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Beth Din reinforces prohibition on rabbis attending Limmud

TALI FEINBERG

The Beth Din this week reinforced a ten-year prohibition of local orthodox rabbis attending or teaching at Jewish learning festival Limmud. This was after the South African Rabbinical Association requested the Beth Din's opinion on their long-standing policy.

Following the request, the *dayanim* (judges) of the Beth Din met the leadership of Limmud to learn what it stands for, as many did not know anything about the organisation. But, in spite of a productive meeting, the policy remained unchanged.

"After much deliberation, the conclusion of the Beth Din is a complete endorsement of the policy of the Rabbinical Association for its rabbis to neither attend nor teach at Limmud because of the latter's promotion of values which are contrary to the Torah's philosophy and principles," the Beth Din told the SA Jewish Report on Tuesday.

This is in spite of the fact that "Limmud South Africa is strictly kosher under the Beth Din, and *shomrei Shabbos* [Shabbat observant] in public spaces, and 90% of people who attend it across South Africa are orthodox-affiliated. In Johannesburg, 35% are *shomrei Shabbat*," according to Limmud South Africa chairperson Adina Roth.

Many international orthodox rabbis and rebbetzins attend Limmud in this country. South Africa is the only place worldwide where there is a ban on local orthodox rabbis attending.

When asked what the Beth Din meant by Limmud not promoting Torah philosophy and principles, the organisation responded, "The Beth Din's mandate is to uphold halacha and Torah values within the community. Underpinning everything we do is the fundamental belief in G-d and the divine origin of the Torah.

"On questioning the Limmud team, we were told that these core beliefs are not a prerequisite for educators, nor is it a prerequisite for content that is delivered at the conference.

"As a result of this Limmud policy decision, the Beth Din is unable to approve or verify this conference, and endorses the policy of the South African Rabbinical Association. If Limmud would change this policy decision,

the Beth Din would certainly reconsider its position."

In response, Roth explained that across the world, Limmud is guided by a set of values which are grounded in Jewish ideas. "There are a range of presenters, and there are always orthodox presenters, including orthodox rabbis, at Limmud. All our learning is conducted with the intention of learning more deeply about Jewish history, culture, religion, and text. Limmud is a space where orthodox and observant people feel very comfortable."

The Beth Din said the policy extended to rebbetzins (the wives of rabbis). "The grounds for the Beth Din endorsing the existing rabbinic policy are as applicable to rebbetzins as they are to rabbis.

Any suggestion that a difference should exist undermines the undeniable and invaluable religious standing and leadership role which our rebbetzins rightly hold and fulfil, with tireless dedication to Torah values and principles."

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein said the long-standing policy of the South African rabbinate not to attend Limmud was a joint decision made by himself and the Rabbinical Association.

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, who heads up the Rabbinical Association, said the policy dated back about ten years.

"As is the case with many old policies, these are reviewed from time to time to see if they are relevant in the current context."

The SA Jewish Report heard from an anonymous source that the Beth Din was considering imposing a *psak* on the matter – a halachic ruling that would make this policy official Jewish law in South Africa. It is still unclear if the endorsement of the policy by the Beth Din is officially a *psak*.

Though the SA Jewish Report asked for more explanation for how the Beth Din had arrived at its conclusion, the *dayanim* declined to offer it.

Limmud is a Jewish festival of learning that originated in the United Kingdom and now holds more than 80 events worldwide. It allows anyone interested in Judaism to attend and present. In South Africa for 13 years, 2 000 people attended Limmud events across the country in 2018.

In these 13 years, the Beth Din has never before asked to meet Limmud, so when its *dayanim* requested a meeting with Limmud's leadership, the organisation saw it as a positive step possibly resulting in the relaxing of the policy on rabbis' attendance. "We were

rabbis, and other orthodox rabbis.

"In South Africa, the demographics of our community are similar to the demographics of those who attend Limmud. Ninety percent of our participants are orthodox-affiliated," said Roth. "Although local rabbis do not attend, we bring in orthodox rabbis and teachers from overseas. Both *shomrei Shabbos* people and unobservant people say that Limmud is the best Shabbos of their year. For those who don't keep Shabbat, it becomes one of the times when they do," said Roth.

"In terms of how we put our programme together, we are guided by Limmud's values. This includes diversity, as well as the idea that everybody should learn, and anyone can teach. We encourage people to empower

Walking in history's footsteps



King David High School pupils take part in the commemoration of Youth Day by walking the route taken by youthful protestors at the Soweto uprising on 16 June 1976.

open to meeting, and always will be," said Roth.

In the meeting, Roth said she and her team explained Limmud's strict policies on Shabbat and kashrut, and that there was strong orthodox attendance at Limmud events globally, both in terms of participants and presenters. In fact, in England, it is attended by the chief rabbi, Beth Din *dayanim*, Chabad

themselves and rise to the challenge of learning and teaching.

"On the same note, we never force anyone to listen to someone they don't want to hear. It's all about making empowered choices. There are eight sessions per time slot, and everyone's biography is available, so you know what you are going to hear and can make an

Continued on page 5>>

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German anti-Semitic attacks

An orthodox rabbi and a 20-year-old man, both wearing kippahs, were subjected to anti-Semitic slurs in separate incidents in Germany earlier this week.

In Dusseldorf, Rabbi Chaim Barkahn told the German news agency DPA that he was insulted with anti-Semitic slurs and followed on the street, before ducking into a community centre.

Barkahn said it was his first such experience in a city in which he has lived and served the Jewish community for 18 years.

In Berlin, in the Prenzlauer Berg district, perpetrators allegedly tried to spit on a young man.

In Berlin, the number of anti-Semitic incidents has increased about 14% since last year. One in five reported incidents have occurred in the nation's capital.

Kosher outlet caught selling treif

The main outlet for kosher food in Liverpool, England, has been caught selling non-kosher meat and poultry.

Rabbi Natan Fagleman of the Liverpool Kashrut Commission said in a letter to residents that "serious breaches of kashrut have taken place at Roseman's Delicatessen".

The letter called on the store's patrons not to use "all utensils that have ever been used to cook meat/poultry bought at Roseman's" and to throw out all food bearing

the Liverpool Kashrut Commission symbol.

The rabbi said that synagogue and communal kitchens were being restored to kosher status, and that he would soon advise on koshering homes, including ovens.

Roseman's reportedly denied rumours earlier this year that it was closing down.

Victory in school massacre lawsuit

The father of a victim of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre has won a defamation lawsuit against the authors of a book that denied the 2012 shooting took place.

Lenny Pozner, whose six-year-old son Noah was the youngest victim in the attack by a lone gunman at the Connecticut school, filed the suit against publisher Moon Rock Books and the authors of *Nobody Died at Sandy Hook*. The publisher said it would no longer sell the book.

A Wisconsin judge ruled on Monday that Pozner had been defamed by authors James Fetzer and Mike Palacek. A trial to decide damages has been set for October.

The book claimed that Noah's death certificate had been faked, the child didn't exist, and that Pozner and the parents of the other victims were "crisis actors".

New Zealand website omits Israel

Immigration New Zealand, an official government website, published a fact sheet with a map of the Middle East that showed "Palestine", but not Israel.

Following a barrage of complaints on social media, the web page was removed, though screenshots remain.

The Israel Institute of New Zealand called for a retraction of the map. "This is incredibly offensive, and the equivalent of New Zealand Immigration displaying a map of the United Kingdom which removes Scotland and Wales, and refers to the entirety of the British Isles as



England," said the institute's director, Ashley Church.

The fact sheet also identified East Jerusalem as "the designated capital of the state of Palestine".

Quebec bans kippahs, turbans, hijabs

Quebec passed a so-called secularism law on Sunday that bans certain public employees – teachers, judges and police officers, among them – from wearing religious symbols including kippahs, turbans and hijabs at work.

Critics say the real target of the legislation is the Muslim community, and that the new law abrogates Canadian human-rights charters by invoking an override clause. Defenders say the law is in keeping with the promotion of secular neutrality by the state, and will promote harmony in the province.

Some Jewish-majority municipalities have passed motions promising never to enforce the law.

Ukraine construction causes outcry

The World Jewish Congress expressed its "outrage" on Tuesday about the prospect of construction of apartment buildings on the mass graves of thousands of Jews murdered in the central Ukrainian city of Poltava by the Nazis.

And Joel Lion, Israel's ambassador to Ukraine, wrote a letter on 13 June to Oleksandr Shamota, the acting mayor of the town, demanding that the plans be abandoned. Lion noted that Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum and research institution, determined the location of the mass graves based on multiple testimonies.

*All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:06	17:59	Johannesburg
17:27	18:22	Cape Town
16:46	17:40	Durban
17:07	18:00	Bloemfontein
16:58	17:53	Port Elizabeth
16:51	17:46	East London

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Torah Thought

Positively brilliant

In this week's parsha, some of the Jewish people are taken to task for complaining. First, they complained of exhaustion as a result of their travels in the desert, and second, they complained about the manna that Hashem gave them as food. In both cases, Hashem was actually being kind to them! He made them travel quickly in order to enter the land of Israel, and the manna He fed them was a miraculous food that gave energy, satiation, and helped them to think.

A lesson here is that the Torah demands a positive perspective.

When thunder and lightning herald a rainstorm, people often grumble and complain. However, the grey clouds overhead should appear as a promise of all the good things in life. The falling rain is, in a sense, a shower of watermelons, cantaloupes, strawberries, cherries, apples, and every other form of luscious fruit and nourishing vegetable. The rain means cotton and other fabrics. It means

grass, which becomes wool, leather, meat, and dairy products. If a grocery company delivered a vast quantity of free merchandise, would the recipient grumble while his kitchen was being cluttered with boxes and crates?

The Talmud in Berachos relates an incident: Rabbi Akiva was travelling, and he sought lodging at a certain town. The people refused to accommodate him for the night. Rabbi Akiva's response was, "Whatever Hashem does is for the best." Left with no choice, he went to sleep in a field. He had with him three possessions – a rooster, a donkey, and a lamp. While in the field, the wind blew and his lamp was extinguished. Then a cat came and killed his rooster. Finally, a lion attacked and killed his donkey. As each misfortune befell him, Rabbi Akiva responded by saying, "Whatever Hashem does is for the best." That night, a group of bandits pillaged the town, but Rabbi Akiva was spared, because he was not noticed

by the outlaws. He was not given away by the light of his lamp, or the crowing of his rooster, or the braying of his donkey. When he heard about what happened, Rabbi Akiva told the people of the city, "Did I not tell you that whatever Hashem does is for the best?"

What was the point of his last statement? Ben Ish Chai explains that Rabbi Akiva was teaching the townspeople why he had been spared. Since he reacted to his rebuffing with positivity and trust in Hashem, Hashem came to his aid. Rabbi Akiva was advising them to get into the habit of doing the same so that they, too, would reap the benefits.

May we make the effort to see the beauty, and get a true perspective of the amazing world that Hashem has given us!



Rabbi Yonatan Landau, Ohr Somayach Savoy

South African Jewish Report
The spirit of quality content, news and insight

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SA woman' 'love at first sight' marriage to Biden's son

NICOLA MILTZ

When South African-born Melissa Cohen met Hunter Biden – the son of Joe Biden, former United States vice president and 2020 Democrat front runner – she told her family it was “love at first sight”.

The couple married in haste – and by all accounts in secret – on 16 May. The ceremony was held only a few days after they were introduced and, according to the American tabloids, they already sported matching tattoos.

According to Cohen's brother, Garyn, a podiatrist in Sandton, the couple were wed by a marriage officer in a simple ceremony in her Los Angeles apartment. It took place, he said, 10 days after they were introduced by mutual friends.

Garyn told the *SA Jewish Report* that his family was still reeling from the news, and knew very little. He said his younger sister seemed blissfully happy, and the couple had wasted no time in tying the knot because they “knew they were right for each other”.

“It's not difficult to fall in love with my sister – she is gorgeous inside and out,” Garyn said.

“Melissa said that she believes in love at first sight, and after spending a weekend together, they decided there was no point in delaying the inevitable and made their relationship official. It's like a fairytale.”

Speaking from Los Angeles this week, the ethereal bride, 32, who has been married previously, told the *SA Jewish Report* that she knew Biden was the man for her.

“The moment I met Hunter, I knew he was the person I wanted to share the rest of my life with. We have so much in common. We are so happy together. I look forward to seeing my family in South Africa soon, and to introduce Hunter to my beautiful family, magnificent country, and congregation.”

Garyn said that his sister was always destined for great things. “When she left South Africa at 21, I said to her, ‘I know one day you are going to be famous.’”

He said his sister, the only girl in the family with three older brothers, was “a really good person who loves helping people”.

Seventeen years her senior, Biden, 49, is no stranger to controversy. Joe Biden may be the famous one in the family, but his son, Hunter, has made many headlines of his own. According to numerous newspaper reports, after separating from his ex-wife, Kathleen, in 2015, Hunter struck up a romantic relationship with Hallie Biden, his former sister-in-law. She was the widow of his late brother, Beau Biden, the former Delaware attorney general, who died tragically of brain cancer in 2015.

Kathleen filed for divorce in 2015 citing irreconcilable differences. The couple have three children together.

Hunter was discharged from the US Navy Reserve in 2014 after

week of singledom before meeting Cohen.

Cohen herself recently split from her long-time boyfriend, Malibu real estate developer and father of three, Rob Mendez. They were also apparently together

selected as an exchange student as part of the American Field Service scholarship programme, and spent three months in Italy, where she picked up the language and developed a love and talent for art, said Garyn.

Hanna Ben Moshe, a long-standing Hebrew teacher at the school, told the *SA Jewish Report* she remembers Cohen well.

“She was a sweet, lovely girl, with blue eyes, blond hair, and an angel face. She was charming. Her family has a long history at the school, Melissa being the youngest of four siblings to come here.”

Ben Moshe said Cohen was enriched by her experience in Italy. “When Melissa came back from Italy in 2003, she wrote an article saying that she had learnt a lot about respect and tolerance for all

people, colours, creeds, and kinds.”

Ben Moshe said Cohen was a “creative and talented art student, who produced beautiful pieces”.

After matriculating from KDVP, Cohen started her degree at the University of Johannesburg, before moving over to the Greenside Design Center College of Design. There, she obtained her Bachelor of Arts in interior design in 2007. She developed a passion for interior architecture.

But her main passions, according to her family, are nature conservation, indigenous conservation, animal, and women's rights, with photographs and posts on her Facebook clearly demonstrating this.

Melissa's parents, Zoe and Lee Cohen, have declined to comment. According to Garyn, they are still coming to terms with the news. “It's very much a fairytale, all they want is for Melissa to be happy, and for there to be a happy ending.”

Her new father-in-law is planning to run for president of the United States in 2020.



Melissa Cohen in Namibia in 2015



Melissa Cohen

allegedly testing positive for cocaine.

He is an accomplished lawyer. He received his bachelor's degree from Georgetown University, and then went on to attend Yale Law School. *Hollywood Life*, an American entertainment website, reports that he is a partner at Rosemont Seneca Partners, and works at a New York-based law firm.

The Biden family has been struck with numerous tragedies over the years. Apart from losing his brother, Hunter lost his mother and sister when he was very young.

Neila Biden, the former vice-president's first wife and Hunter's mother, was involved in a car crash in 1972 which killed her and their daughter, Naomi. Hunter and Beau were also in the car, but they survived their injuries. Joe later married Jill.

The *New York Post's* celebrity news site, *Page Six*, reported that Hunter split from Hallie in April, suggesting that he had only a

until April this year.

Describing her as adventurous, arty, and free spirited, Garyn said that his sister had always been a “champion for nature conservation and the environment, as well as the underprivileged and people from all walks of life. She is truly remarkable, intelligent, and has a special *neshoma* [soul].”

