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south african Jewish Report

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www.sajr.co.za

South Africans have easy access to anti-Semitic texts online

TALI FEINBERG

Did you know that when you order the newest gadget from Takealot.com, your child's birthday present from Loot.co.za, or the latest bestsellers from Exclusive Books online, you can also add a copy of the blatantly anti-Semitic *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to your cart?

These online bookstores stock millions of books from overseas and independent publishers, and it appears the stock isn't vetted. But, according to David Saks, associate director at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* "continues to be a banned publication in South Africa, and therefore any local distributor stocking it is in breach of the law".

This isn't the only anti-Semitic text being sold by these stores. When local community member Greg Schlosberg was browsing Loot.co.za in April, he came across *The Synagogue of Satan: The Secret History of Jewish World Domination* by Holocaust-denier Andrew Carrington Hitchcock.

When Schlosberg queried this with Loot.co.za, he was twice told, "Unfortunately we cater for all sorts of customers with a vast variety of interest in books." He wrote to the store again, saying, "Books such as this promote religious intolerance and incite hatred. Such hatred can, in turn, lead to hate attacks being carried out by fanatics." He cited the example of the terrorist attack at a shul in San Diego in April.

He then took the matter to the Cape SAJBD, which contacted Loot.co.za regarding the anti-Semitic material. "Loot told us that it stocks more than 17 million books, and there is no vetting process on this stock. It said the stock doesn't represent the company's views, but I told them that by selling it, they are promoting it," said Cape Board Director Stuart Diamond. "I asked them if they would have the same response if it was racist towards other South Africans, and they agreed that it was problematic."

Said Schlosberg, "There's no place in society for material such as this to be so easily accessible. These websites are either advertising these books knowing full well what the product comprises, in which case action needs to be taken against them, or there is a greater need for checks and controls to be implemented by these websites. Either way, it's unacceptable."

Alison Swain, the digital marketing manager

of Loot.co.za, later wrote to Diamond again, thanking the Cape SAJBD for bringing this to their attention. "The views and opinions expressed in all the books on our site are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views and values of our brand," she wrote.

"The product [*The Synagogue of Satan* by Andrew Carrington Hitchcock] was unavailable to order [supplier was out of stock] on our site, and I have just been notified by our product team that the book has been removed from the website. Our apologies to the South African Jewish community if this has caused any distress. It was definitely unintended," she said.

However, a simple search by the *SA Jewish Report* showed that books called *The Synagogue of Satan* by other authors are still available on Loot.co.za, Takealot.com, and the Exclusive Books online store, although it is unclear if they are anti-Semitic in their content.

What's more, multiple copies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are for sale on all three sites. The book is a fabricated anti-Semitic text purporting to describe a Jewish plan to achieve global domination. Unedited copies of *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, and *The International Jew: the World's Foremost Problem* by Henry Ford, are also available.

While it's clear that there is no anti-Semitic agenda at these online stores, and they aren't promoting these books, they create a loophole for anyone wanting to access these hate-filled texts, for as little as R109.

A further search shows other discriminatory texts on these sites. A book called *Black People, White People – Who is the Devil* can be bought on Takealot.com and Exclusive Books, and if you search Takealot.com with the word "Islam", the first book that

comes up is titled *Islam: Evil in the Name of G-d*. The book cover lists a series of offensive terms regarding the Prophet Muhammad.

There are also many books with the words "k*fire" and "n*gger" in their titles, although most of these appear to carry historical contexts. One book is titled *Niggerology 101 (The Basic Nigger Lesson Plan): The Truth about the Word Nigger and Them Niggers*.

The South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation's Tali Nates and Mary Kluk said, "In a democracy such as ours, the public have easy access to racist and anti-Semitic information through books, articles, or the internet.

"We encourage members of the public to become upstanders, and to write to the booksellers requesting that they remove literature filled with racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred from their shelves."

The *SA Jewish Report* approached all three stores for comment. Swain explained that Loot used "reputable local and international book suppliers" that sends them automatic feeds. "It's unfortunately near impossible to vet every book and author which gets automatically uploaded and listed," she said.

If books are flagged, "We will deal with it on a case by case basis, and after reviewing the query, will take relevant action. Once flagged and removed, our system will permanently block that title," she said.

When asked if Loot would remove anti-Semitic books like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* from the site in future, Swain responded, "Note that we still have to adhere to the fact that constitutionally, authors are allowed freedom of speech. If a book does constitute hate speech or any human-rights violations then we will most definitely review and take action to remove it." She agreed that the books the *SA Jewish Report* had flagged would be reviewed, and said some had already been removed.

Asked if Loot would look at removing books and texts that are discriminatory against other groups, she said, "We can't comment at this stage. We take this extremely seriously though, and will have internal discussions about it, and advise accordingly."

Exclusive Books Chief Executive Grattan Kirk thanked the *SA Jewish Report* for bringing this to his attention, and said that he would look

Continued on page 4>>



Bringing joy to Kliptown

See story on page 5

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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Farrakhan ‘termite’ tweet removed

A 2018 tweet in which Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan compared Jews to termites is no longer available on Twitter.

On Tuesday, the social media platform introduced new rules prohibiting “language that dehumanises others on the basis of religion”. Twitter said accounts that had posted such tweets prior to the policy change would have to delete offending tweets before being able to post new ones.

Farrakhan’s tweet was no longer available on the site as of Tuesday afternoon.

Last year, the leader, who has a long history of making anti-Semitic and homophobic comments, wrote on Twitter, “I’m not an anti-Semite. I’m anti-Termite.” The tweet was linked to a video of a speech he gave marking the 23rd anniversary of the Million Man March, his 1995 rally advocating empowerment for black men.

At the time, Facebook removed a similar post, but Twitter said it didn’t violate its policies.

As few as five Jews in Cairo

Marcelle Haroun, the mother of the current president of Cairo’s Jewish community, has died at the age of 93.

Her death, announced on Saturday, leaves five Jews known to be living in Cairo,

Watani International reported. They are Haroun’s daughter, Magda, who heads the minuscule community, and four granddaughters.

However, JTA received an email this week from a woman saying that her mother has an Egyptian ID with her religion marked as Jewish, and attends synagogue for events, and thus should be counted as part of the community.

The AFP news service reported in March 2017 that there were also 12 Jews living in the coastal city of Alexandria.

Haroun was married to lawyer and politician Shehata Haroun, known as a Jewish anti-Zionist who was a member of the Egyptian Communist Party, according to the report. Her daughter told *Tablet* in 2013 that Marcelle was her father’s “comrade”.

Egypt was home to about 80 000 Jews when Israel was founded in 1948. Thousands began leaving in ensuing years, and many more in two waves, in 1956 and 1967. The Harouns remained, considering themselves Egyptian first, according to *Watani*.

Haroun was predeceased by two daughters.

Coldplay frontman turns benefactor

Coldplay frontman Chris Martin visited a kindergarten for Jewish and Arab children in the central Israeli city of Jaffa during a quick visit.

The English rock star was spotted by a reporter for Israel’s Channel 12 show, *Good Evening with Guy Pines*, on Monday.

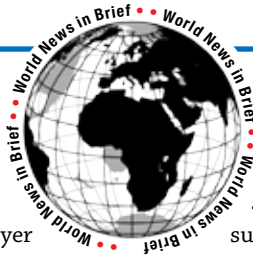
Martin donates to the foundation behind the Bustan Yafa network of schools, according to *The Jerusalem Post*. The schools teach multiple religions and languages, and preach tolerance and co-existence.

Martin was married to the Jewish actress and lifestyle guru, Gwyneth Paltrow, from 2003 to 2016. One of their two children is named Moses.

Melbourne café owner unbowed

A Jewish-owned café in a suburb of Melbourne, Australia, was hit with anti-Semitic graffiti twice in one week.

On Saturday, the back fence of Aliza’s Place Café was painted with, “The Holocaust didn’t happen, but it should have,” and a large blue swastika. It came two days after the same fence was painted with the words “The



Holocaust is a lie.”
“I cannot ignore this symbol,” the owner, Aliza Shuvaly, told the *Australian Jewish News* after the first attack. “All my family were Holocaust survivors - my mother’s parents, my husband’s parents - and for me, it’s hurting twice.” She said she wouldn’t allow the attack to force her to close the café.

Flag stunt won’t silence Madonna

If Rotterdam ends up hosting the 2020 Eurovision Song Contest, Madonna can perform.

The Dutch city’s council voted down a motion to ban the pop star from the contest because of her use of a Palestinian flag on stage in Israel at the competition in May. The motion was proposed by a member of the staunchly pro-Israel and anti-Muslim Party for Freedom.

Last week’s draft motion described the Palestinian flag as “a symbol for the rejection of Israel”, and cited growing anti-Semitism in Rotterdam. It didn’t mention the fact that the singer’s performance in Tel Aviv also featured an Israeli flag.

Hidde van Koningsveld, the head of the pro-Israel CiJo group, noted the omission on Twitter, and called the draft motion “nonsensical”.

During Madonna’s performance in Tel Aviv, despite Eurovision’s policy banning political statements, dancers at one point wore Israeli and Palestinian flags. It was construed by many as a plea for peace.

The Netherlands won the 2019 contest, and thus will host the 2020 edition.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:14	18:06	Johannesburg
17:36	18:31	Cape Town
16:54	17:48	Durban
17:15	18:08	Bloemfontein
17:07	18:02	Port Elizabeth
17:00	17:54	East London

Torah Thought

The mystery of the red cow

The information age has given us an unprecedented ability to understand ourselves, one another, and the world around us. I’m a person with eclectic interests, and have, in my spare time, learned about film criticism, history, engineering, battery design, photography, psychology, design, philosophy, sociology, and lockpicking (I know, right?) All of this has been done without stepping foot in a lecture, but by watching experts on YouTube, and taking online courses.

While I may be more of an information-junkie than most, this is a worldwide phenomenon. Many doctors and lawyers today are familiar with patients and clients approaching them with some self-taught knowledge about their condition or case. This is why the *mitzva* (commandment) that characterises our parsha is one of the most frustrating, and also one of the most important.

The *parah adumah* (red cow) is, as you may know, the archetype of a *mitzva* that we don’t understand. We can explain

Shabbat (declaring, through our abstention from creative activity, that Hashem created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh), *mezuzah* (the words of the *Sh’má* upon the doorpost of almost every room, to remind us of our duties and responsibilities as we pass through), and the laws against murder and theft. But, we can’t explain why water infused with the ashes of the red cow brings purity to one who has had contact with the deceased, but impurity to another who is carrying it simply to transport it.

This is far from the only such inexplicable *mitzva*. Why aren’t we allowed to eat pork? Why are men not allowed to shave with a blade? Why can’t our clothes contain a mixture of wool and linen? For all of these *mitzvot* and more, our rabbis have given explanations, but these have all been (in the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel) like a commentary on a work of art – we can do our best to say what we see and feel upon beholding it, but we can’t capture the artwork in our words. The *mitzva* stands beyond, separate.

Rabbi Sam Thurgood, Beit Midrash Morasha

In a way, my endeavour to learn more and more is an attempt to comprehend and ultimately contain the outside world. “Scientia potentia est!” (knowledge is power), declared Sir Frances Bacon, and through our knowledge, we manifest and actualise our power. But, then, we are confronted with a red cow. That which stands beyond knowledge. We realise that the Torah is too great to be contained within our minds, that it stands apart, beyond, above.

The red cow is to our minds what Shabbat is to our creative energy – the phenomenon that shows us the scope of reality beyond ourselves, that Hashem is greater and more mysterious than we could have hoped for. That we ourselves are not simply information to be grasped, but a part of this eternal mystery, and the part that can wonder in delight at the mystery itself.



South African

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Feinstein unapologetic in his support for Corbyn

MIRAH LANGER

Former African National Congress MP, Andrew Feinstein, has come out guns blazing in reaction to criticism of his Jewish identity in response to his support for Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

“These [often Jewish detractors] are practising a horrible form of deceit, in which they try to turn anyone with different political views into these monsters, and I’m not prepared to let them,” he declared with reference to several attacks he has experienced on social media.

Feinstein, a born and bred Capetonian, served in parliament under then President Nelson Mandela. He called for a thorough investigation into the South African arms deal, and later moved to London. He has since worked as an anti-corruption activist, investigating the global arms trade.

Feinstein says that he came to know Corbyn through his work as chairman of the Stop the War campaign. “I knew he was a backbencher MP, but I knew him more as a remarkable activist and an extraordinary man,” he says.

Corbyn was elected Labour leader in 2015, a political outcome that shocked many due to his ultra-left-wing alignment. His leadership has subsequently been plagued by claims of anti-Semitism.

Yet during this time, Feinstein has tweeted in support of him, refuting persistent claims that the Labour leader is anti-Semitic.

