



Clarice Cliff  
Fantasque Melon  
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Bettie Cilliers-Barnard,  
oil on board  
**SOLD R 60,000**



Zanele Muholi,  
giclee print on cotton paper  
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# Jewish Report

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## Swastika-wearing ‘soldier’ in Wimpy says sorry

NICOLA MILTZ

The elderly man who last weekend was seen enjoying breakfast at a Wimpy eatery in the Free State wearing a World War II German soldier’s uniform with a swastika armband has apologised for his actions.

The Bloemfontein resident in his late 70s – who has asked not to be named for fear of reprisal – walked into the Wimpy in the Fleurdal Mall in Bloemfontein last Saturday, and ordered breakfast, thinking nothing of it. No one said a word to him.

Unbeknown to him, horrified patron Kanya Mofokeng made a video of him, and posted it on Twitter. It immediately went viral, with a broad spectrum of South Africans expressing shock and disgust.

“Unavoidably, this comes across as a public display of identification with Nazism, an ideology inextricably associated with genocidal anti-Semitism as well as with extreme white racism,” said David Saks, the associate director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

Hearing about the furore, Famous Brands, which owns the Wimpy brand, said it took matters of this nature seriously, and would review the incident.

It turns out that the man was going to attend a historical re-enactment at a farm nearby, which was commemorating the 75th anniversary of a famous battle known as Operation Bagration.

The event was organised by the Bloemfontein branch of the Southern Africa Arms and Ammunition Collector’s Association (SAAACA). It is an annual event held locally, commemorating different battles throughout history, and takes place at Leeuwberg Farm, about 15km south of Bloemfontein.

This year, a Nazi flag and a Soviet Union wartime flag were hoisted as a sign that the battle lines had been drawn. Aghast, Mofokeng also posted video footage of the flags, which drew more ire on social media.

Following widespread criticism for his insensitive behaviour, the man told the organiser of the event and Wimpy management that he “did not mean any harm, and was not thinking”.

The chairperson of SAAACA Bloemfontein, MC Heunis, told the *SA Jewish Report* the man “did not mean to offend or hurt anyone, and

expressed deep regret”.

“He shouldn’t have done what he did. He phoned and apologised. He just didn’t think,” Heunis said.

Heunis said members of the organisation had been briefed not to wear uniforms in public or post pictures on social media.

SAAACA aims to promote the collection,

In a statement, Wimpy said, “The customer has since been in contact with the restaurant and confirmed he was part of the simulated re-enactment ... the customer realises it was poor judgement to wear the re-enactment costume in a public area. He has subsequently apologised for the unintended offense this has caused.”

Said Cronje, “He wasn’t thinking. He is an old

The problem arises, he said, when they are displayed outside of those contexts.

For Jews in particular, this kind of behaviour was threatening and deeply hurtful. “However, most South Africans would likewise be viscerally offended by it, as indeed the widespread backlash to the Wimpy incident showed. This might not have been the intention of the person

responsible, but acting the way he did without recognising the offense he was likely to cause was highly insensitive, or at best thoroughly obtuse.”

Cronje said Wimpy staff didn’t say anything to the patron, assuming he was part of the annual event.

“They didn’t think twice when he walked in because they knew the event was taking place that day,” he said.

Anti-Semitism expert Professor Milton Shain said this was not the first time an incident like this had occurred. In most cases, those involved had apologised.

In this case, Shain said the man was “probably oblivious to the impact of his actions”, pointing out that it was important that he had apologised, and it was good that his behaviour had caused a stir on social media.

Richard Freedman, the director of the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation, said the man

acted “stupidly”, but he cautioned against condemning him.

“Is it offensive? Yes. Is it deliberately offensive? No. The man was completely unaware that he was doing anything shocking. We must be careful not to condemn him. It was stupid and insensitive of him, but he was oblivious to the offence. He is a foolish old man who wore a uniform to a re-enactment, and popped into the Wimpy because he was feeling peckish.”

Freedman said the man was not trying to insult Jews and make a mockery of the Holocaust. “This was not a deliberate, inciteful act.”

Both he and Saks said it was the responsibility of the organisers of historical re-enactments to ensure that participants are aware of the sensitivities involved, and act appropriately.

### The swastika-wearing ‘soldier’ at Wimpy (inset) shortly before the re-enactment of Operation Bagration (main picture)



study, restoration, preservation, and responsible, recreational use of collectible arms and ammunition, according to its website.

Branches throughout the country host battle re-enactments.

Historical records show that the Soviet army’s Operation Bagration offensive in June 1944 all but destroyed Nazi Germany’s army, and drove hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops and tanks from Minsk into the Third Reich. Historians say it was arguably the greatest disaster for Germany in World War II, three years after Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union, resulting in more than 400 000 German casualties.

Wimpy’s marketing executive, Jacques Cronje, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the man “had no idea his actions would create such an outcry on social media. He didn’t even know what Twitter was.”

fellow, and it didn’t cross his mind. He didn’t mean any harm. He apologised profusely for causing any harm or upset”.

The open-day event for families is a widely publicised affair. It received a full-page spread in the *Volksblad* this week.

A flyer says, “See the Germans and Russians battle one another and enjoy a nostalgic day of living history, military displays, historic vehicles, militaria and food stalls, beer hall, and an authentic battle re-enactment.”

The SAJBD said it was acceptable to display Nazi symbols in certain contexts.

“No-one can seriously object to their inclusion in museum displays or to their reproduction in books or documentaries,” Saks said. “The same must surely apply to the activities [such as historical re-enactments and memorabilia collecting] of bona-fide military history enthusiasts.”

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## Israel halts fuel to Gaza

Israel has halted the transfer of fuel into Gaza following a rise in arson attacks from incendiary balloons that have burned farmland and woodland in southern Israel. The announcement on Tuesday came after 13 fires were ignited in Gaza border communities the previous morning. One of the incendiary balloons landed on a kindergarten building, according to reports, but did not cause any injuries. Eight fires were ignited over two hours on Tuesday afternoon alone in the wake of the announcement, *Ynet* reported. The fuel is used to power Gaza's only electric plant. In recent weeks, in response to the arson balloons, Israel has also placed restrictions on the Gazan fishing zone.

## UN plans conference of terror victims

The United Nations is to hold a global conference of terror victims while commemorating the 25th anniversary of the attack on the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina) Jewish centre in Buenos Aires. The UN said the aim of the conference would be to come up with concrete recommendations on how member states could deal with terror. Its undersecretary general of counterterrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, announced the conference on Monday at UN headquarters in New York. The conference will bring together victims, member states, experts, and civil organisations, according to the announcement. The ceremony to mark the 25th anniversary of the AMIA bombing is among a series of more than 20 such events being held in major cities around the world from

4 June to 18 July. Monday's event was organised by the World



Jewish Congress and Argentina's government. No one has been convicted for the bombing, which left 85 people dead and hundreds wounded. Argentina and Israel have long pointed the finger at Tehran, implicating several former Iranian officials and Hezbollah in the AMIA attack, and also in the 17 March 1992 terrorist attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 29, and injured more than 200.

## Call for recognition of ME pogroms

A British legislator has called on the government to recognise the plight of Jews forced to flee their homes in Arab countries in the 20th century. Theresa Villiers, who represents the Conservative Party, said the government should acknowledge Jewish refugees when discussing the Middle East, and urged fellow Parliament members to support efforts to preserve Jewish sites in the region, the *Jewish Chronicle* reported on Monday. About 850 000 Jews were forced to flee their home countries in the Middle East and North Africa following the establishment of Israel in 1948. Many faced violence, and had to leave behind most of their property. Villiers, who is not Jewish, previously served as secretary of state for Northern Ireland.

## Nintendo store for Tel Aviv

Nintendo has only two retail stores in the world – one in New York, and now one in Tel Aviv. The official Nintendo retail store opened on Monday at Dizengoff Center, 14 years after the first store opened in New York in Rockefeller Center. A third official store is

scheduled to open in Tokyo in the fall. Nintendo products were only recently introduced to the Israeli market. Prior to this, Israelis had to purchase consoles and games abroad.

## Contraceptive pill inventor dies

George Rosenkranz, a chemist who synthesised the key ingredient in the birth control pill, has died. Rosenkranz, a Hungary native who immigrated to Cuba to escape the Nazis, died on Sunday at his home in Atherton, California, at the age of 102. He and two Jewish chemists, Carl Djerassi, a refugee from Austria, and Luis Miramontes, synthesised the progesterone that was to be used in one of the first two combined oral contraceptive pills. Norethindrone, which the three chemists developed in 1951, at first was used as a fertility treatment, only demonstrating its effectiveness for birth control after five years of trials, according to the *New York Times*. Rosenkranz's team also achieved the first practical synthesis of cortisone, in 1951, according to the *Times*. Rosenkranz studied organic chemistry in Switzerland, earning his doctorate in 1940 before immigrating to Cuba. After World War II, he became the research director of Syntex Corporation, a pharmaceutical laboratory in Mexico. He became a Mexican citizen in 1949. Rosenkranz became chief executive and chairman of Syntex, which grew into a diversified international pharmaceutical and biotech company. He retired in 1981.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:08	18:00	Johannesburg
17:29	18:24	Cape Town
16:48	17:42	Durban
17:09	18:02	Bloemfontein
17:00	17:55	Port Elizabeth
16:53	17:48	East London

## Torah Thought

### Learning to live under water

Each of the 12 tribes had a great spiritual leader. Moses dispatched them to scout the land of Canaan in advance of its intended conquest. Forty days of espionage work, and the “spies” returned divided into two factions, each having different perspectives. Ten of the spies conveyed that the land was unconquerable, and they proceeded to rally people to their position. “The land devours its inhabitants. We cannot capture it. The nations who dwell there are strong, their cities are fortified, and there are giants among them.” The other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, vehemently opposed this, saying, “The land is exceedingly good ... you will not fear the people of that land, for we will win them as easily as one can eat bread. Their protection is gone, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”

#### How is it that they reached such different perspectives on the same tour?

The people erroneously accepted the first spy report, and began to weep. As a consequence, G-d decreed that they would wander in the desert for 40 years,

and their generation would die out in the desert.

**What was their error?**

The spies were not asked to decide if the Jewish people should or could enter the land. That was decided by G-d. They were not asked to determine if conquest was possible. Their mission was to scout and report on the land. But upon seeing it and its inhabitants, the 10 spies became intimidated, overwhelmed, and fearful, and calculated that the Jewish people could survive only in the desert, not in the land of Canaan.

**What is the message?**

Entering the land is the model for involvement and engagement by Jews in the world around us. It's our interaction with life, people, society, work, and the myriad experiences that go with this. The 10 spies are of the perspective that the Jew will lose his identity if he gets involved with the world. He will be overwhelmed, will eventually assimilate, and be lost. Joshua and Caleb say, “The land is

exceedingly good.” By getting involved in the world, and facing these challenge (designed by G-d) as Jews, we are conscious of our mission and supported by our principles and values, the outcome will be that we will rise to even greater heights – “exceedingly”.

The baby cries out because it wants to stay in the womb. It knows that there are massive challenges out there. But, the Jewish people have never reckoned with the world on its terms. As long as we are anchored – connected to Torah and *mitzvot* (religious commandments) – the forces around us cannot diminish us.

As the old joke goes, the weather forecast announces that a great flood will engulf the world in three days' time. The pope announces to his people, “Repent, and you will go to heaven.” The Buddhists proclaim, “Contemplate, and you will achieve Nirvana.” The rabbi announces, “Chevrah, we have three days to learn to live underwater.”



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# Fourth case of grave vandalism in six months

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish graves in Somerset West and Strand Jewish Cemetery were vandalised last week. Two tombstones were knocked over, and a grave covering was cracked, in the fourth case of Jewish grave desecration in the Western Cape since December 2018.

The graves vandalised in Somerset West and Strand belonged to Esther Allan, Fanny Spitz and Sheina Malka Portnoi. “I’m absolutely devastated,” says Blanche Portnoi, the late Sheina Malka’s daughter, who still lives in the Strand with her sister Elaine.

“The grave has been there for 50 years and this has really hit me hard. I’m speechless. But we just have to carry on.”

Susan Shapiro, who lives in San Diego, told the SA Jewish Report that Esther Allan was her husband’s maternal grandmother.

“I don’t know what to say about how we feel other than ‘vandalised,’” she said regarding the destruction of the gravestone.

“In many cases, there are no Jews in those towns,” said Shapiro. “My mother’s family is from Uitenhage, and there are no Jews left there to take care of the cemetery.”

For this reason, she believes it’s vital to have a country communities department dedicated to caring for these cemeteries.

“Esther Allen still has two living children, one in Cape Town, and one in Australia, and grandchildren and great grandchildren all over the world, Shapiro said.

“It’s hard to imagine that it wasn’t an act of anti-Semitism because we are so sensitive to the subject. I’m sure it’s upsetting to everyone, especially those of us who are overseas and rely on the community to take care of our history. It’s really hard, and hits home when it’s family.”

The Strand and Somerset West Jewish community has opened a case with the South African Police Service. Both the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies and Country Communities Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft believe it wasn’t a case of anti-Semitism but vandalism,

because cemeteries are becoming places of antisocial behaviour. “The problem with our cemeteries is that most of them are surrounded by brick walls. This means homeless people can live in the cemeteries, and even if they are chased out, they usually return,” said Silberhaft.

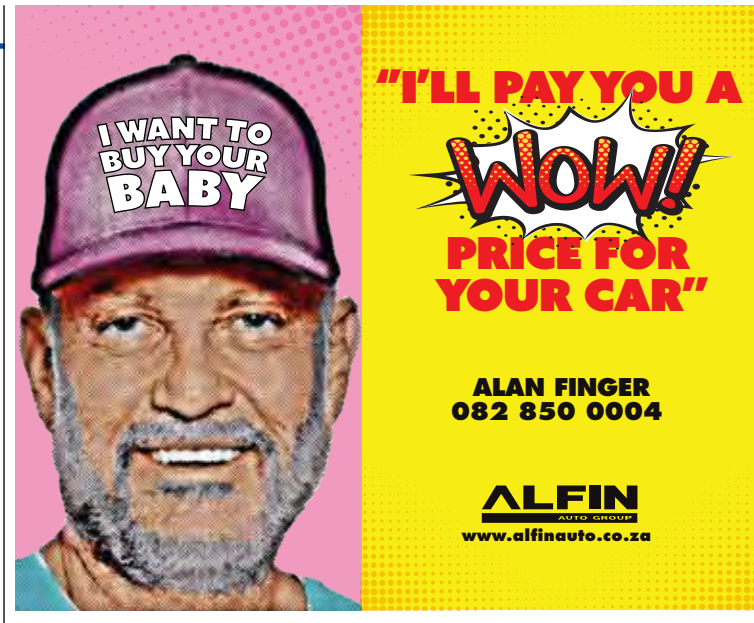
These people often drink alcohol and consume drugs, which means they may knock over a tombstone intentionally or unintentionally. “The stones weigh up to a ton, but they are only held upright by a pin and some cement, so they are very easy to knock over,” said Silberhaft.

In December last year, 39 graves in the Wellington Jewish cemetery were knocked over, an incident which the Cape board did describe as anti-Semitic, as only the Jewish section was targeted.

In May this year, a plaque was knocked off a wall of the Worcester Jewish cemetery, and in early June, a grave was dug into in Robertson. The Cape board viewed these two acts as vandalism without any anti-Semitic intent.

Silberhaft’s country communities department is working across the country to combat these problems by erecting concrete palisade fencing around cemeteries so that it is





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easy to see into them, and by laying all tombstones flat. “All new burials should have flat tombstones,” said the rabbi.

Cape Board Director Stuart Diamond concurred that these instances were caused by people living in the cemeteries, and that it was a problem in all burial grounds, not just Jewish ones.

“Cemeteries in general are quiet places that people can go into. A lot of country communities are now investigating hiring security at night. I have taken it up again

with provincial government and local municipalities, and hope to meet them.

“We’ve created a cemetery vandalism WhatsApp group so country communities are talking to each other. The Community Security Organisation is on that group,” Diamond said. “We’re looking at ways and means to keep in contact, and find solutions to this problem. It’s greatly upsetting, especially if it’s your family member’s final resting place.”

# Israel appoints Joburg native consul general in LA

TOM TUGEND

Hillel Newman, an Israeli career diplomat born in Johannesburg, has been named Israel’s consul general for the southwestern United States, with headquarters in Los Angeles, and encompassing an area stretching from Colorado to Hawaii.

A veteran of about 20 years in Israel’s foreign service, Newman, 54, has served as ambassador to the Republic of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. There, his duties included the preservation of Jewish cemeteries, and “facilitation” of matzah and kosher wine for Passover.

When Newman was four years old, his father, Rabbi Jacob Newman, moved with his family to Cape Town, where he served as spiritual leader of the Sea Point Hebrew Congregation. Subsequently, the family made aliyah, and settled in the coastal town of Netanyah.

Assignment to the consulate in Los Angeles is considered a key career boost for Israel foreign-service officers, and in an extended phone interview, Newman outlined the importance of the city to Israel.

He said that California – in and by itself – is

now the fifth largest economy in the world, sets the pace for technology and innovation, has a large and active Jewish community, wields considerable political clout and, of course, there’s Hollywood with its enormous global outreach.

One indicator of the importance Israel attaches to the Golden State, and the region encompassing Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming is that its three most recent top representatives there have been native English speakers, curiously labelled “Anglo-Saxons” in the Jewish state.

Newman’s predecessors, David Siegel and Sam Grundweg, hail from New Hampshire and Florida respectively.

Newman has been an Israeli diplomat for the past 20 years and, like most of his colleagues, is a man of diverse interests and accomplishment. He earned a PhD in Jewish History and Judaic studies from Israel’s Bar-Ilan University, and among his more exotic accomplishments is a mastery of ancient Greek in order to research the history of Israel during

the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

In the mid-1980s he served as a medic in the Israel Defense Forces during the war in Lebanon.

The vast territory of the Republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where Newman was Israeli ambassador, was formerly part of the Soviet Union, but declared its independence following the breakup of the Communist regime. During the past two years, Newman has served as a special policy advisor to Yuval Rotem, the director of Israel’s foreign ministry.

Both as an activist and a researcher, Newman has been in the forefront of countering attacks on the Jewish practice of circumcision and *shechita* (ritual slaughtering).

Continued on page 4>>



Hillel Newman



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# Economic portion of Middle East plan full of anomalies

RON KAMPEAS - JTA

Days ahead of a workshop where Jared Kushner sought tens of billions of dollars for his Middle East peace plan, the White House unveiled an outline of its economic portion, including proposals, like a Gaza-West Bank travel corridor, that are sure to rattle Israel’s government.

The “Peace to Prosperity” plan authored by a team led by Kushner, United States President Donald Trump’s son-in-law, was posted on the White House website on Saturday. It doesn’t outline the political portion of the peace plan, which the architects say will come in November, after Israel’s September elections.

The economic plan’s 40 pages enthusiastically endorse expressions of Palestinian identity, from Palestinian food to universities, and hint at political outcomes that could upset Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s plans to forge a coalition with parties to the right of his Likud Party. Not mentioned, however, is Palestinian statehood.

In addition to the Gaza-West Bank link, which would inevitably cross Israeli territory, there are proposals to register Palestinian ownership of land, and to give Palestinian farmers greater

access to water and arable land.

These outcomes would put Netanyahu in a tough squeeze. He has been unrelenting in his embrace of Trump, who has recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, pulled out of an Iran nuclear deal Netanyahu loathes, defunded the Palestinians, and effectively campaigned for Netanyahu in April’s election.