She is interested in indigenous conservation, and spent time with the Himba tribe in Namibia



“The moment I met Hunter, I knew he was the person I wanted to share the rest of my life with. We have so much in common.”

in 2015. She also worked in India looking after children for a while.

When Cohen was in Grade 11 at King David High School Victory Park (KDVP), she was

planning to run for president of the United States in 2020.

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Unions claim 'the Rothschilds' control state-owned enterprises

TALI FEINBERG

Unions protesting against the resignation of South African Airways (SAA) Chief Executive Vuyani Jarana are threatening to shut down the aviation industry in South Africa if their demands aren't met.

A large part of these demands relate to "the Rothschilds" – a term implying the wealthy international banking Jewish family – who they say are controlling state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the South African Cabin Crew Association (SACCA) have demanded that SAA board members Geoffrey Rothschild, Thandeka Mogoduso, Martin Kingston, and Peter Tshisevhe be dismissed, and that Jarana be reinstated.

Rothschild has no ties to the Rothschild banking family. Fellow board member, Kingston, is executive chair of Rothschild

& Co in South Africa, and was previously its chief executive.

While this firm does belong to the renowned Rothschild family, Kingston is not Jewish and not related to them. But it seems that Rothschild's surname and Kingston's day job are enough to convince the unions that SOEs have somehow been influenced by wealthy Jews.

The Rothschilds are a prominent banking

family with origins in Germany, says Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history and an expert on anti-Semitism.

Five Rothschild sons presided over financial establishments in Frankfurt, London, Vienna, Paris, and Naples in the early 19th century. They played an important role in European commercial life, but were overtaken in time

Elders of Zion," says Shain.

In his book on the history of anti-Semitism, Shain gives another example of this kind of anti-Semitic thinking in South Africa. "In the 19th century, a Johannesburg correspondent, JA Hobson, wrote that 'a ring of Jewish international financiers controlled the most valuable resources of the South African

that in all SOEs, they are appointed directly to serve on the boards or act as advisers and consultants in the shadows. The Rothschilds and their proxies are known globally for being advocates of privatisation – job security is not their priority."

The statement went on to say that NUMSA had recently "confronted both the Eskom

board and its group chief executive, Phakamani Hadebe, about correspondence from the Rothschilds which was leaked to the union advising Hadebe on how to privatise Eskom. We have no reason to believe that it is not true, and what is completely bad about this correspondence from the Rothschilds is that they were influencing, in a clandestine way, how they should be appointed to advise Eskom."

"These statements smack of old-style anti-Semitism," Shain says "The use of 'proxies' and 'clandestine' influence in the statement reinforces this. One would be naive not to think that this would not resonate with at least some readers."

Says David Saks, the associate director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, "We deplore this unfortunate slippage into irrational race-tinged conspiracy theorising on the part of NUMSA and SACCA. All representative organisations have a particular responsibility to avoid resorting to nonsensical and inflammatory rhetoric that can result only in further confusion and needless division."

Rothschild was unable to comment.



Workers affiliated to NUMSA and the SACCA picket outside SAA headquarters

by larger banks.

Their success made them the embodiment of "Jewish international finance", and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories about them have abounded ever since.

"The Rothschilds are tied into the idea of Jews embodying usury and money. With the growth of capitalism, this was a particularly toxic brew which would take its ultimate form in the conspiracy theory of the *Protocols of the*

Republic.'" According to Shain, "Irrational beliefs about the Jews' drive to 'global domination', 'control' of the economy, and the 'corruption of morals' can only be labelled as anti-Semitic."

In their statement, the unions say, "We are more than convinced that the current minister of public enterprises, Pravin Gordhan, has a special relationship with the Rothschilds. This is because he clearly ensures



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Cape Town sheikh calls Zionism "a world cancer"

TALI FEINBERG

"As apartheid was a cancer here, Zionism is a world cancer. It is going to consume the world. I see Zionism as the major threat in the world today. Benjamin Netanyahu and your ilk and kind, your time is near. You will also go six feet down."

These are the words that went around the world via the internet on a Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) video. They were not the words of a despot in the Middle East. They came from the mouth of Cape Town imam Sheikh Abduraghaman Alexander, at his mosque in Gatesville, near Hanover Park on the Cape Flats on 5 June.

Sheik Alexander is the co-imam of the Masjidul Mosque. He was addressing a large gathering of congregants.

His sermon was recorded by MEMRI, an organisation that bridges the language gap between the West, Middle East, and South Asia. It provides timely translations of Arabic, Farsi, Urdu-Pashtu, Dari, and Turkish media, as well as original analysis of political, ideological, intellectual, social, cultural, and religious trends.

"There is no such thing as the state of Israel. Israel is a rogue state. Israel is an illegitimate state," said Sheik Alexander. "We need to send our voice to Palestine and tell

as powerful as you think you are, Donald Trump and every despot and tyrant of the world. Benjamin Netanyahu and your ilk and kind, your time is near. You will also go six feet down."

In response to the sheikh's comments, Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies said, "Religious leaders should promote harmony, not utilise speech that is divisive and polarising. These statements in no way show a desire for peace building and resolution of this painful conflict. As South Africans and especially South African religious leaders, we would hope that messaging be of a constructive nature rather than these hate-filled utterances."

Rowan Polovin, the chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council, echoed these sentiments. "It is unacceptable that these virulent and vituperative comments that call for the destruction of the Jewish state are made openly in South Africa. This kind of inflammatory language shows the anti-Semitic underbelly of anti-Zionism in this country."

"I am sorry that this sheikh sees his job as stirring hate. This sounds like a call to war, not a sermon with any solutions for the people he claims to support," said Rabbi Greg Alexander, who has worked extensively with Muslim religious leaders to build interfaith bridges between Muslim and Jewish communities in Cape Town.

"Has he reached out to any local Jewish or Israeli partners to discuss the problems of the Middle East? Does he have relationships with any of the non-governmental organisations in Israel and Palestine who are working day and night to create bridges for peace?" Rabbi Alexander asked rhetorically.

"I understand that this same sheikh has called for interfaith understanding. I would want any leader who takes the pulpit to discuss Palestine to work through the complexity of the issues, and put solutions on the table. I invite him to come forward with his solutions," he added.

The SA Jewish Report attempted to speak to Sheik Alexander, but he said he was unwell and could not respond to questions.

Sheikh Shuaib Appleby, speaking in his personal capacity, said, "I would like to suggest that, first and foremost, there is a need for faith leadership to engage each other on the most contested sacred location in the world [Al-Aqsa/the Temple Mount] purely from a religious and spiritual perspective. Mount Moriah, which is known as Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa, does hold a sacred place for Jews, Muslims, and Christians."



Fatah and Hamas, it is time that you come to your senses. Leave aside your political differences. Leave aside striving for domination and power, and take into consideration the desperate conditions of the whole Palestinian people."

He continued, "This morning, we pray to Allah: grant liberation to the Al-Aqsa mosque. Grant liberation to the people of Palestine. With all this turmoil going on, there are heavy drums of war beating against Iran, stemming from the so-called superpower of the United States of America. Come to your senses, all the power that you strive for, and

Beth Din reinforces prohibition on rabbis attending Limmud

>> Continued from page 1

informed decision," said Roth. "Limmud trusts in people's ability to make adult choices about their Jewish lives. They can hear something and disagree with it, or choose not to go to a particular session if they don't want to. We encourage debate, and no one is put on a pedestal. Another value of Limmud is having an 'argument for the sake of heaven'. We focus on education and not polemics, and do not take sides," she said.

In an environment in which many youth feel alienated, Limmud is one of the spaces that attracts young Jews. "Last year, we had an equal number of 20 to 40-year-olds as 60 and up! That's unheard of in any other local Jewish community space. This is a 48-hour weekend of intensive Jewish learning from 08:00 to 01:00 every day. With the statistics showing increased disengagement with Judaism, we are proud that Limmud is successfully promoting engagement with Jewish learning and Jewish

values, and drawing on people from a range of ages and Jewish backgrounds," Roth said.

She wondered what the basis was for excluding members of the Jewish community from participating and presenting at a Jewish event. "Surely Jewish values such as *ahavat chinam* (unconditional love for one another) is something all of us should welcome? Limmud SA welcomes people of all backgrounds to learn and build community in a respectful manner. We do not endorse any stream or denomination, rather we provide an inclusive platform to expand Jewish horizons and enhance Jewish life in South Africa."

She said Limmud's doors were always open. "We hope to continue conversations with all parties involved, and find a way through this impasse. We respect the decision to not attend just as we respect all those who elect to attend Limmud."



ב"ט

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The Pretoria Jewish Community Services Trust, through the Pretoria Council of the SAJBD, invites applications from Jewish families living in or willing and able to relocate to Pretoria, for the partial or full subsidisation of school fees at acknowledged Jewish schools in Johannesburg, for the 2020 academic year.

These families would be required to become active members of the Pretoria Jewish community.

Daily transport to and from the schools will be provided by the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation from its premises in Groenkloof, at no charge.

Further information and application forms may be obtained from the chairman of the sub-committee overseeing this project, Mark Seligman, at seligs@yebo.co.za

The closing date for applications is 5 August 2019 and applicants will be advised before 30 August 2019 of the outcome of such applications. This will enable timeous registration/re-registration for the 2020 academic year at the various schools.

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We should pull together, not apart

We are a small, tight-knit community with many diverse interests, talents, and strong views. It is this that makes us interesting and helps us to punch well above our weight.

Put two Jewish people in a room, and you are likely to have two strong and often opposing opinions. Put 10 in a room, and you will have 10 different views. That's the way we are. We are always right ... even when we aren't.

It's always tough to step down and apologise when it becomes obvious that we are wrong. But it has to be that we are proved wrong, otherwise we aren't wrong. Am I right?

I know this to be true because I, too, find it difficult to admit that I'm wrong about anything, but it happens. I do my best to do it humbly and with respect, but it's never easy.

What am I going on about?

Last week, we got wind of the Beth Din being asked to create a *psak* (halachic ruling) about Limmud, and its attendance by orthodox rabbis. The idea was to ensure that rabbis were clear about the fact that they were prohibited from participating – in any way – in Limmud. (See page 1.)

An old fire from almost a decade ago has now been reignited. I have no idea why the rabbis would rehash a policy from back then that stood, but had long become an unspoken rule. Now, the issue has been brought back to rub salt into the wound.

What's baffling is that this is playing out in South Africa, while orthodox rabbis around the world not only participate in Limmud, but speak at Limmud in their own and other countries. It's only here that there seems to be a problem.

Having been to Limmud a few times since taking up editorship of this newspaper, I was pleasantly surprised. First, I got the sense of being at mini machaneh for families. And I used to love going to machaneh.

I also enjoyed the diversity of the people who attended, from the very religious to totally secular, from ultra-orthodox to progressive, from left-wing to far right in terms of both Israeli and South African politics.

There were very old participants, some even with walkers, and opinionated young adults giving their vital views. In amongst all these adults were children of all shapes and sizes running around having fun in total safety.

Shabbos was sacrosanct, and while people gave talks throughout Shabbos, religion was upheld. The food was 100% kosher. We brought in Shabbos, and there were shul services to suit personal beliefs.

I also learnt a whole lot while there. I absorbed information on many varied topics that I would never have had access to, especially over one weekend. One exception would be Sinai Indaba, which is quite different.

The point is, everything about Limmud was 100% Jewish, about being Jewish, and for Jews.

It's possible that orthodox rabbis don't want to be there, in which case, it's their personal choice. However, I can't say that to be a fact, otherwise why would this issue have been brought to the Beth Din?

Could it be that there are a number of rabbis who want to go, so it was taken to the Beth Din to make a ruling one way or another?

If that's the case, these are adult men who are respected and learned, and should be able to make such decisions for themselves. They are all aware that whatever they do, they do as orthodox rabbis and they cannot – nor would they want to – escape that.

They shouldn't be prohibited from going. In the same way that a rabbi may want to do a course of some sort, he goes to that course wearing his rabbinical mantle. However, he has free choice in making the decision to go.

Surely, it boils down to rabbis having free choice about what is right for them.

I appreciate that the prohibition is not one that encompasses congregations, and I would hate to hear that rabbis are dissuading their congregants from going to Limmud. Again, as it is a Jewish event, we all have the right to decide whether we want to be there or not.

Now, I understand that many orthodox rabbis believe that the combination of different religious practices in the Jewish community is watering down the religion, which is unacceptable to them. And this is taken in an extremely serious light.

However, we are such a small community and apparently getting smaller. Should we be creating divisions and barriers within our community? Or should we find ways to understand each other, and accept our differences?

I know that I believe in the latter.

I want to find a way to meet people halfway. You won't always agree with me, and I'm going to find something to disagree with you about – no matter what – if I try.

So, how about accepting that, and finding the things we have in common? How about agreeing to differ about what we know we will never agree on?

I believe that the rabbis behind this situation did not intend to cause dissent or division. They did this because they believe it to be the right thing to do for the community. I appreciate that, and recognise that they are learned and wise men.

However, I can't help but believe that this is divisive, and we need to pull together not apart right now.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Is confrontation between the US and Iran imminent?

There are fears that a confrontation between the United States and Iran could erupt at any moment in the Middle East.

By this time next week, Tehran will be producing uranium beyond the limits set by the 2015 nuclear deal. It's not a surprise, as the country has been threatening to partially suspend its commitment to the agreement ever since the US withdrew from it last year. American President Donald Trump repeatedly called it a weak and dangerous deal, and he and Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have again been exchanging barbs online.

On Monday, the Pentagon announced that it was preparing to send an additional thousand troops to the Middle East for "defensive purposes". Acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan wrote that it was in response to "reliable, credible intelligence we have received on hostile behaviour by Iranian forces and their proxy groups that threaten US personnel and interests across the region".

The latest announcement comes on the heels of last week's attacks on two commercial tankers travelling through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping route and major transit route for oil. It was the second attack of its kind in little more than a month.

Gulf countries are tightening security measures in order to protect their oil exports, and the American navy has arrived to assist them.

While European countries remain split over who's behind the attack on the tankers, Washington is convinced Tehran is responsible. The US military released declassified grainy video it says

shows a small Iranian ship sidling up to a damaged tanker, and people on the smaller vessel removing an unexploded mine from the larger ship's hull.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo says Tehran "is lashing out" because it wants the "successful maximum pressure campaign" being exerted by Washington lifted. Pompeo is convinced that crippling US sanctions against Iran have pushed its leaders into a corner. Indeed, Tehran has threatened in the past to block the Strait of Hormuz as a form of retaliation. It's as if it is saying that if it cannot sell oil in the Gulf, then it will make sure other countries cannot ship oil through it.

But on the other hand, the nuclear deal that Trump hates so much did not collapse when Washington pulled out of it. The "maximum pressure" campaign has so far not forced Iran to change its behaviour or come to the table for new talks. If anything, it has set up a contest between the leadership of Iran and America that makes backing down harder for either side. Tehran's clerical leadership, for whom continued existence is a priority that looms above all else, cannot be seen to be giving into US pressure.

Tehran's leaders might also believe that the risk of military escalation is one worth taking because of the lack of alternative options. No doubt, they are banking on the fact that Trump has stated that he doesn't want war. But still, they insist they're not responsible for the hit on the tankers. Instead, they've hinted at the possibility of Saudi or American provocation. Lending credence to this is the fact that some of the most sophisticated intelligence services in the world have not, at the time of writing, discovered with certainty who carried out the attacks.

Tehran might also be playing for time in the hope that Trump will not be re-elected come next year

**DATELINE:
MIDDLE EAST**

Paula Slier



November, and that his Democratic successor will restore the Iranian nuclear accord and ease up on sanctions. Why then risk everything by striking at tankers now?

