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‘I can’t hold on any longer’, wrote Adam Seef

NICOLA MILTZ

“I have finally reached rock bottom. I feel so alone no matter how many people I am surrounded by and cared for by.”

The late Adam Seef wrote these words to his beloved family shortly before ending his life last week in Israel while on holiday with his best friends. He had just turned 19, and had the world at his feet.

Tall, dark, and handsome, this popular first-year medical student at the University of the Witwatersrand was, according to close family and friends, a perfectionist with a troubled soul, struggling with identity, anxiety, and depression.

Grief and shock spread like shrapnel as the news of his untimely passing detonated throughout Israel and the diaspora. Spiritual leaders on tour with Adam’s friends have conducted prayer sessions in his memory, including at the Kotel in Jerusalem, and at Auschwitz in Poland.

Many friends ended their holidays, rushing back to South Africa to attend his funeral. Traumatized teenagers and others on the Ohrsom Student tour who stayed behind have received counselling.

Behind the scenes, communal organisations and authorities in both countries moved mountains to get Adam home so he could be laid to rest.

In a bid to quell the disrespectful rumours that instantly flooded social media, the distraught family were advised to post a message on Facebook.

In it, they alluded to the heartfelt letter that their desperately unhappy, much-loved son had left them to explain why he couldn’t go on any longer.

Their post read, “He explained that he was struggling with his place in the world, his transition into adulthood, his identity, and his sexuality.”

The post went viral, and has sparked international conversations on mental health, societal norms, and sexual identity. It has also ignited blogs on well-known news sites, Twitter posts by leading journalists, and newspaper articles.

Addressing his beloved parents,

Jodi and Justin, and his sister, Megan, who he adored, as well as his doting grandmother, Sandra Seef, Adam wrote, “Ending my life is no one’s fault but my own. I am so sorry if my death may greatly affect many people, but no one will ever understand what it’s like living with a depression so great as this. People can say what they want, but I seriously cannot bear living another second like this.”

Shattered by grief, his parents said, “Our beautiful boy was sensitive, kind-hearted, and caring. He battled with low self-esteem, a warped self-image, and anxiety, and this made him miserable. To the world, Adam was confident, fun, and happy, but at home, Adam was troubled, and would often lash out and take out his inner pain on us.”



Adam with his dog,
Casanova on the day of
his barmitzvah

Adam came into the world suffering from double pneumonia. He spent the first eleven days of his life in the intensive-care unit at the Sandton Clinic in Johannesburg clinging to life.

“He always fought so hard to survive and fit in. It must have been exhausting,” said his mother.

From an early age, Adam suffered from anxiety, and hated being alone, especially at night. He had different interests to his soccer-playing peers, and often felt isolated on the school playground.

Justin bought his son a Saint Bernard after researching the best

animal for children with anxiety, this despite living in a comfortable, yet modest-sized townhouse.

“Casanova was Adam’s boy, he slept in his room, and barely left Adam’s side, offering him comfort,” said Justin.

Sadly, Casanova was put to sleep three weeks ago. “I think Cas knew Adam was struggling, and he knew that he had done

all he could for him,” said Jodi. “Adam’s sense of self-worth improved in high school,” she said. He found new interests, and shone at everything he did including drama and academics. High school became his happy place, said his friends.

He excelled academically, achieving brilliant results. He delved into copious novels, loved movies and roller coasters, and wanted to be a filmmaker, instead opting for medicine. He recently wrote his idea of a *Grey’s Anatomy* script, including student friends as members of the cast.



Adam Seef at his matric dance

But he found the transition to university challenging. Although he excelled in his first semester, Adam grew miserable.

At the packed funeral earlier this week, Rabbi Levi Avtzon, the associate rabbi at Linksfield Shul, told mourners that in his letter, Adam had shared the story of a whole different Adam.

“In his own mind, Adam Seef was never good enough. Despite the mountains of love that surrounded him, he lived in a valley of self-hate and darkness.”

Adam “believed that death was easier than admitting to himself and to the world: I am different. I don’t fit the mould”, Avtzon said.

His cousin, Jamey Wolpe, said, “Adam and I have grown up together. He was like my brother. His life’s mission was to make people smile and feel good, even though he was going through so much pain.”

Two of his best friends and roommates at the hotel in Eilat, Israel, said they were shocked and

saddened.

“I knew Adam had insecurities and anxiety,” Mikey Goldman said. “I didn’t know he was depressed. I feel sad that he couldn’t express the pain he was going through. He was an awesome friend, we had a lot of fun together, and made many happy memories.”

Said Adam Chilewitz, “Seef was passionate about his hobbies and his friends. He spoke eagerly about the things he enjoyed, be it pop culture or thrill-seeking. I would never have imagined that someone who is able to speak with such excitement in their voice could be depressed. He was always the life of the party.”

He said Adam was one of the funniest people he knew, and had made people “cry with laughter”.

Lorraine Srage, the principal of King David High School Linksfield, told the *SA Jewish Report* that Adam was an “exemplary student” who “embodied the true values of a mensch”.

“His perfectionism, and his quest to make the world a better place through outreach, has left an indelible place in our hearts,” she said.

Rabbi Avtzon said children must know that they are loved

unconditionally. “We won’t love them less no matter what secrets they hide, and no matter what they discover about themselves in the process of maturing and growing up.”

Adam’s death, the rabbi said, should deepen our understanding of mental illness, and “must remind us to be more understanding of boys and girls who are struggling with their sexuality. We must reach out with love to everyone in the community.”

In a birthday message to her son a few weeks ago, Jodi told Adam how proud she was of him and his achievements, and said she could not wait to watch how his life unfolded.

“Now our hope is that Adam’s life will be celebrated, that it will create awareness and compassion regarding mental health, and foster a world where people are accepted for who and what they are,” she said.

Adam ended his letter by saying, “Each and every one of you has helped me to live a meaningful and joyous life, and know that I’m happier now in death.”

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Great Park Shul robbed

The Great Park Shul in Houghton Estate, Johannesburg, was robbed in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

The shul security guard was held at gunpoint at about 03:00, and tied up by intruders, who then broke into the office and took laptops and petty cash. They did not enter the shul, and no one was hurt in the incident.

The break in was confirmed by the shul’s rabbi, Dovid Hazdan.

“CSO [the Community Security Organisation] is investigating how this happened,” said Jevon Greenblatt, the head of the CSO in Gauteng. “At no stage were lives of community members at risk. Usually these criminals target institutions when they are empty.”

This is not the first time a place of worship has been targeted by thieves in South Africa. Congregants at two churches in the Western Cape were robbed at gunpoint in November last year. A church in Durban was robbed in December 2015.

Jews ‘own worst enemies’

Academy Award winner Richard Dreyfuss says he is more concerned about “Jews not behaving like Jews” than he is about the global rise in anti-Semitism.

Dreyfuss told the *Hollywood Reporter* ahead of the release of his new movie, *Astronaut*, that Jews “sound very much



like our own worst enemies in trying to protect Zionism, and protect our own reputation. We really do need to explore what it means to be Jewish.”

Dreyfuss appeared to criticise Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, saying that “most Jews are willing to celebrate their own history of being oppressed, and then they’ll get up and oppress other people. I don’t want Jews to do that.”

The actor says he is not what he calls a “temple Jew”, but is “very proud of being Jewish, and very proud of being a cultural Jew”. (JTA)

Holocaust survivors get more aid

The spouse of a Holocaust survivor will continue to receive a monthly pension for nine months after the survivor’s death under a new deal with the German government announced on Monday.

The agreements negotiated by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany also provide for a \$50 million (R705 million) increase in funding for social-welfare services for survivors, bringing the total for 2020 funded by Germany to more than \$587 million (R8.2 billion). Also, monthly pensions will increase by 46% from now until 1 January to about \$650 (R9 179) a month.

For the first time, righteous gentiles – non-Jews recognised by Yad Vashem for saving Jews during the Holocaust – will receive a monthly pension from the German government. (JTA)

Kloss dishes the Josh on Judaism

Supermodel Karlie Kloss said she did not take her conversion to Judaism lightly, and she had come out of the experience a stronger person.

“Changing part of who you are for someone else can be seen as weak,” she told *British Vogue*. “But, if you’ve been through what I’ve experienced, it requires you to

Torah Thought

Who needs rabbis anyway?

A small group of daring though deeply spiritual people gathered in the Sinai desert 3 330 years ago with a bold proposition: to create a framework wherein man and G-d engage directly without any space or need for further human intervention – “we are all holy in the eyes of G-d”.

No more would one man need to rely on another to receive from and develop – or pray to and influence – the will of the creator. This truly egalitarian approach would – they believed – transform the dynamic of the human/divine experience into one where truly “all men are created equal”.

But at the heart of this rebellion of Korach, as we read in this week’s parsha, was a deeply flawed error.

Since the moment G-d called Moshe to Mount Sinai “so that the people will hear me speak to you, and will believe in you forever” the Jewish nation has defined Moshe as the supreme communicator of the word of G-d, and thereafter, as

the Zohar says, the “Moshe of every generation”. Whether it was the *tefilah* (prayer) he offered, or the Torah he received, Moshe’s eternally central role in our relationship with G-d is indisputable.

So, while Korach and his family were steeped in the spiritual rites of their Levite tribe, their desire to break down this divine order (which they believed was Moshe’s own self-inflated importance) ended in tragic failure.

But the spirit of his cause didn’t end with him. The persistent myth that asking others to pray for us is somehow “unJewish” couldn’t be further from the truth. (Perhaps the influence of other faiths has seeped into our own consciousness, distorting our own heritage.)

When people question me as a Chabad rabbi in South Africa on the source for asking the Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson) to pray for me – and my encouragement of others to do so as well – I refer them to the “secret

be anything but weak. It requires you to be stronger, self-loving, and resilient. I really didn’t take this lightly.”

Kloss, 26, the host of *Project Runway*, married Josh Kushner, 34, the founder and managing partner of the investment firm Thrive Capital, and the brother of White House senior adviser Jared Kushner, in October in a Jewish ceremony in upstate New York with fewer than 80 guests.

The couple dated for seven years before marrying. (JTA)

Trolls torpedo Adidas promotion

Anti-Semitic trolls forced Adidas to scrap a social-media promotion for a new jersey made for the London soccer team, Arsenal.

The sportswear company allowed fans to put their Twitter handles on the back of a virtual jersey, and tweet an image of it. Some used it to put handle names such as “@GasAllJewss” into the tool. Hashtags such as “#InnocentHitler” also were tweeted on some of the virtual jerseys.

Adidas UK took down the tweets, and eventually the entire promotion on Tuesday.

“As part of our partnership launch with Arsenal, we have been made aware of the abuse of a Twitter personalisation mechanic created to allow excited fans to get their name on the back of the new jersey,” an Adidas spokesman told the *Guardian*. “Due to a small minority creating offensive versions of this, we have immediately turned off the functionality, and the Twitter team will be investigating.”

Arsenal is one of London’s most popular teams. Its fans were the subject of anti-Semitic abuse during a game against Spanish squad Valencia on Holocaust Remembrance Day in May. (JTA)

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:11	18:03	Johannesburg
17:32	18:27	Cape Town
16:51	17:45	Durban
17:12	18:05	Bloemfontein
17:03	17:58	Port Elizabeth
16:56	17:51	East London



Rabbi Asher Deren, Chabad of the West Coast – Cape Town

handbook of Chabad hasidim”. It’s called the Chumash. There, the Torah is replete with examples of the unique power of Moshe’s prayer (as well as of other *tzaddikim* (spiritual leaders) on behalf of the Jewish people. And yes, like in last week’s parsha, with Calev praying at Chevron, even after their passing through, asking for their prayers at their resting place.

This Shabbat, 6 July, is the 25th *yahrzeit* (anniversary) of the Rebbe, and with G-d’s help, I hope to spend this day, on your behalf, at the Rebbe’s resting place in New York City asking that he pray for me, for you, and for South Africa, a country in which he uniquely invested great blessing and promise.

This is the Jewish way of living, and I’m proud to be living it, right here in South Africa.

South African

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Alleged ponzi scheme shocks community

TALI FEINBERG

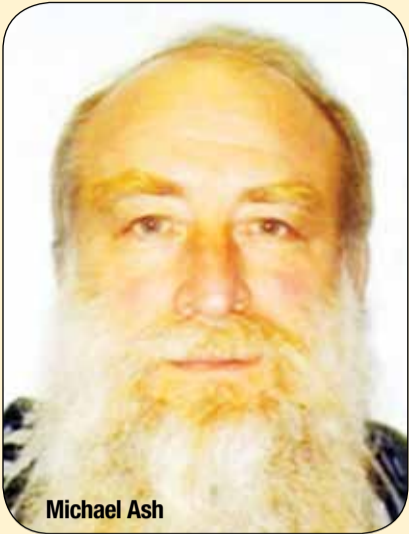
The South African Jewish community last week was shocked by allegations of a yet another fraudulent investment scheme targeting community members, and run by one of our own.

This time, Johannesburg accountant Michael David Ash allegedly scammed community members out of at least R60 million, and then fled to Israel. A case of fraud was opened this week at the Sandringham Police Station on behalf of one of the victims.

The alleged victim is Andi Colley, and it appears there were more. On 7 February 2019, a court order in the High Court of South Africa Gauteng Division demanded that Ash pay back R2.5 million to an ex-South African man and his family now living in Australia.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on condition of anonymity, the Australian man emphasised that he had not invested with Ash. Rather, Ash had been his family accountant for 30 years when he asked him to transfer inheritance funds for the family. The man’s brother was dying, and wanted his affairs to be in order.

