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Right-wing anti-Semitism on the rise in South Africa

NICOLA MILTZ

The right-wing anti-Semitism understood to be entrenched in many parts of the world is now on the rise in South Africa, say experts in the field.

The recent brouhaha involving comedian and satirist Deep Fried Man, aka Daniel Friedman, was an ugly wake-up call for many in the community that hardcore neo-Nazi sentiment is rearing its sinister head for all to see on social media platforms.

But while the numbers of such verbal abuse may be on the increase, it is nowhere near the anti-Semitism experienced in Europe and elsewhere.

Friedman was falsely accused of making fun of farm murders in a video he produced which was later altered and distorted by someone – an Afrikaner-rights activist – allegedly bearing a grudge against him. This ignited a loathsome flurry of right-wing anti-Semitism online, which led to the Jewish performer fearing for his life and taking himself off social media.

Among the many comments sent to Friedman, one read: “You are Jew scum and like 99.9% of you oxygen thieves don’t belong on this planet. Hope you get lynched by a hoard of black savages and your balls cut off and placed in your mouth. SIEG HEIL!”

Another wrote: “Pity his parents missed the train and the showers!!!!!!!!”

These are a mere smattering of examples.

In response, Wendy Kahn, the National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) told the *SA Jewish Report*, “We have not witnessed such a spate of right-wing anti-Semitism for a long time.”

While she says she has seen far larger numbers of anti-Semitic incidents, these were mostly related to anti-Israel sentiment, not traditional anti-Semitism.

“What differentiated this Deep Fried Man incident was that it contained neo-Nazi and right-wing anti-Semitism targeting our community.”

When Kahn spoke at a conference in Geneva last year on monitoring and combatting anti-Semitism, she said the trend in South Africa was mostly related to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

In recent months, however, there have been a number of incidents which have clearly demonstrated right-wing, anti-Jewish sentiment. “It’s on the rise,” anti-Semitism expert David Saks told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

“After the 1994 transition, the white right was shocked and demoralised, and little was heard from them for a number of years. The emergence of the internet and social media has provided effective new platforms for them,” he said.

“Today, the post-1994 spirit of inclusivity, reconciliation, and anti-racism has unravelled and the state of the country, combined with the upsurge in vengeful anti-white rhetoric and fears about crime and proposed land seizures, has given rise to a renewed sense of anger and paranoia. This has created fertile ground for the resurgence of anti-Jewish conspiracies as people look for

“manipulative Jewish capitalists” also receive their quota of blame. “Natie Kirsh has since been added, joining the Rothschilds and Oppenheims, in the pantheon of malevolent Jewish capitalists [being lambasted],” Saks said.

Prior to the 1994 transition, right-wing anti-Semitism was seen as the main threat by the SAJBD and community at large, he said.

This went back to the prevalence of pro-Nazi crusading anti-Jewish movements in the 1930s and 1940s, for example the Greyshirts, and their influence in preventing further Jewish immigration, as well as the anti-Semitic programme of the opposition National Party which won the elections in 1948.

Then came the emergence of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) in the early 1980s, which was “very disquieting, as was the plethora of radical right splinter groups that

and cross-pollination of ideas and theories between the various factions.”

One of the main loci of contemporary anti-Semitism is within extreme right-wing, white supremacist (and therefore anti-black) and usually ultra-nationalist circles.

These factions tend to identify explicitly with and draw inspiration from Nazism, with Hitler regarded as a bold and visionary leader. What distinguishes the kind of anti-Semitism routinely espoused in this camp (as opposed to, for example, that within Islamist or radical left-wing populist circles) is the frequency with which certain notions come up, such as Holocaust denial and Holocaust mockery/humour. Also the notion that Jews are behind a global plot to destroy the white race by promoting – through their

apartheid,” said Saks.

Asked whether it was possible to criticise Israel without bordering on anti-Semitism or whether it was possible to oppose Israel without being prejudiced against Jews, Saks said it came down to assessing each instance on a case by case basis.

“Criticism of Israel is fine so long as it does not exaggerate, is measured and reasonable, and is similar in tone and thrust to criticism levelled at other democratic states. This is true even if the criticism is based on incorrect information or lack of such information. Being wrong about something does not mean one is unreasonably prejudiced.

“When criticism in fact amounts to the notorious ‘three Ds’ – delegitimisation, demonisation, and double standards – this is certainly a form of bigotry.”



Friends across the Africa-Israel divide

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chad's President Idriss Déby met on 20 January 2019 in the capital N'Djamena, and later announced the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries after more than 45 years.

someone to blame.

“The rhetoric around Jewish leftists and liberals polluting the blood of the white race and manipulating their downfall resonates much more strongly here,” said Saks.

“The fact that so high a proportion of Jews were involved in anti-apartheid activities fuels these ideologies,” he said. However,

appeared in the final years of white rule”.

After 1994, however, he said these virtually disappeared as a serious threat to the community.

Anti-Semitism, he said, is present within a range of different ideological camps. “The basic negative tropes about Jews are largely the same. There is, in fact, a constant overlap

clandestine control of the media, politics, popular culture, academia, and the courts – race mixing and mass immigration from non-white countries to white ones.

“This is starting to resonate very powerfully in South Africa, where many whites are looking for a scapegoat on which to pin the blame for the downfall of

Saks said that in practice, one finds that when subjected to closer examination, radical anti-Israel attitudes are at least to some degree mixed up with antipathy towards Jews in general. Often, making pro-Palestinian noises is simply a cover for getting at Jews without being accused of anti-Semitism.

| Shabbat times this week | | |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Starts | Ends | |
| 18:15 | 19:36 | Johannesburg |
| 19:15 | 20:33 | Cape Town |
| 18:15 | 19:33 | Durban |
| 18:15 | 19:50 | Bloemfontein |
| 18:15 | 20:04 | Port Elizabeth |
| 18:15 | 19:52 | East London |

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Israel among top five most innovative countries on the globe

STAFF REPORTER

Israel – commonly dubbed the “Start-up Nation” – has jumped to fifth place in the 2019 Bloomberg Innovation Index, skipping five places since last year. It is officially the fifth most innovative country in the world, according to Bloomberg, an international business news network that calls itself “the central nerve system of global finance”.

Israel has officially overtaken the United States on this front, which is now number eight. It is also ahead of Singapore, Sweden, and Japan (sixth, seventh, and ninth respectively).

South Korea remains in the top spot, with Germany, Switzerland, and Finland taking the

| Bloomberg 2019 Innovation Index | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 2019 Rank | 2018 Rank | YoY Change | Economy |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | S. Korea |
| 2 | 4 | +2 | Germany |
| 3 | 7 | +4 | Finland |
| 4 | 5 | +1 | Switzerland |
| 5 | 10 | +5 | Israel |
| 6 | 3 | -3 | Singapore |
| 7 | 2 | -5 | Sweden |
| 8 | 11 | +3 | U.S. |
| 9 | 6 | -3 | Japan |
| 10 | 9 | -1 | France |
| 11 | 8 | -3 | Denmark |
| 12 | 12 | 0 | Austria |
| 13 | 14 | +1 | Belgium |
| 14 | 13 | -1 | Ireland |
| 15 | 16 | +1 | Netherlands |
| 16 | 19 | +3 | China |
| 17 | 15 | -2 | Norway |
| 18 | 17 | -1 | U.K. |
| 19 | 18 | -1 | Australia |
| 20 | 22 | +2 | Canada |
| 21 | 20 | -1 | Italy |
| 22 | 21 | -1 | Poland |

second, third, and fourth places.

The list was published on Tuesday, as global and business leaders meet at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. There, they discuss the world’s most pressing financial and economic issues, and how innovation can help solve problems and increase prosperity.

The index – in its seventh year of publication – is based on seven categories, including research and development spending, patent activity, manufacturing capability, and the concentration of high-tech public companies.

Patent activity boosted Israel’s score this year, according to *Times of Israel*. For research and development

(R&D) intensity – defined as R&D expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product – Israel came first. However, it was way behind when it came to manufacturing added value.

Israel came second for researcher concentration, which is defined as professionals engaged in R&D per population, and fifth for high-tech density, which is the number of high-tech public companies in Israel. It came forth for patent activity.

Not bad for a country that is smaller than the Kruger National Park, and only 70 years old!

• Additional reporting from Times of Israel

Chadian peacekeepers killed in Mali over restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel



MARCY OSTER – JTA

An attack in the West African nation of Mali that left 10 Chadian United Nations (UN) peacekeepers dead was in reaction to the recent visit to Chad by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

An Al Qaeda-linked Islamist group in Mali, called Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, claimed responsibility for the attack on a UN camp in northern Mali on Sunday, shortly after Netanyahu and Chad President Idriss Déby announced that the two countries would re-establish diplomatic ties.

The claim of responsibility for the attack and the reason for it was relayed by the Mauritanian *Al-Akhbar* news agency, which receives statements from the group, the French news agency *AFP* reported.

In addition to the 10 murdered peacekeepers, another 25 were injured.

Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the UN envoy for Mali, called the attack “vile and criminal”. He said the terrorists had “arrived in several armed vehicles”.

“It demands a robust, immediate, and concerted response from all forces to annihilate the peril of terrorism in the Sahel” region of Africa, his statement read.

The UN Security Council later on Sunday condemned the attack, and paid homage to the peacekeepers.

There are about 13 000 UN peacekeepers deployed in Mali to protect against violence by Islamist militias.

Torah Thought

Emerging from darkness – Yitro’s legacy

In the portion we read this week called *Yitro*, the most significant historical event of all time takes place: G-d’s revelation at Sinai; the giving of the Torah. The portion is named after Moses’ father-in-law, Yitro.

Why is this portion – in many respects the most auspicious of the entire Torah – called by Yitro’s name? Surely not just because he’s Moses’ father-in-law? The Torah is the source of all ethics, and for Yitro to get favoured for being related to Moses smacks of nepotism. Judaism also asserts very clearly that one is judged by and rewarded on one’s own merits.

Maybe it’s because Yitro chose to convert and join the Israelites in the desert that he is given special mention? But then again, so had many other Egyptians tagged along (the *eirev rav*) joining the band of Israelites as they marched out of slavery to triumphant redemption.

The question is intensified when we consider Yitro’s dark past. Not only was he steeped in idolatry for the duration of his life until that point, as the high priest

and minister, he was in fact the leader of his time in idol worship. He himself declares that he was familiar with “all the g-ds”. So of all converts, why is he chosen to have the portion named after him?

The answer lies in the verse in Talmud Berachot: “In the place where *baalei teshuvah* (returnees; penitents) stand, utter *tzaddikim* (the righteous and holy) cannot stand.”

As great a standing as the righteous and holy have – and by that we mean even the most holy of individuals, *tzaddikim* – there is yet a higher reckoning, the one who turns from the path of being disconnected from Judaism and chooses to come “under the wings of the *shechinah* (the divine presence)”.

Yitro was an iconic leader in his time. He enjoyed adulation, was revered, and wielded power. By choosing to join the Jewish nation and turn his back on everything he had stood for and built up, he risked losing everything. He did it because he could not deny the truth he’d recognised in the G-d that had wrought

the exodus and displayed his total dominion over all creation.

Thus, Yitro was honoured with the naming of this portion, because he demonstrated the courage and willingness to choose the path of truth in spite of the discomfort and sacrifice that came with it.

The Kabbalists explain that in negating that deep, dark impurity he’d been involved with and embracing G-d and Judaism, Yitro was able to transform a level of darkness of this world that only he could, because he was immersed in it and rejected it! Hence, his name is Yitro, which means “to add”. He added a powerful G-dly light through his choice.

A further lesson that extends from this idea is that even if you have been immersed in darkness for a long time, you can change in a moment and, like Yitro, attain the highest level of divine approval and reward.



Rav Ilan Herrmann, The JI Congregation

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Drug syndicate caught flying cocaine from South Africa to Israel

NICOLA MILTZ

A high-ranking security official for El Al airline and a former Shin Bet officer are among several people arrested for their suspected roles in an international drug-smuggling network that used Johannesburg’s OR International Airport as one of its transit routes. The arrests were made in November and December last year. According to *The Times of Israel*, the main suspect is Rami Yogev, a high-ranking El Al employee who oversaw co-ordination between the airline and the Shin Bet security service, and is also in charge of the airline’s security abroad.

Yogev was suspected of helping a large-scale drug trafficking network smuggle countless kilograms of cocaine into Israel on El Al planes from Johannesburg.

The investigation into the case began in November, after drugs were found in the luggage of an Israeli citizen arriving on a flight from Johannesburg, according to Israeli media. The suspects allegedly smuggled the drugs, later to be sold in Israel, using couriers who mostly used planes from Johannesburg to Tel Aviv.

The individuals are suspected of bringing drugs into the country on nine occasions via flights from Johannesburg, according to *The Times of Israel*. Although they were caught with only one haul, police are believed to have photographic and electronic evidence of the other eight operations. *The Times of Israel* wrote that in the one intercepted haul, police were said to have recovered 20kg of cocaine, with a street value of about NIS 8 million (about R30.1 million).

Testimony gathered by Israeli police suggest that the network had a “drug smuggling route” from Johannesburg to Israel, and managed to smuggle in countless kilograms of cocaine amounting to many millions, according to *Ynetnews*. Yogev is suspected of assisting the network to bypass airport security checks.