Iran is also appealing to the remaining nuclear-deal signatories to deliver on promised economic benefits. One of the damaged tankers belonged to Japan, and the attack occurred while the Japanese prime minister was in the Iranian capital. Together with Germany, whose foreign minister was also in Tehran recently for talks, the countries are seeking a way to get around American sanctions. In this respect, too, it doesn't make sense why Iran would want to scupper such political efforts.

However, there is one more explanation. The attacks might have been carried out by one of Iran's proxies.

In Yemen, Iran backs Houthi rebels who are at war with Saudi Arabia over its support of Yemen President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, a man the



Houthis deem a Saudi puppet. The rebels continue to pound Saudi targets with drones and missiles, and have hit targets in the Gulf. In response, Saudi Arabia launched a massive missile strike on Houthi-controlled areas in northern Yemen.

The strike on the oil tankers might have been a response by the Houthis to that Saudi attack, but if this is the case, it goes against Iran's policy which is to neutralise any pretexts for a military clash in the Gulf. The question, therefore, is whether Iran has full control over all the actions the Houthis take or whether the Houthis behave without orders from Iran?

Another possibility is that there could be a rogue element among the Revolutionary Guards, a branch of Iran's Armed Forces, who want to wreck every possible political negotiation. It could be that while the Iranian leadership seeks out meetings with Japanese and German delegations, some guards could be acting on their own will.

The Israeli leadership has chosen to keep quiet, for the most part, about the latest events. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says something, he talks only in general terms about the risk Iran presents. He's clearly hoping the US administration will continue to pressure Iran but doesn't want to be accused of being involved in that pressure.

Trump may flip-flop on many things but the one constant in his inconsistent foreign policy is his position on Iran. But with so many unanswered questions and probable scenarios, it's not clear what's really going on.

Should this latest tanker incident be shown to have been caused by Tehran, it will require a US response. Trump, who insists he wants to avoid another Middle-East war, is faced with the choice to step back or move ahead and risk a confrontation.

Education should get to grips with Jewish pluralism



JONATHAN WEBBER

OPINION

Jewish identity is definable, and probably always has been definable, in at least two quite different ways.

One of these is the official, traditional definition: Jews are a unified people who have a spiritual mission, a precisely specified set of laws and customs, and an attachment to Israel, all of which are eternal and can never be changed.

Jewish identity is fixed, stable, coherent, and permanent; it has an intrinsic otherness that separates it from other cultures.

The second approach is what one might call the sociocultural definition: Jewish identity changes all the time because Jews have always had to renegotiate their sense of distinctiveness in the context of the many different languages, cultures, and political environments in which they have lived over two thousand years.

Jewish identity, in this view, is not fixed. On the contrary, it has always been the product of the intense interactions with the culture of the non-Jewish majority society in which Jews found themselves. Therefore it constantly underwent change as local conditions changed in areas including folklore, music, dance, art, food, dress, and synagogue architecture.

Even in Israel, Jewish identity has not remained static.

According to the traditional definition, all Jews have inherited *minhag avoteihem*. This means they are members of one people, have the same identity (or potential identity), and a shared destiny.

According to the sociocultural definition, however, Jews are primarily conscious of their local *minhag hamakom*. This refers to their local community, their local circumstances, and a host of local features that differentiate them from local majority society, and Jews living in

other places.

But these are not either/or definitions. On the contrary, what characterises Jews, and probably most societies everywhere, is that ordinary people believe in both kinds of identity at the same time.

Jewish identity (the unique, official identity), in the singular, exists alongside Jewish identities in the plural (the range of sociocultural realities in which Jews actually live).

It is certainly a paradox, and the two kinds of identity may seem to have nothing to do with each other, but they are both perfectly real in everyday Jewish life.

Even in the Bible, the Jewish people are described as argumentative. However, they are also shown to have a strong sense of unity as and when the need arises, for example, at Mount Sinai.

Both things are true. G-d says to Jacob, "*Pereh ureveh, goi ukehal goyim yihyeh mimeka*. [Be fruitful and multiply: a nation and a company of nations shall descend from you]." (Gen. 35: 11). This is a striking phrase, suggesting unity "a nation" and diversity "a company of nations" at the same time.

My suggestion is that what we see before us today is nothing new. The contradiction and the paradox, the theory and the practice, have been with us from the beginning.

A number of things become clear once Jewish identity is understood in this way.

Diaspora rabbis never included local diaspora

history and culture as part of the educational curriculum in Jewish schools or yeshivot, and they still don't. Why?

The rabbis clearly were not interested in the influence of Polish cooking on Jewish food habits, even if it was certainly considered distinctively Jewish for people to enjoy their chopped eggs and pickled herrings.

But the problem runs much deeper. Even today, Orthodox Jews are still mainly interested in the practice of their own Jewishness, and know next to nothing about the actual beliefs and behaviour of reform Jews or American post-denominational Jews – and, most interestingly, vice versa.

The awareness of a pluralist Jewish world has been growing a great deal during this generation, very probably due to the influence of television and the internet; and reform rabbis now know more than just a little about Hasidism. But what about Israeli education? Has that caught up too, or are secular Israelis still astonishingly ignorant about other segments of the Jewish world?

Do the huge masses of secular Israelis who have come to live in London, Berlin, or New York feel a strong sense of cultural curiosity about diaspora forms of Judaism, and the range of local Jewish identities, or are they still stuck in a time-warp whereby any form of Jewishness other than their own secular Israeli identity is of no intrinsic interest?

Strikingly similar to the religious outlook

of the classical diaspora Orthodox rabbi, we find a secular fundamentalism today. For example, take the Zionist ideology which offers a theoretical insistence on the fundamental unity and shared destiny of the Jewish people, but in practice enables Zionist Jews to hold such beliefs while at the same time feeling free to ignore those parts of the Jewish community with which they feel they cannot identify.

Orthodox rabbis, of course, don't recognise the whole concept of a non-halachic Jew. On the contrary, for them it is a contradiction in terms, even if it is also a fact that the Israeli state does recognise them, at least under certain conditions. But throughout the world, especially in post-Holocaust Eastern Europe, non-halachic Jews are everywhere, and in the sincere belief that they do belong to the Jewish people, they frequently partake in many Jewish community activities and in some sense may be treated as members of those communities, if not even becoming the majority of such communities.

Hence the reality of the paradox: a belief both in the idea of a single people with a shared destiny functioning alongside actual Jewish communities or sub-communities which specify their own agendas, their own rules, and their own definitions of Jewish identity. The challenge today is for Jewish education, everywhere, to teach a new discourse of sympathy and understanding to embrace the substantially increased range of Jewish identity which characterise today's Jewish world.

• Jonathan Webber is a British anthropologist and Jewish activist living in Kraków, Poland. He will be speaking at Limmud Johannesburg (16-18 August); Limmud Durban (21 August); and Limmud Cape Town (23-25 August).

“
But what about Israeli education? Has that caught up too, or are secular Israelis still astonishingly ignorant about other segments of the Jewish world?”

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Changing of the guard at the board of education

JORDAN MOSHE

The South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) is restructuring its executive body, appointing the principal of King David Victory Park (KDVP) Primary, Rabbi Ricky Seeff, as general director to replace Rabbi Craig Kacev.

The SABJE announced the appointment last week. Seeff has been principal of Victory Park Primary for six years. Kacev has been general director of the SABJE for the past sixteen years.

Kacev will be re-deployed in a new position on the executive from January 2020, overseeing the implementation of strategic initiatives aimed at developing the King David school network.

The decision is in line with the SABJE's vision and goals, says SABJE chairperson Eli Atie. "The Board's responsibility is long-term succession planning for the organisation, and the delivery of key objectives at King David schools," he says. "Over the past ten years, we've made significant



Rabbi Craig Kacev

the board felt it necessary to appoint someone to drive appropriate strategic initiatives. "There is nobody better than Rabbi Kacev to drive them," says Atie.

Under Kacev's leadership, SABJE schools have grown steadily, maintaining academic

investment in the infrastructure and educational offerings of our schools, including the establishment of King David Ariel remedial school, and teacher development."

Atie says these initiatives include continuous curriculum advancement, and the development of skills relevant to today's workplace. In addition, they bolster the Jewish and Zionist ethos of King David schools.

To leverage off its investments,

standards across the board. The SABJE has expanded its footprint, most recently by opening King David Ariel, the first local Jewish remedial school, which is in its second year of operation.

"Rabbi Seeff has been a superstar in his role at Victory Park for some time, and was identified as a long-term player suitable for a broader role," says Atie. "This was an opportunity to take him into the broader environment of all 11 schools."

Seeff matriculated from King David Linksfield High School, after which he completed a degree in

engineering and received his rabbinic ordination. Prior to his appointment as principal, he taught in the King David high schools, and was the board's director of Jewish Life before becoming the head of Victory Park Primary. Seeff is now completing his masters in Education through Yeshiva University.

Kacev says he has been working closely with Seeff for some time to ensure a smooth transition of responsibilities.

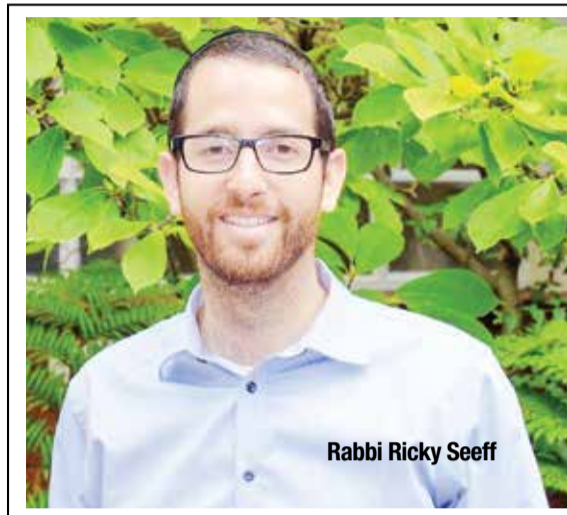
"Rabbi Seeff has achieved great things," he says. "The change is fitting in light of his own personal growth in the SABJE system, both as student and educator."

Kacev says his new position has no title as such, and stresses that it is neither a promotion nor a demotion. "The 3 300 students in our care are foremost, not titles," he says. "The schools in our network are the core

of the Jewish community which surrounds them, and need to be developed constantly."

With Seeff's change of position, the search has begun for a new principal for KDVP primary school.

Atie says the search could take between two to three months. "Rabbi Seeff remains in the school environment, and will assist in the recruitment of a replacement," he



Rabbi Ricky Seeff

says. "We will keep people up to date. These are big shoes to fill, but we are confident that we will find the right fit."

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Chaya Singer wins trailblazing award

Chaya Singer, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' parliamentary and diplomatic liaison, was awarded a Gauteng Provincial Government Premier Youth Excellence and Service Award on Sunday evening.

Gauteng Premier David Makhura and the MEC for Arts and Culture, Mbali Hlope, presented her with the award in the sports, arts, and culture section for the South African Jewish Youth National Identification Project.

Singer has co-ordinated the project for the past four years to foster youth development and social cohesion. It involves encouraging Jewish youth

to participate in commemorative ceremonies on public holidays.

The project offers Jewish scholars the opportunity to visit locations of historical events that changed the course of our country's history. It allows them to hear the eyewitness testimonies of survivors and families who lost loved ones during apartheid, and to engage with government and the



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

media.

"I am honoured to receive this award in recognition of this innovative initiative," said Singer. "Our goal is to encourage South African Jewish youth to be part of greater nation-building efforts that include a respect for democracy, human rights, and harmonious relations amongst all South Africans."

The identification project started after the 2016 National Anti-Racism Campaign of the arts and culture department, when communities from all over gathered in Sharpeville for Human Rights Day.

Singer co-ordinated the presence of Johannesburg Jewish scholars at the event. Since then, they have attended all the commemorative events facilitated by the Gauteng arts and culture department.

The aim of the youth excellence award is to celebrate the positive contribution made by people under 35 years old to improve their life and those of others. It recognises inspiring young people whose development has had a significant impact on people and communities in Gauteng.

"It's difficult to foster social cohesion and a sense of nationhood and belonging in a country that still interacts at a distance," said SAJBD head of communications, Charisse Zeifert. "This initiative bridges the gap between communities which often don't interact. More importantly, it allows young and old to share in each other's history, present and future, by commemorating our past."

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I will be visiting Cape Town on Sunday 21st July to Tuesday 23rd July,

and Johannesburg on Wednesday 24th July to Friday 26 July and will be available for meetings.

Please call 087 551 0790 or send me an email to rlerercohen@kinsearch.com to set up an appointment.

I look forward to meeting you

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What we see as the state of our nation

As President Cyril Ramaphosa was preparing for his State of the Nation Address that was given on Thursday, the SA Jewish Report asked a selection of influential members of our community to give their views on the state of our nation.

Things are getting better

ADRIAN GORE

The economy is weak and people are in difficult circumstances, but we shouldn't misconstrue this as permanent or inevitable. It will pass.

We all suffer from the human trait of "declinism" – the conviction that things around us are getting worse, when in fact they aren't. Research shows that this is particularly true of South Africans.

We must fight hard to avoid this, especially at this important time. The reality is that across every measure that matters – growth, poverty, crime, life expectancy, and more, our country is doing better than before.

This is remarkable given the lost decade of the Zuma administration. It illustrates our country's substantial robustness on one hand, but crucially on the other, the huge inherent potential that can be unleashed with positive and good leadership.

Our new president, Cyril Ramaphosa, presents that opportunity. He is a good, wise, and strong man. He needs time to lead. Remember also that the best opportunities avail themselves during difficult times, when opportunities

and assets are under-priced, and people are distracted. My advice is to stay focused, to seek out the positive alongside the negative, and to remember the unique and special community we have built.

All of the Jewish leaders I speak to are committed to building the community into the best it can be – the envy of the Jewish world.

• Adrian Gore is Chief Executive of Discovery.



In love with South Africa even as they moan

RABBI YOSSI CHAIKIN

I am writing this while sitting on my veranda, in the dead of winter, under the benevolent Highveld sun, surrounded by birds chirping in the trees. So, I may be looking at the state of our nation through rose-tinted lenses.

In truth, the climate and fantastic standard of living are the prime reasons people cite for wanting to live in the country I have called home for 33 years.

I arrived in South Africa at the beginning of 1986 as a shaliach, and with the blessing of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. To put matters in perspective, that year, the queue at the immigration desk of the South African Consulate General in New York was short, very short. It was just weeks after the famous Rubicon Speech, and the country was in flux and its future uncertain.

South Africa has been in transition for decades, yet through the resilience of its people, we have come through crisis after crisis. We all know that things could have turned out very differently.

I like to think that Hashem has a special place in His heart for this blessed country of ours, and that He keeps a special eye on South Africa. There is no other way to explain how time and time again, we have not descended into absolute chaos after each period of upheaval.

I gauge the mood in the country to be cautiously optimistic. With the elections behind us and a cabinet in place, we are emerging from a recent nightmare to a period of hope and



positivity. After a bad dream, it takes a while to recognise that the shivering and trembling can end.

True, young people are concerned about being accepted into the faculties of their choice for tertiary education, and about finding suitable jobs thereafter. But on the whole, people are passionately in love with the country, even as they complain about the ills of South Africa.

As far as yiddishkeit is concerned, the facilities we have here are unsurpassed in the world for a community of our size: shuls, Jewish schools, restaurants, shiurim, and places of learning. We are a tight-knit community that can overlook our differences when necessary.

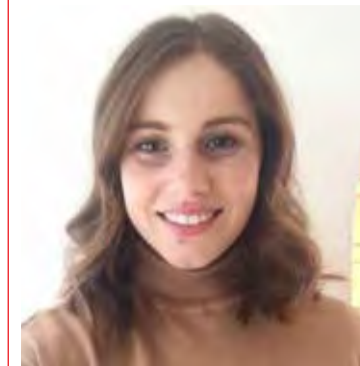
At a time when anti-Semitism is rising sharply all around the world, we are fortunate that serious incidents have not occurred in South Africa.

