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■ Volume 23 – Number 6 ■ 22 February 2019 ■ 17 Adar 1 5779

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## DIRCO – cream on top of the Clover deal

NICOLA MILTZ

“There is no economic ban on Israel whatsoever,” International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Minister Lindiwe Sisulu told a packed media briefing on Tuesday.

This was in response to questions following her press conference at department headquarters on the upcoming national elections and matters of foreign policy.

By saying this, Sisulu potentially breathed new life into the dissolving multibillion rand, foreign-direct-investment (FDI) Clover buyout deal. The Boycott, Divest, Sanctions SA (BDS-SA) movement has been doing its best to scupper the deal because of its connection with Israel. BDS-SA’s actions also seriously undermine the strides made by President Cyril Ramaphosa to attract vital FDI to South Africa, business experts said.

Sisulu told journalists that Israel was bidding to buy Clover, South Africa’s largest dairy producer. “There is no economic ban in this country on Israel whatsoever, and we will allow the normal bidding processes to follow through,” she said.

She went on to answer a question about the African National Congress’s (ANC’s) resolution to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel, saying that the government was bound by the resolutions of the ANC (the governing party). “When we have found a way of abiding by the resolution of the ANC that does not disrupt our normal activities either in our country or any relations that may have been established in Israel, we will go ahead and inform you,” she said.

The proposed R4.8 billion deal for Israel’s Central Bottling Company (CBC) to purchase Clover Industries turned sour after pressure from BDS-SA on Brimstone Investment, a JSE-listed black-empowerment investment company which formed

part of the bidding group led by Tel Aviv-based CBC. Brimstone was forced to “review” its role in the transaction following pressure from the anti-Israel lobbyists.

The ANC Youth League (ANCYL), however, didn’t appear to get government’s “hands-off-Clover-deal” memo. The ANCYL this week issued a statement distancing itself from the views expressed by Rhulani Thembi Siweya, who sits on its national executive committee, in an article she wrote which was published in the *Daily Maverick* last week.

Siweya, the founder of Africa Unmasked – an online platform for Africans to deal with African problems – wrote an opinion piece in which she criticised the BDS for its “reckless” handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This article went viral within the Jewish community.

In her article, Siweya states, “BDS-SA ought to listen to what ordinary Palestinians yearn for. Its messaging on Palestine is not coherent, and fails to benefit the Palestinians living in Palestine. The BDS-SA policy that Israel has no right to exist, and that South Africa must not pursue policies that are in its own best economic interests, must be dismissed.

“The trajectory taken by BDS-SA to selectively discriminate against entrepreneurial and business opportunities by corporations linked to Israel, if not challenged, may lead to a huge collapse of the South African economy and ultimately lead to unwarranted job losses.”

She accused the anti-Israel lobby group of ignoring South Africa’s realities, and of undermining the country’s national imperative to create an inclusive economy for all, especially the poor masses.

Siweya pointed out the double standards and hypocrisy of BDS-SA, saying that she found it “strange” that it “selectively singles out” only the Israeli “occupation”, while South

Africa continues to enjoy bilateral trade relations with many other “occupations”. She went on to list them.

BDS-SA was “deafeningly silent” about such occupations, she said.

“Something does not add up here. BDS-SA must be consistent. So far, it is suspiciously selective, and to South Africa’s detriment. Who is really paying the price for BDS-SA interfering in South Africa’s economy? The answer – South

is clear, Israel is an abnormal state, and no normal relations should exist with an abnormal regime!”

It reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian struggle and the BDS movement – both in congress resolutions as well as through practical action. “We often co-operate on events and our leaders have been hosted by BDS-SA, their partners, and the larger solidarity movement.”

“We do not believe that apartheid

blackmail us and our foreign policy by threatening to increase the price of milk for ordinary South Africans.

“We want our people to own our wealth. This so called ‘investment’ is actually a take-over, not a new investment, it is merely the shifting of ownership away from South Africa, with no notable value added.”

There was an all-pervading silence from Siweya, who is a former student leader and youth



Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Lindiwe Sisulu at Tuesday’s press briefing

African workers.”

The ANCYL, meanwhile, has reiterated its unwavering support for BDS and its disdain for Israel.

The organisation put out a statement on 18 February clarifying its position on Palestine and the Clover deal. It said, “The message

Israel and its corporations are suitable investors for one of our key commodities. As the YL, we do not support the exporting of our profits to an oppressive regime like Israel and its companies.

“If the deal were to proceed, Israel, through its companies, could

activist, after her article went out. Siweya does weekly radio shows and writes opinion pieces for several publications throughout the continent examining current issues. However, when the *SA Jewish Report* reached out to her this week, she chose not to comment.

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## Middle East peace prospects waning, says UN envoy

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African government believes that “peace in Palestine remains elusive”. This is according to a statement put out late on Wednesday night by UN Ambassador Jerry Matjila, the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations.

Matjila was responding to a fairly comprehensive briefing on the Middle East by Nickolay Mladenov, Special Co-ordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. What is essential for any move towards peace, said Mladenov, was “leadership that believes that peace is possible through negotiation and an international community willing to support both sides in finding a resolution”. He added that the Middle East crisis should never be seen as being “about Israel or Palestine, but rather about Israel and Palestine”.

“As time goes on, we have seen the positions of the Israelis and Palestinians growing further and further apart,” said Matjila.

He expressed concern about the “dire humanitarian situation” of more than



Jerry Matjila

two million Palestinians living in Gaza, of which 50% are children.

“The people of Gaza desperately need humanitarian assistance. In that connection, we wish to call upon the international community to continue to support UNRWA [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East], which continues to play a pivotal role in providing basic services for the people of Palestine.”

Matjila expressed South Africa’s regret that the Israeli government had decided not to renew the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) after 22 years of dedicated

service to both Palestinians and Israelis. The TIPH was a unilateral agreement made between Israel and the Palestinians to have a civilian observer mission in the West Bank to ensure that neither side breached international humanitarian law.

This decision, he said, “clearly undermines one of the few confidence-building mechanisms between the Palestinians and the Israelis.” And it will have “negative implications on the Middle East peace process.”

Matjila reiterated South Africa’s position in support of a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders. “We, as part of the international community, support and encourage both parties towards this endeavour. Dialogue and negotiation remains the only way forward to finding a lasting solution.”

He said South Africa was elected onto the security council to work with other member states for a long-lasting peace in the Middle East, and that the council should show consistency and act to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

### World News in Brief

#### Man shot outside Paris synagogue

French police arrested two teenagers in Paris on suspicion that they had wounded a person while firing an air rifle at a synagogue on Shabbat.

The teenagers, aged 15 and 16, are being investigated as suspects in an anti-Semitic hate crime for the incident. They lightly wounded a passer-by near the synagogue of Sarcelles on Friday by shooting a lead projectile into his calf, the AFP news agency reported on Tuesday.

Moïse Kahloun, the president of the Jewish community of Sarcelles,

said he did not believe the attack was anti-Semitic. “This is not an anti-Semitic attack, just kids who shot at random.”

#### Sanders running for president again

Bernie Sanders officially launched his campaign for president in 2020 on Tuesday, with an email to supporters and a tweet that included a nearly two-minute video and a request for support.

Sanders, 77, is an Independent, but is seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party following his unsuccessful bid in 2016. He is a

self-described democratic socialist.

Sanders has been an outspoken critic of how Israel handles its relationship with the Gaza Strip while decrying what he sees as a double standard applied to Israel.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

### Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:16	Johannesburg
19:14	20:05	Cape Town
18:15	19:09	Durban
18:15	19:27	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:36	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:26	East London

### Torah Thought

#### Torah stories for grown-ups

It boggles the mind. Why is so much Torah-coverage given to the subject of an elaborate tent-structure called the tabernacle? The verses that relate to the tabernacle’s construction seem to go on and on. They fill not one, but four weekly portions.

Not only this, but the tabernacle was a temporary structure, commissioned for the one-time journey from Egypt back to the promised land. We no longer have the tabernacle, nor do we anticipate it ever coming back.

The only break in the Torah’s long story of the tabernacle is the short story of the golden calf. Due to a miscalculation, the Jewish people thought that Moses was not coming down from Mount Sinai. So they made a golden calf. If that’s not bad enough, they worshipped it. This is more than mind-boggling. It’s utterly crazy.

Our rabbis make an interesting connection between these two stories. They say that the building of the tabernacle,

the longer story, was an atonement – the antidote – for the shorter story, the sin of the golden calf.

More than a double story, this sounds like a tall story. How is the building of a tabernacle the opposite of worshipping a golden calf?

With a bit of thought we should be able to get to the bottom of the story. To “worship a calf” means to admire the traits of a calf. And the main trait of a calf is to suckle milk from its mother. The Jewish people at that time fell into the mistaken notion of adopting a relationship with G-d that is comparable to that of a calf that suckles from its mother’s milk. Not only did they admire this type of relationship, they held it in the highest esteem. In their eyes it was golden.

Their mistake was that they misunderstood the Torah’s message of the tabernacle. The Torah does not commission construction for the sake of a tabernacle – a place to get close to G-d. On the contrary,

it commissions a tabernacle for the sake of construction

– an opportunity to be similar to G-d. The construction of the Tabernacle was to teach us the importance of being constructive. First, we were meant to construct a model – a tabernacle, then a building – a temple, then a city, followed by the construction of a country, and ultimately a better world.

When G-d gave the Torah to us, his children, he did not give it to us as children’s stories. He gave it to us as an adult read – a guidebook on how to grow up and become his adult partners in constructing a better world. As our rabbis teach on Isaiah’s reference to us as *bunayich* – G-d’s children, “Don’t read *bunayich* – G-d’s children – but *bonayich* – G-d’s builders.”

So what should truly boggle the mind is the fact that the construction of the tabernacle occupies a mere four portions of the Torah.



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Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Herby Rosenberg, Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benji Porter. Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.



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# Leaders object to axing of country communities rabbi

TALI FEINBERG

In November last year, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) announced that it was bringing Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft's tenure as country communities' rabbi to an end and shutting down its country communities department, at the end of 2019.

But leaders of Jewish country communities believe that this will leave Jews around the country in the lurch, and the graves of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents forgotten and neglected.

Since the announcement in November, the status quo has remained in place. "Currently, the work of the department continues as usual, and will continue as such until the end of this year," says SAJBD Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev. "In the meantime, discussions and exploratory meetings regarding the future nature and form of this community service are ongoing. The one area which has already received much attention is to ensure that trusts established by defunct communities are administered optimally."

Ann Harris, the President of the African Jewish Congress and a member of the Hermanus Hebrew Congregation, says that while she appreciates the complexities of the situation, "These actions show a lack of understanding of the foundations of the South African Jewish community. History and tradition is being pushed aside."

In addition, she points out that "there has been no transparency in the way this issue is being handled. There has been no proper communication with the community or affiliates."

"There are few men in the country who really understand the position of Jews in South Africa, and Rabbi Silberhaft is one of them. Now is not the time to get rid of proven leaders," says Barney Horwitz, the leader of the Jewish community in Kimberley.

He points to the fact that looking after cemeteries is extremely difficult for any community, and that this may fall to the wayside if a travelling rabbi is not there to assist. "We have two here, and I am struggling. We have even had to put security guards outside one of them. The least we owe to our grandparents and parents is that their graves are maintained."

Horwitz says that Jews in outlying areas have an important role to play. "At every major government function in this area, I am asked to deliver an address or prayer. Cyril Ramaphosa's first appearance as President was in Kimberley, so suddenly my speech was the first thing he heard as president from the South African Jewish community. Who did I call

on to make sure I said the right thing? Rabbi Silberhaft. If there is no travelling rabbi, who will we call upon? Judaism does not end where Johannesburg ends."

He says urban Jewish communities are shrinking, and many will have 50 families or less with no rabbi, making the role of a travelling rabbi even more urgent.

Michael Waks of Klerksdorp says that while he understands the board's reasoning, "Without Moshe, we would have been lost. We get no support or assistance from anyone else. By June or July every year, he has organised Yom Tov for us. He even found a Jewish woman in Klerksdorp that we had no idea about. That's the kind of thing he does."



Spencer Erling of the Hermanus Hebrew Congregation, speaking in his personal capacity, says he heard that Rabbi Silberhaft had been accused of being "more interested in the dead than the living" because of his care and interest in the upkeep of small community cemeteries. "Clearly this accuser has not had the distressing experience of arriving at a desecrated cemetery where their loved ones are at rest. The board clearly has taken no cognisance of what he has done for living Jewish communities in outlying areas of South Africa.

"I believe that the board has not consulted with Rabbi Silberhaft's congregants and has thus seriously misjudged him and the important work he has done in keeping *yiddishkeit* alive in country districts. There has to be more to Judaism than to run a profitable organisation, which appears to be the main reason for its actions."

"There is no reason to divide our community further, and abandoning country communities is throwing away our history," says Perry Feldman of Parys. "Did you know that forty years ago there were 52 separate communities in the Free State? And in Senekal [in the Free



Yom Ha'atzmaut in the Blue Lounge at the Drostdy Hotel, Graaff-Reinet, 1959

State], there are Jewish graves with Dutch on them. If we neglect our graves, we will lose our connection to the past. Diaspora Jews who have left South Africa should also contribute to the maintenance of the cemeteries they left behind.

