with mentors, top quality speakers and events, and practical training on building social enterprises and businesses that are focused on people, profit, and planet.

The organisation faces a number of challenges, not least funding. It is a small beneficiary of the United Jewish Campaign, the Cape Town Jewish community’s umbrella fundraising body. But for the rest, it must attract its own funding.

In addition, many people confuse it with other organisations like Afrika Tikken. “What we’re doing is different. Mensch is a platform for supporting a range of transformation activities, people, and organisations. We celebrate the great



**Mensch Mitzvah Day activity at Highlands House for residents and guests from iKamva Labantu’s seniors clubs, hosted by the professional staff of the Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council)**

achievements of change-making in South Africa’s history, but we feel an urgent need to support the next generation to continue and expand this legacy,” says Flash.

In addition, some people feel that Mensch focuses Jewish people’s attention and resources away from Jewish concerns, as it promotes *tikkun olam* (healing the world) with a focus on the poor and needy in greater South Africa.

“The truth is it is the complete opposite!

We are creating a Jewish space for something people are already doing and want to do,” says Flash. “This space actually brings people back into the community where they have previously felt unrepresented or excluded. It also ensures that the community remains relevant to future generations.”

The organisation’s vision for the future is centred on growth, including more networking, more education, experiential learning, and meaningful communal social action. Mensch would also like to encourage the corporate world to step up and form partnerships with community organisations. Mensch has a small presence in Johannesburg, but has big plans to expand in 2019. However, it will need support, including funding a part-time employee.

In the meantime, anyone can get involved. “We are a platform, a community, so it is a space to step in and up to. Join the network, check out the members on the site, and find a city and area of work that interests you. Offer to volunteer directly with an organisation, or to create a Mensch event; take part in an isiXhosa or isiZulu language course which will help us communicate; break

down barriers by offering your professional skills, financial support, and/or by being an ambassador by encouraging others to support us.”

In the broader South African society, she encourages people to take part in civic action, politics, and leadership opportunities, to champion democracy, and to “take your place proudly, not backing away from the task at hand”.

For more information, email [info@mensch.org.za](mailto:info@mensch.org.za) or see the website [www.mensch.org.za](http://www.mensch.org.za)



# Record numbers for fun in the sun at this year’s machaneh

JORDAN MOSHE

In a few days’ time, Jewish youth from across South Africa will set off for various campsites on the coast, eager to escape the confines of home and ready for sun, sand, and summer vibes.

Hundreds of young Jews will attend Habonim, Bnei Akiva, or Netzer camp, which all promise to be bigger and better than ever before.

This is the fifth year in a row that Bnei Akiva has attracted more than 700 *channichim* (participants) for its Ivri Anochi machaneh. “This year is the biggest *machaneh* in history, with well over 800 *channichim*,” says Rosh Machaneh Chanan Emdin. “More than 1 100 people will be on site.”

Emdin says the camp experience has changed drastically over the years. Once entailing a two-day train ride down to Beaufort West, and then a lengthy bus trip, today, *channies* fly directly to George, and have an easy 20-minute bus ride to the beautiful campsite.

“Over the past five years, major renovations have been made to the campsite,” he says “It is totally unrecognisable from what it was in the past. They include a new tuckshop, new and bigger tents for *channies*, a state-of-the-art accommodation block for rabbis, doctors, and psychologists, a viewing deck, putt-putt course,

and soccer and volleyball courts.

“The shul has been upgraded, there are two pools onsite, and an obstacle course. This was all done in order to stay ahead of the game and make sure our *channies* have the most incredible holiday while being inspired.”

Equally determined to inspire *channichim* is Habonim Shaliach Danny Adeno Abebe, who says that camp is a space in which to prepare the next generation of Jewish leaders.

“When I arrived in South Africa from Israel, I envisaged bringing Habonim into the Jewish community and creating a space for young Jews to connect and grow,” he says. “Putting aside all politics, we invite youngsters to enter a space that promotes a Jewish identity no matter how religious or irreligious they may be.”

With about 900 *channichim* going to camp this year, Abebe says the movement is committed to making sure that the experience is better than ever.

“Twelve of our *madrichim* (guides) are Israelis,” he says. “In addition, we will have 14 kids joining us from Israel this year. They are all from kibbutzim on the Gaza border, and have all had experiences of trauma that no child should have to face. We want to give them an opportunity to rest and be normal kids, enjoying an inspiring holiday with other youngsters.

“The presence of these people

will make sure that our activities, whether we’re discussing Jewish identity, South Africa, Israel, or Zionism, will be an all-inclusive space of learning and gaining a better understanding of what it is to be Jewish. This is a platform for everyone, and we want every person to feel comfortable and express who they are as a Jew.”

Netzer is also adding international flavour to this year’s camp with the inclusion of American and Brazilian personalities. Says Jason Bourne, this year’s head of camp, “We are so excited to have two *madrichim* from our Netzer branch in Brazil join us for machaneh. We also have an amazing song leader all the way from America who will be in charge of anything musical on camp.”

The 60 Netzer campers can look forward to a vibrant and inspirational experience. Says Bourne, “During machaneh, we normally have a rabbi from the progressive Jewish community join us for Shabbat as they always bring a wonderful energy and brilliant stories and teachings.

“Things will be a little different this year, as we will be hosting the amazing Rabbi Emma Gottlieb on camp for nearly a full week. We cannot wait to see how different camp will be with an in-house rabbi to guide and teach us.”

Netzer machaneh also includes four big, special days that everyone always looks forward

to. “These consist of Israel Day, South Africa Day, Tikkun Day, and of course, how could we forget the all-out, insane battle between the red and blue team in our colour

wars,” Bourne says.

So, no matter which camp you choose this December, you are guaranteed to have many memorable moments.

## What about tech and security at machaneh?

>> Continued from page 4

If children do need to get in touch with their families, there are lines of communication available to them which are regulated by the camp’s administration.

**Security**

Bnei Akiva has introduced a new security system this year, where each *channich* gets a Bnei bangle, or near-field communication wristband to wear throughout camp. When someone leaves the campsite or returns, it is noted by security personnel, says Levy.