In one tweet on 23 June, Feinstein referenced his Jewish identity, declaring, “I’m Jewish. My mother was a Holocaust survivor who lost 39 members of her family in the camps. I have lectured at Auschwitz on genocide prevention. I experienced anti-Semitism in apartheid South Africa. I can state unequivocally that Jeremy Corbyn is not an anti-Semite!”.

The backlash was personal, “I was asked what kind of Jew I was, and

called a self-hating Jew and various other things.”

One rabbi responded by suggesting that the “only reason your [Feinstein’s] mother survived is because she must have collaborated with the Nazis”.

Another person asked him to provide camp records to prove the death of his family members.

At first, he thought he would have to defend his family background, but then took a different angle on the matter. “Who are these people to question me? Who are these people to say Feinstein is not Jewish enough to claim to be Jewish in his support for Jeremy Corbyn?



“There are an enormous amount of Jews who talk about the holocaust when talking about what their Judaism means to them,” Feinstein says. In fact, he sees his ties to the Holocaust as in some way shaping his “hatred of any form of racism”.

He says he has stood by Corbyn because he believes that the claims of anti-Semitism against him are part of a deliberate political campaign to discredit him. People see Corbyn as a threat because he is “very anti-establishment”.

In particular, right-wing groups and internal factions within the Labour party are designing this portrait of Corbyn as negative towards Jews.

“Anti-Semitism has been weaponised to target him because nothing else succeeded ... [After his appointment,] there were various smears against him, none of which held, but the one that became the most difficult was a claim of anti-Semitism.

It is a claim which, Feinstein says, “There is no evidence for whatsoever – and believe me, I’ve looked.”

Feinstein says that as a natural

cynic, he didn’t trust reports, but conducted his own investigation into the various claims made against Corbyn.

The *BBC News* website reported last year that under Corbyn, Labour had adopted a new anti-Semitism code that did not adhere in full to that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The news site also reported that in the past, Corbyn had described Hamas and Hezbollah representatives with whom he had met as “friends”.

Corbyn was also criticised by former Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks for comments made in a video clip from 2013, in which Corbyn declared that a group of British Zionists had “no sense of English irony”.

Last year, Corbyn was embroiled in controversy once again when it emerged that in 2012, he had sent a Facebook message in support of an artist, whose mural was removed from a wall in East London. The mural depicts amongst other images, swarthy male figures with hook noses counting money. Corbyn later said he regretted the message.

He also came under fire following allegations that he had laid a wreath at a ceremony in Tunisia that included the commemoration of Palestinians who had kidnapped and killed 11 Israeli Olympians in

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Munich in 1972.

Feinstein says he investigated the latter incident, and found that Corbyn had been at the same cemetery in Tunisia, but not at that specific ceremony.

Previously, Corbyn has been quoted as saying that he had laid a wreath in Tunisia, but at a ceremony for the victims of an Israeli airstrike in 1985.

Says Feinstein, “the reality is that no one can actually say, ‘Here is something anti-Semitic that Jeremy Corbyn actually said’, or ‘Here is something where he called for the death of Israel’.”

Corbyn certainly is openly and highly critical of Israel’s policies, a viewpoint which Feinstein supports. Yet, criticising Israel has incorrectly become conflated with hating Jews, he says.

“I’m sure there probably are anti-Semites who are anti-Zionism. But to say that because there are some anti-Semites who are anti-Zionist, all anti-Zionists are anti-Semites, is absolutely nonsense. It’s an illogical absurdity, you need to look at the political campaign behind this to get rid of Corbyn.”

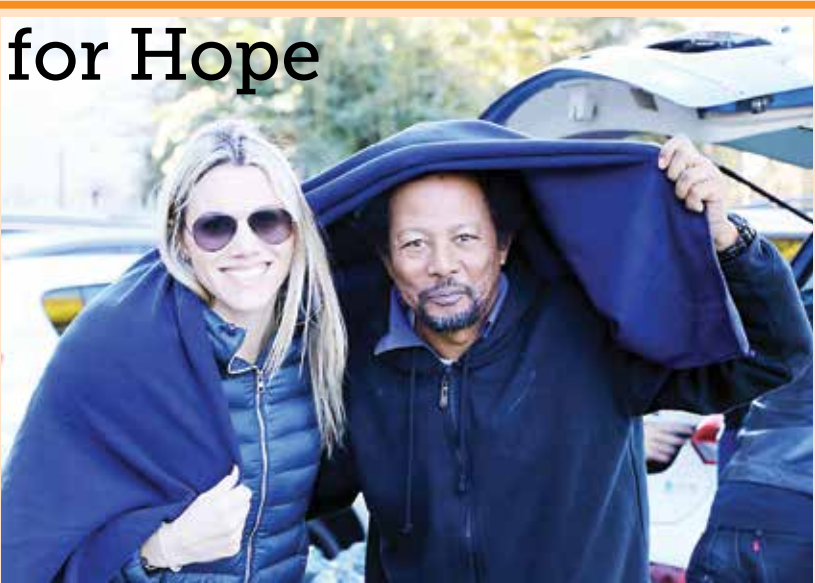
Feinstein says a further concern is that when “anti-Semitism and anti-racism are being used to fight political battles that have nothing to do with these, it undermines the fight against real anti-Semitism, real Islamophobia, and real racism, which is increasing across this country, across Europe, and across the world”.

In defending Corbyn, he doesn’t aim to get everyone to agree with him. However, the Jewish community, “like every other community”, needs to allow for the reality that within it, there will always be a plurality of voices.

“For the very narrow purposes of trying to get rid of an anti-establishment politician, we should not lose that wonderful tradition. We should remember there are a diversity of Jews, and we should respect each other not just as Jews, but as members of society and humanity.”

Blankets for Hope

Nicci Raz, national executive director of the South African Zionist Federation, and Danny Adeno Abebe, shaliach of the World Zionist Organisation and Habonim, celebrate the donation of more than 3 000 blankets to the homeless, destitute, and elderly across Johannesburg. The blankets were donated by the Jewish community in partnership with the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI). They are being distributed through church communities around the city.



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Farewell to ‘the rockstar who never acted like one’

NICOLA MILTZ

Ari Brest captivated audiences whenever he stood up to perform as a singer, musician, or actor. He undoubtedly had star quality – that X factor.

But the life of this 26-year-old, up-and-coming lead singer of the Indie rock band, Boxer, was cut short when he passed away on Sunday.

He stayed over at friend’s house for a get together, went to sleep, and didn’t wake up on Sunday morning. The cause of death is still unclear, his family said.

Jewish Report that their beloved son “loved people and had a zest for life”.

“Ari was not afraid of dying so long as he lived his life to the full, which he did,” they said.

Early on Sunday, as rumours of his passing rippled through the community, disbelieving friends from around the world reached out to one another, clinging to the hope that what they heard was untrue.

But as the news broke on social media, dozens of heartfelt messages came through from people expressing condolences.



After school, Ari obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Drama, majoring in film. He had recently moved away from home, and was eagerly awaiting the release of a new album.

Close friend and fellow band member, Jake Nudelman, who plays keyboard, said the band was struggling to come to terms with the death of its lead singer, songwriter, and close friend. “It has been surreal,” he said.

“Ari was my first friend at high school – we clicked immediately. Our connection was always music and drama. Besides being creative, he was a warm and spiritual person. He was eager to connect with new people from all walks of life and build meaningful relationships.”



Photos: Christelle Duvenage

One of his closest friends, Aron Suttner, posted a message on Ari’s recently created brand page, The Scruple. He called on others to post further anecdotes and messages which will be collated and presented to his parents.

Suttner described his friend as someone who “spread so much love and light”.

“Ari was a man of such sensitivity. He felt the vibrations of

Hundreds of shocked and grief-stricken mourners gathered at the funeral of this gifted performer on Monday.

Portrayed as super-talented, highly creative, intuitive, and free-spirited, Ari touched many with his innate passion for self-expression and sense of humour, those close to him said.

His parents, Hedley and Lindy, told the SA

people around him, and took on the burden of so many people’s angst,” Suttner said. “He shouldered the experience of the modern man with difficulty, but also with grace.”

“His art was cutting edge, and his charming nature made us all walk a bit taller. He also believed so strongly in the creativity of others.”

Ari was born and raised in Johannesburg,

and lived in the suburbs of Fairvale and Fairmount. He was the middle child of three sons, Ilan, 29, the oldest, and Gabi, 19, the youngest.

The three boys grew up in a musical household. Their father, Hedley, is a well-known base guitarist and their mother, Lindy, a gifted singer. The couple met many years ago performing in the same band together.

According to Lindy, Ari knew he “had something” from a very young age, long before they did. “When he was in Grade 1, before we even knew he could sing, he asked us to find him an agent,” she said.

He began his school career at Yeshiva College, and loved singing in the school choir and performing in the Shooby Doob Shloimy concerts. Later, he moved to King David Victory Park (KDVP) High where, according to his teachers, he excelled in the arts.



Apart from doing well on the sports field, Ari became known as a consummate performer in drama and musical theatre.

Head of arts and culture at KDVP, Renos Spanoudes, said Ari was gifted. “He came from a grand pedigree of performers. His father, Hedley, would assist all our musical productions on guitar while his son performed on stage.”

He said Ari had a beautiful voice, and was a strong actor. “He understood the power of taking direction, and was cast in the major productions and one-act plays, in which he shone. He studied two of his great passions in life – music and drama – for matric, and went on to study further in these fields after school, slowly making a name for himself.”

Spanoudes said Ari would often visit the school after he matriculated, offering to help the music and drama students. He became an inspiration to many.

“He connected deeply, and kept in contact with people in his life. You could see this from his funeral, which was attended by so many, a true testament to Ari’s impact on the world.”

Yeshiva College Big Shul said Ari had lived his life with passion and enthusiasm. “He was a rockstar, but when you met him, he never acted like one,” Friedman said.

Indie rock band Shortstraw posted on Facebook, “The world has lost one of the most genuine and kind-hearted people, and a creative mind like no other.”

At the time of his death, Ari had been in great spirits, his parents said, and was looking forward to joining his girlfriend, Megan Gottscho, 26, in Vietnam to make short films and take photographs. Ari encouraged everyone he knew to make the most of what they had, and not settle for less than the life they were capable of living, they said.

“This is what we want him to be remembered for.”

South Africans have easy access to anti-Semitic texts online

>>Continued from page 1

into it. “As a bookseller, we don’t publish books, and are just a retail conduit for publishers. I would therefore think you should approach the publishers directly.”

Takealot.com said it would need more time to respond to questions.

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer says that according to South Africa’s constitution, freedom of expression is limited when it is “propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence, or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm”.

In this context, the sale of the books might be constitutionally protected. So, if a Holocaust denier does not call for imminent violence against Jews, his book can be sold.

Diamond said he hoped the board could play a leading role in calling out companies in instances like this. “We [the Cape Board] want to be a direct line for anyone who sees hatred or products that contain hate speech. That’s why we say that South Africa is #NoPlaceForHate. These online stores might not have done this intentionally, but as South Africans, we deserve better.”

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B’nai Mitzvah twins raise money for Kliptown kids

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When Jack and Emma Yurich were preparing for their Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah in the United States, they weren’t thinking about the oodles of boodle they might get as gifts, but about the children of Kliptown, Soweto, they could help.

This week, they arrived in South Africa, and sought out Future Angels Day Care Centre, a colourful refuge breaking the grey cacophony of shacks that crowd Kliptown’s sand streets.

The centre became brighter still when the Yurich twins came to donate the goods bought with money raised through their B’Nai Mitzvah (Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah) project, which they termed “Karing for Kliptown”.

Welcomed by the singing voices of smiling children, parents and teachers, the twins finally got the chance to interact with the community they have been working so hard to assist.

Jack and Emma first heard about Kliptown when their South African-born mother, Joanne Yurich, visited the township three years ago on a trip back to South Africa. Joanne and her mother, Robyn Menter were struck by the plight of the largely forgotten Kliptown community – which lacks basic infrastructure and sanitation.

“It was the first time I’d been to Kliptown. We’d never been to Soweto, even though we’d grown up in Johannesburg,” recalls Joanne. “Ilan Ossendryver – a private Soweto guide and photojournalist – brought us to Kliptown, where the Freedom Charter was signed, and we were just so moved by the community. We wished that we’d known about their loss of hope, and that we could have brought more to help them.

“When we came back to the United States, we showed my kids all the pictures we’d

taken. What really reached home for us was a picture of a little boy with a toy that he’d made from a milk carton. We showed the kids that these children don’t have toys, they entertain themselves through music or a few soccer balls which are like gold to them.”



Temple Emanu-El, the twin’s synagogue in Dallas, encourages all those approaching Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah to do a mitzvah project. “When the twins began talking about their mitzvah project, my husband Joe and I said we really want you to do something that’s impactful,” recalls Joanne. The twins had been so touched by what they saw and heard of Kliptown that they decided to dedicate their project to the community. “That’s how they came up with the idea to raise money for shoes and soccer balls for the kids, something that was necessary but fun too.”

