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At a moment's notice, they fly out to do a task from hell

JORDAN MOSHE

They work tirelessly all day under the harsh rays of a blazing sun, the stench of death and destruction around them. They are a team of Jewish heroes who are working around the clock with one mission: the recovery of human bodies.

They have left their wives and children at a moment's notice, and travelled to a remote location in a far-off country, where they have virtually no contact with home, or the rest of the world. All this to perform a thankless and heartbreaking task that few can even begin to imagine.

These are the Israeli and South African volunteers of the rescue and recovery organisation ZAKA, whose tireless efforts at the crash site of the ill-fated Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 can be described only as superhuman.

“They’re standing in the heat without any shade the whole day, working on a site which is too terrible to imagine,” says Yaakov Lazarus, logistical head of ZAKA South Africa. “Regardless of what’s thrown at you, this is what you have to do in these situations. You leave your family behind and set off to care for human bodies. That’s what a volunteer does.”

Of the 10-man team deployed by ZAKA, the four South African volunteers are Avi Hack, Netanel Azizollahoff, Josh Green, and Ilan Dubb. Having arrived in the early hours of Monday morning, the group is part of the recovery operation being carried out in the wake of the Boeing 737 Max 8 plummeting to earth only six minutes after take-off from Addis Ababa on Saturday morning.

After flying in from Johannesburg, this ill-fated plane spent three hours in the Ethiopian capital and was “despatched with no remark” for Nairobi with 157 passengers and crew (among them two Israelis) on board. For reasons yet to be understood, the plane rose erratically into the air after requesting permission to turn back, and then suddenly lost altitude.

This is the second Boeing 737 Max 8 to crash in the past four months, coming after a Lion Air crash into the sea off the Indonesian capital Jakarta in October last year, in which all 189 people on board were killed.

After reports of the crash were received over the ZAKA International Volunteer messaging platform, ZAKA South Africa was put on standby due to its proximity to the site.

“Late Sunday morning, we were contacted by the chief of the international unit, Mati Goldstein, to ask for assistance,” says Lazarus. “A request was put out on the local ZAKA group, and 10 people volunteered to

be deployed.”

On Sunday evening, the team was given the green light by ZAKA International to travel to Addis Ababa. Of the 10 South Africans who put themselves forward, four volunteers were selected, and together with a support team of an additional 12 members on the ground in South Africa, preparations were made. That same night, the team flew to Ethiopia and met with another five volunteers from ZAKA Israel, the *shaliach* from the Chabad of Ethiopia, and the Israeli consul to Ethiopia.

are Ma’Aleh Adumim resident Avraham Matzliach, and Shimon Reem from Zichron Yaakov. A deputy director of a security company, 58-year-old Reem was reportedly on the continent for a business trip to Kenya, not unlike 49-year-old Matzliach, a hi-tech businessman, who often made the journey from Tel Aviv to Africa.

According to his relatives, Matzliach had spent a week in South Africa prior to the flight. Both men leave behind wives and children.

Together with ZAKA, the families of both

Samet also criticised the conduct of the local teams at the disaster scene, according to *Israel Today*. He said: “Unfortunately, we know this work very well, and from what we saw on the ground the local crews are working slowly and inefficiently, and there is a feeling that they are not doing everything right.

“We saw stains of blood and personal belongings scattered around. There are quite a few things that, as far as we’re concerned, are findings that must be collected, and I do not understand how they



ZAKA volunteers at the crash site in Ethiopia

The situation that greeted them was both chaotic and complicated. According to Israeli media reports, experts from the United States and Ethiopian authorities made considerable effort to locate the plane’s black box information recording system. After they found it, they left what remained at the scene almost entirely at the mercy of bulldozers and onlookers.

Israeli news agency Reshet 13 described a scene of locals looting at the crash site, while any other remnants that hadn’t been removed to a hangar in the capital for examination were pushed aside by earthmovers. According to ZAKA, both the crash scene and the hangar were initially completely off limits to them, and though they have since been granted some access, their movements remain severely limited.

The remains taken to the hangar include the bodies of the Israeli passengers, both of whom have been identified. They

the deceased are pushing desperately to get the remains of their loved ones flown to Israel for burial.

Reem’s family flew to Ethiopia, and have reportedly been barred from accessing the hangar in which all the human remains are being kept. With ZAKA’s mobility also limited by bureaucracy, there is not yet any clear indication when access to the remains will be given. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Council, and the Israeli consul in Ethiopia, Ofer Zach, are making efforts to obtain the necessary permits to enable ZAKA volunteers to continue their work.

According to YNet, one of the Israeli volunteers, Elazar Samet, said: “We are not allowed to continue our search in the crater, and there is a mess here with the federal police and the airline. They did not give us permission to continue, and we are trying to persuade the government to allow us to work.”

left it like that on the ground.”

Despite the obstacles in their way, the ZAKA team continues to scour the site and retrieve whatever remains they can. Although functioning on little sleep, they support one another and persist with their mission. “What they do gives you goose bumps,” says Lazarus. “As difficult as it is, they work through it together. Even the *shaliach* rabbi’s wife is there, cooking meals for the volunteers at 23:30.”

After Reem and Matzliach were identified, the team assembled beside the crater for the recitation of the memorial prayer, *Kel Maleh Rachamim*, and the singing of *Hatikva* amid the carnage.

Lazarus concludes: “These are selfless heroes who are there to look after Jewish bodies. Regardless of what they face, they are dedicated to their work and always display courage, strength and fortitude. They are superhuman.”

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Norwegian rapper not charged with hate speech

A Norwegian rapper who cursed Jews while performing at an event in Oslo promoting multiculturalism will not be charged with hate speech, because his words may have been criticism of Israel, prosecutors said.

Kaveh Kholardi said “f***ing Jews” on stage at an event last year, for which he was hired by the city.

Tor-Aksel Busch, Norway’s director of public prosecutions, rejected legal action last week, the news site *Document.no* reported.

Pro-Israel activists had filed a police complaint, but it was dismissed. Busch rejected their appeal, explaining that whereas what Kholardi said “seems to be targeting Jews, it can, however, also be said to express dissatisfaction with the policies of the state of Israel”.

Empire actor indicted by grand jury on 16 felony counts

Actor Jussie Smollett, who stars in the musical drama series *Empire*, was indicted by a grand jury in Chicago on 16 felony counts related to making a false police report in which he said he was the victim of a hate attack last month.

The police believe Smollett, who is black, Jewish and gay, paid two Nigerian brothers to stage the 29 January attack in downtown Chicago. Smollett has denied the allegations.

He told police that two men “gained his attention by yelling out racial and homophobic slurs” towards him before attacking, pouring an “unknown chemical substance” on him, and wrapping a

rope around his neck. The assailants said “This is MAGA country” as they fled, he also told police.

Smollett was released on bail from jail the day after he was charged. He is scheduled to appear in court next week.

Israeli businessman running for president of Guatemala

A Guatemala-born Israeli businessman is running for president of his native country.

Yitzhak Farhi (58) moved to Israel at age 46 after heading the Central American country’s 1 200-strong Jewish community. Farhi, who is Jewish, was a director of the Chevrah Kadisha Jewish burial society.

Farhi was spurred to run by a Guatemalan television interview in June 2018 in which he was asked about the secret of Israel’s success. He replied that “ideals and unity” were behind the reasons, and suggested that Guatemala could also benefit from adopting these principles.

He received an offer from the ViVa party and announced his candidacy for the June elections on Thursday. At this point he is not among the frontrunners in the race.

Police close Temple Mount after firebomb thrown at officers

All entrances and exits to the Temple Mount were closed by Israel police after a firebomb was thrown at a police outpost at the site.

The police said in a statement following the attack on Tuesday afternoon that one of the suspects was identified and detained.

Dozens of police officers reportedly entered the Temple Mount compound after the incident, and worshippers were ordered to leave. Clashes reportedly broke out between the police and Muslim worshippers.

Torah Thought

Ancient words apt for modern times

Did you know that the Megillah, which is read every year on the holiday of Purim, is the only book in the entire Tanach – the books of the Torah, the prophets and scripture – in which G-d’s name does not appear even once?

Reading through the story of Purim, we actually find that not only is G-d not mentioned by name, but in the entire story there is little that is miraculous. In fact, most of it seems to be extremely coincidental. It seems like the work of a great novelist, with all the loose ends eventually coming together.

The story begins with the death of Queen Vashti, and King Achashverosh choosing Esther as his new wife. We then read of Mordechai overhearing and foiling a plot to murder the king, and Haman’s rise to power. Haman’s scheme to annihilate the Jews follows, and then the king discovers that Esther is Jewish and that Haman’s plan would have included her.

All the events leading up to Purim seem to fit right into an almost natural course of

events. There was no splitting of the sea, or manna falling from heaven. No oil lasted for eight days, nor were any firstborns smitten. All we have is one coincidental occurrence after another.

And that is precisely what makes the story of Purim so special.

If we take a look at the world around us, everything seems so normal. The sun rises every morning and sets every evening. Trees and plants grow when they are properly tended, and will wither and die when neglected. All this, and much more, is what we’ve come to know as nature. And like everything else in the world, nature, too, was created by G-d. Nature is G-d’s most incredible miracle. We are living a constant miracle. By waking up every morning, we experience this most miraculous event – life.

The very name of the Megillah, Megillat Esther, makes this point. The name Esther translates as “hidden”. The true miracle of Purim, as well as that of our daily lives, remains hidden. But we know that G-d,

Police and Muslim worshippers have repeatedly clashed in recent weeks over the Bab al-Rahma structure, located at the Golden Gate, or the Gate of Mercy, the only eastern gate to the Temple Mount. The building has been closed and locked since 2003, because the police determined that the Islamic heritage organisation that had operated out of the building was associated with Hamas.

Netanyahu hearing delayed until after elections

Prosecutors in the corruption cases against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will not be able to get their hands on the investigation files until after the country’s election on 9 April because of fears of leaks to the media.

The Justice Ministry made the announcement on Monday evening, responding to a request from Netanyahu’s attorneys.

The prosecutors and the attorneys for the prime minister will be given three months to review the materials before a pre-indictment hearing in which Netanyahu can present his argument for dropping the case.

This means that the hearing will be held on, or shortly after, 10 July.

Attorney-general Avichai Mandelblit announced late last month that, pending the hearing, he plans to indict Netanyahu for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in three separate cases – the first time a sitting prime minister will face criminal charges.

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:06	18:55	Johannesburg
18:47	19:37	Cape Town
17:56	18:45	Durban
18:15	19:04	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:09	Port Elizabeth
18:09	18:59	East London



Rabbi Pini Pink, Chabad of Greenstone

although His name is not mentioned in the Megillah, was in fact behind all that had transpired, just as He is behind all that happens in the world.

Citing the law in the Talmud [Tractate Megillah 17a], the Baal Shem Tov explained that the words “One who reads the Megillah ‘backward’ does not fulfil his duty” allude also to one who thinks that the miracle of Purim was valid only back in those days. The millennia-old words of the Megillah have a profound relevance to our present-day reality.

Just as the Jews of that time trusted in G-d that He would save them from Haman’s wicked decree, so must we have faith in G-d that He is the one who ultimately controls our destiny.

So this year, when you hear the Megillah being read on 20 March, and again during the day on 21 March, take the time to think about the miracle of Purim, and how much it really relates to us.

Danny K says he called out racism because he is Jewish

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish South African singer Danny Koppel, better known as Danny K, tweeted to his 44 500 followers that South Africans should stand up against racism – and received a vicious backlash in response.

“Im totally bewildered with the lack of empathy shown by many white South Africans. You don’t need to be woke to get that for the most part we have benefited from the marginalisation and exclusion of people of colour. Own your priveldge (sic), appreciate it and pay it forward,” he wrote.

Danny K

and hatred.

“This forms part of creating my attitude towards standing up against any form of social injustice. We find ourselves in a deeply divided society, and you don’t need to look far to find an event that is perpetuating this divide. My thoughts are to start the conversation and continue the healing.”

Koppel says he was truly shocked that a simple call to action to stand up against racism, or own one’s privilege, “could in anyway be considered as revolutionary or controversial. I think it’s incredibly revealing of those who interpreted this as a problem, or had a problem with me saying it.”

He adds that “most, if not all, black people celebrated [the tweet], and what was really revealing was the amount of hurt and pain that still exists out there. Many people thanked me for voicing what people may be feeling, but are not voicing publicly.”

He said it’s never easy being attacked. “But if I take a balanced view of supporters versus haters, then I am left feeling more positive than despondent.”

Koppel says everyone has a duty to stand up for social justice – celebrities included. “People with big, powerful voices should be using those voices and that influence for good. Racism is in every community, every country, every religion globally – ours included.”

Koppel said if he was to go back in time, he would definitely tweet the same message. “Since this exploded, I have continued to hold firm and stand by my principles. I am committed to rebuilding and striving for true social justice and cohesion, and we can only do this if we are having honest and sometimes uncomfortable conversations.

“My acknowledgement of my privilege frames my outlook and brings empathy, gratitude and responsibility into my life. It’s the driving force behind all my social cohesion work – *Shout for a Safer South Africa*, our library building project, and my keynote, *Worlds Apart or Partners*, with Kabelo Mabalane, where we give people much-needed tools to navigate around our racially charged

But many South Africans called him out, saying he should “get off his soapbox” and “stop being condescending”. Even Western Cape Premier Helen Zille said Koppel “needed spelling lessons”.

“Danny K seems to have touched the ‘I don’t see colour’ brigade on their studios,” tweeted video journalist Wesley Fester. Another Twitter user, Thabo Makhado, wrote: “Hi Danny K, I know you mean well. But in case of South Africa, Afrikans/Blacks aren’t ‘people of colour’. Afrikans are indigenous in this part of the earth and therefore their skin colour is a norm. Other races can be called ‘people of colour’ in Afrika, but not Afrikans (sic)!”

