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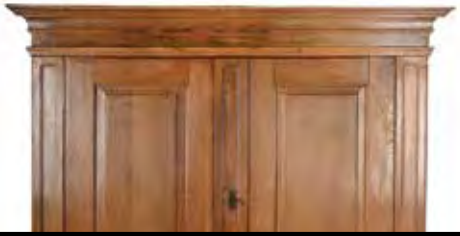


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# South african Jewish Report

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■ Volume 23 – Number 28 ■ 9 August 2019 ■ 8 Av 5779

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## Anti-Israel scholar gives ‘academic freedom’ lecture

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town (UCT) invited Israel-hater Dr Steven Salaita to give its annual academic freedom lecture this week. A proponent of academic boycotts of Israel, Salaita was scheduled to speak about the “Inhumanity of Academic Freedom” on Wednesday night.

In 2014, after three Jewish West Bank teenagers were kidnapped and killed by terrorists, Salaita tweeted, “You may be too refined to say it, but I’m not: I wish all the f\*cking West Bank settlers would go missing.”

In other tweets that year, he said, “The logic of anti-Semitism deployed by Zionists, if applied in principle, would make pretty much everybody [who is] not a sociopath, anti-Semitic,” and “Zionists: transforming anti-Semitism from something horrible into something honourable since 1948”. He went on to write: “At this point, if Netanyahu appeared on TV with a necklace made from the teeth of Palestinian children, would anybody be surprised? #Gaza.”

Academics and watchdog groups warned that inviting Salaita to give the TB Davie Memorial on academic freedom was dangerous in light of UCT’s tilt towards extremism, and a possible boycott of Israeli universities and academics.

Scott Roberts, the secretary of Progress SA – an organisation fighting for academic freedom and freedom of expression on campuses – wrote on *Politicsweb*, “TB Davie is remembered by UCT as a fearless defender of the principles of academic freedom. As vice-chancellor, he resisted the attempts by South Africa’s racist, illiberal Nationalist government to determine who shall be taught, who shall teach, what shall be taught, and how it should be taught.”

Roberts went on to say, “Since 2017, the Academic Freedom Committee (AFC) has been captured by people who have no regard for academic freedom. Many of its members are single-issue activists who wish to use their position on the committee to try enforce a university-wide academic boycott of Israeli scholars and institutions. They do this while maintaining a chilling indifference, not only to the behaviour of any other state, but also to the rights of the members of UCT to associate with, or learn from, whoever they like. The AFC’s commitment to academic freedom has become dubious, to say the least.”

Roberts said that Salaita using the TB Davie lecture as “a platform to denigrate the principle of academic freedom is akin to someone using a lecture in memory of a prominent feminist activist to promote the idea that men are inherently superior to women”.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, he said, “Steven Salaita is a Palestinian nationalist who has written extensively in favour of boycotting Israel. It is our belief that he has been invited by the AFC to drive a BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement] agenda.”

Cary Nelson, a professor at the University of Illinois, wrote a letter to South African students and faculty, claiming there was “more than one painful irony at stake in selecting Salaita as a spokesperson for academic freedom”.

“Salaita’s fierce anti-Zionism last year led him to cross a particularly dangerous line into anti-Semitism. He urged that Zionists be cast out of progressive organisations and campaigns. The effect on a campus or community would be abhorrent,” Nelson wrote.

He said Salaita had previously indulged in hate speech, and might well do so again in South Africa. “The campus and community should organise alternative programming to ensure that opposing views are heard. It’s particularly critical to do so because Cape Town is presently considering a proposal to support an academic boycott of Israeli universities.”

University of Cape Town academics also aired their concerns. Professor David Benatar wrote on *Politicsweb*, “Whether [so-called] pro-Palestinian views can be expressed is thus not a test of academic freedom in South Africa or at UCT. The test of freedom of expression and academic freedom is whether non-dominant views can be freely expressed. UCT has repeatedly failed that test.”

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, told the *SA Jewish Report*, “I presume Salaita was selected as a provocation. The selection of Salaita and his purported theme confirms that the AFC has become Orwellian [destructive to the welfare of a free and open society] in name and purpose.”

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at UCT, said, “The vice-chancellor should acknowledge that the presence of Dr Salaita would be a threat to the dignity of at least a portion of the campus.”

Meanwhile, the university seems oblivious to the situation. UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng wrote that the lecture was “in line with its ideals of championing the principles of academic freedom. The presenter will argue that academic freedom is often a myth that is prioritised over the political movements it’s meant to protect.”

AFC chairperson Professor Elelwani Ramugondo said, “It would go against the principle of academic freedom for the University of Cape Town to ever bar anyone from speaking at the university due to their personal beliefs. Academic freedom as a principle includes the right of people to hold differing views and be able to express them.

“Dr Steven Salaita fell victim to an infringement upon this right as an academic when his offer for a tenured position as a professor at the University of Illinois was revoked following a series of controversial social-media postings. Freedom of speech and academic freedom, although not the same, are related.

“In honouring TB Davie, particularly his courage to defend academic freedom, it’s important to remember that UCT has a patchy history in sustaining what TB Davie

espoused, with moments of regret that we continue to learn from. Threats to academic freedom – and by extension freedom of expression – must also be understood as an expression of dominant interests that operate both within and outside the academy. It is in this context that someone like Dr Salaita could face dire consequences affecting his otherwise illustrious academic career for expressing his personal views publicly. It would be wrong to presuppose what Dr Salaita will be speaking about, and solely based on speculation, seek to censor him,” concluded Ramugondo.

Sara Gon of the Institute of Race Relations and an expert on academic freedom at UCT said, “In three consecutive years the AFC has had speakers with an anti-Israel bias. The AFC is also the power behind what I understand to have been an unprocedural referral of a proposal to the senate to boycott Israeli academia. There is definitely an agenda being driven.

“Presumably he was chosen by those who strongly support a boycott, and would hope that it swings sentiment in their favour,” she added. “I think, though, that various interests could creatively undermine it before the senate next votes. A lot will depend on what he says, and what the pro-boycotters try to do with it.”



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# Jewish donor proud of contribution to CR17 campaign

TALI FEINBERG

A number of Jewish donors have been named in the expose of leaked emails from the Cyril Ramaphosa presidential 2017 (CR17) campaign. The expose, published in *News24* last weekend, demonstrates that the president was possibly closer to his donors than he revealed to parliament.

Among those mentioned were former trade unionist turned businessman Johnny Copelyn; international business leader Sir Mick Davis; Macsteel founder Eric Samson; and Moshal Scholarship Program philanthropist Martin Moshal.

Copelyn told the *SA Jewish Report* he wasn't ashamed of the leak. "All campaigns require funding. In a campaign where one candidate is supported by the deeply discredited outgoing president and gang of kleptomaniacs around him, I think it's absolutely unavoidable for every person who hopes to live in South Africa to have supported Cyril's candidacy, and to support every effort he makes to clean up the disasters

of his predecessor and those around



Johnny Copelyn

him," he said.

"The donation I made was to a trust which had aims significantly broader than just supporting the CR17 campaign, and I support the commitments it has to re-establishing a lawfully functioning democratic state.