“This is just the beginning,” says Levy. “We will be rolling this out over the next few years. There will be a live dashboard that will enable security personnel to know where everyone is at any time. This will really improve security at machaneh.”

The move is backed by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and Community Security Organisation (CSO).

Responsibility for children’s safety and security at the youth camps is a joint effort between camp leadership, the SAZF, and the CSO.

“The camp environment is fraught with potential dangers. The CSO recognises the numerous other responsibilities faced by camp leadership and therefore endeavours to shoulder most of the responsibility for all the participants’ safety and security issues, says a CSO spokesperson.

“The CSO provides security to seven different camps over the December period, 24 hours a day. Over the past 25 years, we have established policies and procedures to ensure the safety and security of all participants.

“These continue to be refined as our environment changes, but you can be rest assured that no-one knows the venues and security requirements better than the CSO. Planning for camp security starts eight months in advance, and is updated every year,” the spokesperson says.

“More than just having a procedural advantage, the CSO teams are staffed by young, well trained, and well equipped volunteers who choose to give-up almost three weeks of their holiday to protect your children.”



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# Your holiday kosher guide

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Please contact individual establishments for trading hours and more information.

**CAPE TOWN**  
**MEAT RESTAURANTS**  
**Avron's Place**  
(Restaurant / Takeaways / Catering)  
19-33 Regent Road, Sea Point  
021 439 7610 avronspace@mweb.co.za

**Goldies Deli**  
(Restaurant / Takeaways / Catering)  
176 Main Road, Sea Point  
021 434 1116 / 021 439 3008  
goldiesdeli@gmail.com

**The Press** (Restaurant / Takeaways)  
176 Main Road, Sea Point  
012 434 7724 david@thepresscpt.co.za

**MILCHIK RESTAURANTS**  
**Cafe B'tayavon @ Highlands House**  
(Restaurant / Takeaways)  
9 Gorge Road, Highlands Estate  
021 461 1100  
residents@highlandshouse.co.za

**Café Riteve**  
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021 465 1594  
riteve@norriecaterers.co.za

**Coffee Time**  
(Restaurant / Takeaways / Catering)  
20 Breda Street, Gardens  
021 461 8414  
http://www.astrajse.com/coffee-time/

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087 940 7474

**Crumbs and Cream**  
16 Regent Road, Sea Point  
081 343 2761

**DELI**  
**Noa's Hummus Bar @ Mojo Market**  
30 Regent Road, Sea Point  
078 029 7537

**JUICE BARS**  
**One Juice**  
Shop 1, The Regency, 90 Regent Road,  
Sea Point 083 677 5735

**The Daily Press**  
Shop 2, Ocean Breeze, Corner St Johns  
and Regent Roads, Sea Point  
info@thedailypress.co.za

**KOSHER SHOPS**  
**Checkers**  
(Deli / Fishery / Butchery / Winery /  
Bakery)  
Corner Regent and St Andrews Roads,  
Sea Point  
021 430 4680 berkies@iafrica.com

**Checkers Meadowridge**  
(Meat / Bakery / Pre-ordered and  
received from Checkers Sea Point)  
Park 'n Shop Centre, Corner Firgrove and  
Howard Drive, Meadowridge  
021 710 5160

**Pick n Pay**  
(Meat / Bakery / Deli / Fishery)  
Artem Centre 127 Main Road  
021 434 8987  
https://www.pnp.co.za/welcome

**Pick n Pay Centre Point**  
(Meat / Fishery / Bakery)  
Corner Koeberg and Loxton Roads,  
Milnerton  
021 552 2057

**Pick n Pay Claremont**  
(Meat / Parev / Fishery / Bakery)  
Main Road and Campground Road,  
Claremont  
021 674 5908

**Pick n Pay Constantia**  
(Kosher Butchery)  
Constantia Village, Corner Contantia Main  
Road and Spaanschemat River Road,  
Silverhurst, Constantia  
021 794 5031

**Sea Harvest Fish Shop**  
(Sealed kosher packaging)  
84 Regent Road, Sea Point, Cape Town  
021 433 0860 info@seaharvest.co.za

**Sea Point Super Spar**  
(Meat / Bakery / Deli / Fishery)  
94 Regent Road, Sea Point  
021 439 0913 chris1@retail.spar.co.za

**Shoprite Sea Point** (Deli / Baked goods  
/ Pre-packed from Checkers)  
365 Main Road  
021 430 3360

**Shoprite Milnerton**  
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Tygerhof Estate, Milnerton  
021 528 1680

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082 550 9388 / 082 899 0582

**B. Delicious** (Catering / Milk)  
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021 712 6830 bsaacks@gmail.com

**Berkies Catering**  
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Western Cape  
082 854 1865 berkies@iafrica.com

**Café Riteve Catering** (Milk / Parev)  
88 Hatfield Street, Gardens  
021 465 1594

**Carolyn's Catering** (Milk / Meat)  
47 De Villiers Street, Western Cape  
021 461 9900  
carolynscateringsa@gmail.com

**Claremont / Wynberg Shul**  
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**Coffeetime @ Astra** (Milk)  
021 461 8414

**Hadassah Friedman Catering**  
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**Merle Rubin Catering**  
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**Norrie Caterers**  
(Catering / Butchery (Milk / Meat / Parev)  
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Maitland  
021 510 5882  
stanley@norriecaterers.co.za

**Premier Hotel** (Milk / Meat / Parev)  
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021 790 1450

**EAST LONDON**  
**KOSHER SHOPS**  
**Nahoon Fisheries** (Parev)  
93 Old Transkei Road, Nahoon, East  
London  
orders@nahoonfisheries.co.za  
043 735 4114

**Pick n Pay** (Meat)  
Devereux Avenue, Vincent Park Centre,  
Vincent, East London  
043 726 3258

**KWAZULU-NATAL**  
**MILCHIK RESTAURANTS**  
**Circle Café** (Restaurant / Milk / Parev)  
44 K E Masinga Road, Stamford Hill  
031 368 1766 info@circlecafe.co.za