This is in spite of the fact that the government doesn't align itself with Israel, it hasn't banned terrorist organisations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and some of its members openly support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

In 1990, South Africa was once again in a state of flux. My father-in-law, Rabbi Koppel Bacher, was then told by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to go back and tell the South African community that it should not fear as things would be good there until Moshiach, and thereafter even better. Amen!

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi of Oxford Shul, and the chairperson of the South African Rabbinical Association.

Three steps forward and two steps back



EDEN PLEIN

The nation is in a bit of a trough.

The election which solidified Cyril Ramaphosa as the leader of our country and the African National Congress had the potential to be a peak. The community felt overwhelmingly optimistic about the fulfilment of promises to strengthen the economy and streamline the bureaucracy. However, as cabinet dissolves before us – perhaps, along with the economy – it feels like we are quickly becoming disillusioned again.

Continued on page 11>>

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States can recover – and this one will too

ERROL ANSTEY

States can recover, no matter how bad the situation. There are many examples of countries that have recovered from the worst scenarios in a relatively short period of time.

Who would have thought that African states like Ethiopia, Burundi, and Rwanda could become flourishing nations today?

There is no doubt that South Africa is on a precipice that could go either way. We have been at this point before, not only at the last African National Congress national conference, but under the old regime pre-1994. Each time, we seem to pull back from disaster.

The single most pressing issue facing our country today is our catatonic economy, which is failing to halt runaway unemployment, and taxing to death a dwindling tax base.

South Africa has the natural resources and people to turn it around. Unfortunately, we are now lumbered with an administration of many corrupt politicians and officials from top to bottom and across all spheres of government.

We need to follow Singapore's three principles, which turned its country from one of the world's

poorest to one of the most successful. These are: a government of meritocracy, where ministers are appointed for their skills and knowledge; pragmatism, where it takes good policies from capitalist and socialist ideology; and honesty, where corrupt leaders are jailed.



Africa to recover.

Success is up to us. We need to remain as committed as ever to the project of building one South Africa for all.

• *Errol Anstey is currently deputy chief whip of the Democratic Alliance in the City of Cape Town. He served for many years on the South African Zionist Federation, and IUA/UCF.*

Pockets of light in the darkness

SOL COWAN

We have come out of ten years of what I refer to as a dystopian era. We have had the breakdown of the process of law, and the selling of the state for a mere pottage synonymous to Esau selling his birthright for a "meal of lentil stew". All this took place under the stewardship of former President Jacob Zuma and his sycophants and acolytes.

The consequences of this is clear to see. There has been little or no economic growth, complete breakdown of all state-owned entities (SOEs), and the threat of a downgrade to junk status. There has also been a rise of xenophobia, and the deliberate promotion of division within society by the usage and promotion of the idea of "white monopoly capital".

However, there were pockets of light amid the darkness. The courts stood fast against all attempts to plunder by various state and non-state actors.

Sectors of the media investigated and exposed the rot. Hats off to them. Various civic organisations such as the Right2Know Campaign (advocating for access to information and protecting freedom of expression) and Corruption Watch applied pressure to have the corruption exposed and perpetrators brought to book.

The African National Congress (ANC) veterans league also played its part in applying pressure on the ANC in spite of much vilification from various quarters of the party.

With all this, President Cyril Ramaphosa finds himself in the invidious position of trying to maintain unity in the ANC as well as moving the country forward.

There are definitely forces within the ANC that are trying to destabilise his leadership and bring back to the fore the allies of Zuma. However, as a result of the events of the past week, many of these characters have resigned from Parliament, thus weakening the anti-Ramaphosa faction.

The appointments of the new head of the National Prosecuting Authority, Shamila Batohi, and the head of prosecutions, Hermione Cronje, are a stroke of genius on the part of President Ramaphosa. Both individuals come with no baggage, and will carry out their duties without fear or favour.

I believe we will see some high-level prosecutions of individuals implicated at the Zondo Commission, and the other commissions of enquiry that are being held.

As for the country itself, this is a rather more arduous task. The cabinet itself is a mixed bunch, but individuals such as Tito Mboweni, Pravin Gordhan, and Barbara Creecy have proven themselves in the past to be up to the task.

The civil service needs to be professionalised, and the main criteria for appointments to posts must be competency. It is vital to stimulate the economy, and formulate policies to attract new investment and give certainty to investors in manufacturing, mining, tourism, and agriculture.

The litmus test in the short term is Eskom. No matter how many pieces you break Eskom into, you cannot wish away its more than R500-billion debt. It cannot be allowed to fail as it is the bedrock of our economy. Certain unpopular decisions are going to have to be made regarding SOEs, such as whether we need a national carrier.

In conclusion, we must not allow ourselves to put President Ramaphosa on a pedestal. He is human, and must be judged by the court of opinion, and the court of the land.

• *Sol Cowan is an ANC stalwart.*



Three steps forward and two steps back

>> Continued from page 10

I am disappointed at the state of the nation. We might be repeating the cycle of relying on unkept promises.

The weather is cold, and rich and poor alike are tired. The state of the nation is simply exhausted with broken promises. This is not to say that there has been no recognisable progress, but nationally, it feels as though our energy has been sapped from a 25-year celebration dance which takes the form of three steps forward, two steps back.

I remain devoted to this country. I

am a born-free/millennial who plans to dedicate the upcoming years of my life to giving back. However, I would like the government to give me sound evidence for telling so many in our community that I do see a future here.

This belief motivates everything I do. The adoption of this attitude by others in our community would also improve matters.

It's obvious what the government needs to do to uplift the nation, but arguably, the more difficult question is, what do we do? It's unrealistic to rely solely on government, we need to

be active.

As Jews, we need to confront our responsibility to *tikkun olam* (healing the world), as well as our advantages here, and take an active role in uplifting fellow South Africans through charity, educational outreach, and empowerment opportunities.

Don't underestimate the role you can play in the flourishing of our precious South Africa.

• *Eden Plein is s'ganit mazkira (deputy secretary general) of Habonim Dror Southern Africa.*

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This 94-year-old educator tackles masters degree

JORDAN MOSHE

Studying for a masters degree in history is a challenge for most people, but Isadore Kahanovitz can't see why people are making a fuss about him doing it at the age of 94.

But then, Kahanovitz is not your typical nonagenarian.

His career as an educator has spanned the better part of the 20th century, during which time he helped to establish King David Linksfield.

Whereas others his age might spend their retirement playing golf, he has committed to furthering his education. "Much of my retirement has been dedicated to various projects," he says. "The last ended 18 months ago. I had to fill this gap, and decided to return to study. I chose history, my favourite subject, as I was struck by how few pupils pursue history in the upper grades."

The passion for learning has run in Kahanovitz's blood for decades. Born in Johannesburg in 1925, his family moved to Newcastle when he was a year old. He was sent to Hillel College in Johannesburg as a boarder for two years before enrolling at Jeppe Boys. After earning a BA in history at what is now the University of KwaZulu-Natal, he began his journey into the realm of education as a career.

Says Kahanovitz, "My teaching

career started in 1948 after graduating. I was appointed to a school in Durban for two and a half years, serving as master of the boarding house and the cricket coach.

"In 1950, a member of the newly constructed South African Board of Jewish Education [SABJE] in Johannesburg met to tell me of plans to build a Jewish school. The challenge was irresistible, and, together with Ike Harris, we started King David Primary School in Linksfield in 1951. I was in my early 20s at the time."

He says the school had about 30 students from grades one to six, with him teaching history to the older students. "Our project was to build up the school, and await the arrival of Abe Lipschitz to take over as the headmaster in 1953," he says.

"It was tremendously challenging. We used an old bus that travelled all over to pick up pupils. Invariably, it was a problem. I had to ring up the city councillor to arrange a city bus. Our staff was also very small, but by the end of the year, we had a flourishing school."

By the time Lipschitz came, the school had grown to include more grades, and Kahanovitz was appointed vice-principal. After serving for two years, he decided to spend time abroad, visiting Israel and London to conduct research and travel.

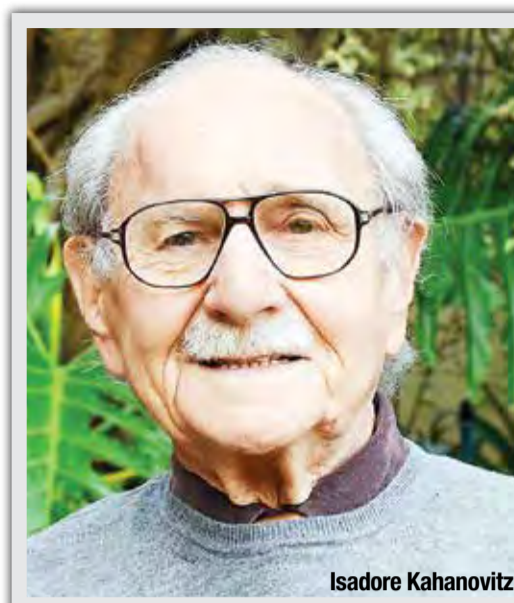
But, he was soon called back to continue developing Jewish education in the country.

"While I was in England, Rabbi Isaac Goss sent me a letter to ask if I knew someone [who could] start a high school," he recalls. "I recommended my good friend Norman Sandler. He called me back from Israel, and together we built up the high school which, in a short while, became overcrowded."

Together, the pair drove the school forward, investing in it an emphasis on Hebrew and Jewish identity.

Though they tried to model it on the school system in the United Kingdom, it didn't always go according to plan. "Norman and I thought in our first year that part of the uniform should be a straw basher hat," laughs Kahanovitz. "Hell, that was a mistake. What only happened at prayers in the morning when the students decided to throw them around..."

Kahanovitz remained at the school until 1959, moving to Durban to assist with founding yet another Jewish school, Carmel College. He recounts, "We started with a few children in 1960, and by 1966, we had our first matric class. We built a thriving high school, and always had excellent results."



Isadore Kahanovitz

to play golf," he says, "but don't have the money for that. What else could I do? I chose a masters."

Kahanovitz resolved to do the dissertation degree at the University of South Africa by correspondence. He has spent the past few weeks reimmersing himself in historical literature and the material he studied in his BA, and is currently choosing a research topic. He believes it will probably be concerned with Jewish history.

"Jews are too often victims of false historical accounts and accusations," he says. "I want to do research to challenge this.

The acceptance of lies speaks for deep ignorance amongst many nowadays, and this needs to be confronted."

He laments that in general, history is a sadly neglected subject in South Africa, and an area from which much can be learned, especially by Jews. "We have survived because of what we have learned from our past," he says. "Without history, we have no foundation that allows us to understand why we have Israel or who we are as Jews."

"Jews must be knowledgeable in general, and Jewish education must remain a priority. So many Jewish minds have been recognised for their contributions to history. We must continue to invest in education."

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The growing trend of the grown-up Batmitzvah

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Karen Kallmann celebrated her Batmitzvah in May at the tender age of 48. She is just one of a number of Cape Town women who have recently chosen to mark this milestone in retrospect – and as adults.

For Kallmann, an independent researcher in socioeconomics, the seed was planted at the time of her daughter's Batmitzvah two years ago. "We're a Modern Orthodox family, and I wasn't happy with the whole de-emphasis of girls in Judaism," she says.

"So, we had a Batmitzvah at the shul, but later in the afternoon, we did a [private] halachic partnership minyan* where the Torah service was led by women, and my daughter *leined* (read from the Torah). It was a very inspiring event. A lot of people enjoyed it."

For her 48th birthday, Kallmann decided to do something similar, identifying opportunities within the halachic partnership *minyan* where a woman could lead the service, and allocating those parts to female friends. A "very supportive" male friend performed the parts of the service that could not be led by women.

"We had a *mechitzah* (partition between men and



Karen Kallmann reads from the Torah at her Batmitzvah

women), but men and women were leading the service."

She says the halachic acceptability of women reading from the Torah, and leading parts of the service in the presence of men is "up for debate".

"When I asked my rabbi, he sought opinions from other rabbis. The response was that it is halachically fine, but it isn't done. It's not accepted in the mainstream, but it definitely is accepted in many Modern Orthodox communities around the world."

Kallmann stresses that in constructing the private service, she relied on guidelines on partnership *minyans* (the quorum of ten adults required for religious obligations) published by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA). This alliance aims to expand spiritual, ritual, intellectual, and political opportunities for women within the framework of halacha, or Jewish law.

"It was wonderful. For someone who's observant and really wants to connect more, it was empowering," she reflected on the occasion. "In a way, it was probably better than having it as a child because I could do what I wanted."



"What was beautiful was to see people of different ages and stages uniting through learning Torah ... They were strangers when they met, and they've really formed into a group of friends."

In a more traditional vein, Rebbetzin Lee Liebenberg of the Claremont Wynberg Hebrew Congregation, has over the past year been offering Master of Batmitzvah Advancement (MBA) classes to a group of 10 adult women whose graduation took place recently. This is the first time that something of this sort has taken place in Cape Town.

"Over the years, I've heard from many women either that they never got the opportunity to celebrate a Batmitzvah when they were 12 years old, or if they did, it didn't have that much resonance for them at the time," she says.

"Now that they're older, they really want to deepen their understanding of yiddishkeit."

The women, ranging in age from their early 30s to late 60s, met every Sunday morning for a year to tackle topics such as belief in G-d, Jewish history, and the Big Bang Theory, along with analysis of the first chapter of *Bereishit*.

A *chesed* (lovingkindness) component of the course involved decorating the Rosh Hashanah table of the Oranjia Jewish Child & Youth Centre, as well as engaging in a challah bake that ensured the children had home-baked challah for *yom tov* (the festival).

"The ladies were incredibly dedicated," Liebenberg reflects. "They were so inspired and motivated to continue learning – they've all asked me when I'm going to do their PhD."

"What was beautiful was to see people of different ages and stages uniting through learning Torah," she says. "They were strangers when they met, and they've really formed into a group of friends."

Nicole Sherman didn't have a Batmitzvah at the age of 12, so when Rebbetzin Liebenberg offered the course, she jumped at the chance. "I guess because I'd missed out when I was younger, and I really wanted to do this for myself. I had no idea what I was going to learn," she says.

"I thought we were going to do challah baking (which we did) and visit the *mikveh* (ritual bath) – which we also did – and learn a little bit. I was more worried that I was going to end up doing a *d'var Torah* (sermon interpreting text from the Torah) at the end of it. Thank goodness that wasn't the case!"

The course has "absolutely" inspired her to continue learning, "but in topics that I would really be interested in, and something that was more on my level".

Sherman says she now has a better understanding of Jewish history. She also relates, for example, that the group went through the *Eshet Chayil* (special

tribute to Jewish women) line by line. "I never knew any of that. Now I want to learn more if I can."

Since graduating, she says she feels "like I've completed something really amazing with a much deeper meaning. I feel excited that I spent an entire year doing something for myself."

While she is "very happy" to have her Sundays back, she would "probably" do a PhD. "You must always carry on learning – you can never learn enough," she states.

During the course of preparing young girls for Batmitzvah in Johannesburg, Adina Roth, Torah scholar, teacher, and clinical psychologist, has also had many mothers tell her that they either didn't have a Batmitzvah, or that it was without meaning for them. They say they wish they'd had the "full curriculum" their daughters were experiencing.

It inspired Roth to start a course for adult women later this year. Roth has, in fact, prepared an 82-year-old woman for her second Batmitzvah, although she did not have a first Barmitzvah. "She gave a *d'var Torah* – it was very beautiful," she remembers.