“We wanted to do something that was

important to us,” said Emma, “and since my mom is born here, it made sense to do this – it’s something that’s part of our roots. We spent a year raising money, and raised just more than \$27 000 [about R383 000].” While the twins set up a website and began raising money through fundraisers like bake sales, a selfless decision took the project to the next level.

“When we were about to do their invitations, they said, ‘We have everything we need, let’s ask people to donate money to the community instead of giving us gifts’,” said Joanne. “That was how they were able to raise enough to be able to give more than just shoes and soccer balls.”

The twins ultimately donated AstroTurf for the playground, toys, a huge selection of dress-up clothes, 14 tricycles, clothing, and three pairs of good quality tennis shoes for each of the 40 delighted kids and seven teachers, as well as 175 soccer balls distributed throughout the community.

After a year of fundraising, the twins, together with their parents, three younger siblings, grandmother, and two family friends, finally visited the community they’d heard so much about. They went to deliver the goods personally. “We’ve never even been to South Africa,” said Emma at the centre, surrounded by the grateful children. “Being here is

awesome, they’re so sweet. We’d only seen pictures, it’s a lot different to what I expected. The conditions are worse than I imagined. Meeting them is so sad, but being able to give them these things and play with them makes it a lot happier. Giving back has always been important to our family, but this has been the biggest thing that we’ve done so far.”

“It’s amazing to be here because all of the work that we’ve done, it just really pays off,” said Jack. “It’s heart-breaking how the government has neglected this community.”

The family aim to keep the project going when the twins’ three younger siblings have their Batmitzvah and Barmitzvahs.

Dolly Ntshangase, the founder of the day-care centre, said the school had started in 2013 with 14 kids. Today, it caters for 40 small children under six, and while they get a social grant from the department, it’s not enough to give the teachers a stipend and cater for the needs of the children, who are also fed two full meals and two snacks daily. The school ultimately survives through donations.

“This project is fantastic,” said Ntshangase. “Maybe this family were sent from above. We didn’t expect this. Just getting three pairs of shoes and a tracksuit for each child is so wonderful. We think Joanne and her family will be blessed from above.”

Ossendryver, who is thrilled by the initiative, is also dedicated to the centre and the wider community. He personally assists, and frequently organises fundraising initiatives, and brings tourists to Kliptown. “I’m one of the few white people who come here,” he said.

To give thanks, the community treated the family to a song by talented singer and guitarist Cleopas Ways, and to a special performance by the Kliptown Gumboot Dancers.

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Shooting from the hip

A Johannesburg man told his father-in-law this week that he was ashamed to be a Jew because the *SA Jewish Report* “named and shamed a Jew to other Jews” to (apparently) sell newspapers. They had this conversation via cell phone voice notes that were distributed to members of the community.

This man was speaking about the story we wrote last week about a Jewish accountant who ran a Ponzi scheme that allegedly left people in the community without their pensions or life savings. The accountant has since left the country in an apparent attempt to avoid prosecution.

Suffice to say that the man claimed in his voice note that by naming the accountant, we were humiliating his family, and that we were “the most disgraceful”, “disgusting” (among other choice adjectives) newspaper.



He went on to claim that Howard Feldman totally agreed with his sentiments about how bad we are. We have since discovered that Feldman did no such thing, which certainly would have been odd, considering that he writes a weekly column for us.

We gave our readers the simple facts of the story. Isn’t it incumbent on us to warn the community about the man, and alert it to what has – and possibly still is – going on? Or should we ignore it, or tell you a story without any names, so that unless you are personally linked to this accountant, you won’t know who we are talking about?

To accuse us of causing pain to the man’s family is misdirected. If the person was concerned about the potential humiliation of his family, he would have avoided committing a crime.

I believe it is incumbent on us to tell you the facts, not who he is related to or any other information that isn’t part of the essence of the story. Why? You have a right to know to protect yourself and others. Also, you might somehow be able to help convince him to come home to clear his name.

Clearly there are people who disagree with us, and who choose to shoot the messenger rather than seeing the need for such a story.

I accept that they want to protect this man’s family. I understand that it’s awful to read about someone you care about in such terms. And we wish them only well. However, they clearly weren’t one of the alleged victims.

For the record, neither I nor any of the journalists on this newspaper get any joy from writing stories like this. There is no upside for us, except in giving information to people who potentially need to know.

In fact, we did everything we could to make sure that we didn’t give out any details that would embarrass or point to family, friends, or the community. We didn’t paint a picture of the life this man led. We just gave you the facts about the case, trying our best to avoid exacerbating the pain.

We didn’t cause the pain. The person responsible is the person who did the deeds, and then left the country.

For the record, we – the board of the *SA Jewish Report* and I – deliberated long and hard on how and if we would run this story. We don’t run every story about Jewish people involved in financial crimes. We believe we had to cover this story because it is in the community’s best interest.

This wasn’t the only story that had people criticising the newspaper last week. In our front page story, we worked closely with the family of a 19-year-old who took his life while in Israel on a two week Ohr Somayach trip. We purposefully did this to avoid causing them additional pain.

While many recognised this, including family and friends, we still received messages condemning us for causing his loved ones further pain. Clearly these readers didn’t know the family or they would have known this wasn’t the case. They – out of the kindness of their hearts – were also shooting the messenger, because they assume we are heartless creatures.

Well, we aren’t. We care about this community. We believe we are working for the community, and giving you the best possible newspaper we can. The journalists on the *SA Jewish Report* work long and hard to make sure that they give you a quality product every week. We work from a moral and ethical base. We do our best to make sure that once you’ve read this newspaper, you know what is going on in our Jewish world.

I’m not telling you this to try and win your honour or respect. That’s not something we can ask for. I’m telling you this so that you know. It’s your right to get angry with the stories.

You are 100% entitled to tell us what you think – I encourage it. We work for the community, so we want to know what you think. We do our best to give you food for thought. We want to give you material to debate, discuss, and ruminate over.

The death of Adam Seef has encouraged people to question how those who don’t fall into a heterosexual mould are accepted and treated in our community. This week we ask the question, and get some expert opinions.

In the light of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s 25th anniversary, we consider what he stood for, and what he meant to Jews internationally, and in South Africa specifically.

Our role is not to demean, humiliate, or upset people, it’s simply to inform you, and be the messenger of the community.

To the voice note-man and his father-in-law, I simply want to say: please think twice before shooting the messenger.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Ehud Barak – the comeback leader

“The state of Israel is facing the total dissolution of its democracy,” says former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. “This is a strategic threat no less than the Iranian threat.” This is the alarming opinion of the man who occupied the country’s top seat from 1999 to 2001.

This 77-year-old Israeli general and former leader of the Labour Party is referring to none other than the leadership of incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Declaring it to be either “the state of Netanyahu or the state of Israel”, Barak has announced a comeback. His political return is plastered across election posters now lining many of the major highways in Israel.

The former defence minister says he can no longer sit and watch as Netanyahu destroys Israel, whether it be through, as Barak claims, his attempts to fight corruption charges, undermine democracy, or radicalise institutions.

The good news for Barak is that he’s regarded by many Israelis as a leader of equal stature to Netanyahu. Among those who’ve come forward to express their support for him is Yitzhak Rabin’s granddaughter, Noa Rothman.

But the latest polls show that his newly formed Israel Democratic Party won’t cross the electoral threshold if it runs alone in the 17 September election. Barak needs coalition partners.

The most obvious choice would be his former party, which desperately needs an injection of credibility and political weight.

April’s election results were the worst showing for the Labour party in its history. A party that had ruled Israel for decades received only six out of 120 Knesset (parliament) seats. Former Sderot mayor and former head of the country’s national trade union, Amir Peretz, was recently re-elected to head the party. He headed Labour from 2005 to 2007.

Peretz is optimistic, declaring that if the left-wing centrist parties unite, they can oust Netanyahu. He believes Labour can realistically receive 15 seats in the next election.

As for co-operating with Barak, Peretz says that “every potential political bond will be considered based on its prospects for widening our block and defeating Netanyahu”.

But let’s not forget that 12 years ago, Barak fired Peretz via fax from his post as defence minister. Still, in the overriding “anyone but Bibi [Netanyahu]” furore, casting past rivalries aside seems a small price to pay.

It’s not just Peretz who needs to forgive Barak. In January 2011, Barak abandoned Labour to found a new, now defunct, political party. The Independence Party, as it was called, lasted less than two years. It’ll be interesting to see whether Labour supporters are willing to forget that.

But, aren’t there enough centrist parties already? What exactly does Barak’s new party offer that’s different?

Netanyahu’s Likud voters are unlikely to support Barak, and the Blue and White party headed by Benny Gantz and Yair Lapid already has too many leaders.

It wasn’t so long ago that Gantz, who was barely a colonel when Barak was chief of staff of the Israeli army, was the hope of the centre-left. The 35 Knesset seats garnered by the young party in April was unprecedented. There’s no advantage for it to join forces with Barak – and it’s unlikely to. The concern is whether they’ll lose seats to him. Although all the recent headlines in Israel have been focused on Barak and not Gantz, the latter’s party, alongside Netanyahu’s Likud, remains one of the country’s two largest political forces. Gantz will continue to believe the competition is between him and Netanyahu only, but is it?

Barak is said to be considering the possibility of forming a centre-left electoral bloc with Labour, Meretz, and former Foreign Affairs Minister Tzipi Livni.

After resigning from politics in February, Livni is now said to be considering a comeback and running as part of a left-wing bloc, but only if an alliance is formed between Labour and Barak’s new Israel

DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier



Democratic Party.

Livni’s Hatnuah party ran on a joint ticket with Labour in 2015, but the former chief of the party, Avi Gabbay, abandoned the partnership in the run-up to April’s election. Livni decided not to run at all, saying she didn’t want to risk splitting the left-wing vote among so many parties as it would result in some failing to cross the electoral threshold, and their votes being wasted. That’s the concern once again. Barak just brings a new party to the fold, and unless a large, left-wing block is created, it’s unlikely they’ll topple “King” Bibi from office.

There’s another concern about Barak. As much as he purports to be against Netanyahu now, he could change overnight, as he has done before. When he broke away from Labour in 2011, it was because he wanted to keep his position as defence minister and not join the opposition. Israelis are asking themselves – rightly so – whether, if Netanyahu somehow wins the 17 September election and offers Barak the chance to become defence minister again under his leadership, will Barak bite?

And then, the final concern is what his views are politically. After meeting with Nitzan Horowitz, the new leader of the left-wing Meretz party, and



the first openly gay political leader in Israeli history, Meretz officials said there was “no breakthrough”. They complained that “Barak has a problem with Arabs and others” among Israel’s non-Arab population that would prevent Meretz from being able to run with him.

Barak’s premiership lasted only a year and seven months, during which time he went further than anyone else in trying to reach peace agreements with Syria and the Palestinians, failing in both attempts. His term ended with the suicide bombings of the Second Intifada.

The right-wing bloc is also considering its options. Still bruised from the wasting of at least seven Knesset seats in April’s election because of the proliferation of right-wing parties, it is adamant about avoiding the same situation again. One of the most important considerations will be that made by former Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked after she and former Education Minister Naftali Bennett formed a new party at the end of last year that failed to cross the electoral threshold. At the time of writing, Shaked was mulling which party to join. New right-wing political alliances are expected to emerge in the next few days.

Netanyahu is painfully aware that he might not do so well come September, and he is also weighing his options. His pre-trial hearing is fast approaching, and now with Barak in the fray, the field amongst those campaigning to unseat Israel’s nearly-longest serving prime minister just got a little more crowded.

The deadline for submitting party lists (who’s running with who) to the central elections committee is 1 August. That’s two-and-a-half weeks from now, which in Israeli politics can be a lifetime.

Sexual orientation can't be learnt, inclusivity can

OPINION

JOSEPH GERASSI



I have spent more than 25 years of my life teaching and engaging with teenagers. My sole agenda is to ensure the social and emotional well-being of the children in our community.

During my time as an educator, I have come to realise the critical importance of identity formation, and sexual identity in particular, for the healthy development of teenagers. When a young person is forming their sense of self (identity), they are establishing what it is that makes them distinctive. However, at the same time, they are also learning how to engage successfully with society. Teenagers whose identity conflicts with the expectations of their community often express feelings of deep isolation and loneliness, and a sense that they can never be themselves. This often leads to depression, which can lead to unhealthy behaviour, and in some cases, suicide.

While many Jewish teenagers manage to develop a healthy identity around their culture and religion, there are those that struggle with their sexual identity. Attending mainly Jewish schools, and being brought up in Jewish homes where their culture and religion are synonymous with that of their community, being comfortable with their Jewish identity is not difficult. They are taught and experience Jewish culture and religion from an early age. Many of their role models are Jewish, and they aspire to emulate these role models, whether they are members of their family, leaders in their community, or even friends at school. The community nurtures and prepares them, from an early age, to adopt an identity that is acceptable to the community.