Lieutenant Colonel Katlego Mogale from the South African Police Service (SAPS) Corporate Communications Operational Service Relations told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that the drugs were believed to be from countries outside South Africa.

“The alleged drugs are not manufactured in South Africa, and could have been imported into the country wherein the suspects were able to courier them to Israel,” she said. “Cocaine is mostly imported from South American countries. Law enforcement in South Africa has discovered the port might be used as in transit route.”

She said OR Tambo was “an international airport which processes travellers in and out of the port of entry within the confines of the law. The investigation seems to have originated in Israel, where the suspects were allegedly arrested with the drugs.”

She said a “multi-disciplinary approach” had been implemented at OR Tambo, and there had been significant breakthroughs in arresting drug mules and traffickers, as well as in making sure that prison sentences were handed down.

A police attorney has dubbed the case “a wide-ranging affair”. Police believe Yogev used his top security clearance and access to El Al planes to facilitate the drug shipments.

A former Shin Bet official, Beno Shalom, has also been implicated in the alleged smuggling. According to *Ynet*, Yogev, Shalom and two others were arrested after drugs were discovered in the hand luggage of one of the suspects who had just arrived on a flight from Johannesburg.

According to Israeli media, the suspects arrested in relation to the case since December include an Israel Defence Forces employee and several who have been previously linked to drug-related offenses.

One of them has reportedly agreed to co-operate with the prosecution and turn state’s witness. It is understood that 14 suspects have been arrested in total.

Ynet reported that a warehouse was discovered in the centre of Israel, which is alleged to have been used by the smuggling ring to store and manufacture weapons.

In some cases, the drugs were loaded onto the aircraft via the jet bridge connecting the plane to the terminal, with Yogev allegedly ensuring the operation could be carried out without detection via security cameras, according to *Ynet*.

The members of the network are suspected of being as “organised as a criminal network”, carrying out

the scheme on multiple occasions and in a methodical manner.

According to *The Times of Israel*, the details of the case were first revealed after a Rishon LeZion Magistrate’s Court judge rejected, during a remand hearing, a police request to gag the details of the investigation. At the time, four suspects were ordered to remain in custody.

It is understood that Shalom, the ex-Shin Bet official, previously served as head of security for the prime minister’s office.

Mogale said the security measures around OR Tambo “are and have always been strict”.

“SAPS renders support as far as the protection of passengers at check-in counters and boarding gates. SARS [South African Revenue Services] customs and

SAPS are responsible for the checks when there is intelligence that has been gathered relating to a specific flight.

“Law enforcement in cases like this will follow on intelligence gathered to ascertain the origin of the drugs, the modus operandi of the suspects, as well as the connection the suspects have to syndicates.”

El Al responded to questions from the *SA Jewish Report* with the following statement: “El Al is assisting the legal authorities in their investigation [to] reach the truth, and regardless of the investigation, we emphasise that El Al has never compromised and will never compromise on security matters, and is acting on this matter in accordance with the guidelines set by official security authorities.”

Jewish leaders take the lead in fight against corruption

JORDAN MOSHE

While many believe corruption to be an unsolvable problem in our country, prominent South African Jews are among those leading the charge against it.

Gill Marcus, the Former Deputy Finance Minister and Governor of the Reserve Bank; former South African businessman Sir Mick Davis, currently Chief Executive and Treasurer of the British Conservative Party; and Professor Michael Katz, Chairperson of ENSafrica, have all been called to serve on commissions of inquiries into corruption.



Marcus this week began her term as one of three commissioners in the commission of inquiry into allegations of impropriety at Africa’s biggest money manager, the Public Investment Corporation (PIC). She will assist Justice Lex Mpati, who was discharged from active service to be a commissioner at the inquiry.

Appointed in October last year by President Cyril Ramaphosa, the commission will investigate allegations of impropriety at the PIC, which invests the bulk of the pensions of public servants on behalf of the Government Employees Pension Fund.

On 14 December, Sir Mick – who lives in London – was appointed by Ramaphosa to be a part of the eight-person task team to advise government on managing the financial and operation crisis at Eskom. Davis, who was once Eskom’s chief financial officer, will review the turnaround strategy submitted by the Eskom board.

Katz is investigating possible corruption at the South African Revenue Service (SARS). Together with Robert Nugent, a former judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal



and others, Katz was last year tasked by the president with probing possible corrupt and illegal practices at the tax authority during the tenure of suspended Commissioner Tom Moyane. They are also assessing the effectiveness of the administration in performing its functions.

With a mandate including a probe into whether SARS compromised its procedures, the commission is investigating whether favour or discrimination occurred against influential people including politicians or their families and known close associates. The commission was required to submit an interim report by September, and a final report by November last year.



The commission submitted its final report to Ramaphosa in December. This included several recommendations including that contracts be set aside, expenditure recovered, and criminal prosecution be pursued against Moyane.

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Continued on page 8>>

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Farewell to ‘the flying dentist’

TRIBUTE

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Humble and exuding a sense of positivity. This is how rugby legend Dr Wilf Rosenberg’s family remembers him.

Rosenberg, dubbed “the flying dentist” due to his trademark dive when scoring a try, passed away in Israel on 14 January after a sudden stroke. He made aliyah in 2009 to join his daughter, Nicola Krost, and family, and had been living at Beth Protea, Herzliya.

Rosenberg played rugby for Jeppe High School, then the University of the Witwatersrand while studying medicine, then Transvaal, before becoming a junior Springbok.

Between 1955 and 1958, he played for the Springboks and became a sporting legend in both rugby union and rugby league. He played professional rugby league after relocating to Leeds University to study dentistry, when he changed his position from centre to wing.

While there, he set a club record

Point Hebrew Congregation, Rabbi Rosenberg held positions in Jeppe, Kensington, Bertrams, Middelburg, Witbank, and Windhoek.

In the 1950s, Rabbi Rosenberg travelled to the United States and was impressed with the Reform movement as a “very good alternative”. In fact, he practised as a Reform rabbi in Port Elizabeth from 1958 to 1961, returning to the Orthodox rabbinate in the early 1970s, according to Rosenberg’s sister, Vivienne Kramer.

When asked how as a rabbi he could allow his son to play rugby on Shabbat, Rabbi Rosenberg’s famous reply was, “My son was born with a G-d given talent. Who am I to argue with G-d?”

Rosenberg was one of the so-called “rugby minyan”, the 10 Jewish Springbok rugby players, a painting of whom hangs above the fireplace in Krost’s home.

“My brother said that what really kept him going during the games was the roar of the crowd,” Kramer

laughed and talked. Afterwards, I said, ‘Who’s that?’ He said: ‘I don’t know. People do this to me all the time.’

“Whoever approached him, he would be friendly, he would stop, and give autographs.” She remembers an incident from 1960 when she and Rosenberg were visiting a small town in the Eastern Cape.

Word had somehow got out that Rosenberg was in town. “When we went outside, the street was filled with people standing silently, clutching their autograph books and rugby balls.

“He just moved among them, saying hello, signing autographs, making small talk. It was really very lovely to see.”

Krost agrees. “He was such a great sporting personality, and a hero to so many, but to us he was really just our father,” she says.

“He was an amazing father who, together with my mother, instilled amazing values in his three children. We always knew he was a great sporting personality, but only on his death are we coming to realise how popular and what a legend he was all over the world.”

She speaks of the “positive aura” Rosenberg exuded as a striking feature. “There was never, ever a negative word that came out of his mouth. He was such a happy individual.

“Whenever my children and I asked how he was, he would always say, ‘I’m living in Israel with my children in the most amazing place. What more could I want from life?’”

For daughter Andrea Jayes, it was “very hard” to come to terms with Rosenberg’s sudden death, as he was “a larger than life character. He was always humorous, full of life, friendly to everybody, treated everybody with respect, and was just so humble and so happy with his lot, his life, and his children.”

The “most devastating” thing that happened to Rosenberg was the loss of his wife, Elinor, who died at the age of 51 years in 1989, Jayes says. “He never



Wilf (front row, middle) with his children and grandchildren in Modiin, July, 2017

(that still stands) of scoring the most tries in a season – 48 during 1960/1 – helping his club win its first championship title.

Rosenberg retired from the game and returned to South Africa in 1964 with his wife, Elinor, and baby Nicola, establishing a dental practice on the West Rand. Two more children, Andrea and Adam – who was later to play rugby for Transvaal schools and the under-20 side – were born in this country.

However, tragedy struck in 1970 when a stroke ended Rosenberg’s dental career. Not one to let a setback define him, he turned to boxing promotion and rugby journalism.

The grit and determination that had served him well on the rugby field resulted in him rehabilitating himself. Defying doctors who said he would never walk again, Rosenberg went on to run 10 Comrades Marathons and played first league squash.

He was the third South African to be inducted into the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 1994.

In spite of his myriad sporting accolades, his “real joy” was his family, says Krost. “He was always very proud of his children and grandchildren.”

Rosenberg’s father, Philip, was an Orthodox rabbi who obtained his ordination at Jews’ College, London, the pre-eminent rabbinical seminary at the time.

In addition to serving as the first rabbi of the Green and Sea

remembers him saying of his rugby playing days. “He loved to hear it – it gave him a big rush.

“My parents saw him play only once each,” she recalls. “My father kept Shabbat, and my mother was too panic-stricken to watch him.

“I went with my mom on one



occasion when we were in Leeds, and she nearly had a heart attack every time anybody even touched him! She was like, ‘Oh my goodness, Wilfred! Wilfred!’ She was beside herself,” recalls Kramer.

“One thing that stood out for me was how humble he was in terms of what a legend he was. I was once walking with him and some stranger came up to him and said, ‘Wilf, how are you?’ and shook his hand.

“My brother chatted to him,

recovered from that.

“For us children, a large part of him went with our mother. When he took his last breath, my brother-in-law, Alan [Krost], said to him, ‘You can now rest peacefully with your Elinor Jane.’”

Rosenberg never experienced anti-Semitism during his rugby career. “Actually the opposite”, says Nicola. His Springbok coach, Dr Danie Craven, says Alan, “was very happy that he had a ‘Jood’ in the team, something he regarded as good luck”.



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Israel trip leads to greater objectivity for SA journalists

NICOLA MILTZ

When South African broadcast journalist Nausheena Mahomed covered a Christian solidarity march for Israel last year in Pretoria, she was not prepared for the pelting she got on social media.

So bad was the backlash for Mahomed, who is Muslim, it created an online hate fest including a wave of anti-Semitic postings, and furore from within her own community.

The reaction to her news clips for *joburgtoday.tv* led her to question whether it was possible to report on events surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a balanced and fair way. But, in spite of the difficulties she encountered, she remained resolute and adamant about reporting the facts.

Her interest in the Middle-East conflict was sparked by a number of high profile, controversial events. These included the Shashi Naidoo “Gaza is a shit hole” saga, and the controversial recalling of the South African Ambassador to Israel, Sisa Ngombane, following unrest in Gaza.

She decided to pursue a better understanding of the conflict to find out why it was “dividing ordinary Jews and Muslims to such a degree”. It seemed logical to her to cover the Christian solidarity march, organised by the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), to add to her repertoire of viewpoints on the subject.

“Viewers were not interested in why there was a march... they were upset and angered that I was covering a march hosted by SAFI. I was mocked for my ignorance for being there, and associating with Jews. I was appalled by the hate for Jews. It was a dark time for me personally.”

Mahomed, aka the Soulful Journalist, is best known for her time at *eNCA* as news anchor and business reporter. She recently started her own media company called Channel M Productions, which according to its Facebook blurb aims to “tell the stories that need to be told, to inspire change, and provide greater insight”.

After being lambasted on social media for covering the march, she reached out to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and Boycott, Divestment Sanctions (BDS) to get the various sides to attempt reconciliation.

“BDS refused to engage with me on the topic of a possible conflict-resolution process. I feel that organisations on the frontline who call for change should be willing to engage constructively. I believe they are activists with no clear agenda to impact meaningfully.”

Meanwhile, positive interaction with the SAJBD led to an opportunity to visit Israel on a spiritual, political,



A photo taken while Nausheena Mahomed was visiting the Dome of the Rock in Israel

and cultural fact-finding mission. Her aim was to engage with ordinary people to “examine life beyond the war on both sides”, as she puts it.

Together with a number of South African journalists, Mahomed toured the region in late November last year, and describes the experience as “transformative”.

One of her highlights was visiting the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Western Wall.

On Facebook, she described her visit to the Old City in Jerusalem as one of the “most peaceful, spiritual encounters I have had since my own

pilgrimage to Mecca”.

“The spiritual rapture” of being in Jerusalem, she said, left her with many unanswered questions about the conflict.

Undoubtedly, what stood out for Mahomed was “the general sentiment among Palestinians and Israelis of wanting to move forward and to get on with their lives”.

“There is a narrow perception among South Africans that Israeli Arabs and Jews don’t get along, but this is not the case. Even though there is a conflict going on, they go beyond it by socialising and interacting with one another daily. They all want peace with their neighbours. South Africans judge the situation by what makes headlines.”

Another journalist, who wishes to remain anonymous, told the *SA Jewish Report* that her visit was “an eye-opener”.