The man claims the transfer never happened. About 350 emails and more than two years later, the brother has died, and his family has been left with nothing. The Australian man has suffered two heart attacks from stress.



Michael Ash

In spite of the court order, he doesn’t think his family will ever see the money again. “Trust no one when it comes to money,” he said.

Colley told the *SA Jewish Report* that five years ago, after returning to live in South Africa, she was introduced to Ash by a family member. She trusted him and invested a total of R2 million over five years. She said she believed him to be a “pious man”, not least of all because “his own family had invested with him”.

“I was paid interest monthly, but it stopped last August. I couldn’t get a clear answer as to why, but was then told I was being paid my own money, and only half was left.

“I was asked to accept an offer to be given this half back, and to sign a non-disclosure agreement that would implicate me in the crime. I

chose not to do this, and contacted Chad Thomas of IRS Forensic Investigations last September. We have been working on [the case] since then. I was told to wait to receive a payout, but eventually realised it would never be made. That’s when I laid criminal charges.”

Lawyer David Swartz was mandated by Ash to try to recover money for creditors, and managed to raise R2.5 million. “We made it clear that I do not and would not act in any proceedings, civil or criminal, and my mandate was limited as above,” he said.

“I had arranged a meeting for creditors for 5 July, but this was postponed solely as a result of the criminal charges laid, followed by the publication of Mr Ash’s picture on social media with content that matched the content of an article published in *The Star*. Now that the matter is under investigation, it is our view that an informal process for purpose of recoveries is doomed to fail, and we are considering this and our position.”

Thomas told the *SA Jewish Report* the case had “all the trademarks of an affinity ponzi scheme. We estimate that the total losses in this particular scam currently run in the tens of millions



of rands.

“An affinity fraud targets a specific community, generally a religious community, and can take the form of a ponzi scheme. IRS has noted a marked increase in ponzi schemes targeting specific communities throughout South Africa in recent months,” said Thomas, who also has a programme on *ChaiFM*.

“These schemes take multiple guises, from investment schemes, to forex schemes, to crypto currency schemes. People need to ensure that the people with whom they invest are registered with the Financial Sector Conduct Authority (FSCA), previously



Andi Colley

known as the Financial Services Board or FSB,” he said.

A prominent Johannesburg lawyer advised that the term “ponzi scheme” in the story was being used colloquially to describe all manner of embezzlement schemes.

Thomas said IRS had met Ash on two occasions to give him the fundamental right of *audi alterma partem* (listen to the other side). “Ash’s explanation as to how our client’s funds were invested changed several times, leading us to believe that it was a ponzi scheme. Once more members of the community came forward, we realised that this could in actual fact be an affinity scam. Follow up meetings were held with Ash’s representatives.

“Our client, Ms Colley, has not

Continued on page 18>>

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Independent country communities’ organisation launched

TALI FEINBERG

The trustees of country communities and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) met last Sunday to plot the way forward following the board’s announcement at the end of last year that it would be closing down its country communities department at the end of 2019. The SAJBD also said it would end the tenure of country communities rabbi Moshe Silberhaft.

The announcement led to much anger and confusion, as South African Jews across the country and the globe wondered who would care for the Jews, cemeteries, and shuls scattered across rural South Africa.

In a historic move, those at the meeting decided that an independent organisation would be launched, run, managed, and funded by the country communities themselves. It is to be called the Small Communities Association (SCA). Rabbi Silberhaft will be its executive director, and Barney Horwitz its chairperson.

“I’m delighted that despite the upheaval and uncertainty of the past 18 months, a resolution has been found. For every person at that meeting, the sole purpose was to find a workable way forward,” Silberhaft said.

“They have committed to the fact that no cemetery or country community will be abandoned. I’m pleased that the trustees and the board recognise and value the importance of country community activities. I’m excited to bring my 26 years of experience and passion to this new organisation,” he said.

On the whole, his work will continue as before, but might include less travel. “The country communities’ hotline number remains the same, and we are just a call away.” Silberhaft confirmed that he would be able to conduct weddings, brit milahs, Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, and funerals in country communities just as he had always done.

He said the decision to join the new organisation would be up to the trustees of each country community. It will be a Section

18A public benefit organisation, and a non-profit. Donors will receive tax certificates.

“The SAJBD and Rabbi Silberhaft have been working with Barney Horwitz, a long-serving leader of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation in Kimberley, to arrive at a proposed restructure that meets the needs of all stakeholders,” said SAJBD National Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev.

“The meeting was called to present the proposal to the trustees of the various country communities for their input and in-principle support. All trustees were invited to attend, although some were unable to do so.

and spiritual leader to the AJC, which represents the small, geographically isolated Jewish communities in such countries.

Zagnoev said that the trustees of current country communities’ trusts would continue to safeguard the assets of defunct communities. “To the extent permitted by the relevant trust deeds, all income derived from these trusts will provide the main source of funds for the SCA.”

While the new body will be independent of the SAJBD, it will have a representative on the board’s national executive council. The SAJBD will continue to address any instances of anti-

from the trusts, the intention is that such income will be re-allocated to the new independent entity. This will need the approval of the trustees of the trusts concerned.”

Regarding Silberhaft, Zagnoev said, “In terms of the original agreement, Rabbi Silberhaft will remain employed by the board until the end of the year. Thereafter, it is envisaged that he will work for the independent organisation. This will, however, be the decision of the committee of the independent organisation.”

While certain community members allege that money was borrowed from country

active involvement of country communities in the running of the new entity will invest it with a great deal of energy. We also believe that it provides a more sustainable long-term solution for dealing with country communities, and for smaller outlying communities.”

SCA Chairperson Horwitz said, “As a member of one of the oldest country communities, I have a passion for ensuring that the rich legacy of Jewish communities throughout South Africa be preserved, and that Jews, no matter their affiliation or level of observance, be cared for. For me, it is an honour to have

Street sign urges Joburgers to be kinder

An imposing and colourful sign calling on passers-by to “Be Kind” was erected this week on the busy intersection of Oxford and Bolton Road in Rosebank.

This sign – sponsored by Liberty Life – is part of Chabad House Johannesburg’s programme to get Johannesburg and the world at large to increase acts of goodness and kindness.

“The sign not only reminds people every day to be kinder to one another, it also puts a smile on people’s faces, thus creating a happier city,” says Rabbi David Masinter, the director of Chabad House.

It went up this week because this Shabbat (3 Tamuz) marks the 25th *yahrzeit* (anniversary) of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who inspired the entire programme.

Masinter says the inspiration came from the Rebbe’s words to a CNN reporter many years ago, when he was asked what his message was to the world. He said, “Moshiach is ready to come. All that is needed from our side is to increase acts of goodness and kindness.”



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

“It unanimously supported the proposal, and agreed that the practical details should now be worked out. The national executive council of the SAJBD, which met immediately after the meeting, formally ratified the decision, paving the way for it to go ahead.”

In the event that the African Jewish Congress (AJC) elects to join the SCA, these services will also be provided to Jewish communities in affiliated Southern African countries, which include Zimbabwe and Namibia. Silberhaft currently also serves as chief executive

Semitism or related violations of Jewish civil and religious rights that arise in country areas.

He said that the capital in the country communities’ trusts was controlled by the trustees of the various individual trust funds, set up over the years for specific country communities that have become defunct, and could not be transferred elsewhere.

“The income earned by the trusts will continue to be used for the purposes specified by the various trust deeds. To the extent that the country communities department of the SAJBD has been allocated some of the income

community trusts, and not returned, Zagnoev emphasised that “this is not true”. He asked the concerned people to contact the board directly “so that we can deal with this unfounded allegation”.

Zagnoev said the board would “welcome input from anyone in the community on the proposed restructure” and would “be engaging actively with all country communities’ trustees to get any further input to obtain their support”.

“We are very pleased with how the restructure has progressed to date. In our view, the

participated in the design of the SCA, and to be an active partner in its future success”.

Silberhaft said he would like to thank every person who had been vocal, and had seen the importance of the country communities department, which had run successfully for the past 70 years.

“I’m glad I can continue to fulfil my life’s dream of celebrating *yiddishkeit* (Jewish customs and practices] wherever Jews are found. I’m here as I always was, offering an uncompromised service to the country communities of South Africa.”

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JORDAN MOSHE

“When it is slaughtered, production is slower, and throughput is less because of kashrut standards. The stunning done afterwards changes PH levels, and the colour of the meat, even texture. Suppliers may therefore be unable to sell those hindquarters to companies who have certain standards.

Goldstein said that the issue was high on the department's agenda, and it wanted to see the cost reabsorbed correctly in the year ahead.

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Chief Rabbi addresses the Limmud issues

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



I would like to take this opportunity to share my thoughts and some important context to the decision taken by South African rabbis more than ten years ago not to speak at Limmud. It was a very difficult decision to make then, and it remains difficult for us today.

It is difficult, and was taken with great pain, for two reasons. As rabbis, our instinct is to seize every opportunity to reach more and more people. How could we turn down this opportunity to connect to our community? Furthermore, our community has a pervasive ethos of inclusivity and tolerance, of unity and co-operation, and a decision like this seems to be a departure from these defining values.

Before I explain the reason behind our decision not to speak, I would also like to clarify that we have never, over all these years, attacked Limmud in public, nor engaged in a disrespectful way. All we have done is chosen not to use it as an educational platform for our own work of promoting Torah Judaism.

I would like to make a plea that the communal debate about Limmud be conducted in a spirit of respect and love. What is so unique and special about the South African Jewish community is the fact that we view each other as brothers and sisters, as part of one family. Families can disagree. It's perfectly fine for brothers and sisters to disagree with one another, but only in a spirit of respect and love.

Limmud is based on a particular philosophy of Judaism which is called pluralism. Pluralism is a philosophy that says that Judaism as a religion is whatever you wish it to be, and that any approach to the beliefs and practices of Judaism is equally valid. Some may say that Limmud is not pluralistic but neutral, a completely neutral space for everyone to express their viewpoint without judgement or prejudice. But the truth is that there is no such thing as a neutral space. The very decision of neutrality is a decision in itself, and it is a decision rooted in a philosophy of Jewish religious pluralism. This has been clear from the programming throughout the years. It was clearly expressed by the Limmud leadership to the Beth Din at its recent meeting, where it was explained that even speakers and content rooted in atheism or a denial of the divine origin of the Torah would be acceptable in the Limmud context.

After much debate and introspection, we feel that this philosophy of pluralism is a clear and definite position that Limmud has taken, and that it is, as such, not a neutral platform.

We understand that Limmud is not neutral in the context of other decisions that it has unilaterally taken.

For example, Limmud last year made it clear that it would not have a speaker who supported the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement at its conference. This is a clear policy decision. There are Jews who are BDS supporters, who maintain that their support for BDS is an expression of Zionism, and that they support the boycott of Israel in order to prod Israel to change and evolve as an ethical and democratic state. In so doing, they believe that they are saving Israel from itself. Yet, Limmud took a strong view, quite rightly in my opinion, that BDS had no space on its stage. Limmud took a similar view regarding Holocaust denial – ensuring there is no place on its stage to entertain these ludicrous theories.

We respect and support these stands and principles. These are lines in the sand. But as rabbis and rebbetzins, whose mandate and calling is to teach and promote Torah Judaism, as it has been expressed, practiced, and protected by our people for thousands of



years, we have our own lines in the sand. We believe that G-d exists. That is not negotiable. We believe that the Torah was given to us by Him. That is not negotiable. We believe that it is applicable and relevant to all times, in all places, and to all people, that its *mitzvot* are eternally binding. These are not negotiable.

For us, these lines in the sand are as strong as those of anti-Zionism or Holocaust denial. And, they are the reason we have decided not to speak on the Limmud stage. To speak under the banner and on the platform of Limmud would be to endorse and support pluralism, which we just cannot do in good conscience.

To reiterate, it's very painful for us. We see a lost opportunity to share and engage with our community. We also hate any division that our decision has caused in our incredibly cohesive community. But we do so because these issues strike at the very core of what we see as the Jewish purpose and role in this world. We believe that Torah Judaism is the only formula for a vibrant future for the South African Jewish community. We believe that Jewish history has shown that pluralism ultimately weakens Jewish identity, practice, and continuity.

Friends, I know this decision may be hard on some to understand and accept, but let's take a moment to step back, and look at the big picture. As the rabbis and rebbetzins of our community, we have dedicated our lives to teaching, reaching, caring for, supporting, inspiring, and connecting to our community. We do this through thousands of interactions reaching tens of thousands of people, throughout the year. We engage on every platform imaginable: shuls, schools, university campuses, shiurim at offices, coffee shops and in homes, at weddings, Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, funerals and shiva houses, on radio, television, social media, and in print. Our decision not to take this stage has been a difficult one, but please don't let it define us. We remain dedicated to continue to serve, reach, and connect with you wherever we can.

A word needs to be said about our shuls in particular. Our shuls are among the most welcoming and inclusive in the world. Every Jew in our community is welcome, no matter who they are, where they come from, whether they keep Shabbos or they don't, whether they are married in the faith or not, whether they can read Hebrew or not, whether they practice *mitzvot* (commandments) or not, no matter who they are, no matter what race, sexual orientation, gender, or age. There is a warm and welcoming place in our shuls for every Jew. As a community, we pride ourselves on the fact that we have been part of making our shuls such warm, welcoming, and inclusive places, and I cannot stress

enough the importance of this going forward.