Being heterosexual and gender normative is also taught in our community by the language that is used, and the expectations that are set. In the same way that we send our children to Jewish schools to learn about culture, and expect them to attend synagogue to learn about religion, we dress our children in gender-specific colours, give them gender-specific toys, and expect them to adopt gender-specific behaviour, to teach them gender-specific norms. This in an attempt to get them to lead “normal” heterosexual lives.

For those whose sexuality (gender and sexual orientation) conform to these norms, their identities are not in conflict with the expectations of our community. However, for those who struggle with their sexuality, they end up living a life that for many is dark and shameful, causing depression, which often leads to harmful conduct.

So, how do we ensure that all of our children grow up confident, proud, and accepted as contributing members of our community? We have to start by acknowledging that unlike culture and religion, gender and sexual orientation is not something that can be learnt, but rather something that we are born with, and that we cannot change. Asking someone to change his or her sexual orientation is tantamount to asking

someone to change the colour of his or her hair or eyes. You can dye your hair or use colour contacts in your eyes, but all you are really doing is masking the real colour.

Research has shown that one of the root causes of homophobia, as well as depression among homosexuals, is the failure of one’s true feelings and instincts to match the stereotypes of what one “should” be and feel. Helping teenagers to get in touch with this concept will allow them to expand their thinking, and test their assumptions when challenging their own and others’ gender identity and sexual orientation.



This won’t be easy in our community, where we are so used to conforming to the expectations of those who manage to see the world only through their own lived experiences. However, a good start would be for our leaders, including our educational and religious leaders, to engage with LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/questioning) organisations in order to plan a way forward, which would result in our community affirming and taking care of teenagers who struggle with their sexual identity instead of, at best, pretending that they don’t exist.

In 2018, the Commonwealth’s Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, published the first ever guide for orthodox Jewish schools to improve the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender pupils. In his introduction, Mirvis wrote, “Our children need to know that at school, at home, and in the community, they will be loved and protected regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.” He pointed out that when homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying is carried out with “justifications” from Jewish texts a “major desecration of G-d’s name” is caused.

The time has come for our community to take the lead from Mirvis, and accept communal responsibility for looking after all of our children, no matter their sexual identity.

• Joseph Gerassi is the executive head of Redhill School, and a former headmaster of King David High School Victory Park.

Modifying approach to LGBT – a life-saving priority

OPINION

DAVID BILCHITZ



The recent tragic death of Adam Seef is a wake-up call for the Jewish community in South Africa to examine its attitudes to LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people. According to his family, in his final note, Adam revealed that a significant part of his feelings of alienation and loneliness related to his sexuality. The question we need to grapple with in this regard is not “what was wrong with Adam?” but “what is wrong with us?”.

Repression and shame around sexual orientation and gender identity play a significant role in generating suicidal thoughts and attempts amongst LGBT+ persons. In a 2004 OUT LGBT Well-being South African study, 21% of the sample reported that they had attempted suicide in the past. These numbers are consistent with a meta-study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* last year, which found that sexual minority adolescents were 3.5 times more likely to attempt

suicide as their heterosexual peers. Changing the approach of the Jewish community to LGBT+ persons is necessary, not just to have children that are happy and flourishing, but to save their lives.

The problem doesn’t lie exclusively in the approach of parents to children. It’s also about a socially toxic environment exacerbated by religious and communal leaders who fail to demonstrate understanding towards LGBT+ people.

I have experienced this first-hand on multiple levels. My teenage years were beset with a personal struggle between what I was told religion required, and a growing, powerful attraction to fellow teenagers of my own sex. Discomfort with my sexual orientation was further cultivated by explicit homophobia, but mostly because of a silence that led me to think I was the only one of my kind at King David.

When same-sex attraction was discussed, it was usually within the context of subtle, unpleasant jokes and comments that littered everyday conversation among family, friends, and teachers alike.

On occasion, it got worse. I recall a fire-and-brimstone sermon at a prominent orthodox synagogue I had attended my whole life, where the rabbi suggested that gay people were fundamentally twisted. I realised on that day, after this tirade of hate and failure of understanding, that I would not willingly attend his synagogue again.

Another orthodox rabbi more recently told me that he would welcome me at his Shabbat table, but not with a male life partner. He didn’t really want “gay” David at his Shabbat table, but a “straight” or “asexual” David who doesn’t exist.

Fortunately, since my teenage years, South African law has evolved, providing equal protection for LGBT+ rights in the Constitution – though much of the society remains deeply phobic of LGBT+ people.

Within the Jewish community, there have also been important positive changes. About 13 years ago, I helped to form an LGBT+ organisation, Jewish Outlook (sadly, it is currently inactive); an annual Pride Shabbat is held at a prominent progressive synagogue in Johannesburg (Beit Emanuel); and an LGBT+/straight alliance was formed at King David Linksfield. Yet, there remain few Jewish communal leaders who are openly

LGBT+; communal leadership has hardly ever sought to address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity; education is limited regarding these issues; and, whilst this newspaper has occasionally reported on LGBT+ issues, the dominant experience in the Jewish community remains one of silence.

It’s news to me that orthodox synagogues are welcoming places (as the chief rabbi suggested last week). LGBT people I know feel forced to leave their communities if they want to live openly.

I don’t raise these matters to make accusations, but rather to identify the problem in our community. What can be done to improve this situation?

The fundamental change that needs to take place is to move questions of sexual orientation and gender identity from invisibility and condemnation to visibility and acceptance. To do so, we need leadership from a range of institutions in our society.

- The South African Jewish Board of Deputies must actively build a Jewish community that is open and welcoming to persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It started an excellent campaign in the Cape with a panel discussion and welcoming posters but, sadly, a similar initiative has not taken place at the heart of the community in Johannesburg;
- The South African Jewish Board of Education (and all Jewish schools) must educate students about LGBT+ issues. Books in the library that deal with diverse families should be included, and we should implement the excellent educational programme developed by Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis (in conjunction with the Keshet LGBT+ organisation). Time needs to be dedicated in lessons for conversations, and further LGBT+/straight alliances must be established;
- Youth movements must expressly offer programming, and indicate acceptance of both LGBT+ *chanichim* (camp attendees) and *madrichim* (leaders);
- Spaces which are affirming and diverse such as Limmud need to continue to provide programming around LGBT+ content;
- It’s not enough for orthodox rabbis to desist from making condemnatory sermons from the pulpit. These influential leaders need to admit that lives are at stake, and find ways to actively embrace LGBT+ persons even though it is challenging for them. They can draw on the wisdom and experience of orthodox rabbis internationally, who have sought to grapple with and find humane approaches to these issues;
- The Chevrah Kadisha should devote specific resources to developing support programmes run by mental-health professionals for those who are struggling, and these need to be advertised prominently. They should include spaces for parents who struggle to deal with their children’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Apart from these important institutional changes, it’s also crucial that our community nurture and actively seek out senior leaders in our community who are gay, lesbian, or transgender. Those who are already there should come out.

The *SA Jewish Report* should have a monthly column on Jewish LGBT+-related issues. Educational curricula should include LGBT+ persons such as Magnus Hirschfeld, a Jewish gay scientist who changed our understanding of human sexuality.

Parents, importantly, must have conversations with their children affirming that no matter who they are attracted to – or how they identify – they will love them unconditionally. And, every person needs to check themselves before making a snide joke about someone being gay. If they do, others must call them out for it.

These steps do not guarantee that there will never be another suicide of an LGBT+ adolescent, but they will render it less likely. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not reasons for shame, they are fundamental facets of human beings which can be the source of pride, celebration, affirmation, and fulfilment. It’s time to make it happen.

• David Bilchitz is a professor at the University of Johannesburg. He co-founded Limmud South Africa, and was a senior international leader of Limmud. He is openly gay, and is committed to making society better for LGBT+ people.

THE ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVER AWARDS 2019

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LGBT+ students urge schools to do more to promote inclusivity

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) teens at various schools within the community say more needs be done to make them feel included, while the schools say they are doing a lot to tackle these issues.

The schools say they are fostering inclusive environments. But, while they have taken some clear steps, LGBT+ teenagers say they believe the issue is often swept under the rug.

Jeremy* a King David High School Linksfield (KDL) scholar believes that Jewish beliefs surrounding the LGBT+ community take precedence over everything at the school. “In general, there’s no real space for change within the school environment, and within the community,” he says.

“Mostly, the school pushes the issue aside,” says Michael*, another KDL student. “It isn’t being homophobic, it’s just not necessarily inclusive of that sort of ideal at the school.”

Michael, however, praises the school for running a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), started in 2015. This group is student led to provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBT+ scholars, as well as their heterosexual allies. “It’s a huge step for the school to allow that, and we’re really happy about it. But there have been issues,” says Michael.

Principal Lorraine Srage; Rabbi Craig Kacev, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education; and pupils began seriously tackling the LGBT+ issue through an awareness committee set up in 2014. They consulted experts and organisations in the United States which were tackling these issues, and drew from their expertise, says head of KDL’s counselling and educational support

integrating the guidebook from Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis on supporting LGBT+ students in orthodox Jewish schools.”

Emily*, a Herzlia student, weighs in. “Herzlia tries to avoid LGBT+ issues as much as possible, which doesn’t help because it’s just pushing down the subject. It doesn’t make you feel good if you know you’re gay or bisexual, and the school is trying to hide that.” There are, however, teachers at the school who she says have helped her negotiate her identity. She believes Herzlia should have a GSA.

Herzlia’s director of education, Geoff Cohen, says the school has always had a very open policy with regards to LGBT+ students. “Kids who have come out or are transsexual or transgender have always been part of our schools, and are accepted as members of our community,” he says.

“We have counsellors at school who talk to those wanting or battling to come out. I was happy to read the chief rabbi of the UK’s booklet on looking after kids in our community who are battling with their sexuality. LGBT+ kids are members of our community, and need to be part of us.”

At Herzlia and King David schools, same-sex partners have been welcomed at school dances.

Andrew Baker, the principal of King David High School Victory Park says, “We strive to foster an environment of acceptance and tolerance in a non-judgemental school climate. I like to think that my students feel free to approach anyone on the staff that they feel comfortable with to discuss any issues that are troubling them.”

Rabbi Leron Bernstein, the managing director of Yeshiva College says, “In various ways, we communicate to learners that human beings are diverse. This sets a



department, Meryl Malkin.

“We also consulted David Bilchitz, the director of the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, Human Rights, and International Law. In our community it’s always a sensitive issue, and we’re a school with so many mixed sensibilities.

“We were advised to focus on making LGBT+ students feel normal within the school setting, and giving them a safe space. The best advice we received was to form a GSA. While the popularity of the club has fluctuated since its inception, it’s now flourishing, says Malkin.

Yet, there have been hiccups. “We weren’t allowed to have a stand to advertise our group on open day because the school was afraid to scare people away,” says Gemma*, another KDL student. “It comes across that the school is more interested in money, and less interested in creating an inclusive environment. The prioritisation is often a bit muddled.”

The school says the group was represented. “We were allowed to display the group, but we didn’t do it separately,” says Malkin. “It’s part of the awareness committee, and the poster was on that committee board. Perhaps we need to reconsider that. At the time, we thought the concept of GSA was new to a lot of parents.”

The school tackles LGBT+ issues in other ways, including sexuality and gender in the life orientation syllabus, and by making LGBT+ issues part of another new initiative, *lashon tovah* (good speech).

“This addresses bullying and prejudices in general, and includes LGBT+ issues. Linksfield is also working on

tone of acceptance, understanding, and inclusivity at our school, combined with established and promoted channels to encourage our learners to reach out for support, for whatever challenges they face.”

But, he says, “There’s always more we can do to support our learners in the area of LGBT+ and across the board in fostering an environment of inclusivity, understanding and mutual respect, directed by the central Torah tenet of, *ve’ahavta le’reiacha kamocho* (to love your fellow as yourself).”

Stuart*, a Jewish student at Reddam House, sums up what he believes schools should do. “School administrations need to drop the excuse of change taking time. A change as important as this must be enacted as soon as possible, because queer students are feeling erased, excluded, angry, and alone every day. Tweaks to the change can occur afterwards if necessary.”

Some students say they find acceptance through youth movements, especially Habonim.

Eden Plein, the deputy general secretary at Habonim, says, “We are welcoming of LGBT+ students and *madrachim* (leaders) We make that explicit. We don’t believe that sexual identity or orientation breaches Judaism.”

Bnei Akiva National Chairman Illan Biddle says, “Informal education is an amazing conduit for kids to be guided by and confide in counsellors. We attract a broad spectrum of *chanichim* (camp attendees) and encourage them to be open with our *madrachim*. They will be heard and cared for within a safe environment.