“The trip to Yad Vashem was the most heart-wrenching – learning about the history of the Jewish people, and getting more insight on the Holocaust. What stood out for me was the light that Jews found at the end of the tunnel after so much darkness. And the light is Israel.”

She was intrigued by “how most Palestinian children are taught to hate Jews from the time that they

are born. One Palestinian spoke about how he did not understand the kindness that was shown to him by a Jew [who he now considers his second mother], because he was taught that Jews are not good people and they only want to oppress Palestinians.

“There are faults in the Israeli leadership that seem to contribute to the conflict,” she said. “There are Palestinian leaders that want peace with Israel and who support a two-state solution. However, what worries me is the Palestinian leadership that does not recognise the right of Israel to exist. If you want peace with Israel, you have to prepare your people for peace with Israel – and that is not what is happening, especially in Gaza.”

Phumlani M. Majozi, the host of *Salaamedia* and *One Nation FM* 88.9 and a *News24* columnist, told the *SA Jewish Report* his trip was “enlightening”.

Before he left, he said, he knew very little about Israel’s history, culture, and demographics. He found it interesting to interact with Ethiopian Jews.

“The political situation is really complex,” he said. “To achieve peace, both countries will have to compromise and make tough decisions. They must work on a resolution with that thinking in mind.”

The visiting journalists were

Continued on page 17>>

Most Jews of Polish and Lithuanian origin are entitled to EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT

A common misconception is that South African Jews of Ashkenazi heritage are of Lithuanian descent, and that only those who are able to prove their eligibility for Lithuanian citizenship are able to obtain a European passport. The fact is that most South African Jews do qualify for European

citizenship, whether they can prove their Lithuanian lineage or not, and most South African Jews of Sephardic heritage are also eligible for European passports.

Ashkenazi: It is important to understand that until 1918, all of Eastern Europe was divided between three empires: Russia, Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian empire. Neither Poland nor Lithuania existed until 1918.

At the end of WWI, the territory was divided, and countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and others were born/reborn. Only then did residents became citizens of these countries. As a result, people who, for example, were born in Riga (nowadays Latvia) could actually be Lithuanian or Polish.

Horesh advises that eligibility for a Lithuanian or Polish passport depends on the city from which your grandparents (or their parents) hailed.

Horesh says many South African Ashkenazi Jews of Lithuanian origin have been refused Lithuanian citizenship because their heritage is actually Polish. They would, accordingly, be entitled to Polish citizenship and a EU passport.

After World War II, the borders in Europe changed, resulting in cities changing

nationality. The resultant effect for descendants of Jews who were born in Vilnius, for example, is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined, but an application for a Polish passport may very well be successful.

Sephardi: The descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are most likely eligible for a Portuguese passport. If applicable, Horesh is able to obtain an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which an application for European citizenship can be made and will most likely be successful. Portuguese citizenship enables one to enter the United States without the need to apply for a visa.

In addition, Horesh is filing many applications for descendants of Sephardi origin who arrived in South Africa from Greece, Turkey, and North Africa. Descendants from other countries in the Middle East – even Holland – are also potentially eligible.

Horesh resides in Israel, but has spent seven years in Poland, and is recognised as a



leading lawyer in the field of European citizenship, with a full understanding of local immigration laws.

Living in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – offers him quick and easy access to Poland and Lithuania, Accordingly, he is able to work closely with local professionals who assist him in tracing the documentation required for successful applications for European citizenship.

In addition, and as a result of his close ties with Portuguese authorities, to date he has had a 100% success rate with applications for Portuguese citizenship.

Horesh is available to discuss your specific details. He is often in South Africa, and can meet you in person to discuss your specific needs.



I will be in Cape Town from 31 January to 5 February and Johannesburg from 6 to 9 February. Please contact me for an appointment. My South African phone number is +27 64 745 5273 • Email me on adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

We must pass the torch of democracy to a new generation of voters



The 2019 national and provincial elections will be yet another milestone event in the history of our country. The elections are an opportunity for citizens to reaffirm their commitment to electoral democracy, the rule of law, and the supremacy of our Constitution. Elections are also an opportunity for us to take stock of our nation’s democratic and developmental journey, to reflect on where we have come from, and have a say in where we are going. Our Constitution guarantees every citizen aged 18 and above the fundamental right to participate directly in the process of laying the foundation for the future. We do this by electing those to serve as representatives of the people in national and provincial legislatures for the next five years. This right to vote is enshrined in the Constitution but, in South Africa, the exercising of this right is not compulsory. Voting is a fundamental form of direct involvement in democracy, and can lay a solid basis for monitoring and holding elected representatives to account. However, it requires a conscious decision and personal choice to participate in and fulfil these responsibilities. South Africa is fortunate in that significant numbers of our citizens continue to understand and believe in the importance of participation in our relatively young democracy. In each of the past five national and provincial elections and five municipal elections, we have managed to maintain registration of more than 75%. Few countries with voluntary registration and voting are able to achieve this. For many of our citizens, the right to vote and participate in the determination of our country’s future remains the clearest break with apartheid and manifestation of freedom. But freedom needs to secure dignity, equitable access, and justice.

Elected representatives need to enable us all to fulfil the promise of our Constitution. The more informed people are about issues and the more engaged they are in factually-grounded debate, the more likely people are to vote, and to engage further once the elections are over. This year, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our first historic elections. There is no more appropriate way for our citizens to commemorate this milestone than to vote. Democracy remains fragile. We must continue to nurture and sustain it at every opportunity. Recent events around the world and on our own continent have shown that democracy can quickly decline and reverse if not defended and protected. This depends on the participation

of each and every citizen: to elect those who hold office and are charged with acting on our behalf, and to hold such representatives accountable, thereby ensuring that governments retain their legitimacy. Elections require the constant renewal and rejuvenation of the voters’ roll to include new voters so that we know our democracy remains healthy and vibrant. That is why the upcoming final voter registration weekend scheduled for 26 and 27 January 2019 is of such vital importance. It is an opportunity to grow the voters’ roll to include all eligible voters, especially the young people of South Africa. Voter registration is continuous – but there is a cut-off for registration for each election. The voters’ roll is sealed when the president proclaims the election. Only the voters on the

voters’ roll at that point in time are allowed to vote. It has never been easier or more convenient to register. A record number of 22 925 voting stations will open from 08:00 to 17:00 on both days of this coming weekend (26 and 27 January) to allow new voters to register close to where they live. Statistics South Africa’s population estimates reveal that there are about nine million eligible voters who are currently not registered to vote. Of these, almost six million – or two thirds – are under 30 years of age. In order to keep the flame of democracy burning brightly, it is vital that we convince the next generation how important it is for them to vote. • Janet Love is the vice chairperson of the Electoral Commission

Vital voter information

- All South Africa citizens aged 16 and older in possession of an official ID document can register as voters (although only those who are at least 18 years old on voting day may vote);
- Voters should take a copy of their bar-coded ID book, smart-card ID, or temporary ID certificate when they go to register;
- Voters must register in the ward in which they ordinarily reside. When registering, voters need to provide their address or a description of where they live to allow the Electoral Commission to place them on the correct segment of the voters’ roll. However,

documentation or proof of address is not required;

- Voters who have two addresses – for example, students who are away from home – can choose which address to use for registration, but it should be where you think you are likely to be on election day (expected to be in May 2019). Once you are registered, you can always update your registration online if you move;
- To find your designated voting station, enter your address in the voting station finder app on the Electoral Commission’s website at <http://maps.elections.org.za/vsfinder/>, or call

0800 11 8000 during working hours;

- Voters who are already registered don’t need to visit their voting station to update and check their address details. To check or update your address, visit the “click, check and confirm” page on www.elections.org.za. Follow the link “Am I registered to vote?”. Or, you can SMS your ID number to 32810 (R1 per SMS), and it will tell you the name of the voting station where you are registered. Please wait a couple of weeks before you do this, as we need time to capture all the registration forms we receive over the weekend!

ADVERTORIAL

Series of articles: Lithuanian Citizenship - Breaking the ‘Myths’. (I)

ADV. DAINIUS AMBRAZAITIS



I am Dainius Ambrazaitis, advocate, partner, and the head of the Citizenship Division at IN JURE law firm, based in Vilnius, Lithuania.

I have been involved in Lithuanian-citizenship reinstatement cases for nine years. For the past four years, I have been intensively assisting applicants from South Africa, where the number of successfully approved cases is now approaching 300.

In the past few years, when meeting with clients in South Africa and other countries, I have encountered a variety of false beliefs - or myths - about qualification for ancestral Lithuanian citizenship. The common - and misguided - notion among my clients is that obtaining their ancestral Lithuanian citizenship will be extremely difficult,

or even impossible, despite the fact that their ancestors came from Lithuania. With this in mind, most potential clients do not even attempt a legal consultation.

The intention in publishing these articles is first, to highlight and counter popular myths about obtaining ancestral Lithuanian citizenship. Second, and most importantly, I aim to encourage you to reconsider your eligibility for Lithuanian ancestral citizenship, and to apply in a way that is client-centric, straightforward, and professional.

Please note that these articles offer summaries of the most frequently asked questions and answers that I have encountered during consultations. Consequently, this information should not be taken as individual legal advice in any particular case. My individual legal consultations are absolutely free of charge, and can be arranged at a time and place convenient to you.

Please see my contact information below.

Myth 1: I have too little information about my Lithuanian ancestry, so it would be impossible to apply.

This is one of the most typical myths commonly spread by the younger generation. Young people are often somewhat embarrassed that they are not

fully aware of their ancestral roots - where their ancestors came from, and when. Generally, their knowledge is limited to the information that someone, such as a grandparent or great-grandparent, was from Lithuania.

Typically, they are persuaded that this information is not enough to start the process of reinstating their Lithuanian citizenship - but this is absolutely wrong. The prevailing reaction of clients in such situations who have attended consultations is sincere and pleasant surprise as they start to see how effectively and rapidly, even with such a small amount of information, their Lithuanian ancestral family picture can be restored.

Myth 2: I have no documentation pertaining to my Lithuanian ancestry, so it is not worth even starting the process.

Another grievous misconception is that you should have documents proving that your ancestor was from Lithuania. Be assured that in nine out of 10 cases, my clients do not have such documents. This is completely normal, and definitely not a problem. Knowing that at least one of your parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents was from Lithuania is the only essential condition to successfully initiate the process.

Myth 3: Some sort of cut-off dates are applied to candidates, so I probably will not qualify.

This frequently-encountered belief is determined by a straightforward and unprofessional evaluation of Lithuanian regulations. It is true that the most convenient legal situation is when one’s ancestor arrived in South Africa between 1919 and 1940 (the later the better). However, I can confirm responsibly that in many situations, even without meeting this standard criterion, after individually and thoroughly assessing other circumstances, my clients have been able to apply successfully for the reinstatement of their Lithuanian citizenship.

If these or similar issues have been holding you back from starting the process of reinstatement, I encourage you to contact me for an individual, free-of-charge consultation to discuss your eligibility.

This article will be continued in next month’s issue.

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Every vote counts, say experts, urging everyone to vote

NICOLA MILTZ

Election analysts are calling on the community to vote in the 2019 election as “turnout is everything”.

Two such analysts, Paul Berkowitz and Wayne Sussman, have urged the community to cast their vote in the national election, scheduled for May.

Berkowitz, an economist and data analyst, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that because South Africa adopts a proportional representative system, every vote can be used towards national and provincial seats. “The higher the turnout for a party, the more likely that that party will win seats,” he says.

In 2016, the Democratic Alliance (DA) was able to obtain 27% of the proportional representation vote in local government elections. Says Sussman, “The DA voters turned out to vote, and many ANC voters who were not satisfied with the party and then President Jacob Zuma stayed at home, with some voting for other parties. If a party’s base support group is not enthusiastic, and turnout for that party is muted, the party will experience a drop in percentage support at the polls.”

The two analysts revealed their research at a 2019 election presentation held at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre recently, including views about what could happen at the upcoming polls.

If the elections were held tomorrow, Sussman says, he believes the ANC would get between 57% and 62%, the DA between 19%

and 23%, the EFF between 9% and 11%, The IFP would get 4%, and the remaining smaller parties would get the remaining 4% to 5% of the vote.

“I know that these projections are not ideal as the range for the ANC and the DA is pretty wide, but a lot will happen between now and election day,” he says.

“What fallout will the ANC experience once the lists for Parliament are finalised? Will the ANC campaign as a united party? Will the DA continue to have breaches of that minority vote firewall from 2016, or will that group of voters lend the party their support again in 2019?”

All these [elements] will influence what happens, says Sussman.

Gareth van Onselen, political commentator and the head of politics and governance at the Institute of Race Relations tells of the most recent IRR poll of registered voters. “It put the ANC on 56%, the DA on 18%, and the EFF on 11%. However, if there is a 69% turnout, it put the ANC on 59%, the DA on 22%, and the EFF on 10%.”

Basing his forecast on current polls and information, Berkowitz predicts similar results, with the ANC getting 58%, the DA 22%, the EFF 11%, the IFP 3%, and others 6%.