But Koppel has stuck by his tweet, responding to each attack with reasoned responses. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, he said he wrote his message because “I would like to think that I have always been a person who finds racism intolerable. Being Jewish, I am acutely aware what it’s like to be on the receiving end of bigotry

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BDS board member compares Israel with Nazis

NICOLA MILTZ

A Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA) board member has compared Israelis to Nazis, and demonised Israeli soldiers by portraying them as calculated mass murderers and child killers.

Dudu Masango-Mahlangu, who is also a member of the anti-Israel South African Council of Churches, crossed the line into anti-Semitism in her opinion piece in the *Mail & Guardian (M&G)* last week.

Her highly inflammatory piece was written in response to the recently released United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry report on the protests and violence along the Gaza-Israel border since March 2018.

The report alleged that there was evidence Israel committed crimes against humanity in responding to protests in Gaza in 2018, as snipers targeted people identifiable as children, health workers, journalists, and people with disabilities.

However, despite the UN report receiving widespread international criticism for being biased and flawed, this did not deter Masango-Mahlangu from lambasting Israel and demonising Israelis – taking the anti-Israel rhetoric to a whole new level.

Simon Plosker, managing editor of *HonestReporting*, told the *SA Jewish Report* this amounted to hate speech. He has written a letter of complaint to the *M&G*.

“Dudu Masango-Mahlangu and BDS-SA clearly have no red lines they will not cross,” Plosker said. “While labelling Israelis as cold-hearted, deliberate and inhuman child killers, the real inhumanity on display is this despicable attempt to portray the Palestinians as the victims of a new Nazi Holocaust. Comparing Israeli actions to those of the Nazis is a clear breach of the internationally recognised definition of anti-Semitism. Shame on Masango-Mahlangu and BDS-SA, and shame on the *M&G* for publishing this hate.”

He said it is clear that she was comparing the situation of the Palestinians to the Holocaust. “Ergo, it is Israelis who are now the Nazi oppressors, while the Palestinians are the Holocaust victims.”

Masango-Mahlangu compared Israel to Nazi Germany, using graphic imagery of the Holocaust, including the use of the phrase “Gaza Ghetto”.

“The wretched of the earth in the concentration camps of the Holocaust raised their fists and embarked on uprisings against the Nazis. They refused to submit; they resisted even though the suffocating stench and very real possibility of death surrounded them. It was in those who resisted the Holocaust that we find hope for good to triumph over evil,” she wrote.

“Likewise, it is in the Palestinian child who comes out week after week to break out of her ghetto that we are persuaded to persevere in our solidarity so that a free Palestine is not only possible but also inevitable.

“Palestinians are refusing to submit on their knees and are insisting on fighting on their feet – just as people did in Nazi Germany.”

In the International Holocaust

Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism, it includes “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis”.

The IHRA is an intergovernmental organisation with 31 member countries. In 2017, the European parliament voted to adopt a resolution calling on its member states to adopt this definition.

Masango-Mahlangu said the “murdering of Palestinians in the past year has mostly been the calculated result of a human being, watching, waiting, aiming and firing – coldly, methodically and calmly”.

She made no mention of Hamas’ widely reported use of women and children as human shields. She spoke about the number of Palestinian “civilian” fatalities, without mentioning that the overwhelming majority of fatalities included members of Hamas and other terror organisations reportedly intent on infiltrating the border fence and injuring Israelis.

Dan Diker, foreign affairs analyst and Middle East expert, the project director for the Program to Counter Political Warfare and BDS at the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, accused Masango-Mahlangu of being anti-Semitic.

“She should stand up as an honest card carrying anti-Semite. She relishes in her blood-curdling description of Jews as mass murderers and child killers, without any understanding of the facts

surrounding the Iran-backed Hamas regime’s campaign against Israel’s southern residents. Her fake and disingenuous charges that Israel intentionally kills Palestinian civilians, including children, boggles the mind in its malevolent, premeditated strategy to libel and slander Israel’s international legitimacy.



“Comparing Israeli actions to those of the Nazis is a clear breach of the internationally recognised definition of anti-Semitism.”

“She defends the murderous Hamas regime in Gaza that denies human rights to its own people, especially Christians in Gaza. She should be embarrassed to show her face at the South African Council of Churches when Christian Palestinians are being punished for being Christian, persecuted, and routinely harassed in Gaza.”

The head of communications at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Charisse Zeifert, told the *SA Jewish Report* that although Israel has its faults, comparing Israel to Nazi Germany crosses a line.

“It’s offensive and blatantly wrong. This shows

Ramaphosa flip-flops in pre-election dance over Israel

NICOLA MILTZ

As elections draw near, President Cyril Ramaphosa is caught between a rock and a hard place as far as downgrading the South African Embassy in Israel is concerned, and is pandering for approval depending on his audience, according to experts.

Last week, Ramaphosa was “put on the spot”, say political analysts, when Munzoor Shaik Emam from the National Freedom Party asked him whether any progress had been made regarding the controversial downgrade.

He found himself ping-ponging on the issue, especially since all eyes were on him during his response, including those of Mandla Mandela, grandson of the late Nelson Mandela, who is openly anti-Israel and hugely in favour of the downgrade.

Knowing that he can no longer pussyfoot around the hot issue, Ramaphosa appeared to be trying to keep all sides to this thorny issue happy. On the one hand, he said the government was moving ahead with plans to downgrade South Africa’s embassy in Tel Aviv, in fulfilment of the resolution agreed to at the national conference of the African National Congress (ANC) more than a year ago.

On the other, he reiterated South Africa’s commitment to playing a constructive role in Middle East peace efforts.

He stressed the government’s continued support for the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbours, based on a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Then he said “the government remains seized with the modalities” of downgrading the embassy, and would communicate once the Cabinet had finalised the matter.

Democratic Alliance (DA) MP and spokesperson on labour Michael Bagraim told the *SA Jewish Report* that Ramaphosa was trying to “keep everyone happy” and in the process

was being “duplicitous” and “speaking with a forked tongue”.

“The president was put under pressure in parliament. He understands that if he is in some way disagreeing with the majority of the caucus, he will have real trouble. I could see this tension.

“I don’t believe the president wants to downgrade the embassy, but he doesn’t have the power to push the resolution aside. He is caught between what he wants to do, and what he has to do.”

He said Ramaphosa was stalling on the issue, which was good for

options open with both sides.”

Sara Gon, policy fellow at the Institute of Race Relations, said: “If the president is tailoring what he says depending on who he is talking to, he must think we’re stupid.”

She said there are contradictory and uncertain positions.

“The ANC supports the Palestinians over the Israelis, and it has resolved to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel to show its disapproval of Israel. It will still play a role in achieving a negotiated settlement to the conflict to achieve a two-state solution. Cyril is doing what the ANC requires him to do.

unnecessary. The number of voters who care or know about the Israel-Palestinian issue is irrelevant.

Meanwhile, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) welcomed Ramaphosa’s assurances that South Africa remains committed to playing a constructive role in the Middle East, and applauded his support for the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbours, based on a negotiated two-state solution.

But the board said it is “disappointed and perplexed” by the president’s intention to give effect to the resolution to downgrade the embassy.

“This indeed contradicted Mr Ramaphosa’s own observation that in order for South Africa to see where it might be able to provide assistance, it needed to continue engaging with all parties to the conflict,” said national chairman, Shaun Zagnoev.

The SAJBD said the downgrade will “do nothing to further peace efforts in the region”, but instead will significantly “reduce this country’s ability to play any kind of role”. It urged the government to reconsider its intention, and to look instead for ways to re-engage with all parties.

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) South Africa was quick to latch on to Ramaphosa’s statement with an incessant flurry of tweets, Facebook posts, and a press statement welcoming his response. It said it welcomed the president’s confirmation in parliament that South Africa will not “turn back” on the downgrade.

The original tweet was placed above an old photograph of a smiling Ramaphosa standing alongside anti-Israel Palestinian teen activist Ahed Tamimi, making it appear as if it was taken more recently. It is not known when this photograph was taken by *Sunday Times* photographers, but it is an old file photograph.



President Cyril Ramaphosa

the community, and he found this heartening.

“When he says the government is investigating the modalities, what exactly does this mean? This is a bullshit answer. He is bullshitting his own caucus. There’s no investigation – he’s merely kicking for touch, buying time. How then does he explain this? He says we might have a role to play in the peace process. So someone has given him an argument to enable him to buy time.

“On the one hand he says we are definitely closing it down, but we are working on the modalities. On the other hand he says we haven’t closed it yet, because we still have a role to play. I think it’s duplicitous. He is keeping his

“The problem is although the Muslim population is very small, it has powerful representation in the ANC. This is magnified by a strong anti-Israel position taken traditionally by the Left.

“South Africa is nobody on the world scene. It has no role in negotiations, and certainly not given its very partisan stance.

“The president repeatedly tries to assure the tiny Jewish population that he cares about Israel, and that investment is a shared goal. The problem is that the Jewish community is not a voting block of any consequence. So, he can reassure Jews about one thing while he goes about doing another. If he is playing into election fever, I think it’s completely

Lithuania: Jewish history on trial



Neo-Nazis marching in Lithuania this week, shouting: “Lithuania for Lithuanians” and carrying a banner of their hero Jonas Noreika

TALI FEINBERG

“This is the Holocaust trial of the 21st century,” says Grant Gochin, an ex-South African who has taken the Lithuanian government to court.

He is demanding that it acknowledges how “national hero” Captain Jonas Noreika was responsible for the murder of 14 500 Lithuanian Jews in 1941, including 100 of Gochin’s own relatives.

Gochin believes the trial is essential because it will highlight how “Holocaust distortion as an official policy of the government is not acceptable, and will not be tolerated by international Jewry”. He believes this trial gives “voice to the 220 000 victims in Lithuania.”

Gochin insists that the case – which was heard in the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court on 5 March – was being skewed by the Lithuanian government because its arguments were based on “standing”, not fact.

For example, a member of the Lithuanian Jewish community, Gersonas Taicas, who attended the trial, wrote: “One attorney seemed to slip up, saying, ‘If the Genocide Centre changed its finding and did admit Noreika had contributed to the Holocaust, then all the history textbooks would have to be changed, and the dispute would have to be resolved at conferences, forums, symposia and so on.’”



“South African Jews have been lied to enough. The only thing we want from them is to tell the truth about what they did to our families. It should be our minimal expectation.”

The Lithuanian government also argued that Gochin’s historians were unqualified to make determinations, and that their investigation was in 2015 – so Gochin contesting it in 2019 came after the time limit.

“The government doubts my interests in this case. They see my claims as political to attempt to damage the country. They accuse me of using Soviet methods. They say my efforts are solely to spread lies about Lithuania abroad,” says Gochin.

During the trial, the government also argued that Noreika had friends who saved Jews, and that his wife gave bread rolls to Jewish children.

“They say I was not personally damaged by Noreika and therefore I should not have standing to sue, and that their historical research has been over a longer period than mine, so I should not question their research. They say it is not the place of a court to determine history and I should not have the right to litigate.”

Gochin has worked closely with Silvia Foti, a Chicago schoolteacher and the granddaughter of Noreika, in putting his case together. Foti grew up on stories about her grandfather’s heroic actions against the Soviets, but as an

adult she learned that he gave the orders in cities where 14,500 Jews were murdered.

“It was of particular note that the government did not present their prior defence, which was that Noreika was completely innocent of any crimes, since he was not tried and convicted during his lifetime,” says Gochin.

“Only when it was pointed out to the Lithuanian government that this new standard excused both Hitler and Stalin of any crimes, did they drop that defence. Nonetheless, it showed the lengths to which the government would go to protect their local Jew murderers.”

The verdict is due on 27 March. “I have already instructed my lawyer to work on an appeal. We have to see how the court rules – that will determine our next move. After almost 30 years of deliberate distortion, I do not expect the truth to be acknowledged in its full form. I do expect that I will ultimately have to take this case to the European Courts.”

Gochin wants the story to get as much publicity as possible. “In the trial, the government admitted that they are sensitive to the international press. There is no movement inside the country to tell the truth, so the single best tactic for Jews in the diaspora is to shine the light of truth on the subject, and to counter their distortions. The press is the only tool that will sway them, so I ask and urge all communities of truth to maintain this in the public domain in the press.”

Gochin believes this case is highly relevant to the South African Jewish community. “South African Jews have been lied to enough. The only thing we want from them is to tell the truth about what they did to our families. It should be our minimal expectation.”

He adds that South African Jews can support him by demanding the truth about what was done to their families. “Lithuania cares about their public image, but we will not sell the memories and truth about our families to enable their falsified narrative. The single best way to support this is to share articles about what is actually happening inside Lithuania, and to generate as much press about their Holocaust distortion as possible.”

Gochin says “ordinary Lithuanians do not know [this history]. The government told the population that people like me who seek historical truth have political agendas to damage the country. Lithuania is unable to conceive that people like us care about what happened to our families and simply want the truth told. We are not trying to destroy that country; we simply want truth.

“There has been very little press inside Lithuania. The youth of the country have to seek external press to find out what is happening, and when they do, they leave. Almost a third of the population has left Lithuania, almost all of them the youth of the nation. The educated are voting with their feet.”

He adds that there are instances of ordinary Lithuanians questioning the government’s narrative, but each time they are labelled “Russian agents” or enemies of the state, or they suffer intimidation by the government. “Lithuania today is more reminiscent of the Soviet intimidation system than any European democracy.”

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Human rights are human rights, however you look at them



We are winging our way towards Human Rights Day (21 March), the first public holiday of the year, which coincides with Purim. I can’t help but wonder about our concept of human rights and what it means, not least of all, to our government.

For a start, it was clear the previous incumbents in the government took human rights very personally – clearly only considering their own rights, and not those of the citizens of this country.

All the former president’s promises of uplifting and caring about human rights were apparently fake. He and his cronies really didn’t care about the poorest of the poor, or ensuring the youth were given opportunities to become contributing members of society. No, what is becoming more and more apparent through the various commissions of inquiry is that they were only intent on enriching themselves.