**names have been changed*

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SOUTH AFRICAN ZIONIST FEDERATION

Visionary advice prevented collapse of SA community



RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN

People around the world last Shabbos commemorated the 25th *yahrzeit* of my saintly teacher and mentor, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory. Everyone from chief rabbis and Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin to supermodel Naomi Campbell weighed in. They praised the rebbe as a colossal scholar, thinker, moral voice, and a pioneering activist for what he did to transform the Jewish world after the Holocaust.

He trailblazed the philosophy of outreach – initially shunned by other religious movements, and today embraced by virtually everyone – and his immense influence has built Chabad into the biggest Jewish international movement with thousands of *shluchim* (emissaries) in every corner of the world, from Paraguay to Perth, Santiago to Siberia.

But for us in South Africa, the rebbe’s influence is much closer to home. First, he sent his students here from the United States to serve this community as rabbis at a time when we had hardly any home-grown rabbis, and rabbis from overseas would not come here because of political fear and uncertainty, never mind the rand exchange rate.

Second, he repeatedly gave his assurance that our anxiety about our political future was exaggerated, and that in his considered opinion, we had nothing to fear, and nothing to run away from.

During more than forty years of leadership, the rebbe took an unusual interest in our community. He was well-aware of our special relationship with Israel, our strong sense of tradition, and how central synagogue life is to our community. Rabbis and businessmen alike regularly asked the rebbe for guidance for decades, and his responses were unequivocal.

The rebbe was completely dismissive of the perceived need to emigrate. He said that we should not be afraid, and we should carry on with our good work. Some people were even advised to return here after they had already emigrated. And, they did very well.

But, people wondered, how can a rabbi or anyone sitting on the other side of the world tell people not to leave a

danger zone? Wasn’t this irresponsible?

My answer is simple. For any person sitting on the other side of the world to answer questions of such magnitude, he had to be either a prophet ... or a fool. Well, one thing’s for sure. This giant of a man, this extraordinary Torah sage and saintly luminary, was certainly no fool.

In the end, his assurances were vindicated and, looking back they were quite prophetic, as South Africa achieved a “miraculously peaceful transition to democracy”.

In case you aren’t familiar with the rebbe’s track record, let me share with you one tiny fraction of his visionary advice on a major international crisis.

Israel, May 1967. A war is looming. Egypt is massing troops, and threatening to drive the Jews into the sea. The whole Jewish world is in panic. People are bringing their children home. Will there be another Holocaust? G-d forbid!

Only one Jewish leader was confident and optimistic. The rebbe. He insisted that his students must remain in Israel, and he predicted that there would be a “great victory”. Who could have imagined Israel’s miraculous triumph in the Six-Day War?

So, the rebbe was not just a rabbi. He was not even just “a rabbi’s rabbi”. He was nothing less than a holy man, and a great visionary. He inspired thousands of South Africans to remain here, and build our country and our community.

At times, when leading Jewish activists here were building museums to remember the soon-to-be-defunct Jewish community of South Africa, the rebbe was insisting that we build more Jewish institutions and increase the programmes offered here. And, he was sending young rabbis and rebbetzins here from abroad to help do the job.



Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Amidst all the pervasive negativity, the rebbe was inspiring us all to stay, be strong, and build a brighter future.

To the man who stemmed the impending collapse of our community, we should all feel eternally indebted.

In 1990, when FW De Klerk announced the release of Nelson Mandela, as historic and exciting a moment as that was, it created new apprehension and uncertainty. What would the future now hold for South Africa? Would there be reconciliation or revenge?

On that very day of the great Madiba’s release from prison, Rabbi Koppel Bacher was in New York and saw the rebbe, who gave him a personal message for our community. “Tell them they have nothing to fear, and that South Africa will be good until the coming of moshiach!”

But today, once again, the prophets of doom are out in full force. It reminds me of what Mark Twain said when he had the flu in London back in 1897, “The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated.”

We’re still here. And whatever political party you support, you must admit that we are far better off today, and there is much more reason for hope and optimism, than just more than a year and a half ago.

The rebbe left us physically in 1994. But his words are eternal, and his message continues to give us hope and confidence that, slowly but surely, we will rebuild our beautiful country, and keep our own community strong and vibrant.

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is the senior rabbi of Sydenham Shul, and president of the SA Rabbinical Association.

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How the Rebbe offered hope to an ‘orphan’ generation

MIRAH LANGER

Taking office so shortly after the end of the Holocaust, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, played a key role as guardian to a generation of traumatised survivors and orphans.

“The rebbe began his leadership in 1950, five years after the end of the Holocaust. He inherited a generation of orphans.”

So noted Rabbi Levy Wineberg at a tribute to mark the 25th anniversary of the passing of the rebbe in Sandton last week. Wineberg, the head of a Chabad yeshiva in Pretoria, said that the rebbe had embodied the *halacha* (religious teaching) about the treatment of others, especially orphans.

“The laws say that although we mustn’t hurt or inflict pain on anybody, we must be especially careful with orphans. Even teachers should treat an orphan differently – guiding them gently and with great compassion over and above anybody else.”

Wineberg said that the *halacha* defined an orphan as needing such treatment up until the point at which they could fend for themselves. This was the case, he said, when they married and had a family of their own.

“When they have a family, they have links to the future.

“Many [of the Holocaust survivors] were orphans to the extent that they lost everyone that they had. Many were orphans in the sense that they lost their anchor. They lost their contact with their background. They lost their Judaism. The legacy that they had received from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov was gone. So they were orphaned spiritually. The rebbe took over this generation of orphans, and led them gently and with great compassion.”

At the same time, mused Wineberg, “How did he get us to stop being orphans? He changed the focus from connecting to the past, to connecting to the future.”.

The rebbe had embarked on this mission from “day one” of his leadership. “Literally, at the very first gathering when the rebbe assumed the leadership of Chabad, he said that our generation had to focus on bringing *moshiach* (the messiah). We are looking to the future.”

Wineberg compared the rebbe’s shift in focus for Jewry to that of deep-sea diving.

Originally, divers in the late 19th century had to be connected to the surface by means of a breathing tube.

“Then, scuba diving was invented – self-contained, underwater breathing apparatus. The scuba diver was able to go under water, and he had with him the means to breathe. Of course, periodically, he had to resurface and fill his tank, but when he went underwater, he could look forward into the water, and not just to his tether to the surface.

“That’s the slogan, the teaching of the rabbi,” said Wineberg.

Wineberg was one of three speakers at the Sandton event, organised by Chabad House and the Lubavitch Foundation.

Earlier, Cindy Polakow spoke about her experience of visiting the Ohel, the site of the rebbe’s grave in New York. “There is a stillness and silence that had an energy of peace and serenity,” she said.

She also spoke about her belief that a letter asking for guidance in an aspect of her life which she had written at the site had come to fruition. In fact, said Polakow, part of the spiritual answer to that letter led to her becoming involved in the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) South Africa, where she now serves as an executive committee member.

Polakow concluded her address by quoting the rebbe, a statement which has become a guiding principle in her own life: “If you wait until you find the meaning of

life, will there be enough life left to live meaningfully?”

Also paying tribute to the rebbe was cardiologist and University of Witwatersrand Honorary Professor Pinhas Sareli.

“Although I’m a heart specialist, it’s the wrong name. I really deal with the pump that pumps the blood, and that’s what I try to help and diagnose. I don’t know where the heart is. The heart is controlled by Hashem. It’s not a part that is opened to us easily.” Yet, he said, the rebbe strove to open up that very spiritual space.

“The essence of what the rebbe wanted to achieve was *ahavat Yisrael* (love for a fellow Jew). And for that he did something that no one has ever done in history: he created an army.”

During his leadership of Chabad, the rebbe sent thousands of emissaries across the world to serve in any place where there were Jewish people.

“It’s an amazing army because the thousands and thousands of people who constitute this army are permanently serving for life. And, there are no questions asked about what you have to do, it’s clear you have to reach this target [of *ahavat Yisrael*].

Sareli said that the rebbe’s mission was extraordinary in that in sending out these emissaries, “the rebbe was taking a huge risk. He took a haredi group, a very religious group, and threw them into the secular world.”

Yet, the outcome was amazing. “They strive, flourish, expand, and get the rebbe’s concepts established in this environment. [Now, the Chabad community] covers the whole world; it is there to reach every Jewish *neshoma* [soul]. I think this is the main message that the rabbi has left behind.”

“The essence of what the rebbe wanted to achieve was *ahavat Yisrael* (love for a fellow Jew). And for that he did something that no one has ever done in history: he created an army.”

Celebrities praise rebbe’s teachings on 25th anniversary of his death

MARCY OSTER – JTA

Supermodel Naomi Campbell, in a tribute to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, wrote on social media: “An inspirational leader, scholar, and teacher. The rebbe taught that we are all inherently good, and we each have the potential to change the world for the better, one good deed at a time. I have learned so much from his wisdom and teachings, and while I never met him, I’ve visited his resting place in Queens to gain blessing and inspiration. With so much discord and division across our society, the rebbe’s words are more relevant than ever. We so desperately need to take them to heart, and learn from his example to always see the good in others, even those with whom we may disagree.”

Campbell added that she would “rededicate” herself to the rebbe’s mission of “creating more light and goodness”.

In 2010, Campbell announced that she had embraced the Kabbalah movement, and that it had helped her turn her life around and control her notorious temper.

Singer and dancer Paula Abdul, who is Jewish, also honoured the rebbe in a tweet to mark his 25th *yahrzeit* (commemoration of his death), promoting his Shabbat candle campaign, which calls on all Jewish women and girls to light Shabbat candles less than an hour before the start of the Jewish Sabbath.

“His teachings to better our world through unconditional love are more urgent now than ever! Join me in his

Shabbat candle campaign, spreading light before sundown this evening,” she tweeted late on Friday afternoon.

An estimated 50 000 people visited the resting place of the rebbe ahead of the 25th anniversary of his passing. The pilgrimage to the burial site in Queens, New York, known as the Ohel, took place last week ahead of the anniversary Saturday, the 3rd of Tamuz on the Hebrew calendar.

Schneerson headed the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement from 1950 until he passed away in 1994 – a movement he helped revive following its post-Holocaust re-establishment in New York. Throughout the year, about 400 000 people visit the Cambria Heights site, many of them not Hasidim or even Jewish, to pay their respects, and reflect on his teachings.



RON BRUMMER

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SOUTH AFRICAN ZIONIST FEDERATION

Limmud strengthens, not dilutes, Jewish identity

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



A few years ago, then Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks described Limmud as “the jewel in the crown of Anglo-Jewry”. While American research organisation, the Pew Report, has pointed to patterns of decline in Jewish communal participation, Limmud has remained an outlier, growing in numbers. It’s now thriving in more than 80 countries around the world, and attracting thousands of people to its events, including that sought-after millennial demographic.

This success has been noted by the organised Jewish world, leading to Limmud being awarded the much coveted Jerusalem Unity Prize in 2017 for its “global success in bringing Jews together”. Where often the statistics point to disengagement, Limmud has a formula that bucks the trend, instilling passion and excitement in participants, and inspiring devotion in its volunteers who run the conferences, tirelessly, from year to year.

If Limmud seems to strengthen and not water down Jewish identity, it might be interesting to consider its winning formula. Limmud is grounded in ten Jewish values, each contributing to the uniqueness of the Limmud experience. A key value that has come under some scrutiny these past few weeks is diversity. Clive Lawton, the orthodox adult educator

and founder of Limmud in the United Kingdom, has always stressed that Limmud is diverse and not pluralistic.

In a pluralistic environment, one might expect that people keep Shabbat in accordance with how each individual defines Shabbat

plenary sessions where participants are compelled to hear a particular presenter. Every time slot at Limmud contains multiple sessions and is characterised by choice-making and empowerment. We all make choices, based on our interests, values, and



Limmud 2017 Joburg volunteers at the end of the conference

observance. Yet, at Limmud, Shabbat is observed in the public space, halachically, according to the highest common denominator. Similarly, in a pluralistic space, there might be multiple kashrut options, allowing for different communities to define kashrut as they see fit. Not so at Limmud, where kashrut is maintained according to a Beth Din hechsher. Religious observance is a key Limmud value.

Another way in which Limmud espouses diversity and not pluralism, is that Limmud does not hold public

backgrounds. Importantly, Limmud invests in both the programme and the programme descriptors, empowering participants to make informed choices.

At Limmud, we are encouraged to attend sessions in line with our interests, and to explore those sessions that might be beyond our comfort zones. This is made possible because all sessions are conducted in the spirit of “arguments for the sake of heaven”, sans political or denominational agendas. This dynamic space, where there is

respect for halacha yet an embrace of our diversity and diverse learning experiences, creates something utterly unique: deep unity.

The unity achieved at Limmud does not presume that we are all the same, and does not attempt to ignore our differences. We all make different session choices, yet we share a social, cross-communal, and intergenerational learning space. People feel they can be themselves while posing any question in a respectful manner, accepting or challenging a point of view. This diversity within unity is a space many people long for, which is perhaps why so many people, from observant orthodox to unaffiliated, have become Limmudniks. Indeed, Limmud emulates the rabbinic adage “seventy faces to the Torah”.