"What's at stake here is the future of the country. If we aren't able to wrest back control of the state from the hands of thieves now, we are all doomed. That is the special role Cyril has in all our lives," he said.

Copelyn said he never hid his donation. "I never touched a cent from the public company

## Gunman showed date Pittsburgh shooting

The gunman who killed nine people in Dayton, Ohio, showed an ex-girlfriend a video of the Pittsburgh shul shooting on their first date.

A woman who briefly dated Connor Betts, 24, earlier this year, wrote about his troubling behaviour in an essay posted on *Medium* on Tuesday.

Betts opened fire outside a bar early last Sunday, killing his sister and eight others before being shot dead by police.

Adelia Johnson wrote that the pair had bonded over mental-health problems after meeting at a college course in January. Betts said that he suffered from bipolar disorder and possibly obsessive compulsive disorder. He told her he had dark thoughts, and joked about wanting to hurt people.

On their first date in March, Johnson recalled Betts asking her if she had seen a video of the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in October that left 11 dead. She said she hadn't.

"He pulled out his phone, and gave me the play-by-play of what was happening."

I run to make it. I paid my donation tax, and the email stolen from the trust and circulated over the internet in an attempt to embarrass is not in the slightest bit embarrassing to me. If we don't stand up to the roguery bedevilling the operation of the state now, we will never get another chance. I have never hidden this point of view from anyone. My public comments in the annual report of HCI are exactly along these lines."

Copelyn said he gave the same support to National Prosecuting Authority head Shamila Batohi "for the central role

Continued on page 3>>

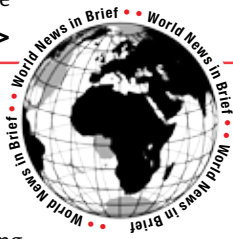
## Vilnius' only shul shut down

The Jewish Community of Lithuania temporarily closed the only functioning synagogue in Vilnius, Choral Synagogue, citing security issues which might be connected to a debate about the honouring of Nazi collaborators.

"The Lithuanian Jewish Community has received threatening telephone calls and letters in recent days," Faina Kukliansky, the chairperson of the community, said.

Last month, Vilnius Mayor Remigijus Šimašius ordered the removal of a controversial plaque in central Vilnius that honoured Nazi collaborator Jonas Noreika, allegedly also involved in the murder of local Jews, who is celebrated posthumously in Lithuania as a hero for fighting communism.

The municipality last month also voted to rename a street that had been named for another collaborator, Kazys Škirpa, who called for Jews to be driven out of Lithuania. The decisions provoked protests and outrage in nationalist circles.



## Torah Thought

### Are we really independent?

Tens of thousands of Jews will converge on Jerusalem's Western Wall this week as our people mark Tisha B'Av, our national day of mourning. On this day in history, both our holy temples were destroyed, and a host of other calamities have occurred throughout the centuries.

Some may wonder, why do we still mourn? Don't we have a sovereign state of Israel? Isn't Jerusalem united under Jewish rule? Why are we still mourning?

The fact is that no Israeli rabbi has ever suggested that Tisha B'Av be deleted from our calendars. Nor have the staunchest, most zealous Zionists ever proposed doing away with the custom of breaking a glass under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy). The tradition reminds us that our personal joy is incomplete until our nation's joy is re-established. That requires the total restoration of our national life, including the rebuilding of the temple.

Since 1967, we are again able to visit the Western Wall. But every now and then, our people have to be evacuated from the wall because huge stones come raining down at them from our cousins on top. In general, as important as that sacred shrine may be, it's only a pitiful remnant of a glorious temple that once stood inside those walls. In fact, according

to halacha, when we visit the wall we should rend our garments like a mourner because we are witnessing the site of the *churban*, the destruction of our holy temple.

The reality is that although we have a Jewish state operating in our eternal homeland, the state of exile is more than just geographical. Exile – *galut* – is a state of being, and not a place on the map. Until the era of redemption arrives and the temple is rebuilt, exile isn't over. You might live in an apartment in the old city of Jerusalem overlooking the Western Wall but you, too, are in exile because the entire Jewish people is still in a state of exile.

It's not only a question of place, it's a question of time. At this time in history, redemption hasn't happened. We still pray three times a day that the temple will be rebuilt speedily in our time. Until those prayers are answered, I'm afraid we are all still in *galut*.

The truth is that we are far from independent. We are certainly not yet independent of Hamas or its supporters around the world, who threaten our existence as I write these lines.

When Jewish lives are being lost to terrorist armies, when thousands of rockets are shot at Israel from Gaza, and our neighbours still dream of driving us

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Sydenham Shul



into the sea, when they still deny us our basic legitimacy, and when the international media challenges our most basic right to defend our citizens, can we claim that we are really and truly independent?

We have an army, navy, and air force. They fight valiantly to thwart our mortal enemies' murderous machinations. They find the tunnels of terror and disarm Hamas. May they continue until the job is complete. But true independence means that our national security is no longer threatened, and that a genuine and lasting peace has been achieved. No wonder Moshiach is called the "messenger of peace". Who else can we turn to for that long-awaited dream? Political schemes certainly don't seem very promising.

And so, we still observe Tisha B'Av. Unless Moshiach comes before that day, we will fast and sit on low chairs in the manner of mourners. We will mourn the destruction of our temple, and the state of exile it created. And, we will pray for full return to Jewish sovereignty and total independence. A time when our cities and towns will be free of enemy rockets, mortar, terror, and our children will feel secure.

May that time be now!

South African

Jewish Report

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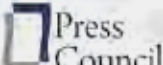
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Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Herby Rosenberg, Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benji Porter. Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.



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# Somerset West school says Nazi salute ‘wasn’t meant to offend’

TALI FEINBERG

At first glance, the picture that appeared on Somerset West Private School’s website appeared innocent enough – matric pupils playing the fool in a relaxed school photograph. But a closer look shows three pupils doing a “Heil Hitler” Nazi salute as they stare straight ahead at the camera.

The photo was displayed on the home page of the school’s website. That is, until Twitter users noticed it, and shared the photo on social media, along with their outrage. Following the outcry, the school replaced the photo with another one of all learners

standing formally, without any Nazi salutes. Waltham said the photo should make all South Africans concerned as it represented hatred, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, and racism.

Somerset West Private School was founded in 1998 by Morne Coetzer, who is also the principal. Its website says it offers classes from Grade 7 to post-matric level.

Coetzer put out an official statement in response to the outrage. “It has come to our attention that there have been objections to a matric photo where some learners give what appears to be a Roman salute,” the statement read. “While we don’t

upward at an angle, in others, it is held parallel to the ground. However, in this day and age, it is widely considered a symbol of fascism. It was made compulsory within the Nazi Party in 1926, and gained nationwide prominence in the German state when the Nazis took power in 1933. Since the end of World War II, displaying the Nazi salute has been a criminal offence in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland.