**KOSHER SHOPS**  
**Pick n Pay Hyper by the Sea**  
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Durban North  
031 581 5300

**Pick n Pay Musgrave**  
(Butchery / Bakery)  
135 Musgrave Road, Musgrave Centre,  
Musgrave, Berea  
031 201 4208/9

**Pick n Pay Umhlanga**  
(Pre-packed meat)  
Shop 16, 14 Chartwell Drive, Umhlanga  
031 561 6365

**PORT ELIZABETH**  
**KOSHER SHOPS**  
**Buttercup Bakery** (Milk)  
24D Newton Street, Newton Park  
041 365 1255

**Pick n Pay** (Frozen Meat / Chicken)  
Vincent Park Centre, Devereaux Avenue,  
Port Elizabeth  
043 726 3258

**Pick n Pay Butchery**  
(Frozen / Prepacked meats)  
Walmer Park, Main Road, Walmer  
041 367 1116

**PLETTENBERG BAY**  
**KOSHER SHOPS**  
**Pick n Pay Frozen Chicken**  
(Frozen chicken)  
Beacon Way, Plettenberg Bay  
044 533 4331

**Robberg Fisheries**  
(Fresh fish / Prepacked meat / Bakery)  
Theron Street, Plettenberg Bay  
044 501 2620

**JOHANNESBURG**  
**MEAT RESTAURANTS**  
**Beit Yosef** (Restaurant / Takeaways)  
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084 580 4580  
beityosefsupermarket@gmail.com

**Friends**  
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**Moishes** (Restaurant/Butcher)  
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kosherbutcher@gmail.com

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011 440 7797 / 082 416 7178  
kosher@nandos.com

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011 485 2303 / 083 700 0414  
nussbaums@telkomsa.net

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011 485 2447 / 082 457 9769  
thekosherpieworks@gmail.com

**RTG** (Restaurant / Takeaways)  
80 Grant Avenue, Norwood  
011 483 3375 / 011 483 1722  
anthony@next-door.co.za

**The Deli Store** (Restaurant / Takeaways)  
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071 489 9188 info@thedelystore.co.za

**MILCHIK RESTAURANTS**  
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071 080 2699 becarubin@mweb.co.za

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Bakery / Milk / Parev)  
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frangelicas@mweb.co.za

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Glenhazel  
083 646 1900 shmuel@joziblue.co.za

**Michelos** (Restaurant / Takeaways)  
15 Northfield Avenue, Glenhazel  
011 885 1500  
michelospizzeria@gmail.com

**Mooz** (Restaurant / Takeaways / Bakery  
/ Milk / Parev)  
74 George Avenue, Sandringham  
082 457 9796 milkmanlen@gmail.com

**Next Door**  
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011 728 2577 / 083 416 1221  
anthony@next-door.co.za

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85 George Avenue, Sandringham  
011 532 9600 rabbij@jhbchev.co.za

**Shoshanna**  
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011 640 1564 shulasbakery@gmail.com

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071 868 9333 slicesjhb@gmail.com

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7 Queen Square, Glenhazel  
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mysosnovick@gmail.com

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**Pick n Pay Gallo Manor**  
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Morning Glen Mall, Corner Bowling  
Avenue and Kelvin Drive, Gallo Manor  
011 802 3118

**Pick n Pay Hypermarket Norwood**  
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Corner Hamlin Street and 6th Avenue,  
Norwood Mall  
011 628 0000

**Pick n Pay Killarney** (Bakery)  
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**Gary Friedman** (Meat / Milk)  
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enquiries@garyfriedman.co.za

**Riva Flax** (Meat / Milk)  
Capri Hotel, Savoy Estate  
082 894 5729 flaxr@telkomsa.net

**Totally Kosher** (Milk / Meat)  
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082 610 9077 ziva@lantic.net

**BAKERY**  
**Kosher Cakes by Design** (Parev)  
16 Shirleydale Road, Cheltondale  
082 717 1151  
koshercakesbydesign@gmail.com









# Geoffrey Ramokgadi’s covenant with Judaism

STAFF WRITER

Wearing a yarmulke, Geoffrey Modise Menachem Ramokgadi draws stares from most people he encounters, whether in his adopted country of Swaziland, his home town of Rustenburg, or in the synagogues and Jewish shops of Johannesburg.

This happened particularly frequently in the early nineties, when he took the decision to affiliate to the Jewish people and Israel.

“They were not used to seeing a ‘darkie’ don a kippah,” he says, but wearing one has earned him the respect and admiration of Jew and non-Jew alike.

Ramokgadi, 65, tells his life story in the book, *My Covenant: The Honorary Jew*, launched last week in Rustenburg, when his “boss”, African Jewish Congress (AJC) Chief Executive Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, took copies for distribution. The book was commissioned by Silberhaft for a number of reasons, but especially because Ramokgadi brings people of diverse faiths together by example as a true ambassador against ant-Semitism.

Ramokgadi is a Vice-President of the congress, and the head of Swaziland’s small Jewish community, where he has arranged shul services, Pesach seders, and Jewish communal events. He was responsible for having ground consecrated for a Jewish cemetery, and travels the world to attend World Jewish Congress meetings, and throughout sub-Saharan Africa for AJC gatherings.

Wherever he goes, he spreads the word of Torah and love of Zion. King Mswati III of Swaziland, the royal family, business people, and labourers alike have fallen under the spell of Ramokgadi’s devout commitment to the Jewish way of life.

It all started with another dream. Ramokgadi told his school principal that he wanted “to be an astronaut”. His principal told him it was an unattainable goal for a young black boy from a poor family. So, Ramokgadi left school early to embark on a music career, gaining a reputation as lead singer and musician in the first multiracial band at the height of apartheid.

Because he left school barely in his teens, Ramokgadi made a covenant with his grandmother and his creator that one day, he would make a contribution to education.

Before that, he spent his school holidays at the home of his mother’s employers, the Abramowitz family in Johannesburg. His mother, Ellah Mampe Moche – later Ramokgadi – was a domestic worker who was totally versed in kashrut. The Abramowitz family had a wealth of Jewish literature, including books and pictures of the Holocaust, which Ramokgadi pored over during his vacation.