These crucial Limmud values: learning, empowerment, diversity, religious observance, community and mutual responsibility, respect, and arguments for the sake of heaven, among others, set a particular tone at Limmud, where we maintain our differences with dignity, and engage with each other in an atmosphere of respect united by our shared love of Jewish learning.

However, in all this discussion about what Limmud is and is not, something gets lost about the passion and excitement Limmud ignites. Many have said that you have to be

there to understand. Others have tried to convey the extraordinary quality of joy and engagement that takes place over a Limmud weekend.

Limmud has a grassroots, volunteer energy, and provides a staggering array of outstanding sessions, 150 offerings over one weekend! It is described by some as machaneh for adults (albeit in a four-star hotel), and by others as spending time with hundreds of other Jewish people and loving every minute of it. Yes, Limmud is about Jewish learning and Jewish community. But what is harder to communicate in words is that Limmud is fun, playful, and filled with vitality. It is a weekend where you will laugh, you may cry, and you will feel challenged, moved, and uplifted.

Limmud respects peoples’ abilities to make choices, including those who might choose not to participate at Limmud. But we look forward to welcoming warmly all those who do come to Limmud in August to celebrate the local franchise of this global Jewish enterprise, and immerse in the profound riches of Jewish history, culture, arts, politics, and text on our programme.

• Adina Roth is a Jewish educator and clinical psychologist in Johannesburg. She has been a Limmud volunteer for many years and is currently the Limmud SA National Chair.

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CNAAN LIPSHIZ – JTA

“I was so moved to learn that he was a donor to communal causes, that he cared about

The sudden and radical annihilation of Macedonian Jewry – within days, the Nazis achieved their highest death rate anywhere – represents an unusual challenge for activists seeking to preserve the memory of this extinct community, which is believed to have settled in Bitola not later than the 3rd century CE.

The area's Jews "became victims for the

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Are people selling up in Joburg’s ‘shtetl’ for Israel?

JORDAN MOSHE

There is the perception that the number of vacant homes in the predominantly Jewish suburb of Glenhazel is on the rise, and that it is due to people emigrating in numbers.

However, while it is true that there is a strong move towards emigration, the slow rate of house sales also has a lot to do with the general economic climate in South Africa, say estate agents.

“There are still bargains out there, and those who can afford to buy them will find them across various areas,” says Michael Rod, an agent at Vered Estates. “Millionaires are often made in a depressed market by buying when costs are low. There is money in South Africa, and there are people looking to buy property.”

Rod says that a supposed mass exodus of South African Jews is not the sole reason for the availability of property in these areas. The variety of stock on the market is the result of multiple and varied causes, and emigration is only one of them.

“Families are going on aliyah, of that there is no question. However, if 80 houses are for sale across Glenhazel, only five or six are on the market for aliyah reasons.”

Joel Harris of Jawitz Properties agrees, saying that he has experienced a record year in terms of sales in Glenhazel and surrounding areas in spite of an increase in people making aliyah over the past six months. “For every home left empty, someone is buying another. Property remains a good investment, although it may take longer than it used to to get a return.”

You Realty estate agent Spencer Schwartz describes those selling to make aliyah as “a pocket”.

“Over the years, there have always been pockets of this,” he says. “We seem to be in one of these periods at the moment.”

“There are about 300 properties for sale in Glenhazel, Fairmount, Highlands North, Sandringham, and Sydenham. Obviously not all are Jewish owned, but a significant percentage are. There is a lot of aliyah talk at the moment, and the fact is that Jews are buying less. Still, there is a strong level of serious Jewish investors who are still active.”

The financial constraints experienced by many account for a considerable portion of the unsold properties in our areas. Rod says that many of those who are selling are at retirement age, having bought properties 40-50 years ago, and are seeking to downsize or move into a retirement village. These older houses are no longer as popular as they once were.

“Three to four years ago, you could put an unrenovated, forty-year old house on sale in Tanced Road in Glenhazel for R4.2 million. It’s just not the same today. Such a house would fetch perhaps R2.8 million. People are operating on the financial aspirations of the past, but there simply isn’t a market when you ask for R3.8 million. People won’t spend that kind of



An aerial view of Glenhazel

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

money on an old house anymore.”

The fact is that most people simply don’t have the money, says Harris. “Your average middle-class buyer in these areas has two or three children to send to Jewish schools, has a car or two to maintain, and has to make provision for an increasing cost of living all the time. What people have left to spend will ultimately determine the price of property.”

Rod agrees, pointing out that the average Glenhazel resident needs to be able to afford expenditure in excess of R100 000 a month along with a bond of R1.07 million. “The banks won’t back you,” he says. “People just can’t afford to spend R30 000 on a bond, they can pay half of that. There’s no buying power out there, and if people don’t have the money, you can’t get R4 million for a property.”

Sellers are therefore beginning to understand

that they need to adjust their expectations, and meet buyers on their level. Schwartz says much depends on why an owner is selling, pointing out that urgent and desperate sellers are settling for lower offers.

“If sellers aren’t realistic, they won’t sell. It’s simple. The market is what buyers will pay, and if a property is not priced at market value, it won’t sell unless circumstances are exceptional.”

Though renovations of properties are taking place, owners and buyers are cautious not to over-capitalise. This is because these modern properties then could become unsellable down the line, with a negative effect on the investment. Harris agrees, saying that a buyer can always be found, but sellers need to be aware of what others have sold, and the price they received. Unfortunately, in Jewish areas, buyers can also have unrealistic expectations.

“Quite a few buyers are simply ignorant of reality. They want all their boxes ticked – they don’t want to walk more than 500m to shul, and won’t settle for an unrenovated bathroom. The need to compromise is essential on both sides, and people will realise that the Jewish market is not as limited as they previously thought.”

Schwartz concludes that it has never been easier or more affordable for the younger generation to buy property than it is now.

“Property has been, and will always be, a highly desirable asset,” he says. “This is especially true among Jews who have always been strong investors in property. In spite of the issues in this country, many are not leaving, and therefore there will always be money available for property.”

Creating Jewish communities

JORDAN MOSHE

Some Jews leaving Glenhazel are choosing to live slightly off the beaten track. Areas like Magaliessig, Greenstone, and Fourways are putting themselves on the Jewish map, offering alternatives to Sydenham, Sandringham, and even Glenhazel.

This is due to the pioneering spirit of Chabad, which is making Jewish life in new suburbs a reality.

Jews are known to be a wandering people, a fact which probably accounts for the movement of Jews beyond the usual areas. Jewish movement to the north of Johannesburg has caused the number of Jews in areas like Greenstone and Fourways to increase in recent years. The same is true in the Western Cape, with more and more Jews moving to the West Coast.

It’s for this reason that Chabad has established a presence in these areas, catering to the religious needs of its Jewish residents, and striving to promote Jewish life. “There is now the option for Jews to live Jewish lives in new areas,” says Rabbi Dovi Rabin of Chabad of Fourways. “There are now alternatives to the typical house in Glenhazel, and people can move into new developments while being practicing Jews.”

Under Rabin’s guidance, Chabad of Fourways was established in 2008 when the movement got wind of the strength of the Jewish presence



Rabbi Pini Pink helping Glen Heyns lay tefillin

there. In spite of its proximity to Sandton, the Fourways community operates across a catchment area which includes Lonehill, Craigavon, Magaliessig, and Glenferness. “Collectively, the number of Jews in these areas could actually equal or exceed those in the *shtetl* (village) of Glenhazel to Great Park,” says Rabin. “We are essentially pioneering Jewish life in a new area for all who live out there.”

Shul services were held by Rabin in a garage in a complex for three years before a property was acquired, and a community centre established. A Jewish pre-school was also founded, and Jews in the area began availing themselves of new communal installations.

Says Rabin, “While Jews here are mostly secular, the fact is that they are out in these areas, and still have a connection. We have about 100 families affiliated with the shul today, hold weekly Shabbat services, run community programmes and shiurim, and continue to draw the Jews living around here. We had about 100 adults here on Rosh Hashanah. That was extraordinary.”

He says living in these alternative areas is appealing to many people, and he has experienced the marked difference between life in Fourways and life in Glenhazel. “Fourways offers estate living, which is secure,” he says. “The whole area is developing all the time, with office parks and head offices being established often. There’s Fourways Mall,



Relaxing at Chabad of Fourways

Continued on page 15>>

THE ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVER AWARDS 2019

LAST CHANCE TO NOMINATE

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

- in honour of Helen Suzman

Awarded to a Jewish person who has contributed in an extraordinary manner over a long period of time.

20th Anniversary

Absa Jewish achiever awards

2019

LAST CHANCE TO NOMINATE

RISE

Nominations close at 17:00 on 14 July 2019

Send nominations to nominations@sajewishreport.co.za

Jewish Report

(absa)

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Providing aid where others fear to tread

TALI FEINBERG

Gal Lusky, the founder of Israel Flying Aid (IFA), doesn't ask permission to go and save people. She and her organisation do what needs to be done to save lives.

"Our motto is 'nobody asks permission to kill, we don't ask permission to save lives'," says Lusky. She says the work of most non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is governed by laws and diplomacy. For example, aid can only be delivered to a sovereign entity, like President Assad in Syria or Hamas in Gaza. This means that aid is often held back from the people who need it most, and it can be held hostage as a weapon. Lusky's organisation goes against all that. It delivers aid wherever it is needed, to whoever needs it, be they victims of war or natural disaster – even to countries that don't have diplomatic ties with Israel, and in places where other aid agencies have pulled out for safety or diplomatic reasons. IFA is probably the only aid organisation in the world doing this, but Lusky hopes to change the whole NGO sector so that other organisations will follow her lead.

"IFA is a response to the hypocrisy of Chapter 7 of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, which says that prevention of aid is not considered a crime. For example, if aid is sent to Syria, it lands up in the regime's hands. As member countries of the UN, we have assisted Assad's army, and we all have blood on our hands. None of our support lands up in the victims' hands," she

says.

"It's a clash between law and justice: the law often prevents aid distribution based on needs, and is guided by political issues. But I place life above any law – as the halacha says, life is sacred, and we are commanded to devote ourselves to justice."

IFA focuses on getting aid to civilians – the people who can't leave. "It's always within the disaster site. This is another way we are different from other NGOs, who mostly work with refugees who have fled."

She founded the organisation after her brother was badly wounded in Lebanon during his army service. As she sat at his bedside, she bargained with G-d that if her brother recovered, she would do something to help others receive the medical support that he got as an Israeli citizen. She knew that in most conflict zones, this is not a right.

When her brother walked out of hospital, Lusky joined NGOs in their work. One of her first missions was to Rwanda during the genocide. Later, she went to Sri Lanka after the Boxing Day tsunami. But in both places, when she saw that aid was not being given to the enemies of the people in charge, she began to wonder if there was another way. She started IFA in 2005.

Because of the risky reality of this work, it's often done undercover and under the radar, especially in countries that are hostile to Israel. Because of its secretive nature, it's difficult to attract donors and support.

In addition, "Being so undercover means that we don't have the opportunity to change

hearts and minds if people see Israel as the enemy," she says, although sometimes if she feels that it's safe, she does reveal that she is Israeli. "We risk our lives for the children of our sworn enemies because as Jews, we are commanded to do so."



Gal Lusky

Though the Israeli government can't support an organisation that works in places that are Israel's enemies, it has recognised her in other ways. In 2015, Lusky was asked to light a flame on Israel's Independence Day, one of the greatest honours an Israeli citizen can receive.

IFA was chosen by the Israeli Defense Forces to assist in getting aid across Israel's border to Syria. She spent eight years on the ground there during the civil war, in places where many feared to tread. She helped set up 17 field hospitals and clinics, and transported tons of medical equipment, medicines, food, and clothing to those battling to survive. Israelis donated 70 tons of warm clothes and blankets to their Syrian neighbours through IFA.

Lusky says that the Syrian mission proved her organisation's professional capabilities, which she hopes to pass on to other NGOs, and train them in IFA's uncompromising agenda. "We hope they will adopt our slogan, become completely committed to the victims, and independent from government policy, diplomacy, or politics."

One of her most memorable moments was assisting the last Jewish family in Aleppo to flee to Israel, which included children and the elderly. They had not left their house in many years, which was on the border of the civil war in Aleppo. The children have since married Israelis.

Regarding the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement, and anyone who hates Israel, Lusky says "They are fundamentalists who don't share any of our Jewish values. In so many genocides, I have seen no Muslim or Christian organisations present. I challenge them: for once, put hypocrisy aside, and help."

• Gal Lusky will be speaking at the South African Zionist Federation Conference in Johannesburg on 27 and 28 July.

on new frontiers

>>>Continued from page 14

which is extremely convenient, and many shops stock kosher products. It's actually a privilege for me to live here.