"Rabbi Silberhaft has achieved what no other country communities' rabbi has achieved,"

says Feldman, who has lived in Parys for most of his life. "There was a funeral in Kroonstad and he asked me to be there to help fill the grave. I drove the 80

kilometres to get there, because that's what people do for Rav Silberhaft. We need to find a way to allow him to carry on his work. If we don't look after ourselves, no one else will."

David Rade, the head of the Hermanus Hebrew Congregation but speaking in his own capacity, says Rabbi Silberhaft has played a major role in the establishment of their new shul over the past decade. "Honestly and truly, I don't believe another person can take his place. Who will take matza to an individual in the middle of nowhere? Who will maintain the cemeteries? When I visited a small town recently, an Afrikaner man told me, 'If not for the Jews, this town wouldn't exist.' And when a fire threatened the Hermanus shul, people who were not Jews arrived to help us. They value our presence. We are important in every country area. To let that go would be a travesty."

Silberhaft says he is grateful to the SAJBD for allowing him to offer this service to Jews across the length and breadth of South Africa for the past quarter century. "I have been very privileged to do what is my passion for half my life," he says, pointing out that every Jew is important, no matter how isolated or unobservant they are. "To turn our back on them – that is not Jewish thinking."

But if a new "home" is needed for this work, Silberhaft proposes a new, independent organisation, managed by country community leaders, funded by its assets, and employing him to continue his work. This would also allow him to train an understudy for when he retires.

"This is certainly one of the possibilities under consideration," says Zagnoev. "A lot would obviously depend on ensuring the financial viability of such a body, which in turn would mean establishing a sufficiently large capital base by adding to existing trust funds that have been set up in the names of various defunct country communities over the years."

Among the possibilities being considered is for the different regions of the SAJBD to take over the responsibility of looking after communities and cemetery maintenance in their particular area, with national oversight.

"We are not 'abandoning' country communities," Zagnoev says. "On the contrary, we are exploring a more sustainable way to ensure that these communities will continue to be cared for over the longer term."

"It should be remembered that when it first became apparent that country communities were declining and needed the support of the main centres to ensure the continuance of Jewish life in their localities, it was the SAJBD that stepped up to the plate and established a special department for this purpose."

"This work has been carried out without interruption and with much dedication for the past 70 years, over time extending not just to assisting communities, but even helping in cases where only one or two individuals remain in a particular town or village."



Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft

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# Why Israel and apartheid can never be the same thing



## OPINION

Haafizah Bhamjee

**W**e have all heard the term before, and either flinched, cringed, or nodded our heads. The words “apartheid Israel” have become a term so often used in the discourse around Israeli-Palestinian conflict that we have somewhat lost our ability to think critically about its use.

But what does the term really imply, is it accurate, and what implications does it have for the remembrance of apartheid, as it were, here in South Africa?

Let us take a step back for a moment and remember apartheid. Apartheid was a social, political, and economic system of power premised on the basis of race. This is complicated by the history of the key word in that description: race.

The history of the word race is complex. Going back even a mere thirty or forty years would afford you with a completely distinct connotative meaning of the word. Apartheid, which was established in 1948, premised its workings on a racial ideology of white supremacy that championed the establishment of racial category premised on biology.

The biological fixation here is necessary to understand the thinking that went into the engineering of apartheid. Biology was the key tenant of the whole system. This way of thinking about race can be broken down into three elements: 1. Race is defined by physical characteristics, for example skin colour and hair

texture. But also, height, the proportionality of facial features and the shape/size of anatomy. 2. Different races are indicative of different stages of human evolution. This view also underpinned theories of racial superiority and the belief that certain races are mentally or psychologically “advanced”. 3. Because of the aforementioned traits, different races are cut out for different climates, different types of environments, and different living conditions. Thus, segregation.

Today, we understand race differently. For us, as residents of an ever globalising world, race is subject to ideas of geography, and is much more tied to location than biology. A person’s race is determined by their geographic ancestry.

In an even more distinct past, pre 1900, race referred to class or family name which is why Celtic whites were considered a different race to English whites.

From this, we see that the term race is not stagnant, and because of this when we undress the meaning of apartheid the very time-conscious connotative meaning of the word must be applied.

But why do we need to be conscious of time-specific meaning? Aren’t all words constantly shifting their meaning? Yes. Most of the words we use in everyday language used to mean different things in the past. However, even in our language we often reserve certain terms for certain historical events. For example, the term “holocaust” is a historically preserved word with a specific and definite meaning. Subjecting a historical term to everyday use ensures that the word becomes devoid of meaning. Attempting to appropriate the word “apartheid” to mean something that is not the historical event, contributes to a denialism or an erasure of apartheid as it occurred in South Africa.

During apartheid, our mothers, fathers, and



grandparents were subjected to humiliating bodily inspection including the infamous pencil test in which pencils were stuck into people’s hair to determine their race. Does this happen in Palestine? Absolutely not. In fact, Palestinian is not a race as such. It’s an ethnic identity. There are no biological criteria for the word Palestinian. Palestinian might be considered, by some, as a race today, but subject it to the scrutiny of apartheid logic, and it is not a race. In fact in apartheid logic, Palestinians, like all Arabs, would be considered Caucasian. Which is why the world’s best known champions of that version or ideology of race, the Nazis in Germany, considered many Arab leaders to be their allies. Therefore, it is impossible to have an “apartheid” against Palestinians as an ethnic identity.

Furthermore, apartheid was a deeply economic system that maintained a white utopia on the backs of black labourers. How was this achieved? Through the accumulation of a black workforce that could be subjected to working conditions so harsh, this could be compared to slave labour. Mine labour is a fantastic example of this. At any given time, there were more black labourers in the mines than white labourers.

In a 2013 census, only 23% of people in Israel were identified as Arab. It’s clear then that Israel is not driving its economy through racialised labour. This would be an impractical assumption even if the entire Arab population of Israel was employed by Jewish owned industries, which they are not.

However, the anti-Israel movement doesn’t define apartheid this way. The anti-Israel movement has forgotten what apartheid was. It has forgotten the pain and trauma, the humiliation and dehumanisation. Instead, it engages in an erasure of what apartheid was, a belittling of the struggles experienced by victims of apartheid legislation.

The anti-Israel movement has sheared the term down to mean simply: segregation. And then it compacted it further, or it must have, because Israel isn’t a segregated state. In Israel, people of different races, religions, and ethnicities attend the same schools, frequent the same parks, malls and beaches, and enjoy the same rights given that they are citizens of the state of Israel. There is even Arab representation in the highest level of Israeli law; its Parliament.

So, if Israel isn’t engaged in an apartheid, why do these so-called activists and other propaganda puppets keep feeding us this misinformation?

The misrepresentation of the situation, in the first place, is in pursuit of a political agenda that requires the support of foreign leaders, foreign wealth, and foreign military power.

The political agenda is not one that embarks on a valiant human-rights crusade for the well-being of Palestinians, as we are so often told. If the pushers of this false narrative were serious about the life enrichment of Palestinians, they would not be so fiercely encouraging counter-

productive, hateful, and misleading language which leads to violence. Instead, they would be looking for ways to calm tensions between stakeholders and encourage co-existence and peaceful negotiation. The real desire here is the desire for the destruction of Israel as a state that protects and promotes the rights of Jewish people, economic migrants, and refugees, many of whom were displaced due to fascism in Europe, anti-Semitism in the Middle-East and conflict in Africa. It hardly needs to be said that the destruction of Israel would be the beginning of stripping thousands of people of their sovereignty as citizens of the region.

The apartheid Israel narrative, which we have established as grounded in a false premise, is simply a tool to convince people to support a sinister and hateful campaign against Israel. But, what we should be concerned with as South Africans is why this narrative is targeting us specifically.



**Attempting to appropriate the word “apartheid” to mean something that is not the historical event, contributes to a denialism or an erasure of apartheid as it occurred in South Africa.**

Every single South African of colour feels emotive when confronted with the history of our country. We all feel personally hurt. Even young South Africans, who did not experience apartheid personally, are experiencing the generational trauma of apartheid. Thus, the use of emotional blackmail is insensitive towards the painful history of our nation, it is an insult to those who suffered through it. Comparing what many of our parents and grandparents endured to a democratic, multi-cultural Israel is, aptly put, a pathetic theatrical attempt to sway public opinion.

Israel is a healthy, prosperous nation. It is a country which makes the well-being of its citizens a priority, champions women’s rights, LGBT+ rights, uses its resources to fund aid relief, and has time and time again promoted the need for dialogue between its own and Palestinian leaders. In spite of the questionability of some of its actions, its existence should never be questioned. South Africans, during our struggle, never questioned the validity of South Africa, and we never lied about what we experienced. We, better than anyone, should be aware of the need for conflict to be dealt with in a just, democratic manner; and we, of all people, should understand when we are being used, insulted and lied to in our own country about our own history.

• Haafizah Bhamjee is a writer and activist from Johannesburg. She is a graduate of literature with a research interest in politics, language and history.

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# Mboweni rings the changes with 'aloesterity'



**OPINION**

*Anthony Chait*

Minister of Finance Tito Mboweni presented a bitter-sweet budget to Parliament on Wednesday that will have an impact on every one of us, not least in increased fuel levies.

In a line of tradition of finance ministers having a personal theme, he entered the national assembly bearing a pot plant in a terracotta holder, and set it down on the podium where he was to deliver his address to the nation.

Back in the 1970s, the late Dr Nico Diederichs selected a tale from *Aesop's Fables* as his theme every year. Subsequently, the late Senator Owen Horwood sported a signature well-worn leather briefcase under his arm for the occasion.

Mboweni chose the indigenous Aloe Ferox or Cape Aloe, which for many years adorned our 1c postage stamp in South Africa – in the days when we still wrote letters.

Having a long history of medicinal use, it is resilient, sturdy, and drought resistant, while withstanding the elements. In medicine, it is bitter, yet its non-bitter gel is used in cosmetics. The bitter-sweet analogy aptly sums up the state of our economy, and set the tone of the Budget.

- At a glance**
- Our personal income tax rates are mostly unchanged;
  - Capital gains tax is also unchanged, at 18% for individuals;
  - Value-added tax (VAT) is unchanged at 15%;
  - Estate duty and donations tax are also unchanged;
  - Company tax is unchanged;
  - Dividends tax is unchanged at 20%; and
  - The fuel levy increased 29c per litre for petrol, and 30c per litre for diesel

In Mboweni's review of the economy, growth in gross domestic product was estimated at 0.7% in 2018, and remains poor. More positively, he said that it would rise to 1.5% in 2019, and then strengthen moderately to 2.1% in 2021.

An increase in personal tax rebates for the next tax year gives relief in the lower brackets, but no relief at the higher level. This will increase revenue for the government by R12.8 billion simply because inflation will increase salaries, resulting a higher tax bracket being reached.

Last year, VAT was hiked to 15%, but this year, Mboweni has introduced some more relief by extending zero-rated products to include white bread flour, cake flour, and sanitary pads. This will be effective as of 1 April 2019.

Last year, the hotly debated and controversial "sugar tax" was introduced. Beverages which

contain more than 4g of sugar per 100ml were taxed at 2.1c per gram above the 4 gram mark. From 1 April 2019, the tax increases to 2.21c per gram. It is still a matter of public conjecture as to whether the government should be looking after our health via our tax system.

For the gamblers, in 2012, the government proposed a gambling tax of a 1% levy on all winnings to mitigate the negative effects of excessive gambling. Seven years later and still on the agenda, the draft legislation regarding this tax is to be published for comment in 2019. This is a further example of the issue of whether the government should be regulating gambling addiction through tax.

The minister had much to say about our tax administration. He has called on Judge Dennis Davis to assess the tax gap, which is the difference between revenue collected and what ought to be collected.

He relaunched the large business office, which was a unit of the South African Revenue Service (SARS) that dealt with groups of companies that were spread out over the country. This unit was initially proposed by former Minister

Derek Keyes in 1993, disbanded in former SARS Commissioner Tom Moyane's reign, and is now to be recreated.

Mboweni went on to cover the issue of having a SARS watchdog. There have been many stabs at this in the past. Initially, the SARS Service Monitoring Office was set up under late University of Johannesburg tax professor Lynette Olivier. Later, Judge Bernard Ngoepe was appointed as tax ombudsman. In this Budget, Mboweni now proposes an inspector-general for tax administration.

Moyane also encouraged the withholding of VAT refunds, which are common for any business that exports. The minister announced that this practice would be discontinued, and VAT refunds would be processed more timeously. This will have a negative impact on future estimates of revenue collection because government does accounts on a cash basis. It will also be significant for the cashflow of businesses who have had their refunds withheld in the past. This was a positive step on the part of the minister, because clearing this backlog is vital in the interests of proper tax administration.