The analysts agree that 2019 is arguably the most significant year for the ANC since it first came to power. Under the new leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa, the party hopes to improve or – at the very least – retain dominance at the polls. Recent voter surveys suggest dwindling support, which threatens to drop the ANC’s national count below the 60% mark.

The experts say Ramaphosa has come with apologies and promises in the hope of rekindling public faith in the party. This follows a disastrous 2018, in which the effects were felt of state capture and major factional infighting. Ramaphosa has reiterated his commitment to a “new dawn”, but analysts question whether this will be enough to lure potential voters in May.

Van Onselen says the EFF is expected to make significant progress.

“If current trends hold, the EFF does seem set for some growth, which is significant given that it comes off a very small base. It is possible for the party to achieve 10%. In fact, there is a possible scenario in which the EFF is the only one of the big three parties actually to grow in the 2019 election.”

Things are not looking good for the DA, he said.

By way of explanation, he says the DA got 22% in 2014, and in order to have a successful election, the party will need to grow beyond that, and win Gauteng. If it runs a good campaign, it might be able to squeeze out some small growth. If it cannot win Gauteng outright, there may be a scenario where it, together with other opposition parties, can bring the ANC below 50% in the province.

The greatest challenge for the ANC is apathy among its voters. “It is not enough just to convince voters about what you stand for, you have to make sure that they actually vote on the day.”

The opposition parties’ concerns vary, says Van Onselen. “For the EFF, its biggest challenge

is a rejuvenated ANC. Most of its growth has come from the ANC. So, if the ANC wins people

back, that will hurt the EFF first and foremost. The DA, too, has a voter-apathy problem, particularly in the Western Cape. As things stand, no one really knows what the DA stands for,” he said.

Sussman says the public perception – and experience – of coalition governments has been more negative than positive. “Coalition governments are difficult. Often, small parties can have an outsize influence on the performance of that coalition government.”

The DA, he says, may have to turn to the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and the Vryheidsfront Plus (VF+) in the Western Cape if it garners less than 50%. The ANC will hope that Patricia De Lille and her GOOD party damages the DA in the Western Cape provincial ballot, and that GOOD and the EFF will work with the ANC to form a coalition government.

In Gauteng, the ANC could fall just under 50%, says Sussman.

“I see the DA battling to work with the EFF on a provincial level. Smaller parties like the VF+ and the IFP will be more inclined to work with the DA, but I see David Makhura returning for a second term as premier, either with a small majority or with coalition partners.”

It’s a lot of guesswork aided by trend analysis and voter surveys. “We will continue to monitor by-election results and opinion polls, and the projections will no doubt be more fine-tuned the closer we get to election day,” Sussman says.



Wayne Sussman

Jewish leaders take the lead in fight against corruption

>>>Continued from page 3

corporate governance, Katz has made an enormous contribution to the success and stability of the South Africa’s corporate, legal, and financial sectors. As chair of ENSafrica, he specialises in corporate and commercial law. In a career that spans more than 50 years, he was appointed by the South African government to chair the Commission of Inquiry into Taxation in 1995 (known as the Katz Commission), and as part of this, nine “Katz Reports” were completed under his leadership.

Katz also chaired the Committee for the Restructuring of the Johannesburg Securities Exchange to review the organisation’s structure and operations, and was on the board of directors of the South Africa 2010 FIFA World Cup. In addition, he has received various academic appointments and lifetime achievement awards. He has had considerable involvement with the South African Jewish community, where he served first as national chairman and then as president of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.

Marcus rose to prominence within the ANC while living outside of South Africa from 1969. She joined the Communist Party and the ANC, working for the latter’s information-gathering department, becoming deputy secretary for information, and later the editor of a news bulletin which followed developments in South Africa.

After spending twenty-one years in exile, Marcus was among the first ANC members to return to the country when the party was unbanned in 1990. After a stint running the ANC’s department of information and publicity, she went on to be elected to Parliament in the April 1994 election, becoming chairperson of the Joint Standing Committee on Finance in

the National Assembly. She was appointed deputy finance minister in 1996, and deputy governor of the South African Reserve Bank in 1999. She held the position of Reserve Bank governor from 2009 until 2014.

The task team Davis is a part of has extensive expertise in electricity, management, and economics geared towards assessing the power utility’s operational, structural, and financial viability.

Born in South Africa in 1958, Davis attended Theodor Herzl School in Port Elizabeth, and went on to attend Rhodes University, becoming a chartered accountant by profession.

After serving as senior manager with accountants Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co, Davis was appointed executive director of Eskom before joining Glencore in 1994. He served as executive chairman of Ingwe Coal Corporation from 1995 until his appointment in 1997 as chief financial officer and executive director of Billiton.

Davis also served as chief executive of multinational mining company Xstrata from 2001, but left after the company was taken over by Glencore in 2013.

Subsequently, he formed mining venture X2 Resources. He was also president of the council of members and chairman of the board of trustees of the Jewish Leadership Council of the United Kingdom, the umbrella body of the largest Jewish charities and institutions in the UK.

Owing to his chairing of the UK Holocaust Memorial Commission, Davis was appointed a knight bachelor in the 2015 Queen’s Birthday Honours. Involved heavily in politics, he was also appointed treasurer of the British Conservative Party in 2016, and chief executive of the party the following year.

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Wellington’s vandalised graves include Holocaust survivor

TALI FEINBERG

When 39 graves were vandalised in the small town of Wellington in the Western Cape at the end of last year, it sent shockwaves around the world.

A video of the vandalised graves was circulated through social media. Although it is a tiny community, Wellington was once a centre of Jewish life, and South African Jews scattered around the globe have family members buried there.

Veteran financial journalist Allan Greenblo recognised the names on four of the graves as family members. Says Greenblo, “They are the parents, sister, and brother-in-law of my cousin. His brother-in-law, David Korzuch, was a Holocaust survivor.”

Describing his experiences during the war in the book *In Sacred Memory: Recollections of the Holocaust by Survivors Living in Cape Town*, the late Korzuch writes that he was born in 1930 in Shemyeshice, Poland, a town situated near the German border. He was the youngest of nine children. When a ghetto was erected in the town, three of his sisters refused to move into it, and left the village. He never heard from them again.

Korzuch, celebrated his Barmitzvah in the ghetto, and soon after that, his mother, father, and grandparents were sent to the camps. He never saw them again. “There I was, all alone in the group of adults selected by the Nazis to work,” he writes. The rest of his childhood and adolescence would be spent in forced labour, trying to survive.

He and his brother, Alteshima, were moved to Markstadt in Poland, where they were forced to help build the Finef



David Korzuch's vandalised grave

Taichen concentration camp. Later, when the construction of the camp was completed, Korzuch and his fellow labourers were transferred to it.

He remained at the camp until it was closed in 1944 to forestall the advancing Russian forces from liberating prisoners. Thereafter, he was forced to march for eight days. “I was like a delinquent, a desperate person who would look for any way to get some food, even stealing a piece of potato skin from a pig’s trough on the marches in order to eat,” Korzuch wrote.

The brothers were loaded into cattle trucks and taken to Buchenwald, where Alteshima

later perished. David remained at the camp until it was liberated by the American army in April 1945. “It was very difficult in Buchenwald. We did not work there, just sat around doing nothing. When we worked outside the camp, we could sometimes organise a little extra food, but in Buchenwald, this was not possible because there was no connection with the outside world,” he wrote.

After liberation, Korzuch was discovered by his brother Max. “We decided to go to Argentina where we had an uncle, but they would not allow Jews in, so we applied for Paraguay, and crossed the border illegally. I met my South African wife there while she was on holiday. It took three years to get permission to join her because the South African government thought that if I was born in Poland, I must have been a Communist.”

In 1958, he finally came to South Africa. “Sometimes in nightmares I return to my village and walk the streets and go back to my school, but I will never, never go back there,” wrote Korzuch.

Greenblo remembers Korzuch as a gentle person “of few words and not entirely comfortable with the English language. As a child, I knew nothing of his experiences. Looking back, I do wonder what his thoughts might have been as he sat quietly in the room where we children were happily playing in all the security and plenty that our families provided.

“He married my second cousin, Ettie Forman, of Wellington in the Cape, where her parents ran a small store. They were of modest means. Ettie’s mother, Dora Forman, and my grandmother, Fanny Greenblo of Muizenberg, were sisters. The gravestones of Barney and Dora, David and Ettie, have all now been vandalised.”

Greenblo says Ettie and David got married in Wellington, where they started a family, and spent the rest of their lives. That is how he came to be buried there. He and his brother Max were the sole survivors of their family.

Meanwhile, the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies is working hard to raise funds to restore the 39 vandalised graves and secure the site.

On 14 December, Stuart Diamond, the Director of the Cape SAJBD, and David King, Sub-Committee Chair of the country communities’ portfolio, visited the cemetery in Wellington where they met the leadership of the Paarl and Wellington Jewish communities to discuss the way forward.

“This shocking and disgusting act of vandalism needs to be called out, and so the following will need to happen: security hardening of the site and removal of what is left of the wall, replacing it with a clear fence so the site is always visible; restoring and repairing the graves; further engagement with the local SAPS [South African Police Services]; and engagement with leadership of the Drakenstein local council,” wrote Diamond.

In spite of a reward of R10 000 offered by the Paarl and Wellington Jewish communities for any information about the vandals, no suspects have been found.



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Left behind: family reunited after 100 years

PAULA SLIER

I am a journalist. I make my living telling stories. But I’ve always known the most important story to tell is my own.

My grandmother, Sarah Altuska, came to South Africa at the age of 11. She couldn’t speak a word of English, and for years, had been scavenging for food on the streets of Brest Litovsk, a Belarusian city bordering Poland. She was embarrassed to wear skirts because a bullet wound in her right calf had scarred badly. She could never properly explain how it got there. She also wasn’t sure how her parents had died. A childhood friend of hers refused to wear the colours white and red as they reminded her of blood on the snow.

It was 1921. Half a million Jewish orphans roamed the icy streets of the Pale of Settlement. World War I was over, there was plague, hunger, and pogroms. Into this inferno arrived a Ukrainian Jewish man by the name of Isaac Ochberg who had relocated to South Africa. He’d secured permission from the Pretoria government to bring 200 Jewish orphans to the country. He drove into one remote village after another, collecting desperate, desolate souls as he went. His rules were strict: no families



Sarah Altuska

were to be broken up, and no sick children would be chosen. But he made exceptions.

One orphan had sheltered his baby sister as the Cossacks (Russian horsemen) who plundered and murdered Jewish villages entered his home. They shot his father dead in front of him and threatened to cut out his sister’s eyes. But the little boy managed to shield her as they hacked off his hand. With one arm carrying his little sister, and a stump hanging where his other hand used to be, he joined Ochberg’s group.

Many, many, years later, I interviewed another orphan, Solly Jossel, in Johannesburg. At 100 years old, he was the oldest orphan still alive. He handed me a small photograph of a woman smiling into the lens. The tears which had been slowly falling from his eyes, dropped onto the picture frame.

“She’s my mother,” he sobbed, stopping the interview for a few minutes so he could compose himself. “She could not care for all her children, and when she heard that a man from Africa was collecting Jewish children to look after them, she begged him to take me.”

A few months later, after the orphans had settled in South Africa, an elderly couple came to visit them

one Sunday afternoon. “The woman looked so much like my mother that I ran up to her crying, grabbed her skirt, and refused to let go,” Solly remembers sadly. “She already had grown-up children of her own and wasn’t looking for any more, but bless her, she adopted me. She wrote to my mother to tell her I was being cared for, and she needn’t worry.”

Solly’s real mother replied. But the letters eventually stopped coming. He later learnt she’d been sent to Auschwitz.

For Ochberg, it could not have been easy choosing the children. From 500 000 youngsters, nothing short of a miracle led him to my grandmother, her two sisters, and brother. He found them in a local synagogue where they’d sleep at night. If not for “daddy Ochberg” as they came to call and love him, they most certainly would have died in the gas chambers of Nazi Europe.

But there was one thing that Ochberg did – or rather didn’t do – that would forever change my family. It took my grandmother and her siblings half a century to correct it. Only now can I finish their story.

Ochberg left behind a sister, Faigel. Last month, my heart skipped a beat as I saw the airport arrival sign light up. Tucuman, Argentina. I remember as a little girl my grandmother telling me we had family in South America. For years, she’d caress much-thumbed letters written in Spanish on faded grey paper. Black-and-white photographs with names and dates on the back would fall from envelopes as strange faces from a faraway land smiled up at me.

This is my first visit to Argentina. I’ve always known I have family living here but until now, I’ve never met any of them. In small physical ways we resemble each other.

“My mother was always sad,” Faigel’s 81-year-old son, Bernardo, tells me in Spanish. “She was always crying. She never got over being left behind.” His veined hand holds mine tightly, and when I look at him, it’s my grandmother’s grey eyes smiling sadly back at me through the generations.

When Ochberg arrived in Brest Litovsk in 1921, it was three years after Russia had signed a treaty in the fortress city ending its participation in World War I. Twelve-year-old Faigel was sick in hospital. She’d been bitten by a snake while looking for mushrooms for her and her siblings to eat. While Ochberg was collecting her sisters and brother and loading them onto a train and then a ship to travel to England and later South Africa, she was lying in a hospital bed. Why didn’t he go and fetch her? Or wait for her? Maybe he planned to return and collect her with more children?