According to Coetzer, “Somerset West Private School’s primary objective is to maximise the academic achievement of its learners. We don’t promote or support any particular

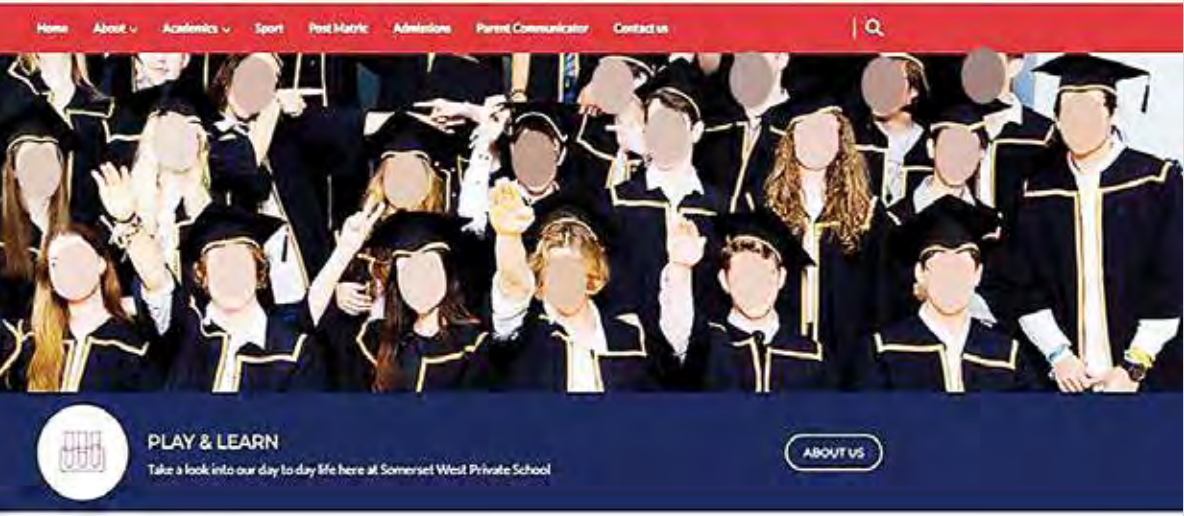
its website, and whether the school and its pupils were aware that it was a Nazi salute and was offensive to many groups, including Jews. It also asked what the school would do to educate its pupils about this, and whether the three pupils concerned would be disciplined. Finally, it asked whether the pupils would be visiting the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre in the future. The school said Coetzer was “too busy” to respond by the publishing deadline.

Mary Kluk, Tali Nates, and Heather Blumenthal of the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation said, “the insensitive use of Nazi imagery and symbolism is deeply hurtful. The photograph of learners displaying the Nazi salute once again highlights the need for quality Holocaust education. The South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation through its three centres invite the Somerset West Private School community – pupils, teachers, and parents – to visit and spend time reflecting and learning about this catastrophic genocide. As the Holocaust recedes in time, society is becoming increasingly casual and

disrespectful of the mass murder of millions. The work of our three centres is more urgent than ever and as painful as this photograph is, it’s a learning opportunity which we hope will be pursued immediately.”

Rael Kaimowitz, the chairperson of the Cape council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) said, “We categorically reject the ‘it was only a joke’ excuse frequently put forward by those guilty of such behaviour, nor do we accept the ‘only youthful high spirits’ argument. Regardless of what the intention might be, those who make Nazi salutes are in practice publicly identifying with – and arguably even propagating – a hateful, ultra-racist ideology that directly led to the greatest genocide of modern times.”

Stuart Diamond, the executive director of the council, said the Cape board would engage with the school to discuss the best way forward. This might include bringing in the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre to conduct an education programme for the pupils, as its Johannesburg counterpart had done in similar cases.



standing formally, without any Nazi salutes.

But the internet doesn’t forget, and screenshots show the original photo. Martin Waltham was one of the first people to pick up on the photo after a friend researching schools shared it on Facebook. Waltham visited the

believe the learners intended to offend anyone, we have removed the photograph from the website.”

A Roman salute might be mistaken for a Nazi salute as it, too, has the arm fully extended, facing forward, with palm down and fingers touching. In some versions, the arm is raised

political or religious views. Learners are encouraged to develop as individuals, think freely, and express themselves freely, provided that such expression doesn’t impair the dignity of others.”

The SA Jewish Report asked the school how the picture landed up on



## Jewish donor proud of contribution to CR17 campaign

>>>Continued from page 2

in our future she will play, and I am in total awe of the unbelievable role Pravin [Gordhan] plays in keeping hope of a lawful South African democracy alive. A thousand *shkoyachs* [well dones] to him. May we all soon see brazen thieves going to jail instead of threatening the presidency.”

Political analyst Daniel Silke said the donations weren’t illegal, but it was an issue of transparency. “Cyril Ramaphosa originally indicated that he wasn’t aware who the donors were. It would have created a possible conflict of interest, as businesses could have been favoured with donations as a conduit to that,” said Silke.

“These emails show that this was a personal campaign, with knowledge of the individuals donating. It confuses the answers the president gave in parliament [in response to the public protector’s report on this], and demonstrates there wasn’t full transparency. These leaks are there to discredit Ramaphosa.”

Silke said that in the wake of these leaks, the donors would need to follow Copelyn’s example by being open about why they donated to the campaign. “Most will probably say they saw it as a positive contribution to South Africa’s future. Even though donors give to various causes all the time, the leaks are now making them sound like they had a clandestine or secretive agenda,

which is untrue.”

Silke said another question that needed to be asked was why there was the need for such a large campaign treasure chest for an internal vote affecting a few thousand people. If we are scrutinising the CR17 campaign, we should also scrutinise donations to the Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma campaign.

The leaked emails will have an impact on the presidency as it is an “embarrassing matter”, and will add to the destabilisation campaign against Ramaphosa. “The question marks it raises will add to the extended cloud hanging over him as he battles various factions within his own party,” Silke said.

In a statement on Tuesday, the ANC said it wasn’t aware of any acts of illegality on the part of a campaign conducted by any leader of the ANC, including Ramaphosa. “The leaks are nothing but a calculated manoeuvre to defocus and detract from the immediate task of socio-economic issues and dealing with the challenges of our economy.”

The SA Jewish Report reached out to the other Jewish donors mentioned in the News24 expose. Sir Mick said that he was never approached to donate to the CR17 campaign, and had never donated to it. Samson was unable to comment for health reasons. Moshal couldn’t be reached for comment.



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# Multi-cultural Israeli women give lessons in waging peace

NICOLA MILTZ

What do a young Arab Israeli Muslim, a Christian Arab guidance counsellor, an Israeli music teacher, and an Israeli psychologist have in common?

Not much, besides a burning desire to help bring about a lasting peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a strong belief in the power of women to achieve this.

This week, four culturally diverse women from the Israeli-based organisation Women Wage Peace (WWP) stunned South Africans with their powerful message of peace through dialogue. They conveyed the importance of fostering understanding of the other, and how it can lead to peace and nation building.

“If we can heal each other from the circle of hatred, and look at the other not as an enemy but as an opportunity, we can change the discourse of the world,” said Hyam Tannous, an Arab Christian counsellor from Haifa.