Roth's Batmitzvah course will span a year, during which 12 biblical women or women from the Talmud are studied, one every month. "It will bring up themes that will allow the women to explore themselves spiritually and psychologically," she says. "They will also have the option of *leining* within a strictly halachic context."

She agrees that this growing phenomenon demonstrates that adult women are serious about advancing their knowledge of Judaism as well as developing their skills and wanting a ritual to mark the transition. "After adolescence and marriage, there are very few life-cycle moments that mark our transitions, yet as human beings, we move into different phases of our lives all the time," she says.

"Without the appropriate rituals, we don't always have the support to grow as we might into these next phases. The course will be about harnessing Jewish texts and Jewish learning to help."

* A halachic partnership minyan is a prayer group committed to maintaining halachic standards and practices while including women in ritual leadership roles to the fullest extent possible within the boundaries of Jewish law.

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Choosing her own time to die

NICOLA MILTZ

The late Sonia Goodman, 88, was always a fiercely independent woman with a mind of her own. So, it was no surprise to her son and family when the terminally ill grandmother chose to end her life on her own terms.

In November last year, Goodman, originally from South Africa and now living in Toronto, Canada, opted for medical assistance in dying (MAID). The practice is illegal in South Africa, and many parts of the world.

Her son, David Goodman, 66, who lives in Johannesburg, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that his late mother did not want to endure prolonged suffering, and become a burden on her family.

“For as long as I can remember, she made it clear she wanted to die with dignity,” he said.

Now, almost seven months following her passing, Dr David Juurlink, who was with her until her last breath, has shared her final moments and his reflections on her death on Twitter. His posts have since gone viral, being read 6.5 million times, according to an email sent by the doctor to the family.

Juurlink, a Canadian pharmacologist and internal medicine doctor, is head of the clinical pharmacology and toxicology division at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, Ontario. This was the hospital where Goodman died.

On 18 May, he tweeted, “She gave me explicit consent to tweet the details of her case about four hours before she died. Her hope was that someone might benefit from her experience.”

According to Juurlink, Goodman experienced a great deal of pain in her thigh and groin caused by an infected and septic pseudo aneurism as

a result of a previous hip replacement. She required further surgery and antibiotics for the rest of her life, something she did not want. She would have been in persistent pain.

“She wanted no more surgery,” Juurlink tweeted. “Her mind was sharp, and she was clear about that. Antibiotics alone weren’t going to cure the infection; they would only suppress it.”

An even greater concern, going forward, was her quality of life, or lack thereof. “She foresaw being confined to her apartment, in pain, struggling with her walker. No more walks outside. No trips to the grocery store. No playing bridge with her friends, as she had done for years. She wasn’t interested in living like that.”

She insisted that palliative care was not for her. At that stage, she was already hospitalised and practically bedridden. So, in consultation with her family and a team of dedicated doctors and medical practitioners, Goodman opted for MAID.



Sonia Goodman

“I saw her every day after that. Managed her pain. Listened to her stories ... I grew very fond of her, especially her wit, and clear-eyed stoicism,” Juurlink said.

David visited his mother in hospital in November. He spent time with her and his devoted nieces (Sonia’s grandchildren living in Toronto who affectionately called her ‘Yaya’). There had been numerous emails back and forth concerning Goodman’s deteriorating condition. There had also been discussions about MAID. His mother was still being assessed for eligibility by the time he left to return to South Africa.

“My mother and I said our goodbyes. She told me not to come back when she passed away.”

About ten days later, on 30 November, David Goodman had his last FaceTime chat with his mother before the two bade each other farewell. “She seemed upbeat and happy,” he said.

An hour later, she passed away with the help of medical assistance.

Medical assistance in dying occurs when an authorised doctor or nurse provides or administers medication that intentionally brings about a person’s death, at that person’s request.

Goodman slipped away surrounded by loved ones, having had her hair done and wearing a fresh coat of lipstick. She sipped cognac with some Canada Dry Ginger Ale, and enjoyed her choice of music by Johann Christian Bach.

Juurlink tweeted, “There were tears, of course. All around. But mostly the atmosphere in the room was one of serenity and gratitude, and a genuine sense of having done the right thing.”

“I’m no MAID expert, and I get that some people are opposed to it for various reasons. But I’ve been a doctor for 25 years, and I’ve seen enough deaths to know a good one from a bad one. This was, without exaggeration, the best death that I have ever witnessed.”

Medical assistance in dying offers patients, who may be experiencing intolerable suffering due to a grievous and incurable medical condition, the option to end their life with the assistance of a medical practitioner. It is provided only to legally eligible patients. There is a strict system of safeguards designed to protect vulnerable people and support all people in making an informed decision.

In June 2016, the Canadian government legalised MAID in Canada for competent adults. The law sets out specific criteria for eligibility.

The practice is legal in some countries under certain circumstances, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Colombia, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, as well as Washington, Oregon, California, Montana and Vermont in the United States.

Cape Town euthanasia advocate, Professor Sean Davison, is the founder of right-to-die

organisation, Dignity SA. Davison was this week sentenced by the Western Cape High Court to an effective three-year house arrest after pleading guilty to the charges of assisting three people who wanted to end their lives.

The legalisation of the right by terminally ill patients to choose when to end their life conjures up intense ethical and moral debate. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has been a vocal proponent of assisted death.

In a heartfelt letter to family and friends last month, Sonia’s granddaughter, Sandy Murray, revealed an intimate conversation she’d had with Juurlink shortly before he posted his tweets. He told her that “at least one person will die differently, and better, because of her”.

“That’s what she wanted. I think she would be absolutely thrilled to hear this. I can’t think of a better testament to her and her character,” said Murray.

“I understand there are sensitivities around this. But this was definitely her story to share, and she wanted that to happen. I am so proud of her and her choice, and so glad she got the end she wanted.”

Euthanasia from a halachic perspective

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish tradition and law assigns extraordinary value to human life. Saving a life, creating a life, and not taking a life are at the very core of Jewish law, ethics, and morality.

What then is the Jewish perspective on euthanasia, medical assistance in dying, or physician-assisted suicide?

End-of-life discussion is extremely sensitive and emotional. It is a minefield, say medical experts and religious leaders. Volumes have been written on the subject.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman of Sydenham Shul said, “While Judaism is extremely sensitive to the pain and suffering of any and every individual, this is not permitted by Jewish law.”

Goldman said there was an unfortunate misunderstanding about euthanasia or mercy killing, but all these things were “simply taking a life”.

“People think they are being kind and compassionate, but life and death are in Hashem’s hands,” he said.

“G-d is the author of life and death. G-d knows everyone’s purpose in life. For us to interfere in His role is arrogant and misguided. It may be prompted by the sincere desire to alleviate pain and suffering, but we should try to find alternative ways.

“This is not in our realm of understanding, this falls in Hashem’s province alone. We dare not even begin to take upon ourselves to play G-d. It’s dangerous.”

He said it was a slippery slope, and asked where we draw the line.

“If it is subject to human rationalisation, we may well decide to terminate the lives of senior citizens who are unproductive by our standards.”

Goldman said the discussion had a spiritual, mystical component. “Every soul has a mission on earth. Sometimes we are meant to experience difficulty in this life, it is part of the soul’s journey. By ending a person’s life, we may be causing them greater pain and suffering prematurely in the world to come.

“Our role is to make the patient as comfortable as possible. Doctors have told me that there is sufficient medication available to assist patients with pain management that will keep them pain free until they die of natural causes.

“We must do the best we can for every patient while placing our faith and trust in G-d. Ultimately it is He alone who determines our destiny.”

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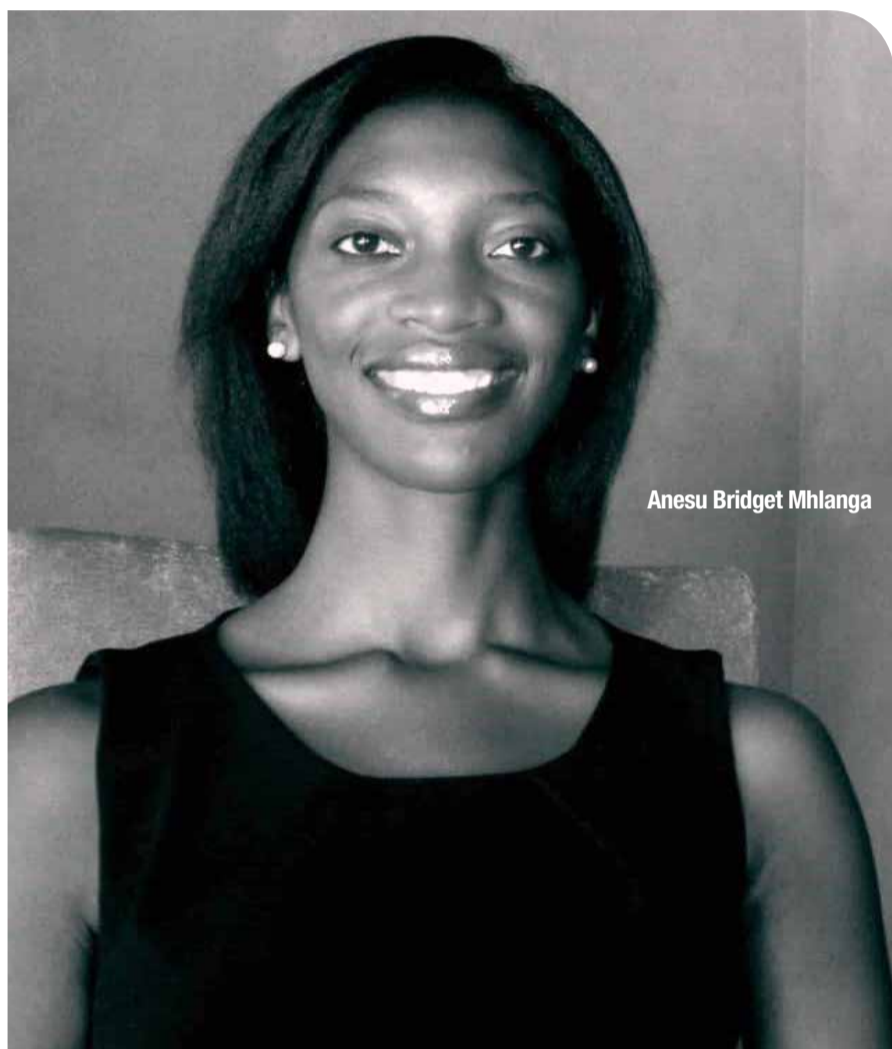
Zimbabwean woman strives to strengthen Jewish community

TALI FEINBERG

Anesu Bridget Mhlanga is on a mission. First, she wants to convert to Judaism, and second, she wants to build a thriving Jewish community centre in Zimbabwe.

She greets me with an enthusiastic “Shalom!” on the phone from her home in Harare. A qualified lawyer, businesswoman, women’s economic empowerment expert, public speaker, and government advisor, her enthusiasm and dynamism are infectious.

Indeed, Mhlanga is anything but ordinary. “I grew up in a Christian home, and since I was a teenager, I always felt Jewish. It’s strange because I went to an Anglican private school, and I didn’t know anyone who was Jewish. But I just never fitted in, and as I got older, I started questioning the doctrine,” she says, explaining her unusual path.



Anesu Bridget Mhlanga

“It didn’t really occur to me that this could lead towards a conversion – I didn’t know you could! I sort of stumbled upon it. At the age of 30, I knew I needed to contact a rabbi as I wanted to convert.” That was five years ago, and it hasn’t been easy.

“I’ve been trying to get into the South African conversion programme, but it’s like pulling teeth. I was told to wait until marriage, but it’s a Catch 22, as I know I can’t get married while converting. I’m 36 years old, so it’s a huge sacrifice when it comes to relationships as I’m not sure if I should try to meet someone who is Jewish.”



“As Jews, being part of community defines you. Yes, this is an ageing community and it’s small, but the people are still here, and we can’t discard that.”

Thankfully, she has the support of a rabbi in the United States and friends in South Africa, but she says, “No one would do this for fun. It’s expensive, and leaves me in limbo between two communities. Yet, my neshama (Jewish soul) will not let me stop until I complete the process. It’s almost like getting a sense of the birth of Judaism, and what it took Avraham to cut ties and follow what he believed in. It’s a strange feeling of being in transition, when you are not part of one or the other.”

This has not put Mhlanga off her plans to revive the Jewish community in Zimbabwe. She attends shul regularly in Harare, but points out that despite the community being so small, there are still divides along Ashkenazi and Sephardi lines. “What unites us is Shabbat. Because there are so few men, we can’t make a minyan alone. We have to share the men, and we have alternate services at the Ashkenazi and Sephardi shuls.”

She says an elderly man in the community told her that, “When one person dies, we lose 10% of our community.”

Yet she points out: “As Jews, being part of community defines you. Yes, this is an ageing community and it’s small, but the people are still here, and we can’t discard that. We need to convene around something, which is why I am hoping to build a community centre.”

With the support of investors and possibly the Israeli government, she hopes to fill vacant land next to the shul with a centre to host events, workshops, festivals, and simchas (celebrations). It will have a kosher restaurant, and accommodation for Jewish businessmen and travellers, especially anyone coming from Israel. There will be a gift shop with memorabilia from Israel, which she sees as especially important as most local community members can no longer travel to the country because of their age. Mhlanga even hopes to build a mikveh (ritual bath).

She sees the community centre as a way to “keep the lights on”, as it would attract investment and visitors, and support Jews who are still living in the country. In particular, her vision is for it to attract Israeli and South African businessmen to Zimbabwe, where she says there are plenty of opportunities for

growth, investment, and expansion. She also believes that Zimbabwe and Israel could strengthen and benefit each other.

Despite the challenges Zimbabwe has faced, Mhlanga remains positive. “Part of the Jewish soul is to be optimistic – it’s what has kept us going as a nation. I don’t think my job here is done. I will remain involved in Zimbabwe because I would like for it to be the country it ought to be.”

If readers want to support her with the community centre, she asks for investment of material resources, but most importantly, she would like people to visit the Jewish community in Zimbabwe. “We would love support from our sister community in South Africa,” she says.

In terms of her conversion, she would like community members and leaders to make it easier for converts to join the fold, and to have a welcoming attitude. Shortly before this article was published, she was thrilled to confirm: “Rav Hender who heads up conversions in South Africa is currently kindly assisting me with relocation for my conversion.”

She would also like the South African Jewish community to play a role in resolving the issue of the Lemba Jews, who want to be part of *klal yisrael* (global Jewry) but are not recognised by the Beth Din in Israel.

Mhlanga sees huge potential in Zimbabwe and its Jewish community, and believes it can still play a role on the world stage. “There is so much potential, and I don’t like to see potential being wasted. Hashem placed us here to be a light – we need to leave a mark wherever we go. Zimbabwe used to be the breadbasket of Africa, so why should it not be so again?”

DANIEL LIMOR FORMER SPY



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Call to Christians to stand up against anti-Semitism

JORDAN MOSHE

Dr Laurie Cardoza-Moore, the president of Proclaiming Justice to the Nations (PJTN), has called on Christian leaders to step-up efforts to combat anti-Semitism.

PJTN is a United States-based organisation that seeks to educate and advocate in support of Israel and Jews worldwide.

South African Christians must reclaim their space, Cardoza-Moore said, and make it clear that groups such as Boycott Divestments Sanctions (BDS) do not speak for them.

"It's time for you to draw a line in the sand, South Africa," she said. "South Africa is a Judeo-Christian nation, and what happened in Durban ends here now. We will not allow someone else to dictate what we believe about our Jewish brethren or the state of Israel."

Cardoza-Moore was speaking at the launch of PJTN's first chapter on the African continent at Beyachad in Johannesburg on 13 June, where she addressed a gathering of local Christian leaders.