The minister mentioned the number of important recommendations made by the Nugent Commission of Inquiry regarding SARS. He confirmed that a new SARS commissioner would be appointed in coming weeks.

He also alluded to the establishment of an Illicit Economy Unit to fight the trade in illicit cigarettes, which will be an improvement on the former Rogue Unit.


Mboweni warned that cross-border information-sharing agreements with co-operating countries would help to fight tax evasion. For those who may not have regularised their foreign trusts and offshore bank accounts, this information sharing would result in information flowing freely to SARS.

The minister reassured the public that SARS' IT system would be strengthened, a long-standing concern of the tax practitioner.

This budget has undoubtedly mixed the good with the bad, which makes it bitter-sweet indeed.






*• Anthony Chait is Chief Executive of Zeridium, a tax and exchange-control advisory firm.*

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# No place for bullying

I can't bear bullies! I know I am not alone in having a serious aversion to anyone or any group who tries to make themselves feel better by making others feel bad about themselves. I can't stand people who push others around just because they are not able – for whatever reason – to stand up to them.

Having said that, it seems we have an epidemic of bullies right now, be it in schools, in the workplace, in local and international politics, and so it goes on. Somehow, in spite of rules and regulations, bullies find their way to the fore, and do such damage.

Does it stem from the days of apartheid, where white people put black people down to ensure they had it all? Racism creates bullies. What is it about people that they feel the need to see those of another race as inferior to inflate their image of themselves? Perhaps we have lived with racism for so long, it is endemic here.

As Jews, we have had the darkest experiences of bullying through the ages, not least of all during the Holocaust. Our bullies are anti-Semites. And, around the world, this form of bullying is on the rise.

There was a 37% increase in anti-Semitic activities in the United States in 2017, according to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation at the end of 2018. In Britain, there is reported to have been a 16% rise in anti-Semitism in 2018, which amounts to 1 652 incidents, according to the Community Security Trust, a Jewish protection and research organisation. France was recently reported to have had a 74% increase and Germany a 10% increase in anti-Semitism.

In actual fact, in South Africa we do not have anti-Semitism anywhere near the severity of Europe and the US. South Africa is – believe it or not – extremely tolerant and accepting of other religions and faiths.

In terms of the community's experience, I see bullying playing out much more when it comes to anything to do with Israel.

I guess as Jews there is a tacit acceptance and expectation that we will somehow support the Jewish state. But as a gentile, if you so much as voice your support for Israel, you will make enemies. These enemies are bullies, and apparently come down on such people like a ton of bricks, to use the cliché.

And, if you stand up and write an opinion piece that defends Israel's right to invest in South Africa, boy oh boy, those bullies are likely to make you regret that you opened your mouth or put pen to paper! It is as if people are not entitled to their opinions, especially when they are offering educated views, and make sense.

Last Friday, Rhulani Thembi Siweya, a national executive member of the ANC Youth League, wrote a reasoned argument that was published in the *Daily Maverick* about how BDS-SA undermines South Africans. She took this anti-Israel organisation to task, saying that it doesn't even listen to what ordinary Palestinians want. She went on to say that, "BDS-SA policy that Israel has no right to exist and South Africa must not pursue policies that are in its own best interests, must be dismissed."

It didn't take long before the Youth League sent out a strongly-worded press release about how this was not its view, it supported BDS-SA, and was 100% anti-Israel.

We were then unable to speak to Siweya no matter how hard we tried. Could the screws have been put on her using the now familiar bully-boy tactics of the anti-Israel lobby? Did she stick her head to far over the parapet?

Do you recall when online radio host Gareth Cliff openly said that Israel had a right to defend its country and people? The vitriol and venom that was showered on him was horrific. Once again, he was reasoned and could explain exactly why he thought the way he did. He dismissed and ignored the bullying for what it was.

Others, like model and media celebrity Shashi Naidoo, could not withstand the bullying, and turned back on what she had originally believed because, apparently, it seemed easier.

Then there was Mpho Phalatse, who is in charge of Johannesburg's health and social development portfolio, and who publicly declared that she and "the City of Joburg stands with Israel". The next thing, the ANC, EFF, and BDS came at her. It led to temporary suspension from her job until she apologised. Bullies!

Then, consider the proposed Clover deal, and how quickly it was pushed into a corner because of bullies. I do hope those involved find a way to make this remarkable deal work, and don't succumb to these vicious tactics. Apparently, while BDS-SA and the Youth League is against the deal, the government and Siweya are firmly in favour of it.

To be honest, I often worry about the people we write about – or give a space to view their opinions – who openly support Israel. We have such an opinion piece in the newspaper this week on page 4, explaining why there is no way Israel could be an apartheid state, and why using this term is insulting to South Africans and Israel.

What happens when the bullies hear or read about it? What will they do?

Considering all the bullying that goes on for racial, religious, and other reasons, is it any surprise when there is bullying and taunting at school? It seems that bullying is permitted to be the way of the world. However, I and every other like-minded person abhor this way of operating. It is totally unacceptable as it destroys rather than builds people and relationships.

Stand up for your beliefs, be my guest, but don't bully me in the hope that I will succumb to your beliefs. Our country – and our world – needs to start getting rid of bullying tactics, and start treating every human being, no matter their age, colour, creed, or religion, as they would want to be treated.

Let start somewhere, so that we can be an example to our children in how to behave.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost Maunder**  
Editor



# How to show that terror doesn't pay

How to fight terrorism while at the same time not encourage it is a challenge Israel continues to grapple with. Last Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that he was enacting the so-called "terrorist salaries law" for the first time. It allows Jerusalem to deduct from the monthly taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA) those monies it claims go towards terrorism.

Imported goods need to go through Israeli ports before they can reach the Palestinian territories. The value added tax (VAT) and customs duties are collected by Jerusalem, and handed over to the PA each month. Last year as much as \$2.2 billion (R31 billion) was transferred.

Israeli figures suggest that from this money, each month, the PA spends nearly \$11 million (R155.3 million) rewarding imprisoned as well as released prisoners. In addition, it also pays the families of wounded assailants or those considered "martyrs". The latter includes Palestinians killed while carrying out terror attacks against Israeli civilians or during clashes with Israeli security forces.

Since 2004, Palestinian law has stated that Palestinian and Israeli Arab prisoners (defined as those "sitting in the occupation's prisons for participating in the struggle against the occupation") and their families are entitled to monthly "salaries". These start from the date of arrest, and for men who serve at least five years in prison and women who serve at least two, they continue for life. Upon their release, they are given priority civil-service jobs. What this essentially means is that the more deadly the attack, the more profitable the payout.

The issue came to a head once again after a 19-year-old Israeli woman, Ori Ansbacher, was raped, repeatedly stabbed in her upper torso, and then murdered by a Palestinian man two weeks ago after she went for a walk in a Jerusalem forest. The case sparked outrage across the country, prompting Netanyahu to vow that the time was ripe to implement the law.

It was already passed last July, but Israeli politicians have been reluctant to implement it until now. They're concerned that, as argued by Israeli security officials, its enactment could hurt security co-operation between the PA and Israel, and incentivise new terror attacks against Israeli citizens.

The rhetoric emanating from Ramallah suggests as much.

Earlier this month, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that if Israel went ahead with the law's enactment, he would refuse to accept all of the tax money Jerusalem collected on his government's behalf.

After Netanyahu's declaration a few days ago, he again insisted he would "not accept any harm to the livelihood of our imprisoned heroes and the families of martyrs and wounded".

PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah claimed Israel's decision was "part of a plan to destroy the National Authority, and deny it the ability

**DATELINE:  
MIDDLE EAST**

*Paula Slier*



to continue to provide services and fulfil its commitments to its citizens".

Palestinian officials further justify paying these salaries as a way to offset what they regard as an unfair Israeli military court system. Israeli rights group B'tselem agrees that justice is not always served, arguing that almost 100% of arrestees brought before an Israeli military court are convicted – often unfairly.

By contrast, Jerusalem views the "terrorist salaries law" as morally just. It argues that each time the PA pays a family or individual connected to terror, others are encouraged to follow suit.

The problem, however, is that if Abbas now goes ahead with his threat to decline all tax transfers, it could lead to a humanitarian crisis for the Palestinians. After the "terror payments" are made, the PA is left with about \$180 million (R2.5 billion) a month that it uses to keep its economy afloat. Without this money, it's impossible to imagine how the Palestinian territories will continue functioning.

Abbas is also threatening to halt security co-operation with Israeli security forces in the West Bank. The risk here is that Hamas – which continues to threaten both Israel and the PA – might increase its attempts to destabilise and even try to grab power from the PA as it did in 2007 in Gaza. This would strengthen the organisation in the West Bank where its already using sleeper cells to attack Israelis.

As for Gaza, the situation is already at boiling point. Abbas' refusal to allow money to be transferred to Hamas from Palestinian banks led Qatar to start sending suitcases filled with dollars into the strip. Since 2012, with the approval of the Israeli government, Qatar has given \$1 billion (R14.1 billion) to Hamas, considered by Israel, the European Union, the United States and others, as a terrorist organisation.

Last year, \$200 million (R2.8 billion) was paid to Hamas, about 80% of which went towards infrastructure, education, fuel, healthcare, and government salaries. The rest went to support the group and its affiliates.

Netanyahu has been severely criticised for allowing Doha to send this money, but he argues it ensures stability in Gaza. But isn't it also a de facto financial reward for terror attacks? What then is the difference between Abbas paying families and individuals connected to terror and money being given to Hamas?

This is the dilemma the country finds itself in. Netanyahu needs to show that terror doesn't pay, but at the same time he must avoid creating the circumstances that allow it to flourish.



The Israeli Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee approves the law to withhold terrorist salaries from the tax revenues that the country transfers to the Palestinian Authority

# When the lights go out, and you can't look on the bright side



## OPINION

Judith Ancer

The first night our power went, we made the best of the experience. My family gathered around the braai, my husband prodded the meat, I sipped a glass of wine, and we reminisced by firelight. We went to bed early, and I woke up refreshed the next morning.

The next time it happened, we were grouchy. My son moaned that he had an assignment, I couldn't watch my recorded TV show, and everyone agreed that everything was going to the dogs. In our case, just the one dog, Jozi the Labrador, from whom we could learn a thing or two about taking things in our stride.

When the power goes out, we feel angry or anxious, all normal responses – and that's when it goes out on schedule. When it shuts down unpredictably, everything feels even more out of control, and an absence invades every aspect of our lives. We can't comfort ourselves with a hot cup of tea or distract ourselves with Netflix.

At the next social event, people mutter about emigration, and confess to a loss of faith in the country's future.

Without minimising these very normal responses, I think it's important to take stock of what's happening psychologically.

Hans Rosling, a global health expert and statistician, explains in his book *Factfulness* that these negative responses are exacerbated by the human instinct for catastrophising. He calls this the dramatic world view. It has allowed us to survive over millennia by interpreting all negative events as alarm signals so that

we could respond decisively when faced with predators or pillaging war parties.

When the lights go out, the catastrophising instinct kicks in. Threats to our comforts and routines lead us to believe that what will follow in the darkness is chaos. This South African situation is compounded by the global sense that the world is getting worse. Because we know too much. When bombs explode in Madrid or toddlers are kidnapped in Portugal, we know about it immediately, and the dramatic live footage makes us fearful or angry. We draw our children closer, expecting the worst.

Social media is an unrelenting assault on our primal fears. The dramatic worldview doesn't serve us well in our connected world. We are constantly triggered, and we can't escape all this reality. And unlike reality shows, no one shouts "cut" to return us to normal, whatever that is.

The world has become an echo chamber of pessimism. We blame the media for pumping out bad news stories rather than the slow boiling good ones that outnumber them, but the media is just us, attuned to overdramatic incidents.

Of course, others respond differently, enthusiastically insisting that we look on the bright side, or take up some faddish belief. But that's also unhealthy. Naivety and denial end up being just as bad for mental health as pessimism and doleful warnings about the future. Denial may be a natural response to feeling overwhelmed, but it works only in the short term.

Whether angry or optimistic, we formulate theories and plans based on our feelings. All feelings are acceptable (hey, I'm a psychologist), but without substantiating facts and evidence, they're a poor executive manager. If we treat them uncritically, especially while sitting in

the dark, we may generate emotion-fuelled decisions on important life issues ranging from, "anywhere is better than here" to "no child of mine will ever uber without an armed guard".

Here are a couple of things you can do to plot a happier course between the two paths I have mentioned.

### Naivety and denial end up being just as bad for mental health as pessimism and doleful warnings about the future.

First, go to the facts. Whether you live in a load shedding South Africa or a Brexit-fearing Britain, the broad facts across the world are in our favour. For example, life expectancies are up, along with access to education, the number of children in schools, immunisation rates, and many more, while homicides, the number of people living in extreme poverty, and disease infection rates are falling. So, let the facts help you to balance your feelings, and embrace the fact-based worldview.