Tannous’ love and concern for Palestinians and Jews has led her to promote dialogue between the two. As part of her work for the WWP, she lobbies for peace among Knesset members and other public figures, and participates in discussions at Knesset committee meetings.

WWP was founded in the summer of 2014 in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge, in which there was conflict between Israel and Gaza lasting almost 50 days. A group of women from diverse backgrounds, who were sick and tired of deadlocked peace initiatives, got together. They believed that by bridging the divide through dialogue and understanding, they would one day find a lasting solution. The women aim to promote a strategic solution to the conflict by means of an honourable, non-violent, and mutually acceptable agreement.

They were brought to the country by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) to interact with South Africans across a wide spectrum of racial, political, and religious backgrounds, including youth from various student and political youth groups and members of the Black Sash in Cape Town.

In a series of appearances and events in Johannesburg throughout the week, they

met International Relations Deputy Minister Candith Kwati Mashego-Dlamini in Pretoria, held talks with female business leaders in Hyde Park, and with youthful activists and faith groups, all of whom were spellbound by their tales of conflict resolution and sweeping efforts to combat barriers to peace in Israel.

In just a few days these women, united in their difference and unwavering belief in a solution to the conflict, have helped shift the narrative and open dialogue regarding conflict

employee, she knew what this entailed. With a Masters in social-industrial psychology, she worked for ten years as a leadership development consultant in the IDF, and has been an activist for peace for many years. She has since found her home in the WWP initiative as it “brings together women representing every side of the conflict”, she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The organisation held a congress last November which connected diverse families

Jews, Muslims, Christians, Arabs, Druze, and Bedouin, young and old. Not to mention the fact that it doesn’t support any single solution to the conflict, said Rubin-Cooper.

“Language is important in bridging the divide,” said Manar Abu Dahl, an Arab Israeli who speaks Hebrew and Arabic. “I go to the West Bank and I show Arab children using photographs on my cell phone that not all Jews are soldiers. I speak to children in Arabic explaining that Jews are my friends.”

Abu Dahl is a Bedouin who grew up in the ancient city of Lod – a mixed town with Jews, Muslims, and Christians living side by side. She said it was a blessing as it had given her insight into the conflict from all sides.

“I see it as my responsibility to bridge divides and bring people together using the power of language as a tool and promoting positive and respectful discourse.”

Vered Eyal Saldinger said she joined the movement upon returning to Israel after living abroad. “It disturbed me that young people had to risk their lives in order to make me safe,” she said. It motivated her to bring about meaningful change.

“The ethos and values of Women Wage Peace have resonated deeply. I believe attitudes and beliefs regarding the Israeli Palestinian conflict were shifted in a positive way this week,” said Wendy Kahn of the SAJBD.

SA broadcast journalist Nausheena Mahomed from Channel M productions, who is Muslim, said: “It was refreshing to engage with social activists from Israel especially during Women’s Month. Hearing from Israeli women about concrete efforts being made to halt violence flies in the face of the stereotypical impression of Israelis that broadly prevails here. It demonstrates that there is much to learn about Israeli society over and above mainstream politics.”

South African businesswoman Soraya Zoueihid Benchikh described the women as “beacons of light”. “I’m Lebanese, and was raised during the war in Lebanon. I’m inspired by these ladies, who choose every day to do the most difficult thing, which is not to accept hate, cynicism, and wallow in the past, but move on, forge a better future, a future in peace.”



Vered Eyal-Saldinger, Yasmin Rubin-Cooper, Manar Abu Dahal and Hyam Tannous from Women Wage Peace

resolution, said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn.

“Everyone in Israel and Palestine has been affected by the ongoing conflict,” said Yasmin Rubin-Cooper, one of the visiting women, “Our organisation brings people together from all backgrounds with a common goal to find a solution. We all want peace regardless of what we believe, and where we come from.”

The women shared their personal stories at an interfaith and intercultural event held at the Women’s Jail at Constitutional Hill, Braamfontein.

Rubin-Cooper, an Israeli mother, spoke of her anxiety when she found out she was pregnant with her first boy. “The only thing that went through my mind at the ultrasound was, ‘Oh no! My son will have to go to the army!’”

A former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)

affected by the conflict.

“There was a settler from the West Bank who lost her son in a terror attack, and a Palestinian doctor from the Gaza strip who lost his two daughters and his niece. They came face to face, and embraced after they agreed that what they needed to move forward was for people to recognise what they had suffered. They just needed to hear that their suffering was acknowledged,” she said, pointing out that the conference was the first time they had felt any sense of hope.

WWP has arguably become the largest grassroots movement in Israel, with more than 40 000 members.

Its strength lies in the fact that it isn’t affiliated with any political party, and its members include women from different communities within Israeli society including

# Zionist Fed director makes aliyah

JORDAN MOSHE

When Nicci Raz agreed to lend her marketing skills to the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) in 2015, she anticipated a short stint involving only a few hours of her time.

Today, she is stepping down from her role as national director of the organisation, having committed herself to fighting for the Zionist cause and promoting Israel for the past four years.

“I was floored. Why would I want to get involved in community work?” she says, chuckling. “Marketing was my field. But after speaking to my husband, I saw that if one has an opportunity to do something positive for Israel, there’s an obligation to do it. That was that.”

After four years of serving the community, the 39-year-old Zionist is fulfilling the Jewish dream of making aliyah on 19 August with her Israeli husband, David, and three teenage daughters, Edden, Noa, and Ora.

Her departure is the culmination of a challenging but rewarding journey of Israel advocacy and community leadership.

Raz reflected on her journey,

and how she became involved with the SAZF in 2015, succeeding Isla Feldman after her 35-year period of service.

Raz had spent years contributing to the successes of ORT JET and ORT SA, and wanted to return to the corporate environment in which she began her career. A chance encounter with outgoing SAZF chairperson Ben Swartz while running the Jerusalem Marathon changed that, altering her trajectory considerably.

“Ben and I were friends. We decided to get Bruce Fordyce involved in a run that would be geared towards promoting Israel. It seemed simple enough.”

As soon as the project was announced, however, Raz had an encounter with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement

(BDS) that made her realise just how controversial support for Israel could be. “I attended Yeshiva College, had been involved in Bnei Akiva, and had always supported Israel,” she says.

“But when BDS hit us, I realised that I had been wearing rose-tinted glasses when it came to how South Africa sees Israel. My eyes were opened, but I refused to allow

Bruce to bail out, and BDS to win.” Raz and Swartz gave Fordyce the support needed to ride the BDS wave, ensuring that the marathon went ahead as planned. Raz returned to the corporate world for a year, and though she learned a lot, she says she felt a lack of energy in her work, and had to find meaning in her career.