I would also like to take this opportunity to explain how the rabbinate works, and how we came to this decision together. The South African Rabbinical Association holds annual meetings and conferences where we debate and discuss important communal issues. A democratic decision was taken, after a collaborative debate, that the South African rabbinate would not use Limmud as an educational platform. The Rabbinical Association recently requested the opinion of the Beth Din, which after having a hearing on the matter, endorsed the association's long standing policy on Limmud. As rabbis, we work together as a team for the common good

of the South African Jewish community. Over the years, we have taken many decisions as a group, and those decisions are accepted by everyone in the group.

In conclusion, we believe that Torah Judaism is the formula for a vibrant future for the South African Jewish community. We believe that Jewish history has shown that Jewish religious pluralism ultimately weakens Jewish identity, practice, and continuity. We believe that Torah Judaism has ensured the survival and thriving of the Jewish people. We are the only one of the ancient nations that still exist today, despite the countless exiles, pogroms, inquisitions, and a Holocaust. We believe that this can be due only to G-d's miracles, and the commitment of the Jewish people for thousands of years to Torah Judaism. Therefore, we have taken the painful decision not to use Limmud as an educational platform because Limmud advocates a philosophy of pluralism.

But we will always engage with respect and love with all those who disagree with us, and who endorse and support pluralism. And, we would ask that our decision not to support and endorse pluralism be equally respected. We can agree to disagree, but still get along. We need, as a community, to find a way to have these disagreements as brothers and sisters in a family in a way that doesn't diminish the love and respect that we have for each other. Let's go forward in the spirit of love and unity to continue to nurture and build the wonderful family of our South African Jewish community.



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Teen-suicide rate highest in 20 years

JORDAN MOSHE

The teen suicide rate is the highest it has been in the past two decades, according to recent international studies.

The mental well-being of our youngsters seems to be deteriorating at an alarming pace, with more of them choosing to take their own lives to escape constant battles with depression and anxiety, according to Oren Miron, a research associate at Harvard Medical School in Boston.

Recognition of – and early intervention in – mental disorders is now more crucial than ever, and the potential for suicide needs to be taken more seriously. This frightening information comes from a study published this week by the American Medical Association.

Miron says that the suicide rate in the 15 to 24-year-old age group is at the highest level since 2000. The surge is particularly strong among teen boys, up 14% annually between 2015 and 2017. Suicide rates for teenage girls, meanwhile, rose 8% annually between 2000 and 2017.

Levels of mental health among South African youth are little better, says Dr Wendy Duncan, a specialist child and adolescent psychiatrist. “There has been a deterioration in adolescent mental health over the past 25 years,” she says.

“There are consistently higher rates of mental illness in adolescents today, with 20% suffering a ‘diagnosable’ mental illness by the age of 18. Youth have higher levels of stress, and struggle with escalating rates of pathological anxiety and depression. The risk for suicidal thinking and

possible suicide escalates with age,” she says.

Clinical psychologist David Abrahamson says that we can’t say conclusively what’s driving these mental-health trends, but we need to make deductions from the evidence we have, and not wait for the cause to be unequivocally proven.

Abrahamson says that while not all the



evidence is consistent, a substantial amount of research has found associations between heavy technology use and poor mental health among children and young adults.

“Technology has fundamentally changed the way young people communicate and spend their leisure time,” he says. “They spend less time with their friends in person, less time sleeping, less time being physically active, and more time on digital media.

“Because of social media, children and teens are so much more susceptible to cyberbullying and feelings of social exclusion and isolation. It takes only a few minutes to access their friends’ Instagram or Facebook account which will confirm when they have been excluded from a

party or a Saturday night out.”

However, he stresses that existing evidence doesn’t support singling out social media or technology as the sole culprit. Other contributors include adolescent developmental changes, increased academic competition, and parental pressure.

Nicole Imerman, counselling manager at LifeLine, agrees, saying that the world has changed dramatically, and youngsters are forced to grow up faster, to their detriment.

“Those between the age of 15 and 25 are at high risk, as they face multiple issues such as underage pregnancy and sexual activity earlier than they would have before. They are exposed to so much more than youngsters were in the past, and it affects them mentally,” she says.

Duncan believes that the single biggest contributing factor to youth suicide is the existence of adolescent onset mental illness, the most common being depression, substance abuse, and emerging personality disorders. She emphasises that a family history of mental illness or suicide significantly elevates these risks.

Regardless of the cause, the stigma attached to mental illness continues to be a problem. Duncan says there is still the commonly held notion of being personally flawed if you succumb to depression and seek out medical treatment. “[Teenagers] might find that they are met with responses like, ‘What do you have to be depressed about? I had bigger issues to deal with as a teenager, and look, I turned out fine.’

“The quest to make sense of their identity is a key developmental task in adolescence. It’s not uncommon for the teen to feel misunderstood. However, if the teen experiences their emerging identity to be completely unacceptable, if they feel that they are unable to explore their insecurities with someone for fear of rejection, they might be more vulnerable to becoming lonely and hopeless.”

The way in which a suicidal tendency can manifest varies as much as the root causes.

Says Duncan, “There is no typical indicator of suicidal risk. There are a host of symptoms that might indicate that the teen is in trouble, and these could be thinking-related, mood-related, or behaviourally driven.

“Suicide is often associated with a sense of hopelessness, a sense that whatever the youth is experiencing is insoluble, that they are alone in trying to resolve this.

“In many respects, adolescents are assumed to be emotionally astute enough to identify that they are not only struggling, but to try and resolve their difficulties independently. They might find themselves completely overwhelmed, and feel unable to seek support.”

Indeed, there might be no suggestion at all that a child is suffering. Kate Shand, a mother whose son, John, took his own life at the age of 14 in 2011, says that while parents may notice some signs, they are difficult – if not impossible – to decipher.

“We want bullet points in a neat box listing the signs to look out for. We need signs to be replicable and accurate so that we can avoid a repeat.

“Why can’t we recognise the signs? The answer is simple – we’re not looking for them. What parent sees the unimaginable coming? What makes it even harder to detect is that teenagers are covert and secretive.”

She advises that if a parent thinks there is a problem, there is one. “Trust your gut,” she says. “Listen to your intuition. Help your children find a counsellor or psychologist to talk to, and keep moving until you find the person who is right for your child.”

On this point, Duncan, Abrahamson, and Imerman all agree. “Eighty percent of people think of suicide,” says Imerman. “That doesn’t mean we will take our own lives, but will have thoughts of not being here anymore. These thoughts need a space to be expressed and discussed.”

Duncan concludes that we aren’t doing enough to support the mental health of our youth. “We are creating extreme expectations for them to live up to. We demand behaviour from them that we ourselves don’t model.

“Discussing the issue of suicide directly, even with a suicidal child, will not increase the likelihood of suicide attempts. Having a place to talk about these thoughts and feelings is often a relief for the teen,” she says.

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Racing towards the awards deadline

JORDAN MOSHE

July brings us another week closer to the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, and the 14 July deadline for nominations is ticking. So, submit your nominations right now to recognise greatness within our community.

By getting your nominations in as soon as possible, you can be sure to acknowledge those unique individuals who deserve the *kavod* (honour) of an Absa Jewish Achiever Award.

Nominations are streaming in, and the excitement surrounding September’s glamorous event is mounting.

The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards acknowledges those whose contributions to society are deserving of recognition, and it pays tribute to men and women who have enhanced our community.

From entrepreneurship to the arts, community service to leadership, the awards seek to pay tribute to individuals from across the professional spectrum for their work.

Last year’s winners represented the cream of the South African crop. More than 430 people were nominated across the nine award categories, each scrutinised closely by four panels of judges who painstakingly interviewed contestants, and had to make some heart-wrenchingly tough choices.

“These awards recognise talent, determination, and tenacity,” says Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*. “But most

importantly, they create role models for our community, and South Africa as a whole.”

The role models who emerged in 2018 included hotel mogul Sol Kerzner, who won the Lifetime Achievement Award; theatre doyenne Hazel Feldman, who won the Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award; the Chevrah Kadisha’s Colin Datnow, the recipient of the Kia Community Service Award; and Professor Bonita Meyersfeld, winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award.

Jason Xenopoulos was recognised with the Creative Counsel Entrepreneur Award, while two organisations, Freedom Under Law and the Helen Suzman Foundation, shared the Bunnahabhain Humanitarian Award. The Absa-sponsored awards went to Judge David Unterhalter, who won the Professional Excellence Award; Mike Abel the Business Award, and Investec Chief Executive Stephen Koseff the Business Icon Award.

“Each nominee is worthy of an accolade,” says Sackstein. “Each inspires us. Sadly, we can have only nine winners. We raise a toast to all those among us who live to inspire others to greatness.”

All nominations should be sent via email to nominations@sajewishreport.co.za. They must include the nominee’s name, telephone number, and email address; the award for which the nominee is nominated; as well as a short motivation for the nomination.

Nominations close at 17:00 on 14 July 2019.

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Sour times for much-loved Mooz Brothers

NICOLA MILTZ

Mooz Brothers, one of Johannesburg’s best-loved kosher bakeries and eateries, closed its doors this week.

You won’t be smelling freshly baked challahs coming from the famous eatery this Friday for the first time in many years.

“It’s a very sad sign of the times,” said owner Leonard Meyerowitz.

“It’s an overtraded market with a diminishing clientele, and sadly it’s been impossible to survive,” he said.

This, coupled with multiple kosher licences by the Beth Din, and the proliferation of “kosher-style” home industries, sounded the death knell of the business, Meyerowitz said.

Angry and bewildered staff, many of whom have been working in the establishment for more than ten years, protested outside the store demanding to know what was happening. Meyerowitz told his staff on Tuesday that the shop was closing after they heard rumours and became concerned.

He has promised to try find alternative employment for the 30 to 40-odd staff members by approaching other bakeries and food establishments. Meyerowitz is also involved with The PieWorks, the tuckshop at Yeshivah College, and Jozi Blue, all of which were supplied goods by Mooz Brothers.

Upset and angry staff members told the SA Jewish Report that they were told, “There’s no more money”.

Long standing employee, Sukoluhle Matshazi, told the newspaper that the news had come as a shock to her.

“I have worked at Mooz for 11 years. I can’t believe we are closing. I’m sad. I have made many friends, and now there are many of us who will lose our jobs. What will we do, we have families



to feed? It’s sad to see suppliers coming to collect stock, and to see the shelves empty.”

Her colleague, David Nkabinde, said he loved his job, and felt lost.

“I’m so down. I told my parents, and we are devastated. I have worked here for eight years. The customers know me. I have built relationships. When they see me, we chat about their orders, and I help them.”

The staff – many of whom belong to a union – are waiting to hear their fate. “We have been told there is no more money, and they cannot pay us,” said Matshazi.

The staff recorded a meeting held on Tuesday in which Meyerowitz told them he would try his best to help them.

He is heard saying, “I’ll do my very, very best to find everyone some or other opportunity. When we closed the PieWorks and Mooz at Genesis, I found work for seven out of the ten employees affected.”

He assured his staff that he had tried his best to stay afloat.

According to Meyerowitz, when Mooz Brothers first opened in 2006, the Beth Din stipulated that it was not allowed to sell a scone with a cappuccino because there was a bakery next door called Kosher King, and Mooz was not allowed by Jewish law to interfere with a fellow neighbouring trader’s income.

“Nowadays, it’s a free-for-all. I recall having to buy the bakery next door so that we could expand our menu,” said Meyerowitz.

He said there were four kosher bakeries on the so-called kosher strip in George Avenue, lamenting that it was “too many in one area with a diminishing clientele”.

The company essentially traded for only 200 days a year taking Jewish and school holidays into account, which added to the difficulties in making a profit. Meanwhile, Spar and Pick n Pay trade all year round.

This brings to three the number of large bakeries shutting up shop in recent months, including Friends Bakery and Brioche, all within walking distance.

“I’m devastated, Mooz was an institution, but

the reality is there are too many kosher bakeries in the same area,” says Meyerowitz. “Our expenses are R150 000 for electricity and rent alone. I haven’t gone out to harm anybody, but sadly, the market has tanked. We’ve tried our best. This has a disastrous ripple effect with bad debt and losses.

“I believe Mooz changed the dining landscape. We were pioneers, and slowly became an institution, a point of reference for people, a sociable meeting point. We started the process of funky dining, so it’s very upsetting.”

The much-loved milk establishment best known for its delicious cheese blintzes, melk tarts, and wholesome party platters, defined the so called kosher strip in Sandringham.

The phrase “shmooz at mooz” is well known by patrons, who have long supported the shop with its *haimish* (homey) pavement café vibe situated in the Jewish hub on George Avenue.

Some said the establishment had not been the same since its beloved manager, popular baker and restaurateur Yonatan Helper, passed away as a result of a stroke in 2016. Said one staff member, “Yoni was Mooz. When he died, a part of the shop died with him.”

Mooz Brothers was established by Leonard and Charles Meyerowitz in 2006. According to the bakery’s website, the two Krugersdorp-born brothers, who owned Dairy World, decided that they wanted to grow Kosher *milchik* (dairy) offerings in Johannesburg.

And this week, loyal customers expressed dismay and disappointment at losing their favourite haunt.

Grooming three presidents

TALI FEINBERG

Not everyone gets to be up close and personal with three presidents. Adrienne Cohen has done just that. Before your mind goes to places it shouldn’t, it’s important to note that her interaction with them was strictly professional. Cohen is a senior make-up artist with 30 years of experience. She was called on to groom Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa, Thabo Mbeki, and Jacob Zuma over the years.