Members of this same ruling party created one of the most beautiful constitutions in the world, with a Bill of Rights that surpasses those in most countries. They thought of everything.

Perhaps they might now begin to implement it. Time and elections will tell.

Having said that, I am amazed at our government and ruling party seeming so set on fighting tooth and nail for human rights in other countries. Or so they so often say...

But, at the same time, they cosy up to some of the most despicable leaders in governments that have absolutely no regard for the human rights of their population.

Just last week, they met with Iranian leaders who visited South Africa to work on an improved relationship. (See page 8.)

In Iran, people may not even hold a peaceful protest. Women are forced to do their husbands’ bidding and have no right to travel without their written permission. They are forced to wear hijabs, and when some protested against this law, they were sentenced to imprisonment ranging from a few months to 20 years, according to Human Rights Watch’s latest World Report. Women are even banned from attending men’s sporting tournaments, including football matches. And that isn’t all...

But South Africa is keen to have better relations with this country.

We have very close relations with China, whose human rights record is also totally unacceptable. The authorities there repress and systematically abuse the 13 million Turkic Muslims in the country’s north-western Xinjiang region, according to the report. It states that the Chinese government has “carried out mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment of some of these people in detention facilities...”.

The Chinese government classifies many religious groups outside its control as “evil cults”, and subjects members to police harassment, torture, detention and imprisonment, according to the report. Last year, that government collected biometrics, including DNA and voice samples, for surveillance purposes, developing a nationwide punishment and reward system. This information, says the report, is for policing programmes aimed at preventing dissent. And so it goes on.

I can name a number of other countries that our government appears happy to have close relations with despite their record of human rights abuses.

However, a tiny democracy in the Middle East appears to be its Achilles heel. This country may not be perfect, but compared to the countries South Africa has relations with (as in those two above), it is far more than angelic.

But for many in the South African government and ruling party, Israel can do no right. The ANC does have a historical bond with the Palestinian people, which goes back to the days of apartheid when the ANC were supported by the Palestinians, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, there is a blind spot to the true picture of Israel. And so there is the constant siding with Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions, and the promise of the South African embassy in Israel being downgraded to a mission.

Already, the South African ambassador was recalled and not allowed to go back to work in the Middle East. Word has it that the government is not planning to send another ambassador in his place.

However, our president does seem a tad conflicted around this.

In his most recent discussion in parliament regarding the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which gets brought up by anti-Israel lobbyists with monotonous regularity, he was not quite clear about where to now on this. (See page 4.)

He did say that South Africa was definitely going to downgrade the embassy there. But within seconds, he was talking about being involved in peace negotiations, which surely cannot take place if South Africa has taken such clear sides in the conflict.

I totally understand that the South African government will not rest until there is a two-state solution in the region. I do understand it wants its Palestinian comrades to be “free”.

However, what always baffles me is how it gets so stuck on Israel’s alleged human rights abuses, which simply do not exist, and certainly nowhere near the level of many of its neighbours and South Africa’s friends.

I accept and support that human rights abuses of any kind are totally unacceptable, but if we are going to demand certain standards, we need to demand them of everyone. It cannot only be one little country in the Middle East – it has to be everywhere.

Here’s to a thought-provoking Human Rights Day and a Chag Purim Sameach!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

The horror of anti-Semitism in France

Weighted down by a bulletproof jacket, I’m standing in front of the iconic French monument, the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris. To my right are the French *gendarmierie* with their shields raised and gas canisters ready. To my left are furious protestors hurling abuse. I don’t notice it today, but previous demonstrations had protestors brandishing posters declaring that French President Emmanuel Macron is “the Jews’ bitch”, “Jewish trash”, “Macron = Zion”, and that he is guilty of “colluding with the Jews”.

In December last year, a Jewish woman on the Paris subway was taunted by some of these drunken protestors after identifying herself as the daughter of an Auschwitz victim.

Anti-Semitism has been around for centuries. It tends to rise and fall with a nation’s sense of victimhood or well-being. Its expression on the streets of France alongside protests that have nothing to do with Jews or Israel or Zionism should not be surprising. Rather, it is a by-product of a movement that has become a free-for-all.

Eighteen weekends ago, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of France to campaign against a gas tax. The protests soon mushroomed into an all-out anti-establishment movement that later became known as the “Yellow Vests”. And with it came increasing expressions of anti-Semitism.

Last month, a group of these protestors verbally attacked the French Jewish intellectual Alain Finkelkraut – ironically a supporter of their demands – as he walked past them on his way home from lunch. They yelled “Dirty Zionist, you’re going to die!” and told him to “Go home to Israel!” and “France is ours!”

The main attacker turned out to be a 36-year-old Muslim convert. This man, Finkelkraut later said, was not an “authentic” Yellow Vest protestor, but rather a member of one of the extremist sects attaching itself to the movement.

It is these extremist sects that are now coming to

DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier



me: “Muslims in France are in a minority, and because they themselves face discrimination, there’s this thinking that victims of racism cannot be racist themselves. But it’s not true.”

An increasing number of observers note that among the Yellow Vest protestors are some who come from these communities. Radical preachers, the funding of mosques, satellite television broadcasting of anti-Semitic discourse, and the country’s failure to integrate second- and third-generation Muslims are all to blame.

Macron rightly condemned the verbal attack on Finkelkraut as “the absolute negation of what we are and what makes us a great nation”. Many politicians expressed similar sentiments.

But some have tried to use the anti-Semitic incidents to discredit the whole movement, which is too simplistic. Rather, it’s the fact that the movement is leaderless – to its benefit but also its weakness – that allows such sentiments to flourish. Anti-Semitism, sadly, also finds support across the board.

Having said that, what is significant is that the response from the movement’s most popular spokespeople has been to either say nothing, or complain that the mainstream media is trying to paint them as racist. One protestor even sported a kippa at a demonstration, suggesting this was the only way to avoid being “gassed” or “rounded up” by the police.

The problem is bigger than the protests themselves.

There are 467 500 Jews in France, 0.7% of the population. And yet more than half of the recorded acts of racism across the country are anti-Semitic.

This year alone, almost 100 graves were desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in eastern France, the word “Juden” was scrawled across a Parisian bagel shop, and swastikas appeared over a street portrait of former health minister and Auschwitz survivor Simone Veil. Last year, another Holocaust survivor was murdered in a grisly attack thought to be motivated in part by anti-Semitism.

Still, a word of caution. The number of anti-Semitic acts in 2018 was 541, and that included verbal abuse, graffiti and violence. Believe it or not, this was historically low. The figure appears dramatic because it followed a lull, or pause, in anti-Semitic behaviour in 2016 and 2017. There were more than 800 anti-Semitic acts recorded in France in 2014, and again in 2015.

Also, it must be said, there has been a general increase in acts of violence by the Yellow Vest protestors across the board, including the desecration of Catholic churches, and an attempt to burn down the country home of the president of the National Assembly.

Initially, most French people supported the protests, but a recent poll found that nearly 60% of the population now wants them to end. As their numbers dwindle, those who remain in the movement are likely to grow more extreme in their views. The worry for Europe’s largest Jewish community is that, as they do, their anti-Semitism will come more to the fore.



Protesters at a rally against anti-Semitism at Republique square in Paris in February 2019

Why pick on Israel?

President Cyril Ramaphosa confirmed in parliament last week that South Africa intended to downgrade its diplomatic presence in Israel. The foreign affairs bureaucracy was working “feverishly” on the matter. “The decision to downgrade the embassy in Israel is informed precisely by the violation of the rights of Palestinians and we are therefore putting pressure on Israel. But at the same time, we are saying we are willing to play a role and ensure there is peace,” said Ramaphosa.

Only the highest principles and most altruistic ideas are on display here – at least within their own logic – befitting a country that still perceives itself as wielding outsized moral authority.

And not only in government: in a recent contribution to the *Daily Maverick* website, Dr Shuaib Manjra assailed Israel, demanding a foreign policy that prioritised “meaningful international solidarity and struggle for justice and human rights”.

Meanwhile, the government of Venezuela resorts to lethal violence and the manipulation of hunger to control its restive subjects. Across the Limpopo River, Zimbabwe’s military, in violation of the country’s constitution, is deployed to intimidate the civilian population.

In China, mass internments of the Uighur minority continue. The release of a video meant to show that a Uighur musician was alive triggered demands for similar “proof-of-life” of other internees.

South Africa’s public response has been not so much quiet as contrary, at least if “solidarity, justice and human rights” are a measure. As Ramaphosa was affirming South Africa’s duty to the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, a delegation of his party colleagues was in the Venezuelan capital Caracas affirming their solidarity with President Nicolás Maduro and his government.

South Africa maintains a cordial and supportive orientation towards the Zimbabwean government. Nothing sums this up – in what it says and fails to say – better than a statement released by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation on 15 January 2019. This was in response to strike action and the brutal state response to it. “The South African government has noted protest action in Zimbabwe and is monitoring the situation. Consultations are taking place between diplomats. We are confident that the measures being taken by the Zimbabwean government will resolve the situation.”

As for China, South Africa’s official stance has long been that of an uncritical, stalwart ally. Nothing, as far as I know, has been said about the troubling developments in Xinjiang, and it is unlikely that anything will.

Perhaps most interestingly, last week South Africa accepted its first ambassador from Morocco in 15 years. With the ANC and South African government sympathetic to the aspirations of the Polisario Front for the independence of Western Sahara (the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic), relations have been strained.

Few prospects of change are evident and most of the criticisms levelled at Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, accurately or not, are applicable here. It even has its own security barrier, the 2 700km Moroccan Western Sahara Wall, cordoning off the barren territory controlled by the Polisario Front.

OPINION

Terence Corrigan



These are mere examples from the recent news cycle. South Africa maintains good relations with any number of countries with lousy human rights records, and has not let territorial disputes elsewhere prejudice its foreign relations.

If the abuse of human rights, repression, the targeting of ethnic minorities and the denial of self-determination (the cause of an ally, no less) present no obstacle to diplomatic engagement with South Africa, why should this be the case with Israel?

Part of the answer is a simple political truism: consistency is much demanded but seldom practiced. As the late political scientist Samuel P Huntington memorably put it, “double standards in practice are the unavoidable price of universal standards of principle”.

There is another explanation. The former diplomat and international relations scholar Professor Gerrit Olivier draws attention to the pervasive and often corrosive influence

of ideology on the country’s foreign policy. Much of this is rooted in the ANC’s experience in exile, its alignments in the Cold War, and its sense of leading a coalition of the “South” since the 1990s.

In all cases, the “West” was a dread opponent to be confronted. In government, while the dictates of practicality may have toned this

down somewhat (though not entirely), the fundamental geopolitical assumptions remain in place.

As Olivier commented in early 2017: “Its foreign policy lodestar is the ANC’s international relations committee discussion document of 2017, an arcane pseudo-Marxist tract garnished with hackneyed clichés and dividing the world simplistically into saints and sinners.”

Israel is a particular target. It is, after all, where various strains of anti-Western thinking – “revolutionary”, “anti-imperialist”, anti-capitalist, Arab nationalist and Islamist (not to mention standard anti-Semitism, in some cases) – intersect as they seldom do elsewhere.

Sadly, when human rights, self-determination and so on are interpreted through this lens, they are fatally compromised. They have become instrumentalist ideas, not normative ones.

Some years ago, I discussed this issue with a senior official at the department. After he had expounded on the centrality of human rights to the country’s foreign policy, I asked whether South Africa ever spoke up for political prisoners in Cuba, dissidents in China, homosexuals in Iran, or women in Saudi Arabia.

After all, if human rights are universal and dear to South Africa, this should concern his department as much as the plight of the Palestinians, or Islamophobia in Europe. He shifted uncomfortably and said that ye-e-e-s, some interventions are made, but they are “unsystematic”. Whether that is a diplomatic way of saying that nothing much is done at all, I’m not sure.

Against Israel, though, it’s all systems go.

• Terence Corrigan is a project manager at the Institute of Race Relations.

South Africa maintains good relations with any number of countries with lousy human rights records.

IEC agrees to extended voting hours for SA Jews abroad

TALI FEINBERG

South African Jews living overseas who have registered to vote in the upcoming South African elections were told the only day they can do this is on 27 April. However, this is a Saturday and falls on both Shabbat and the last day of Pesach, so the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) met with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to make arrangements to accommodate this.

The board was told that the date cannot be changed, but the IEC agreed to extend voting hours on the day. This will only be done at voting stations where there is a Jewish community.

The IEC requested that the SAJBD provide it with the names of those wishing to vote. The board, as a matter

of urgency, therefore asks that all those wishing to vote *motzei Shabbat* (after Shabbat ends) on 27 April to send an email to yanir@sajbd.org with their full name, as well as the foreign mission, embassy or consulate where they will be casting their votes. This needs to be done by 19 March.

IEC Commissioner Mosotho Moepya apologised to the Jewish community, saying the commission’s intention was “never to disenfranchise” any voters, and it would do its best to accommodate all communities living abroad.

The board’s political liaison, Yanir Grindler, said the IEC’s willingness to cooperate in finding a viable solution was much appreciated.

On the day of voting, voters overseas need to take along either their bar-coded South African ID book, smartcard

ID or valid temporary ID certificate, as well as their valid South African passport or temporary passport to the foreign mission indicated on the confirmation that the IEC sent via email or text.

Voters’ thumbnails will be marked with indelible ink and their ID books stamped before they will receive the national ballot paper. They will then mark the ballot in secret, and place and seal the ballot in the unmarked envelope provided.

The unmarked envelope is placed in another envelope that is marked with the voter’s name and ID number. The use of two envelopes is to ensure the secrecy of the ballot (the outer envelope is discarded before counting). The envelope is placed in a secure ballot box for special votes.