“I had been bitten by the community bug,” she says. “The corporate space lets you champion something, but it’s usually a brand or product. I wanted to champion the community and Israel.” She got this opportunity by way of a short-term offer from the SAZF, inviting her to assist with marketing. Her intended short stay was arranged by Swartz, who played a strategic role in getting Raz on board full-time. “People thought I was crazy to accept a position. ‘Why do you want to go into that building?’ they’d ask. ‘It’s a minefield of politics, arguing, and stress.’ Still, there was a job to do, and I wanted to see it done.” Raz says she found others less progressive and openminded than she had expected. “People were very possessive of their territory,” she says. “No one co-operated, because people had preconceived ideas about what others were capable of, and were sticklers for their mandates. I suppose I was disruptive, challenging protocol limits respectfully so that I could get things done.” Her vision was to create a brand for Israel advocacy in South Africa, enabling community members to associate the SAZF automatically with Israel even if they weren’t familiar with the organisation itself. Even with her flair for marketing, Raz

encountered several obstacles along the way, including emotional hurdles, maintaining a vibrant and efficient team, and working with a shrinking budget as time passed.

Raz accomplished much over the years, learning how to delegate roles effectively, and creating a hands-on team of leaders willing to go the distance on behalf of Israel and the local community. She is also proud of her part in fostering the SAZF’s relations with other Jewish organisation such as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish Agency, and Israeli embassy in South Africa.

Raz stresses there is still much to be done by supporters of Israel in South Africa. “When people hear that I’m leaving, they are fearful because they think I see no hope here,” she says. “I’m going to Israel as part of my own personal journey, and will continue to fight from there, but those who stay here still have a role to play.”

She concludes that there is a perception that Israel’s status today means it needs no help, but the Jewish state needs support from the diaspora perhaps more than ever.



Nicci Raz



# PayPal no longer pals with BDS-SA?

NICOLA MILTZ

The Boycott, Divest, Sanctions campaign in South Africa (BDS-SA) has been silent in the wake of suggestions that its PayPal account has been shut due to its close association with a designated terrorist organisation.

In spite of claiming to be a peaceful, human-rights organisation, BDS-SA has unashamedly associated itself with members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). This organisation has been classified as an illegal terrorist organisation In the United States (US), Canada, and the European Union (EU).

The South African branch of the organisation has hosted prominent members of the PFLP, most notably terrorist and plane hijacker Leila Khaled, whom BDS-SA regards as an iconic freedom fighter. Calls by the movement to rename a major Sandton, Johannesburg, road after Khaled have also reached local municipal structures, with political parties voting in favour of the motion.

A controversial tweet by the organisation’s director, Muhammed Desai, on 31 July got international tongues wagging, sparking widespread curiosity over just how close BDS-SA was to the PFLP. Desai, tweeted a photograph of himself shaking hands with a member of the PFLP during his visit to Venezuela, where he met pro-Palestinian activists.



His tweet, sent at 11:23, said, “A representative of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine with BDS South Africa’s Muhammed Desai. The PFLP works closely with BDS-SA in the global campaign against apartheid Israel.”

The tweet was picked up by Jerusalem-based NGO Monitor, a globally recognised research institute, raising questions. Both the BDS-SA tweet and the same Facebook post were then quickly taken down, creating even more of a stir. However, NGO Monitor retained a screenshot of the tweet, which has since been shared several times on various social-media platforms.

A later tweet sent on 5 August at 03:35 shows a smiling Desai with members of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). It said, “BDS South Africa’s @MuhammedDesai engaging Palestinian activists in Venezuela. Here with a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Collective efforts from all sectors of Palestine are vital in the global campaign to isolate apartheid Israel.”

NGO Monitor responded to this tweet by saying, “More #BDS& #terror; how long until BDS South Africa deletes their post with DFLP? This terror group is responsible for 1974 Maalot massacre of 25 school children & teachers as well as shooting, rocket & bombing attacks.”

On Monday, following the tweets, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that BDS-SA’s PayPal account wasn’t accepting donations. It said it was unclear if the online payment service had closed the account due to the organisation’s support of the PFLP.

When the *Jerusalem Post* clicked on the electronic donation section of BDS-SA, the entry by PayPal stated, “Things don’t appear to be working at the moment. Please try again later.”

The *SA Jewish Report* tried to do the same, and received the same response.

PayPal acknowledged questions from the *SA Jewish Report*, saying that it would respond to the questions “shortly”. At the time of going to press on Wednesday evening, PayPal said in an email, “The team is still looking into the request. Once I have more information that I can share, I’ll be sure to let you know.”

BDS-SA has consistently said it advocates a non-violent approach to seeking an end to the conflict in the Middle East, and claims to call for peaceful co-existence for all people in that region. However its ties to the PFLP have raised eyebrows.

BDS-SA had not responded to a list of questions put to it by the *SA Jewish Report* by the paper’s print deadline. Questions relating to the PayPal account were sent to Desai, board chairperson Professor Farid Esack, and board member Bram Hanekom.

PayPal has been known to close the accounts of organisations that closely associate with groups sympathising with terror organisations. In September last year, PayPal closed the account of Germany-based nongovernmental organisation (NGO) International Alliance, an organisation that sympathises with the PFLP.

In May, PayPal joined other major online payment systems in shutting down services to Samidoun, an NGO and proponent of the BDS movement with close ties to Palestinian terror groups. The International Legal Forum, along with the Zionist Advocacy Centre, petitioned PayPal, Donorbox, and Plaid, to shut down financial services to Samidoun, according to NGO Monitor.

In June last year, Visa, Mastercard, and American Express shut down online credit-card donations to a number of terror-linked NGOs active in the Arab Israeli conflict, NGO Monitor said.

Shaun Sacks, senior researcher at NGO Monitor, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the Israeli ministry of strategic affairs, NGO Monitor, and other groups had been saying for a while that the global BDS organisation, in particular BDS-SA, has been in close contact with internationally designated terror organisations, particularly the PFLP. “Leila Khaled

assists BDS-SA with fundraising. She is one of the most infamous PFLP members,” he said.

“The tweet shows BDS-SA openly acknowledging that it works with the PFLP, and that global BDS campaigns are being conducted with the PFLP, a known terrorist group. Very soon after these questions were raised, BDS-SA removed the tweet and the Facebook post. It appears that its PayPal account is no longer active,” said Sacks.

“It could be illegal for PayPal to assist BDS-SA in fundraising if it is working in co-operation with a US and EU-designated terrorist organisation, which very much appears to be the case.

“Many other organisations claiming to be human-rights organisations have had their credit-card processing information withdrawn because of their association with terrorist groups,” he said.

“This is one of many cases of organisations claiming to promote human rights but working hand in glove with terrorist organisations having their financial abilities curtailed because they’re acting illegally.”

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# Inclusive leadership is natural for women

OPINION

DEBBY EDELSTEIN



It’s tempting to talk about how far women’s leadership has come over the past few decades. After all, a record breaking six women are running for president in the United States. More women are running organisations and governments around the world, and the #MeToo campaign has highlighted the reality and scale of sexual harassment for every woman. However as Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the director of UN Women, reminded us at the recent G7 ministerial meeting on gender equality and women’s empowerment, “No country in the world has achieved gender equality. No country. And this is nearly 25 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [an agenda for female empowerment].”

Progress aside, the fight for gender equality still has to be won on many fronts. Women’s leadership is important because it’s only when there is more equality in who leads that gender issues like educational injustice, weaponised rape, and child marriage will receive the attention they deserve.