“Mbeki was very friendly, diplomatic, and polite. Zuma was also friendly and genial. He made us tea, which he poured himself.

Ramaphosa was a combination of both – diplomatic, polite, warm, and genial. He didn’t behave differently from any other person, and was happy to chat,” says Cohen.

Cohen has groomed and done make-up for celebrities, models, actors, statesmen, and even schoolchildren in advertisements. But once they are seated at her table, she tries not to treat them any differently from each other.

“I have only about three seconds to gain their trust so that they feel comfortable with me in their space. I put them at ease by talking about commonalities, for example, mutual acquaintances. One teenage boy said I reminded him of a friend from school. Then I know I’ve done my job well!”

Getting into the head space and physical space of the client is half the work of the grooming or make-up artist, says Cohen. For men, her work includes removing blemishes and shine, providing lip balm and hand moisturiser, and even giving

a man eyebrows, as many don’t have any! “This can transform a face. I once groomed Al Gore and he asked me to do this. He knew the importance of looking your best.”

When working with presidents, she has to hand in her cell phone, and technically is not allowed to talk to them, although they have all happily conversed with her. Because she had to put them at ease, it was difficult to follow that rule. She worked with Zuma and Ramaphosa on election campaigns, and Mbeki on a TV message. After working with Ramaphosa, she was glad that a colleague had a cell phone to snap the memorable occasion. Cohen worked



South African president Cyril Ramaphosa with Adrienne Cohen

hard for that opportunity. The make-up and grooming world is a tough one. While it might seem like a glamorous career, the reality is long hours, working overnight or on weekends, lots of waiting, and lots of competition, even at her level of experience.

But in spite of the physical demands of the job, Cohen loves it. “Even after thirty years, I still find something magical about working on a film set.” Also, she says, “Male grooming is a growing industry. Make-up artists are even offering it to the groom at weddings.”

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Krav Maga crafted on the hard-scrabble streets of Bratislava

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Krav Maga, a unique martial art forged in Bratislava in response to anti-Semitism in the 1930s, is now practised all over the world.

While it is now universally accepted, little was known about its creator until recently.

An exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town – Imi Lichtenfeld, Krav Maga and its Creator – shines a spotlight on an individual whose martial art formed the basis for Jewish armed forces before and after the creation of the state of Israel.

Born in Budapest in 1910, Imrich “Imi” Lichtenfeld spent his childhood and youth in Bratislava, a vibrant Jewish centre in the then-Czechoslovakian Republic. From the mid-1930s with the rise of Nazism, Jews began to be subjected to violence, including shop windows being smashed and Torah scrolls being thrown from synagogues and burnt.

Lichtenfeld and others from his Makabea sports club, and the Jewish organisation Betar reacted by forming a Jewish defence group to face down anti-Semitic gangs in his hometown.

In addition to the athletic use of wrestling and boxing techniques, he gained experience in street fighting that he later used to create his self-defence system. He believed that traditional martial arts had limited efficacy in real-world situations.

Lichtenfeld left present-day Slovakia for Palestine in 1940, and after serving under British forces in North Africa and the Middle East, was granted entry to British-administered Mandatory Palestine in 1942.

Once there, he became involved with the Haganah armed Jewish resistance, which later became the foundation for the Israeli armed

forces. In 1944, he began training members of the Haganah, Palmach and Palyam – illegal paramilitary organisations – in his areas of expertise: swimming, wrestling, and self-defence.

After the state of Israel was created in 1948, Lichtenfeld became head physical training instructor of the armed forces, preparing them

for battle. He served in the army for about 20 years, during which he developed and perfected his unique system of self-defence and hand-to-hand combat, according to an exhibition panel.

This became known as Krav Maga, which translates as “contact combat”.

After leaving the army, Lichtenfeld began adapting his system for civilian use, opening schools in Tel Aviv and Netanya. In 1972, he started a course for instructors at the Wingate Institute, which resulted in Krav Maga spreading in Israel and abroad.



Imrich Lichtenfeld with Lily Katren, a friend from his youth, next to the Donau River in Bratislava, circa 1932 to 1933

It is now part of the training programme for special units and police forces in many countries.

The exhibition in Cape Town, provided by the Slovakian Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava, runs until the end of August.

Lichtenfeld was “virtually unknown” in his native Bratislava, museum director Gavin Morris told the gathering at the exhibition opening. This changed when two of his former students visited Slovakia in 2017 with the intention of creating a memorial plaque to commemorate him.

“They enlisted the help of the Museum of Jewish Culture and slowly, through this process, an awareness of his legacy grew and culminated in the exhibition that you see here today.

Lichtenfeld had the awareness and foresight to recognise the need for the Jewish people to take responsibility for their own safety and security,” Morris said.

“He acted on this awareness, not only in making aliyah, but by applying what skills and experience he had to this issue, making it his life’s work. His training of the Palmach, and later the soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces, undoubtedly helped save many Jewish lives.”

Lichtenfeld’s dedication to the further development of Krav Maga resulted in it becoming a leading form of self-defence training worldwide, including a number of Krav Maga schools in Cape Town.

“Following Lichtenfeld’s example, Jewish communities now take responsibility for

their own safety. We owe those volunteers who give of their time to safeguard us, their fellow community members, our deepest gratitude,” he said.

We learn from one of Lichtenfeld’s students and a friend, Yaron Lichtenstein, that “Imi based the self-defence part of Krav Maga on observation and an understanding of what was

missing from traditional martial arts. In the process, he developed techniques and exercises for any possible situation of danger in the street,” according to the exhibition.

“He also created movements and special techniques that give Krav Maga practitioners unprecedented control of their mind and body.”

Opening the exhibition, Loren Raize, the director of Community Security Organisation Cape Town, said she was drawn into Imi’s story. “How bold he must have been, forming a Jewish defence group and then brawling on the streets of Bratislava, Slovakia, to defend this cause,” she said.

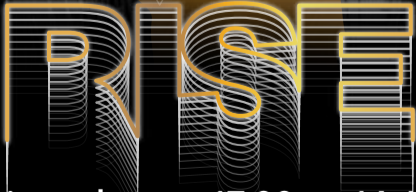
“I think of how he brought Krav Maga into the lives of ordinary people like you and me, so that they might defend themselves and ensure the horrors of our past shall never happen again. Today we are still forced to recognise the need for Jews to be able to protect themselves,” she said.

“The world may look different, but sadly, the threats remain unchanged,” she said, describing Lichtenfeld as a pioneer who had found a way of counteracting his own community’s persecution.

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Jews donate to Christchurch victims

When news of the terrorist attacks on the Al Noor and Linwood mosques in Christchurch broke on 15 March, it left New Zealand reeling.

The impact also resonated throughout the Jewish world, and as a result, more than A\$1 million (R9.8 million) will be handed over from the Jewish communities of Pittsburgh, Sydney, and New Zealand to the Muslim community of Christchurch. The Pittsburgh Jewish community suffered a terrorist attack last October, with 11 people killed.

The funds will be handed over at a function to be hosted by the mayor of Christchurch on 17 July. It will be followed by visits to the mosques where the attacks took place by New Zealand Jewish Council President Stephen Goodman, and Sydney-based NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Chief Executive Vic Alhadeff.

The funds were raised for counselling and support services, medical treatment, financial planning, education, and vocational training for the families of the victims. The money will be managed by the Christchurch Foundation.

The funds will also be used to advance interfaith activities to foster greater connection between the Jewish and Muslim communities of New Zealand.

Alhadeff will present a cheque of A\$71 000 (R700 454) raised from the Sydney Jewish community via a crowdfunding campaign which was

launched within hours of the massacre.

“The massacre occurred at a time when people were at their most vulnerable – at prayer in a house of worship,” Alhadeff said. “An attack on one faith is an attack on us all. We extend our hand in friendship in calling for an end to racism, an end to anti-Semitism, an end to Islamophobia, and an end to bigotry in all its forms.”

“Our faiths share the Abrahamic tradition, and Jews and Muslims have both suffered racism historically and today,” said Goodman. “The Jewish community, both in New Zealand and overseas, wanted the victims of the mosque attacks to know that we see them, we empathise with them, and we support them. One of the first communities to get in touch was the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh in America. The Muslim community of Pittsburgh started a fundraising campaign to support Jewish victims within hours of the attack on their synagogue last October, and the Pittsburgh Jewish community wanted to repay that kindness.

Sheikh Ibrar Sheikh of the Federation of Islamic Association of New Zealand said the support from the global Jewish community was “very gratefully received”.

“To know that our Jewish brothers and sisters understand what we have gone through, and are still going through, and are there to help us in our recovery, is very important to us,” he said.

Child advocates blast Israel’s failure in handling of sex abuse cases

SAM SOKOL – JTA

In April, Israeli police announced the arrest of a 22-year-old man in Beit Shemesh accused of multiple counts of child sexual assault.

Short of celebrating the arrest of an abuser, local victims’ rights advocates took the authorities to task.

Shana Aaronson, the head of the Israeli branch of the New York-based Jewish Community Watch organisation, took to social media, describing in a Facebook post how authorities and the Beit Shemesh community ignored a disturbing pattern of behaviour by the predator in question, who had previously served time for abuse.

“Shortly after he was released” – three years ago, after his first detention – “I started getting the phone calls,” she wrote.

“Numerous community members calling to share that he’s hanging out with kids – a lot – and they are very concerned. I encouraged them to warn the parents. But, you know, it’s awkward. No one ever wants to be the killjoy calling up a neighbour to share the *lashon hara* (negative speech) that the kindly young man who’s taken their kid under his wing is a convicted child molester. Then the next wave of phone calls started. He’s volunteering at local organisations, and using his status there to pick up kids.”

According to Aaronson, the young man even called her to volunteer at Jewish Community Watch, asking to “mentor children who had been sexually abused”.

The police, she told the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, knew he was dangerous, but were restrained from acting because nobody with first-hand knowledge of the abuse had been willing to come forward. Israel, unlike the

United States, does not keep a registry of sex offenders.

As a result, Aaronson wrote, for two years “it seems a community’s worth of people has been watching while a child molester strategically groom[ed] and prey[ed] on his victims”.

Israel has experienced an overall increase in the reporting of incidents dating back to the beginning of the decade. But several recent incidents here have highlighted what advocates like Aaronson describe as a systemic failure of both government and civil society to deal adequately with the issue of child sexual abuse.

In May, the state comptroller’s annual report revealed that 60% of Israelis jailed for sexual crimes ended up being released without undergoing any sort of therapeutic treatment to prevent recidivism.

The report also found that there was increased monitoring by police of offenders after their release. And, while there were more investigations into incidents of paedophilia than in previous years, seven out of 10 cases ended up being shut down without an indictment.

Some advocates believe that part of the problem may be ingrained in Israel’s political culture. Tough slander laws here make it hard for victims to accuse their abusers publicly. Meanwhile, advocates have said that sentencing guidelines are inadequate. There has also been a strong taboo against reporting abuse among members of haredi orthodox communities.

According to a recent investigation by Israel’s Channel 13, Deputy Health Minister

Yaakov Litzman was alleged to have improperly intervened to aid at least 10 sex offenders from Israel’s haredi, or ultra-orthodox, community. This comes after earlier reports that Litzman, who himself is haredi, had been questioned by police over suspicions that he had attempted to prevent the extradition of accused child molester Malka Leifer to Australia.

The extradition battle over Leifer, who fled

activist Rabbi Yakov Horowitz said there was definitely a pattern to how such cases are handled in Israel, especially when it comes to extraditing accused abusers such as Leifer and Avrohom Mondrowitz, who has been living openly in Israel for years. Mondrowitz is a Gur Hasid and accused serial molester who fled Brooklyn for Israel in the 1980s. *Tablet* reported that some believe that local authorities in New York declined to have him extradited because of haredi political pressure.

Horowitz is being sued for defamation in an Israeli court for warning people against convicted sex offender Yona Weinberg, whom he has publicly asserted constitutes a danger to the community. Weinberg also disputes Horowitz’s statement that he is wanted on further charges in the United States.

Horowitz recalled an op-ed from a decade ago in which the victims’ advocate wrote that, “Word on the street is that there are powerful people backing Mondrowitz. Having him successfully avoid extradition will confirm that suspicion in the minds of many. It will also reinforce a horrible message to the public at large and more specifically to

abuse victims – unfortunately the one that is prevalent – that the blood of innocent children can be washed away if the molester knows the right people.”

Ten years later, little has changed, he said. “There seems to be a really large thumb pushing down on the side of the scale where the abusers are,” Horowitz said.

As *Ha’aretz* reported in April, some advocates have gone so far as to describe Israel as a “haven” for Jews accused of crimes of a sexual nature.



Malka Leifer, centre, arrives for a hearing at the District Court in Jerusalem in 2018

Melbourne in 2008 with the help of figures in the local haredi community after allegations against her surfaced, has dragged on for several years, frustrating her accusers.

It’s worrying when such behaviour is “coming from the top”, said Manny Waks, the founder of the victims’ rights organisation Kol v’Oz. “To have Litzman setting such an example, that is the core of the issue here because that shows that there is a systemic failure in leadership.”