But South Africa was closing its doors to Jewish immigration, and soon the Soviet Union would no longer allow children to be taken out of its borders.

Faigel eventually left the hospital. Can you imagine the terror she must have felt on being told that her entire family had gone to Africa – a continent at the other end of the world? Her son tells me she married at 15, and then set sale for Argentina, a relatively underdeveloped country that was encouraging immigration. Although it seemed improbable, she clung to the hope that one day she’d find her family.

It took years of seeking, but in 1972, after being assisted by the Red Cross, the search was finally over. Fifty years had passed, one sister had died, and the orphans now had grandchildren of their own. My grandmother and her younger sister travelled to Buenos Aires for a reunion. “That was a massive event in our family,” an Argentinian cousin tells me. “I was 10 years old at the time, and I still remember that there was a lot of crying and hugging and laughing.”

The sisters could communicate only in the broken Yiddish



Ursula Milsztejn, her father Bernardo, Paula Slir and her mother Alicia praying over Faigel Altuska’s grave in Argentina

of their childhood. The most urgent questions Faigel wanted to ask her sisters was why they left her behind – and the date of her birthday.

I am writing this after visiting Faigel’s grave at the Jewish cemetery in Tucuman. On behalf of three generations of cousins who have never met each other and are today scattered around the world, I recite the mourner’s kaddish. My newly found uncle, Bernardo, and his daughter, Ursula, take my hands. With tears rolling down our cheeks, over Faigel’s grave, he whispers thanks that after all these years, the family is finally reunited.

I place a stone on my great-aunt’s tombstone. She died not long after meeting her siblings. It was as if she’d been waiting for them her whole life.

* Two weeks ago, I set up a WhatsApp group for my cousins – 41 grandchildren of the original five orphans. Many of us have never met each other. One of them, from Argentina, texted me privately. “I am so grateful for knowing that we are no longer alone,” she wrote. I imagine my grandmother and her siblings are looking down at us from heaven and smiling.



Sarah Altuska’s son, Lionel Slir, at an Isaac Ochberg memorial in Brest Litovsk

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A leading educator of Jewish spirituality and Kabbalah for over 35 years, Rabbi David Aaron returns to the Sinai stage to challenge his audience to look at their deepest fears and assumptions about their beliefs, and ultimately discover that **a new view of G-d and themselves will grant them access to a power they have never experienced before**. Rabbi Aaron is a best-selling author and a compelling speaker. He has written eight books, including *The Secret Life of G-d*, *Inviting G-d In* and *Love is my Religion*, which have attracted substantial media attention, from *Larry King Live* to *E! Entertainment*. **Using gentle humour and deep insights**, Rabbi Aaron urges us to **change the way in which we look at G-d, ourselves and our purpose in the world**.

CT

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Major General Yaakov Amidror, the **former national security advisor to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu**, returns to our Sinai stage as **a master on all matters of Israel's national security**. This is an opportunity to listen to the man who was the head of the Research Department of Israeli military intelligence, played a central role in high-level talks with US officials over the Iranian nuclear programme, led efforts to restore relations with Turkey following the Gaza flotilla incident, and presided over Operation Pillar of Defence – an IDF operation aimed at halting rocket attacks from Gaza. Today, he is the Anne and Greg Rosshandler Senior Fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies, a leading security think tank. Amidror offers a **no-holds-barred look into Israel's military, security and strategic affairs**.

CT | JHB

David Sacks

Known as one of the **funniest and deepest speakers** at Sinai Indaba to date, David Sacks is back. Beginning his comedy writing career as editor of Harvard's satirical magazine, *The Harvard Lampoon*, Sacks went on to become a **writer and producer on The Simpsons**, one of the most acclaimed, well-loved and enduring television series of all time. After winning an **Emmy Award** for his work on the sitcom's landmark fifth and sixth seasons, he began writing and producing for another TV cult classic, *3rd Rock from the Sun*, for which he received a Golden Globe award. His other noteworthy credits include *Malcolm in the Middle*, *The Tick*, *Regular Show* on Cartoon Network, and *Murphy Brown*. Currently, he is executive producing *Final Space*, an animated space opera available on Netflix. An expert on new age spiritualism, **combined with deep Kabbalistic/Chassidic ideas**, Sacks produces a weekly podcast, *Spiritual Tools for an Outrageous World*, available on iTunes and Stitcher. He is **co-founder of and senior lecturer at The Happy Minyan of Los Angeles**.

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Meeting the African Hebrew Israelites in Joburg

JORDAN MOSHE

Jews are not the only people who observe Shabbat on Saturday, stress the centrality of Israel, and maintain the tradition of speaking Hebrew.

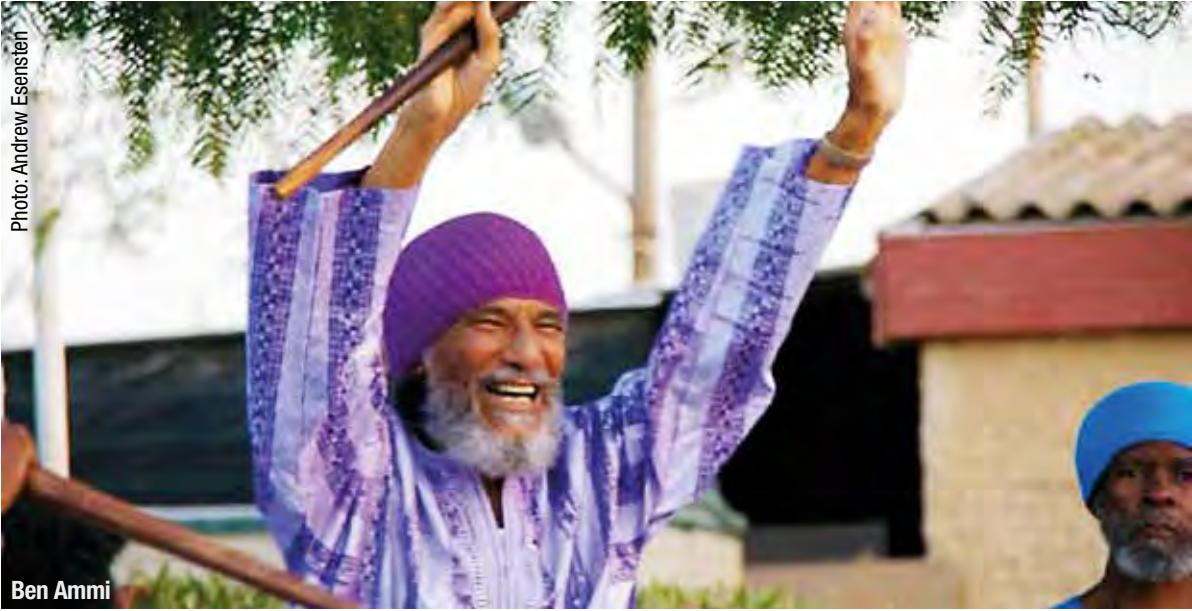
Although their faith is relatively young, the African Hebrew Israelites maintain an identity that is strikingly similar to Judaism in many ways. While they don't identify as Jews per se, many of their customs are drawn from Jewish texts and teaching.

"Essentially, we are a people who have reclaimed a particular identity," says Akh Hodiell. "We have not created a new one, but have assumed one that existed for many years." A convert to the faith since 2007, Hodiell explains that the group, which started in the United States, has been in existence officially for about 40 years.

According to their belief, they are the remnants of a group which was originally part of the Israelite nation, but driven from Jerusalem by the Romans into different parts of the world, including Africa, in 70 C.E.

Many Israelites migrated to West Africa, where once again, they were taken captive – this time by Europeans on slave ships – to the Americas along with other African tribespeople.

"In 1966, our spiritual leader,



Ben Ammi, received a vision from the angel Gabriel," says Hodiell. "He was told that the time had come for the lost children of Israel to return to their land, and the exodus movement was born."

In 1967, the first group of 39 Israelites made the move from Chicago to North West Africa. They settled in Liberia's interior to rid themselves of the "negative attributes" they had acquired in captivity.

After spending two-and-a-half years in Liberia, the Israelites were prepared to make the last section of their journey to Israel, which they call home. According to Hodiell, somehow they managed to get into Israel in 1969 under the Law of

Return.

More would continue to arrive until 1972, when the Law of Return was changed and only those born of a Jewish mother were considered eligible to enter Israel.

Still, those who settled in Israel continued to follow the directive of Ammi. "We had a spiritual mission," says Hodiell. "We had to establish a kingdom of G-d in Israel despite the constant threat of arrest and deportation from the land." After scouting for a suitable location, Ammi chose to establish this kingdom in the Negev desert in Dimona, securing a disused army barracks as an initial base.

From there, the kingdom grew and developed into what Hodiell

says is a thriving urban kibbutz called Kfar Hashalom. Nevertheless, the Israelites have had a tempestuous relationship with the Israeli government.

However, in March 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu highlighted the community's participation in the Israeli Defence Force, according to *Haaretz*. "On this opportunity, I want to send my blessing to the members of the co-operative society that is working towards the inclusion of the Hebrew Israelite community in Israeli society at large," read a letter Netanyahu sent to them. "Your integration in recent years into the Israel Defence Forces reflects

your status as an integral part of the Israeli experience and its institutions."

Hodiell said his own involvement with the Israelites began in 2005 while studying at Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. Hodiell befriended a fellow student who was involved in various arts and cultural societies on campus. Through his involvement, Hodiell found out about the Israelites, many of whom were students at the university.

When he returned to his native East London, Hodiell sought out the local faith group in his area, attending information classes held at the East London Museum.

"I went in, sat down, and that was the end of the story," he says. "My grandmother identified as Anglican, and I used to attend church services with her. I would swing the incense burner during services, but gradually withdrew, and would read my Bible at the back of the church."

Hodiell's interest in the Israelites went uncontested by his grandmother and sisters, all of whom respected his decision and encouraged him to do what he saw fit. "Although it was hard to withdraw from the life I had known, I felt I had to. I no longer went to family gatherings like Christmas, and though some of my relatives were angry, I pursued my path."

Continued on page 14>>

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‘Train in the Distance’ travels close to home and heart

STEVE LINDE

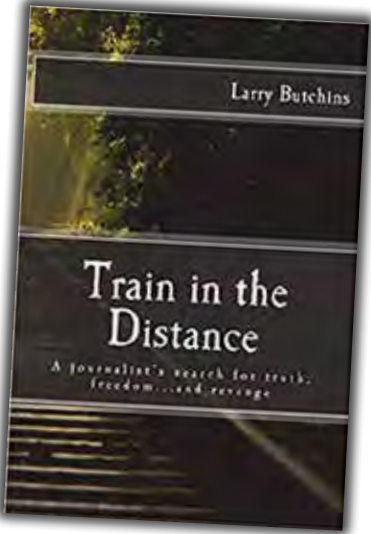
REVIEW

Be warned! Once you pick up, *Train in the Distance: A journalist’s search for truth, freedom and revenge* by Larry Butchins, it will be hard to put down. It is the kind of book that will make you laugh and cry, as you uncover the intricacies of the riveting story, which starts in South Africa and ends in Israel. It is told through the eyes of Adam Marks, an investigative and idealistic Jewish journalist. He begins his career by exposing the evils of apartheid and opposing the death penalty during what the author calls “the years of struggle” in South Africa, but ends up moving with his family to Israel, where he is recruited by the Mossad to uncover the evil mastermind behind a suicide bombing. The story begins when Adam, who lives in Durban, is given the scoop of a lifetime: an interview with a top anti-apartheid leader via Rashid, a friend in Johannesburg. He becomes a target for the apartheid regime, and for reasons which will become clearer in the book, Adam and his wife, Francie, decide to leave South Africa with their children and move to Israel.

There, in a terrorist tragedy, Francie’s sister and her mother are killed in a Hamas suicide bombing at Tel Aviv’s Dizengoff Center. And Adam, as it turns out, is picked by the Mossad to interview the man who ordered the attack. His two worlds come together in an explosive ending, which I will not spoil for the reader. The book is fabulous “faction” – dramatic fiction based on facts – and is dedicated “to the memory of all victims of apartheid and terror”. The title, incidentally, comes from a Paul Simon song, whose lyrics are, “Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance... everybody thinks it’s true/What is the point of this story? What information obtained?/The thought that life could be better is woven indelibly into our hearts... and our brains.”