Second, distinguish between the concepts of "weather" and "climate". Current events are weather, what happens over longer periods is climate. Power outages are weather. The fact that 30% more South Africans have electricity now compared to 1994 is climate – not headline worthy, but true. Even a cursory study of history reveals a stark truth: most profound problems such as poverty, hunger, and violence are being reduced steadily. The failure to find dramatic short-term solutions is not a failure of

what we are doing, but of how we think about our incremental improvements. Distinguishing between weather and climate trains us to understand that, as Rosling says, life can be both bad today and improving at the same time.

Finally, beware of all-or-nothing, either/or thinking. Either the world is good or it is bad; either politicians are the devil's spawn or saviours leading us to the promised land. A healthier psychological position is to acknowledge that sometimes things are grey. In the midst of the bad we can see some good, and we can hold seemingly contradictory points of view. A non-binary view of the world allows for the ebb and flow of positive and negative. It sees people as simultaneously capable of indifference and kindness (kissing your child goodbye while turning away from the beggar on the corner), and it helps us to deal with complexity and uncertainty. Letting go of either/or thinking is liberating and psychologically healthier.

If you can discipline yourself to think this way, you can become what Rosling calls a "possibilist". A pessimist thinks that life will get worse, an optimist thinks that life will get better. Both are routinely disappointed. However, a possibilist "neither hopes without reason, nor fears without reason [and] constantly resists the overdramatic worldview". A possibilist pays careful attention to the facts, and sees that improvement is possible.

In a nutshell: life (and Eskom) is bad, but improvements are possible. There is some light, in spite of the darkness.

• Judith Ancer is a clinical psychologist in practice in Johannesburg. She supervises and trains mental health professionals, educators, parents, and organisations, and is currently working on a book on mental health in the workplace.

## ADVERTORIAL

# Series of articles: Lithuanian Citizenship - Breaking the 'Myths'. (II)

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 January issue of the paper (Vol 23, No 2, 25 Jan 2019), I mentioned three typical false beliefs - or myths - about the process of obtaining ancestral Lithuanian citizenship. Those are:

- I have too little information about my Lithuanian ancestry, so it would be impossible to apply;
- I have no documentation pertaining to my Lithuanian ancestry, so it is not worth even starting the process; and
- Some sort of cut-off dates are applied to candidates, so I probably will not qualify.

None of the above is true.

### Another popular myth is that you would have to renounce your existing citizenship to take up your ancestral citizenship.

The Republic of Lithuania permits dual citizenship in exceptional cases. An ancestral Lithuanian citizenship is one of the exceptional cases in which the reinstatement of one's Lithuanian citizenship is possible without losing existing citizenship status.

It should be noted that from 15 July 2008 to 12 December 2010, this reservation on dual citizenship was considerably curtailed. At that time, regulations allowed people to reinstate (or according to the terminology used then "to implement the right to") their Lithuanian citizenship if their ancestors had emigrated from Lithuania between 15 June 1940 and 11 March 1991. The "no earlier than 15 June 1940" criterion narrowed the circle of South African Litvak and their descendants who could apply for reinstatement of Lithuanian citizenship.

However, the new Citizenship Law of 2 December 2010 (with some changes in force now) has abolished the requirement for ancestors to have left Lithuania no earlier than 15 June 1940, thus giving legal grounds to a large amount of South African Litvak and their descendants to apply for the reinstatement of their Lithuanian citizenship.

### A further myth is that the timeline for the reinstatement procedure is unpredictable, and it usually takes a very long time.

In most cases, the timeline is predictable, namely 10 to 14 months on average if the

application is submitted correctly and in full.

The reinstatement procedure has two - or sometimes even three - stages:

**Stage one** involves preparation for application, i.e. collecting all the legal documents required to justify the application. The most important part of this stage is to collect evidence confirming that the applicant's ancestor was actually a citizen of Lithuania (i.e. not only that she/he emigrated from Lithuania, but that she/he had citizen status). Here, we are meeting the legal requirement of "citizen" as it is determined by Lithuanian legislation and judicial practice.

Said evidences gathering isn't limited to consulting Lithuanian or broader archives. In the majority of cases, it requires legal procedures such as court applications. Therefore, if you attempt to do this without professional assistance, stage one can take as long as several years or even encounter irremediable stumbling blocks, instead of the normal six to eight weeks if done with professional legal assistance. I have had many clients contact me after several months - or even years - of unsuccessful attempts to solve shortcomings in their application for the reinstatement of Lithuanian citizenship independently, or with non-professional help.

**Stage two** involves examination of the application by the migration department of the Republic of Lithuania. This is the longest and most patience-testing stage - with an unpleasant twist. The migration department is legally obliged to examine applications

for reinstatement within six months from the date of submission, but in reality, it takes 12 months on average due to the staff shortages. Ongoing reorganisation of Lithuanian migratory institutions will probably solve this problem in the future, but this is the current scenario.

In cases where there is a lack of documents (evidence) submitted to the migration department, **the third stage** – the collection of additional documents (evidence) - occurs.

These articles summarize the most frequently asked questions and answers that I have encountered in years of 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.

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

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# Sydenham rings the changes with removal of shul choir



Members of the Sydenham Shul choir performing at the SydShul Anniversary celebrations

## JORDAN MOSHE

When Johannesburg Jewry got wind that the Sydenham Shul choir was not going to be singing for the foreseeable future, most were astonished. The choir had been a huge pull factor for this shul, as choirs have been for many other large congregations over the years.

"The decision may seem sudden, but it has come after lengthy discussion," says Sydenham Shul's Rabbi Goldman. "We wanted to ease the community into a period of change, but things are moving very quickly. Reality demands that we innovate. We need to adapt or die."

Goldman says the decision to discontinue the choir was not easy to make, but he believes it is necessary. The choir is being removed as a regular fixture to create a clean slate to allow for more innovative approaches to the service.

Sydenham Shul's Rabbi Goldman, Rabbi Stern, and the shul council communicated the decision to the community last week. In their communicate they explained that chazzan, Yudi Cohen, will continue leading all shul services, but will do so unaccompanied by the shul choir until the end of Pesach. It is at this point that the shul leadership will "reassess and establish from feedback received if this style of davening has had the required effect." "Personally, I love chazonus," Goldman

says. "But the reality is that there are very few people left who appreciate it. Whether we like it or not, we have to acknowledge that the age of chazonus and old-style liturgical choirs is coming to an end."

Goldman stresses that the decision is a response to the pressing reality all big shuls face today. "Big shuls everywhere are having to redefine themselves. There is no established route or answer available. While the shul has always enjoyed a reputation for the finest shul music in the country and the Jewish world, it is not our responsibility to be the guardians of liturgical music. It is our sacred responsibility to remain relevant and inspirational to our current generation of shul-goers, and at the same time, to build the next generation."

Both Goldman and Cohen stress that the drive to innovate does not mean that the choir has been disbanded entirely, nor that the shul will become a *shtiebel* (a smaller, more casual shul). Rather, they aim to create a space in which new styles and approaches can be tested and a lasting solution found.

Says Goldman, "What we are looking to do is simply to explore all options. We will be experimenting with a variety of models. A new sound, a fresh sound, more participation, a shul music that will set the benchmark for music in big shuls for years to come."

Cohen says the choir was not the only element considered in the discussions. "The

entire product the shul offers is being re-evaluated," he says. "We are not saying that the choir was no good, nor that it has no place here. Rather, we are interrogating the very reason for the shul's existence, taking into account everything it offers the community. The choir is just one piece of the puzzle."

He continues, "We are living in challenging times, and our job at the shul is to bring positivity to people. After a long week, we need to give people a reason to come to shul. Twenty years ago, big shuls could boast excellent attendance. That was then. Nothing in South Africa has remained unchanged over the past two decades, and shuls are no exception."

Although they admit that there is no definitive strategy in place at the moment, both Cohen and Goldman highlighted some of the steps they will take in coming weeks. These include ad-hoc singing groups, the active inclusion of younger members in the services, participatory services which include the community, and similar experimental approaches.

Cohen, Goldman, and the shul committee are determined to work closely with the shul's members, and aim to encourage more people to become involved. "We ask our congregants to please bear with us. We are making bold and hard decisions which will be for the ultimate good and success of the entire congregation," they say.

# Ramaphosa mentions Middle East in SONA

## NICOLA MILTZ

The Middle East conflict made a backseat appearance at this year's State of the Nation Address (SONA) debate, while more pressing topics of a local nature took centre stage during hours of robust discourse.

Experts say that SONA is not the usual platform to discuss the Middle East conflict, but the topic popped up during debate, albeit fleetingly, and was swiftly dealt with by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The president responded to members of parliament (MPs) on 14 February, after questions were raised in a two-day debate on his state of the nation address speech on 7 February.

In his response, he said, "Solidarity needs to extend beyond our borders. Those who have been freed from the chains of oppression, those who live in conditions of liberty and democracy, have a responsibility to those who struggle against occupation, discrimination, and repression."

"Our support for the struggle of the Palestinian people is not merely a product of history, it is a refusal to accept that a people should be continually denied the right of self-determination in violation of international law."

And that was it. Short and sweet.

Steven Gruz, an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs, told the *SA Jewish Report* that it was not unusual for there to be little mention of Israel in SONA, and that "perhaps Ramaphosa's hand was forced by a question that mentioned Palestine".

Interestingly, he said the ANC election manifesto made little mention of Israel or the Palestinians, other than the downgrade of the South African embassy in Israel.

SONA is not really a foreign policy platform, Gruz said. "I don't think the ANC's position has changed from what it has said for many, many years, which is to support a two-state solution and a peaceful solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. In reality, South Africa has become a meaningless player in that, and the peace talks have ground to a halt, but SONA is not generally a showcase for foreign policy."

"It is an election year. Ramaphosa seems not to want to scratch this scab unless forced into it," said Gruz.

Democratic Alliance (DA) MP and Shadow Minister of Labour, Michael Bagraim, told the *SA Jewish Report* that Ramaphosa had spent very little time on the matter. "It tells me that a rational president doesn't see Israel as an issue, I don't believe it is an issue in this president's book."

He did, however, mention that it was under Ramaphosa's watch that the debate on the downgrade of the SA Embassy in Israel was allowed to hit the floor of the national assembly.

"He is the first president who allowed the debate to go forward to parliament. Zuma and past presidents kept it off the order paper."

Ramaphosa went on to say that the nation would be going to the polls in just less than three months, and cautioned that "we need to avoid utterances or actions that divide South Africans".

"As political parties and as leaders, we must desist from statements that demean or insult or offend other races, other languages, other religions or other groups," he said.

"We equally share a responsibility to work together to build a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it. In these difficult and trying times, we share a responsibility to work together for the people of this country."

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# The Israeli elections and the politics of the individual



## OPINION

Aubrey Katzef

In just eight weeks, Israeli voters head for the polls. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will be seeking re-election for the fifth time. However this election will be like no other election in the history of the state. The Labour Party, once the major political party and still a dominant player right up to the last election, is predicted to be on the brink of a meltdown. In the last election, it won 24 seats in the Knesset, but now polls predict only five to eight seats.

What has happened to the once mighty Labour Party? First, it has for years lacked a strong charismatic leader. You have to look back more than 20 years to the party's last strong leader, Yitzhak Rabin. For a good number of years, there has been infighting between leading members so that the party elected Avi Gabba, a virtual unknown and only a recent member of the Labour Party, as chairperson.

Fed up with this scenario, party members have deserted the party, polls show, and appear to be supporting newcomer Bennie Gantz. They may prefer him as a potential prime minister, or it might be a case of what I term "strategic voting". Knowing that there is no hope of a Labour Party victory, they believe by throwing their weight behind Gantz, his party will have more of a chance of winning the election and being asked to form a government. This happened when Ariel Sharon formed Kadimah in the 1990s, and won over many traditional Labour Party voters. Sharon formed the government and became prime minister with Kadimah. Though it worked then in spite of forecasts by many columnists in the mostly left-wing newspapers, I don't think it will work this time.

The major personality of this election is Gantz and his Israeli Renaissance Party. He is being punted by all and sundry as the man to beat Bibi. All he has to do is gather the centre-left where he places himself up with the left, and it will be the answer to the "anyone but Bibi" cry.



**All he has to do is gather the centre-left where he places himself up with the left, and it will be the answer to the "anyone but Bibi" cry.**

He is one of the new breed of what I call "the politics of the individual", in which the success of the party revolves around the party leader. Of course, this also applies to other parties such as Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid, Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu, Orly Levy-Abekasis's Geshet, Moshe Feiglin's Zehut, Baruch Marzel's Otzma Yehudit, and maybe even Tsippi Livni's Hatunah.

Much is known about Gantz's military career, but very little about his political views. He has made very few policy statements and held even less public meetings. He appears to have a right-wing view on settlements but a left-wing view on social issues. I am sure he has top-class consultants advising him, but so far he hasn't shown his hand.

Moshe Ya'alon and his Telem party, another of the new parties running for the first time, has joined up with Gantz, but I wonder whether this will make any difference to the number of voters Gantz will attract. Other than a brief spell as defence minister, I don't think he rates as a superstar and a good catch.

Gabi Ashkenazi, the former Chief of Staff of Zahal, would be a better vote catcher.