While he felt that he could not comment on specific allegations against Litzman, American

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The fascination of the female serial killer

TALI FEINBERG

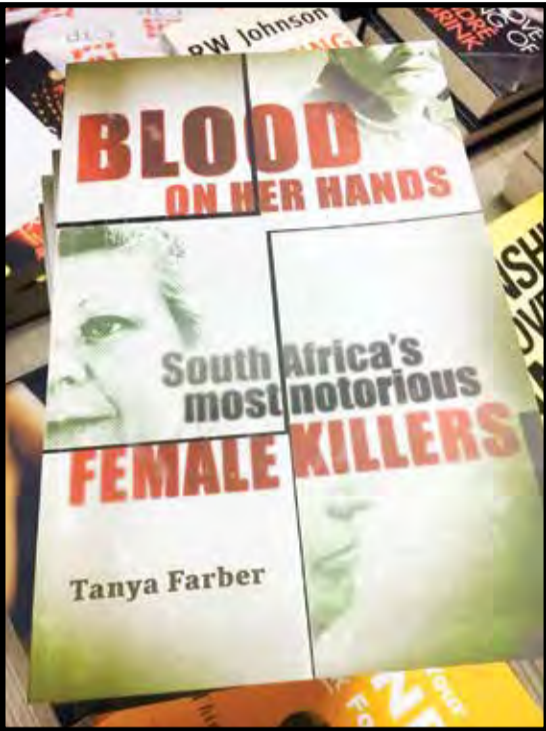
It is a fact that only 5% of killers worldwide are female. “They are outliers, and their stories are far more fascinating than their murderous male counterparts because they are not stories of impulsivity and raw aggression,” says Tanya Farber, who has written a book about women who have committed murder in South Africa. “They are, instead, stories of a slow-burning process, and very careful planning.”



Dina Rodrigues

The book, *Blood on Her Hands: South Africa's Most Notorious Female Serial Killers*, covers local women whose names have become famous: Dina Rodrigues, who murdered baby Jordan-Leigh Norton; Najwa Petersen who murdered her husband Taliep; and Phoenix Racing Cloud Theron, who killed her mother. Then there are the ones we may not know so well, like Daisy de Melker, who killed her two husbands and children with poison in the 1930s; or Chane van Heerden, who butchered

her victim in a way that plays out like a horror movie. “My book features women who cannot on any level justify what they have done,” says Farber. “Someone said to me during the process that many women who kill do so for a good reason, and my response was that that isn't always the case. I note in the book that



I didn't include women whose actions can be explained – like the mom who kills her tik-addicted son, or the desperate shack dweller who dumps her newborn baby in a bin. All the women in my book should be held entirely responsible for their crimes.” The idea for the book surfaced when, as a science reporter at the *Sunday Times*, Farber

read research on American serial killers, and what made women different from men. “From there, I wrote a newspaper feature, and it soon became clear that there was a whole book inside me,” she says. She found it fascinating that generally speaking, women put a lot more effort into planning a murder than men, and their psychological makeup is far more interesting. “A lot of the research shows that women tend to kill for resources or for gain, and I speak about that a lot in the final chapter of the book, which is the insights and analysis chapter. Women are also more likely to have accomplices or to hire hit men. I think people are also more fascinated by them because of how statistically unusual they are, and because they subvert our stereotypical notions of women as nurturers who are more caring, and less prone to violent behaviour.” Farber did not interview the women or their families, rather, it was a careful process of reconstructing the narrative of each story from written sources. “This included countless media reports, historical records, long court records, and affidavits not in the public domain. I did not, however, want it to be a dry account or for it to be written in a journalistic style. Instead, I would say it is narrative non-fiction in the sense that all the stories are true, but many parts of it are written using the same style that one would find in a novel. This was an amazing part of the process as it required climbing inside the mind of the “main character” in each story, and imagining what they might be thinking based on insights into their personality as it comes through in the records.” Farber's favourite story to write was the Daisy de Melker chapter. “It happened long enough ago for me not to be overwhelmed with sympathy for the people who died or whose lives were affected by the murders she committed. It was very interesting to look at South Africa's history at that time, and imagine the world in which Daisy lived. Furthermore, of all the women in the book, she is the only one who worked alone and killed many people, and used poison as her weapon.



Tanya Farber

as if she was born without a soul, in a sense.” For her, the most difficult story to write was the chapter on Joey Haarhoff, who with Gert van Rooyen infamously kidnapped six girls in the 1980s. They killed themselves as the police closed in, taking the answers with them about what happened to those girls. “There were six victims, which meant that, in essence, six different stories had to be researched and written. They were all girls whose stories were written about so extensively in the mainstream media that doing the research was a painstaking experience,” says Farber. “Also, I was a young girl of the same age as the victims in the late eighties when the crimes



Phoenix Racing Cloud Theron

happened. I remember the absolute dread and fear of the time, and now, thirty years later, I am a mother of two girls who fall into the same age group as the victims and I cannot bear to think of what those parents went through. This was the chapter that literally gave me sleepless nights.” Farber has recently begun to offer counselling services as a departure from her almost 20-years as a journalist, but the two are intertwined. “It was through my work as a journalist that I became aware of the huge need out there for counselling. There are so many people who need emotional support, but can't necessarily afford private psychotherapy. I studied counselling, and have now set up my own after-hours service in which I do group counselling for people who are going through a similar issue or phase such as pregnancy, divorce, looking after an elderly parent, and so on. “As a journalist, people tell me their stories, and it is important for me to be a good listener and to be highly empathetic. The three-year counselling programme has given me some extra tools to really hold someone in that moment when they are sharing a painful story with me.”



Najwa Petersen

“By far the most harrowing was the Chane van Heerden chapter because of how she and her accomplice [her boyfriend] treated the body of their victim. Skinning, beheading, and dismembering a victim is a highly unusual crime, and writing that chapter gave me chills. It's so hard to imagine someone wanting to do that to another human being, and yet, she had always been obsessed with skinning, and it felt

• “*Blood on Her Hands: South Africa's Most Notorious Female Serial Killers*” is available at bookstores and on Amazon Kindle.

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'It's never too late to start again,' says world karate champ

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Having trained in an “illegal” multiracial karate *dojo* (martial arts space) during apartheid, Kerry Saloner was never allowed to compete. Now 46 and living in Australia, she says she defied the odds to win three gold medals in her first international karate competition.

Saloner took three gold medals in the over-45 category at the GKR Karate International World Cup X held in London this past weekend.

While she was a black belt when she moved to Australia in 2005, she struggled to find a similar style to goju-ryu, which she'd practiced in South Africa. “I tried other styles of karate when we got to Australia, and they just weren't similar enough,” she says. “They didn't fit me.” So, she took more than ten years off from karate, and focused on her husband, son, and career as a social worker.

“It was only about a year and a half ago that I found gokan-ryu, which is a similar style to goju-ryu,” she says. “I've loved it, and gone back quite passionately.”

It was the right time, says Saloner. She felt her son was now old enough for her to follow her passion, and her husband encouraged her to start again. So, Saloner reduced her hours at the Australian College of Applied Psychology, where she now

synchronise the kata. She took gold in all three.

“I'm over the moon,” she says. “I left for the world cup hoping I could just bring home something. I'm a very competitive, hungry person by nature, so I did everything I could to prepare myself for the gold standard, but I had no idea what to expect.

“We shouldn't let our age define us. It doesn't have to be a limitation. We don't know where our limits are. I still feel strong and fit. Achieving goals is largely about what's going on in our mind. We have the ability to push ourselves so much further than we think.”

“My wins were surprising, exciting, and very validating for me as a karateka.” Saloner competed as an Australian, as it's one of only four countries in the world cup that do this style of karate.

While she resumed her training only recently, Saloner has karate in her blood. “I was born into a karate family, so I was inevitably going to do karate at some stage,” she says.

“My father was already a black belt, and was training in Doornfontein when I was born. There was a very traditional *dojo* upstairs from his work, and he started training there with *shihan* (master instructor) Stuart Booth. My brother started to train with him too when he was just old enough to walk, and I began my training there at about the age of six.

“We were living in the Lyndhurst area, so our *shihan* set up a little *dojo* gym in Bramley, and we trained there,” recalls Saloner. “There were often events on weekends though, so

we'd go to the head *dojo* in Doornfontein.

“We'd be training with people of all races in the middle of apartheid. It was an eye into a world that we were not exposed to in the rest of our lives. With everything being segregated and demarcated racially, it was very unusual to walk into a dojo where everyone was divided according to their karate grade, not the colour of their skin.

“Equality was acted out in the dojo. Race was not an issue. That exposure was quite profound for me.”

After school, Saloner's brother encouraged her to go for her black belt. “My *shihan* had moved the dojo from Doornfontein to Yeoville, where we'd go for 05:00 weekday training,” she says. “Here, we'd meet up with guys that had woken up at 03.30 to run from Soweto or Alex to the *dojo* in Yeoville to make training on time. The spirit between us was incredible.

“There was camaraderie, and a respect that developed through our karate that I've never replicated anywhere else. It was very humbling for me to be able to train with

these people who were surviving incredibly tough circumstances, but still showed commitment and dedication to their karate. There was very little reward, it was just about doing it for yourself.

“The instructor himself was – and still is – a very tough man. He's a role model, and he was an amazing mentor for me,” she says. “I think a lot of the success I've reaped this past weekend was due to the foundation that he instilled in me. He was a very traditional man, based on Japanese old-school-type karate, where there was a lot of repetition and focus on detail in our stance, techniques, and form.”

Saloner remained loyal to her *shihan* and accepted the fact that she couldn't compete because of South Africa's apartheid landscape. “I loved the training and my identity as a karateka,” she says. “But it upset our family a lot that our instructor had to deal with the fact that he'd been snubbed by his colleagues in the martial-arts field.

“There was no compromise on the multiracialism of our *dojo*. We

realised the consequences were unfair, one of the many injustices of apartheid society. It was part of a learning curve of understanding the dynamics of growing up in South African society.”

Speaking of resuming her karate training at this stage of her life, Saloner says it's all about having the right mindset. “We shouldn't let our age define us. It doesn't have to be a limitation. We don't know where our limits are. I still feel strong and fit. Achieving goals is largely about what's going on in our mind. We have the ability to push ourselves so much further than we think.”



Kerry Saloner

works as a guest lecturer and part-time supervisor, giving her sufficient training and family time. “I wanted something to work towards, a new challenge.”

While she had to start from scratch, Saloner was fast-tracked to reach competitive status. “I'm not yet back on black belt, I'm building my way back there,” she says. Yet it's been an amazing 18 months. “I'd never competed before, but in joining this style, there were opportunities to do so.”

Saloner entered and won the regional tournament. From there, she went onto the states and national championships at the end of 2018, where she won double gold. “The golds at nationals boosted my competition confidence,” she says, “so I decided to go ahead and compete in the world cup, and I qualified well.”

Saloner entered three events: the kata (a series of set choreographed moves on different grades), and the kumite (freestyle fighting), both individual events; and a team kata event where three teammates

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Finding peace in or out of orthodoxy

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It's never easy to go against the grain, especially when it comes to your relationship with Judaism. But those on a religious journey sometimes move towards or away from an orthodox way of life to find inner peace. Born in Israel, Kobie Cohen was never particularly observant. "I come from a home where there was no Shabbos, or Yom Tov," he says. "My mother lit Shabbos candles, and when there was a function, we did the traditional things, but that was all."

At 27, Kobie moved to South Africa with his girlfriend – now wife – Lisa, and together they slowly became more involved in Chabad. "It was a fluke that we became *frum* (devout)," he says. "I worked for a security company, and a shul had been robbed. I went there with my shorts and my cigarettes, and I put the alarm system in. While I was there, the rabbi encouraged me to lay tefillin, so I did. Then he kept pressing the panic button every day, so I went, and each time, he encouraged me to get more involved. Slowly, we became more observant. My wife and I decided to become *frum* together almost 21 years ago, and I've never looked back."

Kobie ultimately resigned because his boss wouldn't allow him time off for Shabbos and Yom Tov. "Rabbi Baumgarten – without whom I wouldn't be who I am – then suggested I go on a *mashgiach* (kashrut supervisory) course, so I did. Now I'm at Moishe's in the butchery, kashering meat and people's kitchens," he says. "I think about why Hashem took me thousands of kilometres from Israel to South Africa to become *frum* – not only to become kosher, but to help other people to keep kosher. It's

probably what my *neshama* (soul) was supposed to do. Sometimes you have to change your path in life to reveal what's inside."

"I was born in South Africa, and raised in Israel on a very secular kibbutz," says Kobie's wife, Lisa. She admits that adopting a religious lifestyle was an adjustment. "Covering my head and giving up my denims was quite an issue for me. Even today, I listen to the radio and I haven't given up TV. Everything else came slowly. From becoming *frum*, I've gained a better quality of life to a certain extent. Maybe because I chose the life, I appreciate the values. Lisa acknowledges a certain amount of friction with more secular family members, but says they've learned to adapt because family is so important. "Part of *yiddishkeit* is learning to accept people," she says. Also a *ba'al teshuvah*, Kerri Sacks had virtually no religious upbringing. "We had traditional Friday nights, but I knew absolutely nothing about *yiddishkeit*. Then in my mid-20s, I was going through a really hard time in my life, and there was no direction and meaning. I was introduced to keeping Shabbos by a friend. I thought it was amazing, and began keeping it too. Two years afterwards, I met my husband, who had also newly become *shomrei* (upholding tradition)."

Kerri says it took her a long time to find the right balance in her level of religiousness. "When you don't know anything, you lose yourself a bit in the religion, but then you



Kobie and Lisa Cohen

start finding yourself again.