But elements of the plan portend security compromises that Netanyahu might be loath to make. Chief among these is a \$5 billion (R71.6 billion) transportation project that would link the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Kushner’s plan envisions \$50 billion (R716 billion), to be disbursed on building infrastructure and capacity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as to promote trade and tourism partnerships with Egypt Jordan, and Lebanon, with portions of the funding to go to these countries.

Neither the 40-page plan nor the accompanying 96-page breakdown of how the money will be spent mention statehood. Kushner has said he doesn’t find the term useful, and David Friedman, the US ambassador to Israel, has said that the political portion of the plan will relinquish to Israel security



control of the West Bank, suggesting that full Palestinian sovereignty is not on the table. Netanyahu has retreated from favouring a two-state outcome, and has said he plans to extend Israeli sovereignty to Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority, which boycotted the workshop this week in Bahrain, has rejected the plan unseen in part because it seems clear it will stop short of statehood and of a Palestinian claim to a portion of Jerusalem. The plan and its annex, which breaks down in detail where funds should go, do not mention Jerusalem at all.

The Gaza-West Bank project would take about two years.

“Features could include an interurban rail line linking many of the major cities of Gaza and the West Bank for rapid urban transport, mass transport stations near urban centres, and connections to regional railways such as the Jordan railway project,” the proposal said.

A similar proposal was raised during the Oslo process in the late 1990s. Israeli officials at the time fretted that any system that transported Palestinians from Gaza, where the Hamas terrorist movement flourishes, to the West Bank across Israeli territory posed a massive security risk.

Other elements of the plan suggest an embrace of Palestinian national identity, which could also be a hard sell to Israeli hardliners, and even to Netanyahu’s Likud Party.

“A new flagship liberal arts and sciences university in the West Bank and Gaza” is tagged at \$500 million (R7.1 billion). Palestinian universities have over the decades nurtured the Palestinian national identity, and have at times been the nexus of protest at Israel’s occupation. Israeli authorities over the years have repeatedly shuttered the universities during periods of unrest.

Another \$80 million (R1.1 billion) has been set aside for the development of Palestinian arts, which often embrace a nationalist

outlook, and \$150 million (R2.1 billion) is earmarked for the Palestinian museum near Ramallah. The museum is dedicated to celebrating Palestinian identity, including resistance to Israel.

The plan includes nearly \$28 billion (R401 billion) earmarked for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Funds would also go to three neighbouring countries for cross border projects, including tourism: more than \$7 billion (R101 billion) for Jordan, \$9 billion (R128.9 billion) for Egypt and \$6.3 billion (R90.2 billion) for Lebanon. Unlike Jordan and Egypt, Lebanon does not have a peace treaty with Israel, and Hezbollah, an Iranian-allied terrorist militia that rejects any accommodation with Israel, remains hugely influential in the country.

The proposal advocates for easing the movement for Palestinians, and for greater access to fertile land and water.

Unmentioned are the obstacles that Israeli policies, mindful of security and favouring Jewish settlement growth, impose on these ambitions.

The plan proposes a vast expansion of border crossings which will incur costs for Israel if it is to secure and help staff the crossings.

The issue of governance, which presumably will feature in the political component, is absent, but nonetheless haunts the document. Hamas, a US designated terrorist group, rules the Gaza Strip, and the Trump administration and US congress have banned all but a small amount of direct funding to the Palestinian Authority.

Addressing the second day of the workshop on Wednesday, *Haaretz* reported Kushner said the political component of the plan would be announced when the US was ready, and there would be a peace deal only when both sides were ready to say yes.

## Israel appoints Joburg native consul general in LA

>>>Continued from page 3

Looking at the broader picture, he observed that “Jewish life and identity are in jeopardy. There are the direct murderous attacks at synagogues in Pittsburgh and San Diego, and the internal threats of assimilation and lack of Jewish education.”

Newman is also concerned about the growing politicisation of American public opinion vis-à-vis Israel, and hopes for a return to a time “when Israel was a bi-partisan issue”.

Rounding out the picture of the new consul general is a profile released by the foreign ministry, which notes, in part, that Newman “has gathered extensive experience in professional advocacy, public speaking, networking, new media connectivity, and the cultivation of formal and informal contacts ...[He is] passionate about the preservation of global Jewish identity, and the safety and security of the state of Israel.”

Newman is expected to take up his new post in early July, accompanied by his wife and their nine-year-old son, Ram.

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# SA journalist called out for claiming peace plan is ‘worse than apartheid’



Photo: Bahrain News Agency via AP

White House senior adviser Jared Kushner talks to the audience during the opening session of the “Peace to Prosperity” workshop in Manama, Bahrain

TALI FEINBERG

On the eve of the unveiling of the Trump administration’s Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, Independent Media’s Foreign Editor Shannon Ebrahim had her own version of events about how the plan would be “worse than apartheid”. However, her opinions were not based on the information available, says Simon Plosker, the managing editor of media watchdog HonestReporting.com.

On 23 June, Ebrahim wrote that the peace plan unveiled by the White House would lead to a future where Palestinians would be “starved into submission”. She wrote that “Palestinians will be squeezed into a tiny fraction of historic Palestine ... they will be confined to cantons or Bantustans, stripped of water, resources, the right to a military, or any real sovereignty.”

But there is no proof to these claims, and HonestReporting has flagged the story as hugely problematic. “While most other mainstream media outlets were commenting on the actual contents of the Trump economic plan and the forthcoming Bahrain Conference, Ebrahim was making it up as she went along based on a clear hatred of Israel,” says Plosker.

“It’s one thing to write anti-Israel hate speech based on nothing more than one’s own misguided and warped opinion. It’s another to claim that this opinion is based on fact – in this case a fully open United States plan that anyone and everyone can see for themselves,” wrote Plosker.

“Any media professional is entitled to his or her opinion, but this doesn’t entitle someone to make up their own facts.”

“Maybe Ebrahim believes what she writes, but her opinions are certainly not based on fact. In this case, attempting to invent parts of a US plan that don’t actually exist is a breach of the press code,” he says. His organisation has since lodged a complaint with Independent Media.

The SA Jewish Report also studied the White House’s *Peace to Prosperity Plan*, and could find no evidence of Ebrahim’s claims.

When questioned, Ebrahim said that in order to verify the information, “I interviewed at length Ahmed Majdalani, a senior executive in the Palestine Liberation Organisation and also social affairs minister in the Palestinian Authority. He has personally verified the accuracy of these tenets of the ‘deal of the century’, as have other Palestinian leaders whom I met recently in the Middle East.”

She also pointed to two links – the *Daily Sabah* and the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* – which referred to leaked documents on the political part of the peace plan, still to be released. However, neither of these links could provide concrete evidence for Ebrahim’s claims.

In a tweet which referenced a *Jerusalem Post* story on this supposed leak, United States Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt wrote, “FYI: our plan hasn’t leaked. Reports like this are inaccurate and just speculation. The article itself

even says it may be a hoax. Once again, speculation and bad sources don’t do anything to advance peace. If you haven’t heard it from our team, don’t trust it.”

“The economic prong cannot be divorced from the political prong,” says Ebrahim, but admits that “the political prong is not officially published”.

She insists that her opinions are based on facts, and “judging from the political situation which is being planned for the Palestinian territories, there are many who would argue that it is an attempt to concretize apartheid”.

“The idea that the Palestinians would be confined to self-governing disjointed cantons that are not contiguous, and that do not in any way reflect the components of a viable independent state, is an attempt to convince the Palestinians to give up their rights to a state, and to huge tracts of historic Palestine [which are currently illegal settlements] in exchange for money and investment.”

Plosker told the SA Jewish Report that he wouldn’t classify this story as fake news. “When it comes to fake news, our definition is a story that simply isn’t true or never took place. It isn’t something that we happen to disagree with.

“However, in the case of Ebrahim, this is an opinion piece. Any media professional is entitled to his or her opinion, but this doesn’t entitle someone to make up their own facts. In the case of Ebrahim, every credible commentator has been writing about the Trump economic plan and the Bahrain conference based on facts that have been openly disseminated. Ebrahim chose to attack Israel based not on the facts, but her own evident hatred and prejudice.

“South African media outlets shouldn’t believe that they have a free ride when it comes to spreading malicious and hateful anti-Israel propaganda,” Plosker says. “Only the Jewish community has the knowledge of Israel to counter the lies and distortions.

“Ultimately, we’ve seen how hatred of Israel eventually has an impact on local Jewish communities. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that the South African general public doesn’t fall into that trap due to the country’s media.”

Plosker says there is no reason for South African Jews to hide their Zionist identity, even if the media lambasts Israel at every turn. “People should never be afraid to question or criticise Israeli government policies, but at the end of the day, BDS [Boycott Divestment Sanctions] needs to be exposed for what it really is, an organised and vicious campaign that opposes peace between Palestinians and Jews, and advocates the end of Israel as a Jewish state.

“This goes against reconciliation and everything that the new South Africa stands for, and it is vital that the South African people realise that. In addition, as the Israel apartheid libel spreads around the globe, nobody is better positioned to fight this than a Jewish community which knows what real apartheid is.”

Ben Swartz, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, said Ebrahim’s story was “symptomatic of being influenced by a BDS lobby. Ebrahim gives nothing to substantiate her claims. The White House peace plan is trying to alleviate the situation. We have to start somewhere, and this plan offers a \$25 billion [R358 billion] budget to uplift the Palestinians. Her article is all about hating Israel, and has nothing to do with the welfare of Palestinians. She can choose to reject the plan, but she should at least consider it.”

# GAL LUSKY HUMANITARIAN



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# Small steps to sanity: life in Mozambique after cyclone

YANIR GRINDLER

Ripped-off rooftops, sunken roads, and lacerated power cables dot the streets of Beira. The port city on Mozambique’s central coast bore the brunt of Cyclone Idai when it made landfall on 14 March, bringing heaving winds, torrential rain, and widespread flooding to various parts of south-eastern Africa.

The storm battered Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Madagascar, killing hundreds and displacing hundreds of thousands.

Last week, I travelled to Mozambique with five others as part of a team brought together by Cadena, a Jewish-headed humanitarian aid organisation founded in 2005.

We found that Beira – three months later – is slowly returning to normal. It has become the hub for co-ordination of Mozambican aid efforts. Thousands, however, are still forced to find refuge in the city’s makeshift relief camps, set up by the government and run by humanitarian groups.

Our mission was to restore dignity to the victims of the cyclones. With the generous support of the Ramson

Located in Sofala province, Beira is the commercial nerve centre of Mozambique’s central region. However, it is seen as a stronghold of the opposition Renamo party, prompting claims that it has been deliberately neglected by the ruling Frelimo party.

Reuben told me that if it was not for the humanitarian organisations that quickly came to their rescue, many more would have died. Reflecting at the end of each day, however, it felt a bit like we were only sticking band aids over the pain.

What would happen after we left, when the water filters we had provided stopped working, when the temporary tents were taken down? Who would assist then?

On our last day in Beira, we ventured inland to spend some time with children orphaned by the cyclones. Miguel runs an orphanage that was partially destroyed by the storm.

“Before the storm, we housed 21 children, now we house more than 60.” he told us. As we distributed hygiene kits and water filters to Miguel and his colleagues, we couldn’t help but notice the sadness in the eyes of the children aimlessly passing the time in their makeshift playground.

We spent time trying to lift their spirits, playing, singing, and dancing with them, giving them temporary solace, but we struggled to hold back our emotions when we left. These children had been physically and emotionally neglected for so long, and as we drove off waving goodbye, it felt like we were simply adding to their pain.

Life has changed completely in Beira and its surrounding areas, but it goes on, and people are resilient. Everywhere we went, they were doing everything they could to rebuild their lives, however small the step.

Women strapped their babies to their bodies with brightly-coloured cloth, and continued to get water from wells or cook

over small fires, slowly sifting porridge into boiling water to feed their families.

The young children, though, really stole my heart. The world’s true optimists, they found excitement in almost anything, sifting through piles of rubble, and making toys out of the debris – pieces of plastic, twigs, smashed CDs, and bottle tops.

Out of the devastation left by Idai, they found treasure. I went to Mozambique to give to these people, never thinking that I would receive so much in return. We have a lot to learn.

Cadena has recently launched a chapter in South



Yanir Grindler playing with children at a relief camp on the outskirts of Beira, Mozambique

Photos: Self-Aweh Productions

Cross Foundation and Dis-Chem in Norwood Mall, we transported 18 duffel bags full of goods to deliver to those in need. These included hygiene kits to prevent the spread of bacterial disease, reusable “subz” (sanitary pads and panties), drinking water filters to contain the outbreak of cholera, and inflatable solar lamps to compensate for the loss of electricity.

Beira had infrastructural challenges before it was hit by Idai, including poorly maintained public buildings and roads dotted with potholes. The storm drastically worsened these problems.

Travelling around Beira to reach the relief camps thus turned out to be a major challenge. Our first stop in Mozambique was in the storm-hit district of Buzi, located a few hours southwest of Beira.

On the outskirts of the village, a temporary relief camp had been set up, a desolate ground about the size of four soccer fields scattered with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) tents, each packing in more than 15 people.

In spite of the devastation, we were uplifted by the villagers, who showed a zest for life even in dire circumstances.

We were welcomed with spontaneous song and dance, and offered assistance at all times during our stay. “I’m just happy to be alive,” a 20-year-old man who identified himself as Reuben told me. He volunteered to be one of our translators. In broken English, he told me that in spite of losing his parents to the cyclone, he was confident that he would be able to find a job when things returned to normal.

It was a real whirlwind of emotions engaging with these special people. We spent the next two days allocating drinking water filters, solar lamps, and hygiene kits.



Africa, and is encouraging people to get involved. More information can be found on its Facebook page “Cadena South Africa”, or by sending an email to the South African director at director.sa@cadena.ngo

• Yanir Grindler is political liaison at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

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# Limmud: Torah educators

*The Beth Din’s decision last week to reinforce a policy ensuring local orthodox rabbis cannot attend Limmud has caused consternation, but so far, the affected local rabbis have remained silent.*  
*Three top international orthodox rabbis and one local Torah educator give their views on orthodox rabbis participating in this Jewish learning festival.*

## Don’t fear Limmud for providing neutral space

### RABBI DR SAMUEL LEBENS

South African orthodox Judaism is an inspiration. But I have also thoroughly enjoyed teaching and learning at Limmud South Africa.

The Beth Din of South Africa states that Limmud promotes “values which are contrary to the Torah’s philosophy and principles”. Indeed, some at Limmud will promote reform Judaism. Some will promote secular forms of Judaism.

When I was there, I did my best to promote orthodox Judaism. Limmud itself promotes none of these. It is neither in favour of my orthodoxy, nor in favour of somebody else’s anti-orthodox views. It simply provides a space in which honest and sincere people can present their vision of Judaism.

I was blessed to have seen this first hand. But I have also seen Limmud first-hand. There, I saw a large number of Jews, many of whom were loosely affiliated with orthodox communities but thought of themselves as on the margins.

For one reason or another, those

guardians of this tradition. It is a tree of life, and we should cling to it.

But Jews in the information age are living in a free market of ideas. If we are unwilling to “sully ourselves” by presenting our views alongside other views that compete for the allegiance of the Jewish people,



The University of Johannesburg (UJ) allows professors to teach views that are contrary to Torah values. It gives them a platform. Does that mean that it promotes values that are contrary to the Torah? Does the Beth Din want to prohibit rabbis and rebbetzins from attending university campuses?

A Marxist historian’s presence at UJ in no way indicates that he agrees with the views of his Keynesian colleagues. An orthodox rabbi’s presence at Limmud in no way indicates that he agrees with the views of reform or conservative Jews.

Sinai Indaba touches thousands

people are not being touched by Sinai Indaba (though thousands of others are). I saw how eager they were to meet orthodox rabbis face to face, to talk to them, and to learn with them.

They told me they felt comfortable doing this only in what they believed to be a neutral space. Limmud shouldn’t be feared for providing a neutral space. Its neutrality is what attracts a large number of people who we orthodox educators should be eager to engage.

The Torah was passed down from Sinai in an unbroken chain. Our orthodox rabbis and teachers are

then I fear we’re putting our own pride before the urgent need of the hour. I fear we will have written off our obligation to those Jews who fall between the communal cracks. I would urge the Beth Din to reconsider.

• Rabbi Dr Samuel Lebens is a research fellow in the philosophy department at the University of Haifa, and a dynamic Jewish educator. He is also an orthodox rabbi, having studied at various Israeli rabbinical schools (Yeshivat Hakotel, Yeshivat Hamivtar, and Yeshivat Har Etzion).

## Rabbis are obliged to teach there

### RABBI NATHAN LOPES CARDOZO

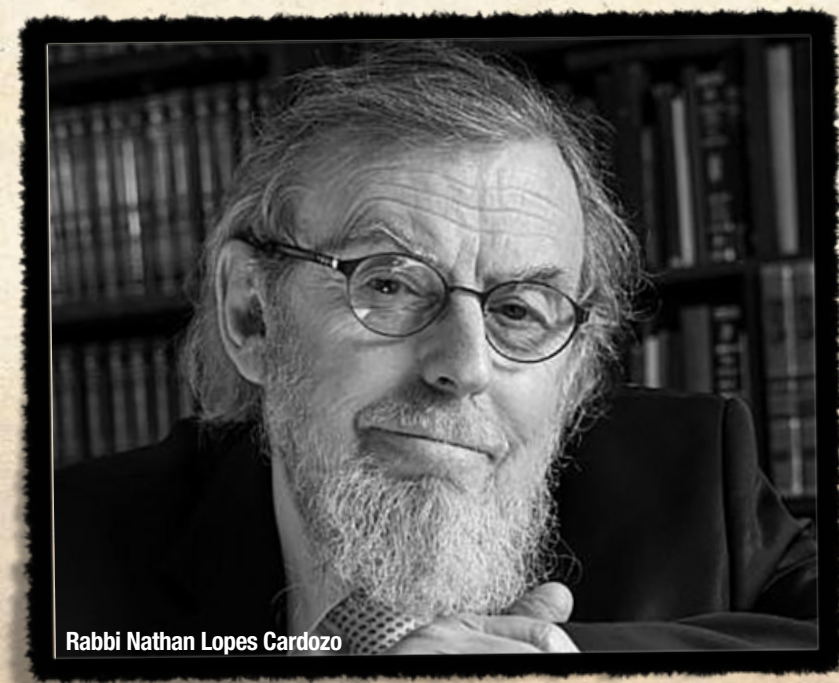
My main objections to the chief rabbi and Beth Din are as follows:

First, all of Limmud will fall into the hands of the conservative, reform, and secular movements. By not participating, they deny the Limmud audience an orthodox point of view. Is that what they want to accomplish?

Second, they make the impression that the orthodox rabbinate is afraid of the other denominations. It’s seen as a form of cowardice. Is that what they want? Should the other denominations not be afraid of the orthodox? Where is orthodox courage?

As long as Limmud is fully kosher, keeps Shabbat in the kitchen and in all public spaces, and has an eruv, orthodox rabbis have an obligation to teach there.

• Nathan Lopes Cardozo is a Dutch-Israeli orthodox rabbi, philosopher, and scholar of



Judaism. He is the founder and dean of the David Cardozo Academy, and the Bet Midrash of Avraham Avinu in Jerusalem. Rabbi Cardozo heads up a think tank focused on finding new halachic and philosophical approaches to dealing with the crisis of religion and identity amongst Jews and towards Israel.



# Speak out

## Limmud about learning, not grandstanding

ILANA STEIN

Amidst what is no doubt a plethora of letters and opinions on the current Limmud/rabbinical debate, I'd like to put my oar in. I'm not going to deal with politics or policies, rather discuss the difference between pluralism and diversity.