One of the problems Gantz faces is that unlike when Yair Lapid formed Yesh Atid, he (Gantz) does not have the unaffiliated (I prefer this description to that of centre) to himself. There is fierce competition for the unaffiliated, including Moshe Kahlon for the centre-right and Naftali Bennett for the far-right. Bennett may attract those unaffiliated voters who like his strong views on defence but would not vote for him when he headed Bayit Yehudi, a right-wing religious party. Gantz, Lapid, and Levy-Abekasis are all rivals for the centre-left vote.

By placing himself in the centre, Gantz will suffer very much the way Lapid did after doing

so well in his first election and winning 19 seats.

The only way Lapid could prove himself was to join the coalition. This meant that his party's policy in most cases had to be subjugated to the policies of the coalition government. Since he left the government, his party has been reduced to 11 seats, and with many more of the unaffiliated supporting Gantz, I would be surprised if Lapid managed to retain his 11 seats.

Gantz, too, will have little to offer if he doesn't join the coalition, but he has stated that he won't do this. If he doesn't, then what will he achieve in opposition? Will he do better than Labour? If you look at the slate chosen by Labour in its primaries held last week, it has a number of experienced politicians. Gantz so far has failed to

attract big names.

It's too early to predict. This can take place only after the closing date for submission of candidate lists.

It's certainly going to be the most interesting election in recent times.

*Aubrey Katzef is a Cape Town attorney who has a CA, BProc and an Honours degree in Jewish Studies. He is a dedicated Zionist and been involved in Jewish communal affairs and various communal bodies his whole life, including the Jacob Gitlin Library in Cape Town. Katzef has been an Israeli election pundit for many years and his predictions are seldom off the mark – when they are, it is by a very small margin.*

  
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# Another fight over Holocaust memory threatens warming ties between Israel and Poland

SAM SOKOL – JTA

It was meant to be a diplomatic triumph for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: a much-touted diplomatic summit in Jerusalem on Monday with four central European states.

Instead, harsh words from Israel's acting foreign minister opened a diplomatic rift threatening to severely damage Israeli-Polish relations, and the summit was cancelled.

Warsaw decided to pull out of the meeting on Monday, after Yisrael Katz, citing late Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, told Israel's Channel 13 that Poles "suckle anti-Semitism with their mother's milk", causing a national furore in both countries.

Netanyahu has been promoting the meeting of the so-called Visegrad Group – an alliance of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia that represents the nationalist and conservative wing of the European Union – as heralding a nationalist bloc within the EU that supports Israeli policies more strongly than many in the West.

However, he has also come under harsh criticism from domestic critics on both right and left, who have alleged that he has shown an overly solicitous attitude toward Israel's Eastern and Central European allies. According to this view, Jerusalem has downplayed concerns about anti-Semitism and Holocaust memory in favour of closer engagement.

Poland's decision to pull out, which effectively cancelled the summit and caused the other Visegrad, or V4, nations to downgrade their diplomatic visits to merely bilateral ones, came after several days of furious denunciations and diplomatic scrambling.

The controversy began last Friday, when the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Netanyahu, in Warsaw for a conference on the Middle East, accused "the Polish nation" of collaborating with the Nazis. Netanyahu later clarified that he had not implicated the Poles collectively. The *Post* subsequently amended its story, and it initially appeared that the crisis had been averted.

Katz's comments on Monday morning, however, revived the diplomatic crisis. "I am a son of Holocaust survivors, and I was even born and grew up in a community

made up of Holocaust survivors," Katz, a senior Likud minister just tapped by Netanyahu as acting foreign minister, said on Sunday. "The memory of the Holocaust is something we cannot compromise about; it is clear and we won't forget or forgive.



**"As Yitzhak Shamir said, they suckle anti-Semitism with their mother's milk."**

"In diplomacy you try not to offend, but nobody will change historical truth", Katz continued. "Poles collaborated with the Nazis, definitely. As Yitzhak Shamir said, they suckle anti-Semitism with their mother's milk."

Poland's Ambassador to Israel, Marek Magierowski, tweeted that he was astonished that Katz, who is the child of Holocaust survivors, had uttered "such a shameful and racist remark". The Polish foreign ministry reprimanded Israel's Ambassador to Poland, Anna Azari, and is reported to be considering withdrawing Magierowski from Tel Aviv in protest.

By early afternoon in Jerusalem, the summit had been officially cancelled, a stunning reversal of last year, when Netanyahu had appeared to endorse a Polish narrative of the war years, and released a joint statement with his Polish counterpart, Mateusz Morawiecki, defending Poland's wartime record. That statement was itself an effort to repair ruptured ties after Jerusalem condemned Poland for a controversial law that made it a crime to hold Poland responsible for Nazi crimes.

The release of the joint statement led to an unprecedented rebuke of the prime minister from the usually apolitical Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Centre. It termed the joint statement "an offense not only to the historical truth, but also to the memory of the heroism of the righteous among the nations."

Yad Vashem has recognised more than 6 800 Poles as righteous among the nations for having risked their lives to save Jews – far more than in any other country.

Netanyahu's joint statement with

Morawiecki last year also seemed to equate anti-Semitism with animus toward Poles, stating immediately after a condemnation of anti-Semitism that "both governments also express their rejection of anti-Polonism and other negative national stereotypes". It was later reported in the Polish press that Morawiecki had emphasised that the declaration was the first to put anti-Polonism on the books as a recognised form of discrimination.

"One should read the current Polish reactions to Israeli expressions in this context. Polish officials stated it is racism since for them, Israel confirmed that anti-Polonism and anti-Semitism are similar fundamental hatreds. This is just one problematic practical results of the joint declaration," noted Havi Dreifuss, a historian of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe at Tel Aviv University.

"Yet, one should also note that much of what was said lately in the Israeli media is far from being accurate," she continued. "The fact that many Poles took part in harming Jews doesn't mean that all Poles killed Jews.

And the Holocaust was first and foremost the product of Nazi Germany and its murderous ideology. Moreover, anti-Semitism was one important motive for Polish readiness to harm Jews, but it was definitely not the only one. Updated research and the vast documentation available exposed how alongside Polish anti-Semitism, Jews were harmed for various reasons, including greed, revenge, terror, and more."

According to Rafal Pankowski, a Polish academic and the founder of the Never Again Association, in recent days there has been an uptick in anti-Semitic sentiment in Poland that appears to mirror the atmosphere that prevailed last year during the previous diplomatic crisis. During that period, local media engaged in rhetoric viewed by many as anti-Semitic. Pankowski cited recent statements by journalist Rafał A Ziemkiewicz, a host on state television, who tweeted to his 166 000 followers that "the worst of it is that a man cannot

even hate Jews in

response" because this is what they want.

Pankowski rejected the equivalence of anti-Semitism and anti-Polonism, saying that he had "never heard about anyone in Israel believing that there is a Polish global plot against the Jewish people, but had heard many times in Poland that there is a global Jewish plot against the Polish people."

While acknowledging the complicity of "a number of Poles" in the Holocaust, the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland responded harshly to Katz's words, saying that "accusing all Poles of anti-Semitism offends the righteous; it also offends all those who today want to see in them the true representation of Polish society. And it also offends us, Polish Jews, who are a part of that society."



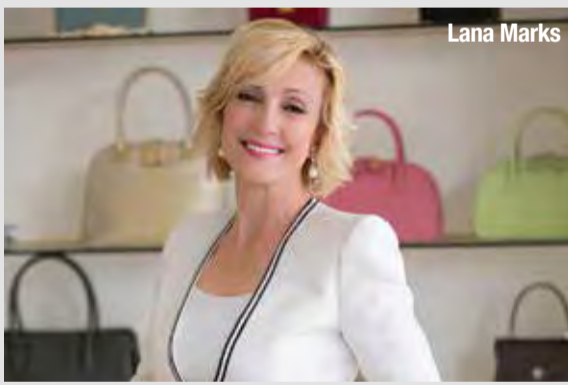
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with Polish President Andrzej Duda

## From Palm Springs to Pretoria – on your Marks

NICOLA MILTZ

The White House has re-nominated controversial businesswoman and socialite, Lana Marks, as the next ambassador to South Africa.

The South African-born couture handbag designer has officially been re-nominated by her close friend, United States President Donald Trump, to be the future ambassador to South Africa. This is a formality in that although she was nominated in November last year, the nominations need to be resubmitted if



Lana Marks

a new congress begins and all the nominations have not been acted upon.

Marks is already planning to pack for Pretoria, and has started preparing to leave her home in Palm Springs, according to media reports. However, there is still a way to go before she can board the plane.

"With our new congress having begun its work this January after US general elections in November, the White House re-nominated Lana Marks for the position of ambassador to South Africa on 16 January," said Robert Mearkle, the spokesperson for the Embassy of the United States of America this week. "We look forward to working with Ms Marks as she prepares for her senate confirmation hearing, which has not yet been scheduled."

The US has not had an ambassador in South Africa since Patrick Gaspard vacated his post in December 2016, with its mission being overseen by a chargé d'affaires. Trump's nominee to serve as the next ambassador to South Africa was born and raised in East London, and has no experience in diplomacy.

Marks left South Africa about 40 years ago, but claims that she is fluent in Xhosa and Afrikaans.

Continued on page 17>>

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**Nida Degutiene** is a top expert in the field of citizenship reinstatement. Having lived in Israel for 5 years and frequently visiting South Africa for 10 years, Nida has acquired the highest level of credibility among the Jewish community. Besides an MA degree in law, Nida holds a Global MBA from IDC Herzliya in Israel. Nida is passionate about Jewish traditions, history and cuisine, she is the world-renowned author of the book: *A Taste of Israel*.

# How to be upstanding – and save tax

ANTHONY CHAIT

Judaism places a moral and ethical obligation on its people to give *tzedakah* (charity) regularly. The root of the Hebrew word is *tzadek* meaning a righteous person. *Tzedakah* is much more than a spontaneous act of goodwill or generosity, and the sages tell us that this mandatory act is to be performed even by those of limited financial means. It is also spiritually uplifting, and is considered to be one of the three main activities which we believe can have a positive influence on a potentially unfavourable heavenly decree.

South African tax laws encourage and promote giving to charity through a mechanism known as section 18A. Both a company and an individual can derive a tax deduction by making donations. However, not all charities entitle the donor to a tax deduction. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) approves certain public-benefit organisations (PBOs) that may accept donations. For this, the PBO issues a special certificate that needs to be retained until you prepare your annual income tax return.

Your accountant can assist you in calculating the exact amount that you will save.

A family trust that has significant taxable income is also permitted to deduct donations to PBOs.

If the trust's taxable income is R5 000 000, then donations at the discretion of the trustees are tax deductible up to R500 000.

The tax saving is 45%, which on a donation of R500 000 amounts to R225 000.

Companies, too, can deduct 10% of their taxable income, and this is the ideal way for corporates to demonstrate social responsibility to the community. In the case of public companies, they are required to publish an integrated report in conformity with

international accounting standards.

There is the very real possibility of saving tax in the next few days by making donations to worthy Jewish organisations, and in so doing, reduce provisional tax. Section 18A certificates will be issued by PBOs in coming months in time for the commencement of the SARS tax filing season, which opens on 1 July. As part of the SARS e-filing process, the section 18A certificates will be required to be uploaded as part of supporting documents for the verification of your assessment.

• Anthony Chait is Chief Executive of Zeridium, a tax and exchange-control advisory firm.



**Individuals may deduct up to 10% of their taxable income by way of tax deductible donations.**

A division within SARS, known as the tax exempt unit, receives applications from PBOs and applies strict criteria before granting approvals. Many Jewish organisations have obtained PBO status, and are therefore in a position to receive donations. These are a valuable way of raising funds to cover expenses so that these organisations can continue to play their vital role in our community.

As the end of the tax year is fast approaching – 28 February – it is time to prepare a provisional tax return. You can reduce the amount of provisional tax that you have to pay by making a donation to a PBO under section 18A of the Income Tax Act, 58 of 1962.

### How do you determine the tax deduction?

Individuals may deduct up to 10% of their taxable income by way of tax deductible donations.

For example, if a taxpayer has an annual taxable income of, say, R1 500 000, then he or she can make donations of up to R150 000 which would then reduce their taxable income to R1 350 000.

This would result in a tax saving to that person of R52 500. This is calculated using an average tax rate of 35%.

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# Meyer declares his confidence in Ramaphosa

MIRAH LANGER

President Cyril Ramaphosa offers great hope for South Africa both in his commitment to the constitution as well as his modern outlook. So says Roelf Meyer, a politician who worked with Ramaphosa during the negotiations to end apartheid.

“If you trusted us in creating the constitution, I think you can trust him today as well. He is absolutely the same person that I got to know. I can say that as a witness over many years. Not only in the negotiations, but after that, when he was in business, and more recently after he came back to politics.”

Meyer, who was formerly National Party Minister of Constitutional Affairs and Communications, Defence and Constitutional Development and Provincial Affairs between 1991 and 1996, spoke at a Dr Herzl Lodge Hebrew Order of David event in Orchards, Johannesburg, this week. He reflected on the past 25 years of democracy.