Also present were Congress of the People (COPE) President Mosiuoa Lekota; Ayellet Black, the deputy ambassador of Israel in South Africa; and Gavi Sacks, the chairperson of South African Friends of Israel.

South Africa must rise to the task of combatting anti-Semitism and the lies spread

about Israel, said Cardoza-Moore. "You know that this is your hour. It's time to act. What happened at the United Nations World Conference on Racism in 2001 in Durban is not what we stand for."

The threat isn't only political, it's

religious, she said, pointing to a rapidly rising tide of "replacement theology" experienced by the Church. This promotes a false narrative which aims to remove Jews from the history of Christianity and write them off.

"Replacement theology is anti-Semitic. It's a lie. It suggests that the covenant with the Jews is over. There's no text in the Bible, and no book or verse to substantiate this position. Yet it's preached and promoted across the West."

Dr Laurie Cardoza-Moore



Cardoza-Moore suggested that governments worldwide are acting contrary to the will of their citizens, pushing Israel away when they should be doing the opposite. The launch of PJTN in South Africa is thus a call to society to make its voice heard.

"We cannot sit by and allow government to dictate what is true," said Cardoza-Moore. "We will stand, and we will speak out. It's tragic but true that Christians killed Jews in Crusades, in pogroms, in the [Spanish] Inquisition, in the Holocaust. Now, we see anti-Semitism on the rise, unlike anything seen in our lifetime. Where is the Church? Is it promoting a false

doctrine, or drawing a line in the sand?"

Her words were met with enthusiastic applause. It was clear that those in attendance were confident that institutions such as PJTN would help to amplify the voice of the Christian community. Many said anti-Semitism was at odds with the Judeo-Christian principles entrenched in South Africa, and must therefore be addressed.

The South African chapter of PJTN will host its inaugural conference on 12 September at the Mosaïek Teatro in Fairlands, Johannesburg, affording Jews and Christians alike a space to show their support.

'Everyone is Present' sees history anew

MATTHEW KROUSE

Local artist and writer Terry Kurgan's autobiographical book that begins with her grandparent's flight from Poland has been longlisted for an Alan Paton Award for non-fiction.

It covers her grandparents' crazy journey to Cape Town via Istanbul, Baghdad, and Bombay; their complicated personal relationships, her discovery of her grandfather's exquisite handmade journals, and her own journey backwards to Poland.

Everyone is Present is a landmark publication in the sense that it takes a distinctly 21st century view of a story that bears vague resemblance to others told in the Jewish world.

Many families have these sagas of flight and arrival. But we tend to conflate facts, overlooking the minutiae of personal relations in favour of

sweeping conclusions that tie up loose ends, allowing us to maintain the social order we've constructed in a new land.

Not so with Kurgan, who is an accomplished visual and conceptual artist stationed in Johannesburg. Her main body of work examines images, and the way that they throw history back at us. Using mostly vernacular photography, she looks at the way we explain who we are, creatively, in ordinary spaces loaded with personal significance.

The award citation tells us that, "If there is truth in the assertion that catharsis is the road to healing, then the annual Alan Paton longlist reflects a nation imbibing and dispensing some serious mass medicine."

And, while Kurgan's memoir, based on looking at family photographs, might not dispense "mass medicine", its writing has been an act of healing on her part.

At the book launch at Johannesburg's Holocaust & Genocide Centre late last year, Kurgan said that by viewing her late grandfather's photographs and by reflecting on his writing, she had attempted "some kind of return, some kind of reparation, some kind of retrieval".

Through the book, Kurgan tries to reimagine the drama and dynamics of the Kallir family. They were well-to-do, lived in a cosmopolitan Polish setting. They holidayed for months at the famous Zakopane health and holiday resort, with a governess for their children. Here, her devoted grandfather took snapshots of his wife, Tusia, while she had an extra-marital affair.

Isabel Hofmeyr, professor of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, and global distinguished professor at New York University, pointed out that the book poses the question: "How do we inherit the past?" One of

the important arguments that the book makes is that the past always comes to us via testimonial objects – the family album, the photograph, the diary, the anecdote, the song. These are small, everyday forms that we think we understand. They appear to be self-evident, and we hardly ever look at them twice.

"What this book does is teach us how to pay attention. It says that if you take these things that you think you know, what you need to do is look at them with this extraordinary potential curiosity."

"It is a book that is asking us to look at these things, and to look at them anew."

One of the things Kurgan looks at "anew" is the computer application Google Street View which allowed her to examine the exact spot her family inhabited in the town of Bielsko, about 60km from Krakow, where the Nazis attacked Poland in 1939.



A photo from *Everyone is Present*

The narrative of her family's flight from Poland takes on nail-biting proportions. But, it is the mechanical simplicity of Google Street View, seen in 2013 when Kurgan was doing her research, that is cause for introspection about the impact of conflict on our daily lives. By tuning into Street View, Kurgan found that the building her family had lived in had not changed substantially in more than 70 years.

Reflecting on the mass migration of refugees in the present day, Kurgan writes about irony and the movement of refugees towards the Europe her family once fled from.

But in the end, it is in evoking her family members' triumphs and disappointments, through photography, that makes *Everyone is Present* a triumph of storytelling in a contemporary way.

While her grandfather was "living the wrong life", according to Kurgan, he tolerated his wife's infidelity as much as he tolerated change. Perhaps it is in Kurgan's mother's fascination with fairytales that we find a sad inability to deal with harsh facts a generation down the line.

Not so Kurgan herself. The book, like its author, comes to the conclusion that there is no one truth to arrive at when we look back at our lives. She uses the photographic medium to make her point.

"Ultimately, in the same way that memory and narrative have very unfixed meanings, so too do photographs," says Kurgan. "People confuse photographs with truth, with fact. But most photographs are fiction."

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Jewish Report



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Memoir makes apartheid activism personal

JORDAN MOSHE

When both your parents are arrested and held for three months without trial, and you – a young teenager – have to look after your three younger siblings, you are left with much more than a story to tell.

This was the shock awakening of Toni Strasburg, the daughter of activists Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, shortly after a state of emergency was declared in South Africa in 1960.

Strasburg has combined the voices of her father and mother with her own to give a face to the traumatic history of apartheid South Africa. In her book, *Holding the Fort: A Family Torn Apart*, she makes the experience of living under a brutal regime personal.

It is a memoir of the author's experiences in South Africa in the 1960s, pieced together from her own memories and the writings and diary entries of her late parents.

Strasburg was in Johannesburg to launch her memoir at Love Books in Melville on Tuesday.

She told the *SA Jewish Report* that the book's creation began with her mother's death in 2006.

"My sister and I came across reams of my mom's diaries after she died, most of which I don't even want to look at," she says. "The three months which the book cover was a short period in her life. I read through them, and found it was a time I remembered."

Strasburg says the diary entries, many of which were penned during her mother's incarceration, made it clear that she remembered less than she thought she did. Supplementing her memories with the text, she integrated the diaries into her own narrative, adding her father's writing at the last minute for a man's voice.

It posed considerable challenges. "Getting my writing to flow alongside my mother's writing – which I really wanted to showcase – was a challenge," Strasburg says. "I really wanted to do it for her, because she deserves to have her personal experiences shared."

Her mother's experiences have helped Strasburg to better understand her own past. As Strasburg was sixteen at the time, there was much she couldn't comprehend. "There were

things I didn't fully understand," she says. "I had no conception of what a hunger strike was. To a sixteen-year old who has never gone without lunch, ten days without food is difficult to understand.

"This is really the distant past, and it feels almost like somebody else's story. There were events after that which were much more traumatic. The Rivonia Trial and going into exile were both much bigger events. This was just a short time in our lives."

For this reason, Strasburg believes her book is readable and different. "This is the story of three months in the lives of people during the state of emergency, in particular that of a group of white women in prison about whom my mother writes," she says.

"It's an easily accessible book, and not a big story. I'm not trying to speak about the revolution or suggest that I'm a hero of the struggle. There are enough of those, which is why I have pitched this differently. The inclusion of other voices, writings, and drawings adds to the appeal."



Mandla Langa and Toni Strasburg at the launch of *Holding the Fort: A Family Torn Apart*

While the book's creation gave her satisfaction, it was not an exercise in psychological catharsis.

"We dealt with what happened a long time ago," she says. "There was a time for that to be dealt with, and that has passed."

What she has gained from the exercise, however, is an understanding that the voices of others can be used to give expression to your own voice. "It's

possible to use another's material in a personal way," she says. "I have used my mom's own writing to express myself. It's quite hard to take another's writing and make it your own."

The inclusion of her mother's writing adds a personal dimension to a political history. "We often come across the idea that political people were not effective parents," Strasburg says. "But my mother's letters show her concern as a parent, and her love for her children."

"This was an ordinary family. Obviously my family wasn't ordinary, but at the same time, we were. We had a house in Observatory with a pool, we

went on holiday, we attended school – all part of a normal, white life. It wasn't all drama."

This duality is ultimately the message her book imparts best. "The message is that you need to stand up to inequality, but support your family at the same time," says Strasburg. "You can't keep your mouth shut in the face of discrimination, but family always matters as well."

Jewish theatre by women, for women

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Observant women rarely have the opportunity to show their talent for theatre, dance, and song, but they proved their abilities last week in *The Power of Song*.

This adaptation of the *Sound of Music*, held at Eden College in Johannesburg from 13 to 19 June, was an all-woman production for an all-women audience – and it was all-out phenomenal.

"There are many observant women who, because of halachic restraints, won't perform in front of men," says Linda Zulberg, the brainchild of the production. "Our idea is to ensure an all-female audience, giving [performers] more creative outlets. It gives them the opportunity to sing, dance, and act on stage, an opportunity many thought they'd never have."

Zulberg, who over the years has written, directed, and produced many acclaimed school plays, first conceived of the idea of the Joburg Jewish Women's Theatre a year and a half ago, inspired by similar companies in Israel and the United States.

"There are women's groups doing just this, and I've watched their productions," says Zulberg. "Both my children who were involved with such groups in America and Israel said to me, 'If you're going to do it, do it now'."

"So, a year and a half ago, we did it for the first time with *The Fortunate Two*. It was like jumping into cold water, but we had an overwhelming response," Zulberg says. "For me, this is a project that's come out of a very full communal and family life. It's a wonderful outlet, and I love doing it." Having now completed their second production, the theatre group is flourishing.

Word about the auditions spread throughout the community via shul and WhatsApp groups.

"Many, many people came, and we saw very talented women," says Zulberg. "It's tough, because if you do it by audition, you can take only

those who are appropriate to the parts. Some heartbreak is involved, unfortunately."

Yet, what resulted was a highly talented group of singers, actors, and dancers. "We've also got a wonderful production team including top managers, choreographers, and musical directors. It's given those of us who are observant in the production team a chance to express ourselves. People are very excited about this production. We've had capacity audiences."

Zulberg says the play brought women from all corners of the Jewish community together. "Every single part of the community has been involved," she says. "Amongst the cast, there are people from every religious background. For example, just by chance, each of the seven children of the household in the play came from different schools – from King David to Hirsch Lyons to Torah Academy to Sandton Sinai. It's really a unity project."

The story of a young governess who comes to look after seven wayward children, and fills their home with light and music has entranced audiences for decades.

In this version, the governess is the impetuous Ashira, who comes from a Jewish seminary. "We decided to do *The Sound of Music* because it's an absolute favourite with everyone," says Zulberg. "It's a delightful musical, well-rounded, and the songs are gorgeous. I adapted it to have Jewish relevance, and wrote the words to the additional songs."

"It's a difficult musical to do because the demands on the voice are extremely high – it's only really for sopranos. Baruch Hashem, through auditions we found our lead, Daniella Winer. She was literally the last person to audition. We were just completely dumbstruck. What a voice!

"This production has been an amazing experience because everyone worked together well. They've all done it voluntarily, and they've all been very committed."

The play was financed through ticket sales, with additional proceeds donated to the charity DL Link.

"Sitting in the lighting box watching this show, I'm already thinking about what the next play will be."

“It's given those of us who are observant in the production team a chance to express ourselves. People are very excited about this production.”

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Kosher Butcher's wife gives us a taste of home

NIKITA SINGH

The "Kosher Butcher's wife", Sharon Lurie, whose recipes are a favourite among the community, launched her third cookbook, *A Taste of South Africa with the Kosher Butcher's Wife*, last Wednesday evening at Nussbaums Butchery in Glenhazel, Johannesburg.

Lurie combines uniquely South African flavours with the requirements and traditions of kosher cooking. She has developed ingenious ways of using leftovers and modernising traditional recipes.

She explains, "Traditionally, when we make fish balls and fried fish for the Jewish holidays, we tend to go a little overboard, just in case we don't have enough! So, leftover fried fish is always a given." In the book, Lurie transforms leftover fish balls into sweet and tangy "Curried Cape Malay fish" for a flavoursome South African twist.

Recipes like "Soweto salad with bubbe's borscht twist", "chakalaka corn latkes", and "bobotie fish blintzes" showcase Lurie's skill in adapting South African flavours to traditional Jewish dishes. Her recipes are simple and modern, and her sense of humour shines through in her writing.

A firm favourite in the Lurie household is "Bobba Shar's no-bake melkert". Traditionally, a milk tart filling is made with milk, sugar, and eggs; but Lurie adds a tin of condensed milk for a luxurious and decadent twist.

Lurie's first book, *Cooking with the Kosher Butcher's Wife*, was published in 2006. "The first book took me 25 years to write," she says. With encouragement from her sister-in-law, Lurie worked to condense decades worth of recipes and cooking notes from her files, and eventually approached Struik publishers.

Her debut cookbook aimed to educate home cooks about meat. "The first book was about teaching people. No-one really knew all the cuts of meat there were, and how to cook them," says Lurie.

"I used to work in the butchery, and obviously I wouldn't be allowed all the prime cuts. So, I would get what the customers didn't want, and I used to think to myself, 'How can they ignore all these beautiful cuts?' There's some delicious cuts out there."

Lurie became the butcher's wife when she married Ian Lurie 37 years ago. Ian is the owner of Nussbaums Butchery, which has been providing the community with kosher meat for four generations.

"I always say... G-d knew what he was doing 59 years ago when he put the two of us together in heaven. He knew how much I love cooking. It was the right lid for the pot," says Lurie.

The new book demonstrates the Lurie family's adoration of meat in the chapter, "Let's meat and eat". The chapter features drool-worthy meat recipes from "Jislaaik ribelicious ribs" to "Joburg-style jerk chicken". Lurie says that in her home, she's in charge of the braai. "My husband works with meat all day – smoking, cooking, cutting – so the last thing he feels like doing is repeating that all over again when he gets home," says Lurie.

If Lurie's first love is meat, her second is bread. "If you were to ask my friends what I could never live without, they would all answer in unison, 'bread and meat'. I love, live, and breathe bread." From challah, to bagels, to *potbrood*, Lurie loves to bake her own bread. "I love fresh bread. I love to be able to tear it apart, and eat it with layers and layers of... biltong."

The new book features a never-before-seen recipe, "Xoliswa's Ndoiyiya's *umbhako* challah".

This is challah made in a pot and cooked over a fire (especially useful for load-shedding nights). The recipe was developed for members of the community climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. The climbers needed a pot recipe as there wouldn't be ovens to make challah for Shabbos. "No doubt this was a first for Mount Kilimanjaro," says Lurie.

Lurie has a strong following overseas. She believes the expat community appreciates her

recipes as they are a reminder of home. "You just want that connection... with kosher, and with South Africa."

She will launch her cookbook in London in September, and possibly in New York later in the year, giving her expat following an authentic taste of South African Jewish cuisine. "Wherever you are in the world, may you always enjoy the tales and tastes of your home, your heritage, your traditions, and your culture," she says.