Importantly, Limmud is not about pluralism but about diversity. There is a difference. Pluralism is basically: we're both right. Diversity describes the fact that we hold different views, in other words, I think I'm right, and I don't have to think you're right to have a conversation with you over a cup of coffee.

The point that seems to be made by the rabbis is that orthodox rabbis can't sit on a platform with those of heterodoxy as this would be seen to legitimise the latter's beliefs. But, if you read the values of Limmud, you'll find that it doesn't advocate pluralism, but rather states, "We do not participate in legitimising or de-legitimising any religious or political position found in the worldwide Jewish community. Anyone coming to Limmud seeking opportunities for this will not find them. We have no part to play in the debates between/ across denominations."

In other words – and as a Limmudnik for 11 years I can testify to this – there are no platforms.

When you go to Limmud, you understand another Limmud value, "Everyone should be a student, and anyone can be a teacher." This means,

that as a thinking adult, I can work out for myself who the speaker is, his or her orientation or belief systems, and whether I want to listen to them. No-one is – or should be – there to be dogmatic.

Has Limmud sometimes got it wrong? Yes. Have some sessions been marked with disrespect instead of respect? Sadly, yes. Do some speakers espouse values that clash with orthodox beliefs? Definitely. Is anyone convinced that my presence expresses agreement with or legitimisation of these? I highly doubt it. When

leave the boxes at the door, that fear slips away, leaving in its wake a unity with others that is at the level of the *yiddishe neshama*, the collective soul of the people.

Rabbi Ben Greenberg, formerly orthodox rabbinic advisor at Harvard, in his excellent article, "Orthodox and Non-Orthodox: Can We Learn from Each Other?" says, "When a Jew cannot sit down with another Jew to learn our sacred texts together, the Jewish people as a whole are at a profound loss."

We just want to learn together.



at Limmud, people are not there to be brainwashed or told what to do. They're there to hear, to learn, to engage – and yes, agree to disagree.

It is natural to fear the unknown. Stepping outside of our boxes can be uncomfortable. But when you understand that at Limmud you can

• Ilana Stein is a conservationist, and lectures on the subject of Judaism and the environment as well as Tanach for the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning. She is working on her Masters in Jewish Education through the Academy's National Education Development Programme.

## The Halachic reasons for attending Limmud

A respected British rabbi, who does not want to be named or drawn into the local debate, has in the past written about the halachic issues Limmud raises, and whether it should be permissible for orthodox rabbis to attend.

He speaks about the negative impact of an environment in which beliefs and values contrary to halacha are shared and promoted, citing a teaching in the book of Mishlei to "distance your way from her". This, he says, is explained by the rabbis of the Talmud to mean that we should stay far away from places of heresy. Based on this comment, halachic authorities have warned against being in an environment where we are confronted by beliefs and values contrary to the halacha.

However, the rabbi believes that Limmud is a different case altogether, pointing out that the beliefs and values contrary to halacha shared at sessions are not those of Limmud itself. Thus, he argues, while the above teaching would certainly apply to some sessions at Limmud, it does not apply to Limmud as a whole. He likens a broad ban on the festival to forbidding a visit to a public library, given that a library certainly contains books that are contrary to Jewish beliefs and values.

The second point he raises is the problem of learning Torah from individuals whose beliefs and values run contrary to halacha. He believes Limmud offers a variety of opinions from which one can choose, and cites Rabbi Yehuda Black of Kenton Synagogue who says, "The way I see it, Limmud is a supermarket, and you can buy all kinds of products off the shelves, some of which might have a hechsher and others not." For this reason, he argues that the presence of orthodox rabbis is necessary at Limmud to offer a halachic opinion. Their absence constitutes placing a stumbling block before the blind.

The third issue is the problem of legitimising beliefs and values opposed to the halacha, like those expressed by some non-orthodox denominations, which poses a risk of legitimising these denominations. Unlike other settings,

however, the rabbi says Limmud doesn't require speakers to share platforms with those of different religious attitudes, meaning that attendance of Limmud doesn't involve making a theological compromise. He compares attending Limmud to contributing an article to a publication that includes essays from authors of different beliefs and values, which is permissible.

Quoting the late former United Kingdom chief rabbi, Immanuel Jakobovits, he presents a more extreme expression of this idea. "Normally, on my American lecture tours, I accept invitations to speak on conservative and reform as well as orthodox platforms. I believe the Torah was given to all Jews, and I am obliged to teach it to any section of the community when invited to do so. Obviously, I have nothing other than orthodox Judaism to proclaim."

In response to the claim that his presence would be viewed as an endorsement – or at least legitimisation – of beliefs and values of such non-orthodox denominations, Jakobovits responded, "I don't think anyone would misinterpret my appearance as extending 'recognition' or 'credibility' to non-orthodox Judaism. I and my teachings are known well enough, I believe, not to have my presence taken as any kind of endorsement whatsoever. On the contrary, I hope my presence and presentations help to enhance respect for Torah teaching."

Thus, he says, attendance at Limmud confers no legitimacy to denominations beyond orthodoxy, as Limmud is itself neither a conservative nor reform platform, but a setting where various speakers can learn and teach, especially when the speakers are recognised as representing orthodox beliefs and values.

The rabbi concludes that there is no prohibition per se on attending Limmud, but recognises that attendance of sessions by speakers explicit in their rejection of core beliefs and values remains halachically problematic. Those who can express a true halachic spirit and orthodox values at these sessions are to be commended, he says.

DANIEL LIMOR

FORMER SPY



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# Throwing the book at autism: a mother’s journey

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When Ilana Gerschlowitz’s son was diagnosed with autism, she saw it as game on, not game over. And while fighting to save her son, she brought effective treatment to South Africa.

In her book *Saving my Sons: A Journey with Autism*, Gerschlowitz, with the help of journalist Marion Scher, reveals how she and her family turned apparent darkness into light.

“Goodbye and good luck.” That was what Gerschlowitz and her husband, Martin, were told when their firstborn son, David, was diagnosed with autism at the age of 20 months.

“We were basically told, ‘Accept it, make him comfortable, there’s nothing you can do,’” she says. A qualified attorney, Gerschlowitz put on her research hat, and sought solutions.

The couple sought treatment options in the United States, drawing on the work of top international experts. “We weren’t willing to give up on our son or accept that he would have no future,” she says. “I discovered that autism is a treatable medical illness, and it doesn’t always have to be a lifelong disability.”

This was a revelation. “We learnt about a gut-brain connection, which is undeniable. Doctors in America were successfully treating children with autism by treating the gut to heal

the brain. When I suggested this to the South African medical profession, I was dismissed.”

Finding the right education was also key. “I went from school to school to school,” she says. “In South Africa, we tend to box children – mainstream, remedial, special needs. In Australia and the US, there is a more integrative approach.

“When David was seven, I met a woman in Chicago, Dr Doreen Granpeesheh, who introduced me to a teaching methodology called Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA),” she says. “Once we placed David on her ABA programme, we started to see progress. ABA is a teaching methodology endorsed by the US surgeon general and the American Academy of Paediatrics, and is covered by medical insurance in 49 states. If it didn’t help children, why would they pay for it? There is no cover for it in South Africa.”

Gerschlowitz brought ABA to South Africa, and launched the Star Academy 10 years ago. It now offers educational instruction to a wide range of children on the autism spectrum, and those fighting oppositional defiant disorder and ADHD.

“David’s battleground has laid the path to recovery and healing for many children with autism on the African continent,” she says. Through the academy, they are now servicing children in African countries including Zambia, Mauritius, Ghana and elsewhere.

Gerschlowitz has long wanted to write a book to share her experience and expertise, and show the importance of maintaining hope when it seems all is lost. Writing the book took her and Scher 18 months. “I would write, and Marion would edit. She gave me confidence. Through her polishing, she helped make my words come alive.

“I wrote the book to break down barriers for other families trying to access the right treatment for their children,” says Gerschlowitz.

“I wanted to dispel the archaic notion that autism has to be a lifelong disability, to give parents whose children are now receiving an autism diagnosis a roadmap and a way forward. They are where I was 15 years ago. My advice to these parents is that autism means game on, not game over. Put on your boxing gloves, and fight for your child. Autism

is a treatable and recoverable diagnosis.”

While autism has a wide spectrum, ranging in severity, all sufferers have two things in common: deficits in communication, and the ability to fit into social settings. “You can have a child that can’t talk at all, and you can have a child who can talk, but is struggling to establish and maintain friendships,” says Gerschlowitz. “Early intervention is key, but it’s never too late to start treatment. Autism left untreated can strip a child of the basic skills to function as a human being.”

She says recovery means that the child is in a mainstream school with no facilitation, and he or she has scored average to above average on their IQ. “Recovery means that the child is indistinguishable from their peers,” says Gerschlowitz. “Not every child will fully recover, but we can work towards the child’s functionality and independence.”

In sharing her personal story, Gerschlowitz shows that she’s been there, and come out stronger. “In the beginning, we were in shock. We went into survival mode. We were so afraid of the unknown, and the grief we experienced was unimaginable. I wrote the book so that family members and other

professionals understand what autism can do to a family.

“I want them to understand the brokenness. I talk about the sadness, and the heartbreak, but I also talk about victories along the way. My older son still wrestles with autism every single day. We will never give up trying to restore his health and functionality, even though he’s 17 now. There’s a message

of hope.”

Gerschlowitz has three sons, and has seen all sides of autism. “My older son still battles, the second one escaped autism, and the other son recovered from autism,” she says. “The message of this book is that at any given point in time, we all face challenges. We must focus on the blessings in our lives, and on finding solutions, no matter whether the journey ahead appears insurmountable. If mountains need to be moved, we must move them.”



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# Trauma not only treated on the analyst’s couch

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

South Africans live with high levels of anxiety, says Professor Danny Brom, a clinical psychologist and the founding director of Metiv, the Israel Psychotrauma Center.

The internationally renowned expert on trauma and resilience in the face of terror and disaster recently presented workshops for mental-health professionals in South Africa. He also addressed Holocaust survivors and members of the Community Security Organisation.

“We psychologists are so old-fashioned. We think that everything is solvable by sitting on a chair for an hour a week, and talking. That doesn’t work for everyone,” he says, in explanation for his ways of working. “We must be creative, and think of how to use methods like neurofeedback, really training the brain. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) means you’re staying in survival mode when it’s not necessary, and that means that your brain really changes. It can change back though. We work on finding ways to make that happen.”

Born in Holland, Brom has lived and worked in Israel since 1988. “In the past 30 years in Jerusalem, we’ve developed many programmes,” he says. “The Psychotrauma Center is really a development space. My passion has always been to look at what hasn’t yet received attention in the trauma field.”

Brom told the *SA Jewish Report* that together with dealing with a constant threat of crime, South Africans have bigger questions about where society is going. “A lot is happening, and there’s a lot of anxiety here. Our work can be useful here, although one must always be

respectful of the culture, and what does and doesn’t apply.”

Brom has done extensive work with Israeli Defense Force veterans, through the Psychotrauma Center’s Peace of Mind programme. “We take whole combat teams after they’re out of the army, which was never done before,” he says. “We give them time to speak, open up, and ask themselves, ‘What did my army service do to me?’ This is totally against Israeli culture. People don’t speak, wives don’t know where their husbands were in various wars. It’s amazing what it does when you give them that space.”

One part of the four-phase Peace of Mind programme involves taking veterans to Jewish communities in the diaspora, including places like London and New York, and possibly soon South Africa. “Connecting with communities offers a way of broadening both their perspective and the meaning of what they’ve done in the army.

“They’re blown away by how connected Jews are to Israel, and with the Israeli army,” says Brom. “We see them again six weeks later, and then six months later, to see who needs further support.”

Brom and his team have also reframed the nature of resilience, specifically in childhood. Questions they examine include how you build resilience, and whether you can make children more resilient. “In the past five to ten years, it’s become clear that the concept of resilience is a bit too vague. What’s taking over now is the concept of regulation. Can you regulate your emotions and your arousal? When you get overwhelmed by something that happens, can you get back to being regulated? That’s a central factor in how well people will cope with trauma.”

During his trip, Brom visited King David Linksfield, and spoke of how parents and children can be taught to regulate their emotions. He also revealed how teachers can be used as agents of change and resilience. “Children don’t need psychologists, they need their parents and their teachers to know how to allow them to go on with life after trauma,” he says.

“To keep all children learning and developing after experiencing trauma, you need to go where they are – in schools and with their families. You’re building and handing over a system of care that says, ‘Do something for all the children, build resilience’. You then determine through screening which children are more at risk, and ensure that they get what they need.”

One of the latest developments in psychology and trauma work, according to Brom, is the notion that trauma is not only in the mind, but in the body. “It’s the nervous system that reacts to threat when someone walks in with a gun, for example. We react, we don’t think and feel – we do. That means this hardwired system of survival mode is really in the body.

“In the Western world, psychology has taken it all to the head. When people see people trembling after a fall for example, they say, ‘You need to do something, you need to stop that’. We know now that’s the way the body gets out of survival mode.

“Just being with someone, and letting that



Professor Danny Brom

natural discharge of energy develop is an amazing process if we dare just to let it be. Don’t be afraid of how your body reacts when you go through trauma. It knows what to do.”

Brom also uses a method of somatic experiencing, allowing positive feelings to overtake the panic that arises when traumatic memories surface. “American clinical psychologist Dr Peter Levine developed this method of having people just track what is happening in their bodies,” Brom says.

“He coined the term, the trauma vortex. As you think about a traumatic experience, you become increasingly constricted. If it’s later, and you’re experiencing PTSD and focusing on that memory – which is what many therapists have done until now – it doesn’t really work well because people go back into survival mode, and then there’s no processing.

“So, you do the opposite – tap into the body and the resources it has, and focus on a positive or relatively ok feeling somewhere in the body.

If you do that, it starts to roll over in the body, creating the healing vortex. Through our research, we’ve found that this is a nice method to help get people out of PTSD.”

• Brom’s trip to South Africa was organised by local clinical psychologist Tracey Farber, and made possible by donor Jeff Shankman.

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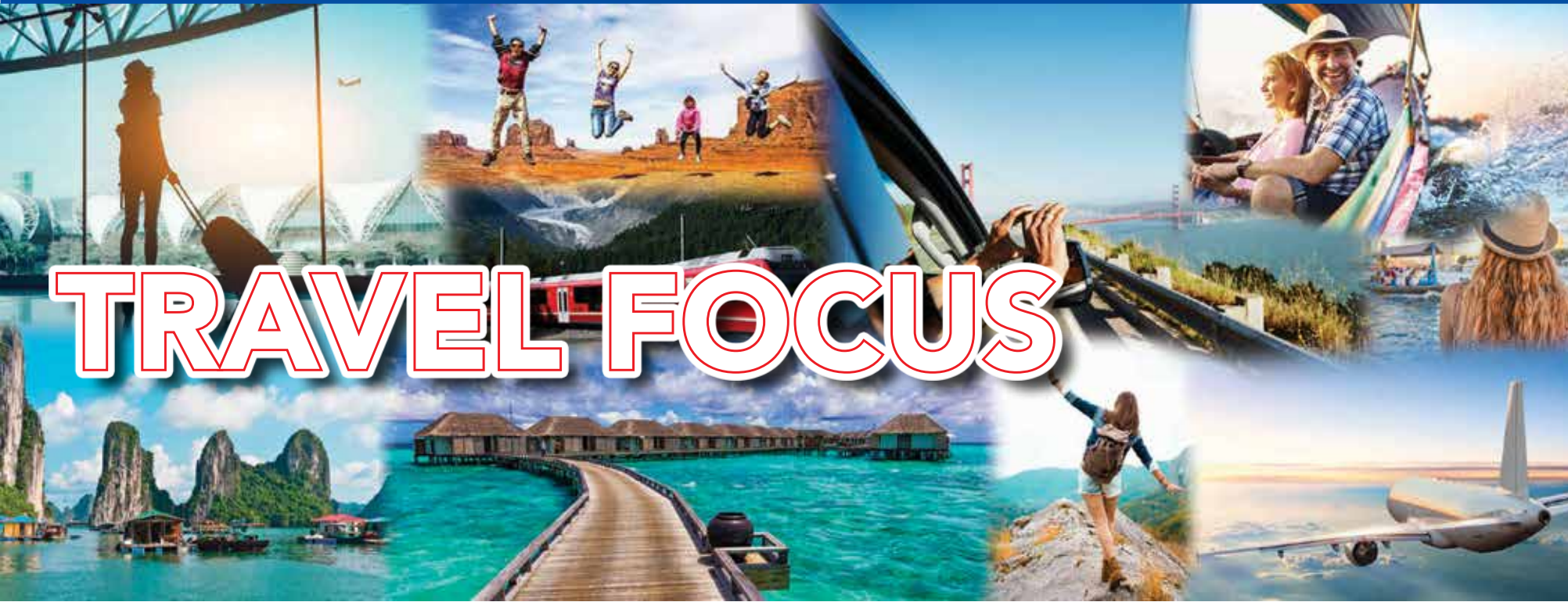
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# Time to get off your toches and travel

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

New Orleans heaves with music, and the smell of cocktails rises as drunk tourists fall on the sordid sidewalks of Bourbon Street. In the ramshackle temple that is the historic Preservation Hall, the city shows-off its musical magic. Standing in the shadows on a raised platform at the back of the hall, I watch a performance by the greatest jazz musicians alive, belting out brass riffs composed by the liberated slaves of the American south. It is a perfect moment, a life experience etched into my soul for eternity.

Life appears to be an endless chase, seeking out those moments of perfection that make everything worthwhile. That is the magic of travel. The whiff of new smells, the taste of exotic spices, the incomprehensible language, the culture that makes no sense at all, and the embrace of people who have nothing other than their warmth and hospitality.

My life journey has taken me to 75 countries around the globe, each one exceptional in its uniqueness. Lurking in the shadows of the jazz hall, I realised that South Africans just don't know how to travel. Sure we sit on the crystal white beaches of Mauritius, and dance at the full-moon party of Ko Phangan.

We do New York in the snow, and the sales in London at the end of Chanukah. We worship at the Western Wall, and take cruises on the Mediterranean, but travel is meant to expand the mind, educate and open us to new cultures and ideas. We, as

a community, seldom venture beyond the comforts of the known. In the hope of encouraging more South African Jews to explore the nether reaches of the globe, I'm suggesting 20 life experiences, all of them unusual, remarkable, doable, and accessible. They



A Sami Tribesman in Norway

are meant to take you, shake you, and give you an experience impossible to forget:

1. Take a 4x4 through Salar de Uyuni, the salt deserts of Bolivia, and see the fluttering Israeli flags that decorate the Dakar Rally pit-stops in the white desert. Stay in hotels made entirely out of salt, where even the chairs and tables are pillars of sodium, and take photos in a unreal moonscape where no perspective is possible.

2. Stay in a tree house in the Amazon jungle, and visit the Chabad shul of Manaus, the largest city in the rain forest. Swim with fresh-water dolphins in the Rio Negro, and be escorted by an Amazonian woman with a "Jewish papi".

3. Eat Falafel in Cusco, Peru, before you start your trek on the Inca trail to the ruins of the hilltop village of Machu Picchu. After your hike, bath in the hot natural springs of the village of Aguas Calientes.

4. Practice your Hebrew in the tiny islands of San Blas off the coast of Panama, where most of the tourists are Israeli. Each island has a few huts, a few palm trees, and a handful of Israelis. Eat at the kosher restaurant in the little seaside village of Bocas del Toro,

and visit starfish beach.