"If you live in Glenhazel, your nearest mall is Balfour Park, which offers very little. Property in Glenhazel is more expensive, and older. Fourways has crime, but it's safer, cleaner, and more cost effective. There is potential for young Jewish people here, and it could even become a hub for Jewish life."

Rabin says there are lots of facilities the area still needs, including a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and a Jewish school. The community does, however, run a cheder to offer Jewish Studies to students who attend non-Jewish schools, though most of the area's Jewish youth attend King David Victory Park (the school nearest to the area). There are plans to arrange a bus service to transport them daily.

Although closer to the Jewish heart of Johannesburg, Greenstone is another upcoming hub of Jewish life. Rabbi Pini Pink, the head of Chabad of Greenstone, established the community in 2016, transforming a small *minyan* (prayer quorum) in his home into a shul that is currently under development.

"There is definitely a desire and a need for Jewish infrastructure here," says Pink. "Greenstone didn't exist ten years ago, but today, there are so many Jews out here that we reach out to. I receive new names of Jewish people out here on a daily basis. More people want to be involved all the time."

The community primarily includes Jews residing in Greenstone, as well as Kempton Park and Dowerglen. Although smaller in size than Fourways, it holds weekly Shabbat services, with 50 to 60 people in attendance on Friday night. Pink says that while the community is mostly secular, it numbers roughly 90 members, and continues to grow.

"In the two months since we bought the new shul property, I've had five

to six inquiries from *frum* (observant) couples who are interested in joining the community. They don't want to live in Glenhazel, and Greenstone offers much more, including developments and complexes which are close to the shul. We're still close enough to schools and shops in Glenhazel.

"I'm sure we'll see more people coming this way. The area offers affordability,

security, and beauty."

Rabin believes that the movement of Jews from Yeoville to Glenhazel is happening again, now pushing further north. "At the moment, these newer Jewish areas can't match the peak of Glenhazel and surrounds," he says. "However, I think Sandton is becoming the new Glenhazel, and Fourways will become the new Sandton where Jewish life is concerned."



At Chabad of Greenstone

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I will be visiting Cape Town on Sunday 21st July to Tuesday 23rd July, and Johannesburg on Wednesday 24th July to Friday 26 July and will be available for meetings. Please call 087 551 0790 or send me an email to rlerercohen@kinsearch.com to set up an appointment. I look forward to meeting you



FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

I have the privilege of being an American married into a South African family, and have been impressed by the cohesiveness and kindness manifested by South Africa's Jewish community. I read the recent article by the chief rabbi relating to the decision to boycott the Limmud conference, and feel compelled to offer some comment.

should be respected for their efforts to educate their followers and enrich their lives, the fact that at this time, he seeks to divide the community is unforgivable. In effect, he doesn't want a significant section of the community – probably the majority on the basis of recent surveys – to drink from the fountain of Jewish knowledge. In a tradition as contested as ours, it beggars belief that any rabbi confident of his intellectual ability would pass up an opportunity to debate, deliberate, and persuade an audience eager to learn

Sadly, unlike other communities which show tolerance towards Limmud, and even some tacit support from the orthodox rabbinate, we, a beleaguered community, have to be divided. I would urge all members of the community to back Limmud.

Oh, and if Goldstein wishes, I'm happy to buy him a ticket, and he can attend my discussion of the Jewish influences in Gustav Mahler's 2 and 9 symphonies. If I represent the tradition wrongly, he's welcome to point out the mistakes to me. And, no, I won't play any of the choral bits in deference to his particular interpretation of *kol isha* (the voice of a woman). – **Professor Dennis Davis, Cape Town**

The “line in the sand” the chief rabbi and Beth Din draw is a specious one. As much as one can believe that Torah Judaism is truth, at the end of the day, it is only a belief, and as such, cannot be assumed to hold any superiority. If the spokesmen

I, sadly, suggest that the arguments proffered are a surrogate for the arrogance of moral superiority of the leadership couched in the prosaic language of *ahavat Yisroel* (love for a fellow Jew). This “moral superiority” has plagued Jews in every generation, and led to the destruction of the Temple as well as fracturing Jewish communities for time immemorial.

If the inclusiveness of this community is to continue, it would appear the South African theocracy should not be afraid to share their ideas and love of Torah in what they consider to be a *treif* (non-kosher) environment. Not doing so is to deprive a large element of the community of exposure to Torah Judaism, which is unfortunate. Disagreement and debate are at the heart of the Talmud, and it keeps a community vibrant and alive. – **Lester Gottesman, New York City**

In difficult circumstances, you produce a really fine community newspaper. It gives us a rare opportunity to explore diverse views. A major reason for the polarisation of the world's democracies and religions is the ability social media gives people to avoid opinions that don't correlate with their own.

In particular, I enjoyed the dialogue you published over the Beth Din's decision not to participate in Limmud. The opinions range from sincere to witty, and provide welcome stimulation.

As an orthodox Jew, I respectfully disagree with the chief rabbi's decision.

At face value, of course he is right. A platform of pluralism gives credibility to anti-Torah schools of thought.

But, of course, we have to question whether it is helpful to try to eliminate exposure of our community to thoughts that we oppose. Is it even possible?

Or, should we rather have the conviction to rise to the challenge, and sharpen our arguments, confident that the truth will always prevail if presented clearly and respectfully?

Countless studies in the field of cognitive dissonance conclude that a belief system is strengthened by exposure to alternative viewpoints.

I understand that many rabbis hold that quality is more important than quantity, and that *kedusha* (holiness) is diminished by open exposure.

But we don't have to look back too far in history to see the shortfalls of this argument.

In response to the Haskalah movement, the mainstream rabbis instituted severe restrictions (such as prohibitions from making sermons in the vernacular or using raised pulpits). These did more harm than good, and

It goes without saying that the challenges and opportunities facing the Jewish community today are significantly greater, and there is considerably less room for error.

As it is said, news must contain unpopular views. The rest is advertising. You do us proud.

Going forward, I would love to see other debates. For instance, between anti and pro-Zionist orthodox communities covering military service, entitlement, and other areas.

Far from sowing division, it would enable participants to examine, strengthen, or modify their convictions, instead of sweeping dissension under the carpet, and expressing their opinions only to like-minded people in yeshivot or at insular Shabbat meals. – **Alan Menachemson, Johannesburg**

In the wake of the tragic death of Adam Seef, it's worth keeping in mind the power of words. Although the outpouring of compassion and calls for understanding have opened up important discussions about mental health, gender, and sexual identity, I read references a number of times to Adam having “committed” suicide. This phrase is outdated, and laden with stigma and blame.

The term “committed”, even subconsciously, is associated with “committing a crime” or “committing a sin”. It ignores the fact that suicide is the result of an underlying illness (depression, bi-polar, anxiety, or post-traumatic-stress disorder) and should be regarded in the same way as any physical health issue or condition.

It's more accurate to talk about a person as having "died by/of suicide" as one might die of a heart attack. More compassionately, we should talk about a person being a "victim of suicide" because the person is a victim, not a perpetrator. If we are going to have discussions about mental health and suicide that have an impact, it's fundamentally important that we do what we can, in big and small ways, to remove stigma.

By the same token, when dealing with

issues of gender and sexual identity, everyday language is important if we are to create a safe-space in which people feel they can “come-out” and live as their authentic selves. For those of us who are part of the LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, or Questioning) community, we hear homophobic statements around us every day. Young people have become acclimatised to slang such as “that’s so gay” which, while perhaps not said specifically to be hurtful, is always pejorative. We are surrounded by heteronormative language that repetitively reinforces the fact that we are “different”. We are constantly confronted with the assumption that we will date and marry someone of the opposite gender; we fill in forms that assume heterosexuality; and when we open a magazine or switch on the TV, we rarely see people who reflect our realities.

This environment is specifically difficult for those who are struggling with their sexuality, and who have yet to come out.

Paying attention to our language is something that each of us can do to reduce stigma, and make the world that much easier for those who are going through so much. – **Simonne Horwitz, Johannesburg**

For many years, I had become quite distant, if not alienated, from Jewish life. And then, Limmud happened. I suddenly discovered a diverse, exciting, non-judgemental space that makes everyone feel welcome and valued.

Since then, I have been drawn back into other parts of the community and Judaism. So I find it utterly baffling that some people who treasure *yiddishkeit* want to discourage people from attending. I would've thought they would be doing the exact opposite.

Limmud should be supported and celebrated as a unique gathering that breathes life into our communal Jewish experience. – **Nimrod Geva, Johannesburg**

While South African-born Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis does support Limmud in England, his predecessor, the popular Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, boycotted it.

This is no surprise to me. I enjoy attending Limmud, and look forward to returning, but it has led to doubt and confusion in my mind about traditional (orthodox) Judaism. – **Martin Zagnoev, Johannesburg**

Guidelines: Letters are limited to 400 words. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. Letters should be emailed to editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

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*Cars.co.za, June 2019

Pillow talk of the power hungry

What would the contents of your dustbin tell a stranger about your life? There has been much talk in South Africa lately about the rubbish of major politicians, and whether it is morally permissible to rummage through it.

What if we took this example to Israel, to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, not physically but ideologically? Netanyahu isn't a stupid man, nor inexperienced in politics, coming from prestigious ideological roots aimed at building the state of Israel.

With his background, he must understand the danger for Israel of developing a close relationship to United States President Donald Trump, who is deemed stupid, untrustworthy, and dangerous to most of the thinking world. And, of turning Israel into an "ethnic" state, rather than one where everyone is equal, which is what founders like David Ben-Gurion envisaged.

He has played a powerful role in developing Israel as a technological, potent state. This is why so many are puzzled at why he concentrates unrelentingly on the dangers to Israel from Arabs rather than all possibilities of seeking peace with them.

This is similar to the idea of *swart gevaar*, which South African Jews can't but remember from history. The rhetoric was used by South African leaders under apartheid, painting blacks as the irreconcilable enemies of whites.

What can he be thinking about in his private moments when he puts his head on his pillow to sleep at night? Is it blind personal power, as many say? Or the looming possibility of indictment for corruption? It's impossible to pick through anyone's throwaway thoughts, just as prying in

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



people's physical dustbins is borderline immoral.

One of Netanyahu's outstanding qualities in the past was his ability to project an image of sophisticated forcefulness about Israel and himself, which convinced world leaders to trust and admire him. Today, many say he has no serious long-term vision for Israel aside from keeping himself in power.

This is illustrated by media advisor to the Israel Police, Lior Horev, who recently stepped down amid allegations levelled against him by Netanyahu of attempts to sway corruption investigations against him.

Why should a prime minister who is busy dealing with the nuclear threat from Iran, the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, and similar crises, engage in settling accounts with media advisors?

With the investigations roiling about him, Netanyahu clearly can't function rationally. Will he make critical decisions based on personal troubles rather than the state of Israel? For example, will he continue to encourage the growth of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. This outcome could ultimately make the two-state solution – the only realistic solution – unviable and lead to a one-state reality, the opposite of what the Zionist ideal was originally about.

Yet this is what he does, either because he actually believes in it, which is foolish, or because he thinks it helps preserve popularity with the right wing. Either way, it's extremely dangerous for Israel.

Nurturing Jewish leadership

The recently concluded Nahum Goldmann Fellowship Programme (NGFP), this year held in Israel, once again brought together a broad range of up-and-coming young Jewish leaders from around the world for an intensive period of Jewish learning, discussion, and sharing of experiences and perspectives.

As always, the participants found it to be extremely enriching and inspiring, particularly in the opportunities it provided for engaging with Jews from completely different backgrounds. Among the fellows at this year's event was the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) Cape executive director, Stuart Diamond. He is one of scores of young South Africans who have attended at least one NGFP programme over the decades. Many of these alumni today hold senior leadership positions, whether in a lay or professional capacity, within our Jewish communal structures, including within the SAJBD. They include the board's current Cape Council chairman, Rael Kaimowitz, who pioneered the concept of regional Nahum Goldmann programmes in South Africa. The latest of those regional programmes was held last year in Saldanha Bay.

The NGFP is one of the flagship projects of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture (MFA), a body established with the primary purpose of rebuilding Jewish life in post-Holocaust Europe. It has since become a dynamic vehicle for grooming future Jewish leaders in all parts of the world, largely through its flagship NGFP project. We congratulate our distinguished past-president, Marlene Bethlehem, on being elected for a fourth term as president of this prestigious organisation. The close, mutually enriching relationship that exists between

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



the board and the foundation has largely been due to her dedicated efforts over many years.

SA Jewry survey, 2019 – don't miss out!
In May this year, as previous reported, the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town launched its Jewish Community Survey of South Africa (JCSSA). The results of the survey, which examines questions such

as levels of Jewish identity and practice, attitudes towards South Africa and its future, emigration, Israel and Zionism, involvement in Jewish communal life, anti-Semitism, and political leanings, will be of critical importance

in assessing our community a quarter of a century since our country's transition to democracy.