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SA’s contrasting stance towards Iran and Israel

STEVEN GRUZZ AND TALİ FEINBERG

While diplomatic ties with Israel wither, South Africa’s friendship with Iran is blossoming. Last Thursday, President Cyril Ramaphosa told parliament that the government was “working feverishly” to implement the ANC’s decision to downgrade the embassy in Tel Aviv to a liaison office. According to EWN, he said: “The decision to downgrade the embassy in Israel is informed precisely by the violation of the rights of Palestinians and we are therefore putting pressure on Israel. But at the same time, we are saying we are willing to play

a role and ensure there is peace [in the Middle East].” Many would say it takes two (not) to tango. The next day, South Africa was warmly welcoming diplomats from Iran, the only country that has openly declared its intention to vaporise another sovereign state: Israel. This year, Iran celebrates 40 years since the 1979 Islamic Revolution swept Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power in Tehran. Since then, Iran has threatened, repeatedly, to obliterate Israel from the map, supported Holocaust deniers, and issued despicable invective against Jews

and the Jewish state. Just last month, a Revolutionary Guard leader vowed to “raze Tel Aviv and Haifa” if the United States attacked Iran. The Islamic republic arms and pays Hamas in Gaza, and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria – proxy forces that fire missiles and dig terror tunnels into Israel. Iran’s human rights record stands in stark opposition to South Africa’s Constitution. For example, on Tuesday, female human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh – representing women who removed their headscarves – was charged with spying and insulting Iran’s supreme leader. She was sentenced to 148 lashes and 38 years in

prison. But last Thursday, Iran’s deputy foreign minister for political affairs, Seyed Abbas Araghchi, held talks with South Africa’s speaker of the National Assembly, Baleka Mbete, in Cape Town. Cooperation in the political and economic arenas was among other issues discussed during the meeting. Mbete, for her part, underlined the significance of bilateral relations and highlighted South Africa’s readiness to promote economic cooperation with Iran. A day later, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Reginah Mhaule received a delegation led by Araghchi at parliament. It included senior officials from both governments. In her remarks, Mhaule said: “I am most honoured to meet you today and wish to convey our appreciation for your visit to the Republic of South Africa... Difficult times... bring friends together and I am delighted to have witnessed the increased interactions between the governments of Iran and South Africa during the last year.”

“Difficult times... bring friends together and I am delighted to have witnessed the increased interactions between the governments of Iran and South Africa during the last year.”

Indeed, this is not an isolated encounter. The Iran-South Africa Deputy Ministerial Working Group has convened eight times, and the two foreign ministers met in June 2018. The South African government undertook a high-profile trip to Tehran in August 2018 “to convey the South African government’s political support to the Islamic Republic of Iran”. Ramaphosa visited Iran in November 2015, and former president Jacob Zuma took a trip to Tehran in April 2016. Mhaule said South Africa found it “regrettable” that the US had decided to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), better known as the Iran nuclear deal. “We believe that [the JCPOA] provides the necessary framework and confidence-building measures under which your country is able to pursue its nuclear activities for peaceful purposes,” said Mhaule. She added that she was encouraged by the other JCPOA signatories and Iran keeping the deal alive. “We believe that your country has adhered to its prescriptions as reinforced by various IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] reports. “It is my firm belief that today’s meeting will add further momentum to our bilateral relations, such that South Africa and Iran will weather the storm together.” In his response, Araghchi said Iran appreciated South Africa’s support and that the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear deal violated UN Security Council resolutions. “The US is trying to punish other countries who don’t do the same,” he said. “We remain a major player in the Middle East. We know how to find our way, despite sanctions. We continue to work towards peace, stability and security. We look forward to friendship between our two countries.” Although members of the media could take photos and hear the opening remarks, they were not allowed to ask questions. Time will tell if elections in South Africa and Israel can shift the needle.



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Happy intersectional Purim



OPINION

Rabbi Ramon Widmonte

One of the questions that haunts the story of Purim and moves silently through the lines of the Megillah is clear and chillingly simple: How could Jews have chosen to remain in Persian Shushan? It was so clearly an environment in which anti-Semitism was so prevalent that a genocide could be planned and almost implemented without comment by broader society.

When we confront the realities of the Spanish Expulsion in 1492, and Germany in the 1930s, we ask again: Couldn't they see it coming? Why did they wait?

Our sages in the Talmud (Megillah 12a) paint a terrifying portrait of the Jews of that era. Exiled to Babylon (and then to Persia), instead of choosing to return to Israel to rebuild the temple (as the prophet Jeremiah had said they should do after 70 years of diaspora life), they remained, partying with King Achashverosh. They were so enwombed in his orgy that they didn't care that the wine they were potting was held in the once-sacred vessels of the temple.

Our sages, as always, capture in this one comment the deepest, tragic human condition of the Jews: a community wilfully overconsuming itself into an oblivion that they hope will mask their identity as Jews.



Ilhan Omar vilified Jews by saying that they had monetary control of US politics

When we look in the mirror, we think to ourselves: It would never happen to us! Would it?

Over the past five weeks, Jews worldwide have been witness to a grotesque new mutation in the body politic of the United States. A freshman congresswoman, Ilhan Omar, has openly stated that US support for Israel is "all about the Benjamins, baby", referring to the image of Benjamin Franklin on the \$100 bill. After apologising for that slur, which clearly alleges Jewish monetary control of US politics, she followed it up with a notorious canard accusing Jewish American supporters of Israel of dual loyalty.

Everyone expected a clear response to Omar's resurrection of smears thought long dead in the US. And everyone waited and waited and waited. Would the Democratic Party leadership take a clear stance? Would a resolution be passed in Congress? The speaker, Nancy Pelosi, thought it was a slam dunk, but then faced an incredible pushback from new members who believed Omar was being targeted for her skin colour (she is black) and her religion. Meanwhile, bigoted statements by other members of Congress were ignored.

Finally, instead of a clear rebuke to Omar and targeting anti-Semitism, a whitewashing resolution was passed, decrying all forms of discrimination. Omar was not censured at all, and she continues her membership of the influential House foreign affairs committee.

What does this mean for Jews worldwide? In many liberal circles today, the concept of intersectionality has become dominant. Intersectionality is a view of the world which claims that human social constructs

should be understood in terms of who wields power, and that there are different systems of power which intersect – and the most powerful people sit at those intersections. Meanwhile, those who occupy no power structures are the most marginalised. But beyond mere description, intersectionality ventures into prescription. So, in order to address these power imbalances, it demands that the voices of those people who were born at such intersections (white Christian, Western males being the most stained) be muted to ensure that the voices of those most oppressed take their rightful place.

The far-reaching impact of this philosophy really hit home when I stumbled across an article titled "Ten things every intersectional feminist should ask on a first date" by Lara Witt. (In case you're wondering, I'm happily married and first dates are long behind me.)

So what are the 10 things that are crucial to knowing your date, according to Witt? In order, they are: "1. Do you believe that black lives matter? 2. What are your thoughts on gender and sexual orientation? 3. How do you work to dismantle sexism and misogyny in your life? 4. What are your thoughts on sex work? 5. Are you a supporter of the BDS movement? 6. What is your understanding of settler colonialism and indigenous rights? 7. Do you think capitalism is exploitative? 8. Can any human be illegal? 9. Do you support Muslim Americans and non-Muslim people from Islamic countries? 10. Does your allyship include disabled folks?"

In this brave new intersectional world, anti-Semitism isn't what it once was. Once upon a time (about 70

years ago), anti-Semitism became the Jewish security blanket. No matter what happened, everyone agreed that anti-Semitism was the worst example of bigotry, and had to be avoided at all costs for the dangers it foreshadowed for all people, not just Jews. Like the Jews in Shushan, so long ago, we were drunk on the heady wine of acceptance.

But now, Islam is the most persecuted religion – and Witt actually writes: "I can't think of any other religion which

has been vilified and lied about more than Islam in a cultural and systemic way." (Wow! Guess the Holocaust doesn't qualify anymore.) And even juicier: the old Jews are now the oppressors, not the oppressed, hence the inclusion of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

What a marvellous reversal, truly worthy of Purim! And to boot, it liberates the Western world of any sense of lingering responsibility for the Holocaust. That is because the former victims are now perpetrating the same evils. This means that all's square, and Western libertarians can happily work towards the destruction of the Zionist state without any doubt that they are anti-Zionist and not anti-Semitic.

And lest we Jews in South Africa congratulate ourselves on escaping this reversal, we need look no further than the statement of Pule Mabe, the ANC's official spokesperson, regarding deaths at the Gaza border last year. "We watched in complete disbelief as a people, who continuously remind us all about the hate and prejudice Jews went through during Hitler's antisemitism reign, will exhibit the same cruelty less than a century later," he said.

This Purim, as we reflect on the Jews of Shushan, the first reflection should perhaps be on contemporary Jews wherever they are, be it the *goldene medinah* of the US or the shores of sunny South Africa. Perhaps the miracle of Purim is that despite our perpetual blindness, Hashem saves us anyway.

• Rabbi Widmonte is the dean of the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning.

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What it took for Esther to find her courage



OPINION

Rabbi Shmuli Kagan

An attentive listener to the Megillah reading on Purim may notice a transformation in the character of Esther, for whom the story is named. She emerges from her protective palatial cocoon, where her natural beauty won the eyes of the Persian king, to become a powerful and courageous queen.

Our first exposure to her is as a young woman who grew up parentless in the home of Mordechai, the great Jewish leader. Once she is captured to participate in the beauty pageant of King Achashverosh, Megillat Esther describes her lack of independence: “And whatever Mordechai said, Esther would do – just as when she was still in his home.” She asks for no makeup or cosmetics. No one knows from where she comes, or her ancestry. Esther prefers to remain under the radar, but somehow she still stands out, passively becoming queen against her will.

Esther’s hesitation to take action is highlighted by her response to the news that Mordechai has donned sackcloth, as she sends him new clothes. It is unclear whether the queen at this point knew about the news of Haman’s decree to wipe out the Jews. Nevertheless, once she is asked to intercede, she refuses. Her apparent claim is that approaching the king without his initial request could be fatal, but Mordechai accuses her of apathy towards her people: “Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews.”

He finally empowers her: “Who knows, perhaps for the sake of a time such as this you have come to join the royalty?” Her unlikely response is one of leadership, and a call to action: “Go and gather all the Jews.”

Queen Esther of Persia inspires her people, the Jews, to fast and pray. She manoeuvres politically, cornering Haman, while unabashedly revealing she is a member of the nation Haman describes as one “whose ways are different”.

As the scroll nears its end, the once-anonymous Esther writes to the sages to record her story for generations. Megillat Esther tells of the miraculous survival of the Jewish people, but it is named for her.

What activated such a transformation? There were a number of factors, such as someone whom she trusted who believed in her, and the realisation that the threat was as much a personal as a national one. Just as Esther recognised that the message to her people was to be taken personally, we too can learn from the ancient story of Purim a relevant lesson that affects each of us today.

There is a joke about the difference between ignorance and apathy. The answer is, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” As Jews, we cannot hide our head in the sand, ignoring the tremendous challenges our people are facing. Whether they are physical threats of anti-Semitism or the spiritual decay of assimilation, we must enlighten ourselves to their reality and their effect.

Queen Esther may have been able to claim ignorance of the situation unfolding beyond the palace walls, but today social media and the internet penetrate even our pockets.

We should feel a shared personal identity and fate with the Jewish people. Just as Haman did not differentiate between types of Jews, Hitler viewed each of us as individuals who are no different from each other. Mordechai urges Esther: “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from elsewhere, but you and your father’s house will perish.” A



person’s apathy is removed when they realise they are personally threatened. Perhaps Esther may have survived, but the Jewish value of collective responsibility that she inherited from her father’s home would have vanished.

We are not only personally responsible because we share a common fate, but each of us is endowed with our own unique mission. We find ourselves with singular talents and

circumstances, just as Esther found herself in the palace. We need mentors who believe in us, and we must share that belief in others.

Most significantly, G-d has faith in us. It was Rav Nachman of Breslov who stated: “The day you were born is the day G-d decided the world could not exist without you.”

Soon university campuses around the world will be hosting Israel Apartheid Week. Fortunately, there are many students and activists, Jewish and non-Jewish, who do not hide behind the false protection of ignorance and apathy. They attempt to educate and stand up against the lies and threats of those who could not care about democracy, or are unwilling to find out the truth for themselves.

The Talmud finds a hint to the existence of Esther in the Torah from the words “I shall surely hide my face”. Megillat Esther tells of how a woman revealed her hidden drive and wisdom, influencing the transformation of a nation from death to life.

As we are reminded of this shared story, let us reveal the Esther in ourselves, for our own sake and for our people. Purim Sameach!

• *Rabbi Shmuli Kagan is the rabbi of Bnei Akiva South Africa and teaches Kodesh at Yeshiva College High School.*

History shows many versions of the Purim story

JORDAN MOSHE

Purim is a unique festival during which we celebrate the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish community of Shushan from the designs of the grand vizier of Persia, Haman. Or is it? Taking place in about 300 BCE, the Purim story is feted as a miraculous event, commemorating Jewish victory against all odds. Unique it may be, but there are in fact similar events in history that all bear an uncanny likeness to what happened in Persia.

Over the course of Jewish history, there have been numerous occasions on which communities experienced tumultuous crises that threatened their lives in all parts of the world. Upon surviving these ordeals, many Jews chose to commemorate the event by establishing a Yom Tov, marked by special observances of gratitude and celebration.

In fact, many of these observances were fashioned after and even called Purim, and over the last several 100 years there have been dozens of recorded local Purim-like occurrences, with some celebrated by the Jewish community of a town or city, and others observed by families.

With the passing of time, most of these celebrations and the events they commemorate have been forgotten, but they remain fascinating, nonetheless.

Algiers, Shiraz, Tunis and Frankfurt all have Purim stories of their own. In every instance, the local Jewish community is threatened with plunder, expulsion or massacre, but against all odds emerges triumphant against a tyrant bent on its destruction. Perhaps most notable among these accounts is that of a Cairo-based Purim miracle, the events of which are strikingly similar to the Purim miracles of Shushan. Some Egyptian Jews and Jews of Egyptian descent still commemorate the event, recounting the narrative from a historical document originally written in a form of Hebrew.