5. Stop for lunch at the Chabad of Playa del Carmen in Mexico, before revelling the night away at the Coco Bongo nightclub, part Cirque du Soleil, part Mardi Gras. Swim with turtles in the ocean at Akumal Beach.

6. Eat at the huge Red Heifer Kosher restaurant in Cancun Mexico, before spending your days on the whitest, widest beaches, and the most aqua water you have ever seen. Many of the tequilas are under the supervision of the Mexican Beth Din.

7. Stop by the Jewish community centre in San Jose, Costa Rica, for a quick game of tennis before sitting in the warm volcanic natural pools at the foot of Arenal Volcano. Choose your beaches from either the Pacific or the Caribbean, in the only country in the world without an army.

8. Go kosher whisky tasting along the Kyle of Lochalsh in Scotland, and eat smoked salmon in the ruins of Castle Urquhart on the banks of Loch Ness.

## The island of Koh Rong Sanloem



Photos: Howard Sackstein

9. Chase after the northern lights on a safari in Tromsø, Norway, where darkness lasts for months on end, and Shabbos never comes out. Play with the dogs before dog sledding, and spend a day with a Sami tribesman reindeer herder.

10. Eat raw herring from a kiosk in the

## The nuclear bomb site, Hiroshima



flower market in Amsterdam, before heading to the Portuguese shul, where candles still illuminate a synagogue with no electric lights or heating. Don't forget to book well in advance to see the Anne Frank House, and recover in a coffee shop in Rembrandtplein.

11. Visit a shul in Berlin, only recently rebuilt after the Kristallnacht destruction, before heading out to Checkpoint Charlie, and trying to find remnants of the Berlin Wall.

12. Take a hamper with you from Rabbi Butman in Phnom Penh when you go to watch the sunrise over the temples of Angkor in Siem Reap Cambodia, matched only by the pyramids in their beauty and

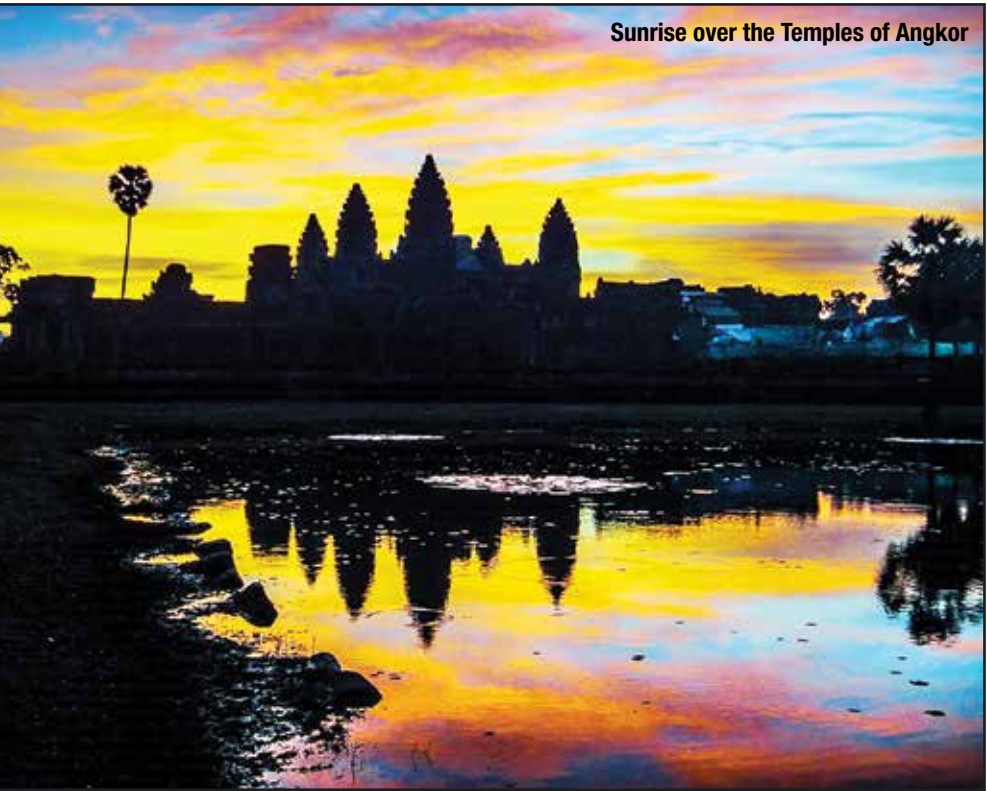
scale. The Phare Circus in Siem Reap rescues street children, and teaches them performance skills and a new life.

13. Take a hot air balloon over the thousands of Buddhist temples and stupas of Bagan in Myanmar after visiting the shul in Yangon (Rangoon) looked after by the

## The northern lights







Sunrise over the Temples of Angkor

single remaining Jewish family in Myanmar. Join one of their trips on Shalom Tours.

14. Before heading off to the most beautiful beaches in the world in El Nido on the island of Palawan in the Philippines, stop by Manila to learn how the Filipino government saved thousands of Jews from Nazi persecution in World War II.

15. While wandering through China, pop by the city of Kaifeng to see the rich history of Chinese Jews, who are thought to have arrived in China with Marco Polo on his trade missions to Asia. Don't miss a hike along the Great Wall, but the most

spectacular sight has to be the terracotta soldiers in full military formation in the excavation pits of Xi'an.

16. Japan is hot at the moment with the Rugby World Cup and the Olympics just around the corner. Hang out in the Gion Geisha district of Kyoto, and stop at midnight to ring the peace bell in Hiroshima to commemorate the destruction wrought when America bombed Japan at the end of World War II.

17. When next in Israel, cross the border into Jordan and visit Petra, the ancient city carved into the mountains of the desert.

Amman is a spotless, beautiful city that will remind you of Jerusalem with its white stone buildings.

18. For complete rest and relaxation, take a ferry from Sihanoukville in Cambodia to the islands of Koh Rong Sanloem. Hike across the island to watch the sunset, and wander back through the desert by torchlight. There are no roads on the islands, and no cars or bikes. To get around, you walk on the beach – a perfect getaway for Shabbat.

19. When next in India, stop by Kochi (Cochin) Kerala, home to India's once 20 000-strong Jewish community. Visit the ancient Paradesi Synagogue in Jew Town, with its hundreds of brass and gold

chandeliers donated by congregants over its 350-year-old history. After shul, hop on a houseboat, and cruise the backwaters of Kerala before heading south to the beaches of the red cliffs of Varkala, the home of Indian massage.

20. Nepal boasts one of the largest Passover seders in the world, but don't miss out on Pokhara Lake at the foot of the Annapurna trail of the Himalayas or Nargakot, where you can watch the sunrise over the highest peaks in the world at an elevation of more than 7 000 feet (2 133m).

So, before you pack your next bikini for Mauritius, think of a few more reasons to make the Cohens next door just a little more jealous of you and your family.



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# Visit Thailand

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### GREAT VALUE

With its rand-friendly currency exchange, Thailand has long been a favourite for South Africans looking to make their budget go further. Visitors can enjoy extravagant holidays at not-so-extravagant prices thanks to an abundance of great-value four and five star accommodation. From secluded retreats set among palm-fringed private beaches to bustling central resorts offering a multitude of activities and adventures, there's a range of accommodation for every kind of holiday. Wherever you go, you can look forward to service that always goes the extra mile.

### A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

There's a vibrant Jewish community in Thailand, primarily centred in Bangkok and the popular tourism hotspots of Koh Samui, Chiang Mai, Phuket. Hotels in these areas are accommodating of their guests' dietary and religious needs, and there are numerous Jewish-run businesses, tour operators and kosher restaurants. Each of these cities also have their own Chabad centres, offering Jewish travellers of all backgrounds a home away from home. These centres run frequent social events and holiday programmes, allowing visitors the unique experience of celebrating their heritage against a backdrop of tropical paradise. Every year, hundreds of thousands flock to Thailand to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Chanukah in unforgettable style.

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  - The Houghton Hotel medical suites, with varying offerings; and
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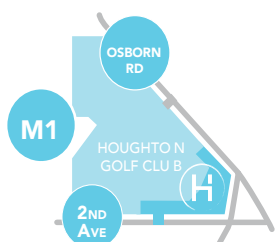
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# The ebb and flow of working on a cruise ship

TALI FEINBERG

Rael Codron spent almost a decade working on cruise ships as a doctor, during which time he visited every continent – including Antarctica – multiple times.

He is one of many Jewish people who have opted to work on cruise ships for a finite amount of time. “I can’t imagine my life without having gone to sea,” says Codron. “It was the best eight years of my life.”

While it may seem luxurious to work on a cruise ship, Codron says that it’s actually the opposite – especially for a ship’s doctor. “The job is seven days a week, as a cruise ship doesn’t stop. You get hours off, but not days off. Especially being the only doctor on a smaller ship, you are on call 24/7.

“You do clinic hours in the morning and afternoon, and it’s busy as people don’t want to be sick on holiday. It can become exhausting, especially if there is an outbreak of flu or gastro. You can’t refer someone onto another doctor!”

But when he got to port, Codron was able to leave and explore, although always with his phone on. “Once you’re in port, someone can be referred to a hospital in an emergency.”

It was these periods of downtime that were the highlight for him. He visited 88 countries in total. His favourite place was Antarctica, because of the natural beauty, and he recommends that everyone take a cruise there.

Why else would someone choose to work on a cruise ship? “It’s like living on a kibbutz! If you do your job well, everything else is done for you,” says Codron.

“You don’t have to cook or clean, and all your expenses are covered, so you can save a lot of money. Your travel documents and visas are all organised for you.

“I used the time to study and write exams, I read a lot, I met many people, and got an amazing international perspective. You work with people from all over, and usually there are about 50 nationalities on board.”

Codron says the cruise-ship life would not work for anyone who is *frum* (religiously observant) or anyone with a family. “No ship would allow you not to work on Shabbat and *chaggim* (Jewish holidays), and kosher food would be difficult.”

However, Jewish guests can get kosher food,

and Jewish staff can host Shabbat services for themselves. Codron was once even allowed to do *tashlich* (casting off the sins of the previous year) and throw crumbs off the side of the boat, even though throwing anything over is usually strictly forbidden.

He recommends that people work on cruise ships at the beginning or end of their careers when they are not tied down by family commitments.

where he works as a “generalist” and heads up an entire hospital – something he says he could never have done without his training on ships.

“I’ve traded a life of sea for a life of sand,” he quips, about living in the middle of the Australian desert. “The experience of living on a cruise ship is something I would highly recommend.”

He advises parents to allow their children to work on a ship if they want to, even if it’s not a

she had no experience in the hospitality industry, and it was a challenge. “With cruise ships, you have to work your way up. Management needs to see how you attend to your role, and your general attitude. Working seven days a week with only hours off was difficult to get used to. It was all dependent on how fast you worked. Sometimes girls on the same floor would pair up to move through the rooms quicker.” After this, the crew were



conventional career path.

Haylee Pincus worked on a ship for a year as cruise photographer. “I always wanted to have a gap year after university and travel, and working on a cruise ship was a clever way to earn great money and travel essentially for free, as well as meet interesting people from all over the world,” she says.

For her, the most challenging part was the work hours. “The working hours are incredibly intense and long for everyone on board. You’re on your feet anywhere from nine to 12 hours a day, every day, for six to nine months.”

But being able to travel places she would normally never get to visit was a highlight. Her favourite memories are interacting with rescued dolphins and sea lions in Atlantis, bobsledding in Jamaica, lying on the pink beach in Bermuda, and zip-lining through the forest in Honduras.

She would absolutely recommend working on ships to anyone who is a “people person” and willing to work hard. “Working on a ship far away from family is difficult. It was definitely a bit of a wakeup call, and a shock to my sheltered system. It makes a person grow up really quickly; and it made me independent and strong. The ship is a demanding space, but if you do what you have to do work-wise, you will be rewarded with the spoils that ship life has to offer.”

Sian Cohen worked as a stewardess on a luxury cruise liner in 2010. “I attended to ten guest rooms every day and night, cleaning the rooms, managing the guests’ personal requests and needs, and making a Noah’s Ark of towel animals!” The ship was split almost 50% guests, 50% staff. “It meant we delivered an extremely personal experience to each guest, right down to knowing their first and second names.”

Although Cohen had an advertising degree,

allowed to socialise: “You feel exhausted 24/7 because you work so hard and party just as hard for months at a time.”

One funny memory is of meeting a lovely Frenchman who worked in room service. “It was the perfect match: I got fresh cappuccinos and croissants every morning while I was attending to my guests’ rooms, and no one was any the wiser. The guests also always loved a good love story, and tipped us well. It was always very strategic!”

Her favourite destinations include Scandinavia. “The little sea-side towns we visited were something out of a fairy tale. The Norwegian Fjords are breathtaking, even



while cleaning the balcony of one of your rooms.”

Cohen wouldn’t think twice about recommending working on a ship, “but it’s important to know the good and the ugly about ship life, and decide if it suits who you are, and what type of experience you are seeking. Be prepared to work hard, but have equal amounts of fun.”





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# The survival guide to eating kosher while on holiday

ANTONY AND JUSTINE SEEFF

When we think of Rome, we are transported back. Not to the Trevi Fountain, the Colosseum, or the Pantheon. But to Ba’Ghetto Milky. Ba’Ghetto Milky is an unassuming kosher restaurant in the Jewish quarter of Rome which makes the most unbelievable pizza we’ve ever tasted. The base, which let out a crunch that was music to our ears,

all about. Of course, there are other great perks that come with international travel like sightseeing, learning new cultures, and exploring different cities, but it’s the eating that stands out for us. It’s the sampling of local cuisines – whether it be pad thai in Bangkok or paella in Barcelona – which really gives you a feel for your destination and adds flavour to your journey. But how can you unlock that gastronomic travel experience if you’re kosher?

It really comes down to two options – you can either pack a few extra kilos of some trustworthy tinned tuna together with the requisite amount of Provita and mix it in with your tears as you cry through every meal in your hotel room. Or you can put in a bit of effort, and follow a few simple tips to make sure that you’ll be able to eat your way through whichever destination you choose – like a mouse munching through a giant wheel of (kosher) Swiss cheese. First, you have to research your destination carefully. Some cities, like New York or Paris, are packed with kosher restaurants just waiting with doors-wide-open for hungry travellers. Others have a handful of options that you can make work (we’ll touch on them below). But then there’s a third category of cities, the kosher abysses, where you’ll struggle to eat kosher, with no kosher restaurants, no Chabad (if you can believe it!), and no kosher supermarkets or local kosher products. A bit of online research and asking around should point you in the right direction for your next trip.



was caressed by the Gal Gadot of cheese, together with toppings that were fresh yet fantastic, simple yet scrumptious. It was the kind of pizza that ruins every other pizza you taste afterwards. And, don’t get us started on the deep-fried Jerusalem artichoke. If you ask us, that’s what holidays are

getting a feel for the lay of the land from their perspective. They can show you where to eat, where to buy supplies, and tell you about what local products you can get away with. They can also help you translate some of those kosher lists you downloaded online but couldn’t quite make sense of. If you’re stranded and hungry, you can always resort to technology, and fire up an app like Kosher Near Me to help you find your way to the closest *mashgiach*. Our last piece of advice is to learn the *halacha*, and eat like a king wherever you are! Some products are acceptable anywhere in the world and, with a bit of knowledge and some fresh pots and pans, you can eat gourmet meals on a cruise, in a hotel, or restaurant wherever you may find yourself. Generally speaking, fruit, vegetables, and fish are always safe, and double-wrapping a kosher fish in tin foil together with some lemon and fresh vegetables is a delicious option. However, please check with your local rabbinic authority before being so brazen. So, add those pots, pans,

So, with a bit of research and the right planning, there’s nothing stopping you from enjoying your kosher cuisine wherever your next adventure takes you.

Second, plan ahead before you go. This includes chatting to friends about their experiences, and spending as much time as you can doing research online. Google Translate will become your best friend in this endeavour. It’s also worth calling local rabbis and Chabad centres to get more information. You’re basically seeking to find out about the local kosher restaurants and supermarkets – where they are, what hechsher they have, and importantly, whether they’re still open. Unfortunately, kosher restaurants aren’t known for sticking around too long. It’s also helpful to find out what local food you can eat. For example, milk in some countries is sometimes a problem from a kashrut perspective. Remember that most countries won’t have a kosher hechsher on products, so try to download any lists of kosher products that you can find before you go. It’s a lot easier to download these and keep them on your phone than it is to try find them on the go while connecting to some dodgy free Wi-Fi. Now that the pre-planning is over and you’ve reached your destination, hop in a taxi and go straight to the nearest Chabad, shul, or kosher establishment. You can find out only so much online. Nothing beats chatting to the locals, and



and spices (to give your meals an extra kick) together with your copy of *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) to your packing list, and get ready to eat in style.

And, if you have some extra space in your suitcase, you can include a disposable braai together with some kosher meat, and cook up some boeries to remind you of home. This technique is actually used by a cousin of ours who often travels to Shanghai for work. So, with a bit of research and the right planning, there’s nothing stopping you from enjoying your kosher cuisine wherever your next adventure takes you. And please don’t forget, when you go to Rome, you have to try the pizza from Ba’Ghetto Milky.





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# Taking the stress out of kosher travel

David Walles never imagined that he and his wife Chana would be running a highly regarded international kosher travel company operating luxury cruises, African safaris, multiple Pesach programmes, Alpine ski trips, and high-end land-tour vacations.

Originally from Melbourne, Walles had a successful steel manufacturing company and his wife was in the real-estate business when the two decided to run a Pesach programme in a Queensland hotel. Heading north to what he described as the Miami Beach of Australia, the couple hosted five-star Pesach vacations for five consecutive years. That was 17 years ago.

By all rights, a decision to move to Israel could have ended the family foray into the hospitality business, but while on a pilot trip to the holy land in 2008, David met the person whose recently deceased father in law had founded Eddie’s Travel & Tourism back in 1979. It was already an established travel and tour operator catering to the needs of the kosher Jewish traveller.

“Eddie had just passed away, and he had a sterling reputation,” David, a father of four, told *Jewish Link*. “His son in law was looking for someone to buy the business, and it became a no-brainer for us, letting us turn our passion into a full-time business, and at the same time fulfil our aliyah dream.”

The Walles family added Pesach hotels to their offerings each year, and began operating kosher cruises and land tours. Focusing on providing fabulous kosher food at unique destinations without compromising on quality, Walles grew the business to keep up with the changing demands of the kosher travel market.

There is a vacation package we have on offer for every day of the year,” said Walles. “It used to be a seasonal business, but it no longer revolves only around Pesach and Sukkot.”

Multigenerational family tours and cruises are another relatively new phenomenon in the world of kosher travel. In addition to hosting Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs at hotels, Walles has also welcomed many families celebrating milestone birthdays and anniversaries who treat their entire *mishpacha* (family) anywhere in the world to a most memorable and unique experience.

“These days, many Jewish families are spread out in communities across the globe and don’t get to see each other too often,” said Walles. “We have families fly in and meet in Venice, and together join our Greek Isles cruise, spending a whole week together enjoying family time, meals, and tours.”

“We are also seeing more travel in private-group tours for friends that are like minded as well as community organisations and synagogue missions.”

After having kept the company’s original name for many years, Walles recently rebranded the image and logo in keeping with changing times and travel trends. Known today as Kosher Travelers, the company’s “one-stop shop” approach offers a true turnkey vacation experience.

“Our team does all the work,” said Walles. “You just need to show up, relax, and enjoy the experience.”