"I strongly believe in giving my three kids a Jewish education, and encouraging them to learn Torah. I feel that if I had Torah, I would maybe have been stronger as a person, and I wouldn't have been swept away by life or have made bad decisions. You never know though."

Wendy Richard embraced a religious lifestyle slowly, and is now a rebbetzin. While she lost some friends as she became more religious, good friends and family stuck by her. "I always try to keep in mind that I've seen life from both sides, and not judge how others choose to live their lives."

Like Kerry, Wendy says the biggest challenge in becoming *frum* was to find a balance between being religious and being obsessive. "Of course, Hashem wants us to do His *mitzvot*, but we should be serving him with joy. My biggest gains have been marrying my husband, building a family, and watching my children grow up with Torah values."

For Michelle* a *frum* lifestyle was never the perfect fit. When she was a child, her father and stepmother became more religious, and she came to accept it. "I got married at 21, and my ex-husband also came from a *frum* family," she says. "So, it was kosher, Shabbos, mikveh, and all of that, but I never wore a sheitel. After 21 years, he met someone from work and decided he was done with this whole marriage, religion, and family business, and moved out. I felt like I'd embraced the religious lifestyle for him, it wasn't really something that I wanted myself. Judaism was never the focus of my life, it was the framework within which I lived my life."

Becoming less religious was a gradual process, she says. "It took me a year to drive on Shabbos. I felt really guilty about that, but now I don't blink. At first, I was worried that my family would see me, but later I moved away from the *eiruv* (halachic enclosure). Having kosher meat has stuck, and I still light candles on Friday night as it has meaning for me – but then I go and watch TV."

Tammy* became very religious, but later moved away from the fold. "I grew up in a traditional home, but when I was a teenager, I got hectically involved in *yiddishkeit*. My parents had got divorced, and the sense of family and community was something I'd never experienced. It's still something I admire. I went to *sem* (religious seminary) in Israel after school."

She later married a man who was *frum* from birth. "I wore a sheitel, he wore a black hat," she says. "I was very into it, but then

unfortunately I got sick. I think people go one of two ways in these cases – they either get closer to religion or they don't. I moved away, but there's one thing I'm sure of. I've now got the closest connection to G-d that I've ever had because I'm doing things that mean something to me. I'm not doing things by rote.

"My husband is still *frum*, and we respect each other. He's not fanatical. It was very gradual, so there was time to get into it." Tammy says that while she has the support of her husband, their families, and their friends, there have been losses. "I don't have any community standing by me now. When I left, I never even got a call to ask what was going on. I think that you're put in a box when you're religious, and you've got to conform to that box. I walked away from it, and it's a two-way street, I guess." Now I focus on the right things – trying to be a mensch. I've got a daughter, and I'll support her whether she wants to be *frum* or secular. I want to be able to be a role model for her in terms of [myself as a] person, not in terms of a religion."

“It’s probably what my neshama (soul) was supposed to do. Sometimes you have to change your path in life to reveal what’s inside.”

Joshua* grew up in a *frum* home, but gradually experienced problems with the lifestyle. "I was into being *frum* because that was all I knew, that's how I grew up, and that's who my friends were. I went with it."

Yet slowly, he began to drift away from a religious lifestyle. "It wasn't working for me. There was a lot of preaching about the amazing way of life, and what it gives to you, and I wasn't seeing that. It felt like do this and that because it's the right thing to do, and then your family and your marriage will be amazing, and you'll get lots of money because you give lots of *tzedakah* (charity). [My] experience was to the contrary. Joshua now has an observant wife, and has found a happy medium. "I'm a lot more at peace and happy with my religion. I'm comfortable with what I do. I'm not properly *shomrei* or kosher, but I'll probably get back there eventually."

* Names have been changed at the request of the interviewees to protect their families.

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Jewish Report

(absa)

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New siddur feast for the eyes and food for the soul

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

When Sara Evian and Balu Nivison met on a women’s tour of Israel about nine years ago, they could never have imagined that they would land up collaborating on a new siddur that will be launched in September.

Evian, an Observant teacher of Jewish mysticism and a ceramicist, and Nivison, a dancer, clothing designer, and yoga and meditation practitioner, clicked immediately. “Balu wanted to connect to Judaism, and couldn’t find a way in,” Evian recalls of the time.

“At one point in our relationship, she asked me to teach her how to pray. So I bought her a siddur, and marked the morning prayers that transported one ... and that became very meaningful for her.

“It was also very meaningful for me to see what the essential prayers are, because when you open up a siddur with 957 pages – if you have not learned about it – it’s hard to know where to begin.”

Thus, the seed was planted for the pair’s four-year journey to produce the recently published *Beloved of the Soul*. “Balu was the one who suggested it to enable people like her to access prayer as a daily ritual,” Evian recalls.

Nivison also suggested the title, a translation of Yedid Nefesh, a pre-Sabbath prayer expressing the soul’s yearning and desire to be close to G-d, reflecting her own journey.

“I had been searching for many years in different permutations for some kind of meaning and a way that Judaism could be aligned with my life as an artist and a dancer,” says Nivison. “Sara ended up teaching me how to pray, what the prayers meant, and what the purpose of prayer was. I had no idea.”

Together they started *Beloved of the Soul* workshops combining Nivison’s dance, movement, and yoga with Evian’s Torah wisdom, using soulful Jewish music. “I wanted to bring Judaism alive, and I wanted a place for women to feel that they could have an experiential Judaism. That is, as opposed to having to stand upstairs or on the sides behind a *mechitzah* (partition separating men and women in synagogue) and kind of bob up and down and have no idea where their place was,” Nivison says.

Support came from a rather unexpected source in that “quite a few” rebbetzins (rabbis’ wives) started attending the workshops. “We had a whole following of very Orthodox women who absolutely love to dance and move and find a way to express their souls in a Jewish way,” she says.

“I thought we were going to be appealing to the waifs and strays, but it’s not like that at all!

“Eventually, I said to Sara that it would be such a tragedy if her wisdom and way of teaching and interpretation didn’t get out into the world, especially for Jews who were alienated or had no idea about the treasures of Judaism.”

Evian, the author, has worked in conjunction with Orthodox rabbis all the way, and has incorporated many of the teachings of Rav Daniel Kohn of Israel. “His teaching of Torah was so exceptional. I could never have embarked on this book without it,” she stresses.

The siddur differs from others in that it comprises a selection of morning prayers “so that one doesn’t become overwhelmed”. The

first part consists of mystical insights into prayer and connection, including sections on praying with intention, movement, music, song, and meditation before prayer “so that prayer becomes a full-bodied experience”.



Sara Evian with the new siddur she has authored

there’s a sense of unification,” Evian says.

“Then one goes into the fourth level of *chaya* (the Amidah), the level of our soul which is transcendent, our place of insight outside of the body. It ends in the level of *yechida*, which is oneness with Hashem.

“The prayers are broken into these levels so that you understand as you pray that you are moving on a journey – the ladder of prayer.”

The prayers are in Hebrew, with transliterations and translations. “We’ve tried to make the translations accessible to our day and age without losing any of the authenticity,” says Evian, crediting Rabbi David Nossel of Johannesburg and many “mainly” Chassidic sources.

The siddur is “definitely not” specifically for women, rather it is intended to make prayer undaunting, meaningful, and accessible. “It’s not about going through everything, it’s about feeling that you are connecting while you are doing it, even if you are saying less,” she says.

“Even if you sit with the siddur open on one page with an image of a shul in Poland or Prague (the pair travelled to these once vibrant Jewish centres) or an image capturing G-d’s natural glory, and you read the words of the psalms that are written on it.” The images form a backdrop to many of the prayers and psalms.

In the words of the preface, the prayer book is as much food for the eyes as it is food for the soul.

While the siddur is “very abridged”, being a selection of essential prayers that need to be said in the morning, Evian says that as far as she is aware, it is the only one to have been produced in this country.

• *Beloved of the Soul* is available in Jewish bookshops in Johannesburg, and the South African Jewish Museum shop in Cape Town. It will be launched in September at the Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris Centre in Johannesburg, and at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town.

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Alleged ponzi scheme shocks community

>>>Continued from page 3

just lost money, she has also lost her faith in people in general. What makes this matter worse for her is that Ash forms part of her extended family, and she has been ostracised by several family members for exposing this alleged scam. It is indeed a sad indictment when victims are further victimised or shamed by those closest to them for exposing what is clearly an issue requiring further investigation.”

He is not 100% certain that Ash has fled to Israel. “We have been advised that he travels between South Africa and Israel on a fairly regular basis.” However Colley was told that Ash would return mid-June, and he has still not returned. “South Africa has an extradition treaty with Israel which was tested successfully in July 2016 when Rabbi Eliezer Berland was formally extradited from South Africa to Israel,” said Thomas.

The *SA Jewish Report* used all reasonable means to contact Ash to allow him to present his side of the story, without success. We asked Swartz, among others, to connect the newspaper with Ash, who said he would ask Ash’s permission to give us his contact details. He didn’t get back to us before the newspaper was published. The *SA Jewish Report* was unable to ascertain Ash’s present whereabouts.

Thomas said anyone who believed that they might be a victim of an alleged scam perpetrated by Ash should contact the

police and lay charges.

“Before taking financial advice from anyone, or investing in any venture, check that the person offering or giving financial advice, and the company that he or she represents, is registered in terms of FAIS [the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act] with the FSCA.”

The South African Reserve Bank website advises, “When choosing a money making opportunity, do your homework thoroughly. Get advice from registered financial advisers. This is available free of charge with no obligation. Take your time, you didn’t save it overnight. Be particularly cautious about ‘opportunities’ that promise to make you wealthy in a very short period. Beware of a ‘secret formula’ that will be shared only with select investors.”

It advises to use accredited financial institutions that are regulated and supervised by the South African Reserve Bank, National Consumer Commission, or the FSCA. These organisations are governed by strict rules and controls that are not necessarily in place with unregulated and unsupervised persons and groups where your money could be at risk.

• For more information, visit www.resbank.co.za. To find out if a business is accredited, contact the FSCA Fraud and Ethics hotline: 0800 313 626.

Painting a better future for prisoners

TALI FEINBERG

Art gallery owner Avital Lang has spent ten years running workshops at Pollsmoor Prison. Getting to know prisoners and helping them to discover their artistic talent is a way to assist them to re-integrate into society.

An Israeli who made her home in Cape Town, she is one of the few outsiders – and probably one of the very few women and Jews – who have voluntarily set foot in one of this country's most notorious prisons.

"I grew up in a very religious family in Jerusalem, and my grandparents always told me that being a Jew is to have a heavy responsibility to bring balance and peace to the world. So, it comes from wanting to do *mitzvot* (good deeds) and *tikkun olam* (heal the world)," says Lang, who is herself a talented painter.

Lang came here on *shlichut* (commission) from Israel, and was welcomed by a man at the airport who would later become her husband. They lived in Israel for a number of years before settling in South Africa. As Lang made Cape Town her home, she realised that most people dealt with the problems in the country by building higher fences and bigger walls. While she doesn't judge them for doing this, it didn't sit well with her. Following the values of her Jerusalem home, she decided she wanted to play her part in changing society.

So, she started an art programme at Pollsmoor. “I faced a huge backlash from a lot of people, including the members of my own family. A rabbi even called to ask what I was doing. But this is what I felt I needed to do.”

She ran art workshops for ten years, and the prisoners were hugely receptive, respectful, and open to Lang's teaching and message. "If I have managed to make even a small difference to one person, it would have been worth it," she says. In addition to art, she taught yoga and breathing exercises, and hoped to train talented prisoners to teach others.

She witnessed the horrific living conditions at Pollsmoor, learned about prison gangs and systems to create order out of chaos, and even learned that prisoners have their own language. “When you go there, you have to leave everything else behind. It’s like entering another realm.”

It wasn't without its challenges. Although Lang always felt safe and respected, she had to set up strict boundaries with the prisoners, who often expected her to help them with whatever they needed. She also had to deal with corruption in the system. Eventually, too many broken promises by those in charge led her to stop giving workshops.

Now, former prisoners come to her, as do other people on the margins of society. Her art gallery is located in the middle of Cape Town's historic Bo-Kaap, and she has taught local children art classes. She has hosted a number of exhibitions for ex-prisoners, and hosts shows for established artists.

Lang once devoted a small section of her gallery to the very disturbing work of a female prisoner as a favour to the woman, never expecting any of it to sell. Yet, a man from England walked in and bought all the work.

Her latest project is an exhibition of etchings by ex-prisoner Joseph Buys (59), which has gained interest from newspapers, TV shows, and the public. Buys is a former gangster who has spent most of his life in prison, but is now trying to start afresh.

He makes intricate etchings of himself, and for 24 hours straight does not stop to eat or drink until the image is complete, says Lang. He has created at least thirty of these small but impressive works, as well as a large painting. Buys told Lang he draws himself as he has finally come to accept how he looks. Three etchings have already been sold, and she expects more to follow.

Lang has been invited to give talks, and

Avital Lang with a painting by ex-prisoner Joseph Buys



Photos: Tali Feinberg

Photos: Tali Feinberg

wherever she has gone, she has found misconceptions about Jews, some deeply anti-Semitic. At a Women's Day church gathering in Mitchells Plain, grown women asked her if Jewish girls menstruated, and if Jews got special powers on Shabbat. The bishop of the church told her that the Jews had an "excellent strategy" of spreading themselves around the world so that they could control it.