“I could not believe the oppression and genocide of the six million under the hateful Nazi regime. I could not help thinking that, although us blacks suffered under apartheid, there was no comparison.

“Then, I felt Judaism and love of the Jewish people burning in my heart, and resolved to adopt the faith.”

He and his wife, Dudu, later visited Israel

“and as if it were a sign, we met then Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, at the Kotel”. A huge framed photograph of Shamir shaking hands with the Ramokgadis takes pride of place in the entrance to their home – named The Kibbutz – in Mbabane, alongside an equally large photograph of the Swazi king.

His home is full of Judaica, menorahs and Magenei David. It is par for the course for him to be in the company of Jewish community leaders and ambassadors, who often spend Jewish festivals with him.

Ramokgadi can speak and read Hebrew like a pro. He is partly self-taught, but was helped by his friend, Nathi Gamedze, a linguist at the University of the Witwatersrand, and now an Ohr Somayach rabbi living in Israel.

Another “sign” for Ramokgadi was the Ethiopian Jews’ arrival in Israel. “They had no idea of modern facilities, including flushing toilets, so I thought to myself, if they can be Jewish, so can I.”

Ann Harris, the President of the AJC,

wrote a letter to Ramokgadi in the book, stating: “I have watched you many times fit so comfortably into Jewish life and practice. You have often put me and others to shame! Here I am, a Jewess, born into an old Orthodox family, giving service to Jewish communities the world over, but I often, as so many of us do, grumble about the weight of our religious and communal burdens. Not you, my friend.”

There have been setbacks, like the premature birth of the Ramokgadi’s daughter, Cohava Shoshana. She was born in Johannesburg, as there were no gynaecologists in Swaziland, smaller than a wristwatch strap. She raised the concern of the doctor, as babies were dying in the hospital because of a Sabex drip contamination. Ramokgadi, wearing his kippah, said to the (Jewish) doctor, “It’s all in the hands of Hashem.”

Today, their daughter is 28 years old, having survived further vicissitudes, including Down Syndrome and a form of autism.

But she is the light of Ramokgadi’s life, and a warm, affectionate child, remaining in the body of a 12-year-old.

Ramokgadi, who has friendships across the spectrum, including the family of the late Nelson Mandela, kings and queens, pop stars, and paupers, has not been well of late, and has become somewhat frail.

• *The book is available from the Kollel Bookshop in Glenhazel, and the Jewish Museum shop at Café Riteve in Cape Town.*



Geoffrey Ramokgadi and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft

# Tough, teasing, enigmatic: Abramowitz’s debut novel is a stunner

SIMON APFEL

*FutureLife: A Protea is not an Artichoke* is not a book about horticulture. It’s not a book about breakfast cereal. In some sense, it’s not even a book. It’s a work of paper-and-print performance art written by one of South Africa’s best new authors. It’s also, beguilingly, an autobiography of someone else – who, as it happens, doesn’t exist.

Mariaan Abromowitz, the protagonist of Tanya Abramowitz’s daringly experimental debut novel, lives a charmed life. Born in the Karoo at the turn of the century to a family of sheep farmers, she quickly displays a precociousness that catapults her out of her small-town beginnings into the big time.

In this almost Gumpian tale, Abromowitz goes on to found a bottled-water empire, becomes an international vice-president at a global pharmaceutical company, and plays an instrumental behind-the-scenes role in the 1969 moon landing. And then, at some point in the story, with no prior warning, Abramowitz pulls the rug...

*FutureLife* begins as a fairly conventional coming-of-age tale, then morphs into something more opaque and altogether darker. A shocking development midway through calls into question everything that came before. Piece by piece, beat by beat, the story and the characters start slipping through the reader’s fingers, and the big, reassuring world that the author has so meticulously built begins caving in. At some point, with no attempt at an explanation, Baruch Spinoza enters the narrative.

This feeling of being left unmoored from previous certainties is more than unnerving, it’s almost stomach-turning. And then it becomes heart-rending.

Throw away details suddenly take on ominous new significance. The oddity of the protagonist’s very Afrikaans first name and very Jewish surname gently foreshadows the disarray down the line – and emerges as a comment, perhaps none too subtle, on the fractured nature of identity.

Ultimately, the title is a bitter irony – the fictional Abromowitz caught in a spiral of trauma that keeps her trapped in her past, unable to escape the platteland,



chained to her damaged, unevolving self. Different planes of reality emerge, as *FutureLife* takes on a surprising, perhaps even shocking genre twist, delving into sci-fi, flirting with theoretical physics, the author showing off her virtuosity with forays into string theory and the multiverse.

Also interesting is the manner in which genuine autobiographical details are sprinkled throughout the book – her father’s long-running battle with addiction, the toxic relationship with her three older sisters, the crippling childhood knee injury she suffered on a jumping castle.

Little clues lining the path of the story seem to indicate that the protagonist is ostensibly the author’s own great grandmother. And indeed, as the story unravels, *FutureLife* blurs the lines between fiction and reality in intriguing ways. It emerges that there’s a real life Mariaan Abromowitz who grew up in the Klein Karoo but bred cattle not sheep, while the author’s actual grandmother was a sheep farmer, but from the south of England.

Throughout *FutureLife*, Abramowitz exhibits a formal daring, a playfulness with tropes and traditional storytelling techniques that verges on, but never wholly tips into, satire. Ultimately, she has too much affection for these characters to poke fun at them.

This more self-serious approach is particularly apparent in the way *FutureLife* tackles its Jewish themes. Jewish identity (the protagonist’s and the author’s) figures prominently. Scenes of the family around the Shabbos table are almost painterly in their composition, and achingly earnest. Though one could argue that the absence of irony from these scenes is, itself, ironic.

Not all of it works.

Abramowitz overdoes the whimsy, and is prone to flights of fancy that soon wear out their welcome. And at some point, her high-wire act begins to draw attention to itself, leaving the reader alienated from her captivating story.

Even so, there’s so much to admire here, and it seems churlish to fault Abramowitz for her ambition.