According to Jewish historian Jacob Marcus, this narrative concerns a festival that was celebrated in Cairo on 28 Adar, a strong similarity to the original Purim. In 1524, the governor of Egypt, Ahmed Pasha, usurped the throne of the Ottoman-controlled Egyptian kingdom, becoming incredibly powerful in a bid to revolt against Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. To fund his rebellion, Pasha intended to plunder the wealth of the prominent Egyptian Jewish community, and considered massacring them shortly thereafter.

As part of his revolt, Pasha ordered that his name be used in place of the sultan’s in the Friday sermon at local mosques, and on locally minted coins. The head of the mint was an Egyptian Jew, Abraham de Castro, who, thinking on his feet, requested that Pasha put his request in writing. Escaping secretly from Cairo, de Castro sneaked the written order to Constantinople, where he revealed it to Sultan

Suleiman and recounted what had befallen Cairo.

When he learned that he had been exposed, Pasha flew into a rage, arresting 12 of Cairo’s prominent Jewish leaders, including the community’s rabbi, the Torah giant known as the Radbaz. To bolster his rebellion financially, Pasha demanded an exorbitant ransom for their release, threatening to execute them, plunder Jewish homes, and exile the entire Jewish community if it wasn’t paid by 28 Adar.

Like the Jews of Shushan, Cairo’s Jews responded by declaring a day of prayer and fasting, and they began gathering the ransom money. When they had amassed what they could (about a tenth of the demanded ransom), they brought it to the palace, hoping the vizier would accept it as a down payment.



The back gate of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo

Presenting themselves to deliver their funds, they were informed by Pasha’s secretary that the amount was insufficient. He added that Pasha would have no choice but to order his decree to be carried out – as soon as he emerged from his bath.

Unbeknown to him, however, Suleiman had amassed an army and marched on Cairo that very day, determined to eliminate the political upstart. Although Pasha attempted to flee, Suleiman gave chase, catching up with him and proceeding to destroy his force and beheaded the rebel.

With Pasha’s head fixed on a spear, he entered Cairo and announced that the tyranny of Pasha had passed.

In so doing, Suleiman ensured that 28 Adar was joyously proclaimed a local festival and observed for as long as a sizable Jewish community existed in Cairo. The day of their liberation was proclaimed *Purim Mitzrayim*, or “The Purim of Cairo”, owing to its striking resemblance to the original Purim story. This Egyptian version is always within a few weeks of Purim as we know it.

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No more Mr Nice Guy: Mordechai’s intervention in the narrative of Esther



Adina Roth

There is a beautiful idea in Judaism, that G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. Although it is unlikely that G-d literally peered into a hand-written Torah scroll to create the world, this mystical teaching about the origins of our universe conveys a profound truth. We are not, as some would have us believe, random atoms, hurtling into an abyss of uncertainty.

If we live in a universe that is predicated on the Torah, we live in a “universe filled with meaning and purpose”. If this is the case, then each of our lives is intertwined with a larger destiny, and our small story has a role to play in the bigger narrative.

This is why our rabbis teach us that we should keep a note in our pocket with the message, “For me was the world created.” This notion of a universe filled with meaning is explored in the fourth chapter of Esther after Mordechai has learned of Haman’s decree against the Jewish people.

At this point, Mordechai places himself outside the palace gates in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther sends a messenger to assist him, he conveys the terrible news. Esther is distressed, but she immediately expresses that she is without power to intervene.

The king has not summonsed her for days, and if she goes to the king without an invitation, it would mean almost certain death. One can imagine what is going through Esther’s mind at this time. She is frightened for her life, feels incapable of taking on a challenge of such great proportions, and is convinced of her failure.

What Mordechai says in response might constitute the first, ancient “intervention” – that modern phenomenon made popular by 12-step programmes and the self-help shark addicts’ support group in *Finding Nemo*. An intervention occurs when a friend confronts a person about their self-destructive behaviour, and goads them to take action to embody their potential.

Mordechai says to Esther: “Don’t imagine in your soul that you will be able to escape in the king’s palace... who knows whether it was just for such a time as this that you have attained the royal position.”

Mordechai’s words contain the urgency of a wake-up call.

Indeed, he warns Esther that she will perish and disappear into oblivion if she fails to intervene on behalf of the Jewish people. But to think that Mordechai is simply inciting Esther into acting on his behalf, or even on behalf of the Jewish people, is to miss the point.

Mordechai is challenging Esther to step into her own destiny, to live a life filled with largesse and purpose. Mordechai is reminding Esther that “G-d looked into the Torah and created the world”, that there is a deeper meaning to her life.

Being a queen to the Persian king might feel like a type of greatness, but Mordechai reminds her that in

the bigger picture she would be consigned to the annals of ancient history. Esther needs to realise that she is queen for a reason beyond her own edification that will transform her into a woman of true greatness.

Instead of terrifying her, Mordechai’s words seem to release Esther from the vice of fear. She finds her own voice, discovers clarity of action, and instructs Mordechai what to do next. The rest, one could say, is history.

Mordechai’s wake-up call to Esther could be understood through the Kabbalistic qualities of *chesed* and *gevurah*. *Chesed* is the quality of compassion, love, expansiveness and generosity, whereas *gevurah* is about strength, boundaries, firmness and containment.

Were Mordechai to have sympathised with Esther, he would have ended up colluding with her fear and the small vision of life she had chosen for herself. Instead, he opts for *gevurah*, and chooses to confront and challenge Esther. In this instance, his *gevurah* saves her life and the welfare of the Jewish people.

I believe this is something we



Actress Gal Gadot dressed as Queen Esther

humans struggle with in our various roles as employers, spouses, parents and friends. The quality of kindness can become romanticised to the point that we end up colluding with a person’s sense of victimhood, and leave them stuck in their wallowing mud.

It is sometimes harder to confront;

certainly there is more risk involved. If the person involved does not take our confrontation well, we could end up harming a relationship.

The clue for how to navigate this tension between *chesed* and *gevurah*, between empathising and challenging, comes again from Mordechai’s approach to Esther.

Hidden in his words is the message to Esther: “You are bigger and better than this.”

His confronting her is ultimately about holding up a vision to Esther of the better person she can become. His words offer her a larger sense of self and her place in the Jewish story. Mordechai’s challenge to Esther reflects her capaciousness, not diminishment.

As we enter Purim this year, and play with our dress-ups and disguises, let us use this time for a little self-reflection. Remember Mordechai’s words at the heart of the Megillah and contemplate where we might have opted for identities or lives that are too small for us. Let us find the courage, like Esther, to step into the shoes of our own destinies, to find our voices and assist in the healing of our communities and world.

• Adina Roth is a clinical psychologist in private practice and a teacher of Jewish studies. She runs an independent barmitzvah and batmitzvah programme in Johannesburg and teaches Tanach to adults.

Jews and alcohol – and the close bond between them

JORDAN MOSHE

Think of a Prohibition era bootlegger and you probably imagine an Italian accent, bespoke suit and Tommy gun. But you would be just as correct to replace that image with a Yiddish accent, long black coat and dangling *payot*.

Because there is another figure whose role in peddling alcohol was just as controversial and perhaps even more influential: the Jewish bootlegger.

Although the exact number of people involved in bootlegging during Prohibition in the United States between 1920 and 1933 is not known, evidence of almost 60% of them being Jewish exists. In fact, commonly believed bootlegger stereotypes are inaccurate, with research suggesting that only about 30% were Italian and 10% were Irish.

“At first, alcohol offered a way for American Jews to present themselves as the best sorts of Americans, as the ones who consume alcohol regularly but are not drunkards, who participate in the economy in ways that benefit communities and society at large,” writes Marni Davis, author of *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition*.

The close connection between Jews and alcohol can actually be traced back further than the US of the early 20th century. Jews had been fierce opponents of temperance and prohibition efforts since the 1870s, for both economic and cultural reasons. Long before the ban on alcohol, Jews were deeply involved in the alcohol business.

Wine is an important component of Jewish religious practice, traditionally and historically. It is blessed and drunk at tables on Friday night and Saturday morning in honour of Shabbat. Jews are instructed by *halacha* to create their own wine, which can’t involve anyone outside of the faith. Jewish cultural practices also separate us from other communities.

This, as Davis explains, gave rise to the economic connection. If Jews were overseeing the entire process of wine-making, they could increase their expertise and capitalise on the manufacture of wine.

Insofar as both wine and beer were concerned, Jews produced drinks for their own consumption and that of their gentile neighbours for centuries. The Jews of Persia made a living from brewing beer. Jewish communities who were part of the Islamic empire of the Middle Ages produced wine for Muslims who sought a clandestine supplier. They served as brokers and middlemen, trafficking alcohol across a vast network, thereby situating themselves centrally in an important commercial market.

This was particularly important for American Jews in later years. Alcohol commerce was a driving force of social mobility for Jews, enabling them to reach new heights and better their prospects. The threat posed by Prohibition imperilled not only this means of life improvement, but represented a xenophobic movement in the US. This was a concerted effort to keep immigrants and religions like Judaism and Catholicism away from the mainstream.

The American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith, and other Jewish organisations opposed Prohibition because of its larger implications. They saw it as pushing a more sinister association between those considered “the

other” and alcohol, and stressed the danger that both represented a moral American public.

When Prohibition was enacted, a heavily Jewish industry effectively became an outlawed one. Under the Volstead Act, wine consumption was still permitted for sacramental purposes, and rabbis and priests alone could legally possess and distribute it.

Every Jewish adult in the country was allocated 10 gallons of wine a year. This restriction had the amusing effect of seeing a single Los Angeles congregation rise from 180 families to 1 000 families in a single year. By 1924, 2.9 million gallons were being given out, causing many to think, mistakenly, that the Jewish population was growing.

Because the rabbinate in the US was very loosely organised, it wasn’t long before Jewish communities witnessed an increase in the presence of “rabbis” with unusually large congregations.

When a federal grand jury investigated 600 rabbis in New York City in 1926, the amount of wine drawn from the strictly sacramental wine storage locations suddenly dropped from one million gallons in 1925 to 6 000 gallons in 1926. Their suspicions were clearly confirmed.

Alongside bootlegging rabbis, Jewish involvement in moving other alcoholic beverages was no less impressive. The Canadian businessman Samuel Bronfman, owner of Seagram Gin, had Jewish bootleggers floating so much illegal liquor into the US over Lake Erie that it became known as the “Jewish Lake”.



Storefront during the Prohibition era, circa 1920

Photo courtesy of Underwood Archives, Inc.

In fact, says author Daniel Okrent, almost half the bootleggers who pumped the US with alcohol during Prohibition were Eastern European Jews, including real-life gangsters such as Longie Zwillman, Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel. The Jewish cohort of notorious mobsters was sizeable. Lansky and Siegel ran the Bugs and Meyer Mob, which later became a part of Murder Incorporated, a key part

of the bootlegging enterprise and the brutal enforcement arm of the Italian Mafia.

Jews were also represented on the side of the law, with federal agents such as Izzy Einstein accosting elderly bearded Jewish men pushing prams through the Lower East Side and discovering that they contained “the cutest tot of whisky he ever saw”.

Whether for religious practice or pleasure, Jewish bootleggers ensured that the alcohol kept flowing in the US at its driest time in history. Although unlikely allies, rabbis and gangsters worked side by side, united in a mission that would see Haftorah clubs and Pesach Seders alike kept well supplied with the necessary tippale.

It’s Purim – let’s eat!

SHARON LURIE – THE KOSHER BUTCHER’S WIFE

South Africans enjoy yeast dough Hamantaschen. Well, I definitely prefer them to the biscuit version. Their soft, delicious, bread-like texture makes them mouth-wateringly tempting. With all the

wonderful fillings you get these days, it’s no wonder they just get more and more popular. Dulce de leche, jam, *mohn* (poppy seed), cheese, cinnamon and raisins, cranberries and apples, peanut butter, chocolate and halva, and my latest version; pear, ginger and caramel. Of course, being the butcher’s wife, a savoury

Hamantaschen goes down well in our home. So here’s what I’m making to go with my leek and potato soup on Purim.

TIPS
Add a personal touch to your bought Hamantaschen: If you don’t want to make your own, order them and

dip the ends in white icing (icing sugar and boiling water). While still wet, sprinkle with 100s and 1000s, chocolate vermicelli and sparkle sprinkles. Allow to dry and enjoy.
If you want to make your own in advance, allow dough to rise once, roll out, add filling and freeze immediately while still raw. Then,

early on Thursday morning, allow them to defrost, double-brush with egg wash and bake.

• *Sharon Lurie is a food consultant and writes for various local and international Jewish publications.*

SAVOURY DELI HAMANTASCHEN

- INGREDIENTS:**
SAVOURY DOUGH
- 6 cups flour
 - 1 tablespoon salt
 - 2 tablespoons sugar
 - 2-2½ cups water
 - ½ cup oil or non-dairy margarine
 - 2 sachets rapid-rising yeast

- FILLING**
- 500g assorted cold meats, sausages and polonies, very finely chopped or shredded (cooked brisket doesn’t work well with this recipe – the smoked meats are better)
 - ¼ cup hot dog mustard (I like All Gold)
 - ¼ cup mayonnaise
 - egg wash (1 egg mixed with 1 tablespoon water)

- DIRECTIONS**
- Place all the dough ingredients in a Mixmaster with a dough hook and knead until the dough leaves the sides of the bowl to form a ball (about 8-10 minutes). Challah dough texture is perfect for this recipe.
 - Allow to rise once until double in size then roll out on a floured board to ½cm thickness.
 - Cut into circles about the size of a side or bread plate.
 - Combine the mustard and mayonnaise. You can add a little sweet chilli sauce to your sauce or, if you prefer a little heat, add a tablespoon of regular peri-peri sauce.
 - Paint each circle with the mustard-mayo combination, leaving a 1cm border around the edge of the dough. This makes it easier for the dough to grip along the seams as you press the edges together when shaping into triangles. Too much sauce could make the seams a little slippery.
 - Fill with the finely diced meats.
 - Pull the sides up into a triangular shape and make sure the seams are well sealed by pressing them together with your thumb and forefinger.
 - Allow to rise again. At this point you may notice the seams separating. Press them together again, brush with egg wash and place them in the oven. They may open again while baking, but that’s all right as it will just crisp the lovely meat packed inside.
 - Serve with your favourite deli condiments.