Meyer, now aged 71, said he had known Ramaphosa since 1988. When they worked on the constitution together between 1994 and 1996, Meyer was a member of the then ruling National Party while Ramaphosa served as the African National Congress’ chief negotiator. Meyer later co-founded the United Democratic Movement with Transkei leader General Bantu Holomisa in

1999. After retiring from politics, he announced that he was joining the ANC in 2006.

Meyer said that two facets of Ramaphosa inspired hope in him.

First, Ramaphosa’s modern leadership style boded well for the future.

“South Africa is supposed to be a modern country, but for nine years, we were ruled as if we were a traditional monarchy by a chief [President Jacob Zuma]. There was a complete disconnect between the manner in which we were ruled, and what we are supposed to be. Cyril has shown that he is bringing us back to modern aspirations.”

Second, it was great for South Africans that Ramaphosa was a “constitutionalist at heart”, declared Meyer, quipping that, “And I think I’m qualified to say this!”

Ramaphosa’s support for the constitution was vital as it remained the framework of a functioning democracy.

“The past nine years were very unhappy years in terms of the destruction that took place,” Meyer said. Yet, “the constitutional framework and the Constitutional Court came to our rescue. We have a set of institutions which keep our constitution intact.”

Looking ahead to the 8 May national elections, Meyer said that while he believed that Ramaphosa was the right leader, it was clear he faced some problems.

“His biggest enemies are not necessarily in the opposition, but in his own party. He is constrained.”

Nevertheless, Meyer said that one of the most promising aspects of having Ramaphosa at the helm was that the government would be amenable to partnering with business.

At recent talks between the public and private sector – which Meyer attended –

Ramaphosa’s response to business leaders

“gave me the belief that it is possible to come up with a plan to save the country”.

“Cyril realises that we

have to open the door and work together on joint plans. We have to keep pushing if the door is there to be opened.”

Meyer offered a similarly optimistic outlook on a number of other key issues.

While Eskom’s problems were huge, all South Africans could contribute to fixing them. For example, the new regime was open to renewable energy projects.

Asked about illegal immigration, Meyer said many foreigners – “not all of whom have the legal papers to prove their status” – had made a positive impact in the South African workforce. In addition, from a

humanitarian point of view, “there is no way we are going to keep hungry people out of South Africa, and it would be unfair to do so”.

Moreover, as neighbours, South Africans should focus on helping countries like Zimbabwe to solve their core problems, rather than complaining about them. Questioned about affirmative

action policies, Meyer agreed that implementation had not been wholly successful. He said many “white businesses” were guilty of “fronting”, putting a “black face” on their business without actually transforming: “We enriched a few instead of enabling the masses.”

However, he said the challenge now was for businesses to find a way to put policies into practice in a meaningful way. For example, he suggested that businesses start giving their workers a share of profit. “That’s a completely different aspiration.”

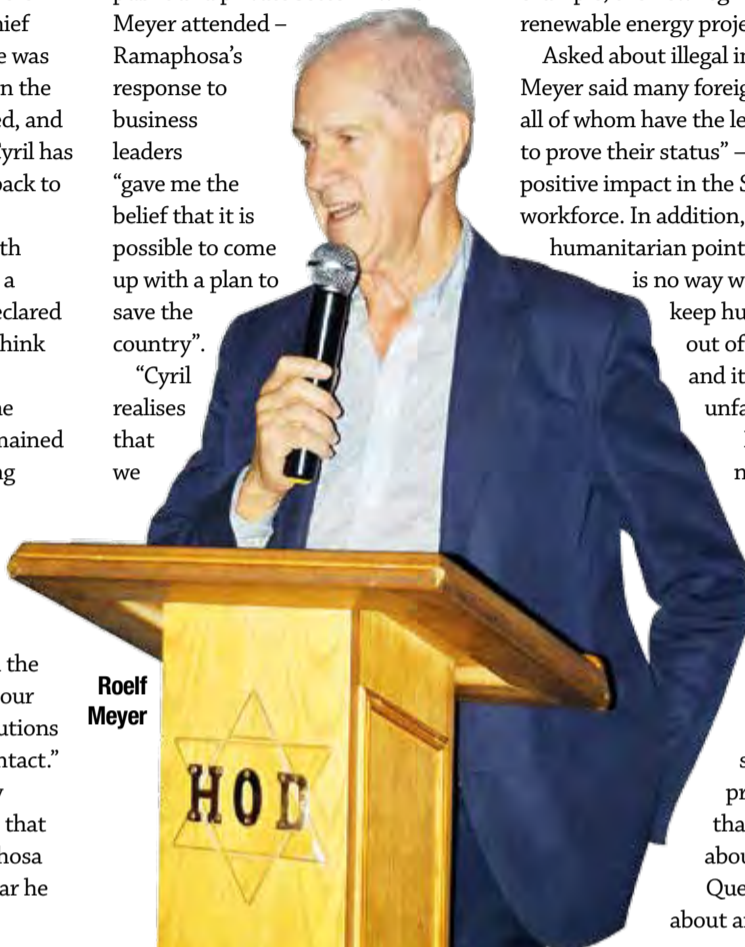
On the subject of land reform, Meyer said that, on the one hand, it was crucial to rectify the injustices of the past.

On the other hand, the government had come to realise that land had to have commercial value – particularly when it came to agriculture. This understanding had led to a more “balanced” viewpoint on the issue.

Meyer said South Africa’s most critical problem remained education – particularly the scrapping of vocational training.

“The biggest damage done by apartheid was to education. We created an inherent problem that will not go away for generations unless we have aggressive policies in place.”

Meyer said he still got “itchy” to do new things. He proposed that this was the right mindset to have. “Stop thinking about the past. Rather ask what we can do about tomorrow.”



Roelf Meyer

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1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000



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# Can trauma be passed down through the generations?

TALI FEINBERG

When paediatrician Tammy Bottner gave birth to her son, she was relaxed about what lay ahead. After all, she looked after babies every day. But what she didn't expect was to have vivid flashbacks of terror and a feeling that the Nazis were hunting her, even though those events were half a century ago. She spent the first days with her newborn wondering where she would hide her baby if they came for her.

The strange thing was that these were not just postpartum fears, but real events that had happened to Bottner's grandmother, Melly, during the Holocaust. The experience prompted Bottner to explore the very new field of epigenetics, which examines if trauma can have an impact on our genes, generations down the line.

It also led her to write a book about her family's harrowing but miraculous experiences during the war, in which she reflects on how

particular experiences could possibly lead to trauma being passed on, enhancing feelings of post-traumatic stress, depression, and fear in future generations.

Bottner presented her experience at a talk at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre linked to its current exhibition, "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race." Hosted in partnership with the Jacob Gitlin Library, Bottner also signed copies of her book, titled *Among the Reeds: The True Story of how a family survived the Holocaust*.

"I called the book 'Among the Reeds' because it reminded me of the baby Moses, and how he was sent down the Nile to save his life, just like my father was placed in hiding during the Holocaust," Bottner says.

The book is powerful because it turns Holocaust survivors into real people, foibles and all. In addition, Bottner writes from her grandmother's perspective, taking on her voice in a first-person account.

We meet grandmother Melly's father,

Tammy Bottner shows a photo of her grandmother, Melly, her grandfather, Genek, and their children Irene and Bobby after the war in 1946



Leopold, who was born in the town of Oświęcim, "and died there 56 years later in Auschwitz". A man who slowly goes mad after poisoning himself during World War I to get out of army service, he later dreams that the Brownshirts are coming to arrest him.

The next morning, he flees his affluent life in Germany for Holland, and three days later, the Brownshirts arrive looking for him. His family then follow him to Holland as refugees, and later make their way to Belgium.

We meet Genek, who walks 1 000 miles (1 609km) to Belgium, never to see his family in Lodz again. He picks Melly as the woman he wants to marry, and the first she hears of it is when her mother tells her, at the age of 17, that there is going to be a wedding. "Whose?" She asks. "Yours", is the response.

Carrying all this on her young shoulders, Melly gives birth to Bobby, the light of her life. But things are still scary, as Melly is a newlywed and a young mother at the age of 18, who doesn't like her husband very much. Just three weeks later, the Nazis invade Belgium.

We follow the family's decision to once again pick up their lives and flee, and how they are stopped at the border. We read how Melly makes the heartbreaking decision to place her son in hiding. Later, her baby daughter Irene is formally adopted by a non-Jewish couple, which saves her life. When her parents return to claim her, the trauma reverberates throughout the rest of their lives.

All of these very real scenarios demonstrate that survival was filled with heartache, terrible decisions, and deeply ingrained fears. In that context, it is no wonder they come to the fore at vulnerable moments – even for grandchildren.

After all, just a generation before, Bottner's father, Bobby, was placed in hiding in a convent, crowded into a cellar where he wasn't allowed to make a sound. And Melly is only 23 when the war ends in spite of having experienced a lifetime's worth of horror and heartache that will reverberate for the rest of her life. After the Holocaust, the family try to go to Israel, and are detained in Cyprus. They make it to the Jewish state, but later move to Canada, where they move many times. "These constant upheavals and the catastrophic thinking came from a place of never feeling safe," says Bottner.

She explains that epigenetics looks at how life events modify genes and how they are expressed. "It is like dimmer switches. Trauma can make certain characteristics get 'brighter' or 'dimmer'. Adverse childhood events can lead to certain health outcomes in later generations, like being susceptible to depression, heart disease, diabetes, or being overweight. In addition, survivors and their children often have altered levels of stress hormones."

These events can also lead to increased resilience. Bottner points to her father Bobby, who had so many traumatic moments in his early years but was able to lead a relatively normal life. "Even if we are knocked down, the most important thing is to get up again," she says.

• *'Among the Reeds: The true story of how a family survived the Holocaust'* is available at the Jacob Gitlin Library or on Amazon Kindle.



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# 'Murmurations' of magic at Cape art fair

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Johannesburg-based Jake Michael Singer was among some of the world's most exciting artists who exhibited in the special SOLO section of the Investec Cape Town Art Fair 2019.

This talented 27-year-old multi-disciplinary artist was represented by the Matter Gallery in Toronto, Canada, at the fair, which took place from 15 to 17 February.

Singer was carefully selected from around the world as one of the few SOLO new-media artists, in keeping with the world trend of integrating new media into traditional art fairs.

Singer has certainly trod the path less travelled in his artistic endeavours. "I have always been interested in experimentation in a variety of media," says the artist, who works in the fields of sculpture, photography, and drawing. "I also paint secretly," he admits.

"I'm always trying out things in new media and looking for a unique gesture and that allows me to avoid making derivative or generic work. I'm also aware that sometimes the work that I make references other extraordinary artists."

Singer matriculated at Hilton College in KwaZulu-Natal, then graduated with a BA in Fine Arts (Honours) cum laude at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art in 2013. He is distinguished by a large-scale steel sculpture at the top of the W+A Building in the Maboneng precinct in Johannesburg.

Singer says that the work he presented at the fair represents new technology, futurism, and science fiction. Yet some of the techniques he used were traditional ones. "I'm just using them, innovating them, and bringing them into the space of new media," he says.

His *Murmuration* series, for example, consists

of bird-like sculptures made of thousands of tiny pieces of stainless-steel rods. "The murmuration phenomenon describes how a number of simple entities come together to form a complex behaviour as a collective," he explains.

"If you look at the way a flock of birds fly, the way schools of fish swim, or even the way that people run in crowds – that's murmuration."

Singer believes the reason he was selected to exhibit at this fair was because, "I'm interested in serious contributions to the field of contemporary art, and I've been making very experimental work professionally for the past five years and working with a Toronto gallery for the past two years."

"They [the organisers of the fair] see my contributions to art and how I engage audiences, and I think they thought it would be a good show – work that I think people can relate to."

Needless to say, he agrees that his work pushes the boundaries in its distinctiveness. "I think all good art is not necessarily derivative, it's expanding a genre."

"In a sense, I work in conversation. The *Murmuration* series is in conversation with a work called the *Nike of Samothrace (Winged Victory)*," one of the most celebrated sculptures of antiquity on display at the Louvre. "The sentimental victory, positivity, and energy are echoed in a sculpture like that, and in a way,



This artwork was part of Jake Singer's exhibition at the Cape Town Art Fair



Jake Michael Singer

I'm just part of this very long conversation of creating."

There are also references to Botticelli in his work. So, while he believes in innovation, he is not averse to adopting elements in a nod to the great artists of days gone by.

Singer describes his studio as being "something like a science lab. I'm experimenting with different materials and arranging them. So, everything from resin to bonded materials, different substrates, silicones, it's a process of constant creation, experimentation, and exploration."

An avid reader, Singer mentions that he is inspired by William Gibson's book *Neuromancer*,

which he describes as "almost a predecessor to *The Matrix*, a seminal text of science fiction"; cultural stories of creation; and biblical stories. "I think that there's extraordinary wisdom in ancient texts, and it's something that I draw on."

He adds that a substantial part of his work feeds off Johannesburg's "raw, dynamic energy".