Walles’s vacations attract a diverse clientele of all levels of religious observance who have at least one thing in common – an interest in eating strictly kosher food no matter where in the world they may be. Because Kosher Travelers criss-crosses the globe, rabbinical supervision varies by destination: Pesach hotels in Israel are all Glatt Mehadrin under the auspices of the local Israeli Rabbanut, while cruises are supervised by Rabbi Nechemiah Rottenberg of Vienna. Most tours have a full time *mashgiach*, with food prepared by a Kosher Travelers chef in a hotel or eaten at local kosher restaurants. One thing is certain: Kosher Travelers’ clients will never be served frozen airline meals.

In spite of the diverse crowd that can exist on some tours, Kosher Travelers goes out of its way to make every person feel comfortable. A Sefer Torah travels along with the tour in locations where there are no synagogues, while in others, itineraries are planned around local shul schedules, giving travellers a glimpse of a local Jewish heritage and culture often different from their own.

“Our target audience is mostly Modern Orthodox, however, we do often attract a sprinkle of Chareidim, and many traditional Jews. They all sit in the same dining room eating together and everyone loves it,” said Walles.

That same something-for-everyone approach is evident in Kosher Travelers’ list of packages, offering a dizzying number of destinations including Pesach at multiple hotels in Israel, and its European Pesach package on the exclusive island of Losinj in Croatia.

It has winter and summer cruises to the Norway Fjords, Alaska, Caribbean, Panama Canal, Mediterranean, Japan, and exotic land tours to Italian Alps, China, Peru, Galapagos Islands, Spain and Portugal, India, Morocco, and, of course, the ever-popular whisky tours in Scotland. For ski lovers, it offers a fabulous package to Les 3 Vallées in France with more than 600km of ski slopes. The list goes on and on, with the Walles personal touch evident as it scales up and employs the right staff,

hosts, and guides for each vacation.

“You can google ‘kosher in Morocco’ and find a kosher restaurant and travel on your own, but if you don’t speak a word of Arabic, you will have a hard time without a guide and logistics manager,” said Walles. “We take all the stress out of travelling to exotic locations by taking care of every detail.”

Kosher Travelers’ prices vary by package, and the company’s high volume of business allows it to pass on considerable savings to its clients without compromising on the quality and kashrut of the package. In regard to Pesach, Walles invites clients to consider coming to Israel, noting that Israeli programmes are priced less than European packages, and offer an opportunity to spend Pesach 2019 in the holiest place in the world.

More than just a business, Walles views Kosher Travelers as an opportunity to give back to others, choosing worthy causes to highlight in his hotel programmes. Through the business, they have raised considerable sums of money for organisations including Ezer Mitzion, Leket Yad Eliezer, Innovation Africa, and Tzohar.

“While we do get much satisfaction from arranging kosher travel, we get even more from being able to change the world and better people’s lives,” said Walles. “We are thrilled to be able to use our business as a platform for *tikun olam* (improving the world).”

• For more information on Eddie’s Travel & Tourism, visit it online at [www.koshertravelers.com](http://www.koshertravelers.com)



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# An ‘authentic’ Tel Aviv market has become a vegan haven

KAREN CHERNICK – JTA

In a city where new eateries open and older ones close with the frequency of the waves lapping at the nearby seashore, Tel Aviv’s Levinsky Market stands as a place where people have anchored their food businesses for decades.

Chef Haim Rafael, for instance, still prepares Turkish tarama salad according to his grandmother’s recipe, whisking breadcrumbs and light pink fish eggs into the same spreadable paste the way she did when the family set up their delicatessen in the market in 1958.

Occupying a seven-block stretch of Levinsky Street in the south of Tel Aviv, the marketplace of dry goods, spices and delis founded in the 1930s by working-class Balkan Jews attracts shoppers looking for specialty items and the smoked and briny flavours of a bygone era.

With its inclination towards kippered fish, cured meats and pungent cheeses, Levinsky Market might not seem at first glance like a logical locus for a vegan invasion.

But it was, in fact, the market’s time-honoured quality that recently attracted a surprising newcomer to the scene: the upscale vegetable-centric restaurant Opa.

“I think that Levinsky Market is one of the last truly authentic places remaining in the city,” said Shirel Berger, chef and co-owner of Opa, about her choice to open a fine-dining establishment there in November last year. “People have had their stores for generations, and I really like the vibe – it seems real and not like a mall, or anything new. It’s very raw and authentic.”

Opa is the latest plant-based addition to

the neighbourhood, but certainly not the market’s first vegan establishment. Over the past few years, the number of Israeli vegans has swelled to 5% of the city’s population of about 400 000, ranking it high among the countries with the largest number of vegans per capita. Tel Aviv alone boasts 400 vegan-

culinary options expanded.”

Certain plant-based foods were always abundantly available through vendors in the market, such as the nationally beloved hummus and falafel. But Levinsky’s vegan menu has now grown to include items such as non-dairy *malabi* (a vegan version of the



A vendor roasts nuts in the back of his Levinsky Market shop in Tel Aviv

friendly eateries, and several have found a home in Levinsky Market.

“Levinsky Market was actually always a place for vegans without intending to be,” said Ori Shavit, a Tel Aviv-based food journalist and vegan advocate. “It has an abundance of pantry staples that are an inextricable part of vegan nutrition, especially anything related to the world of grains and beans, nuts, seeds, dried fruits and, of course, an enormous range of spices.”

“Many vegans shop in Levinsky Market and also live nearby, so it was only natural that they’d eat in the area, and with time their

traditional Persian milk pudding topped with rosewater syrup and crushed pistachios), cashew-cheese pizza, *borekas* (Balkan phyllo dough pastries) and non-dairy cheeses.

There is even an all-vegan delicatessen resembling the style of Haim Rafael’s veteran establishment. The Taste for Life deli opened five years ago. Like many of its Levinsky Street neighbours, it makes all of its own spreads, producing pepper-corn pastrami made from walnuts, tart coconut-based yoghurt, and soy cheeses.

“It just seemed necessary (to open a location in Levinsky Market),” said Daniel

Mikitas, co-owner of Taste for Life, “because there are regular delis, so we vegans deserve to have one too.”

The deli, a vegan pioneer when it opened, is in good company now.

“Today, the vegan options around the market are very diverse,” said Shikma Jacoby, a vegan blogger and advocate, who found only two plant-based eateries in the market when she moved to the area three years ago. “You can have anything from incredible desserts to vegan shawarma.”

These options include the veteran street vendor permanently parked in front of the Eliahu Hanavi synagogue with signs advertising the rare homemade vegan *malabi*; Café Kaymak, which serves plant-based versions of traditional home-cooked dishes; a tahini-based tapas restaurant with an entirely vegan menu section called Hatahinia; and an outdoor café, Tony ve Esther, offering elaborate vegan breakfasts that include almond-based *labane* cheese, tofu scrambles and vegan *affogato* (ice cream-topped espresso).

Side streets off Levinsky house Lila Pizza, which happily substitutes cashew cheese on any of its pies, and an artisanal coffee roaster, Cafelix, serving vegan desserts.

These eateries are certainly not the establishments that Levinsky Market was built upon, but they seem to easily coexist with the veterans. Opa sits midway on a block bordered by Fat Dog hot dogs on one corner, and a cheese shop called Hahalban (Hebrew for “the milkman”) on the other. Berger has found ways to incorporate some of her neighbours into her kitchen.

“All the dry goods are definitely from

Continued on page XI>>



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# Did an ancient Jewish scholar introduce the world to pizza?

HENRY ABRAMSON – JTA

In 1983, Italian-Israeli professor Sandra Debenedetti Stow stunned the scholarly world with an explosive article that proposed that Jews introduced pizza to the European diet.

She cited Yehuda Romano, a 14th-century Hebrew scholar from Italy, who translated Maimonides’ use of the word *hararah* (a type of flatbread) in the Mishneh Torah with four simple Hebrew letters: *peh, yud, tzadi* and *heh*, or “pizza”, arguably the very first time the word was ever used in any language.

Before the heaven could rise, a new scholarly sub-field was born.

I tripped over this appealing historical fact while reading the catalogue of the new National Museum of Italian Judaism and the Shoah in Ferrara on the intermediate days of Passover (no doubt my gustatory interest was partially fueled by the holiday). I was intrigued by the possibility that while oblique references to the aromatic staple of adolescent diets can be traced to ancient times, it was the Jews who first gave a name to the global delicacy.

The connection to Maimonides was also quite tempting. Was his *hararah* really an Egyptian antecedent of Chicago deep-dish? A thousand questions erupted. Did Maimonides hold, asked Yechiel Goldreich on Twitter, with the “one slice *mezonos*, two slices *hamotzi* rule” (one slice, no reciting grace, two slices grace rule)? And if Rambam ate pizza, wondered Professor Jared Ellias, how did we Ashkenazim get stuck with gefilte fish and stuffed cabbage? Even my wife chimed in, “Finally, the end of challah tyranny!”

Unfortunately, it turns out, the story is a little more complicated, and our ethnocentric glee was premature. A 10th-century Latin code from Gaeta explicitly mandates the donation of “twelve pizzas” to the local bishop every Christmas and Easter, antedating Romano’s reference to the word by 400 years and, incidentally, providing evidence of the very first pizza delivery service.

Writing in the journal *Onomastics in Contemporary Public Space*, Ephraim Nissan and Mario Alinei, perhaps hoping to redeem the Jewish antiquity of the doughy disc, pointed to the pizzarelle, possibly a cookie-sized version of pizza eagerly consumed by Jewish children in ancient Rome. The fact that pizzarelle were served on Passover, however, diminishes its value for our purposes – if it isn’t *chametz*, it can’t be real pizza.

## An ‘authentic’ Tel Aviv market has become a vegan haven

>> Continued from page X

Levinsky Market, of course,” said Berger. “We have a small nut roaster right next door, so of course we work with him. I have relationships with everyone.”

For the market’s old-timers, it seems to make sense to welcome the new vegan arrivals. Vegans mean business, fresh clientele, and renewed interest in the historic market.

Asked how long he’s been selling coconut-based *malabi* from his street cart, the vendor outside the Eliahu Hanavi synagogue answered: “For years already. Everybody likes it.”

“I think that Levinsky Market is extremely open to veganism and is embracing it,” said Jacoby. “It’s almost as if when you don’t offer vegan options, you are kind of out of the loop.”



Nissan and Alinei vehemently dispute Oxford Professor Martin Maiden’s argument that the word “pizza” is of Germanic origin, deriving from the old High German word “pizzo” meaning “bite”.

Maiden seems to give little credence to the obvious association with pita bread, suggesting instead that the Mediterranean food was also influenced by Gothic vocabulary. Seriously.

After much research, I’m not much closer to really pinning down the origins of the word, but one thing is clear: pizza, in one form or another, has been part of our diet as long as Jews have been turning over the kitchen after Passover. Who knows, even Maimonides himself might have enjoyed a slice or two.



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# The Jewish family travelling to every country on earth

ARIELLE KAPLAN – JTA

What would you do to make it into *The Guinness Book of World Records*? Eat an absurd amount of bagels? Jump rope for days on end? Grow your nails so long that they drag on the floor? Travel to every single country in the world?

The last option might be incredibly expensive, and time-consuming, but it’s exactly what one Jewish family intends to do.

Justin Zackham, a screenwriter who literally coined the term “bucket list”, is attempting this feat. But he’s not doing it alone – his wife, Katherine, and their sons, aged 5 and 10, are travelling along.

This impossible journey has an incredible back story.

After graduating from New York University’s film school in 1994, Zackham, 48, scribbled what he called a “list of things to do before I kick the bucket”, which he later shortened to “Justin’s bucket list”. Marrying the “perfect woman”, jumping out of an airplane, and visiting the pyramids in Egypt and Taj Mahal in India were just a few things on his list.

In 2007, he crossed off the first item: Get a movie made at a major Hollywood studio.

Yes, Zackham’s list is what inspired the hit movie, *The Bucket List*.

About 12 years later – plus two kids, two movies, and a TV show – Zackham and his family are 21 countries deep into their endeavour. The mission is twofold: Zackham wants to scratch “visit every country” off his bucket list, as well as cement the family name in *The Guinness Book of World Records*.

Following a trip to the Bahamas, Zackham took some time from his current “office” in Puerto Rico to chat to us about adventures with little ones, if it’s plausible to travel to every single country in the world, and what, if anything, being Jewish has to do with it.

## When and why did you decide to travel to every country?

It’s kind of a crazy idea and adventure, but the reality is we have always loved travelling as a family. We really want to show our kids – especially given everything that’s going on in America right now – how to focus on the good in the world. The best way of doing that is to travel.

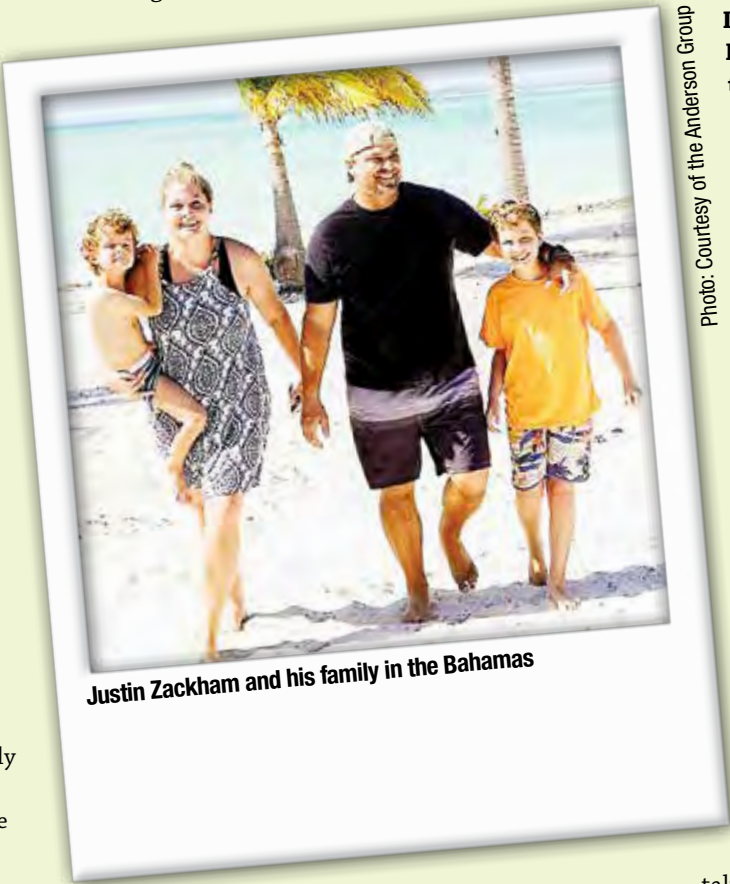
## Your kids are being home schooled in a very non-traditional sense. What are they learning that they wouldn’t in a classroom setting?

Our boys get to see completely different cultures and ways of thinking than they’ve ever known. In Fez, Morocco, they saw a tiny, single-classroom school in the Medina. Finn, who is 10, was particularly affected by the difference in education. He immediately asked to sponsor a student. He gives a dollar a week from his allowance, which directly pays for a boy his age to go to a private school he would otherwise be unable to attend.



## How did your kids react when you told them what was in store?

The little one is more concerned about Wi-Fi strength than anything. When we get to the hotel, he wants to know how good the Wi-Fi is because, you know, YouTube beckons. Our older son, Finn, wants to go to Finland because he feels that he’s going to be welcomed like a king. He wants to go to Greece because he studied ancient Greece.



Justin Zackham and his family in the Bahamas

Photo: Courtesy of the Anderson Group

## Do you take breaks? How do you plan to go to every country? And how long do you stay in each place?

Guinness listed 195 sovereign, self-governing nations, that doesn’t include territories. There are people who have done this before, but no group has ever done it. There are ways of travelling, and you have to document everything. They don’t want you to stay in any country for more than two weeks, and once you start, the idea is that you keep going without taking extended breaks

unless it’s for an emergency. So we have those rules, but we also have two kids. If a year goes by and, as much as our 10-year-old loves to travel, he wants to go home, we will do that. We don’t think he will because he loves it so much, but those are our biggest task masters, and this is all about them and for them.

## What have you learned from travelling with kids? Do you have advice for parents?

Just do it. It’s easier than you think because your kids adapt faster than you do. You’ll grow closer to your children, and grow as a parent. Our biggest tip is to leave extra time on travel days. Airports are stressful for everyone – but more so for children who don’t walk as fast, use the bathroom more, and can’t see over the heads of crowds.

## Being in an interfaith family, how do you navigate religion?

My wife’s family is not religious at all, and I haven’t practiced religion for years. I do, however, identify strongly with the cultural side of Judaism. My oldest son is at the age where we are beginning to talk about what it means to be Jewish. We will read the Torah together when we go to Israel, and both boys will learn about the modern history of our people.

This past autumn, during our visit to Spain, we all learned about the Sephardic

diaspora from Iberia and the forced conversions for those that remained. It led to some wonderful discussions about what makes our people different, what makes us strong, and why our culture is worth preserving, even if it makes us outsiders. We were able to add another link to this chain this past week in Medellin, Colombia, where we learned that the city was originally founded by Jews who fled from Spain and Portugal.

## Some countries aren’t considered safe to travel to. How will you navigate that?

There are some countries that are too dangerous to go to, but there are ways around this. Like, there is a resort island off Yemen that you can go to. It’s more about the journey, and the experience.

## If you don’t make it into The Guinness Book of World Records, how will you feel?

*The Guinness Book of World Records* is great, and we’d love to get into it, but we are doing it for our sons to have that connection, to have an appreciation for each other, and a love of travel.

• This story originally appeared on Kveller.

# History

JORDAN MOSHE

Blackbeard captained the Queen Anne’s Revenge, Jack Sparrow captained the Black Pearl, and Jews captained the Prophet Samuel.

As European nations advanced westward in a scramble for colonies, the Caribbean became prime property for pirates, among them Jews.

Taking to the high seas aboard the Queen Esther, the Prophet Samuel or even the Shield of Abraham, a rich history is gradually coming to light of Jewish buccaneers who undermined the Inquisition and persecution by becoming pirates.

Between the 1600s and 1800s, Jews fleeing persecution at the hands of Catholic Europe often joined the voyages of explorers bound for South America and the Caribbean. Out of this fateful encounter of piracy and Judaism, many Jews took up swashbuckling lives on the high seas.

While history books have rarely accounted for the exploits of Jewish pirates, their surprising prevalence has gained more recognition in recent years. They even feature in a book titled *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean* by Edward Kritzler.

Excavations carried out in historical graveyards discovered in the Caribbean over the past decade have yielded tombstones featuring a combination of the Magen David, Hebrew writing, and the infamous skull and crossbones insignia.

Though certain Jewish pirates of antiquity – most notably those of the Hasmonean period – have been accounted for, most were active after the Spanish expulsion of the Jews in 1492.

Exacting revenge on the Catholic empire, they frequently seized control of its trading vessels, often with the backing of their new refuge, including the Ottoman Empire or Europe’s Spanish rivals such as the United Netherlands.

Dozens of Jews were also economically invested in backing privateers attacking Spanish ships. Privateers were essentially pirates with government protection for the pursuit of less-than-legal goals in wealth, dominance, and control of the seas. Jewish privateers could have seen it as a profitable revenge strategy for the expulsion and continued religious persecution of Jews.

Even the Caribbean, the very capital of piracy, served as a welcome haven for Jewish buccaneers. Jamaica was one among the many remote and distant locales in the New World where Jews and other unwelcome apostates sought shelter as far from the inquisitors of Spain and Portugal as possible.

The lush Caribbean island served as home to several hundred Jews. While many of them sought to make a living from typical economic opportunities like sugarcane plantations or by trading various commodities, others turned to a more adventurous calling: a pirate’s life at sea.