And what of proteas and artichokes? You’d have to read the book for yourself to find out.

• Visit <https://tanyaabramowitz.wixsite.com/futurelife> to pre-order the book or find out more about the author.

# New novel dwells on Jerusalem’s dark side

JORDAN MOSHE

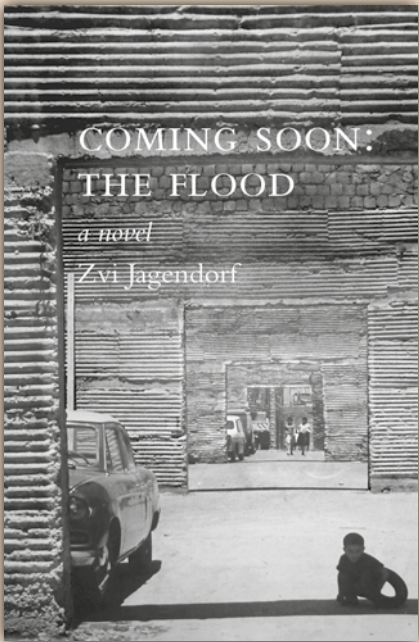
Like a city in the shadow of an oncoming storm, a novel can be dark, brooding, and forbidding.

In spite of being set in the Jerusalem of 1961, Zvi Jagendorfs *Coming Soon: The Flood* features none of the city’s brightness.

From its outset, the novel is shrouded in a cloud of ominous darkness. The Jerusalem of the author’s imagination is a divided city in which characters are still coming to terms with the holocaust, trying to rebuild shattered lives at a time when life itself is a collection of fragments.

In the wake of the Nuremberg Trials, Adolf Eichmann is about to be tried, a topic relevant to a number of the characters. With chapters including *Ruin* and *G-d is Dead*, this is a narrative of broken individuals, damaged lives, and an ever-present sense of brooding darkness.

An embodiment of this theme is Ada. Perpetually dressed in black, carrying a haze of smoke in her



wake, she tries to piece together the lives of her family, refugees who fled Vienna. Ada’s world is pieced together from an array of different shards. There are the fragments of different languages, snatches of German, French, Spanish, and Yiddish spoken in a place of protean identity. The landscape is ruinous, covered in chipped stones, and eroded inscriptions. A setting worthy of TS Elliot, this is almost a wasteland, whose fragments may yet be used by its people to prevent their ruin.

Taking its title from a production one of the characters wants to put on, the novel makes use of Noah’s flood in an unusual way, overwhelming readers with gushing torrents of personal stories and narratives of trauma. Readers who are looking to see the dark side of life after tragedy, to share the burden of individuals striving to gather the fragments of their lives in an unfeeling world, and explore a Jerusalem unlike the one they know will certainly find what they’re looking for in this novel.



# Denialism: what you refuse to know can kill you

HIV/AIDS doesn’t make the headlines these days as it once did. It has largely slipped under the radar because medically, the disease is now managed successfully.

But in 1993, in the middle of the AIDS epidemic, medication wasn’t available, and people everywhere were terrified of being overrun by the virus – like a mysterious octopus associated with gay people.

That was when South African photographer Gideon Mendel went to London’s Middlesex Hospital. He asked to enter a ward treating desperately ill AIDS patients to take pictures of them to help combat the stigma attached to them. Most were young gay men.

Of course, the hospital said no, but after reassurances about sensitivity and confidentiality, and explicit consent from the patients, permission was granted. Mendel was allowed to go into the wards of four dying AIDS patients – John, Ian, Steven, and Andre – and photograph their treatment and ward life. This included the intimate way partners, staff, patients, and families related to each other. They died soon after the pictures were taken, just before medication became available.

Being gay was still frowned on in many places, and aside from the lack of successful medical care, the AIDS stigma was gigantic. Nurses treating patients didn’t tell their own families. AIDS wards in hospitals were hidden. This went as far as the plaque marking Princess Diana’s opening of the AIDS ward at Middlesex Hospital being covered by a painting.

In an attempt to penetrate the wall of silence, in the United States in 1987, a gigantic AIDS quilt was shown on the National Mall in Washington DC, created from panels with names of people who had died of AIDS. Many

## TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



funeral homes refused to handle their remains. Now, 25 years later, Mendel has assembled a poignant collection of those photographs in a book called *The Ward*. Its cover picture shows a grief-stricken, healthy man draping himself over and kissing the lips of his sick male friend lying in a hospital bed. You can tell from their body language that they had once had a joyful, loving life together. It is heartbreaking.

Attitudes have changed and the furore seems alien now, with antiretrovirals allowing HIV-positive people to live full, healthy lives. December 1 is still called World AIDS Day. But in 1993, it took nerve to do what Mendel did.

What’s the lesson for us today? The AIDS denialism of those days is similar in its impact to today’s climate-change denialism. Leaders of the most powerful countries, such as US President Donald Trump and leaders in India and China, continue to behave as if there’s lots of time, while the earth shakes.

Our future is bleak unless major action is taken urgently on climate change. Already, the seas are warming, and the icecaps are melting. Scientists hope we can limit the rise in global temperature to only 1.5 degrees, rather than the two degrees that would eventually kill us all. Global greenhouse gas emissions must be at zero by mid-century.

We need climate change activists of the sort who tackled AIDS, or most of the planet’s civilisations are doomed and the Gideon Mendels of the future will come and photograph the ruins.

# The lessor-known lesson of Chanukah

Chanukah is so last week. Which makes it a lot less topical than I would like. That means that if I choose to use my column to speak about it, then I must consider it to be that important. And I do.

I might be alone in having had a very childlike view of the festival. To my mind, Chanukah was all about the ancient Syrian Greeks (not to be confused with modern day Greece), and all about the fight against oppression and dominance. And, it was about the oil that lasted way longer than it should have.

Until I arrived early for shul on Shabbat morning and heard the end of Rabbi Aaron Zulburg’s shiur I had no idea that one of the bigger battles of Chanukah was a Jew-versus-Jew one. Apparently, there was a group of Jews called the Mityavnim. These were Jews who embraced the Hellenic culture over their own, and many converted to the pagan Greek belief system.