Feminism (still a surprisingly fraught and misunderstood term) simply means that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. One of the best ways we can accelerate this process is to get more women into positions of power.

Not surprisingly, as late Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize laureate,

Margaret Thatcher, an old-style leader

Wangari Maathai noted, “The higher you go, the fewer women there are.”

Some advocates of change like Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, believe in what has been referred to as the “DIY model of empowerment”. Women should “lean in” more, be more assertive in order to increase their leadership potential.

Sandberg’s critics include Anne-Marie Slaughter, political scientist and the author of Unfinished Business, who believes that much broader social, political, and cultural change is necessary to change the system.

I believe both. The broader system, and the values it represents, certainly needs to change but for many of us who aren’t able to influence change on a structural level, we still need to find a way to make changes where we can. I’d like to suggest two strategies for making a difference that are accessible to most of us.

The first is that we broaden our definition of what leadership is. The second is that we focus on some of the skills that come naturally to many women.

Even though there is more recognition of different kinds and styles of leaders, we still tend to default to the style of leadership which is more traditional and patriarchal. (I lead, and you all follow.)

After all, which names come to mind when we think of who is at the helm of countries and organisations, and even who we should invite to give the keynote address at a conference? It’s still easier to give lists of high-profile male leaders.

Years of being socialised into a way of being in the world means that many of us are more comfortable to be in the wings than to take centre stage. It’s not that there’s a shortage of talented women. Rather it’s a sign of how reluctant women are about taking a seat at the table.

However, when we use a different, more inclusive definition of leadership, it’s easier to think of more women who fall into this category. We are more inclined to include ourselves as legitimate candidates for leadership. And most important of all, we can become more ambitious about what leadership is able to achieve in the world.

Leadership author Margaret Wheatley’s definition is helpful. “A leader is anyone willing to help, anyone who sees something that needs to change, and takes the first steps to influence that situation.”

When this is our definition of leadership, a leader might be a parent who intervenes in her child’s school, a colleague who refuses to allow the mistreatment of others in her workplace, or a neighbour who rallies others to save trees in the suburb.

When we expand our notion of what leadership is, we encourage people to step forward and make a small difference in their communities. It’s also the kind of definition that is naturally more appealing to a wider range of women leaders.

In the same way that research into the world of micro-finance reveals how women who accept loans are more inclined to invest back into their families and communities, women are more inclined to expose themselves to the risk of leadership when there is a greater cause at stake.

When we think of leadership as a call to make a contribution rather than a more individualistic instinct to put ourselves in charge, we tap into a feminine ease with supporting others, speaking up for the voiceless, and making a difference to many.

The second strategy is to harness a set of skills which comes especially easily to women. This is the cluster of skills which I and others in leadership describe as the art of conversation.

The dark side of this ability is when girls exclude others socially. Most women have at least a memory of what it feels like to be an outsider. Often, it’s as a result of these social scars that women reinforce the narrative that women are inclined to bring other women down rather than build them up.

But the flipside is the natural ability women have to create conversations, safe spaces, and make others feel welcome. Like good listening skills, the idea of inclusion is becoming core to good leadership. Inclusion simply means making sure that an organisation is welcoming at every level to every individual. Inclusion is about diversity of thought and individuality regardless of race, heritage, or gender. It’s becoming the new normal, and at its heart is a skill that is second nature to little girls all over the world.

Women from different countries, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds have been raised to welcome others into their homes, make them feel comfortable, introduce them to people they might not have met before, and offer them food and drink. The limitation is that we have been raised to think of these skills as the skills of home economics rather than as the elements of leadership. These are skills that we don’t need to go to business school to finesse. They are abilities that have been relegated to the catering committee of our communities rather than in the boardrooms – or peace talks – where they belong.

In an age where we have too many connections but feel less connected than ever before, we crave meaningful conversation, human connection, closer bonds with our inner circle, and meeting diverse voices who expand our worlds. These are the kinds of feminine leadership skills that the world needs now. Not because they come naturally to women, but because they create and encourage essential human values.

It’s time we took them out of the domestic realm, and put them into the world.

• Debby Edelstein founded WeLead Circles, a women’s leadership programme which was nominated for the 2019 Accenture Global Greater Than Awards. She is on the Advisory Board for TuksRes Women’s Leadership Academy at Pretoria University.



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# Stop waiting for others to solve our problem, business leaders say

JORDAN MOSHE

If South Africa is to navigate the stormy waters of rising unemployment and economic downturn, it needs to stop underselling itself and waiting for others to solve its problems. This is what businesswoman Phumzile Langeni, Discovery founder Adrian Gore, and Moshal Scholarship Program founder Martin Moshal believe.

It’s only by taking control of the situation ourselves that we can hope to avoid a tumultuous future, the three said at a panel discussion last Friday morning, led by Talk Radio 702’s Joanne Joseph.

The discussion was part of a networking event hosted by the Moshal Scholarship Program. Founded in 2009, the programme is responsible for providing university scholarships for 1 200 students every year.

Guests from across the corporate spectrum came together for a morning of knowledge sharing, networking, and inspirational talks by future Moshal graduates, alumni, and guest speakers.

Self-perception is the key to economic success, said Langeni. “South Africans are innovators, but too often, we undersell ourselves. Our county is a mining giant, and a leader in financial services on the continent. Yes, growth rates are down, but we have something to offer, and continue to be global players.”

Langeni, the executive chairperson of Afropulse and chairperson of Primedia Limited, was appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa last year to join his special presidential envoy to crisscross the planet looking for investments. Together with former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, former Deputy Finance Minister Mcebisi Jonas, and former Standard Bank head Jacko Maree, her job is to seek out R1.2 trillion in new investment in the next five years.

She maintains that South Africa has a lot to offer foreign investors, but it’s up to us to promote ourselves and attract foreign interest.

Moshal, who has a background in commercial ventures and investment, agreed with her, but said government corruption rendered any talent we possess useless. “Talent in South Africa is amazing, but the reality is that because the government steals from its people, any talent we have is completely irrelevant.

“South Africans are global players, but they’re not in South Africa. That’s the problem. They go to places where the infrastructure is good enough. If South Africa wants to keep its people, it needs an infrastructure which creates an environment in which people want to stay.”

Moshal explained how this can be achieved. “It’s simple: stop stealing from your people. Provide electricity, and make sure there a high probability you will not be killed in your car on the road. It’s not complicated. What needs to be done in South Africa is obvious. It’s about time that elected officials realise this, and deliver the basics.”

According to Gore, we must stop waiting for the government to resolve these issues, and address them

ourselves. He believes the root of our problem is procrastination. “We’re all waiting for better days. The fact is that they’re not coming. We need to make them a reality ourselves.”

Gore said we have the resources available to improve our situation, but we can’t see it because we are too negative in our outlook.

Contrary to popular belief, he maintains the country still has much to lose. “The amount of money stolen by a particular group we all know well was, on estimate, \$10 billion to \$15 billion (R147.9 billion to R221.8 billion.) The University of the Witwatersrand’s (Wits’) budget is R3 billion a year. This means we could fund Wits, Pretoria, the University of Cape Town, and Stellenbosch for a decade with the money we lost. Just think about what we can lose, and understand the danger we’re really in.”