SWEET AND SALTY PEAR, GINGER AND FETA HAMANTASCHEN

- (with white chocolate, caramel and macadamia nuts topping)
- INGREDIENTS:**
DOUGH
- 4 cups flour
 - 2 cups warm milk or water (not too hot as it will kill the yeast)
 - 1 sachet rapid-rising yeast
 - ¼ cup sugar
 - ⅓ cup butter or oil
 - 1 egg
 - 2 teaspoons salt

- FILLING**
- 1 large can of pears, drained and finely chopped
 - ¼ cup ginger syrup with pieces finely chopped
 - ½ teaspoon ginger powder
 - ¼ cup ready-made custard
 - ½ cup crumbled feta cheese

DECORATE WITH
White chocolate, caramel (optional), a little extra feta cheese and macadamia nuts

- INSTRUCTIONS**
- Place all the dough ingredients in a Mixmaster with a dough hook and knead until the dough leaves the sides of the bowl to form a ball. It may be a little more sticky than challah dough, so a well-floured board to roll and shape it is recommended.
 - Allow dough to rise once until double in size, then roll out on a floured board to ½cm thickness. Cut into circles about the size of a side or bread plate.
 - Combine the well-drained chopped pears, ginger syrup, feta and custard and place 2 tablespoons (or a little more) into the centre of the dough.
 - Pull the sides up into a triangular shape and make sure the seams are well sealed by pressing them together with your thumb and forefinger.
 - Allow to rise again then brush with egg wash.
 - At this point, if you notice the seams separating, press them together again, brush with egg wash and place them in the oven. They may open again while baking, but don’t worry as you are going to grate chocolate over them as they come out the oven, which will melt the chocolate. Optionally, drizzle with caramel and then the nuts.



First kosher restaurant set to open in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan will soon have its own kosher-certified restaurant – a first for the country.

The meat restaurant, named 7/40, will open in May on Samed Vurgun street in Baku, the capital, with supervision from the city’s rabbi, Shneor Segal, said the restaurant’s operator, Moshe Moiseev.

The restaurant is located in the Nasimi district, formerly Baku’s Jewish neighbourhood. It is around the corner from Segal’s Chabad synagogue and about 450m from the Georgian synagogue.

Boasting 100 seats, the restaurant will combine Azeri cuisine with Middle Eastern Israeli dishes, said Nasiyev, who was born in Baku, a bustling metropolis on the Caspian Sea. It will open at a time of decline for Baku’s Jewish population, which now numbers no more than 8 000. It was double that in 2000.

“But those who stayed, their attachment to Judaism has grown stronger,” Segal said.

The new restaurant will “help reinforce that”, uniting families in which only some members keep kosher, he added. It also will “upgrade in a major way” the experience of Jewish tourists, whose presence in Baku is growing. Moiseev said his business model is based on developing a non-Jewish clientele.

“This will be a kosher restaurant,” he said, “but its success depends on its appeal to the average Azeri restaurant goer, and we’ve done everything possible to make them feel at home at 7/40.” (JTA)

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Remembering Operation Moses, 30 years on

TALI FEINBERG

“My father may live in Jerusalem, but his heart and mind are still in Ethiopia,” says Danny Adeno Abebe, who was a child when he and his family were airlifted to Israel in 1984.

He was speaking at the opening of the exhibition *Operation Moses – 30 Years After* at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town.

Abebe says he was given the name “Dan” by the Jewish Agency when he landed in Israel, and many people call him that or “Danny” today. But he actually prefers his given name, Adeno, which means “healthy”.

Abebe is currently the Habonim Dror *shaliach* in South Africa, and he sees himself as a true Israeli. He served in the army, speaks perfect Hebrew, went to yeshiva, was a journalist at the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonot*, and gave his children Hebrew names. “I was even the first Ethiopian Israeli to be on Army Radio,” he says.

But his life began in a different time and place: a tiny village in Ethiopia so remote that villagers say “G-d created us and then forgot us”. These Ethiopian Jews, known as Beta Israel, were so cut off from other people and world Jewry that they did not celebrate Channukah or Purim, and did not know of the Talmud, as these all came after they were separated from the Jewish Diaspora.

But their traditions, oral history and identity demonstrated that they are Jewish in every way. “We believe we come from the lost tribe of Dan. We dreamed of Jerusalem, we had synagogues and rabbis, and we practiced Judaism very strictly,” remembers Abebe.

His childhood seems like it was from another life. He was a simple shepherd boy who never knew exactly when his birthday was, but he and his family were happy. Then, one day, his father started selling their cattle and other worldly goods, but the young boy was not told the reason.

“Then one evening – it was Rosh Hashanah night and Shabbat – we left our village and started walking. We walked 800km to Sudan, where we were put in refugee camps.”

At this point, Abebe becomes visibly emotional. “I do not say it lightly... but we suffered a small Holocaust in Sudan. A third of the people died en route. The suffering was terrible. Everyone lost someone.” This included his family: an aunt who was young and healthy passed away suddenly from disease during the journey to Sudan, but the family had to keep going. “This was very hard,” he says.

He believes this aspect of Operation Moses needs to be highlighted, as for him it was the most traumatic part. Although the exhibition explores Ethiopian Jews’ lives in Israel, he would like to see an exhibition on the suffering experienced in Sudan.

Abebe recalls being loaded onto a cargo plane but not really understanding it was a plane, then arriving in Israel and having to figure out how everything worked, from a fridge to a bus. The family settled in Jerusalem – the place of their prayers and dreams – but the confusion of life in Israel soon hit them hard.

This bewilderment was



overpowering for many Ethiopian Jews, including his father. “Thirty years later, he does not know how to speak Hebrew, and he doesn’t work. He tried, but it was too difficult. Now he dreams of Ethiopia,” says Abebe, noting that this is normal among older men in the Ethiopian community.

This contrasts to the idealised narrative of Ethiopian Jews settling

easily in Israel. “Many men really struggled. They did an *ulpan* to learn Hebrew, but beyond that they just had to find their way,” he explains.

Abebe says his father has hardly ever spoken about his experiences in the refugee camp in Sudan, and perhaps it is this trauma that affected his ability to integrate into Israeli society. Despite these challenges, he says his father is his hero.

In contrast, many women succeeded – simply because they had to for their children. Abebe’s eyes light up as he describes his mother, who got her driver’s licence, learned Hebrew, and ensured her children became integrated Israelis.

Many of these contrasts are reflected in the exhibition, which tells the stories of 10 Ethiopian Jews 30 years after the operation. Some

have succeeded and risen to the upper echelons of Israeli society, whereas others have battled poverty, unemployment and discrimination. Some yearn for Ethiopia; some see themselves as only Israeli.

Abebe knows everyone featured in the exhibition. Although they are not close family or friends, it is a tiny community and many suffered together in Sudan. One or two were even children with him in the refugee camp.

He has returned to the village where he was born, taking his children to visit, and he says they could not believe how remote it was. It is in moments like these that Abebe feels like a “bridge” between his parents, who fought so hard to become Israeli, and his children, who take their Israeliness for granted.

“For me, it was like jumping 100 years from Ethiopia to Israel,” is how Abebe describes the cultural challenges and battle to integrate. “But for my parents, it was like 300 or 400 years. Maybe it was just too hard.”

Another Israeli at the exhibition, Lior Shur says hearing Abebe speak was the first time he realised how tough it was for Ethiopian Jews when they arrived in Israel. “I just realised how unprepared Israel was, both literally and physically,” he says. “And we are still feeling the effects today.”

Why investing in Israel is worthwhile

JORDAN MOSHE

“There is no better way to combat Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) than by engaging with and investing in Israel’s economy – not on ideological or Zionistic grounds, but on economic grounds.”

So says Marc Reiss, deputy managing director of international activities and private banking of Israel’s Mizrahi Tefahot Bank. Speaking at a dinner hosted by local real-estate group Home in Israel at the Wanderers Club last week, Reiss elaborated on the significance of the Israeli economy and the context of this success.

He also made it clear why, aside from countering BDS, it is so worthwhile investing in a life, property or business in Israel.

He explained that Israel’s economic success is rooted not only in Jewish savvy, but in Jewish heart. Despite the statistical insignificance of Jews worldwide, the force they represent finds expression in the success of the Jewish state and its ability to punch above its weight economically.

“To understand the Israeli economy, one must first understand the environment which we are in as Jews,” he said. “Our challenges are often difficult to quantify, but we need to put things into part of a broader perspective.” Explaining that people often have the idea that the Jewish world is far vaster than it actually is, Reiss quantified the actual presence of Jews worldwide.

“Today there are roughly 14.5 million Jews in the world. The largest population is in Israel, at 6.6 million. This is followed by the US at 4.5 million, France at 500 000, Canada at 400 000 and the UK at 290 000. South Africa ranks ninth with around 60 000.”

He continued: “There are roughly 7.7 billion people in the world. Today, it takes 10 years to add a billion to the world population. Jews are only 0.19% of this, and because of population growth, we become increasingly insignificant as time passes.”

Despite this insignificance, Jews are a central

focus of world politics. Reiss said the global political arena is increasingly becoming divided by extreme left and right divisions, with countries like Mexico and Greece moving to the hard left, and Italy, France and Brazil joining the right.

“The one thing in common between ultra-right and ultra-left is that both are not particularly fond of the Jews,” said Reiss. “In this climate, our enemies’ enemies have become our friends.”

Add to the mix economic fluxes, financial indicators and unemployment, and you can begin to understand Israel’s economic success and appeal. Said Reiss: “Financially speaking, there has never been a generation in which it is better to be a Jew, let alone an Israeli. This is the first time in our history that this is so.”

Israel’s population growth is 2%, compared with that of the European Union at 0.4%, which is due only to the influx of Middle Eastern and African refugees. “The workforce in Israel is four million,” explained Reiss. “Unemployment is 3.9%, which by any definition is full employment. The GDP is \$400 billion (about R5.745 trillion), placing the Israeli economy at 19th in world, better than France, England, and even Japan. The budget deficit is 2.5%, meaning this is a world-class economy. Contrast this with our insignificance as 0.19 of a percent.”

This means it is economic opportunity that is getting people interested in Israel more than anything else. Reiss said although everyone seems familiar with Israel’s success in the hi-tech industry, it amounts to only 9% of Israel’s economy. “Every industry in Israel contributes to its economic success, not only hi-tech. Pepsi-Cola bought Israeli company Soda Stream for \$3.2 billion (about R46 billion). That is not hi-tech. That’s water. It so frightened Pepsi that they bought it.”

From app creation to gaming, news to software, Israel succeeds in every industry. “If you add all these up, you can see why the shekel is strong,” said Reiss. “Israel is an economy with no natural resources. Our biggest resource is knowledge.

People are not leaving their countries because of politics, but because there are jobs and opportunities available in Israel.”

People are behind Israel’s economic success, according to Reiss. “Finance is about the people,” he said. “People, tech and capital are the pillars of banking. Israeli banks have something to add to every part of the Jewish world, and their staff understand things with a Jewish head. The Israeli economy is human and makes use of Jewish heart and spirit.”



He said that every transaction focuses on the human element.

“In Israel, you can phone up a banker and find something to suit your needs based on your approved budget. When you’re not 100% sure about what you can buy, whether it’s worth it, what fees you can expect, there is someone to assist. It’s all about the people. They can navigate you through the system.”

Reiss concluded by stressing the need for Jews around the world to play a part in this success by combatting groups such as the BDS movement. “When you invest in a company in Israel, when you buy property in Israel, or when you use an Israeli service, you are engaging with the economy. There is no better answer to the BDS.”



Moving mountains: the upside to social cycling

NIA MAGOULIANITI-MCGREGOR

WhatsApp group chats, frequent breakfasts, the odd braai, an occasional wedding invitation, the continual search for the perfect coffee shop, and joint holiday plans. You’d be forgiven for thinking these are just your average garden-variety BFFs (best friends forever).

But throw in some helmets, carbon fibre or aluminium on and off-road bikes, Oakley eyewear, a few well-used maps, leg muscles, and an ethos of “no one gets left behind”, and you’re smack bang on another path. The path of social cycling. Even Albert Einstein had a theorem about it. “Life is like riding a bicycle,” he once said. “In order to keep your balance you must keep moving.”

A few Johannesburg-based cycling enthusiasts have turned this theorem on its head. They keep moving to keep their balance.

Like entrepreneur Steven Blend, 62, who’s been cycling for 30 years, and invented the term “serious/social” to describe it, as it’s “a full workout, and very social”. Part of the Capri Wheelers Club – to which “everyone is welcome but for the moment, we’re 80% Jewish” – Blend says cycling is an integral part of his life.

“We moan when we do ride – we meet very early in the morning – but we moan even more if we don’t. Most of us feel ratty. The day drags.”

He gave up golf for this, and has no regrets. “You feel free and happy, and have a huge sense of satisfaction afterwards.” He particularly loves the camaraderie. “Our club consists of 20-somethings and 70-somethings who’ve become friends. In one family, three generations ride together.”

Don’t ask Blend what they talk about when they’re not huffing and puffing up a hill. “What we discuss on tour, stays on tour!” he laughs.

But he’ll say this, “It’s usually difficult to find such happy, healthy, sociable, like-minded people. We love the scenery, the open-roads, the clear skies, and the coffee breaks most of all.” It doesn’t have to be an expensive sport, he says, though it can be. You can start with an outlay of a few thousand rand. “But the carbon-fibre bikes will set you back about R100 000.