Jislaaik ribelicious ribs

Whenever a South African says jislaaik (pronounced "yis-like"), it's normally said with some sort of surprise. For instance, in rugby, if a man scores a try by running from one end of the field to the other avoiding all the other players, that's jislaaik. Or, if something tastes delicious, you say, "Jislaaik this is good!"

Three racks meaty-smoked steakhouse ribs, cut up individually (about 20 ribs, each about 12cm long)

- 2 litres cola
- 1 tsp crushed fresh garlic
- 1 heaped tbsp grated ginger
- 1 tsp dried chilli flakes

Basting sauce: 1 cup tomato sauce (e.g. All Gold) or ketchup; ¼ cup hotdog mustard (your favourite); ¼ cup soy sauce; and ¼ cup smooth apricot jam.

1. Wash the ribs well to remove excess salt from the smoking process. Place them in a large pot and cover with the cola, garlic, ginger, and chilli flakes. Don't worry if they are not covered completely, as there should be sufficient liquid to steam them. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer, and allow the ribs to cook for at least 30 minutes. After 15 minutes, swap the ribs at the bottom of the pot to the top so



that all the ribs are cooked evenly in the cola.

2. Preheat the oven to 180°C. Transfer the ribs to a roasting dish, discarding any cola that hasn't already cooked out.

3. To make the basting sauce, mix the tomato sauce or ketchup, mustard, soy sauce, and apricot jam in a bowl until well combined. Baste the ribs with this mixture, then roast in the oven, covered, for one hour, turning after 30 minutes. After an hour, reduce the heat to 160°C and roast for another hour, uncovered, until the ribs are dark and crispy.

• Serves 6

This recipe is provided courtesy of Sharon Lurie and is in her latest cookbook.

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Jewish Report



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Tribute to communal leader par excellence

JORDAN MOSHE

Cape Town communal organisations are reeling from the loss of Nilly Baruch, who passed away unexpectedly last Thursday at the age of 75.

Baruch, deeply involved in community service, was admired for her selfless devotion to others and her commitment to several Jewish organisations.

Baruch underwent surgery to her ankle on Monday last week, and although she seemed to be recovering, collapsed unexpectedly on Thursday. She passed away that evening. Her funeral was held on Sunday at the Jewish cemetery in Pinelands.

An activist for several local Jewish organisations, Baruch's involvement in the community brought her into contact with many who recall her fondly. They paint a picture of an indefatigable woman, who was always elegantly dressed, sporting her signature red lipstick and earrings.

"Nilly always went beyond the call of duty," says Lisa Sandler, the joint head of ORT

Cape Town where Baruch served for about 20 years. "She wore many hats in her time. Whether [it was] ORT, the Union of Jewish Women, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), Bnot Tzion, Partnership2Gether, or any other, she always gave of herself entirely."

Baruch was known for her ability to break down barriers, shunning all protocol and formality in reaching out to people from across the religious and ethnic spectrum. Says Sandler, "She always tried to make a difference in the Nilly way."

"Her home was always open, and people visiting from overseas were always there with her and her husband, Tzvi. I remember a communal seder she

held one afternoon during Pesach just to share the unique experience with colleagues beyond faith. She was always breaking barriers in issues concerning religion and Israel."

Baruch was also involved in the SAZF in Cape Town, serving as a member of the management committee for 24 years. Julie Berman, her close friend and executive director of the Cape Council of the SAZF, remembers her as one of the most active members she knew.

"Nilly was instrumental wherever she worked," says Berman. "Her heart way exceeded the size of her body. She could only think of doing good for others and making their lives easier."

The two were friends for 21 years. Berman spoke about Baruch's support of many communal causes and organisations, within and without the Jewish community. She was a major sponsor of the control room of the Community Security Organisation, and was involved in strengthening ties with Christian Zionists, forging strong connections with the

African Christian Democratic Party.

Baruch put others before herself, even after suffering a personal loss. The proud mother of three children, she lost her son, Nir, in a motorbike accident, but is said to have been unflagging in her duty to the community in the aftermath of the tragedy. Says Berman, "She just kept going. She did all she could to keep herself occupied, and kept giving to the community. It was remarkable."

"Like any person, she had her moments," Berman says. "Still, I would give anything to hear her talking about her latest project. Though she will be sorely missed by the SAZF, this is a loss for the entire community."



Nilly Baruch

What the popularity of 'Shtisel' tells us about the non-orthodox majority

DANIEL TREIMAN – JTA

Would the builders of New York's Temple Emanu-El ever have imagined that their congregation's sanctuary would one day be packed to the balconies with thousands of devout followers of a black-hatted orthodox rabbi and his family?

That was the scene last week when the citadel of high reform Judaism on Manhattan's Upper East Side was overtaken by *Shtisel*-mania.

Fans of the Israeli TV series about the day-to-day dramas of a haredi – that is, ultra-orthodox – family in Jerusalem filled the Fifth Avenue synagogue to see the show's three stars discuss their surprise Netflix-streamed hit. Demand was so intense that the organisers – Emanu-El's Streicker Center, The Jewish Week Media Group, and UJA-Federation of New York – added a second night when the first quickly sold out. About 4 600 attended over the two nights, according to the event's sponsors.

The first night at Temple Emanu-El, the three "Shtisel" actors – Dov Glickman, who plays family patriarch Shulem Shtisel; Michael Aloni, who plays his son Akiva; and Neta Riskin, who plays daughter Giti – and show producer Dikla Barkai seemed as surprised as anyone at their show's success, marvelling at the crowd of thousands assembled before them.

They recounted their more modest initial expectations for the show. Aloni said *Shtisel* didn't exactly have the hallmarks of an international hit: there is no sex or car chases.

"We all shared this feeling that we were doing something great that no one would watch," he said.

Yet, this quiet show about private family dramas in Jerusalem's insular haredi community made a big splash. In Israel, where *Shtisel* first aired in 2013, its popularity bridged the secular-religious divide. Its two seasons cleaned up at the Israeli Television Academy awards, while TV-less haredi Jews found ways to watch avidly and surreptitiously.

But it wasn't until Netflix picked up the show in December that *Shtisel* got a second life as an international sensation. Now, there are plans for a third season and also for an American version set in Brooklyn.

To what does *Shtisel* owe its popularity? For starters, it's just excellent TV: superbly written, well acted, with compelling characters, and rich story lines. There's also, no doubt, a certain voyeuristic appeal: an opportunity to gaze into a mysterious and cloistered world.

For many Jewish viewers, I suspect, curiosity about our haredi kin is a significant part of the show's attraction. We non-haredi Jews can appreciate that haredim are connected to us, that they are, in some sense, our *mishpocha* (family). Yet, our connection to the haredi world is attenuated by a profound religious chasm. *Shtisel* allows us to bridge that divide from the comfort of our couches.

That's because the show's themes are deeply relatable: love, longing, loss, fidelity, and infidelity, filial and parental responsibility, conformism and rebellion, and dreams, both chased and crushed.

Shtisel is fundamentally about its characters' relationships played out within the confines of their community. The outside world intrudes only sparingly – the American soap operas enjoyed by Shulem's mother, much to her pious son's dismay; the overheard roar of a military air show on Israel Independence Day; the "damned evil people", a phrase invoked by Shulem's

brother Nuchem to decry unseen but hostile outsiders.

Even Akiva, whose dream of a career

as a painter is scorned by his father – a religious scholar with a low regard for any arts that are not culinary – but encouraged

by a secular patron, keeps the nonreligious world at arm's length.

While *Shtisel* is a show about a haredi family, Judaism is not the show's

subject. It is, rather, the show's context. For the entire first season, we do not so much as see the inside of a synagogue. But every aspect of the Shtisels' everyday lives is suffused with Jewishness, from the way the characters dress to the words they use to the way they greet one another to the blessings they utter before they take a sip of water.

This is one way in which *Shtisel* differs from the recent bumper crop of shows with Jewish protagonists.

The show's characters inhabit a thick and rich Jewish context. And that is what makes the universal human stories at the heart of *Shtisel* into a great Jewish drama.



Shtisel has a certain voyeuristic appeal to Jewish viewers


Photo: Netflix/Dori Media

בס"ד

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COMMITTEE FOR PREVENTION OF JEWISH GENETIC DISEASES

Manners maketh parenting

I am aware that any column I write in which I complain about the behaviour of children at shul will paint me as an old *kvetch* (persistent complainer). And whereas I might be, I need to disclaim the following:

I love the fact that children are in and around shul; and I enjoy the fact that they happily play, laugh, and make a noise – even if it's so loud that I can't concentrate on the conversation I'm having.

But last week, in a shul that will remain nameless for the purposes of this column, it made me a bit mad.

And I don't blame the kids at all. I blame the parents for what is an appalling lack of parenting.

This kiddush was a special occasion, which meant there was biltong, dry wors, and all sorts of other goodies. But as soon as kiddush was said, the children surged forward and grabbed as much as their filthy little hands were able to. They heaped their plates with so much of the "good stuff" that there was hardly any left for an adult.

I witnessed one of these 10-year-old pirates weaving through the crowd with his booty piled so high, that it was genuinely quite perplexing. His gleeful expression and evil chuckle, along with smug victorious expression, was bone chilling.

For good order's sake, I don't blame the miniature scoundrels at all. They are programmed this way. Hard wired to forage. They hunt and they gather like the uneducated hillbillies that they are. They cannot differentiate between this and the excited collecting of sweets when they are thrown at someone called up to the Torah. Not without their parent's guidance. For further clarity, I certainly wouldn't have won any parenting awards when our children were young. However, I do believe that teaching children to be sensitive to the fact that they should be aware of the other people in the

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



community is a lesson that goes well beyond the shul brocha.

Recently at another shul, a four-year old child escaped from the brocha and thankfully, was found in the street by one of the security guards who returned him safely to his parents. The parents saw fit to berate the security guard and the shul security team for not being on the lookout for roaming children.

The parents also failed to understand that protecting a shul requires one to stand with one's back to the shul – at most shuls anyway – as the threat comes from the outside.

The "brocha lady" at the shul I was at on Shabbat told me that she was lambasted by some parents for setting up a coffee station at the back of the hall because of the danger it posed.

When she queried why the parents were not able to supervise or teach their kids about heat, she was told that she was not being sensitive to their needs.

This is significant because to not teach a child about the dangers of heat, but rather to choose to guard the hot-water urn, is to disempower that child. To not teach a young one that there are other people around, all of whom need to share the food on the table, is to raise selfish, entitled adults.

To shout at a security guard for allowing a little one to run further than you would like is to deny taking any responsibility or ownership. In none of these cases will a child learn anything.

Shul is a great place to spend a Shabbat morning. It's also a great place to teach children how to function in society.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

SAJBD staff on the move and in the news

As has often been pointed out in this forum, our professional staff make up the engine room of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

It is they who are ultimately responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation, and for putting all decisions made by the elected lay leadership into action. Their work routinely takes them beyond the confines of the board's offices, including to Parliament, and often beyond our country's borders. This week, three SAJBD staffers were involved in noteworthy initiatives that helped to raise the prestige and profile of our Jewish community.

From 16-18 June, National Director Wendy Kahn took part in the 6th World Jewish Congress National Community Directors' Forum in Bucharest, Romania. This is an annual event for Jewish communal professionals from throughout the world to share experiences and expertise, and forge working relationships for the future. In 2017, the SAJBD was privileged to co-host this prestigious event in Cape Town.

Also taking place in Bucharest at this time was the first International Meeting of Special Envoys and Co-ordinators Combating Antisemitism, where the Romanian presidency of the council of the European Union issued a declaration officially affirming its commitment to "supporting international initiatives directed at tackling the challenges facing Jewish communities".

Unlike Kahn, political officer Yanir Grindler's travels took him just across the border to Mozambique. Once there, however, he moved about considerably, visiting remote parts of the country that were especially hard-hit by the cyclone disaster earlier this year. Grindler was joined by representatives of Cadena, a Mexican-based Jewish-headed humanitarian organisation with

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



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnov



whom the SAJBD partnered to assist cyclone victims. He followed up on relief projects in the areas worst affected, assessed the needs of the communities, and distributed further humanitarian aid (including water filters, solar lights, pads, and hygiene kits).

We thank all those members of our community whose generous support made it possible for us to join our international counterparts in bringing critically-needed aid to our neighbours during a most difficult and traumatic time.

Last week's column referred to the board's role in ensuring Jewish participation in events organised for national holidays such as in Sharpeville on Human Rights Day, Soweto on Youth Day, and Tshwane on Heritage Day. This forms part of a broader SAJBD initiative to foster youth development and social cohesion by involving young Jewish South Africans, particularly school pupils, in national commemorative ceremonies.

We were most proud and gratified that this initiative, called the South African Jewish Youth National Identification Project, earlier this week received the Gauteng provincial government's Premier Youth Excellence and Service Award for Sports, Arts, and Culture, including Social Cohesion. Congratulations to the board's parliamentary liaison, Chaya Singer, for receiving the award, and for the part she played in obtaining this welcome public recognition for this important aspect of our work.

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

Still rearranging the deckchairs?



TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin

Fingers are being pointed everywhere following the tragic results of the latest survey of South African Jewry by the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, a summary of which went out to community members this week.

Who is to blame for the heartbreaking decline in the numbers of South African Jewry, from 120 000 in 1970 to 50 000 today? Those who say this is not tragic are putting on a brave front or fooling themselves.

Part of the explanation is that Jews are leaving the country as part of the broad trend of white people leaving. Between 2013 and 2018, the white population dropped by 2% to 4.5 million, out of a total population of 57 million.

Where is the Jewish religious leadership? Religious leaders are a major influence in how Jews see themselves. It would be good if those leaders of whatever rank would do what they could to build bridges and bolster morale, not divide.

The iconic Titanic has been a cipher for many metaphors of collapse. South African Jewry fits here. Some may say that the community can be small, but still vibrant, with active Jewish schools and so on. That might be true for now, but the numbers tell their story.

In ten years' time, there won't be 50 000 Jews, but maybe 10 000. Afterwards, as more old people die and younger ones leave, who knows?

Within a few years, there will probably be no African country with a sizeable Jewish community. Most Africans will never meet a Jew in their life, and will be left only with stereotypes from books.

Many believe the orthodox component of this community – the largest – has failed to show necessary leadership.

To an observer, obsessive attention to whether the international Jewish learning programme – Limmud – is kosher enough, or who can sing at the cemetery, is bizarre.

And, some people object to the orthodox leaders' use of European holocaust rhetoric to bolster arguments against Israel's critics rather than exploring whether this dying community can be rescued by gathering together its remaining resources.

Examples of this trend were published in *Haaretz* in an article about South African Jewry on 16 June, in which the South African chief rabbi is quoted as saying that the apartheid accusation against Israel is "on the level of blood libels in Europe".

And, the national chairman of the South African Zionist Federation is quoted as saying that BDS (the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement's) tactics, which have included storming events with Israeli guests and boycotting stores that carry Israeli products, are a "Kristallnacht".

Historians and pro-Israel quarters find this trivialisation of the blood libel an insult to Jews who were persecuted in its name over centuries. Similarly, the use of the word "Kristallnacht" in this way, is an insult to Jews who were destroyed by it.

Leaders use these analogies irresponsibly, while the Titanic that was once South African Jewry quietly begins to list. Rationally analysing the facts and listening to critical voices would be better than demeaning critics.

Jewish leaders are constrained by their positions from expressing personal views openly. They have to stick to the standard line: that the community will survive; Jews are loyal South Africans.

Alarm bells are ringing; this Titanic is sinking. In years to come, there may be a reckoning about who tried to man the lifeboats and save something, and who let everyone go down as the band played on because they wouldn't sit at the same tables as other Jews.

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Jewish Report



Europcar

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Sewing empowerment



Ariane Henneck (UJW exec member), Cimanga Ornella (student), Chido Tsodzo (teacher), and Cindy Kree (executive director)

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Sewing Empowerment Project held its graduation at the UJW's offices in Johannesburg on 13 June, celebrating empowerment and the creation of new skills.