In spite of its tragic backdrops – apartheid and terror – the book somehow keeps your hopes up right until the end, when it’s difficult not to gasp and smile. Butchins’ protagonist’s life mirrors his own. “As a journalist in Johannesburg during the early 1970s, I covered many of the actual events fictionalised in this story,” he says. “Several of the characters in the story are real-life individuals who I interviewed, and who did many of the things ascribed to them.” Born in Cape Town, Butchins started his journalism career as a cub reporter in Durban, and moved with his wife, Marlyn, and three children to Israel in 1987, where he went into hi-tech marketing, wrote travel blogs and children’s books, became a professional actor, and founded the Guild Theater in Ra’anana. The Butchins family now live in Tzur Yitzhak, north of Tel Aviv, and have three grandsons. The book, he says, had been “on the boil” for about 15 years. “I felt it was important to bring a different story about apartheid-South Africa to the world. Not the usual story told from the point of view of a black person suffering under apartheid, but from a young, privileged white reporter with a strong social conscience, who hates what the policy is doing to his country and its people,” he says. “The spark to write it came from a personal tragedy some years earlier, in which two members of my family were killed in a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. While the story is not specifically about that event, it does highlight the protagonist’s personal conflict regarding his lifelong opposition to the death penalty (one of the cornerstones of apartheid government power) and the calls by many people in Israel to impose the death

penalty on those planning and supporting acts of terrorism, of which his family has been a victim. One of the key motivations for the protagonist’s move to Israel was that it has no death penalty. “I felt that, with the value of hindsight and viewed from another country, I could bring a different perspective to the fight against apartheid, tyranny, and hatred. I would like people to understand that



the good fight anywhere in the world is predominantly fought by ordinary people who decide at some stage that enough is enough.” It is important to note that Israel has carried out the death penalty once in the past – against Nazi mastermind Adolf Eichmann in 1962. After the latest wave of terrorist attacks, former Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman is pushing for the Knesset to pass legislation that would allow courts to

sentence terrorists to death. Still, the book raises some important questions about the death penalty, apartheid, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and journalism as it tells a fascinating tale of a man in conflict in two countries in conflict. As a journalist from Durban who considers Butchins a friend and colleague, I am biased. But I highly recommend this book and, after imagining every scene as I read it, strongly believe it should be turned into a film! It will be woven indelibly into your hearts... and brains! • Steve Linde is the editor of ‘The Jerusalem Report’. This review was written for and first printed in the ‘The Jerusalem Report’.

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Antique military medal finds its way home

JORDAN MOSHE

It’s not every day that someone calls to tell you that they’ve found an antique military medal which belonged to your ancestor. Bill Bergman received such a call, but soon realised the ancestor was not his, but that he knew who the descendent was.

When militaria enthusiast and collector Munro Swerski found a Queen’s South Africa medal on auction in November last year, he was surprised to find that it had been awarded to a Jacob Bergman. He bought the medal there and then because it bore the same name as that of his good friend Bill.

Given that Swerski’s friend was a decorated veteran of the South African National Defence Forces, the likelihood of the two Bergmans being related seemed too great to overlook.

“Munro phoned me and said he’d come across a medal that must have belonged to an ancestor of mine,” says Bergman. “He had bought it from another collector after seeing the surname, and was very excited at the thought that it would find its way back to its original family. Jacob was the Hebrew name of my late father, so the fact that this had turned up was amazing.”

After conducting some research, however, Bergman learned that it did

not belong to his father. “The medal had been awarded for service in the Boer War, and because my father was born only in 1910, it couldn’t have been his.”

However, after discovering that this other Jacob Bergman had lived in Port Elizabeth, he believed he might know the rightful descendent. Through a cousin of his, he met a woman who, despite having the same surname as him, was not related. “I knew that Myra Bernstein, whose maiden name was Bergman, was from a family hailing from Port Elizabeth. When I contacted her, she not only told me that Jacob was her late grandfather, but that his surname had not always been Bergman.”

In fact, explains Bernstein, the family’s previous surname had been Gochin, one which itself was not the original surname. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, she and her nephew, MP Darren Bergman, outlined the fascinating history of their family’s heritage, which can be traced back to the Spanish Inquisition.

“Our family settled in India after fleeing the Inquisition,” says Bernstein. “Like many other Jews, they settled in Cochin, a city which would inspire them to change their surname to Gochin. They eventually ended up in Europe, and settled in Lithuania where Jacob was born.”

According to their extensive

research, Jacob Bergman was born Jacob Gochin in 1873 in Papile, Lithuania. Just after 1892, the Gochin cousins – Joseph, Jacob, and Abraham – decided to leave their country of birth for South Africa where, rumour had it, fortunes could be made.



The Queen’s South African medal

When they decided to settle in Heidelberg, they chose to change their surname once again. “They bought a general dealer business in town that was established and trading under the name ‘Bergman se Winkel,’” Darren says. This purchase resulted in Gochin becoming Bergman which, in spite of being an Afrikaans surname, was equally suitable as a Jewish one.

When the second Anglo Boer War

broke out in October 1899, Jacob and Joseph packed their belongings and set out for the Eastern Cape, knowing that most of the family had recently arrived and settled there. Motivated equally by the unpalatable prospect of finding that they were fighting for the Boers against family conscripted on

surname Bergman. Jacob, his brother Joseph, and cousin Abraham enlisted in the newly created Town Guard of Middleton in which they served for the duration of the war. It resulted in Jacob earning the esteemed Queen’s South Africa medal for his service.

Bernstein and her nephew says Jacob eventually started farming in the Uitenhage area in about 1918, and went on to rise to considerable prominence in the Jewish community. “In 1912, he became the first president of the Raleigh Street Shul in Uitenhage,” Darren says. “During this time, he married, was involved in the community, and continued to be engaged in business. He was certainly very prominent in his community.”

In spite of his reputation, the discovery of this medal is the first real opportunity his descendants have had to better understand the man Jacob was. Says Bernstein, “Growing up, I knew of my grandfather only through a picture hung on the wall at home.

“Our family history was a closed chapter in our story, much like the Holocaust was for many Jews at the time. My parents never spoke about him, and though we’ve found out much about my grandfather over the years, this medal is something concrete and exciting for us.”

The *Forward’s* woes deal the Jewish world a blow to the kishkes



OPINION

Andrew Silow-Carroll

My dad, who grew up in a time and place where his Judaism only marked him as an outsider, never really got my professional fascination with all things Jewish. That all changed when nearly 20 years ago, I got a job with the *Forward*, the English-language offspring of the venerable Yiddish daily.

He recalled how the *Forverts* would arrive at his family’s home in New York state’s rural Orange County, one of his parents’ few links to the bustling Jewish community downstate, and a window into a wider world.

“My father learned to be American from reading the *Forverts*,” dad told me.

I came to the *Forward* in its second generation as a revived weekly dedicated to treating its subject matter – the Jews – with the seriousness and curiosity they deserved. Seth Lipsky had reimaged the paper as a quality Jewish journalistic enterprise a decade earlier. His successor, JJ Goldberg, kept that spirit of inquiry alive, and as his managing editor, I managed to work with an array of people far more talented than I.

Under Jane Eisner, the *Forward* remained an incubator and farm team for excellence in writing about North American Jewry in the post-immigrant, postmodern and, as some warn ominously, post-Zionist era.

The news last week that the *Forward*, already reduced to a monthly magazine, is stopping its print operations altogether, and that key senior staffers, including Eisner, are being laid off, hit all of us in the industry hard. Personally, many of those let go are my friends. Professionally, it is an ominous sign of the state of Jewish journalism.

But you don’t have to be a Jewish journalist to bemoan the diminution of a storied news enterprise. Love it or hate it (and many people do), the *Forward* represents the kind of serious conversation that Jews need to be having in turbulent times.

Its reporters have held Jewish organisations and leaders accountable to the people they serve. Its opinion pages raise important questions that we might otherwise be reluctant to discuss in public. They give voice to those – Jews of colour, Mizrachim, women, Jewish “renegades” – who too often are left out of the communal conversation. Most of all, it reminds us to think like adults, and put aside the kitsch and pablum that sometimes defines the Jewish discourse.

This week I took part in a Muslim-Jewish dialogue sponsored by the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. The focus was the media’s treatment of our respective groups. I was reminded how lucky we are as Jews to have a mature and robust tradition of communal self-scrutiny. The Muslims in the room represented their communities’ critical thinkers, in all senses of that term. More than a few quietly bemoaned the lack of outlets for an honest and often uncomfortable discussion of the challenges facing them and their coreligionists. Although the Jewish discourse can often

be coarse, and the intramural fighting ugly, I am always proud as a Jewish journalist to be in the thick of it.

As an industry, Jewish journalism is on the ropes. Weekly newspapers have been shrinking, many dying, for more than a decade, the result of the double jeopardy of economic and ethnic upheaval.

I wish the *Forward*, its staff and its alumni only good things.

The Jewish world needs them. And if you doubt that, or are gloating over the *Forward’s* financial woes, you are arguing for a community that cannot discuss its most pressing issues honestly. You are trusting professional and volunteer stewards of multimillion-dollar nonprofits – your money, in other words – to police themselves. You are okay with tuning out political and ideological views with which you don’t agree. You are trusting the Jewish story to outsiders, and will not have the answers when others confront us with their versions of the truth.

The *Forverts* taught my Jewish immigrant grandparents how to be American. The revived *Forward* taught all of us how to think Jewishly in an era of assimilation and acculturation. I hope a new *Forward*, and all of Jewish journalism, can rebound to teach us how to argue with one another, learn from one another, and love one another.



Photo: Lewis Hine/Wikimedia Commons

Newsboys for the *Forward* wait for their copies in the early morning hours in March 1913

Meeting the African Hebrew Israelites in Joburg

>>Continued from page 12

After attending classes for a few months, Hodiell became part of the group at a graduation held at the first national gathering of the Israelites in South Africa in 2007. “Since then,” he says, “I’ve been on a journey as an individual and as a part of the African Hebrew Israelites as a whole.”

Though the kingdom has been established, the work of the faith’s members continues, he says. “We are tasked with heralding the kingdom of G-d and sending envoys around the world to share His word with humanity,” he says. “We encourage others not necessarily to convert, but to come and see what G-d has created in his kingdom in the Holy Land.” The Israelites have set ups across the globe, all of which are geared towards promoting the prominence of the kingdom in Israel.

Central to supporting this kingdom is to maintain a particular way of life. The Israelites aim to “return to the state of simplicity” in which people lived during the time of Genesis, when humanity first began.

Says Hodiell: “We strive to begin humanity anew, relying on the text of the prophets for guidance. The prophets of history all stemmed from the lineage of Abraham through blood and the power of prophecy, and we believe that we are part of that lineage.”

The Old Testament, therefore, is a key text to the Israelites, as well as the other books of the Tanach, especially the Prophets. While the group does recognise the New Testament, anything it contains which clashes with the

Old Testament is considered non-binding.

The Israelites’ lifestyle includes not eating meat. In fact, they are strictly vegan, wear clothing made of natural fibres only, and fast fairly often. They are clean living, avoiding alcohol and drugs.

While they do not form communities as such, groups of Israelites tend to live together in a certain area, though their prayers are recited individually.

Like Jews, they pray three times daily, but also allow for the inclusion of additional services as individuals. Also, like Jews, the group observes a form of Shabbat on Saturdays. While they make every effort to avoid working on Shabbat, they make an exception for those who need to work. They also fast for the duration of Shabbat.

The group also maintains a strong Hebrew education, believing it crucial to their faith and to connecting properly with the prophetic texts.

Although they are often at odds with South African society, the Israelites here remain committed to their path and their beliefs. “People need to be patient and understanding when confronted with groups which aren’t familiar to them,” says Hodiell. “We aren’t so different from many African cultures, and have much in common with other people in our country.

“Our way of life has proven itself over its 50-year history, and though we may come under fire, we’re prepared to roll with the punches.”

The 16-year-old prodigy who loves to sing

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

The talent of Shmuli Brill was recognised by a veteran cantor and singer while he was preparing for his Barmitzvah. It was almost four years ago, and Brill was singing yigdal at Sunny Road Shul in Glenhazel in preparation for his big day.

Ezra Altschuler, who himself descends from seven generations of cantors, heard Brill’s beautiful singing and took him under his wing, teaching him the basics.

Six months later, they started working together, doing musical Shabbats, chuppas, and other performances. From 2015 to 2017, while he was still just a ‘tween’, Brill was the chazzan of Sunny Road Shul.

“He was a phenomenal talent, and now he is an unbelievable singer,” Altschuler says of the young 16-year-old prodigy. Brill is making a name for himself as a liturgical singer and performer in the Jewish community and elsewhere, in spite of the fact that his voice is still breaking.

Brill has performed almost 30 chuppahs, and has even been flown to Cape Town and as far as London to sing. In 2017, he accompanied Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein to sing *Oseh Shalom* in front of 70 000 people at a National Day of Prayer at the FNB Stadium in Soweto.

Astonishingly, he started lessons with a voice coach only a few months ago. This was partly intentional, says

his mentor, Altschuler. “While his voice was changing, we wanted to let his voice be as natural as possible. We needed to find a teacher who would take his natural ability, and not try to change it.”

Brill came to live in South Africa from Israel just six years ago. He arrived with no spoken or written English. One of a family of seven children – who are all musical – he was born in Netanya, and lived in Ra’anana, Bnei Brak, and Modi’in Ilit before the family relocated to South Africa when he was 10.

“Most of my family – my grandparents, aunts, uncle, and cousins – were living in South Africa,” Brill says of the family’s relocation.

He “didn’t understand anything anyone said at first”, and had to catch up with an extra teacher in his English class at Maharsha Boys School in Johannesburg. Now in Grade 11 at Hirsch Lyons, Brill speaks English fluently, without the trace of an accent. But, fluent Hebrew has served him well, helping him to understand every word he sings, giving extra meaning and fluency to his performances.

Brill comes from a musical family on both sides. He counts at least two keyboardists, many accomplished singers, two guitarists, and a composer amongst his immediate family.