As with previous studies of this nature, the survey is being conducted in close consultation with the SAJBD and other major communal bodies like the Union of Orthodox Synagogues, Chevrah Kadisha, South African Zionist Federation, and South African Union for Progressive Judaism. However, the degree to which it is successful will depend on how many members of our community complete the survey. Participating in this vital project – apart from the benefits for those responsible for ensuring the continued vibrancy and sustainability of our communal organisations – is easy, interesting, and enjoyable. Again, I urge those who have not yet filled out the survey to do so on www.jcssa2019.co.za. You can assist further by encouraging friends, family members, and any others you might be aware of to do likewise.

- 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

Don't shoot the messenger



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

I hated last week's *SA Jewish Report*. I hated the fact that it covered the alleged fraud of a religious Jew. I hated that the lead was about the suicide of Adam Seef, and that the paper gave me the news that Mooz had closed. I hated being reminded of the cost of kosher meat, and the fact that the paper continued to cover the spat between the Beth Din and Limmud.

But I need to be cautious to not shoot the messenger. Hating the stories is not the same as hating the paper. Hating the negative news, and the fact that the paper sometimes forces us to hold a mirror a lot closer than is comfortable, is not a reason to detest the publication.

I received terrible (and brilliant) feedback on my own article about homophobia in the orthodox community. I was told that I was ignorant, and that I was a disgrace. I was told that I was "bating" (sic) people, and that I was taking cheap shots at Judaism.

And then I received a few messages from rabbis saying that my article was important, and that they were continuing to have the conversation I started from the pulpit.

It has long been said that the *SA Jewish Report* has thousands of editors. As a community, we are outspoken and opinionated. We have strong views as to what should or should not be spoken about. Unfortunately, we are also not always as honest as we should be. What I mean by this statement is the following: whereas we might feel very strongly that the paper should cover a matter this week because we might have been negatively affected by it, or because we don't know any of the parties involved, we might feel

very differently next week because we happen to be family friends of the subject. I do know that the editor and board (where necessary) agonise over these stories, and that sometimes I agree with their decisions, and sometimes I don't.

As past chairman of the board, I also know that the paper tries to stick to the principle that it reports on what is in the public interest, not only what is interesting to the public, when it comes to sensitive matters. This too, along with most things, is open to discussion, and very often it's possible to start from the answer we want before honestly debating the merits.

We all have the choice whether or not to read the paper. We have the choice whether to love or hate the content. Where we have less options is the manner in which we respond to what we like or don't like. We can contact the editor, we can discuss it with friends, and we can send a letter to the paper.

On Sunday night, I received a voice note that seemed to capture a conversation between two people. It was shockingly disparaging of the newspaper, and used my name (inaccurately). Sending a voice note that suggests that the best use for the paper is toilet paper is to negate any valid comment or criticism we might have. Especially as that is the type of message that people tend to share and share again. The irony of the complaint that the paper is too *shmootzik* (dirty), and contains *lashon hara* (derogatory speech) while sending a note like that, should not be ignored.

It's not pleasant to read negative stories, especially when it's about our own community. Sometimes it's better that we hold that mirror up close, and take responsibility for who we are, rather than being forced to deal with it when it is reported in other mediums.

Either way, it would do us no harm to take the time to appreciate the fact that we have a robust and independent paper, and be grateful for all it represents.

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ART, SPORT, SCIENCE & CULTURE AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has excelled in any of these spheres.

20th Anniversary

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(absa)

Europcar

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L’Chaim for Bidvest and Selwyn Segal



Barney Girnun, Alan Fainman, Lara Milner, Adam Sieff and Molefi Moatshe

Following the success of the 2019 Bidvest Sports Quiz in April, event organiser Mscsports handed a cheque of R400 000 to the event’s beneficiary, the Selwyn Segal Society, on 4 July.

The Bidvest Sports Quiz, which took place at the Wanderers Club, brought icons of the community together with sporting celebrities such as Schalk Brits, Jesse Kriel, and Vernon Philander to test their sporting knowledge.

“It’s an event that has captured the imagination of the people in Johannesburg as well as raising money for such a wonderful charity. We are delighted to do our bit for both the Chevrah Kadisha and the residents of the Selwyn Segal. And what better way to do it than through sport?” said Barney Girnun, the joint managing director of Mscsports.

Alan Fainman, the head of Bidvest Services said, “I have been attending this event for many, many years, and it has just gone from strength to strength. In fact, it’s a highlight of the year for many of us in Johannesburg. It’s Bidvest’s first year as title sponsor, and we are delighted to be able to hand over a cheque of R400 000 to one of the Jewish community’s most iconic institutions.”

Grade 5s make their mark on market day

Students put up impressive stalls at King David Victory Park Primary School’s annual Grade 5 Market Day last Thursday.

The offerings ranged from crafts and gifts to cupcakes and other delicious treats. The students’ overall consensus was that the experience of running a market was “awesome and educational”.



Blyde River Shabbaton builds bonds and Judaism

Torah Academy Boys High School held an action-packed five-day Shabbaton recently next to the Blyde River Canyon in Hoedspruit.

The boys, their teachers, and *schluchim* (Chabad emissaries) enjoyed a game walk, visiting an animal rehabilitation centre, hiking, rock jumping, and seeing some top South African natural sites like G-d’s Window, the Three Rondavels, and Bourke’s Luck Potholes.

At Swadini Resort at the canyon, they bonded over bonfires, learning sessions, meaningful *tefilah* (prayer) and Shabbat services, entertainment, swimming, games, and sport.

In addition to being a lot of fun, the Shabbaton enabled the children to forge stronger relationships with each other, their teachers, and their Judaism.

Saturday (13 July)	Monday (15 July)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bet David Morningside invites you to a Shabbat talk with author Lynn Sherlock. Lynn will be presenting her book <i>The Man Behind the Mask</i>, a personal account of her husband, Chris’s, journey with cancer. Time: 12:00. Venue: 3 Middle Road, Morningside. Contact: 011 783 7117 or admin1@betdavid.org.za	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) hosts David Shapiro, chartered accountant and the chairman of Sasfin, on <i>Surviving SA’s Economic Winter</i>. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053
Sunday (14 July)	Wednesday (17 July)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second Innings hosts Penny Hochfeld, the manager of Exclusive Books in Killarney, on <i>A visit to Lemgo in Northern Germany to discover our family history</i>. Time: 09:45 for tea; 10:30 for the 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.• Second Innings hosts a theatre outing to <i>Here’s to You: The Simon and Garfunkel Song Book</i>. Time: 18:00. Venue: Pieter Toerien’s Montecasino Theatre, Montecasino, Fourways. Cost: R160 for the best seats. Transport can be arranged at an additional R120 per person. Contact: 011 483 7425.• The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JH&GC) commemorates the Armenian genocide with a screening of the film, <i>Crows of the Desert: A Hero’s Journey through the Armenian Genocide</i>. Time: 16:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP to dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.• The Big Band Music Appreciation Society hosts a programme presented by Jack Mink and Philip Howard. <i>Audio: British dance bands from the 20s, 30s, and 40s</i>. After the interval, a movie will be screened titled, <i>Let’s make a night of it</i>, featuring Charles “Buddy” Rogers, June Clyde, Claire Luce, Fred Amney, and Claude Allister. Time: 14:15. Venue: Beit Emanuel Slome Auditorium, 38 Oxford Road, Parktown (entrance in Third Avenue). Contact: Marilyn 072 243 7436 or Jack 082 450 7622.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second Innings hosts a movie morning at the South African Military Museum, screening the international prize winning film <i>Hollywood and the Holocaust</i>. Time: 09:30 for 10:00. Cost: R110, includes movie and tea/coffee and refreshments. Contact: 011 483 7425.
Thursday (18 July)	WHAT’S ON
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society (JWBS) is hosting Nik Rabinowitz’s new comedy show, <i>Work in Progress</i>, at the Theatre on the Square, Nelson Mandela Square, Sandton City. Time: 20:15. All proceeds go to enhancing the lives of indigent, isolated, lonely, and elderly people in our community. Contact: 011 485 5232 or jwbs@icon.co.za• Hebrew speakers meet. Time: 10:35. Venue: Second floor, Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene.• Learn Yiddish every Thursday with Tamar Olswang and the UJW. Time: 10:00 to 11:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Cost: R100 per person, R80 for pensioners and UJW members. Includes tea/coffee and refreshments. Contact: 011 648 1053.• Join the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) every Thursday for a <i>Lunch & Learn</i> shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00. Venue: Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Contact: WIZO office: 011 645 2515.	<div>WHAT’S ON</div>

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Futsal in the run up to Budapest

LUKE ALFRED

These are trying times for Ronen Cohen, the convenor of SA Maccabi’s futsal delegation heading to Budapest for the European Maccabi Games at the end of the month.

In the dead weeks before departure, time stands still. Late injuries are a constant danger, and keeping excitement within manageable proportions is a job in itself, he says.

“It’s one of the worst periods as we approach Budapest,” Cohen says wryly. “We’re excited, but we don’t want to arrive in Hungary carrying too many niggles. Generally what we do over the next few weeks is play more matches, but reduce the intensity of training and concentrate on warm-ups and warm-downs to keep injuries to a minimum.

“I also encourage them to sit on the couch and watch football on YouTube,” he says. “It’s safer!”

Futsal players make up about half of South Africa’s 90-strong delegation to the 15th European Maccabi Games in Budapest held between 30 July and 6 August. Divided into four categories – under-16, under-18, Open and Masters – Cohen says this is the first time ever that futsal has entered teams in all four age groups to a Maccabi event.

He isn’t shooting his mouth off, but he’s quietly hopeful that all the hard work and fundraising of the past 18 months pays off, and medals can be brought back in all four groups.

The Open and Masters teams won bronze in Berlin in the 2015 European Maccabi event, and remain fundamentally the same sides, with the current under-18s also taking bronze at the 2017 Maccabiah as under-16s. “They’re a talented bunch, and have developed since then,” says Cohen of the current under-18s. “I’m hoping they can push on, and now take gold.

“I also have high hopes for the under-16s. We’re holding thumbs they can come back with a medal.”

of soccer courts in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Sometimes these were privately or council-owned, and sometimes they took root at schools such as Herzlia and King David Victory Park. It has also been said that the courts were useful in the Cape’s recent water crisis because they didn’t need to be watered.

Cohen says that while he has high hopes for all four teams participating in Hungary, not all will be playing on a level playing field. This is because different categories of futsal attract a different number of participants.

For example, the younger age categories tend to have smaller fields, while the Masters and Open have nine and 10 participants respectively, obviously making the taking of a medal all the more difficult.

As a general rule, Cohen says that Great Britain and the European nations tend to dominate in the younger age categories, while the Open and Master’s divisions attract a broader range of participants, including, say, the



Under-16 and under-18 Futsal boys after their friendly match against each other

Turks. “There’s a lot of banter beforehand. The banter on, say, WhatsApp is what it’s really all about,” he says. “I’ve been in conversation with a Turkish friend recently – they beat us in the Master’s category in the semi-finals in Berlin in 2015 – and we’ve been joking that this time round, we’re going to meet them in the final.”

This will be Cohen’s eighth Macciabiah overall. Remarkably, he started out winning table tennis bronze as a 15-year-old in his first games in 1997, and has progressed through the ranks to playing in, coaching, and managing futsal teams since the South Africans first started taking futsal to the event.

It’s been a heady ride, but not one without hiccups. As a member of an Open South African futsal side at the Pan-American Maccabi Games in Sao Paulo in 2011, the team of which he was part were hammered 21-1 by their Argentine counterparts.

Cohen can laugh about it now, but being humiliated at the time wasn’t pleasant.

Twenty-goal drubbings aside, Cohen is counting the days until the South African delegation take their place in the



Some of the Masters after their friendly match against HTP FC

For those who don’t know, futsal is a five-a-side game played on an indoor court. It originated in South America in the 1930s, where limited space in urban centres meant that football needed to be customised into a smaller, more easily accessible game. The game is quick, precise, and technically demanding, with futsal players generally finding that they have more space and time when they graduate back to the larger 11-a-side pitch.

The name “futsal” derives from *futbol sala* meaning indoor soccer in Spanish.

In South Africa, the game caught on in the post-2010 World Cup period with the building

march-past, the ceremony serving as the games’ traditional opener. “They’ll be wearing their golf shirts and their shorts. That’s my advice. I’ve told them it can get pretty hot there, there’s no use in wearing a tracksuit,” says the man who will be managing, playing in, and coaching the Open futsal side in Budapest.

When he takes off those many hats (what does he do when it’s time to be substituted?) he’ll kick back and enjoy himself, meeting old mates, and renewing acquaintances. “The sport is a tool to make ever-lasting relationships,” he says. “And, who knows, we might just have a beer or two as well.”

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