However, he said attitude drives everything. “We need to move now, and need to move positively. Every country has intractable problems. Look at the United Kingdom with Brexit.

“Our mistake is procrastinating and waiting. We need to move on, and build. We must appreciate what we’ve got. Gauteng’s economy is bigger than Kenya’s or Ghana’s, and 80% of the continent’s pension-fund assets are

in South Africa. We must understand what we’ve got instead of having a constant feeling of crisis, saying things are terrible. We’ve got a lot to

“Like America, we need to make South Africa great again,” said Langeni. “As South Africans, we need to believe that we can succeed.

shaping a better future. “We have to be optimistic, and must maximise resources by providing a better work environment,” he said. “I believe in



lose, and we have to understand our potential.”

All three panellists agreed that we need to be more forward looking, believe in ourselves as South Africans, and be willing to take our country to the world and not the other way around.

Our youth needs to believe that the world is their oyster no matter their circumstances or background, and we need to change the narrative so that more people can see it this way.”

Moshal believes that South Africa can be great again. He said there was talent in our midst capable of

the South African people, but we need to understand the crisis we’re in. We’ve got to get our house in order.

“The people running this country will be dead in 30 years’ time, and it’s the youth who will take this country forward. South Africa will be great. We hope it will be sooner than later.”

## South African singer performs with Andrea Bocelli

TALI FEINBERG

Singer Colin Schachat has performed at Buckingham Palace, sung with one of the original Three Tenors, and entertained world leaders at conferences and concerts. However, the experience that topped all of these was being invited to sing with famed opera singer Andrea Bocelli in a special private concert at his home in Italy a few weeks ago.

Schachat, who lives in Israel, is a businessman and a singer. “I grew up in Senderwood, and went to King David Linksfield my entire school career. I always enjoyed singing, and was co-opted by Linksfield Shul to sing in the choir. I became the regular soloist, and in later years, the chazzan for six years.

Some years ago, he was invited to perform with José Carreras (one of the original Three Tenors) in Israel. “I became friendly with the management company that represented Carreras, and from time to time, it has arranged for me to participate in special events with major international artists. It also works with Bocelli,” he says.

“Last year, I performed with Bocelli in a star-studded event in Porto Venere, Italy, alongside legendary stars such as Josh Groban, David Foster, and Katharine MacPhee. This went well, resulting in an invitation for me to appear with Bocelli in a special private concert at his home in Forte Dei Marmi, Italy.”

Schachat says Bocelli is “a wonderful person – kind and easy going, and a musical genius. He plays a few instruments at professional

This year, Bocelli requested that we perform two other Neapolitan songs, *O Surdatto Nammeruto* and *Vogue Vivere Così*.”

Other highlights in Schachat’s career have been performing a Mozart recital at Buckingham Palace with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; performing and recording with Carreras; a performance for world leaders at the opening of the President Peres International Conference; and regular performances with some of the world’s leading singers and *chazzanim*.

“Without doubt, my biggest success is that I have a show with two of my sons, Gabi and Micha,” he says. “We perform in Israel and around the world. Even prestigious events don’t match the satisfaction and pleasure I get when performing with my sons, who are established artists in their own right.”

There are also some major challenges, including balancing family, professional business life, and a singing career; dealing with disappointment – which is part of the music business – and keeping in good vocal shape.

Schachat says his Jewish identity has played a key role in his life and career. “I have never hid who I am, and I try to conduct myself in full knowledge that I represent more than myself. I have also lost on out on opportunities as I don’t perform on Shabbat. I have no regrets in this regard. I have had proper kosher food in the most unlikely of places and events. People respect consistency and loyalty to one’s heritage. Whether I like it or not – and actually I do – being Jewish defines who I am.”

His advice to young people who would like to succeed as singers is that, “It’s a very tough industry. Anyone who decides on it as a career should prepare for much sacrifice and disappointment, along with satisfaction and success. You need talent, dedication, luck, and most of all, unbridled passion.

“Even though I have been living in Israel for 28 years, my South African roots are always referred to in some way”, he says. “I was privileged to be part of this amazing community which gave me so many opportunities. It created the foundation from which I was able to move forward. So, I say thank you.”



His Jewish background continues to play a role in his career. “When I sing in the secular world, I’m known as the ‘cantor who sings opera’, and when I sing in the cantorial or Jewish context, I’m known as a professional baritone who also sings *chazzanut* [cantorial music],” he says.

So how did he come to perform with Bocelli?

level, including the flute and piano. His mind is phenomenal – he knows more than 5 000 songs off by heart. New arrangements were written for our performances, which made it even more special. In 2018, we sang *The Pearl Fishers Duet* from the opera by Bizet and *Vieni Sul Mar*, a wonderful Italian song made famous by Caruso.





# Ruth Weiss: a life dedicated to justice and peace

CHRISTINA STUCKY

The three girls put on their camera smiles for the newspaper photographer, cheeks glowing like polished red apples on the summer evening. They are pupils at the Ruth Weiss High School, named after the diminutive woman sitting beside them, who has just finished a two-hour talk. One of the girls is about 12, the same age Weiss was when she fled Nazi persecution to South Africa. In 1936, Ruth Weiss was a shy child. Last month, the author, journalist, and activist turned 95.

In 1936, the notion that a school in the southern German town of Aschaffenburg would one day be named after a Jewess would have been preposterous. The 11½-year-old could not have guessed that she would meet people like Nelson Mandela, or become friends with Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer. She also could never have imagined that the apartheid government would bar her, and that she would contribute to bringing about the end of apartheid.

All that was unimaginable for a Jewish child in Germany in the 1930s. The department store founded by her uncle in Aschaffenburg was seized under Nazi “aryanisation” laws. Relatives were murdered, persecuted, or escaped in time. Among them her father, Richard Löwenthal, who fled to South Africa in 1933, after losing his job and following an invitation from relatives in Johannesburg. Her mother had a job, so she and Ruth stayed. Three years later, the Nuremberg race laws were in force, and her father urged them to join him. They made it out just in time.

Between 1933 and 1936, about 6 000 refugees from Nazi Germany arrived in South Africa before the ruling National Party barred Jews from entering the country. “The Nats at the time were pro-Hitler and close to Nazi ideology,” Ruth Weiss recalls. At first welcomed, the party eventually decided that Jews “had the right skin colour, but the wrong religion”.

Having attended a Jewish school in Fürth, and living there with her religious maternal grandparents during her last years in Germany, she grew up as a “conscious Jewess” in South Africa. “Partly because I had been made very aware of being one in the few years in Nazi Germany, partly because of the South African situation in the 30s and 40s. It was natural for me that my parents joined the German-Jewish synagogue founded by a group of immigrants.” She also joined a Zionist youth group.