“Us older guys with more time meet four times a week. My wife Zoe doesn’t mind as long as I don’t wake her up at 04:30. Of course, she gets the benefit of a young, healthy husband!”

This is a group, he says, that’s prepared to “schlep our bikes around the world. My wife often quips that if there’s room, I’ll take her too.”

Advocate Gail Blacher, 62, is part of the Sand Rats, an off-road cycling club. “It’s a de-stressor,” she says. “And it brings balance into my life. Cycling can be pure joy, and the next minute, it’s full of sweat and tears. It’s therapeutic and brilliant exercise.”

But, more than that, she says, “A level of trust builds between you. You know that if you fall or hurt yourself, someone will look after you. There is a code that no one gets left behind.”

She joined the Sand Rats 20 years ago. “It’s mostly Jewish, but we’re very inclusive and open. About 95% of the time, I’m the only woman. We’re on a WhatsApp group, so we chat about where to go. It could be in the South in Walkerville or Pretoria. Or we choose a bike park. We go out of town together to the Midlands or Eastern Cape. Last year, a few

of us went to Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia.” Last weekend, she and about 10 teammates participated in the Cape Town Cycle Tour.

“It’s not about winning. Just participating. We meet for a social warm-up ride the day before, and a pre-ride dinner. The night after we meet for a meal and war stories.

Hirschmann, 72, agrees. “There’s lots of emphasis on looking after each other. You have a responsibility to your teammate.”

In Botswana for a cycle tour a few years ago, Hirschmann cracked his pelvis. “Doctors insisted I return to Johannesburg. My teammate, Colin, said,



Gail Blacher



Steven Blend with a trophy from his cycling club

“I feel like a million dollars when an event is over. I wonder what I would do if I didn’t have cycling, especially as my partner Martin Davies also rides. Would I just hang out in shopping centres?”

Blacher says there’s a lot of bonding, even though you often have to part mid-conversation. “A heavy guy will fly downhill, for example, and take more time going up, so you can sometimes pick up again with them later. You don’t compete against others. There’s no ego. There’s no pats on the back, but they have my back.”

Blacher’s Sand Rats teammate, 52-year-old entrepreneur David Jossel, says that when he started cycling 10 years ago, he was neither fit nor strong.

Other riders “nursed” him. “They rode slowly next to me, and encouraged me for months. Someone always came back for me. Very early on, it felt more than a cycling club, it was being with like-minded friends from totally diverse backgrounds. Little compares to riding on a single track through a wattle forest. There’s that feeling of togetherness. It’s morphed from a group of people cycling to friends cycling.”

Insurance broker Jacob

‘I’ll take you back.’ I said he was crazy. We’d been waiting for a year for this. He asked what I would do if our roles were reversed. There was nothing to discuss.”

A few days later, Colin called to thank him. “It turns out, the doctor had diagnosed a detached retina. If he’d carried on with the ride, he would have lost sight in that eye.”

As social as cycling is, sometimes it’s intensely private. Like when Hirschmann is out in the bush. “You look up at a sky so full of stars. And sometimes you see buck, tortoises, or rabbits. I am overcome with a sense of peace, wonder, and gratitude.”

For his part, five years ago Chief Executive Mark Kruger, 49, had a brainchild: the Hatzolah Stonehage Fleming Cycle Tour. Besides the charitable work it has given risen to, Kruger has witnessed something else.

“It’s amazing to see a group of men come together as strangers, and leave as a united group. People form long-lasting relationships.

“Each day, I see this camaraderie building, and watch how the strongest riders go back and motivate the slower riders. These people not only ride mountains, they move mountains for each other.”

Still, no one will reveal what they talk about while riding. Hirschmann laughs, “We can’t say anything. There’s an Official Secrets Act.”

Team Hatzolah cycled for a worthy cause

The riders in Team Hatzolah sweated out all the excitement they had built up prior to the 5th Cape Invasion Cycle Tour, which took place from 4 to 8 March in the Western Cape. The team members cycled their hearts out in gruelling conditions to raise much-needed funds for Hatzolah Medical Rescue, the voluntary emergency medical service organisation.

The team’s record number of 51 cyclists included riders from Johannesburg, Cape Town, Israel, Australia, and the United Kingdom. They covered a remarkable 600km along the Garden Route, cycling up the Outeniqua Pass outside George, and through many majestic areas in this scenic part of the country. Their

route encompassed some of South Africa’s most breathtaking vistas as it meandered along the edge of the ocean, ending in Gordon’s Bay.

As if to prove their mettle even further, many members of the team then cycled an additional 109km around the Mother City on 10 March to complete the Cape Town Cycle Tour.

David Maron, Daniel Kattan (UK), David Slotow, and Rabbi Dovid Cass (UK)



Photo: Jason Crouse

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SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA



ABOUT OUR SCHOOL

Moriah College is one of the largest Modern Orthodox Zionist schools in the Southern Hemisphere. It is an ever-evolving place of learning where students and staff members have access to the most advanced facilities. We employ more than 350 staff members and enjoy an enrolment base of more than 1700 students.

WHO WE ARE

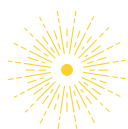
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What happens when ladies don’t play ‘nice’



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

When thousands of ultra-Orthodox women swarmed to the Western Wall (Kotel) in Jerusalem last Friday to harass women belonging to the feminist Women of the Wall organisation who were attempting to pray there, it created shock when looked at from afar. But both sides were doing the right thing. It was a veritable battle: the Women of the Wall, consisting of Reform and Conservative Jewish women, many from the United States, were celebrating Rosh Hodesh and the 30th anniversary of their organisation’s founding. They started praying in the women’s section when ultra-Orthodox women, who object to liberal groups like them, started kicking and pushing them. Women of the Wall director

Lesley Sachs told *Haaretz* that the scene was a nightmare and she sustained bruises. Two elderly women on crutches were evacuated by paramedics. Fortunately, the group was determined to carry on.

The group then moved to the egalitarian section where women and men pray together, and were joined by men who had come to show solidarity. Ultra-Orthodox women and men surrounded them, trying to prevent them from praying.

Nava Meirsdorf, an Israeli woman studying to become a conservative rabbi, was reciting her morning prayers when she felt “all sorts of things” being thrown on her and saw a stampede of ultra-Orthodox young men storming in her direction.

It was an unseemly sight as they pushed, spat on and cursed her. A male supporter of Women of the Wall, the director of a Jewish pluralism watchdog organisation, had fringes from his tallit and his tefillin torn off, and someone threatened to murder him. They

were called “stinking leftists”.

All of this may seem perverse, but it is not. For one thing, it is good that women are doing the fighting. Often, men bear the brunt of fighting about interpretations of religion, while women are left behind with the old adage, “What are girls made of? Sugar and spice and all things nice.” Discarding the “nice” burden, these women, together with their men at the Kotel, were acting as a force rather than just looking after their children and households.

It epitomises the healthy soul of Judaism – an ongoing contestation over what it means to be Jewish that has endured for millennia and inspired generations of great thinkers. Judaism has no pope to lay down the law on things of that nature; it is up to the people and the sages.

It evokes pride to see women’s groups take off the gloves and engage directly, instead of keeping a polite distance and being nice. Even so-called incorrect behaviour – which is what

each group has accused the other of – means that someone has been exposed to a different view, rather than being stuck in a single one.

Last Friday’s clash coincided with International Women’s Day. The fight for women’s rights epitomised by the day evokes dramatic images of the bra-burning protests against men in the 1960s as part of the women’s liberation movement. But what about a situation in which a woman finds herself battling against other women, rather than against men, even if it is for religious rights, such as last Friday? Most ultra-Orthodox women would probably say they have their rights and are not forced by men to follow their lifestyle. The same for Women of the Wall.

Who is right? Both groups are right to fight for their beliefs. Who will win? Probably neither, the positions are too far apart. The battle about Judaism will go on, as it should. The Kotel is as appropriate a place as any to have this sort of argument.

Embassy downgrade is South Africa’s loss



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

It’s a strange thing. The news that South Africa will be downgrading its embassy in Israel upset me for reasons I hardly expected. As a vocal supporter and advocate of Israel, I expected to be hurt by the injustice and the hypocrisy and the unfairness of it all.

I expected to feel protective and outraged and saddened by the damage that it would do to the country that is my spiritual home.

I fully expected to point at the horror of abuses of Iran and China and Syria, and the persecution of gays and women in the Gaza area. I was ready to shake my head as I pointed out the magnificence of what Israel has contributed to the world in areas of medicine, science, environment, and sustainability. And I thought that I would want to list the occasions when Israel has sent its citizens all around the world to assist when tragedy struck.

Instead, what I felt is overwhelming sadness for the country that is doing the downgrading.

The story of Israel is an inspirational one. In its short 70 years since independence, it has achieved success incomparable to almost any other country. It has done so while facing a real and tangible existential threat. First the threat came from all its Arab neighbours, who attacked the vulnerable and infant state days after the United Nations voted on the Partition Plan, then from terror groups, and more recently from Iran. With one eye on its enemies, it has managed to offer the world arguably more than any other country of its size.

South Africa, on the other hand, is in many respects not a success story. It is a country with rampant and heartless corruption, an unacceptable crime rate (even outside parliament), blundering and directionless economic strategy,

and flagrant disregard for its poor and vulnerable. It can ill afford to downgrade a relationship that offers tangible and real solutions to many of its challenges.

It is a classic example of shooting oneself in the foot. The worst part is that South Africa doesn’t even seem able to recognise that this will cause pain. Even worse is that, in doing so, it absurdly believes that it has gained the moral imperative, when the truth is exactly the opposite.

Why President Cyril Ramaphosa feels he needs to do this (while continuing to woo the Jewish community) is a matter of speculation. It is well accepted that he leads a precariously and dangerously balanced ANC.

He needs to weigh up each decision carefully in order to determine what is the best strategy in the medium and long term. It is highly possible that he had to follow a decision made by his party in December 2017. It is also possible that the practical implications are nought and that the optics are more important than the substance.

The past few months have been interesting in that, for the first time – and with increasing frequency – South Africa’s Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) strategy has been openly challenged by those who actually care about the country.

The pushback from the BDS movement over deals that would bring billions of rand as well as a significant number of jobs to the country exposed it to many. It could not have been more apparent how little the organisation cared for the country, and how its only goal was to damage Israel.

The above considered, I believe that the downgrade, although extremely disappointing, is a legacy issue from the corrupt Jacob Zuma era, when any diversion from his theft was welcomed. I believe it will make no practical difference, and that South Africans fully understand the absurdity and hypocrisy of this move.

I believe that Ramaphosa knows full well that Israel doesn’t need South Africa, and that the contrary is true.

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

IEC extends voting hours for expatriates



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



This week, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) was working with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to resolve a problem that has arisen regarding the date on which South Africans who will be abroad at the time of the upcoming elections will be able to vote. The designated date for this vote (provided those who intend voting have registered to do so beforehand) is 27 April, which falls on Shabbat, as well as the final day of Pesach. It therefore precludes a substantial number of Jewish community members from participating.

At a meeting between the board and the IEC on Wednesday, it was agreed to extend voting hours at stations where there is a Jewish community to enable people to vote after Shabbat is out. It was explained that the date itself cannot be changed, since it being a Saturday caters for expats who find it difficult to take time off work to vote. Moreover, since voting abroad is already considered a “special vote”, it is against IEC regulations to hold another “special vote”. Under the circumstances, we feel that the outcome achieved was a fair and reasonable one, and we appreciate the willingness of the IEC to accommodate us. We have issued a press statement on this, and refer those interested to our Facebook page.

Marlene Bethlehem continues to serve commission

The Jewish community has from the outset had a special connection to the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights

(CRL). This Chapter 9 institution was established under the Constitution “to foster the rights of communities to freely observe and practice their culture, religion and language”. It also promotes understanding and respect between South Africans from different backgrounds. When the commission was constituted in 2003, SAJBD past president Marlene Bethlehem was successfully nominated by the board to serve on it as a representative of the Jewish community, and indeed she was chosen by then-president Thabo Mbeki to be its first deputy chairperson. She continued to sit as an ordinary commissioner after completing her initial five-year term, finally stepping down in 2013 after 10 years of distinguished service. Bethlehem brought much honour to our community through her sterling work on this body, and earned the respect and affection of all she had worked with. In light of this, we are delighted by her recent appointment to the selection panel that will choose the new commissioners.

Well-deserved recognition for Cycalive

Related to the theme of fostering ties of friendship and respect between people from different backgrounds in South Africa, we were delighted to learn last week that the Torah Academy Cycalive project received the bronze award at the Premier’s Service Excellence Awards. Every year since 2002, Cycalive has brought together Grade 11 pupils from the Torah Academy and their counterparts from a range of racially and culturally diverse schools in Gauteng to cycle from Johannesburg to Durban to raise funds for education in under-resourced schools in the province. It was the SAJBD’s idea to nominate this inspiring project, and we also helped to prepare the motivation.