In 2012, Singer interned with William Kentridge for *The Refusal of Time*, a five-channel digital video installation. He describes this as "an extraordinary experience. I saw all the possibilities of what a studio is and what it could be".

"There were a lot of people at the workshop – technical assistants, dressmakers, set designers, production managers, video editors, Harvard professors. For me, the creative energy and resonance amongst a whole group of people coming together, sharing their skills, working towards an articulation that was not necessarily economic, I think that's the closest thing you can get to magic."

"That is my purpose – to make magic, and to usher magic into the world. I hope that when somebody sees my work, they have an emotional reaction and are able to connect. The reaction can be intellectual if they wish it to be, but [it can] also just [be] visceral."

"By exploring the impact that new media has had on traditional media, and vice versa, we hope that a full picture will emerge of the state and future of art practice on the African continent," says Galleries and Special Projects Manager Khanya Mashabela.

"By progressing to new traditions, it is hoped that emerging practitioners and collectors will begin to think more analytically about the impact of the digital world on art."



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# Coffee: a most Jewish drink

JORDAN MOSHE

Whether procured from Starbucks, Jozi Blue, or Seattle, coffee is a non-negotiable start to the morning for many of us.

While Jews may not have been the ones to discover the marvellous effects of the famed beverage, we certainly have had a hand in popularising it across the globe.

Over a millennium has passed since the Ethiopians discovered the stimulating effects of the berries of their native coffee trees, primarily achieved by chewing them. This crop would eventually be exported to Yemen, where Sufi Muslims succeeded in roasting and brewing it into a tasty hot beverage. The drink caught on like wildfire, says author Gil Marks in his *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, not only as a social substitute for alcohol, which is forbidden in Islam, but also as a stimulant to keep the Sufis awake for their evening prayers.

With the proliferation of coffee across the Ottoman empire, Jews began to consider the status of this beverage, posing halachic questions and considering what kashrut standards should be applied to it. According to Jewish historian Elliot Horowitz, this started as early as the 1500s, when Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra questioned the permissibility of coffee prepared by a non-Jew. Although he ruled that

it could be drunk, he took issue with the coffeehouses in which it was frequently enjoyed, writing that “Jews who are holy [...] would be embarrassed to drink it at such an establishment.”

While Jews may not have frequented coffeehouses, they certainly drank coffee copiously in the Beit Midrash. Religious Jews, like Muslims, imbibed coffee to stay alert for their night-long study of Torah until the early hours. Halachic authorities wrote copiously about these benefits, with one going so far as to say that “one cannot attain presence of mind without coffee”. Other questions arose with time, giving rise to fierce debates across the Jewish world about whether it should be considered medicinal, what *bracha* should be said over it, and whether it interfered with concentration during prayer.

**Authorities forbade Jews in Verona from having “women of any religion” visiting their coffeehouses.**

In spite of the stigma attached to coffeehouses, the popularity of the drink rose so dramatically, it was a Jew who exported the concept of the coffeehouse to Europe, specifically in Italy in 1632. Twenty years later,

a Lebanese man known only as “Jacob the Jew” would establish the first English coffeehouse in Oxford. Even Sephardi Jews, many of whom also became coffee traders, soon joined Armenian and Greek merchants in bringing the coffeehouse and its contents to the Netherlands and France.

This wasn’t always easy, however. Authorities forbade Jews in Verona from having “women of any religion” visiting their coffeehouses. In post-medieval Germany, the authorities attempted to restrict the Jewish coffee trade altogether, writes Israeli historian Robert Liberles, because they feared the innovative beverage would threaten their thriving beer industry: “My people must drink beer,” proclaimed Prussian King Frederick the Great.

Fortunately, societal change had swept in by the 19th century, often heralded by those thinkers who frequented the coffeehouses themselves. In Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, and Prague the rising “café culture” fostered the growth of the Jewish intelligentsia. Mavericks such as writer Stefan Zweig, psychologist Alfred Adler, and then young journalist and playwright Theodor Herzl were among those sipping coffee in style.

Thanks to the Boston Tea Party,



agencies, sought out an orthodox rabbi who ruled in 1923 that coffee was a berry, and certified that coffee made by manufacturer Maxwell House was kosher for Pesach. America further innovated the coffee culture with the famed chain Starbucks, acquired in 1987 by Howard Schultz, a Brooklyn-born Jew.

coffee replaced tea as the more “patriotic” drink in America, resulting in the coffee industry flourishing in the 18th century. European Jews arrived in their dozens at this time, bringing along coffee cake, the essential coffee pairing dish, which soon replaced the English teacake. These Jews also often entered the coffee trade in cities such as San Francisco, New Orleans, and Tucson.

As time passed, more and more Jewish personalities made names for themselves in the coffee industry. Latvian immigrant Joseph Martinson, Samuel Schonbrunn (who manufactured the Savarin brand served at the Waldorf-Astoria), and others competed fiercely for their place in the market.

When many Jews mistakenly began to believe that coffee was a bean that couldn’t be eaten during Pesach, Joseph Jacobs, the head of one of New York’s first Jewish advertising

Even in Israel before the founding of the state, Jews had a strong affinity for coffee and the café scene. Members of the underground Haganah forces often frequented Jerusalem’s Café Atara, as did writers like Shai Agnon. For years, the country’s only available coffee options were Nescafé – the generic term in Israel for “instant coffee” – or a thick Turkish coffee commonly called “mud”. Today, however, *caffè hafuch* (or upside-down coffee) is Israel’s own cappuccino. From Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, coffee shops occupy street pavements, and several local chains boast the finest roasted-bean variety of coffee-based choices, from Nutella lattes to artisanal iced coffees.

So, while we might not have invented the beverage itself, you can enjoy your next cup of coffee in the knowledge that Jews have found ways to make coffee Jewish in more ways than one.

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## Rabbinical association elects new executive



The SA Rabbinical Association's new executive, seated from left, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, Rabbi Yossi Chaikin (Chairman), and Rabbi Yossie Goldman (President). Standing from left: Rabbi David Shaw, Dayan Shlomo Glicksberg, Rabbi Ron Hendler, Rabbi Yossie Hecht, Rabbi Gidon Fox, Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines, Rabbi Anthony Gerson, and Rabbi Danny Sackstein. (Absent) Rabbi Sholem Bacher, Rabbi Michael Katz, and Rabbi Yehuda Stern.

The South African Rabbinical Association, the official body representing South African rabbis across the country, held a significant general meeting towards the end of 2018 to discuss weighty matters affecting the community. The meeting included the

election of Rabbi Yossi Chaikin as Chairman of the association to replace Rabbi Gidon Fox, who stepped down. A number of younger rabbis were also elected to the executive with a view to building strong leadership for the future.

### From Palm Springs to Pretoria – on your Marks

>>Continued from page 10

She is best known for her showpiece five and six-figure exotic leather handbags, worn by red-carpet celebrities like Benoni-born Charlize Theron, Jennifer Aniston, Angelina Jolie, Reece Witherspoon, and Helen Mirren; as well as her friendship with the late Diana, Princess of Wales. She is the owner and chief executive of Lana Marks Collections.

In an interview with *New York Magazine* earlier this month, Marks, who owns several upmarket stores, explained that if confirmed as ambassador, she would have to give up any personal business interests within 90 days. "Essentially," she told the magazine, "I'd say that I'm getting ready to sell."

President Cyril Ramaphosa is believed to be considering her nomination.



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# Spitting in the well



## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

It has always amazed me that South African expats around the world refer to themselves as “ex-South Africans”. Meet a Brit living in New York or an American living in Tel Aviv and ask them their nationality, and they will most likely answer “British” or “American”. And yet, South Africans add a prefix that is more appropriate to use when referring to a divorced spouse than a country and place of origin.

Which might explain the approach of some “ex-South Africans” on social media.

Perhaps leaving South Africa is more painful than it is to leave another country. Perhaps those who left feel hurt and frustrated by the fact that they believe they had to leave, and along with that feeling, is some anger. Perhaps the new home is not that easy to settle into, or not that easy a place to live in, and there is a need to justify the emigration. It might be all or none of the above.

No one likes the “I told you so” guy. It is understandable and tempting to celebrate the moment when your dire warning was proved correct. And certainly, it is not unreasonable to want to let your closest Facebook friends know that you were sage in your decision.

But it is important to remember that many South Africans still actually live in the country. Chances are they know that things are tough, and know full well that they are

sitting in the dark when others around the world are not.

Last week, in the midst of Stage 4 load shedding, when the cell phone signal hovered between edge and nothing, I just managed to refresh my Facebook feed. The first post I saw was from an “ex-South African” rabbi who claimed to have risen early in Australia (although he lives in Israel) to give a Skype shiur to South Africans.

Apparently, it was vital that he let South Africans know that they had no power because presumably they were confused as to why they were bumping into things. I could think of no reason why there could be any need for us to know that he had risen early. I would also be so bold as to suggest that considering that we were most likely overwhelmed by frustration and impotence – and that were sitting in the dark (or balancing on the jungle gym in search of a signal) – we hardly cared.

But his point was made. I told you so.

Not all “ex-South Africans” have this approach. There are many who, no matter where they live around the world, wish the country success. They do not need the country to fail in order to prove that their decision to leave was correct. They might be happy on some days and less happy on others. They might adore their adopted country, but still long for their friends and for the Highveld summer thunderstorms. They want their country of birth to flourish.

Many ex-South Africans owe a great deal to the country. Perhaps it is still their place of business and livelihood. It could have been the only country that sheltered their parents

or grandparents from the storm of a European war. Maybe it is the country that educated and schooled them, or it is the home of the community that still looks after their parents. Whatever the case, it is important not to spit in the well that might once have sustained you.

More than that, it is probably also worth thinking – with some sensitivity – of those who still live in the country and who have chosen to continue to do so.

Contrary to what many abroad think, South Africans do not live in a constant state of denial. They are aware that the roads have

deteriorated. They are aware of the crime and corruption. They are aware of the weakness in the currency, and how difficult things might be economically. And they are aware of the Eskom situation.

They know when the lights go out.

But mostly, on a Sunday, when they are sitting in the glorious African sun after a run through the beautiful leafy suburbs of their neighbourhood, and they are having coffee with their friends, they don't send “ex-South Africans” their localised weather reports and remind them of what they are missing.

## Is there such a thing as too many babies?



## TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

South Africans take it for granted that they live in a large country where the population of 56 million fits easily, and they can drive for hours in the countryside and pass through only a few towns with a few people.

Not all residents live well. Aside from the poisonous racial obsession, most are poor and unemployed. The country is not an unqualified success by most indicators.

But other countries which are regarded as eminently successful, such as Israel, have their own problems. The Zionist ideal of Jews moving to Israel to build a flourishing society has been immensely successful, but success depends on the criteria used to measure it.

Demographers from Israeli universities quoted in *Haaretz* are united in the view that Israel's changing demography within current borders poses extremely tough challenges which could undermine the successes.

Israel is not the same country it was in the early days of Zionist pioneers when it pleaded for Jews to come and help build kibbutzim and cities. South African Jews and others responded enthusiastically to this.

The figures are startling. Today Israel is, worldwide, the third most densely populated developed country after the Netherlands and South Korea. It is growing so rapidly – 2% a year versus just 0.5% for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries – that by 2035, it will be the most densely populated.

If its population, currently at 8 million, reaches 18 million by 2050, 98% of Israelis will have to live in massive apartment towers containing hundreds of units each – essentially tiny cities.

Parts of Singapore and Hong Kong already live like that, but people there have small families. Israeli families average 3.1 children; Singapore and Hong Kong average one.

The implications of a dense population

are apparent in daily life. Try driving on the roads, which are the most clogged up in the developed world, with more cars per paved street than Spain, which comes second.

Medical care is stretched. At 94%, Israeli hospital emergency rooms have the highest occupancy rate in the developed world.

One demographer says you can't measure standards of living without relating to quality of life, such as “the ability to spend time outdoors without being overwhelmed by the masses”. Lake Kinneret's shores, for example, are closed during Passover when they reach full capacity.

This is where demographers enter contentious territory. They say excessive population growth relates to the widespread view in Israel that “children are a blessing”. It encourages childbirth with child allowances, and gives discounts for large families.

Many Israelis, particularly in the ultra-orthodox sector, have very large families, sometimes more than 10 children. It is almost heretical to suggest a negative view of this. But it is contrary to most developed countries, which expect future populations to shrink – Japan has already begun to do this.

There is also sensitive politics involved. Jews still believe Israelis face being overwhelmed numerically by Palestinians. Yet the birth-rates among Israeli Arabs dispute this. Over the past three decades, the Israeli Arab birth-rate has dropped from an average of nine per woman to three.

This does not account for the larger political dimension – the future of the West Bank and its relation to Israel. Demographers assume that a political agreement will be reached for two national entities.

These figures give much food for thought, but what do they mean practically for South African Jews, many of whose children are immigrating to Western countries such as Australia? It is not clear. Perhaps their concept of city life, including Israeli cities, will change. Other world cities where people live happily are also densely populated. Changing one's view is not easy.