The Mityavnim fought against the concept of circumcision (the Greeks didn’t practice this) as it “exposed” Jewishness in the public bath houses. They tried to rid Judaism of other practices. It essentially became a battle for the authenticity of the Jewish faith.

Why do I think it’s important to write about this now? Because although I realised that as Jews we have always been our own worst enemies, I didn’t connect the dots. I didn’t know that the ancient Greeks used the Jews to further their own ambitions. You see, not only did they [the Jews] understand the heart of other Jews, but by doing this, it made it acceptable to those who were not.

It’s the story of Jews who join the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement. It’s the story of B’Tselem, and it’s the story of Jews for a Just Palestine. They are damaging because they grant

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



perceived legitimacy to an unjust cause, and to a cause that would result in significant damage to the Jewish people.

Like the Mityavnim, Jews who espouse this philosophy and approach are not interested in the future of the religion, or the preservation of our ancient faith. They are interested in its annihilation.

Why this had an impact on me is because until this point, I hadn’t realised that there is no such thing as a “self-hating” Jew. The Mityavnim might have lived thousands of years before, but they are relevant as a concept today.

The term “self-hating” Jew is a misnomer. They have no hatred for “self”, rather their hatred is for Jews. They abhor the faith, and they wish it harm. That they were born Jewish is not as relevant as we think it is. We need to forget the notion that they are Jewish. It is just confusing.

This does not mean that anyone who has a legitimate criticism of either the practice of Judaism or of Israel will fall into this category. Our history and pursuit of intellectualism demands that we robustly debate and consider and argue. We need to engage, and we need to struggle. We need to be pained by the loss of Jews to anti-Jewish causes. But we need to protect our faith vigorously as well.

If the Mityavnim had been successful, we would not exist today. Consider what would happen if the organisations above achieved their goals.

We need to learn from our own history.

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

## A year of activism for community and country

This being the final Above Board column for the year, I will, as has become tradition, take the opportunity of reviewing the work of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) during this period. For the country as a whole, there have been many momentous developments, while from the SAJBD’s point of view, it was another exceptionally busy year in which, in spite the occasional set-back, we accomplished a great deal, and recorded many significant successes.

The year got off to a rocky start in the aftermath of the resolution to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel taken at the ANC’s electoral conference. At this stage, it has not yet been implemented. We were encouraged by President Cyril Ramaphosa’s reiteration of government’s support for engagement with both sides, rather than boycotting.

The South Africa-Israel relationship continues to come under persistent attack, however. Part of our push-back against this pernicious trend has been



Above Board  
Shaun Zagnoev

to work with the South African Union of Jewish Students and the South African Zionist Federation to combat the grotesque “Israel Apartheid Week” jamboree on university campuses. Here, we have made encouraging strides in turning this period from being a dreaded hate fest into a celebration of Israeli diversity.

Apart from a brief spike in activity in the middle of the year, anti-Semitism continued to be a relatively low-level problem. In a number of widely-publicised cases, we were able to reach a satisfactory conclusion through a process of restorative justice whereby offending parties apologised publicly, and underwent a course of tolerance-awareness education through the South African Holocaust Foundation.


We also finally saw a satisfactory outcome in our cases against Tony Ehrenreich, former ANC Western Cape Chairperson of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), and former ANC Western Cape leader Marius Fransman. Both were found guilty of hate speech against the Jewish community by the South African Human Rights Commission. On the negative side, the hate-speech ruling by the Equality Court against Cosatu’s Bongani Masuku was overturned in the Appeal Court in what is believed by many in the legal profession to be a deeply flawed judgement. Papers are currently being prepared for the Constitutional Court.

We represented the community on a range of public and interfaith bodies addressing issues of common concern such as combating racism and related prejudice, and poverty relief.

In terms of broader human-rights activism, the Gauteng Council organised the launch of the Hate Crimes Working Group’s five-year report into hate crimes in South Africa. Similarly, our Cape Council launched its “No Place for Hate” campaign.

Perhaps the most uplifting demonstration of our community’s commitment to South Africa was our Gauteng Council conference on 25 November. There, we were able to send a staunch message of support to Ramaphosa and other members of his government that the Jewish community is behind his efforts to get our country back on track. At the same time, the capacity hall was uplifted by the president’s warm words to the community, and his commitment to uproot corruption wherever it may occur.

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



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# KosherWorld Chanukah bash

KosherWorld hosted its annual community Chanukah Party on Thursday, 6 December. The beneficiary was Yad Aharon & Michael, the Jewish food fund, which entertained the children with doughnut icing, popcorn, candy-floss, face painting, colouring-in, and more. The turnout was excellent, and great fun was had by all. Rabbi Michael Katz lit the giant channukiah.



Shayna Newman ices doughnuts

# Record-breaking Chanukah doughnut tower

It is not every day that Johannesburg sees a Guinness World Record attempt – and this one was extra sweet. On 5 December 2018, Chabad of Strathavon Jewish Life Centre broke the world record for the world’s highest doughnut tower. As a few hundred people looked on, Rabbi Ari Shishler and his team topped a record-breaking 152cm doughnut stack. The previous record was 125cm. It took 3 198 doughnuts to build the tower, and all of them went to the Chevrah Kadisha Jewish Helping Hand, which distributed them to the aged, needy, and disabled. The record was verified by auditors PKF Octagon and Bidvest Wits soccer coach Gavin Hunt. Guinness now reviews the evidence provided before it issues an official certificate of achievement. Why doughnuts? Well, for a start everyone loves them. And, doughnuts are traditionally eaten on Chanukah (the festival of lights). Chanukah celebrates the triumph of light and goodness over repression and negativity. Wednesday night was the fourth evening of the eight-night holiday. And, everyone could use a dose of light and optimism these days.



In addition to the doughnut tower, the centre held a night market, including a variety of children’s Chanukah-themed games. Children competed in a Chanukah game show with prizes, and tackled the sticky task of eating – without using their hands – doughnuts suspended from string.