Prisoners told her they thought Jews were stingy, rich, arrogant, and isolated. None of this came from a place of hatred – it was just ignorance, says Lang. So, wherever she goes, she tries to educate people about Jews, and believes it's urgent that the community does the same. With her gallery located in a historic Muslim area, she believes interaction with the local community is helpful in building bridges.

Meanwhile, she will continue to use art to heal, transform, and break down barriers. "Art is not a club for the rich and famous. It should be affordable and accessible, and we should not dictate who will be successful," she says.

To the Jewish community, she says, "If we are supposed to be a light unto the nations, we

for children. It can be in our own community or beyond, says Lang. "We need to come out of our cocoons, go somewhere dark, and spread a little light."

- *The exhibition by Joseph Buys will run at the Avital Lang Gallery, the Urban Hub, 40 Dorp Street Cape Town, until 20 July.*

all need to do at least one action a week to fulfil a *mitzvah* (good deed), and learn about what we are here for." This doesn't mean everyone has to go to Pollsmoor, it can be a small gesture like delivering *challot* (Shabbat bread) to needy Jews, visiting the sick, or caring

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Gamer who threatened to kill Jews wants his gun back

GABE STUTMAN – JTA

A 23-year-old East Bay, San Francisco, man who threatened to murder “over 30” Jews and police officers on a gaming website, wants his gun back.

Ross Farca of Concord, California, returned to court this week to contest a restraining order that would extend the prohibition on his possession of firearms.

Farca was released on bail days after his arrest on 10 June. The move shocked the local Jewish community. According to a police investigation, Farca professed admiration for the Poway and Christchurch shooters, assembled his own AR-15-style assault weapon, and on a gaming website, detailed a plan to mow down “clusterf***s of kikes”.



Farca used the screen name “Adolf Hitler (((6 million)))” on the video game site Steam to inveigh against Jews.

Jewish Vocational Service, based in downtown San Francisco, circulated an email with Farca’s mugshot, warning recipients to contact police if they saw him. One congregation hired a professional guard for Shabbat services on 21 June, and requested an increased police presence, according to a community-wide email.

A group of anxious parents and grandparents from the East Bay Jewish community who attended a preliminary hearing in Contra Costa County Superior Court in Martinez on Tuesday wanted to

know why Farca was released on bail in the first place.

One father in the group described Farca as “creepy” and “disturbed”.

“I sat behind him in the courtroom while he was talking quietly with his lawyer,” said the individual, who wished to be identified only as a “concerned East Bay Jewish parent” out of fear of being targeted. “Reading about his boasts of body counts, I thought, ‘This man wants to kill my son.’”

The father told J. that while exiting the building, Farca approached one of the grandmothers in the group, looked her in the eye and said, “I hope it goes well for you.”

“Then he walked away,” the parent said. “What did he mean by that? It was bizarre.”

According to the county bail schedule, the standards for being held without bail are quite high, and include crimes such as aggravated murder and possession of a deadly weapon by a prison inmate.

“Under the law, he’s allowed to make bail,” said Scott Alonso, a spokesperson for the Contra Costa County district attorney’s office. “It’s a very high burden to ask a judge to keep a defendant in custody on no bail.”

Still, Alonso said, “the charges in this case were very serious”. He said as part of the conditions of Farca’s release – in addition to a prohibition on handling firearms – he is subject to search and seizure by police “any time, day or night”.

Farca’s bail was initially set at \$225 000 (R3.1 million), and approved by Judge Anita Santos on 12 June. An amount of \$100 000 (R1.4 million) was allocated each for the charges of manufacturing an assault weapon,



and possessing an illegal assault weapon, and \$25 000 (R353, 050) for making criminal threats.

But in a hearing the following day presided over by Judge David Goldstein, the bail amount was lowered by \$100 000 (R1.4 million).

Alonso said the judge reduced the bail because two charges were related to the same weapon, and the California penal code prevents “stacking” of punishments related to the same criminal behaviour.

“Basically, they were alternative charges for the same gun,” Alonso said.

An emergency order that has kept guns away from Farca since his arrest expires on 1 July. He appeared in court with a private attorney on 26 June to protest the new order, sought by the Concord police department, that would continue the prohibition through to 15 July.

Farca was arrested following a tip to the Federal Bureau of Investigation that he made online threats to commit a mass shooting, and boasted that he possessed an assault rifle, according to a court filing.

Farca used the screen name “Adolf Hitler (((6 million)))” on the video game site Steam to inveigh against Jews. He threatened an attack that would exceed the number of victims in the 27 April shooting at a synagogue in Poway, California, in which one woman died, and three were injured. He said he would do so while “wearing a Nazi uniform” and livestream it, like the shooter who killed 51 people and injured 49 in March during two consecutive terrorist attacks at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Farca said he would add “Nazi music”.

“I have a fully semi-automatic weapon AR-15 with multiple high capacity magazines,” Farca wrote in his tagline,

according to police. “Wanna see a mas[s] shooting with a body count of over 30-subhumans?” He anticipated he could “probably get a body count of like 30 kikes, and then like five police officers, because I would also decide to fight to the death”.

In a press release, police said a search warrant of Farca’s Concord home at the time of his arrest turned up an illegally assembled AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, several high-capacity magazines, and “Nazi literature, camouflage clothing, and a sword”. A Concord police officer later told J. that the literature included “some old-looking books” that appeared to be from the 1940s, and “related to Hitler youth”.

Farca was arrested and booked into Contra Costa County Jail on felony charges.

Farca did not stay in custody for long. The day after his bail reduction on 13 June, Farca posted bail through a bail bonds company, paying a 10% fee.

Rafael Brinner, the director of Jewish Community Security with the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Federation, said he was encouraged by how swiftly the authorities had arrested Farca after receiving a tip from the FBI, which had “averted a developing threat”. Brinner also said the



He anticipated he could “probably get a body count of like 30 kikes, and then like five police officers, because I would also decide to fight to the death”.

authorities continued to “focus on mitigating any threat [Farca] might pose” after his release.

Still, some in the community remain uneasy. Farca’s next scheduled court date for criminal charges is 30 July.

The group of parents and grandparents who attended the preliminary hearing got a chance afterward to speak to the prosecutor, Deputy District Attorney Rachel K. Piersig. One Jewish parent was in tears as she told Piersig that she had taken her daughter out of school because she was so afraid of what Farca might do.

“It was very difficult,” the concerned dad said about the scene on Tuesday. “There was a feeling of real helplessness watching this person walk free.”

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Jewish Report

(absa)

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Saturday (6 July)

- Join us for the uplifting Yoga Minyan at Bet David. Suitable for beginners, advanced yogi, young and old. Bring a yoga mat, if you have one. Entrance is free, all welcome. Time: 10:30 to 12:00, 3 Middle Road, Morningside. Contact: 082 552 7385 or admin1@betdavid.org.za

Sunday (7 July)

- Second Innings hosts Craig Allenby, the managing director of the South African National Biodiversity Institute on *Zoos: Arks of the Future*. Time: 09:45 for tea; 10:30 for speaker. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Second Floor, Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors, includes tea/coffee and refreshments. Contact: 011 483 7425.

Tuesday (9 July)

- The Women’s International Zionist Organisation Forum

presents *On the road with Africa’s travelling rabbi*. Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft shares experiences accumulated over 25 years. One of the highlights is the story of 127 Jews detained in Mauritius during World War II. Time: 09:30 for 10:00. Venue: Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Cost: R40, includes tea and refreshments. Bookings: Lauren 011 645 2515/ wizojhb@beyachad.co.za

WHAT'S ON

Thursday (11 July)

- 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.

We need to address our homophobia

It's time for us to stop avoiding the conversation about homosexuality and orthodox Judaism. Children are dying while we pretend that there is no need to talk about it.

We may try to believe that homophobia is not a problem. But it is. And if there's any doubt, just spend a morning in studio with me when I report on Tel Aviv Pride, and then read the station's text line. Simply reporting and discussing it has listeners calling me a "disgrace to my family", an "abomination", and telling me that I ought to be ashamed of myself – and I'm not gay. I can hardly imagine what it's like for someone who is.

On some level, we need to take responsibility for last week's suicide of a beautiful young boy who couldn't, among other things, face living in a world that he felt wouldn't accept him.

In a Facebook post following the incident, his family wrote that one of the difficulties he was having was "struggling with his sexual identity". And whereas there is no doubt that there is hardly a singular cause of this type of tragedy, this struggle was part of it.

This case is even more tragic because it is not unique. It's a challenge confronted by anyone who is different.

No one chooses to be gay. Being gay is as much a choice as choosing to be 5ft (1.5m) tall. There might be environmental factors at play in some cases, but for the most part, most people have little control over it.

It's a randomness of birth. It makes it all the more perplexing that our response in the past has largely been little more than a shrug of the shoulders, and the expectation

that a gay person should simply accept that according to Judaic belief, they will never be allowed to have a real and close relationship, family, and sexual fulfilment – some of the most fundamental aspects of being human. The expectation is that a gay person should simply get on with their life, which essentially means enduring an existence of loneliness and isolation.

Surely, we owe it to people to engage on the subject, and not ignore it in the hope that it will go away. It won't.

It's not like orthodox Judaism hasn't found solutions before. We understand that an "eye for an eye" in scripture denotes financial value, not the removal of the eye. We no longer stone people or pour hot lead down their throats, and we have accepted that whereas in the past, a person who committed suicide couldn't be buried in a Jewish cemetery, today this is not the case. And yet, when it comes to dealing with homosexuality, there is no desire to even address it.

It's not to say that schools like King David are not taking great strides in dealing with it. And it's not to say that there aren't wonderful orthodox rabbis that are trying to do their best in a very complex and complicated area of Judaic principle.

Following last week's tragedy, I saw an email by the former head of Bnei Olami (the Bnei Akiva youth movement's) Israel programme inviting anyone who might be struggling with the challenge of living an orthodox life and being part of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) community, as well as anyone struggling with any other

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



issues, to speak to him. There is finally recognition that this matter is deadly serious.

But sadly, it's not enough.

Too many orthodox South Africans have left this country because they didn't believe that they would ever be accepted. Too many G-d-fearing people have left the faith because they felt their faith excluded them. And, too many beautiful young people end their own lives because they can't imagine living in a world where they are considered an "abomination".

The tragedy of this young man's death is all of ours. The pain was discussed and felt wherever I went over the weekend, and yet I wonder how many rabbonim had the courage to address it from the pulpit this past Shabbat? I understand how uncomfortable the conversation is.

I have no idea if there is an elegant solution to this very complex and complicated issue within orthodox Judaism, and I understand that Judaism cannot simply ignore a stringent prohibition. But we owe it to our children to at least try.

It's time. It's time for us to address homophobia in the community. It's time for us to have the discussions that make us uncomfortable. More than anything, it's time to tell our children that we will love them no matter what issue they are facing, and not assume that they already know that.

Billionaire behind Israeli politics is a Hollywood kingpin

The ongoing saga about the possible indictment of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for fraud and breach of trust has surprising tentacles, some connected to SA.

It raises moral dilemmas about the survival of Israel, and what it has needed to do over the years to do so in a tough world, where enemies are waiting around every corner.

A colourful figure and reputed friend of Israeli politicians over many decades, who has helped Israel dating all the way back to David Ben-Gurion, is Arnon Milchan. He is a billionaire Hollywood mogul who has produced or co-produced dozens of movie classics, including *Pretty Woman*, and recently *Bohemian Rhapsody*. He is a one of the greatest Hollywood names of the past few decades.

But he has another significant role aside from the movies. He is also a legendary arms dealer whose name has been well known to Israeli politicians and defence officials over many decades. This is because of his involvement in covert operations for military equipment for Israel when Israel desperately needed this kind of help.

Milchan is connected to a large number of such acquisitions and intelligence operations. When France was a major weapons supplier, Milchan helped arrange helicopters, after the executives of the French manufacturer, *Aérospatiale*, saw the value of his close connections with powerful Israeli defence people such as Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres. Later, Milchan developed relationships with American manufacturers involving things like missiles, helicopters, and antitank missiles.

Today, commentators believe police investigations into Milchan's extensive contacts with Netanyahu, and possible corruption, could potentially send the prime minister to jail. However, many Israelis still regard Netanyahu as the only one with the experience and know-how to keep Israel safe, and would hate to see him go.

Regarding Netanyahu's tax scandal and Milchan's involvement, Israeli Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit warned on Sunday of a possible "real erosion" of the rule of law. He was referring to Netanyahu's attempt to

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



change the law in order to prevent indictment of a sitting prime minister, to protect himself. A draft indictment on Netanyahu says he received gifts and benefits from Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer, in return for helping them with actions worth billions.

The South African link hangs like an old cloud over Israel's relations with South African liberation movements, and is exploited by Israel's latter-day foes. It still makes South African Jews uncomfortable.

It's about Israel's controversial sale of military hardware to South Africa during apartheid. Although the background at the time was very complicated, and so much water has passed under the bridge since then, it's right that Jews should still feel compromised by this relationship. That is, particularly in the "new" South Africa, and when Israel has shifted so significantly to the right that the old, idealistic Israel of Ben-Gurion's day has faded.

What can be learned from this? Can a country like Israel, which is still surrounded by enemies, choose freely who it associates with, regardless of its partner's morality?

Sadly, Israel, which is a phenomenal success story today, is developing under Netanyahu a cosy relationship with ethnic, far-right regimes hostile to foreigners, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This is happening because Netanyahu believes Israel will benefit, and he shares some of Orbán's views.