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# unearths Jewish piracy as revenge for the Spanish Inquisition

>>Continued from page XII

As Kritzler suggests, perhaps the most famous of the Caribbean’s Jewish pirates was Moses Cohen Henriques. After living initially as a secret Jew under the inquisition in his native Portugal, he was discovered in 1605, and tortured in public. The experience is said to have led Cohen to devote his life to working against Spain and Portugal. Escaping to Amsterdam, he reportedly enlisted as a secret agent for the Dutch navy, making his way to Jamaica. On behalf of the Netherlands, he attacked Spanish ships, and frustrated Spain’s plans to settle the New World.

Teaming up with Dutch hero Admiral Piet Pieterszoon Hein and one of the most feared pirates, Sir Henry Morgan, Henriques went on to capture vessels across the sea. His prizes included a legendary treasure fleet, consisting of a fortune of gold and silver bullion that amounted to a staggering 11 509 524 guilders (worth around \$1 billion or R14.4 billion today). It was hailed as the Dutch West India Company’s greatest heist in the Caribbean. Another recorded Jewish pirate was Yaakov Koriel, who commanded three pirate ships in the Caribbean. He eventually renounced his piracy, and retired to the Israeli city of Tzfat, studying mysticism under famed Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria. Another is David Abrabanel,



who joined British privateers after his family was put to death off the South American coast. He assumed the name “Captain Davis”, and commanded his own pirate vessel called Jerusalem. All of Spanish extraction, Henriques, Koriel, and Abrabanel knew too well the sting of the anti-Semitic slur *marrano* (pig) and its associated acts of persecution. Although he was French, their cousin from across the pond, Jean Lafitte, knew the meaning of *maudit juif* (damned Jew), and similarly turned to piracy to take revenge for persecution. Born in France in about 1780, the infamous buccaneer moved to the French colony of New Orleans in the United States, where he and his brother, Pierre, held respectable jobs as blacksmiths. Unbeknown to anyone else, however, they held commissions from the Republic of Cartagena (found in today’s Colombia) to intercept Spanish boats. With a crew and ships of their own, they carried out raids off the coast of New Orleans from a secluded colony in Barataria Bay. Laffite offered his services to General Andrew Jackson in 1812 to help American troops foil British invasion plans in exchange for a pardon of pirate activities. Jackson agreed, and Laffite’s gang emerged victorious. Jackson would later dub Laffite “one of the ablest men” of the Battle of New Orleans. A pirate to his core, however, Laffite returned to piracy a few years later, amassing almost a thousand followers. Until his death in about 1825, Laffite maintained his reputation as a feared pirate of the “Spanish Main”, the eastern

coast of Spain’s holdings in the New World. As several other such accounts come to light, the range of Jews who took up a life on the high seas continues to grow. A Moroccan rabbi, the right-hand man of famed Turkish pirate Barbarossa, and even a physician credited with introducing the potato to Europeans are among the Jewish figures emerging as having held a life of piracy. Whether they substituted the cry of “Yo ho ho!” with “Oy vey!” we may never know, but their stories are undoubtedly as impressive as any other found in the annals of piracy’s history.



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# The wanderlust of the Jewish Don Quixote

JORDAN MOSHE

History shows that in addition to being called “the people of the book”, we Jews have undoubtedly earned the title of seasoned traveller.

When we’re not learning, we’re wandering, and even when we learn, we often learn about wandering. Our journeys frequently take up our prayers and religious practices.

Though the catalysts for our various peregrinations have varied, it is Benjamin of Tunyedevka whose journey was inspired by the oddest catalyst of them all: a date from the holy land.

Benjamin is one of the many unique personalities created by Minsk-born Yiddish writer Mendel Mocher Sforim, the pen-name of Shalom Jacob Abramovich.

Born in 1836, Abramovich is recognised by all the great Yiddish writers as the *zeida* (grandpa) of Yiddish literature. He was the first enlightened Jewish author to write in Yiddish as opposed to Hebrew. He attempted

to influence the Jewish people to free themselves from the physical and intellectual restraints of the ghettos of Europe.

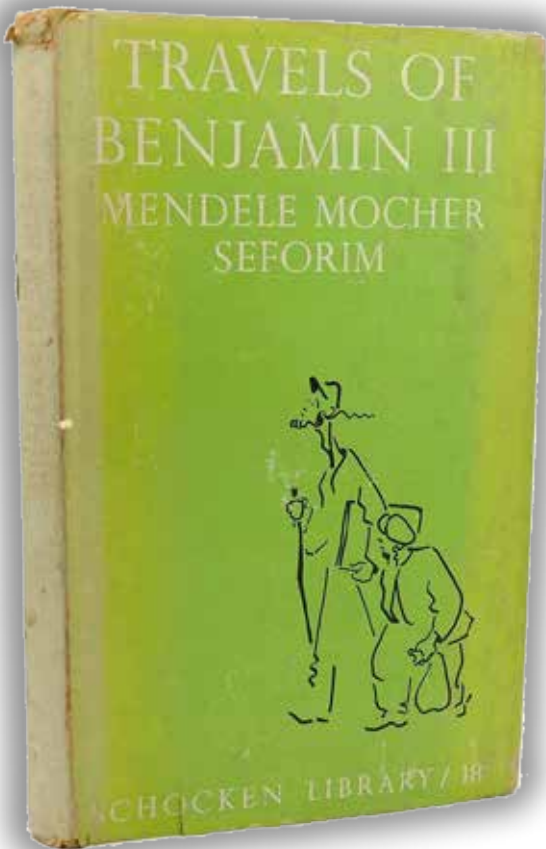
It is these Jews and their apparent complacency with living provincial lives who fuel his major work of 1878, *Masos Benyomen Hashlishi*, (The Wanderings of Benjamin III). Until today, it is considered by some to be the greatest satire on Jewish life in exile.

Benjamin dives into travelogues and travel literature, thirsty for whatever descriptions he can find of the world beyond the shtetl.

Benjamin – a bumpkin by all accounts – is shaken to his core by the arrival of a date from Israel while at home in his shtetl of Tunyedevka. The fruit inspires him to travel the world.

The wonder with which he describes the simple fruit is visually rich. “A Bible was brought to prove that the very same little fruit grew in the holy land. The harder the Tunyedevkans stared at it, the more clearly they saw before their eyes the River Jordan, the Cave of the Patriarchs, the tomb of Mother Rachel, the Wailing Wall. They bathed in the hot springs of Tiberias, climbed the Mount of Olives, ate dates and carobs, and stuffed their pockets with holy soil to bring back to Tunyedevka. For a moment, the whole of Tuneyadevka was in the land of Israel.”

Benjamin dives into travelogues



and travel literature, thirsty for whatever descriptions he can find of the world beyond the shtetl. He prepares himself for the journey by venturing alone into the local forest, and getting lost in the process. Hearing a voice in the distance, he immediately imagines it to be a highwayman. Despite initially being overcome with fear, he steels and reprimands himself, “For shame, Benjamin! You dream of voyaging to far deserts and oceans teeming with griffins, hydrae, and anthropophagi, yet tremble at the thought of encountering a robber in the forest? I swear, I thought better of you!”

These words achieve little. Although he discovers that the suspected highwayman is simply a peasant driving a cart, Benjamin faints, wakes up in the cart, and believes himself taken captive by Arabs. Like Don Quixote before him, he believes every fanciful thought which enters his head, and embarks on a journey with his own Sancho Panza, a fellow-Jew called Sendrel.

Unlike Quixote, whom few actually take seriously, nearly everyone believes Benjamin’s delusions of grandeur. In fact, the act of setting out on the road makes him a hero. He is even suspected at times of being the Moshiach.

This work of satire is said to be inspired by an actual Jewish traveller called Benjamin, who lived hundreds of years earlier. This Benjamin was born in around 1127 in the city of Tudela, located in the northern Spanish province of Navarre. Benjamin of Tudela is the author of one of the most famous early travel books, *Massaot Shel Rabbi Benjamin* (The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela).

A rabbi by training, he set out on a world journey around 1159. During the next 14 years, he travelled to areas in Greece, Syria, ancient Palestine, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Arabia. He is also believed to be the first European to approach the Chinese border. He visited 300 cities in all, including many of importance in Jewish history.

The book he wrote to describe these travels, first translated in the 1840s, gave scholars one of the first eyewitness accounts of life in the Middle Ages throughout parts of southern Europe and the Middle East. Benjamin included fascinating descriptions of the physical conditions under which Jewish people lived in these regions, as well as politics, trade, and geography.

So, when you’re next looking for inspiration to set out and see the world, perhaps Freshfellas or some other well-stocked greengrocer might be the place to start.

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# Hot tips for Jewish travellers

JORDAN MOSHE

Since we journeyed from Egypt to escape slavery, certain guidelines have always been relevant to Jews when we travel.

We are known for jetting off with everything barring the kitchen sink, but there are a number of until now unwritten tips which govern the way we travel.

Here is some advice you might want to consider for your next holiday, whether you're going to Beaufort West or the Bahamas.

Before going anywhere, read up on the history and current affairs of the location you are considering visiting, and make sure to be as thorough as possible. You don't want to be branded an ignoramus when confronted with a landmark you are unable to identify.

Instead, you want to be an expert not only on the sites, but the people, their food, their families, and whether their children have married into good families or not – heaven forbid! The intricacies of Jewish geography can spring up anywhere.

Then you'll want to consider what to pack. In theory, how much you pack depends partially on how long you'll stay. However, you'll probably want to ensure that your apparel is *de rigueur* (current fashion) wherever you are, as you wouldn't want to give your community a bad name.

With this in mind, be sure to include in your luggage every possible colour combination to complement your surroundings. Heading to the Kruger Park? Leopard print cannot go amiss. Men can find a suitably-patterned kippa for any setting, so they have no excuse for failing to blend in anywhere, be it the red-light district or the Vatican.

When you're a traveller with dietary restrictions, there are logistical challenges. Be aware that not every delicacy you come across is kosher, nor is it guaranteed to be as flavourful as your mother's.

Imagine walking down the bustling streets of Bangkok, passing street food vendors hawking their wares, and delectable smells wafting your way. What you see might look like Shabbos cholent, but it isn't necessarily so.

It might be worth looking up kosher restaurants in the area (as suggested in an article on page VIII) before going out in search of supper or befriending local Jewish residents who seem like the sort to invite strange, foreign Jews into their homes.

You are still encouraged to take food with you – how much and what will depend on whether you suffer from heartburn, the amount your family can eat, and what you usually enjoy at the Shabbos table.

Remember that Shabbos customs tend to differ around the globe, and what is true of Glenhazel might not be so in Madrid. Note that ring-fighting bulls pass through all local shuls during Kabbalat Shabbat, and this is a perfectly normal phenomenon.

Sing along to tunes which are not familiar to you as loudly as possible, as this will show the locals that you are eager to envelop yourself in their community's practices.

It is advisable that you take a ready-to-use Shabbat kit wherever you go. Simply put all essential Shabbat items in a large ziplock bag, including matches, tea lights, a box of matzah crackers, a small grape juice, a cholent pot, the fine glaze Royal Dalton dinner service, and a 12-seater Shabbos table (complete with tablecloth, table runner, the good napkins, bobba's challah board, and bobba herself).

It goes without saying that you should commit to memory a few useful words and phrases in the local language. These

should include appropriately translated equivalents of, "I don't eat anything that is not gluten-free, vegan-friendly, and contains no traces of animal products," as well as, "When my aunt visited this place, she said that..."

Locals will always appreciate hearing you speak their mother tongue, so no matter how much they insist that you speak English, continue to make those strangled sounds your audiobook taught you,

and you'll ensure you are understood and welcomed.

If all else fails, remember that a Chabad House can be found within a 10km radius of your location. To make your search as discreet and unobtrusive as possible, always carry a picture of the Rebbe with you, and flash it at anyone who looks like they could direct you to Chabad. Remember to be persistent, and break into a rousing chorus of "Mashiach" if all else fails. They'll get the hint.



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# Chance encounter helps opera-singing Uber driver’s career

TALI FEINBERG

When Menzi Mngoma auditioned for the Cape Town Opera on 12 June, he couldn’t believe the turn his life had taken. After that, he was accepted to compete in the Voices of South Africa International Opera Singing Competition and master classes to be held in Cape Town.

All this happened simply because Mngoma – an Uber driver – opened up to a passenger, Kim Davey, that he was an opera singer.

“Nothing in life is coincidence. We were put in one another’s paths for a reason,” says Davey, whose video of the opera singing Uber driver has gone viral, leading to these life-changing opportunities.

“On 23 May, I went to Durban on a work-related trip and hailed an Uber. The driver, Menzi Mngoma, and I got chatting, and I discovered that he was an opera singer who due to a lack of opportunities in South Africa, became an Uber driver to support his family,” Davey says.

“Not letting the unique opportunity pass me by, I asked Menzi if he would mind singing for me. He gladly obliged, and I was blown away. I asked to film him. In our subsequent conversation, I told him, ‘There must be someone who can help you!’

“When Menzi dropped me back at the airport, I told him not to give up on his dreams, and that he

needed to put positive energy out into the universe and something would come. I asked his permission to post the videos on Facebook. Little did I know that through my post and simple request, I would be that someone who would help to expose his natural talent.”

What transpired afterwards is the stuff of a Hollywood movie. “I never imagined that my post would go viral. My friend suggested that I make the post public, and that is when the number of shares climbed. The video has since been viewed more than 650 000 times. The response has been overwhelming and as a result, Menzi has been offered some wonderful opportunities,” says Davey.

Jacaranda FM’s breakfast show, *Breakfast with Martin Bester*, donated R5 000 to Mngoma and his family. East Coast Radio arranged for him to work with musician Hendrik Joerges to have a single produced, recorded, and released on the radio station. He was invited by Stuart Barry from Impi Concert Events to join its

line up at Durban’s Music at the Lake, performing with Mi Casa and Hot Water. He was also invited by Anthea Ambursley to perform at the second Annual AfriCAN Authors Awards.

Yet, the Voices of South Africa International Opera Singing

come and hear him in person,” says Davey.

She is now raising funds for him to attend iPOP in Los Angeles in December, an annual event which promotes emerging talent to agents. “He will have the

they met. “This past weekend, we were reunited in Johannesburg, when he was invited to perform at a private function. I will continue to support and encourage Menzi on his journey.”

Davey has gained hope from the encounter. “Negative stories about South Africa not only unsettle us as a people, but create a disharmonious environment. In order to bring about balance and to move forward as a nation, we need to strive towards achieving the spirit of *ubuntu* (humanity). This experience has reaffirmed for me that there is good in the world, and that by working together, anything is possible.”

She says her Jewish identity played an important role. “Judaism teaches us to be socially responsible, which is achieved through acts of loving kindness and the giving of *tzedakah* (charity). I believe that we all have the potential to make a difference in someone’s life.

“We need to be less self-absorbed, more conscious of one another, and most importantly, take action. As a child, it was instilled in me not to judge a book by its cover, and always treat people the way I would expect to be treated. If you can be anything in this world, be kind.”

• If you want to help Mngoma, or find out more about sending him to iPop, visit <http://gotalent.co.za/send-menzi-to-hollywood.html>



Kim Davey and Menzi Mngoma

Competition and master classes stand out for him above all else.

“The master classes are led by international guests and representatives of opera companies. Furthermore, there is a concert planned at the Baxter Concert Hall in Cape Town that Menzi will perform in, so all the people who have supported him so far can

opportunity to showcase his talent in front of more than 200 agents,” Davey says. She has no doubt that the opera singing Uber driver will go far. “He has a dream to perform opera internationally, and he is committed to achieving that dream.”

She and Mngoma have communicated every day since



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# From the bima to singing *La Traviata*

JORDAN MOSHE

Chazzan Yudi Cohen this week exchanged the bima for the stage, stepping into the spotlight to put his vocal prowess in service of a different purpose.

Kitka became cantata as he stepped out of Shabbos into the role of Alfredo in Verdi’s *La Traviata* at the Johannesburg Theatre on Saturday night, delivering a first-rate opening night performance.

*La Traviata* is one of the most popular operas of all time, telling a heart-breaking story of love, sacrifice, and tragedy. It premiered in Venice in 1853, and has remained a classic. Producer Pierre du Toit and Sempre Opera brought the show to South Africa audiences this week in Braamfontein, where it will be staged until Sunday.

The *SA Jewish Report* chatted to Cohen after his performance, getting insight into the demands of operatic music. Cohen, a familiar face and voice at Sydenham Shul,



Photos: Yolandi Jacobsz

is more than a community cantor, having studied opera at the Tshwane University of Technology.

Although he has had his degree for more than ten years, this was his debut in professional opera on stage, and the stakes were certainly as high as the notes.

“The last time I performed a proper opera was while studying,” said Cohen. “I played parts in operas like *Carmen* and *La Boheme*, and the stress was enormous. This was my first appearance in a professional opera, and I did not anticipate the stress it would bring.”

This is unsurprising, as Cohen was cast in the role in mid-April. An active chazzan, businessman, and father, he was given little more than two months to prepare after not having performed in an opera for more than ten years.

“Pierre du Toit was one of my lecturers at university,” Cohen said. “He phoned me the day before I left for a trip to New York to ask if I wanted the role. Although I studied opera, I’d never studied the part, and Du Toit was taking a lot on faith. But I had actually planned to watch *La Traviata* in New York on my trip, so I took it as a sign that it was meant to be.”

Juggling his various commitments, Cohen devoted hours to memorising his lines and the music in spite of missing some rehearsals which

fell over Shabbat. Although his regular stint as chazzan did help somewhat, he says the two styles are very different.

“Chazzanut helped me to some extent. The deeper meaning of both tefilla and opera need to be tapped into to give the singing greater significance, but there’s no crossover in their respective genres. While one can load singing in shul with certain amount of emotion, opera singing requires a specific channelling of emotion. A



chazzan is not necessarily an opera singer.”

Although he was the sole debutante in the cast, Cohen took to the role naturally, and said that he found that his character and the plot resonated with him as a Jew. Though the story is set in 19th century Paris, he believes it remains pertinent to us today.

“There are human issues which Verdi addresses that remain relevant to us as



people, and as Jews. Alfredo loves a woman who is scorned by society, but his father won’t support him. It’s all about *yichus* [lineage], loyalty to parents, avoiding scandal, and making our own choices. In the *frum* [observant] world today, these continue to be concerns. What children want is replaced with what their parents want.

“My background as a religious Jew helped me to understand this. The opera questions whose life you’re living, whether you care what society thinks, and how you navigate its contradictions. We need to express who we are.”

For Cohen, singing is an expression of life. He stresses that we all need to find our way of achieving this. “To say that you must follow your heart is a cliché. What I’m saying is that you don’t need to explain yourself to anyone, especially when you’re trying to find the nourishment your soul needs. If you have a passion for something, you must do it, because that’s the talent G-d gave you. If people try to suppress it, they could be preventing you from achieving your purpose.”



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# Beth Din has right to express its view

The collective gasp from the community could be heard the moment the *SA Jewish Report* rolled off the production line. “Beth Din reinforces prohibition on rabbis attending Limmud” was the lead headline. With the ink still “smudgeable”, the outrage began. It was swift, cutting, and mostly critical of the Beth Din’s decision.

This decision has been the position of the rabbinate for the past 10 years. My own response bothered me. A childhood reflex to reject being told what to do kicked in. Nothing would motivate me more to attend the conference (as a speaker) than being told not to – not that I am an orthodox rabbi (or any other kind). Meaning that the notification, or prohibition, wasn’t even aimed at me.