# Gap-year seminar for youth leaders cements unity and identity

The Israel Centre – Jewish Agency’s Partnership2gether Peoplehood Platform hosted its second gap year seminar in November for Jewish youth who are on year-long programmes in Israel. The seminar aims to foster co-operation and understanding between South African youth movements and peer movements in the Israel partnership region of Beit Shemesh Mate Yehuda. Seventy-five participants from Habonim Dror and Bnei Akiva in South Africa, and Tzofim, Ezra, Mechinah, and Diller in Israel, gathered for a learning experience in Beit Shemesh. Using a series of programmes inspired by Jewish educator Avraham Infeld’s Five Legged Table as a metaphor for building a strong Jewish identity, participants were given a unique opportunity to discuss their views on aspects of Judaism, the Jewish people, Israel, and Zionism, and to find areas of common ground. “This seminar was the perfect platform to connect all of our up-and-coming leadership from various youth movements who are on a gap year in Israel. It promoted learning and

growth... and allowed all who attended to forge meaningful relationships and discuss concepts of unity through diversity, community, and Israel”, according to the South African Zionist Youth Council. Said Anthony Rosmarin, the Chairperson of the Partnership2Gether programme in Johannesburg, “All too often we find ourselves focusing on the things that divide us as a nation. This programme seeks to explore aspects of Judaism that unite us and build tolerance around our differences. Our diversity should be a source of strength and unity, not division. This is the message we wish to convey.” This seminar laid the foundation for a commitment to work on co-operation across youth movements, and between South Africa and Israel.

- For more information about the youth seminar or about programmes run by Partnership2Gether, please contact the Israel Centre p2g@israelcentre.co.za



# A healthy stomach is a healthy mind

If you have a healthy stomach, you have a healthy physical, mental, and emotional approach to life. So says Richard Sutton, health and wellness specialist, who was hosted by the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO’s) Women Inspired branch on Tuesday, 27 November. Sutton’s inspiring and informative talk, held at the home of Joceline Basserabie, revolved around the belief that our entire anatomy, including our brain, is controlled by our stomach, which is why it is so important to keep it healthy. Sutton gave a lot of information about diet control, including the use of probiotics, berries, seeds, and nuts. He also emphasised the importance of exercise as part of a healthy regimen. The event was attended by about 70 women. The proceeds of the event will go towards the improvement of the lives of women and children in Israel.



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# Education ‘change maker’ honoured in Switzerland

While global citizens gathered in South Africa over the weekend to celebrate Nelson Mandela’s centenary and raise money for deserving causes, a South African citizen was being celebrated in Zurich, Switzerland, for his work in the field of child and youth development. James Urdang, the Chief Executive and founder of Education Africa, was one of ten recipients of the 2018 Klaus J Jacobs Awards honouring social innovation and change-making in the field of child and youth development. Awardees were selected from all over the world including South Africa, Brazil, Uganda, Slovakia, Nepal, Turkey, Colombia, and Jordan. Lavinia Jacobs, the President of the Swiss-based Jacobs Foundation said, “They have found affordable, sustainable ways to promote positive development that can be easily implemented. They are beyond talking – they act.” Urdang received CHF100 000 (R1.4 million), which will be used for the ongoing sustainability



and development of Education Africa’s Early Childhood Development (ECD) project. This project, established in 2008, provides training and support to ECD practitioners and current or future caregivers with a view to ensuring school readiness as children progress from preschool to primary school. The organisation recently changed its focus from skills-based training to a SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) NQF Level 4 certified training programme, improving employment prospects for participants, and raising qualification levels in the field overall. Says Urdang, “Our comprehensive training programme is of great benefit to ECD centres in disadvantaged areas that are already strained for resources. While many of the trainees entering this programme are already caregivers working in ECD centres, others are unemployed youths seeking a career opportunity. We are thrilled to be able to provide both with opportunities for growth.”

# New Beit David shul consecrated in Durban

The new Beit David Synagogue was consecrated at the Durban Jewish Club in Durban on Sunday, 2 December. A mincha service led jointly by Rabbis Sa’ar Shaked and Emma Gottlieb was followed by the consecration service and ceremony at 20:00. Congregants were treated to the first sight of their new sanctuary, and speeches were delivered by Monica Solomon, the National Chairperson of the South African Union of Progressive Judaism; Shaked, the National Chairperson of the South African Association of Progressive Rabbis; Jeremy Droyman, Chairman of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies KwaZulu-Natal, as well as Rob Sinclair, the President of Beit David.



The refurbished ark at the new shul. Jeremy Droyman (Chair, SAJBD KZN), Rabbi Avidan (Rabbi of Beit David, Durban), Monica Solomon (National Chair, SAUPJ), and Rob Sinclair (President Beit David Durban)

# UJW celebrates another capacity year of Brain Boost



Brain Boost, a stimulation group run by the Union of Jewish Women (UJW), celebrated the end of 2018 with a farewell tea held at Friends Restaurant on 4 December. Brain Boost was established in 2016 after the UJW identified the need to establish a group to support those affected by memory loss. It has since grown to full capacity. The group, which meets once a week on Tuesday mornings at the UJW’s offices, is supported by occupational therapist Kim Lewitte and UJW volunteers, who ensure that the morning is warm, fun, and entertaining. For more information, call 011 648 1053 or email info@ujw.co.za

Kim Lewitte with volunteers Isabelle Kampel, Bev Cohen and Sue Cohen



# English and American soccer clubs join forces against anti-Semitism

JACK MILNER

Russian billionaire and owner of the Chelsea Football Club, Roman Abramovich, is joining forces with Robert Kraft, the owner of the New England Revolution football club, to fight anti-Semitism in the United States.

Abramovich – who was recently said to have made aliyah – is on a mission to ensure his “Say No To Anti-Semitism” campaign remains active.

Abramovich launched this campaign at Chelsea Football Club at the end of last year, and has staged a number of projects to make people aware of the racist sentiments that pervades fans of the sport.

The Chelsea team will travel to Foxborough, Massachusetts, at the end of the European soccer season in April to raise money to promote equality and tolerance in the sport.