His brother Shlomo taught himself to play keyboard, and is also “an exceptionally rare talent”

Altschuler says. The talent goes back generations. His grandmother “used to sing on the radio”, and his late grandfather sang in the Sydenham Shul choir, recognised as one of the leading Orthodox male Jewish choirs in the world. The brothers often perform together.

Altschuler does not mince his words when he describes Brill as a *yeled pele* (prodigy). “I haven’t heard another talent like this,” he says. But it’s not just his musical ability but his personal qualities that make him world-class.

“First,” he says, “Shmuli has an instrument with an exceptional range. And, his harmonic ability and musicality are unparalleled.”

Other qualities that make him star material include a humility which endears him to others, a passion to do what he does, and the ability to perform. “I’ve seen people with very good voices who are unable to perform,” Altschuler says. “Shmuli is calm. He manages to contain his excitement, and use his energy. The chazzan is the link between the congregation and G-d. Shmuli takes the audience places spiritually. He has the ability to inspire the world.”

Certainly, Brill is disarmingly



grounded when he talks about performing, saying that he considers whether he has an exam scheduled for the next day when signing to do a chuppa. At the FNB Stadium, he took along his maths books to study for an exam.

His modesty is also apparent when he talks about his family. His mother, he says, has a “gorgeous voice”, so does his older brother Shlomo, who often sings and plays keyboards with him. “Honestly, I would say that I perform the most in my family, but

I’m happy to take advice from anyone.”

Brill says his first love is liturgical and “slower songs”, though he enjoys being an all-rounder and doing concerts, saying it’s fun to sing with a band. He loves to keep changing the songs for the chuppa, but leaves it up to the bride and groom to choose the songs. Usually, he meets them and practices once before performing. He warms up about 15 to 20 minutes before by doing vocal exercises.

“I’m not usually nervous,” he says. “I do get a bit nervous if I’m singing a new tune, or if I’m under pressure, for example, if I am being flown to Cape Town to perform. But, singing makes me happy.

It puts me in a good mood – even during exams. I’m very passionate about it.

Of his year as chazzan at Sunny Road Shul, he says, “I wouldn’t call it labour, I’d call it fun.”

“Sometimes, I go into another world. I close my eyes, and then I realise that I’m performing,” he says.

His dream is to get hold of a manager/agent after matric, and to sing internationally. Judging by his success so far, this dream is likely to be realised.

Emigration?
Jewish Education?
Antisemitism?
Identity?

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Youth on a mission to smash BDS

BENJI SHULMAN

More information about Israel abounds, and the only way to curtail the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement in South Africa is to educate people about the Jewish state. Noah Tradonsky – who has been a part of the year-long Diller Teen Fellowship programme – wanted to make a difference and believed this was the route.

The Diller Teen Fellowship is designed to support youth leaders in the Jewish community. It promotes the ideals of leadership and Jewish peoplehood to Jewish high school pupils. Following the programme, Diller teens need to apply the skills they have learnt to create projects to benefit the community.

Says Tradonsky, “I went on the March of the Living in 2015, and was incredibly affected by the trip.” He realised that education could be a key to helping non-Jews to understand the Jewish community and, particularly, the importance of Israel. He was also very aware of the importance of South Africa in the fight against BDS.

“It was a three or four-year process,” he says. After a couple of false starts, he approached Nicci Raz from the South African Zionist Federation which hosts the Diller programme to find the best way to put together an education programme to Israel. He also began raising funds for the trip. “Throughout Grade 11 and matric, I was meeting

businessmen and women, dealing with their PAs in between classes,” he says.

He partnered with the South African Israel Forum to send five top Christian university activists on a tour of Israel. The South Africans joined a tour bus of American students from across the country.

Masego Meyer, a medical student and part of the Anglican Students Society at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), was on Tradonsky’s tour. “The culture is dynamic; from the vibrant nightlife of Tel Aviv to the very religious atmosphere of some parts of Jerusalem,” he says.

Like him, others found that the country was not what they expected. “What I remember is when we were by the Gaza Strip, how scared I was standing there, and when we went to Yad Vashem, it just showed that there’s so much that we don’t know about Israel, yet we are so quick to reach conclusions,” said Sechy Maropola, who is doing her International Relations Honours at Wits.

This sentiment was echoed by Said Dzhavhelo Ndou, a third-year Bachelor of Accounting Science student at Wits, and chairperson of the Christian Action Fellowship. “Israel is very rich in history and its history is interesting from a political, economic, and religious point of view. Its history has great significance in understanding and appreciating the current complex political climate. Ideally every Christian should visit Israel,” he says.

Nachum Goldman Fellowship: unity within diversity

CHARISSE ZEIFERT

For South Africa Jews, the dominant narrative has long been that we arrived in this country – popularly referred to as the *Goldene Medine* (Golden Land) – escaping pogroms in Lithuania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Through small beginnings, we soon became part of the broader South African society, while also setting up formal organisations to look after our needs such as the Chevrah Kadisha to support us in the social-welfare sphere, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to protect our civil liberties, and the South African Zionist Federation to give expression to the overwhelming Zionist nature of our community (prominent since the inception of our community).

Yet, how accurate is this narrative? Professor Adam Mendelsohn questioned its authenticity while speaking at the regional Nahum Goldmann Fellowship (NGF) in Saldanha Bay last year.

He argued that economic factors rather than persecution were the main driving forces behind emigration (pogroms were, in fact, a rarity in areas from which South African Jews originated), and while most Jewish immigrants did indeed come from Lithuania, a sizeable number were from other parts of Eastern Europe, including Poland, Belarus, and the Ukraine.

These facts were important, Mendelsohn said, because the stories we tell ourselves about our past are bound to have an impact on our future, and hence they need to be constantly revisited and re-evaluated. Historical narratives are rarely clear-cut and straightforward.

The NGF is one of the flagship projects of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, which promotes Jewish peoplehood by supporting and developing the next generation of scholars and leaders in Jewish communities around the world. Its aim is to engage young Jews to think seriously about what it means to be Jewish, and certainly, as far as many of us can relate to the above story, questions about Jewish identity are never simple.

From that weekend in Saldanha Bay alone, it is clear that

our Jewish community is more heterogeneous than many people realise. Using the “safe space” provided by the forum, participants from a wide array of backgrounds discussed the issues facing South African Jewry, as well as their own Jewish journeys.

Some of the personal stories included that of a woman from the Indian community who has since recently completed her conversion to orthodox Judaism. She spoke about why she had chosen Judaism over her religion of birth, and the reaction to her decision from her family and our community. Another woman shared her tale of coming from a mixed marriage, with a Jewish father and Christian mother. Never feeling accepted by the mainstream community, she became involved in extreme anti-Israel movements, and found herself confronting community members who were attending Zionist functions. She began to feel increasingly isolated, and although she maintains many of her views, she is seeking to come back into mainstream Jewry.

An orthodox participant shared his concern about the insular nature of religious South African Jewry, and how hard it is in certain forums to advocate more liberal approaches to Jewish issues. Many shared personal struggles to fit in, and said that what was lacking in our community were forums in which people felt comfortable sharing their stories with one another.

Yet, amidst all the gripes, there was recognition of the warmth and cohesiveness of South African Jewry.

Jews in this country are proudly heterogenous. We have communities within communities, and a whole host of sub-groups. They all have their own unique history and can only enhance our collective Jewish identity. Once we break down barriers, we may find that while we may not agree on every aspect of religious or Zionist affiliation, we still have an underlying commonality that unites us.

• Charisse Zeifert heads up the communications department at the SAJBD, and hosts a show, ‘Jewish Board Talk’, on Chai FM.

The stories we tell ourselves about our past are bound to have an impact on our future...

Most South African Jews of Sephardi origin are entitled to EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT

A common misconception is that South African Jews of Ashkenazi heritage are of Lithuanian descent, and that only those who are able to prove their eligibility for Lithuanian citizenship are able to obtain a European passport. The fact is that most South African Jews do qualify for European citizenship, whether they can prove their Lithuanian lineage or not, and most South African Jews of Sephardic heritage are also eligible for European passports.



Adv. Avi Horesh has in-depth knowledge of the applicable legislation and in his experience, the majority of South African Jews have ancestors who were illegally deprived of citizenship. As their descendants, these Jews are eligible for European citizenship which will result in them obtaining an EU passport.

Ashkenazi: It is important to understand that until 1918, all of Eastern Europe was divided between three empires: Russia,

Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian empire. Neither Poland nor Lithuania existed until 1918.

At the end of WWI, the territory was divided, and countries like Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and others were born/ reborn. Only then did residents became citizens of these countries. As a result, people who, for example, were born in Riga (nowadays Latvia) could actually be Lithuanian or Polish.

Horesh advises that eligibility for a Lithuanian or Polish passport depends on the city from which your grandparents (or their parents) hailed.

Horesh says many South African Ashkenazi Jews of Lithuanian origin have been refused Lithuanian citizenship because their heritage is actually Polish. They would, accordingly, be entitled to Polish citizenship and a EU passport.

After World War II, the borders in Europe changed, resulting in cities changing nationality. The resultant effect for descendants of Jews who were born in Vilnius, for example, is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined, but an application for a Polish passport may very well be successful.

Sephardi: The descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are most likely eligible for a Portuguese



passport. If applicable, Horesh is able to obtain an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which an application for European citizenship can be made and will most likely be successful. Portuguese citizenship enables one to enter the Unites States without the need to apply for a visa.

In addition, Horesh is filing many applications for descendants of Sephardi origin who arrived in South Africa from Greece, Turkey, and North Africa. Descendents from other countries in the Middle East – even Holland – are also potentially eligible.

Horesh resides in Israel, but has spent seven years in Poland, and is recognised as a leading lawyer in the field of European citizenship, with a full

understanding of local immigration laws.

Living in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – offers him quick and easy access to Poland and Lithuania, Accordingly, he is able to work closely with local professionals who assist him in tracing the documentation required for successful applications for European citizenship.

In addition, and as a result of his close ties with Portuguese authorities, to date he has had a 100% success rate with applications for Portuguese citizenship.

Horesh is available to discuss your specific details. He is often in South Africa, and can meet you in person to discuss your specific needs.

I will be in Cape Town from 31 January to 5 February and Johannesburg from 6 to 9 February. Please contact me for an appointment. My South African phone number is +27 64 745 5273 • Email me on adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

Are we biting the hand that helps the community?



HOWARD FELDMAN

There is no doubting the financial pressures that South Africans are experiencing across the country. Years of slow economic growth, a weakening currency, and the looting of resources has created a perfect storm. The cash crunch is tangible.

For the Jewish community, this has been compounded by the cost of tuition at private Jewish schools, programmes to Israel, and the inherent cost of leading a “kosher” lifestyle. Shabbat, *chaggim* (holidays), larger families, Barmitzvahs, Batmitzvahs, and weddings all contribute to a community seemingly straining under the pressure.

Just over a year ago, I spoke to two entities who were attempting to reduce this burden. Friends Restaurant lowered the itemised prices on its menu and tried to make eating kosher more accessible. Maharsha School reduced the cost of tuition significantly in order to reduce the number of students who required assistance, and to give dignity back to parents.

Friends has closed for financial reasons.

The Maharsha model, on the other hand, seems to be working. To understand the reasons for its success, I chatted to Rabbi Menachem Raff, who has championed the cause. He believes that because he has made school fees accessible to his parent body, non-payment – and therefore the need for subsidies – has become rare.

He insists that parents set up “stop-orders” on the beginning of each month so that payment is more or less assured. More importantly, it allows for a dramatic reduction in the cost of interest, a saving that can be passed on to parents.

But like any school, no matter what parents are charged, there is always a shortfall, and this is something he continues to deal with.

A recent social-media post listed the cost of all the Jewish schools in Johannesburg. More revealing than the chart was the comments that followed. Most interesting was the fact that there seemed to be a need to “discount” why the Maharsha model could not apply to other schools.

It reminded me of years back when car jackings were commonplace. There was always someone who would ask what car the victim was driving, and then sigh audibly when told it was a car that they didn’t drive. There might even have been head shaking and victim blaming, because blaming the driver means that it can’t happen to us. We needed to find reasons why it can’t apply to us.

The financial strain on the community is significant. Anyone who does not see clearly chooses not to. The cost of leading an observant Jewish life places additional strain on people, and not dealing with this crisis places our community further at risk.

We can no longer pretend that “car jackings” happen only to those who drive cars that are different to ours. If the Maharsha model doesn’t work for another school, then that school needs to find a model that does. Choosing to find reasons to distance ourselves is to ignore one of the most fundamental challenges our community is facing.