The Nation-State Bill passed last year, which specifies Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and which encountered major criticism internationally, points in this direction.

There are unfortunate echoes of Israel's past relationship to South Africa in this association. We don't yet know if Netanyahu will be indicted, but let's hope Israel won't suffer because of his links with Hungary, and similar authoritarian regimes.

PAULA SLIER
WAR CORRESPONDENT
& NEWS ANCHOR

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THE UNTOLD STORIES
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Paula Sliver has worked in broadcasting for over 20 years on the front-lines of Syria, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Egypt; Gaza, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. She is a foreign correspondent, an anchorwoman and news editor and has received numerous awards for her work.

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

New era beckons for SA country communities

As reported elsewhere in this issue, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies’ restructuring of its country communities department has taken an encouraging turn. At a special stakeholders meeting on Sunday, it was agreed to proceed with the establishment of a new independent body to carry out this important work in future.

Contrary to certain claims that have unfortunately been doing the rounds since the decision to restructure was announced, the new arrangement does not mean that the board has abandoned its responsibilities to the country communities. Rather, henceforth, the country communities themselves, together with the trustees of trusts set up in the name of defunct communities, will take ownership of the process. While we are encouraged by the unanimous agreement at the meeting to establish the new organisation – called the Small Communities Association (SCA) – it should be clarified that it isn’t yet a done deal. The next stage will be to secure support for the SCA from the trustees of the various country community trusts. That process is already taking place.

I congratulate Barney Horwitz, who has headed up the historic Jewish community in Kimberley with great dedication for many years, on being appointed as the first chairman of the SCA. We thank him for the passion and commitment he has shown, and look forward to working further with him, along with present Country Communities Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, in bringing this hopeful new chapter in the history of our country communities to successful fruition. I would also like to express our sincerest



appreciation to Rabbi Silberhaft for heading up our country communities department with such inspiration and devotion over so many years, for which he has deservedly gained international renown.

SAJBD leaders visit Israel
Over the past two weeks, I have participated in a series of meetings with senior government officials in Israel along with a number of my board colleagues and representatives of the South African Zionist Federation. The meetings were held to update the officials on our community’s current situation, and to get a perspective on the political situation in Israel itself. Among the departments we engaged with were the ministries of foreign affairs and regional co-operation.

In these uncertain times, it is particularly import that diaspora communities remain in regular contact with Israel and with each other to discuss common problems, and explore ways of working together to resolve them. I thank all those who gave of their time to meet us for their staunch support for our community and willingness to partner with us in safeguarding and promoting Jewish life and the Jewish way of life in 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

Making rainmakers while the sun shines



Tatum Lipschitz, Naama Saban, and Gia Machet making rainmakers

Grade R children at King David Victory Park Pre-Primary school spent a creative morning making rainmakers in honour of the book *Nomvula’s Big Shake, Rattle and Rainbow Adventure*. The book tells the story of Nomvula, and how making rainmakers saved the yellowwood tree. The book, written by Thalia Hoff, a parent at the school, explores the beauty of South Africa and its unique treasures. Hoff guided the children in making their own rain makers using symbolic items such as proteas, corn, jacaranda seeds, grass, bells, beads, and more.

Letters

SWASTIKA-CLAD ‘SOLDIER’ KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING

It seems there is some sympathy for the man who dined at the Wimpy in Bloemfontein wearing full Nazi regalia (“Swastika-wearing ‘soldier’ in Wimpy says sorry”, *SA Jewish Report*, 28 June). Though the Bloemfontein resident in his late 70s has apologised for his actions, nobody said anything to him, apart from the horrified Kanya Mofokeng whose video went viral. The man knew exactly what he was doing, in fact he may even be old enough to have been a member of the Ossewa Brandwag. He’s also old enough to know what the Swastika means to the “other”, and by Hitler’s reckoning, Mofokeng along with Jews would have been classified as *untermenschen* (inferior people). Famous Brands, the owner of the Wimpy brand, brushed it off as an “incident” that it would investigate. He was dressed for a pageant, or he was identifying with Nazi ideology, otherwise why would he have walked

around in public, wearing those hated symbols. If we let one person get away with it, we might as well become ostriches. At the very least, Wimpy should reprimand its manager or franchisee, and make a suitable donation to a Jewish charity. The man should also be forced to do community work with a Jewish organisation in Bloemfontein. And, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies should take him to the Equality Court, and lay a charge of racism and anti-Semitism at the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). Although I suspect, the court being as biased as it is, it would take months to resolve. Witness Marius Fransman, the former provincial secretary of the African National Congress in the Western Cape, and trade unionist and anti-Semite, Tony Ehrenreich, who still haven’t apologised for their hateful remarks, even though ordered to do so by the SAHRC. – **Brian Josselowitz, Cape Town**

DON’T JUDGE THE JUDGES

In regard to the Beth Din’s Limmud decision, don’t judge our judges. The Book of Ruth talks about how in the days of judging judges, there was a famine. Our rabbis ask about the seeming tautology of judging judges, and explain that because they judged their judges in order that they should not have to listen to them, they were punished with a famine. So, please don’t judge our current judges and continue all your *loshan horah* (negative speech). The Beth Din’s decision with regard to Limmud is its business, with reasoning beyond us. I shouldn’t have to justify to you why you shouldn’t do so, but will share a snippet with you. There is a fairly prominent rabbi – who

incidentally achieved six distinctions in matric when distinctions were rare – and has been involved in full-time Jewish learning for more than 20 years since the day he matriculated. It gives us an indication of how learned he is, and how little importance he attached to matric. I heard this rabbi say about one of the judges that he has no idea how someone can know so much. So to conclude, the Beth Din and leadership gave Limmud a fair hearing, and in their wisdom they decided it wasn’t good. There are so many 100% kosher and free shiurim which are of a much higher calibre than the Limmud lecturers, whom I have heard speaking elsewhere. – **Elliot Kuppler, Johannesburg**

DIN OF CONFUSION

As a secular Jew, I am somewhat bemused by the stand the Beth Din has taken against Limmud. Beth Din branches do what’s convenient for them to do. According to the Johannesburg Beth Din, you cannot be a *mashgiach* (kosher supervisor) if you are not *shomer Shabbat* (Shabbat observant). According to the Cape Town Beth Din, you don’t need to be *shomer Shabbat* to be a *mashgiach*. Seems to me there is confusion within the Beth as to what is the Din. – **Chaim Myerson, Cape Town**

**BANNING OF LIMMUD ATTENDANCE
DICTATORIAL**
The Beth Din endorsement of the Rabbinical Association’s banning of “its rabbis” from attending or teaching at Limmud is not surprising, albeit disappointing. It’s one thing for rabbis to decide not to attend Limmud, which is their prerogative and right, but to be instructed by a directive is unseemly and dictatorial. It reminds me of Ronald Reagan’s comment with reference to the bankrupt Soviet Union, when he aptly stated that they “have to build walls to keep their people in”. – **Bernard Katz, Johannesburg**

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Jewish Report

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Farewell to Comrades legend Jackie Mekler

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The end of a long and inspirational running road, a road that stretched more than 100 000km or nearly three-times around the world, has come for Jackie Mekler. Arguably the most successful Jewish athlete in South African history, Mekler died peacefully in his sleep on Sunday, 30 June, at his home in Cape Town at the age of 87.

Mekler, a five-time Comrades Marathon winner, was a man who persevered until the very end. He finally published his autobiography, *Running Alone*, this year, and he was at the Comrades Expo last month giving autographs to star struck would-be Comrades runners, former winners, and journalists.

Mekler ran his first Comrades Marathon in 1952, finishing seventh. He won his first Comrades Marathon in 1958, and went on to claim further victories in 1960, 1963, 1964, and 1968. He holds 10 Comrades gold medals, one silver, and one bronze.

He donned the Springbok vest in England, Finland, Canada, and France, and held three world records in the 30 miles (48km), 40 miles (64km), and 50 miles (80km) at one time.

In his professional career, he became a journeyman printer in an abbreviated timespan, a successful print sales representative, and later the managing director and chairman of Penrose Press in Johannesburg.



Jackie Mekler en route to one of his five Comrades victories

After he left the printing industry, he made a success of a farming venture in Mpumalanga before retiring to the Cape in 2018.

Bruce Fordyce, who recently chatted to Mekler at the Comrades Expo, and often spent time with

him at the Comrades VIP lounge, said Mekler was an “absolute gentleman, quiet, very dignified, a lovely, lovely guy”.

“In fact, Jackie lived opposite me for a while in Forest Town. His house was directly opposite, so in



Jackie Mekler

Photos: Comrades Marathon Association

one small street in Forest Town, we used to laugh, there were 14 Comrades Marathon wins, because he won five, and I won nine,” said Fordyce.

“As well as the five Comrades wins, he is also famous for a silver medal from the Commonwealth Games in 1954 in Vancouver. He was also very good at the shorter distances.

“I bought a copy of his book recently. It’s such a shock to all of us that he died because a month ago, he was full of beans. He was signing autographs at the expo, talking to people. We Comrades winners see each other a lot. We are like a little family. It’s terribly sad that he’s gone.”

The former chairperson of the Comrades Marathon Association, Peter Proctor, echoed Fordyce’s sentiment. “Jackie was such a good friend and mentor to so many Comrades Marathon runners of all ages over the years, whether a contender, a midfielder, or an aspirant finisher,” he said.

“Jackie always had a word of advice or encouragement to anyone who asked. He has been to the Comrades Finish and VIP lounge for many years, always with a smile and a joke to tell. He had an effervescent and bubbly personality, and was a true gentleman of the Comrades greats, with never a bad word spoken about anyone.

“I had the honour and privilege of escorting Jackie down to the

finish line to fire one of the cut-off guns in 2018, which he was so proud of doing. Once done, we were having photographs taken, and he whispered to me, “This will be my final chapter at Comrades, and what a moment it has been!”

You will be very sorely missed, but never forgotten. Rest in peace!”

Comrades runner and personality, Arnold Geerds, said, “Jackie was the small man with the big heart. The children’s home product that rose from such humble beginnings to become a five-time Comrades winner, record setter, and world record holder. He completed 32 ultra-marathons of which he won an astounding 13, including the Pieter Korkie and London to Brighton.

“His 50 mile [80km] world record was [completed] in a speedy 5 hours, 24 minutes, and 57 seconds in 1954 wearing Bata tennis takkies. Aside from running, Jackie become a force in the printing industry after having started from humble beginnings, and ran one of the finest printing houses in the country.

“Jackie, I’m sure you and your beloved teammate, competitor,

“Jackie was a true gentleman of the road, respected by thousands for his prowess as a runner, modesty in success, and praise of the efforts of fellow athletes.”

and friend, Wally Hayward, have already set off for a few runs up there. Soon you’ll have organised a few races too. Can’t wait to run with you when I see you again.”

Blake Wilkins, a close friend and the publisher of Mekler’s book, said, “Jackie was a true gentleman of the road, respected by thousands for his prowess as a runner, modesty in success, and praise of the efforts of fellow athletes. Hundreds of athletes called on Jackie at his *Running Alone* book stand at the Comrades 2019 Expo, and later in the VIP section of the Comrades finish in Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. His enjoyment of the occasion in the company of friends and fellow athletes was visible to all who came to spend time with him.”

Mekler, a family man, is survived by his wife Margie, daughters Kate and Bronwen, and grandsons Sebastian and Leo.

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A CALL TO ACTION



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Women and girls (age 3 and up) should light candles every Friday afternoon, 18 minutes before sunset, in honour of the Shabbat, and before Festivals.



TEFILLIN

Men (age 13 and up) should put on Tefillin every morning excluding Shabbat and Festivals. Tefillin are black leather boxes containing small parchment scrolls of selected portions from the Torah, in which the fundamentals of the Jewish faith are inscribed.



MESSAGE ON A DOORPOST - MEZUZAH

Every Jewish home should have a mezuzah on its doorposts. The mezuzah contains the Shema and is a sign that the home is sanctified for G d and enjoys His protection.

TORAH

Study a portion of Torah daily. Even a few lines contain the infinite wisdom and will of G d.



TZEDAKAH

Give charity daily. When you give to the needy, you are serving as G d's emissary to provide for His creations. The home is a classroom, and keeping a "pushkah" (charity box) in your home -- and contributing a coin to it every day -- will teach you and your children the noble value of regular giving.



A HOME FILLED WITH HOLY BOOKS

Furnish your home with as many holy books as possible. At the very least, get a Chumash (Bible), Psalms, and a Prayer Book.



KASHRUT

Eating is one of the basics of life. Shouldn't it be done with intelligence? For a healthy and sound soul, eat only kosher foods, for when you eat differently, your Judaism is not just metaphysical, but part and parcel of your very being. Contact Chabad House if you need advice or assistance in koshering your kitchen.



OBSERVE FAMILY PURITY

Observance of the Jewish marital laws allows you to make the most of your marriage, bringing you and your spouse to new, undiscovered depths of intimacy and sacredness in your relationship.



EDUCATION

Every Jewish boy and girl should receive a Jewish education. Teach your children everything you know about your faith, and provide them with a quality Jewish education -- you will be ensuring Jewish integrity, Jewish identity and a Jewish future.



LOVE YOUR FELLOW

"Love your fellow as yourself," said the great Jewish sage Rabbi Akiva, is a most basic principle in the Torah. Reaching out to your fellow Jew with patience, love, concern and unity is among the greatest mitzvot a Jew can do.

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