The project's students, many of whom are unemployed, are now able to use a sewing machine and do beadwork. At the graduation ceremony, they related their experiences on the course, and many were overcome with emotion at the positive change the project had made to their life.

The students modelled outfits they had made during the course, as well as displaying their beaded items. It is difficult to believe that four months ago, they didn't even know how to use a sewing machine. They received a certificate of completion, and each student received a non-perishable food parcel, courtesy of the Lions Club.

The school ultimately aims to equip the unemployed with the skills to be able to support themselves. Its graduates now produce yarmulkas, bags, aprons, tablecloths, and other items which can be ordered through the UJW.

Victory Park pre-primary builds school with ecobricks



KDVP Pre-Primary displays their collection of ecobricks

The seniors at King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park recently made ecobricks for Ditshego House of Laughter, a school and place of safety situated in an informal settlement in Mooiplaas, Centurion.

An ecobrick is a plastic bottle densely packed with a variety of non-recyclable waste that can be used for building. It's an exciting way to reduce the amount of waste that lands up on landfills, and the errant bits and pieces that land up in our drains, water-courses, and oceans.

The children's outreach project included making goody bags for all 101 children at Ditshego, which contained a beanie (woollen hat), toys, and sweets.

Daddy Liberty reflects on Jerusalem

Sihle Ngobese, aka "Big Daddy Liberty", enthralled the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) on 13 June with his love of Israel, Jerusalem, and especially the Torah.

Ngobese, the host of *Big Daddy Liberty* on YouTube, and head of strategic operations at the Institute of Race Relations, appeared at WIZO's 52-year celebration of Jerusalem, talking about the city's beauty and relevance as the essence of Jewish spirituality. Ngobese is currently converting to Judaism, and is a passionate advocate for Israel.

He also brought a liberal perspective to the future of South Africa, leading to poignant discussion amongst the audience. A short film on the recapturing of Jerusalem by Israeli forces was screened.



WIZO's Yvonne Jawitz, Sihle Ngobese and Chairwoman MD Kathy Kaler

Jewish families subsidised to relocate to Pretoria

Young Jewish families who are willing and able to take an active role in the Pretoria community are being drawn to live in the city through generous subsidies of accommodation and school fees.

In an extension of the school-fee subsidy programme, now in its second year, Jewish families living outside of Pretoria willing to relocate are invited to apply for school fee subsidies for the 2020 academic year.

The subsidy programme is organised by the Pretoria Jewish Communal Services Trust through the Pretoria Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. It is designed to incentivise young families to move to and take an active part in Pretoria's close-knit and hospitable community, whose numbers are dwindling.

Jewish scholars resident in Pretoria at any of the acknowledged Jewish schools in Johannesburg are offered partial or full subsidies. Daily transport to and from the schools is provided by the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation from its Groenkloof premises - at no charge.

In addition to school fees, the Young Couples' Program provides rent-free accommodation for such families.

School fees have become a major financial burden, even in the budgets of well-to-do families. Communal organisations hope that the subsidies will elicit a strong response, and in so doing, help Pretoria's Jewish community to survive and thrive.

For more information, contact Mark Seligman at seligs@yebo.co.za. The closing date for applications for the 2020 academic year is 5 August 2019.

Letters

POPE PIUS XII DOESN'T DESERVE BEATIFICATION

Readers may be interested to hear that the Catholic Church is looking into beatifying Pope Pius XII.

Pope Pius XI, against the advice of then Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, issued the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Concern) to be read in all churches, much to Hitler's anger. The encyclical condemned breaches of the 1933 *Reichskonkordat* agreement signed between the German Reich and the Holy See.

Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, soon after becoming Pius XII, showed that he was to be very different to his predecessor, which pleased Mussolini and Hitler.

One of Pius XII's first actions was to re-establish relations with the right-wing Action Française, in response to its leader, Charles Maurras, reversing Pius XI's ban. Maurras was

France's foremost anti-Semite.

In 1939, Pius had written a "secret encyclical" against racism, which Pius II seized; it was only released by the fine Pope John XXIII.

On 7 April that year, Mussolini invaded Albania. "Not one word from his mouth about this bloody Good Friday," wrote prominent French Catholic Emmanuel Mourier.

Mussolini was encouraged by the report of the Swiss papal runcis, who said that the atmosphere in the Vatican was like "a breath of fresh air". The pope spoke with "much sympathy for fascism and with sincere admiration for the Duce".

It is thus disturbing to hear of an ongoing process for Pius XII's beatification; he hardly merits it. – Peter Onesta, Johannesburg

Sunday (23 June)

- Second Innings hosts Jack Bloom, Democratic Alliance caucus leader in the Gauteng provincial legislature, on the May 2019 elections. Time: 09:45 for tea, 10:30 for speaker. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, 2nd Floor, Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R20 Second Innings members; R40 visitors (includes tea/coffee and refreshments). Contact: 011 483 7425.



Wednesday (26 June)

- Second Innings hosts an outing to the Modderfontein Dynamite Museum, Frans Hoenig House, and the Flamingo shopping centre. Time: Bus departs at 09:30. Venue: Meet the bus in the parking below Golden Acres. Cost: R150, includes bus and guided tours. Book with Ivy Grushkin, Jewel Gold, or Ros Traub. Contact: 011 483 7425.
- Join the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) every Thursday for a *Lunch & Learn* shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Contact: WIZO office: 011 645 2515.

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Long-distance autobiography befits running legend

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Perseverance is a trait five times-winning Comrades Marathon icon Jackie Mekler possesses in abundance. Not only did he win this, the world's largest and oldest ultramarathon, in 1958, 1960, 1963, 1964 and 1968, he also persisted for 45 years in writing his autobiography.

Mekler, who grew up in the Arcadia Orphanage in Parktown, completed 11 Comrades and 403 races under the standard marathon distance. He also won 14 of the 41 standard marathons he contested in South Africa, Canada, England, Scotland, Greece, and Finland, and 13 of his 32 ultra-marathons – including the Comrades, Pieter Korkie, and London to Brighton.

He set new records at many of these events. He also set world records on the track for 40 miles (64km) and 50 miles (80km) running against the clock. He is the recipient of the Spirit of Comrades and Living Legends Awards.

Mekler's newly released autobiography, *Running Alone*, tells the story of a man with a fiercely competitive spirit that carried him through harsh experiences in an era in which the first glimmerings of medical and scientific advances in the sport were emerging. It illustrates that no mountain proved too treacherous for Mekler to navigate.

One of those mountains was a feeling of being restricted by the rules, regulations, and discipline imposed by the Jewish orphanage. When he was 13 years old, Mekler regularly bunked out of the institution to go for runs to overcome this feeling. This is how his insatiable appetite for running began.

"My frustration led me to explore ways of loosening the shackles of confinement. The best and easiest way was to start running," says Mekler.

He was so canny at this, he never got caught. But, he was eventually kicked out by the institution even though he tried to

do a *mitzvah* (good deed).

"I was caught taking out some bread to someone who had missed a meal. I felt a mighty clout at the back of my head, turned round, and grabbed a pair of hands. It was the matron. They expelled me – within 24 hours I was gone."

He used this fairly devastating experience as an opportunity to reunite with his father in a boarding house in Berea.

When Mekler made an early start to his Comrades career at the age of 20, he was prepared. "I started running when I was 13, running a half mile (0.8km) at the time and gradually building up. By the time I ran my first race, I had run about 7 000 miles (11 265km) in training.

"I ran to get fit, and I ran as many races as possible, sometimes 10 marathons a year. There was no such thing as scaling down or peaking. I would run 50 miles (80km) on a Sunday morning, and in the evening I would do a fast 10 miles (16km)," he says.

"I remember going to the Drakensberg to train. I would run before breakfast, after breakfast, and do a third run in the afternoon. One week, I ran 440km. My biggest downfall and biggest asset was exactly the same thing – my love for

running. I loved it so much, that I did too much at certain times."

It was this love for running that pushed Mekler on when he encountered surprising obstacles. In the 1960 Comrades, Mekler was cruising to victory and a second winners medal when he gashed his leg on a board placed across a ditch for the runners to cross. The board caused a painful blow on the leg, from which blood was streaming.

But, being a person who has always pushed his limits, Mekler refused to allow this obstacle to thwart him, and he soldiered on to breast the renowned Comrades finishing tape in what was then a record-breaking time of 5 hours, 56 minutes, and 32 seconds.

Mekler had no one to encourage him or offer him a lift home. "At times on my training runs, I became so tired that it surely would have been beneficial to cut short my session or stop altogether. But early on, for better or worse, I trained myself never to give in, only to drive harder.

"But, when I joined Germiston Callies, I found the Morrison family who were almost like foster parents to me. They encouraged and helped me along. As part of the Germiston team, I went with Wally Hayward and Fred Morrison to run the London to Brighton race, and we stayed with Arthur Newton. It was magnificent, a wonderful experience."

Mekler says he is honoured

to be classed as a legend of the Comrades alongside fellow five-time winners Hayward, Newton, and Hardy Ballington. "It is a humbling experience because these are people I really looked up to. I used to get their autographs, and there I was ranked with them. Great moments."

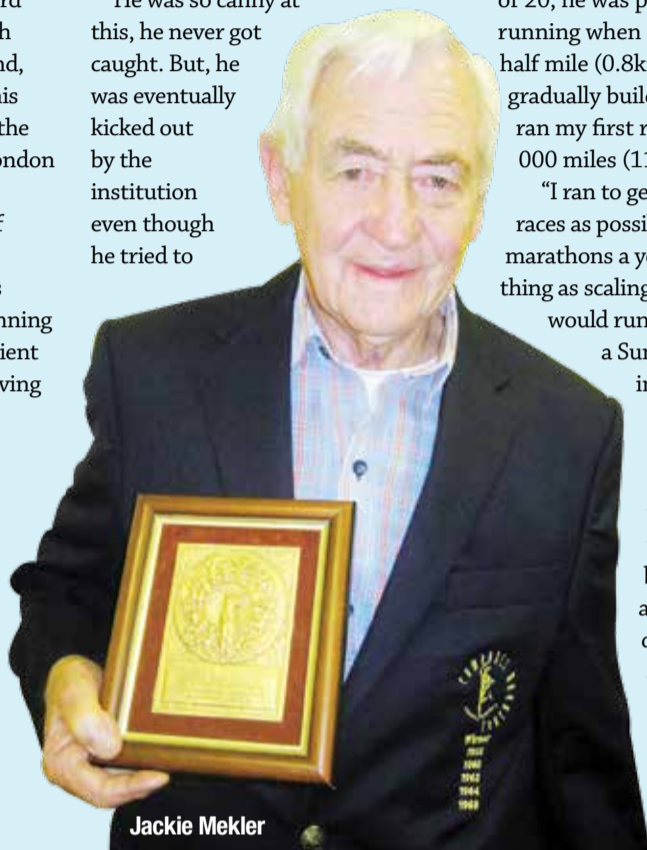
One of the reasons his autobiography has taken 45 years to complete is that Mekler is an intensely private individual. While he shared very little of his hardships growing up even with his closest friends, he poured his soul onto paper.

"When I was 13, I started a diary and recorded all the training and races I did, how I fared, and how I felt. That became volumes and volumes across the years, and it became the crux of the book," he says.

The quality of his running data is such that Professor Tim Noakes used Mekler's logbooks as the cornerstone of his research into distance running. While a scientist like Noakes gleaned hard information from them, it is the stories behind them that feed into the richness of the book.

His advice to aspirant Comrades runners is, "if you are driven, work hard, enjoy what you do, and are able to motivate yourself, you are good to go".

At the age of 87, Mekler still runs alone in Cape Town because "no one is slow enough to keep up with [him]".



Jackie Mekler



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SA Jewish rugby on the up and up

LUKE ALFRED

Jewish rugby in South Africa is flourishing, says Brad Berger, Maccabi South Africa's director of rugby. The system is slowly producing good young players. Also, with the appointment of former University of Cape Town coach Kevin Musikanth as King David Linksfield (KDL) Director of rugby, schools like KDL are raising their game after what some might say have been years of under-achievement.

With this in mind, Berger has thrown down the gauntlet to those hoping to make the South African Maccabi squad come the next games in 2021. "The level is getting much better," says Berger approvingly. "There are some good players out there, and King David has just put in a high-performance centre – its under-18 side have also just had a very good season.

"We're going to take sides in three age groups – open, under-19, and under-16 to the next games – and I'm hoping that getting into the next Maccabi side is going to be difficult."

Every sport needs its generational pioneers, and Jewish rugby is no exception. Hacjivah Dayimani, the former Jeppe Boys schoolboy and Igbo Jew, has played a barnstorming role in recent seasons. Then there's Jordan Chait, the Maties flyhalf,

who helped the "Maroon Machine" to the 2019 Varsity Cup title a couple of months ago.

This weekend, Cullen Collopy will be sitting on the Sharks bench when they travel to Canberra in Australia for their Super Rugby quarter-final against the Brumbies. Collopy, who is comfortable playing at either hooker or flank, has shown good domestic form and, without either Beast Mtawarira or Phillip van der Walt in the touring party, has cracked the nod in the 27-man Sharks squad.

Such players might ultimately be a step or two beyond Maccabi structures (indeed, Chait has spoken recently about going overseas after graduation at the end of the year), but they do provide others with a template of what is possible.

Besides the inspiration these players provide, the system itself has become more streamlined. Berger monitors every player in the country, just over 60 all told. That is whether they play at either of the two main English-speaking universities, Pirates, or College Rovers, as is the case with the much-travelled Collopy, who has played some of his rugby as far afield as Barcelona in Spain.

A Jewish side now participates regularly in the Cape Town Tens, and the system is generally more sensitive to the day-to-day goings-

on of the players. "Ideally, we'd like a Test against Israel next year as part of our preparation for Maccabi the following year," says Berman. "And we're definitely aiming for a camp to bond and get the guys together."

All of this represents a significant improvement from eight years ago, when rugby for the Jewish community was in the doldrums. The schools weren't particularly interested, structures were poorly-developed, and talent was wasting away.

Enter Maccabi SA Chairperson Clifford Garrun and a couple of like-minded rugby-fans who didn't want to see the game they loved vanishing before their eyes. In essence, they started taking the game seriously, and giving it the respect they believe it deserves.

"Now we're looking for the community to start taking notice," says Berger. "If it knew a bit more about what was going on, maybe it could help a bit more financially."

Budapest awaits

There is just more than a month to go before the departure of #TeamMaccabiSA to the 15th European Maccabi Games in

and supporters.

According to Elan Sawitsky, the South African team's head of delegation, planning is on track to ensure that #TeamMaccabiSA have a successful and enjoyable event. "We are taking a large delegation which requires a fair amount of logistical planning. We are now finalising the last details to ensure that our games run efficiently, allowing our athletes to focus on competing."

The games are not only a sporting extravaganza, but a cultural celebration. Running parallel to the games in Budapest is the Jewish Cultural Feast, the largest Jewish cultural event in Europe. The teams will have a unique Shabbat dinner at the famous Great Synagogue of Budapest. Otherwise known as the Dohány Street Synagogue, the Great Synagogue is the largest in Europe, seating 3 000 people.

"We wish all our participants the best of luck," says Garrun, the chairperson of Maccabi SA. "We trust that the experience will be rewarding and meaningful, taking place, as it does, in a city steeped in Jewish history."



Jordan Chait

Budapest, Hungary. With a delegation of more than 90 participants and officials, #TeamMaccabiSA will be competing in tennis, table-tennis, futsal, swimming, and the half-marathon. They will also be joined in Hungary by a 70-strong party of well-wishers

KosherWorld

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