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Sunday (27 January)

- Second Innings hosts Silke Kaiser, polygraphist and author, on *Sex with Sociopaths – The Trauma – Bonded Relationships*. Time: tea at 10:00. Meeting at 10:30. Venue: Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres, Sandringham. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors, includes tea and light refreshments. Contact: Linda Fleishman 011 532 9701.
- Nechama Growth from Grief support group. Time: tea from 09:30, group starts at 10:00, to 11:30. Venue: Jossel Card Room, Ground Floor, Golden Acres, Sandringham. No need to book. Contact Linda Fleishman 011 532 9701.
- The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) in partnership with the Embassy of France and the United Nations Information Centre invite you to a commemorative lecture in honour of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Keynote speaker Professor Renee Poznanski will explore the topic *Being Jewish in France in World War II*. Time: 15:00 for 15:30. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP to dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.
- Pretoria Hebrew Congregation launches Rabbi Dr David Nassel’s new book, *The Upside-Down Tree of Life: Lessons for virtuous living based on the weekly Torah reading*, as well as a second-hand Jewish book sale. Time: 16:00. Venue: PHC, 246 Schroder Street, Groenkloof, Pretoria. Free admission. Copies of the new book will be available for R250. Contact: JP Burke, paysach12@gmail.com, or 072 384 1001.

Wednesday (30 January)

- Jewish Learning Institute course with Rabbi Ari Kievman discussing *Judaism and the Death Penalty*. Time: Morning: 09:45 to 11:15.

Venue: Chabad House, 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Evening: 19:15 to 20:45 at Sandton Central Shul, 8 Stella Street, Sandton, opposite Gautrain. Contact: www.jli.org.za, 011 440 6600 or jli@chabad.org.za

- *Davening for Beginners*, a new series with Chaim Bancroft, offers a step-by-step guide in how to pray in shul and what the prayers actually mean. Time: 12:30. Venue: Chabad House, 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: 011 440 6600.

Thursday (31 January)

- JHGC host a public lecture by Professor Mario Barenghi on *Bearing Witness: Primo Levi and the Memory of the Holocaust*. Time: 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP to dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.
- Hebrew speakers meet at 10:45. Venue: Beyachad building, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.
- Sandton Seniors Club meets at 10:15 at Chabad Riverclub, 33 Marico Road, cnr Ballyclare Road. Contact: Rabbi Ari Kievman, rak@chabad.org.za, 011 440 6600.

Monday through Friday

- Chabad Seniors Club includes memory enhancement, dynamic shiurim, transport, a delicious lunch, tech tutors and more. Time: 09:00 to 13:00 at Chabad House, 37 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Contact: Rabbi Ari Kievman 011 440 6600, rak@chabad.org.za



Israel trip leads to greater objectivity for SA journalists

>>Continued from page 5

given more than a bird’s-eye view of the region. Among many varied experiences, they met Arab-Israeli and Israeli journalists. They heard explanations about the complexities of the conflict from leading academics. They met a former Gazan resident now living in the West Bank who tries to bring about reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. They toured Ramallah; visited Yasser Arafat’s tomb; met Nidal Fqaha, the Director General of the Palestinian Peace Coalition; and they visited Sderot close to the Gaza border.

Mahomed said she was convinced that “objective leadership” was needed in South Africa if it was to play a meaningful role in the conflict.

“South Africa can have a positive impact, given its relationship with the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, and can bring the sides together. As journalists, we need to question the integrity of the efforts South Africa wants to make around the conflict, and hold the government accountable to the role it could be playing.”

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Tu B'Shvat sparks green shoots of awareness

Tu B'Shvat is an ecological holiday that reminds Jews of our connection with the earth and our responsibility for looking after the environment. On Tu B'Shvat, we celebrate the wonders of the natural world.

As winter comes to an end, and the trees of Israel start to blossom, Jews around the globe take the opportunity to make their environment better and raise awareness of how important it is.

In the spirit of growth and renewal which characterises Tu B'Shvat, pupils at various Jewish schools this week celebrated the new year of the trees with an array of vibrant and exciting projects.

From innovative works of art to tree planting, these activities captured the sense of excitement which defines new beginnings and opportunities.

As these photos show, the pupils made the most of the opportunity to show off their talents, and make the world a little greener and more environmentally-aware.

Eden College Lyndhurst: Jordan Cowling, Daniel Kerem, Holly Leibowitz and Erin Silverberg



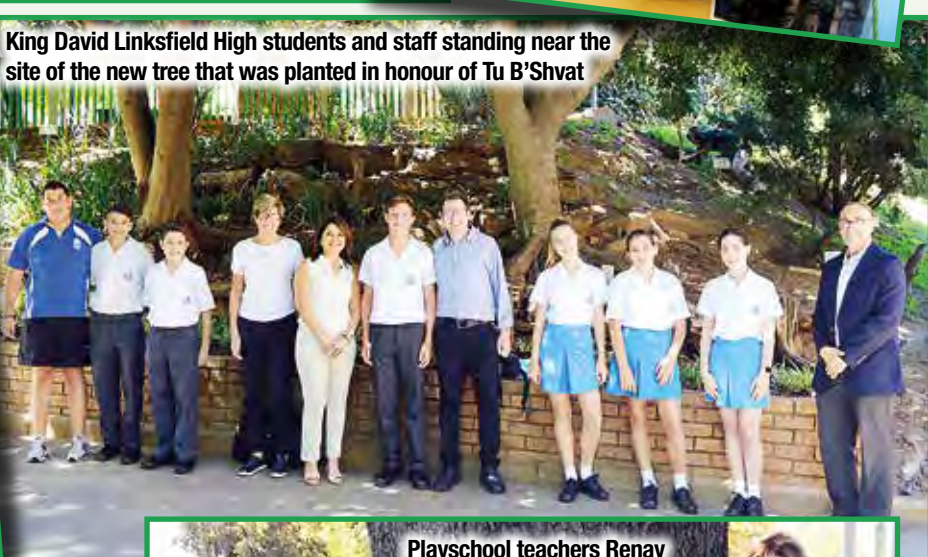
Ella Jude from Alon Ashel used clay to create a tree



Tu B'Shvat celebrations at Herzlia Constantia



King David Linksfield High students and staff standing near the site of the new tree that was planted in honour of Tu B'Shvat



Playschool teachers Renay Jacks and Lara Riback discussing trees with their class at King David Linksfield Pre-Primary



King David Ariel: Mrs Julie Widmonte, Shiri Chernick and Aryeh Herring



Jesse Kaveberg, Rafael Berkowitz, Raph Kalinko, Jake Kalinko and Danny Kalinko loving trees at Sydenham Pre-Primary



Leor Netzer, Avi Cobb, Ariel Benjamin and Akiva Rosen from Torah Academy Boys' High School,



Ruby Chimes at King David Rosabelle Klein Nursery School



The King David Victory Park matric students planted a fig tree in the Biblical Garden



King David Sandton kids getting their hands dirty



Shane Sacharowitz celebrating Tu B'Shvat at Minnie Bersohn Nursery School



King David Victory Park Primary grade 1s plant a tree on their playground with Mrs Yoseffa Becker and Rabbi Ricky Seeff



At King David Linksfield Junior Primary the new Grade 1s planted trees in celebration of Tu B'Shvat



Herzlia matrics celebrating Tu B'Shvat



Sarina Meyers and Rafaela Cosani in the King David Victory Park Pre-Primary veggie patch



Hero? Villain? Who gets to blow that strong whistle?



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

When a bold man raises his head too far above the parapet, he risks having his head chopped off. By either side.

Angelo Agrizzi, the key whistleblower on corruption in the ANC and elsewhere, who is appearing at Judge Zondo’s Commission into State Capture, must be aware of this irony. He has become a champion of a strange kind to some. He will be remembered not only for past wrongdoing as chief operating officer of Bosasa, a channel for billions in laundered money, but for his act of coming clean about the slew of powerful individuals involved, many of whom are struggle heroes who want him to shut up. The death threats against him are not surprising.

His revelations debunk the naïve notion

that struggle heroes are by default honourable people. A procession of them have turned out to be dirty and corrupt, ranging from former President Jacob Zuma downwards. People ask: is there anybody out there who is still to be trusted?

It is confusing, this switching of identities from hero to scoundrel, and vice versa. It’s a theme of our times. Perhaps life was always like that, but it is often heard around dinner tables nowadays that it’s hard to tell the good guys from the bad. A nostalgia exists for less confusing days.

What to do with the Watson family from the Eastern Cape, for example, who bravely opposed apartheid, and were members of the then-banned ANC and South African Communist Party?

“Cheeky” Watson refused to participate in trials for the 1976 Springbok team, instead playing rugby in black townships, thus breaking segregation laws. This made him a local hero. Later, he used his high-level contacts to accumulate huge, illegal wealth.

During apartheid, most people knew the racist system was bad, whether they opposed it or not. During World War II, most knew Germany was an enemy. In South Africa today, ordinary people instinctively reject corruption, but don’t appreciate its extent as the biggest threat to the country. They don’t realise that, more than racism, corruption could destroy our country.

The villain-hero dichotomy goes beyond our borders. Robert Mugabe, once a hero of Zimbabwe’s struggle to rid his country of the English oppressors, changed into the villain once he got used to being in power. He almost destroyed the country with corruption and authoritarian rule, and by refusing to relinquish power. Zimbabwe has since stumbled from one catastrophe to another. However, many today long for the stability he brought.

The identity switching cuts across generation and race. A lecturer at Wits University says that when she mentions the name of anti-apartheid music icon Johnny Clegg to black students, they call him an “old white man” not worth knowing

about, denying him another identity regardless of what he did. Other white faculty report similar occurrences. Minority communities, such as Jews and Greeks, experience similar blanket labelling, with little attempt at unpicking nuances.

Confusion about identity isn’t just political, but social. Billionaire Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, was once regarded as the hero who would democratise information and communication away from the clutches of people with nefarious interests. Facebook is so intertwined with modern life, one cannot imagine being without it. But it is as much a channel for hate as for good – a ‘Big Brother’ collecting data about people and sinisterly watching their habits. Zuckerberg might be seen by future historians as a Stalin manipulating the masses rather than a hero.

Is the Zondo enquiry useful or futile for tackling corruption? There is no way to know yet, but if it gives the Agrizzis of this world a strong enough whistle to blow, it might just be the former.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Poll-registration drive encourages Jewish youth to get on voters’ roll

As reported last week, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has been conducting a nationwide voter-registration drive to encourage Jewish community members to make sure that they are registered to vote in the upcoming national and provincial elections.

To that end, we have been engaging with the schools and the South African Union of Jewish Students to encourage all of our young, first-time voters who have not yet done so to get their names and details onto the voters’ roll.

In addition to first-time voters, those already on the roll whose details have changed also need to visit their relevant IEC registration station to ensure that their information is up to date come election time. For more details, refer to our advertisement in this week’s *SA Jewish Report*.

it marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945, was designated by the United Nations General Assembly to be the day to remember the six million Jewish and other victims of Nazi tyranny, and foster the development of educational programmes aimed at preventing the recurrence of such atrocities.

For this year’s commemoration, the World Jewish Congress has once again launched a worldwide #WeRemember campaign, in which people are asked to take a photograph of themselves holding a “We Remember” sign and either post it online with #WeRemember, or send it to weremember@wjc.org. I encourage everyone to join in this solemn demonstration of solidarity and commemoration.

also owe Koseff a lasting debt of gratitude for all the friendship, support, and generous assistance he has shown the Jewish community, with which he wholeheartedly identifies.

From the perspective of the board, his assistance over the years has been invaluable, and this is equally true of a range of other Jewish organisations. Koseff recently stepped down as chief executive of investment banking giant Investec, of which he is a

co-founder, and whose remarkable success both locally and abroad has been in great part due to his skill, foresight, and bold initiatives.

We warmly thank him for everything he has given to our community, and salute him for multiple contributions to the development of our economy and society.

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

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies



Above Board
Shaun Zagnoev

The board’s voter-registration drive forms part of its broader pre-election education and awareness campaign, which I will report on in this column as it unfolds over the next four months.

Remembering the victims of Nazism
Also taking place this weekend, on Sunday 27 January, is International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This date, chosen because

Tribute to a great Jewish South African
The highlight of the board’s Gauteng Council conference last November was an exchange of perspectives on South Africa’s challenges and prospects between President Cyril Ramaphosa and renowned business leader Stephen Koseff.

As a community, we were proud to be represented by someone who has combined extraordinary success in the business world with a passionate commitment to working for the betterment of the country as a whole. We

Letters

BITTER LAWSUIT NOT CONSTRUCTIVE IN PALUCH TRAGEDY

Your front-page headline in the first edition of the paper for 2019 states, “Soccer-goaltop tragedy far from over”. It will never be over, because the pain of losing a child remains with you for as long as you are breathing. I walk in those footsteps.

I pity the Paluch family, because as long as they keep this feud alive, they will not begin to deal with their pain. Blame, accusation, and anger are the first part of the grieving process. It is only when you let go of these feelings that you can move on.

“On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.” Perhaps they should rather institute a lawsuit against G-d, and place blame on this decree. It seems to me that their spiralling legal costs must be covered by some benefactor with misplaced ideals, since legal costs become large amounts in a short time.

I would feel greater sympathy if they used this money to engage engineers to draw up specifications for the securing of goal posts, and then travelled the length and breadth of South Africa to ensure that every school and sports club adhered to these safety measures. Something good could then come out of something bad.

Extorting money from the school and its insurers cannot ease the pain of their loss. Their anger and bitterness would be constructive if it was directed rather at a concrete project to ensure the safety of other children. They say repeatedly that this is their aim. As a wise man said: there are three sides to every story. The loss of a young life is tragic enough. Punitive bitterness does not reflect well. – **Yvonne Kaplan, Johannesburg**

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



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