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

## Growing ties in Africa

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn last week accompanied a delegation from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (COP) on a visit to Kenya and Uganda. Among others, the delegation met with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda. Wendy also gave a presentation on the South African situation to the COP.

Participants were struck by the consistent warmth and friendship with which they were received.

The Kenyans were especially grateful to the group for continuing with its visit in spite of the deadly terror attack that took place in a Nairobi hotel only the previous month. For Wendy, it brought to mind the various solidarity missions to Israel from diaspora countries that were organised during the early part of this century when Israel was experiencing

wave upon wave of terrorist attacks. As she remarked, it means a great deal to people when friends stand by them in their time of need.

Terror has become a major concern for Kenya, an East African country bordering on war-torn Somalia. Terror groups linked with Al-Shabaab have been primarily responsible for the many heinous atrocities that have been inflicted on the Kenyan people. These include the attack on Westgate Mall in 2013; the massacre at the Garissa University College in 2015 in which 148 people (mainly students) were killed; and the Mombasa attacks in 2002 targeting an Israeli plane and hotel. Israel today provides extensive assistance and advice in combating this threat.

Kenya is one of several African nations that are developing close ties with Israel in key

areas, including security and economic and skills development. In various meetings with government representatives, glowing accounts of this relationship were received. Similarly in Uganda, both in a visit to parliament and in meetings with Cabinet ministers and other leaders, the delegation regularly heard about

the importance of education, housing, and food security, all of which Israel is ideally placed to offer expertise and support.

In the Ugandan capital Kampala, the delegation was hosted by Museveni at his official residence overlooking Lake Victoria. In a very open discussion, many issues were raised, ranging from trade to international relations. The president spoke extensively of the Bible and the Jewish claim to its homeland, Israel. He has developed a close relationship with Israel, and there is likewise a developing friendship between the countries on many levels.

The visit demonstrated the heartening progress that is being made in developing ties – economic, diplomatic and other – between Israel and Africa. Wendy's inclusion (by invitation) in the delegation was further indicative of our own community's strategic position as the largest Jewish community in Africa, with strong connections to the wider Jewish world. We can feel encouraged not just by what is being achieved in practical terms, but by the consistent goodwill towards the global Jewish community that we have encountered in our interactions with African leaders.

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



## Above Board Shaun Zagnoev



### Sunday (24 February)

- Second Innings hosts Ruda Landman, news presenter, journalist and author, on *Tell Me Your Story*. 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.
- Beit Emanuel hosts a *Wizz of Quiz* evening. Time: 17:00 until 19:00. Tables of ten to compete. The smart and incorruptible quizmaster, Ian West, will put us through our paces. Venue: 38 Oxford Road, Parktown. Cost: R120, includes a place at the table, a light bite to eat, and a small something to drink. Contact Morgana Segel on 011 646 6170 or office@beitemanuel.co.za to book.

### Wednesday (27 February)

- Second Innings hosts an outing to the South African Mint.

Time: Bus departs at 09:00. Meet in the parking below Golden Acres for the bus. Cost: R160 per person, includes bus and tour. Advanced booking and payment is essential. Enquiries: Book with Betty Kowal 072 316 4394 and Fanny Baumann 083 470 2644.

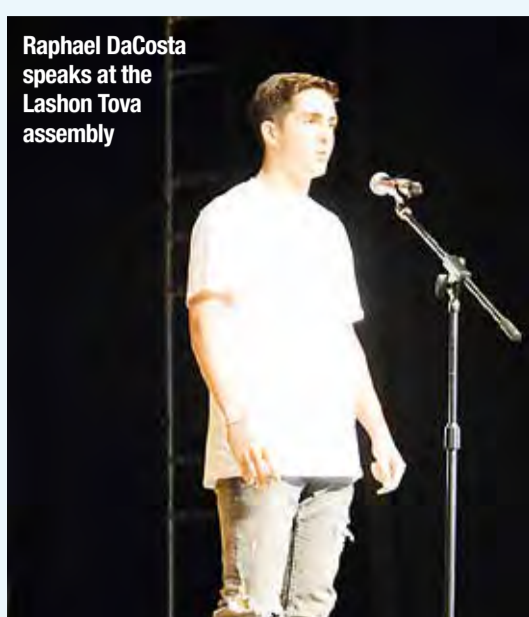
- ORT SA hosts intermediate Excel training. Time: 18:00 to 21:00. Venue: ORT SA, 44 Central Street and 10th Avenue, Houghton Estate. Cost: R100 per session for ORT JET members, R200 for non-members.

### Thursday (28 February)

- Hebrew speakers meet at 10:30 at Beyachad building, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.



## King David Linksfield transforms into *lashon hara*-free zone



Raphael DaCosta speaks at the Lashon Tova assembly

the advancement of technology, we are able to engage even more easily in irresponsible behaviour. We can spread *lashon hara* with one text, email, or photo to hundreds of our closest friends.

“People engage in this type of behaviour to feel superior, out of boredom, out of envy, to feel like they are part of a group, for attention, or out of anger at their own unhappiness and pain. However, what gossip or an evil tongue does in a community – and in our case a school – is to make people suspicious of one another and break trust amongst us all.”

Srage says speech wasn’t intended to harm, it was intended to hold communities together, to create trust, and create an environment which is inclusive and supportive.

“We are determined to create a culture in our school in which we encourage people to be themselves, and not do and say what others want them to say or what they think they should say.”

As part of the campaign, the school has secured 900 rubber bracelets from Israel with the words **אלי מדבר לא הרצ לשון!** “Shaming shames me!” on them. These have been distributed to the entire school (staff and pupils) to wear as a constant reminder to speak kindly to one another. In addition, there are Lashon Tova posters in every classroom.

Finally, pupils from the school have written *lashon hara* words on paper, which has been remodelled to form a massive heart and placed in a strategic area in the school that demarcates a “*lashon hara*-free zone”, proving that something beautiful can come from something bad.

King David High School Linksfield (KDHSL) launched its “Lashon Tova” campaign with a powerful assembly on 15 February. The campaign, which encourages kindness and mindfulness when speaking to others, will continue throughout the year.

KDHSL says it is one of the first schools to take a stand against *lashon hara* (derogatory speech about another person) in such a public way. According to Principal Lorraine Srage, the campaign is predicated on the notion that, “if you cannot be kind, be quiet”.

“This will inform the culture of the school,” she said.

Directly translated as an “evil tongue”, *lashon hara* intends to demean another person and cause them pain. “People speak out of turn as if they have the right to do so, or because it’s their story to tell,” Srage says. She points out that with

## Abby the robotic nurse jet fuelled by ORT

Josh Lasker, an ORT Jet beneficiary, is a founding partner and head of development of a robotic nurse named Abby – an automated, self-service, health-screening kiosk.

Abby can do 12 health checks in less than two minutes, print a ticket comparing the results to normal values, and/or send them to a secure web portal on your phone.

This invention won Lasker the Startup Jerusalem Competition 2018 for South Africa, run by the Embassy of Israel.

“ORT Jet has been invaluable in helping me on this start-up journey,” Lasker said. “It’s great to have a support structure you can rely on that opens up its network to small businesses in need of strategic partners and support. I intend to continue our relationship.”

His prize was an intense, all-expenses-paid, five-day experience in Israel, where winners from across the globe were joined by local Israeli entrepreneurs.

“It was incredible,” Lasker said. “A jam-packed programme from 07:00 to midnight, networking with other start-ups and going to lectures, workshops, and meetings with Israeli investors and professionals.”

Over the past two years, with the help of his ORT Jet-assigned mentor, Elizabeth Goldberg, Lasker has been developing the business side of the invention, setting up stations at South African Police Services, various medical aids, and private companies interested in promoting the health of their staff.

“Liz has been there to lend an experienced ear whenever I need an outside perspective. Her selflessness in giving up her time to help others is admirable,” Lasker said.

“The next step is to make Abby available and accessible to all South Africans, followed by roll out to other suitable African countries. “The positive feedback has been overwhelming. The future looks bright for Abby,” he said.



Ariellah Rosenberg (ORT SA Chief Executive), Josh Lasker and Helene Itzkin (ORT Jet Manager)

## Killarney Mall cares

Generous Killarney Mall shoppers and retail sponsors have managed to collect one-year’s-worth of stationery for Thembelenkosini Care Givers in Soweto, part of an ongoing initiative to support the centre.

Co-founded and managed by Witness Khosi Ntshangase, the Thembelenkosini Care Givers centre offers a safe after-school environment for children to study, further their education, and learn invaluable life lessons from the centre’s volunteers and tutors. It even offers swimming lessons, and has a library where students can read and study in a learner friendly environment.

Ntshangase says she was inspired to create the centre by her late father, Thembelenkosini, who showed love for people and compassion for the disadvantaged in his community. The centre is named after him.

“As a mall and a community, we realise the importance of supporting education, and those institutes which support our youth without

government funding,” says Sharon Wapnick, the Chairperson of Octodec Investments, which includes Killarney Mall in its property stable.

Wapnick and Craig Kramer, the mall’s leasing agent, started the stationery collection initiative in December 2018. Sponsors Bostik, Dis-Chem Pharmacies, and Pick n Pay Killarney, as well as generous donors amongst the Killarney Mall community, assisted in providing a year’s worth of stationery for the centre and food supplies for about three months.

Killarney Mall donated more than 400 work books, 500 pens and pencils, 150 sharpeners, 150 erasers, and supplied Grade 10 students with calculators and maths sets. In addition to the sponsored stationery, shoppers donated countless books, crayons, files and folders, filling a total of 10 boxes. Their generosity further made it possible to purchase canned goods, rice, pap, and sweet treats, enough to serve lunch to children for three months.



Craig Kramer with the children of Thembelenkosini Care Givers

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# Rebbetzin takes to the road in cycle race

TALI FEINBERG

**W**hat does the Cape Town Cycle Race and a mikveh have in common? It is quite simple: Rebbetzin Sara Wineberg.

Wineberg is joining the 35 000 cyclists taking part in the annual cycle challenge to raise money for a new mikveh in Cape Town. And she is believed to be the very first rebbetzin to ride this race.

Every year on the second Sunday of March, Cape Town's roads are overtaken by cyclists doing the Cape Town Cycle Tour around the peninsula – the largest timed cycle event in the world.

People line the streets to cheer them on, and some people feel slightly left out and commit to joining in the fun the following year.

Wineberg is making her commitment a reality in the 109km race around the Cape on 10 March. "Since we moved to Cape Town, I always felt slightly envious of the cyclists," she says. "It's always something I wanted to do. I am doing it this year to raise funds for the mikveh in Cape Town, and to make people aware of this important mitzvah."

She explains that forty years ago, Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Avigail Popack built the first and only mikveh in Cape Town. "The time has come for a major renovation, as well as awareness and education about the tremendous mitzvah of mikveh. I feel that this is an important opportunity. Hopefully it will help to raise much-needed funds to renovate our mikveh into a world-class edifice that Cape Town can be proud of."

Ronit Netter, Gita Osrin and Lindy Sachs, have joined her in this fundraising initiative,



Photo: Sara Wineberg

Lindy Sachs, Sara Wineberg and Ronit Netter training on Chapman's Peak

and together they have been training an average of three times a week for one to three hours. They go everywhere from the promenade to the mountains. "Initially it was gruelling, but as time went by it got much easier. We wake up early in the morning, and are often back home before our kids have even realised that we are gone!"

The camaraderie and encouragement has

been incredible, says Rebbetzin Wineberg. "It certainly has been an eye-opener for people that a rebbetzin is ready to ride the race, and it has been causing a bit of a positive stir."

As a religious woman, she had to buy her kit and make some adjustments. "I have bought arm guards that are for protection against the sun, and to cover my arms. I have had to sew a skirt down the sides of the

padded cycling pants. It is very comfortable, and doesn't hinder me in any way. I have a headpiece that is breathable and easy to wear. I will find out if there are any kosher refreshments on the day, but otherwise I will bring my own snacks and drink water."

She is also seeing a dietician to advise her on nutrition during training and on the day as she feels this is a vital component to success.

Wineberg points out that the fact that she is doing the cycle tour shows that *frum* and observant people can do anything others can do. "There may be restrictions, but we can work with them," she says, pointing out that a number of other local rebbetzins do similar activities, from running to mountain climbing to yoga.

It was tough to find the time to train. Making it a priority required sacrificing family and community time. But as the mother of seven, she is doing this as a gift to herself and the community.

Wineberg has not seen many *frum* women taking part in the sport, so she hopes this initiative will encourage them. "It is wonderful to be out on the mountains, feeling the exhilarating endorphins, taking time out, and forming connections." She knows that exercise is a luxury, but if one can find a way to do it, she recommends it highly.

On the day of the race, she hopes it is "not too hot, not too windy, and that I finish it!"

To support Rebbetzin Sara Wineberg in raising R100 000 towards the renovation of the Cape Town mikveh, visit [www.backabuddy.co.za/mikvah-renovation-fundraiser](http://www.backabuddy.co.za/mikvah-renovation-fundraiser)

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