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

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

Saturday (16 March)	or wizojhb@beyachad.co.za
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The E-HI crew visits Bet David as part of the World Zionist Organization’s Beit Ha’am ambassador programme. Following the Shabbat service (10:00) and <i>brocha</i>, the crew will share personal stories about Israel and engage in a discussion. All welcome. Venue: 3 Middle Road, Morningside. Contact: 011 783 7117.	Wednesday (20 March)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second Innings hosts Judge Ezra Goldstein on <i>The Reason for the Authenticity of the Five Books</i>. Time: Tea at 10:00. Meeting at 10:30. Venue: Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors. Includes tea and light refreshments. Contact: Linda Fleishman 011 532 9701.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Chabad Goodness and Kindness Centre hosts a Mexican Purim party with ventriloquist Garrett Lush. Time: Megillah 18:40. Venue: 8 Stella Street, Sandton. Cost: Adults R150, kids R80. RSVP: Batya 072 801 7491 or batya@chabad.org.za
Monday (18 March)	Thursday (21 March)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Union of Jewish Women hosts Dr Eric Dabbs, former professor of genetics at the University of the Witwatersrand, on <i>Japan in 25 Visits</i>. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW Office 011 648 1053.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chabad seniors Purim party with great food, entertainment and a multimedia Megillah. Time: 10:30. Venue: Chabad House, 27 Aintree Avenue, Savoy. Sponsorship opportunity! RSVP: 011 440 6600 or rak@chabad.org.za.• Chabad House hosts <i>Purim on the Square</i> kids programme with Megillah, food and entertainment, including the <i>Shooby Doob Shloimy</i> concert. Time: 16:00. Venue: Theatre on the Square, Sandton City. Cost: R100 via Chabad House. Contact: 011 440 6600 or sharon@chabad.org.za• The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts a screening of the film <i>Forgotten Soldier</i> and a Q&A with Lady Irene Hatter. Time: 19h00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Free admission, donations welcome. RSVP: dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.• Join WIZO every Thursday for a <i>Lunch and Learn shiur</i> with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad building. Contact: WIZO office on 011 645 2515.
Tuesday (19 March)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Women’s International Zionist Organization forum is back. <i>Is there light at the end of the tunnel for South African Jewry?</i> Meet Ben Swartz, national chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, and Deena Katzen, head of the South African Union of Jewish Students at Wits. This is your chance to ask about Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS), the government’s stance on Israel, the Clover deal, Israel Apartheid Week, the South African embassy in Israel, and more. Time: 09:30 for 10:00. Venue: Beyachad building, 2 Eray Street, Roedene. Cost: R50 (including tea and refreshments). Contact: Lauren 011 645 2515	



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A High-Tech Way For Getting A Green Card

A different alternative than the fluctuating real estate market for investing in the EB-5 program

The recent, dramatic shifts in immigration policy have resulted in a reduction of H1B visas, and in rejections of H4 EADs. The timeline to receive Green Cards now may be over 15 years. Because of all these changes, there is a desperate need for alternative solutions for those seeking permanent residency/Green Cards.

The EB-5 program has long been used by real estate developers to build Manhattan skyscrapers and hotels around the US, while allowing investors and their families to get Green Cards. The EB-5 program has not been looked at as a source of traditional funding for high-tech or medical device companies... until now.

Dr Jay Yadav, an Atlanta based serial entrepreneur and world-renowned interventional cardiologist who has also created and sold three different leading-edge healthcare companies exceeding US\$1 billion, is now in his newest venture to build an innovative and high-tech Spine and Orthopaedic company as the Founder and CEO of MiRus. MiRus is founded with strong technology platforms with \$80 million in R&D and holds more than 140 patents. It is introducing disruptive technologies in Spine, Orthopaedics, Dental, and CMF with a long-term view of creating a multi-billion dollar global company.

Dr Yadav, an immigrant himself, has been very involved in the Atlanta community to create high-tech jobs and provide an opportunity to expand the international relationships with the business community. While he has had tremendous interest from investors globally in his new project through traditional funding methods, Dr Yadav and his team incorporated the EB-5 program to create alternate funding mechanisms for MiRus while addressing the needs of the immigrant community for Green Cards.

MiRus' strategy is to create hundreds of high-tech medical device jobs in Atlanta and has been scoped by the EB-5 program to create 2 400 jobs.

For many Indian investors who work very hard to save



money, investing in fluctuating real estate might be more risk than they can afford to take. Investing in an operating medical device company that is already generating revenues, provides confidence in not only receiving Green Cards for the investors and their families but also in getting the \$500,000 original investment back in four to five years, along with receiving a nominal interest payment annually.

The EB-5 program through MiRus has already received multiple investors who have transferred \$500,000 to receive green cards for them and their families. The families can move to the US on a conditional Green Card with the responsibility on MiRus to create 10 direct and indirect jobs per investor.

MiRus has received significant interest in the EB-5 program investment from surgeons, physicians, Wall Street investment bankers, high-tech H1B employees, management consultants, and Silicon Valley professionals, all of whom are in the US on a temporary visa.

Parents and families can also gift the amount to the individuals seeking a Green Card, which allows for many students on an F1 visa to apply for the MiRus EB-5 program, provided that there is full compliance with the source of funds of the giftor. The source of funds can be a mix of cash, loan against property, gift from families. Recognizing that high-tech employees and physicians on an H1-B visa will be unable to come up with the required investment, we are working with non-traditional lenders who can help bridge that gap.



The EB-5 program at MiRus is being implemented by Noah Roth, Chief Operating Officer. Please visit MiRus at www.mirusmed.com and email nroth@mirusmed.com or call 732-809-7995 with additional questions.



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Building a library book by book

“You can find magic wherever you look. Sit back & relax. All you need is a book.” – Dr Seuss

On 7 March, King David Linksfield (KDL) Primary School brought magic to CityKidz Primary School. To celebrate World Book Day, pupils from KDL had the honour and privilege to present the school with more than 1 200 books that they have been collecting for the build-a-library initiative.



Kiva Goldberg, Tal Goldberg, Jaxon Cohen, Chase Cohen and pupils from CityKidz Primary School

Celebrating Rosh Chodesh Adar

Temima Tobias, Chai Hadar and Tzivia Pink enter into the spirit of Rosh Chodesh Adar 2 at Torah Academy Primary School. As is the custom, the pupils dance and have other festivities. This year, the school introduced big and little sister-brother teams, in which senior kids paired with junior ones. They had the opportunity to befriend one another over the previous two weeks.

On Rosh Chodesh they dressed up as twins by wearing the same item of clothing. Teachers also twinned with a co-teacher.



Sandton Sinai supports DL Link



Sandton Sinai Nursery School children gave special power to the DL Link Jerusalem Marathon runners in their support of those people in the community with cancer.

The children took part in a tandem initiative by DL Link, the cancer support group, called “turn the ribbon around”.

The children drew pictures on the inverted ribbon that has two symbolic meanings. The top of the ribbon is shaped like a “V”, which stands for victory, and celebrates (cancer) warriors who have conquered cancer. The bottom of the ribbon is in the shape of a teardrop. It represents tears and sadness for all the warriors who have lost the battle with cancer.

Their artwork will not only enhance the spiritual experience of the team running on 15 March in the Jerusalem Marathon, but they will then be taken to the Kotel on behalf of the children.

Harnessing teen and team spirit

Young teenagers from vastly different backgrounds came together in Johannesburg last weekend for a charity soccer event aimed at uniting children from different communities.

The Sandton Barmitzvah programme, run by Rabbi Sruli Kaufman of the Sandton Shul, partnered with Feed SA, a non-profit organisation working to reduce hunger, in hosting a *chesed* (kindness) soccer event at Discovery Soccer Park, Wanderers.

About 25 Barmitzvah boys, mostly from King David Sandton, and 25 young teens from Munsieville, Krugersdorp, battled it out in a friendly soccer tournament.

The boys found common ground in their shared love for the game.

“It was wonderful to see the boys engaging with one another, having fun and laughing together,” said Kaufman.



Rabbi Yisroel Kauffman of Sandton Shul with some of the boys from Munsieville, Krugersdorp at the soccer event

Child yogis at KDVP

A typical morning at King David Victory Park (KDVP) Pre-Primary School involves yoga stretches for Grade R students. Teacher Jodi leads the children through a series of poses including the ice-cream, tortoise, and seated twists. Yoga is a holistic system of mind-body practice for mental and physical health. The children’s response is mixed – some love it, and go deep into quiet mode, while others giggle throughout.

The teachers say yoga involves physical postures and exercises to promote strength and flexibility, breathing exercises to enhance respiratory functioning, and relaxation techniques to cultivate the ability to release tension and stress. Yoga also teaches children about mindfulness practices to enhance mind-body awareness.

“There are few better ways to help children to learn proven practices for long-term health, happiness, and holistic success like yoga. KDVP is thrilled to be offering it,” the school says.



Grade Rs doing yoga

Soweto music school sings different tune

Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto has a long-standing connection to the Jewish community in Johannesburg, having originally been built by the Lithuanian Jewish immigrant after whom it is named.

Initially, Isaacson had set up a fund for black students to complete their education to university level, but in 1956 the 10-classroom school was opened to 300 pupils. It was originally called Mohloding School.

Its adjoining music centre, formerly

known as the Cape Gate MIAGI Centre for Music, was recently rebranded the Morris Isaacson Centre of Music. A joint collaboration between MIAGI CEO Robert Brooks and philanthropist Mendel Kaplan, this purpose-built music centre on the grounds of the school was designed by architect Monty Sack and opened its doors in 2012.

Access to music education is a luxury in most township schools, yet many studies have revealed that children who are taught music benefit from the focus, team work and discipline it requires. There are other benefits too, such as removing them from the lure of drugs, alcohol or sex that might exist in their communities.

The growth of the rebranded centre and the push towards a wider priority of human development through music is heavily supported by the Kaplan Kushlik Education Foundation.



Jiafeng Chen, UK based violinist, will be performing in a one night only recital to support music education in Soweto

Pyjamas, pages and pizza

What an amazing “pyjamas, pages and pizza” evening we had on 6 March at Yeshiva College Pre-Primary School in Johannesburg. The magic of books and reading, and the sense of togetherness they engender, were palpable. Pizza and chocolate milk provided a delicious supper, and because the children wore pyjamas, they could go straight to bed after the event. Through the generosity of parents, our school library has been extended and enriched with some new and exciting books, both fiction and non-fiction. Thank you to our wonderful community that joined us for this special event.



Yeshiva College Pre-Primary School kids in their pyjamas

MMA fighter captivates Jewish Inspiration

The Jewish Inspiration (JI) Congregation, a new shul in Glenhazel led by Rav Ilan Herrmann, recently hosted former Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter Danella Eliasov at a community Shabbos dinner.



Rav Ilan Herrmann and Danella Eliasov square up before Shabbat

Eliasov, a former MMA champion and specialist psychiatrist, enthralled the audience with her tale of being a medical professional, and then brawling in a cage.

“I had to keep my involvement in MMA a secret from my Jewish mom to spare her the hysteria. When I kept coming back with bruises, she thought I’d married badly, but when the fight was due to be screened on TV, I had to tell her. Of course, I tranquillised her first.”

The shul is based on the first floor of Kosher World, and holds services every Friday night.

“You guys had toilet seats – so I stayed.”

LUKE ALFRED

If there’s a deal to be struck or an audit to be done in South African sport, you can be sure that Dave Sidenberg will be there or thereabouts.

Sidenberg, a Toronto-born Canadian who has lived in South Africa for 25 years, isn’t everywhere, but examine the fine print of a ground-breaking broadcast deal, say, between the South African Football Association and the SABC, and he’s likely to have offered his considered view at some point.

Currently, Sidenberg is consulting to pretty much everyone in the sports industry, whether they be corporate sponsors, broadcasters, or any number of sporting federations.

Of particular concern is the new Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) draft paper that seems to be designed to break what it perceives to be SuperSport’s monopoly on buying up sexy international rights.

Sidenberg doesn’t see ICASA’s attempt to clip SuperSport’s wings as innately problematic. However, he adds the caveat that had ICASA thought through its position – and had its draft paper been better conceptualised – it might have succeeded in calming the industry rather than launching it into a frenzy of uncertainty.

Other than creating unease, what is at stake? The brute reality of

the current situation is that South African sporting federations’ only inventory is their broadcast rights. Unlike federations elsewhere in the world, they don’t turn much of a buck from merchandising, licensing or season-ticket holders, and sponsorship revenues are already being forced to punch above their weight.

Showing more sport than would have been shown on SuperSport on free-to-air platforms such as the SABC is all very well, but they can’t pay for it. This, in turn, means that federations are essentially giving away their broadcast rights for free, as Cricket South Africa did with the inaugural Mzansi Super League last November.

No money from broadcast rights means no money in federations’ coffers for programmes. And no programmes – and therefore no development – means the slow poison of sporting death, particularly for those who can’t afford to play their sport in the sanctuary of well-provisioned clubs and private schools.

“What with the [ICASA] proposals slated for debate at public hearings only next month, it has served to overshadow the perhaps more pressing issue of media disruption. Either way, it’s likely to be the most fearful and exciting time in sports broadcasting ever,” says Sidenberg.

He came to the mixed joys of contemporary South Africa via a circuitous route. One of four children,

he has three sisters: one older, two younger. Back home, his dad was a lawyer, his mother a bookkeeper. “She worked for the Toronto branch of the Pamensky family,” says Sidenberg. “They produced industrial motors for the Canadian mines.”



After attending the University of Western Ontario between 1982 and 1986, he learned the art of selling furniture before dabbling in the local stock exchange. With the industry in a state of flux, and with the young Sidenberg having perhaps more money than he should have, he was gripped by a bad case of wanderlust. For 26 months he travelled the world.

During the first year he “hung out with a bunch of crazy Australians”, threading his way from Europe to Nepal, Thailand to Bali, and most of Australia. En route home he met up with a good friend who had other ideas – and the travel bug kicked

south. The Afrikaans-speaking customs officials assumed he was a farmer bringing workers across the border, but the Zimbabweans he was with were traders, venturing to markets in Johannesburg, where they hoped to sell every layer of the many clothes they were wearing bar one.

A few hours later he was at the Rotunda near Park Station, being whisked away to the luxury of Westcliff in a Jaguar driven by family friends. “You guys had toilet seats – so I stayed,” said Sidenberg. “Three or four days after I arrived, Christ Hani was assassinated. If I had a return ticket, I don’t think I’d still be here.”

Once he’d decided to stay, Sidenberg’s financial background came in handy, with the added attraction that he had an accent most South Africans mistook for an American one. In no particular order, he worked at Liberty, World of Golf, and Selwyn Nathan’s SAIL, before heading into the world of market research, particularly in the sports industry.

He’s now chief executive at BMI Sports Marketing, a market leader in sports research in the country. He acknowledges that the times are fluid and confusing, but frankly, he likes South Africans’ propensity to fly by the seat of their pants.

Coming from trusty Canada, where jumping a red light makes front-page news, he wouldn’t have it any other way.



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