Last year, I was deeply critical of the fact that Limmud had invited speakers from the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign to present at the conference. My concern was that many in the anti-Israel movement routinely deny a voice to those who support Israel. Intimidation tactics, anti-Semitism, and even support of terror are not unknown, and I felt that to grant them a platform was to – quite literally – shoot ourselves in the foot. Limmud ultimately withdrew the invitation. At the time, I was challenged for the inconsistency of my approach. Why would I feel so strongly about issues relating to Israel, but not about issues relating to the preservation of core Judaism? Why was it different, I was asked, to allow speakers to present when they might undermine some of the tenants of Torah and Judaism? The answer that I gave is that in the case of religious presentation, that debate is possible, whereas in

the case of BDS, because of its approach, it isn’t. But here’s a question: should it be an issue for the Beth Din to have a view on rabbinic attendance when it comes to Limmud? Is it wrong for it to say that a certain environment doesn’t reflect its values, and that for that reason, it won’t allow rabbinic council rabbis to attend?



It wouldn’t be the first organisation to do this. Yes, we might hate the very idea of “thought police” but to be clear, they aren’t telling us that we shouldn’t go. They are telling their members that they shouldn’t.

And whereas I might not like the approach or even agree with it, and whereas I might be convinced that there must be a solution to the quandary, I do wonder if I am within my rights to be outraged about it. If we are so open to various views and standpoints, why is this the one viewpoint we reject? By definition, a speaker at Limmud might genuinely make a case for underwater yoga, or atheism being the only way to serve G-d, and we would tolerate it because we are “tolerant”, but a view from the rabbinate that relies on thousands of years of deep learning is something we reject out of hand. I have never attended Limmud, but I hope to present there this year. That is my choice, and my decision to make. I still hope the Beth Din and Limmud will be able to reach a compromise, perhaps one that involves a stream that they would be comfortable with. But in the absence of a solution, whether I like it or not, I need to make sure that I respect the Beth Din’s approach just as much as I respect the underwater yoga teacher or atheist.

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# How Anne Frank remains vulnerable at 90

In this age of vulgarity, with increasing anti-Semitism and racism, the power of the mass media to propagate hatred through the internet has increased a million-fold. It draws in people who would shudder at accusations of anti-Semitism, including naïve Jews. Who would have thought that this power would result in mocking world-renowned holocaust victim Anne Frank, who would have been 90 this month? One of the episodes of a show currently distributed by Netflix is called *The Roast of Anne Frank*, in which she is “roasted” by a panel that includes Hitler. He mocks her, saying, “Everyone knows you as a hero and a bestselling author, but to me you’ll always be little number 825060.” It is part of a Historical Roasts programme, where various historical figures take the hot seat to be lampooned by their peers, including Abraham Lincoln and Princess Diana. It seems crude that the late Anne Frank should be included. Comedian Jeff Ross, who hosts the show, tries to deflect accusations towards him, saying that he only kids people he loves, and Anne Frank is close to his heart. He says her diary made him cry. This sounds like sloppy Hollywood thinking, where nothing is sacred. Most Jews still view any depiction of the Holocaust and its victims as a serious thing, not to be treated light heartedly. This is particularly the case in an age when rising anti-Semitism reminds us of the 1930s. Jewish historians remember Nazi publications which used cartoon imagery to

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# Taking anti-Semitism seriously

At the time of writing, I am in Israel with Zev Krengel, the national vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). We have participated in a number of high-level meetings aimed at providing updates on the political developments in South Africa, sharing information about our community, and getting perspectives on the political situation in Israel. This will form the basis of my next column. This week, I would like to focus on National Director Wendy Kahn’s recent participation in two very important international gatherings in Bucharest, Romania, namely the International Meeting of Special Envoys and Coordinators Combating Anti-Semitism, and the annual World Jewish Congress National Community Directors’ Forum. At the special envoys meeting, presentations were made by a range of senior political and communal leaders at the forefront of combating anti-Semitism worldwide. They included Elan Carr, United States special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism; the United Kingdom’s special envoy for post-Holocaust issues; and Anna Bokshitskaya, the executive director of the Russian Jewish Congress. On the one hand, it is reassuring to see how seriously governments across Europe and further afield are taking the threat of anti-Semitism, and the kind of practical measures that are being implemented to protect Jewish communities. On the other, it’s deeply sobering that 75 years after the Holocaust, the hatred against Jews has increased to such an extent it necessitates these responses. The meeting included an event to mark the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires. Considered to be the worst terrorist attack against Jews in the post-World War II era, the AMIA atrocity claimed 85 lives, and fundamentally changed the way

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# ABOVE BOARD

*Shaun Zagnoev*

Jewish communities in the diaspora operate. Today, unfortunately, we have to rely mostly upon ourselves to provide adequate security for our communal events and installations. Indeed, our own Community Security Organisation was formed on the initiative of the SAJBD soon after the AMIA attack. At the directors’ forum, senior communal professionals from more than fifty countries came together to share experiences and discuss common challenges. Two of the issues discussed at length were the dire situation of the Jewish community in crisis-ridden Venezuela, and the ongoing problem of anti-Semitism within the UK’s Labour Party. Taking part in forums like this makes one realise that Jewish communities everywhere have their own unique challenges, which we need to bear in mind when dealing with our own. We can also be strengthened by the many sincere and committed non-Jewish opponents of anti-Semitism who are fighting the scourge alongside us. Lord Kevin Shinkwin, who we were honoured to bring out to South Africa earlier this year to speak at Yom Hashoah and at various other human-rights forums, is one of them. Speaking in a debate on anti-Semitism in the House of Lords last week, Shinkwin paid generous tribute to the SAJBD “for the wonderful work that its national director, Wendy Kahn, and her colleagues do to promote the Jewish community and its continuing and significant contribution to South Africa”.

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

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

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# TAKING ISSUE

*Geoff Sifrin*

depict Jews, such as *Der Sturmer* in 1934, with its front-page cartoons of ugly Jews in grotesque poses, accompanied by allegations of Jewish ritual murder – the notorious “blood libel”. But as the Holocaust recedes further into history, younger generations of Jews become more distanced from it. Even some of the children of Holocaust survivors who grew up with the constant echo of what happened to their parents are less inhibited about how they portray it. Another, equally vulgar treatment of Anne Frank and the Holocaust, reported in May in the *New York Times*, involved the *Harvard Lampoon*, an independent satirical publication run by students at Harvard University. It published a sexualised, digitally-modified image of Anne Frank, depicting her facing the camera, with her head mounted on the body of a slim, large-breasted, bikini-clad woman. A bold headline above it read, “Gone before her time: virtual aging technology shows us what Anne Frank would have looked like if she hadn’t died.” The text below it read, “Add this to your list of reasons the Holocaust sucked.” An uproar followed among students and faculty, with demands of accountability. The journal apologised publicly, and promised to review the editorial processes which allowed this to slip through. The *New York Times* has itself been accused of anti-Semitism after it recently published a cartoon featuring Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It apologised for the incident. The power of internet-based media houses is new in the world because of its scale. Netflix is like a behemoth that lacks cultural sensitivity. It challenges the moral basis on which the media operate, not only in relation to Jews, but others.

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# How Anne Frank remains vulnerable at 90

In this age of vulgarity, with increasing anti-Semitism and racism, the power of the mass media to propagate hatred through the internet has increased a million-fold. It draws in people who would shudder at accusations of anti-Semitism, including naïve Jews. Who would have thought that this power would result in mocking world-renowned holocaust victim Anne Frank, who would have been 90 this month? One of the episodes of a show currently distributed by Netflix is called *The Roast of Anne Frank*, in which she is “roasted” by a panel that includes Hitler. He mocks her, saying, “Everyone knows you as a hero and a bestselling author, but to me you’ll always be little number 825060.” It is part of a Historical Roasts programme, where various historical figures take the hot seat to be lampooned by their peers, including Abraham Lincoln and Princess Diana. It seems crude that the late Anne Frank should be included. Comedian Jeff Ross, who hosts the show, tries to deflect accusations towards him, saying that he only kids people he loves, and Anne Frank is close to his heart. He says her diary made him cry. This sounds like sloppy Hollywood thinking, where nothing is sacred. Most Jews still view any depiction of the Holocaust and its victims as a serious thing, not to be treated light heartedly. This is particularly the case in an age when rising anti-Semitism reminds us of the 1930s. Jewish historians remember Nazi publications which used cartoon imagery to



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# Fasting can be good for you – but don’t make a meal of it



**ON  
NOURISHING  
NOSH**

*Hilit Milner*

David and Ben are sitting at their breakfast meeting. David turns to Ben, and asks what he wants for breakfast. Ben replies, “Nothing thank you – I’m fasting.” Taken aback, David asks, “What fast have I missed? I know it’s not Tisha B’Av or Yom Kippur!” Ben laughs and says, “I’m intermittent fasting”.

One of the most popular health trends today is intermittent fasting. As with any new dieting approach, there are many basic questions about intermittent fasting: what is it, does it work, and can anyone do it?

Well, to answer this, let’s start at the top, and understand what it is and what the research says.

Intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating. It’s promoted for fat and weight loss, longevity, enhanced cognitive ability, and improvements in markers such as blood sugar, cholesterol, and inflammation.

There are different types of intermittent fasting. Some of the most popular are:

- **The 16:8 Method or Leangains Fasting Protocol.** This is the most popular type of fasting routine. In this method, you fast for 16 consecutive hours, and eat during the remaining eight hours. This means that if you stop eating dinner at 20:00, you fast until 12:00 the following day.
- **Alternate-day fasting or eat-stop-eat fasting.** This involves complete fasting for

24-hour periods, similar to the length of Yom Kippur, for one to two days per week. The other five days incorporate normal eating routines.

- **Modified Fasting or 5:2.** This involves a fast day where individuals restrict their caloric intake to 25% of their normal daily caloric requirements for two non-consecutive days of the week – the other five days incorporate normal eating routines.

The only things you can have during total fasting hours are water, black tea, or black coffee (no milk or sugar).

Numerous changes occur in our body when we fast. When we eat, glucose and fat are used as the body’s main source of energy. Glucose is usually used first.

However, when glucose is not available to use as fuel, such as in a fasting state, the body switches to using fat as its main fuel source. This can then lead to “fat burning”.

Hormonal changes also occur during a fasting state like a drop in insulin, which increases the accessibility of fat stores, and an increase in growth hormone, which stimulates growth and cell regeneration.

Weight loss is by far the most studied benefit of intermittent fasting. Research is mixed as to whether intermittent fasting or a normal calorie-restrictive diet is more effective for weight loss. Some studies show that intermittent fasting results in less muscle loss and greater reduction in body fat.



It seems that the success of intermittent fasting can be due to it being easier to follow than a “normal” diet, resulting in increased compliance and sustainability.

Intermittent fasting doesn’t dictate what and how much you should be eating, but rather when you should be eating. However, people forget that creating a caloric deficit is still important, and mindfully eating a balanced diet still holds true. Being a glutton during non-fasting hours will limit its success.

Intermittent fasting is also in the spotlight for other potentially powerful benefits such as a reduced risk of developing diabetes due to reduced insulin levels, improved cardiac health by reducing blood pressure and LDL cholesterol (the unhealthy cholesterol). It also potentially increases longevity, though the studies have mostly been done on mice.

Research has also shown that intermittent fasting upregulates our antioxidant and anti-inflammatory pathways as a result of causing a mild stress response in our cells.

Based on the above information, intermittent

fasting sounds great for everyone, right?

Unfortunately, it isn’t. While a lot of research has been done on its benefits, many of the studies to date have a variety of limiting factors. These range from the length and size of the study group, to testing on animals rather than humans.

Intermittent fasting is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It’s important to understand that choosing whether to do it also depends on your medical history, and your health goals.

Certain groups of people should not fast at all, or should do so under professional guidance, including:

- Pregnant or breastfeeding women, women with fertility or hormonal problems;
- People with a history of nutritional deficiencies or any form of disordered eating;
- People with advanced diabetes on insulin; and
- Anyone suffering from chronic diseases or on medication.

Though intermittent fasting can be beneficial, as always, it’s best to fast under the guidance of a dietitian as more conclusive research is needed, especially in the case of specific patient profiles.

Ask yourself what eating approach is most sustainable for you. If fasting results in imbalanced eating with extreme hunger, side effects, or poor compliance, then it’s not a balanced approach for you.

Learn what’s good for your health, and go with it.

• *Hilit Milner is a registered clinical dietitian who runs a private practice, works in a top private hospital, and has founded a wellness blog called ‘Sunrise by HM’.*

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# Hatbox from Kovno tells family history

JORDAN MOSHE

When 20-year old Doreen Benjamin Fait left Lithuania for South Africa in 1934, she arrived with a duvet cover, a set of candlesticks, a tin of Wissotzky tea, and a hat box full of hats.

Although all these items remain with her family until today, it is the hatbox that best captures her endurance. It is also this hatbox that is what Doreen – who passed away in 1998 – is remembered for by her children and grandchildren.

Doreen’s unique legacy has now not only been preserved, but is part of a campaign to collect and display artifacts connected to ORT at the ORT SA Academy in Johannesburg.

This is because Doreen trained to become a milliner at her local ORT centre in Kovno (Lithuania) when she was 18, creating the hats which will go on display with the hatbox.

Her daughter-in-law, Ruth Fait, a history teacher by profession, was determined to record her mother-in-law’s story from the moment she heard it. “The hats

and their story have been part of our lives for decades,” Ruth says. “We knew that she had been a milliner, but she never made hats for anyone after arriving in South Africa. “These hats took her back to a past that was painful to remember, and because she wanted to forget Lithuania, she left her trade behind as well.”

Doreen was born in 1914 in Shavel, Lithuania, and her early years were marked by hardship and loss. Her father, Samuel, left for South Africa before her birth to seek out a better life for his family, but Doreen lost both her sister and mother to typhus when she was just 11.

Doreen was raised by her mother’s sister, Rocha, and Rocha’s husband, Feivel Rosenfeld,

who in 1933 planned to leave for Cuba to escape Nazi persecution.

“My mother-in-law was by then earning a living as a milliner, having been sent to ORT by her uncle when she was 18,” says Ruth. Her uncle suggested that she contact her estranged father

delicatessen in Cyrildene. Doreen cooked the supplies herself.

Although she no longer practised as a milliner, Doreen’s collection of hats became part of the lives of her children and grandchildren. “We

photos to create a special project.” The project is called “Brimming with Pride: A Milliner’s Story”, and includes the hat box, which has been encased in pewter and enhanced with photographs of Doreen. Among them is

one featuring her crafting a hat at the ORT centre in Kovno, which is why Ruth made the decision to hand the hat box over to ORT Johannesburg for display.

“My father, Morris Seeff, was very involved in ORT,” she explains. “Our whole family knew a lot about ORT, and the work it does. When we moved from Savoy to Oaklands in 2017, I decided to thin out the collection of stuff I’d accumulated over the years, and chose to take the box and hats to ORT. These hats have come a very long way, and ORT is part of their story.”

Gina’s project was also given to ORT, and is the first in what the centre hopes will eventually be a collection of items related to the organisation’s history.

Ruth believes that her



and ask to join him in South Africa.

Although she had never seen him, he sent her a ticket, and she arrived here in 1934.” Doreen soon met and married fellow Shavel resident Charles Fait, who was 13 years older than her, and had been living in South Africa since 1926.

Both lost all the relatives they had in Europe to the Holocaust, but went on to have

three children of their own

– Faye, Norman, and Ruth’s husband, Abram.

Living in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg, the couple ran their own kosher

were always using them,” says Ruth. “They came out for fancy dress parties or even to be used with Purim costumes. Although she wanted to forget the past, the hats became part of her family’s life.”

Ruth received the box in 1984 when Doreen moved out of her house in Berea, and after recording her mother-in-law’s story in detail, she kept the box in her home where her grandchildren could become acquainted with its contents and story.

It is for this reason that Gina Dave, Ruth’s granddaughter, chose to use the collection as the subject of her Roots school project earlier this year, and showcase her great-grandmother’s legacy.

Ruth gave her all the information she required, sharing what she’d gleaned from her mother-in-law before she passed away at 84 in 1999.

“I’d asked her all about herself and where she came from,” says Ruth. “I was the only one who really pushed her to tell me about her life before coming to South Africa. When Gina told me that she wanted to use it for her project, I took the hats out of storage, and we combined it with

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LIMMUD PROHIBITION A STUPENDOUS OWN GOAL

The Beth Din is fruitlessly fighting last century’s war, and the collateral damage is unaffiliated Jews in our community hungry for Jewish learning. Rather than protecting Torah Judaism, the popular open platform that is Limmud is handed on a platter to a plethora of secular and non-orthodox voices.

Limmud’s goal is to help participants “take their next step on their Jewish journey”. The Beth Din is ensuring that for the not already frum Limmud-attendee, it’s very unlikely to be a step towards a traditional Torah observant journey. You can’t win a war of ideas by running away.

The grounds for a blanket prohibition on all orthodox rabbis is puzzling, as there is no consensus across the orthodox world on this divisive matter. Our community rabbis are being dishonoured. Why should their congregations respect their rulings or pay them any heed if the *dayanim* (judges) treat them like children. No other community has done such a thing. Globally, Limmud is attended by orthodox Rabbis, haredi, non-haredi, chief and rosh yeshiva. The *dayanim* and the chief rabbi may believe this is inappropriate – and don’t have to attend – but to impose that viewpoint on all orthodox rabbis in South Africa, of diverse communities, talents, and *hashkofot* (meanings), is astounding.

– Rabbi’s assistant in orthodox shul, who requested anonymity

WHY IS THE BETH DIN SO AFRAID OF LIMMUD?

What a sad day for South African Jewry! This prohibition of rabbis attending Limmud is shameful, divisive, and creates alienation in our community.

First, does any conference involving Jewish life, Israel, and Jewish issues have to have a Beth Din hechsher for South African rabbis to participate? I can understand if they are representing the Beth Din (and the chief rabbi) or the Union of Orthodox Synagogues. But what if they are participating in their own right?

Second, why are we restricting or prohibiting the dissemination of Torah to Jewish audiences. You might not agree with some of the other speakers, even vehemently disagree, however why not use the platform to inspire and share creative Torah? I

have attended Limmud many times (even presenting at conferences) and have found it to be stimulating, inspiring, and provocative. It’s such a wonderful opportunity to give the 1 000 to 2 000 attendees some expansive and creative Torah. What’s the Beth Din and chief rabbi afraid of? You would think South African rabbis could make a call as to whether they could make a meaningful contribution or not. If they can’t do that, then maybe they shouldn’t be a rabbi.

Of course, anyone can rightfully decide whether they want to attend or not, but to be prohibited by Beth Din decree! I find such a prohibition distasteful, it smacks of an archaic policing of Torah teaching and thought control. I can imagine a handful of South African rabbis who could instil

some amazing Torah light into the Limmud programme – what a lost opportunity! Where are the voices of the community, and where are the voices of the rabbis (are they too afraid of the Beth Din and the chief, their jobs, and livelihood?) As a community, we are entitled to know what halacha is being violated?

Readers might be interested in reading the account of Rabbi Simon Jacobson, the director of the Chabad New York Meaningful Life Center (and a presenter at Sinai Indaba) of his very positive experience at London Limmud ([www.meaningfullife.com/vayechi-2500-seekers/](http://www.meaningfullife.com/vayechi-2500-seekers/)). United Kingdom Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis also felt it was in order to attend the conference. Makes you think, doesn’t it? – **C Ralph, Johannesburg**

WHERE ARE OUR RABBIS?