To help raise funds, Abramovich and Kraft will each donate \$1 million (R14,3 million), with all proceeds from the match going towards programmes to combat anti-Semitism.

The joint project is motivated by the murder of 11 Jewish congregants by a gunman at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in November.

On announcing the move, Abramovich said, “I’m proud of the work Chelsea does to promote equality and tackle discrimination all over the world. The Say No To Anti-Semitism campaign has already achieved so much in raising awareness of this important issue, but there remains a lot of work to do.

“I am delighted to join forces with New England Revolution and Mr Kraft in this initiative, and we look forward to the match.”

Kraft, who is a member of the family that owns the Kraft food



Robert Kraft with son Jonathan at a New England Revolution soccer match

group and is said to be worth about \$6.8 billion (R97 billion), was given an award for his work in sport at the World Jewish Congress’ Theodor Herzl Award dinner in November.

In his acceptance speech, Kraft reflected on the power of sport to break down barriers. “It’s clear we need to do more to help combat anti-Semitism and all hate crimes in the wake of ongoing discrimination around the world, including the recent tragedy in Pittsburgh.

“We’re excited for the Revolution to host Chelsea in support of raising awareness of the dangerous manifestations of anti-Semitism.”

## South Africa Friends of Sheba off to a flying start

Ivan and Lynette Saltzman hosted an event to celebrate the launch of South African friends of Sheba in their home in Johannesburg on 6 December. The initiative aims to strengthen the relationship between the South African Jewish community and Sheba Medical Center in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Between music, fine food, and menorah lighting, Professor Mordechai Shani, Chancellor of the Sheba Fund for Health Services and Research, spoke about the origin of the Sheba Medical Center, with roots that go as deep as the establishment of the country it services.

Naomi Hadar, Executive Director of South African Friends of Sheba, mapped out the goals of the South African organisation, and gave hope for the future. Director General Emeritus Dr Talia Golan, originally from South Africa, and now head of Sheba’s Early Phase Clinical Trials Program and

Medical Oncologist at Gastrointestinal Unit, shared information about the important work she and her team are doing in pancreatic cancer research, as well as moving personal stories which brought tears to many eyes.

Yoel Har-Even, Sheba Medical Center’s Chief of Staff, said, “We are looking forward to strengthening the relationship between the Jewish community in South Africa and Sheba Medical Center in Israel. Our goals include formulating programmes that will allow South African medical students to intern and specialise at Sheba Medical Center, to assist disadvantaged communities in South Africa and the rest of the African continent, and ongoing support for Sheba’s highest standards of medicine, research, innovation and technology, transforming medicine in Israel and worldwide.”



Yoel Har-Even and Naomi Hadar present Ivan and Lynette Saltzman with a unique Hamsa amulet

## Silk Butterfly Project a soulful way to celebrate Jewish heritage

When psychiatrist Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross visited the Maidenek concentration camp in 1946, she found hundreds of butterflies etched on the walls of the children’s barracks. Some had been engraved with pebbles, and others scratched with fingernails, but all of them represented a message which took Kübler-Ross 25 years of working with dying patients to fully comprehend. In spite of the awareness that their young lives were drawing to a close, the children left the butterflies as representations of their eternal souls, which would live on forever.

A total of 1.5 million children under the age of 16 lost their lives in the Holocaust. Today, the surviving population is rapidly diminishing. Who will ensure that that the memories of these young innocents are perpetuated from one generation to the next?

The Silk Butterfly Project, founded by musical theatre coach Vicki Mervis, is inspired by Kübler-Ross’s discovery. The project is a non-profit organisation that gives South African children about to celebrate their Barmitzvahs or Batmitzvahs the opportunity to twin with a young Shoah victim of a similar age. With silk being one of the strongest natural

fibres, it aims to give Jewish youth an enduring thread to their history, heritage, and the humanitarian ethos that epitomises the Jewish way.

“Although we cannot bring [the Shoah victims] back to life,” says Mervis, “the twinning programme ensures that we keep the flame of memory burning, and honour these children on an individual and collective level.”

An enthusiastic group of B’notmitzvah girls at Johannesburg’s Great Park Synagogue recently had the chance to share their simchas in this way. Each participant was given the name of a young person who perished in the Holocaust, and directed to a Yad Vashem website

where they could learn more about their “twin”.

In light of the overwhelming number of children murdered by the Nazis, there is often very little biographical information about the victims. To counter this, the participants are encouraged to imagine the lives of their twin: what they looked like, the pastimes they enjoyed, their hopes and dreams, and what they may have grown up to become.

Each participant honoured the memory of her twin with a short presentation, and a moving candle lighting ceremony, as well as by lighting Shabbat candles, led by Robyn Smookler.



Vicki Mervis, Robyn Smookler and the Great Park Synagogue Batmitzvah girls

### Letters

#### STAN & PETE PROBE LEAVES US WONDERING WHAT OUR RIGHTS ARE

There is no doubt that the Jewish community should not only thank Bowmans for its report, but also compliment it on the amount of work conducted, and its investigative ingenuity in arriving at the conclusions it did in the Stan & Pete kashrut investigation.

No doubt, Jeff Shull was advised by his father, Bernard Shull, (a lawyer) of his right not to co-operate with the investigation.

I was wondering what rights we have, considering that if the Beth Din advised that it was a kosher function, we would never have thought that there would be a strong possibility that we would land up eating *treif* chicken and meat.

The Beth Din has been very quiet about this saga,

other than to tell us about the new steps it will take to ensure that in the future, a kosher affair will be just that.

My question to the Beth Din is, surely after the Bowmans report, there is sufficient evidence that Jeff – and even his father – should be sent to cherem, and ceremoniously thrown out of the Jewish community.

There is a programme on TV titled *Criminal Investigation*, which shows a friend being killed by his friend. The show starts with the words, “With friends like this, who needs friends?”

I would ask, with Jews like the Shulls, who needs such Jews in our community? – **Aubrey Lampert, Johannesburg**

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BLACK & WHITE

**220<sup>99</sup>**



WHIZZY  
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