Having read the article in the *SA Jewish Report* on 21 June 2019 about the Beth Din ruling to reinforce the South African Rabbinical Association’s prohibition on rabbis attending Limmud, I am left feeling extremely disappointed with our leadership. It is not only the response from these official leadership bodies, but the deafening silence from our rabbis, that reverberates. I’m left assuming that their silence means consent.

Their reticence to speak out on this and other issues is probably in response to an atmosphere of coercion created by the South African Rabbinical Association, the Beth Din, and the chief rabbi. It creates a fear of publicly expressing a divergent voice, thus becoming a betrayer of the “party line”. Having a counterview ultimately leads to stigmatisation and deliberate marginalisation.

This coerced silence is a worrying sign of a fragile, insecure Jewish leadership and organisations without the values, confidence, and security to withstand public debate and difference. Is this draconian and dogmatic style of leadership what is required “to uphold halacha and Torah values”? Judaism has survived for more than 3 000 years not only because

we were able to hold onto our core beliefs and practices, but because our leaders were able to respond to the challenges of the world around them and innovate to meet the demands of the day. Ezra and Nehemiah, through the introduction of public Torah reading, enabled Judaism to exist as a diaspora religion without a centralised temple. The Rambam, by integrating Aristotelian philosophy with Torah and the writing of the *Mishneh Torah*, was able to empower the Jews of his time to resist the physical and intellectual onslaught of Christianity and Islam. The Zionist visionary, Theodor Herzl, dreamed of the Jewish State in Palestine at a time when this seemed impossible.

The contribution of these historic Jewish visionary leaders may be too much to expect from our rabbis. There is, however, much to be learned from the Limmud style of leadership. Limmud is a place where all Jewish people have a voice. There is one massive and gaping void – the absence of our appointed spiritual leaders and their diverse voices.

How can anyone lead if they are forbidden to listen and forbidden to engage? Of what value are our rabbis, if their own religious judgement and agency is taken from them? – **Nina Cohen, Johannesburg**

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ASSUMPTIONS PREMATURE, AS JEWISH COMMUNITY SURVEY NOT YET RELEASED

The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town is in the process of conducting the Jewish Community Survey of South Africa ([www.jcssa2019.co.za](http://www.jcssa2019.co.za)).

We have noted with concern recent newspaper reports referencing the release of findings from this study. No findings have been released, and no conclusive data will be available until the study is completed later this year.

The Jewish Community Survey of South Africa is a once-a-decade study of trends within communal life. The data we collect is used to aid communal planning and give an accurate portrait of the community. Its primary goal is not to estimate the current size of the South African Jewish population.

Newspaper reports may have confused the ongoing Jewish Community Survey of South Africa with a soon-to-be-completed needs analysis of the Cape Town Jewish community. Preliminary findings of this needs analysis have been shared with the leadership of the Cape Town community. These findings relate to religious, political, and demographic trends within Cape Town. This needs analysis has not sought to develop a national picture of the Jewish community, but has collected important data about Cape Town that we will release once this study is complete.

We strongly advise and caution against assumptions about current and future trends within the South African Jewish community until all data from the Jewish Community Survey of South Africa has been collected, analysed, and interpreted.

Given its importance to the Jewish community, we urge all South African Jews to complete the survey at [www.jcssa2019.co.za](http://www.jcssa2019.co.za). The fieldwork phase of the survey will close in a few weeks, so the time to participate is now.

Results from the Jewish Community Survey will be finalised by the end of 2019, and will be shared widely. – **Professor Adam Mendelsohn, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies**

IMAM’S INCENDIARY SERMON ON MIDDLE EAST OPPORTUNISTIC

We at Cape Town’s Open Mosque, South Africa’s most progressive Islamic house of worship, reject the bigoted stance of the Gatesville mosque regarding the volatile situation in the holy land.

When Abdurahman Alexander, the imam of that orthodox institution, gives a highly incendiary sermon to mark the end of the blessed month of Ramadan, his manifestly ill-informed address only entrenches prejudice and partisanship.

Instead of focusing on the venal corruption and religious tyranny of the Muslim Judicial Council, this opportunistic stalwart of the traditional Islamic clergy expediently defects attention from the growing rot that pervades the local Muslim community by highlighting the conflict in the Middle East.

A far more effective and beneficial strategy would be to urge everyone in Israel/Palestine to come to the negotiating table so that a genuinely just, equitable, and lasting peace can be secured that guarantees the legitimate rights of Jews and Arabs.

Anything that jeopardises the future of Jews in the region only exacerbates matters and encourages hardliners and extremists on both sides of the divide. – **Dr T Hargey, The Open Mosque, Cape Town**

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



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\*Cars.co.za, June 2019



Letters		
<b>RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE MAKES ME SICK</b> <p>I have taken umbrage over the past six months or so at some of the opinions in lead articles and letters by some “prominent” members of the community. Last week’s front-page headline, in particular, made me sick to the stomach, inferring that other brands of Jewishness are not good enough.</p> <p>Most of the time, most Jews express tolerance and understanding of co-religionists, be they secular, atheist, modern, or halachically observant Jews.</p> <p>Would the presence of orthodox rabbis at Limmud corrupt those rabbis, instead of them taking the opportunity to strengthen Jewish knowledge among different people? We have attended several Limmud Sunday sessions in Johannesburg, and we encountered attendees of all levels of observance, everyone exhibiting respect and the harmonious and intelligent interchange of ideas.</p> <p>Would it not be preferable for the Beth Din and its rabbis to pay more attention to the problems of divorce, those of the <i>agunot</i> (anchored women), and other matters that impose suffering and cruelty on many lives?</p> <p>Our community is rapidly diminishing. Would it not better to <i>mekariv</i> (bring someone closer to Judaism) than to create further controversy</p> <p>Isn’t discussion and interchange of ideas paramount and central to Jewish life and values? – <b>Jack Miller, Johannesburg</b></p>	<b>SHORT-SIGHTED DECISION TAKES US BACKWARD</b> <p>I am an elderly orthodox Jew. I have supported Limmud for many years, and applaud it for the work it does.</p> <p>I also admire it for the way it appeals to many young people who don’t only attend its events, but participate actively and passionately.</p> <p>I was disappointed to read in the <i>SA Jewish Report</i> (21 June) that the Beth Din has reinforced the decision made by the South African Rabbinical Association and the chief rabbi to forbid South African orthodox rabbis from teaching or lecturing there, and that they have extended the ban to the wives of rabbis.</p> <p>I want to see my rabbi as well as other distinguished South African rabbis, including our chief rabbi, at Limmud. I want to see my rabbi teach at Limmud.</p> <p>This ban is not just an own-goal for the Beth Din, it causes yet more division in our community. Our numbers are not growing. South African Jewry should be immensely proud that they are able to offer Sinai Indaba and Limmud to the community as opportunities to come together and learn.</p> <p>Short-sighted decisions by the Beth Din take our community backwards, not forward, and they force us apart rather than bring us together. – <b>Herbert Rajak, Johannesburg</b></p>	<b>BETH DIN INTOLERANCE SMACKS OF PARANOIA</b> <p>We feel the need to voice our dismay and disappointment in the Beth Din at its rigid stance on Limmud South Africa.</p> <p>At a time in which the South African Jewish community is shrinking and world attitudes to Jews and Israel are reminiscent of the events we read about in history books, it’s distressing to see such a narrow-minded, divisive, and outdated approach from our leadership.</p> <p>Their decision to impinge on their affiliated rabbis’ rights of speech and thought is another can of worms. Do they feel their rabbis are so weak and feeble minded that if they are exposed to something different, they will be “turned to the dark side”?</p> <p>Their need to control and dictate to our rabbis who they may associate with smacks of paranoia and power-mongering.</p> <p>Surely, at such times, they should</p>
	<b>JEWISH ORGANISATIONS CONFLICTED ON FREEDOM OF THOUGHT</b> <p>The Jewish world is strange, holding two conflicting views on the same subject.</p> <p>The South African Zionist Federation has asked alumni to submit their objections to the University of Cape Town against the proposed boycott of Israeli universities and academics in order to protect freedom of thought and open discussion.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, the South African Rabbinical Association, and the Beth Din have prohibited orthodox rabbis from participating in Limmud’s activities which encompass - guess what - advancing freedom of thought and open discussion.</p> <p>Which view do you support? – <b>David Woolf, Johannesburg</b></p>	<b>LIMMUD ABOUT STRENGTHENING JEWISH TIES, NOT WEAKENING THEM</b> <p>The weekend I spend at Limmud is the highlight of my Jewish year. Contrary to the views expressed in last week’s <i>SA Jewish Report</i> (21 June), this is not a time when I am vulnerable to weakening my links to orthodox Judaism, but actually when those bonds are strongest.</p> <p>The thrill and adventure of having a community of Jews celebrate their diversity is unparalleled by anything else on the Jewish calendar. The most attended sessions involve discussions of politics, current affairs, art, literature, culture, and history, not, as is suggested by the Beth Din, an evangelical onslaught on orthodox Judaism.</p> <p>At Limmud, I am united in my Jewishness</p>

20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Absa Jewish achiever awards

2019

# ABSA BUSINESS ICON AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has achieved iconic status within the business community.

Nominations close at 17:00 on 14 July 2019

Send nominations to [nominations@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:nominations@sajewishreport.co.za)

Jewish Report

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## RABBINATE’S HYPOCRISY INDICATES ULTERIOR MOTIVE FOR LIMMUD BAN

I have just finished reading the *SA Jewish Report* front-page article (21 June 2019) about Limmud with much dismay. To quote, “the Beth Din’s mandate is to uphold halacha and Torah values within the community”.

Later, I read that Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis regularly attends Limmud in England. Therefore, I must conclude that the esteemed Chief Rabbi Mirvis and the British rabbinate do not have a mandate to “maintain Torah values and halacha in the community”. Obviously, that’s nonsense. Therefore, I must come to the reasonable conclusion that our rabbinate has some other reason to boycott Limmud.

I ask our rabbinate to give reasons for not supporting Limmud, and not issue a pompous statement which says nothing. Perhaps they think only rabbonim can teach Jewish matters.

The worst aspect of this matter comes last. The Beth Din is considering imposing a *psak* on the issue (a halachic ruling that would make this policy official Jewish law). This would be an infamous first in the Jewish world. – **Paul Rome, Johannesburg**

## RABBINICAL ASSOCIATION’S INTOLERANCE A DISGRACE

I feel disgusted at the South African Rabbinical Association’s stance on Limmud.

I have been going to Limmud since its inception. The diversity of its lectures and the variety of its presenters make it difficult to choose from this spectacular event.

It is the highlight of the calendar year, and it brings the Jewish community together regardless of their beliefs.

Anne Harris, the wife of the late Rabbi Cyril Harris, has attended and presented at Limmud. Overseas rabbis attend and present at Limmud worldwide.

Non-Jewish teachers are employed at Jewish schools. Do they believe in the halacha and Torah law?

I can imagine how uncomfortable a non-Jewish person must feel after reading that article. It’s an absolute disgrace, and creates divisiveness.

The association’s intolerance for others breeds anti-Semitism.

The least it could do is apologise to Limmud, and not discourage congregants from attending.

Its members are the poorer for not engaging in this enriching experience. – **Ruth Freedman, Johannesburg**

Sunday (30 June)

- Second Innings hosts pianist Malcolm Wood, in *More Marvellous Music by Malcolm*. Time: 09:45 for tea, 10:30 for performer. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, second floor, Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R20 Second Innings members; R40 visitors (includes tea/coffee and refreshments). Contact: 011 483 7425.

Thursday (4 July)

- The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre opens the participatory exhibition, *My Congo, My Story*, exploring the personal stories of citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who fled the violence of war in their homeland. Time: 18:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Free admission, donations welcome. RSVP to [dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za](mailto:dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za) or 011 640 3100.

- Hebrew speakers meet at 10:30. Venue: Beyachad second floor, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.
- Learn Yiddish every Thursday with Tamar Olswang and the Union of Jewish Women. Time: 10:00 to 11:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Cost: R100 per person, R80 for pensioners and UJW members. Includes tea/coffee and refreshments. Contact: 011 648 1053.
- Join the Women’s International Zionist Organisation 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.

WHAT’S ON



## Pine Street wins again



The Pine Street Shul quiz team was victorious yet again on 19 June, this time beating 20 teams of about 180 people at the Bnei Akiva fundraising quiz at Waverley Shul Hall.

The team is made up of a group of old friends and work colleagues who have played together for a few years. It has won a number of other Jewish quizzes, such as the recent Sandton Sinai quiz.

## Torah Academy makes smart moves



Torah Academy Primary School pupils Mushka Feinblum, Yael Naparstek, and Shayna Badler play chess against King David Victory Park Primary at home. The pupils fared well in their recent match against the strongest Jewish school in chess in Johannesburg, scoring 2-2 for senior girls; 2-4 for senior boys; and 2-2 for junior boys.

## Humanitarians shine at Absa Jewish Achiever Awards

When Freedom Under Law's (FUL's) Nicole Fritz accepted the Humanitarian Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards last year, she said defending democracy often took just a few committed individuals.

“Many are surprised to learn that Freedom Under Law is a very, very small organisation. It has a single employee - that's me,” she quipped on accepting the award on behalf of the organisation.

Yet, the fact that FUL and the Helen Suzman Foundation (HSF) were jointly recognised for their accomplishments proves that even the small are capable of punching well above their weight when it comes to fighting the good fight.

Their receipt of the award last year is proof of the impact they have made in fighting for the administration of justice in our country.

“We are here to promote our constitutional democracy, defend the Bill of Rights, and hold those in power accountable,” Fritz declared.

FUL Chairperson Johann Kriegler, a retired Constitutional Court judge and life-long human-rights lawyer, as well as Francis Antonie, the HSF's executive director, joined the ranks of an esteemed cadre of winners.

In jointly accepting the award, Antonie paid tribute to the powerful woman whose legacy his organisation upholds.

“We can give thanks for Helen's life, especially the values she brought to public life, which we endeavour to honour in our work,” he declared.

A number of household names have been honoured at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards for their humanitarian work.

These include former Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, a remarkable public servant determined to battle corruption. He is currently minister of public enterprises, and is involved in evaluating the damage wreaked by state capture, and implementing a lasting solution for Eskom.

Gordhan clearly believes that anyone can make an enormous difference to the lives of others. “[Corruption and state capture] are not issues for politicians, but issues for people,” he said when accepting the award in 2017.

“The Jewish community is extremely resourceful, with great skills, talent, and entrepreneurs, some of whom are here today. It has produced fascinating freedom fighters from whom my generation learnt some of their politics and principles.

“We have to find bridges for [our differences], and that requires people of foresight... This community has produced illustrious people who've contributed to the Freedom Charter, which stands as a testament to real imagination, foresight, but above all, humanity.”

Other previous winners are clearly of the same calibre as Gordhan, including human rights lawyer and icon, George Bizos; Thuli Madonsela, whose reports into governance changed the face of South African politics; and master educator Professor Jonathan Jansen.

There is certainly no shortage of people who, like Madonsela, Gordhan, and Bizos, contribute to the betterment of our lives on a daily basis.

Email your nominations for this and other awards to [nominations@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:nominations@sajewishreport.co.za)

## Barmitzvah boy inspires sports fund for needy kids

For a kid who loves sport, there's nothing quite like the feeling of a brand new English willow cricket bat, a World Cup-branded soccer ball, or new boots. However, many children never get to have that “brand-new” feeling.

Now, a young boy has challenged the community to donate to a sports fund to meet that need.

The idea came from a young boy in the community, who while playing for his club, began to notice the people around him who never had that “brand-new feeling”. His eye was drawn to their scuffed, second-hand shoes, and tattered kits, and his heart was filled with resolve. At his Barmitzvah, this young boy stood up and pledged to donate a portion of his gift money to the chev so that other Jewish children could also enjoy the best of the best, and feel like a champion on

and off the field.

The boy, who wants to remain anonymous, also challenged his friends – and all the barmy boys and batti girls around Joburg – to spread the *simcha* by donating to the chev's sports fund.

The fund, run by the Chevrah Kadisha, will primarily help Jewish children to be able to afford sporting equipment, though a percentage of funds raised will go to children outside of the community.

The campaign will target Barmitzvah and Batmitzvahs specifically as it's something kids can relate to, and a great charitable cause for a *simcha*, says Taryn Hatzkilson, group marketing manager at the chev. Hatzkilson says the campaign has also been advertised on social media, through posters around the community, and via press releases and advertising in school and shul newsletters.



**The South African Board of Jewish Education**  
invites applications for the role of:

**Head, King David Primary School, Victory Park**

This co-educational ISASA affiliated Primary School, situated in Victory Park, Johannesburg offers education from Grade 1 to Grade 7. The school has strong traditions, is community focused and has a high success rate across academics, sport and arts and culture. The opportunity exists for an Educator to be appointed as Head of this accomplished Primary School which has over 300 pupils and 40 educators.

The Head will report to the General Director and Board and will assume responsibility for the leadership, providing the drive and direction for the continual betterment of the school, as well as the day-to-day functioning of the Primary School.

Reporting to this role will be the Deputy Head and Subject Heads.

**Specific qualities, knowledge and skills of the successful candidate will include:**

- \* A proven track record with a minimum of 3-5 years' experience in a leadership role in a Primary School, preferably an independent school
- \* A respect for and support of the Jewish and Zionist ethos of the school and a commitment to the South African Jewish community
- \* Appropriate academic and professional qualifications and experience
- \* Strong leadership and communication skills coupled with effective administrative and organisational skills
- \* A progressive educational philosophy, aligned with current trends
- \* A commitment to the maintenance and enhancement of the schools teaching excellence
- \* Exposure to international benchmarking and best practice

Please send your application in confidence to:  
[megan.frankel@amropwoodburnmann.co.za](mailto:megan.frankel@amropwoodburnmann.co.za)

**Closing date for applications: 19 July 2019**  
**The SABJE reserves the right not to make an appointment**  
**Only shortlisted candidates will be interviewed**

*Amrop Woodburn Mann is a leading executive search and leadership assessment consultancy. For further information, please visit our website: [www.amropwoodburnmann.co.za](http://www.amropwoodburnmann.co.za)*





**The South African Board of Jewish Education**  
invites applications for the role of:

**Financial Director**

The Financial Director is responsible for the strategic and operational financial management of the organisation, including establishing and maintaining the organisation's financial strategy and execution, and driving efficiencies to ensure the financial sustainability and stability of the organisation.

**Main duties and responsibilities include:**

- \* Drive the financial planning, performance, investment decision making and financial risk management of the organisation
- \* Lead and supervise all accounting and finance personnel and oversee all audit and internal control environments
- \* Coordinate, prepare and present an annual budget for approval to the Board
- \* Prepare monthly financial reports, interim financial statements and reports to present forecasts, trends, risks, etc. to the Board or other stakeholders
- \* Ensure awareness and adherence to financial laws, regulations and guidelines
- \* Management and implementation

of the subsidy programme including interviews, and associated decisions, meeting, discussions

- \* Contractual oversight of external companies, suppliers, vendors, etc.
- \* Financial oversight and governance of the King David Schools Foundation

**Specific qualities, knowledge and skills of the successful candidate will include:**

- \* A registered Chartered Accountant with a proven track record as Financial Director and/or a similar role with a minimum of 8-10 years' experience
- \* In-depth knowledge of financial and general data analysis, forecasting, accounting principles, laws and best practices
- \* An analytical mind with strategic ability
- \* interpersonal and communication skills

Please send your application in confidence to:  
[kurt.alpers@amropwoodburnmann.co.za](mailto:kurt.alpers@amropwoodburnmann.co.za)

**Closing date for applications: 19 July 2019**  
**The SABJE reserves the right not to make an appointment**  
**Only shortlisted candidates will be interviewed**

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