Along with her religious beliefs, Ruth Löwenthal (later Weiss through marriage) brought a clear understanding of injustice to South Africa. On the boat to South Africa, she and her sister played with African children deck passengers picked up on the stops along the coast. “We thought we had to learn African languages and culture so we could live with them. But the first words I heard when I arrived in Cape Town were from a white woman who said, ‘Oh, how lovely that the children have such fair skin.’ That was a shock. We arrived in this country ignorant.” Twelve years later, apartheid became an institutionalised system of racial segregation.

“Other people had to work their way to the knowledge that apartheid was unjust,” she



says. For Ruth Weiss’ family the injustice was apparent because of the Nazi persecution of “non-Aryans”.

When the first reports of the atrocities arrived from Germany, she recalls feeling an overwhelming sense of guilt. “We should have been there,” she writes in her autobiography, *A Path Through Hard Grass*. She also asked herself, “Is it permissible that the plight of the blacks touches me more than the monstrosities that happened to Jews in Europe? In South Africa, I constantly had the feeling that I shouldn’t be faring as well as I did. In view of the ever more obvious discrimination against blacks, I always had the feeling that I had failed.”

She abandoned her plans to emigrate to Palestine. Driven away by the increasing horror of apartheid, she left South Africa and embarked on a journalistic career that took her from London to Lusaka, Cologne to Harare, meeting Robert Mugabe, Mandela and other struggle stalwarts along the way. She was a business journalist, but reported equally on social and political issues. In 1968, she was declared persona non grata in Southern Rhodesia, where she was working at the time, and denied re-entry into South Africa.

In the 1980s, she was one of the founding members of the Zimbabwe Institute for Southern Africa, organising secret meetings with white and black South Africans and representatives of the liberation parties. “We brought people together who had learned to hate each other, furthering understanding and forging friendships across the barriers.” Her dedication to building bridges led her to be one of 1 000 women activists nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

After the end of apartheid, she visited South Africa several times in the early 1990s, but decided against returning. “It was the time for the young, the local, and returning leaders and activists. I felt an old woman like myself was superfluous to requirements.”

Today this nonagenarian uses her formidable memory and myriad experiences

to speak out against prejudice. She has written 35 books and 46 unpublished manuscripts, including the children’s book *My Sister Sara*, set in South Africa. Many of her public talks return to the roots of her activism. Audiences often ask her about Nazi Germany or her thoughts as a Jewess about anti-Semitism in Germany. “The old prejudice against and lies about Jews, nurtured during centuries and reshaped to the extremes in the 30s, have never gone away. An old man said to me at a lecture, “They filled our heads with certain notions that are impossible to get rid of.”

That the Aschaffenburg school carries her name has less to do with her than with Germany’s history, she asserts. “It’s an honour for me, but I know my name was chosen as a symbol of something that no longer exists. It’s a reminder of the once-thriving Jewish community that was completely eradicated.”

• Christina Stucky is a freelance journalist based in Bern, Switzerland, where she works part-time for the non-governmental organisation PeaceWomen Across the Globe.

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# When changing careers means finding your calling

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Whether prompted by changing circumstances, passion or opportunities, these four women prove that it’s never too late to change careers.

“How do you really know what you want at the age of 18?” asks Stacey Lewis. “How do you know that that’s going to be the same when you’re 40? Life changes you.” Having begun practicing as a

Stacey Lewis

physiotherapist at 22, Lewis – now 41 – is in her second year of an LLB degree. “When I matriculated, if you got good marks you went to medical school – so I did,” she says. “I landed up working in the field of paediatric neurology. Through work, I injured my back, so I decided to find another less physical avenue within physiotherapy.” Lewis soon discovered medical litigation, doing disability assessments and reports. She now runs a medicolegal reporting business.

Circumstances took Lewis along another unexpected path. “Eleven years ago, I went through a divorce, and through that process, I established a divorce-support website and became a qualified divorce mediator.” Lewis has written two books on divorce – one alone and one as a co-author.

Through medical litigation and divorce work, Lewis developed an interest in law. “People live a lot longer now, and generally don’t just retire at 60,” she says. “It’s a long time to work in one career. Today you must reinvent, re-educate, or upskill yourself.”

Philippa Levitt, Lewis’s co-author on her book, *From Break Up to Break Through: 4 Powerful Steps to Reclaim Yourself*, has moved away from a successful law career. Known for starting the first all-female legal firm in South Africa in 1991, Levitt – who specialised in litigation, divorce, and property law – was inspired by her desire to create a comfortable space for working moms. Yet, after five years, Levitt became so busy that she faced the very struggle she’d set out to eliminate. “I felt I had to choose once again between law and family.”

I sold my practice to my partner when I was about 34, and stayed on as a consultant for roughly another four years.”

Philippa Levitt

Losing her father, who had been her mentor and inspiration, shortly afterwards, Levitt embarked on a spiritual journey. “I wanted to use the time I’d gained to delve into answering some of life’s deeper questions.” Travelling through India, she was exposed to great spiritual thinkers and writers. “This began an epic quest to read, learn, and experience as much as I could,” she recalls.

“It culminated in my discovering, many years later, the work of Debbie Ford, the *New York Times* bestselling author of several books including *Spiritual Divorce*, *Divorce as a Catalyst for an Extraordinary Life*. I trained with the Ford Institute in San Diego to become a divorce coach. Over several years, I’ve coached people all over the world, and I still do.”

Levitt also returned to her first love, art, enrolling herself at the Johannesburg Art

Foundation. She’s since sold many works, and had exhibitions in South Africa and Sydney. In the past two years, Levitt has also become a corporate trainer for Levy Network Africa. She addresses unconscious bias, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Bev Butkow

“I see my life and work as an everchanging tapestry that fits together in ways that often aren’t immediately apparent, and that might still lead me anywhere,” she says. “My legal training weaves its way through everything I do, and enriches every aspect of my life. It’s more about adding to my first career than changing course completely.”

In contrast, Bev Butkow’s career did an about turn. Having carved a successful career in corporate finance, she constantly juggled work and family. “I adored my job – it was stimulating, exciting, and the people I mixed with were all bright and interesting,” she says. “I worked through many nights as I tried to balance my job with being a mom, wife, daughter, friend, and community member.”

Yet when she was 38, Butkow and her

husband decided to have a fourth child. “It forced me to finally accept that four kids and a job in corporate finance wasn’t sustainable,” she says. “It was a fraught decision, but also one of the best of my life. I was left to ponder what I’d do. My turn to art happened slowly – one art lesson, a small drawing, an investment in some good paint brushes, and then one day, in my early 40s, I threw myself in by renting a studio in an organisation called Assemblage. I’ve never looked back. I love how I’m forced to take chances, overcome fear, and put myself out in the world so my world gets bigger.”

Butkow is currently doing her Masters in Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, making material objects out of painting and weaving. Through the support of gallerist Julie Taylor of Guns & Rain, she’ll be exhibiting in London later this year.

“The hardest part of changing careers was recalibrating who I was without the ego, status, salary, reputation, and chic business suits,” says Butkow. “What was most rewarding was recognising how much support I have, especially from my husband, kids, and parents. It’s because of this that I’ve been able to grow so much in the past six years. While being an artist was never in my life’s masterplan, I can’t imagine a more perfect life.”

For Daniella Getz, a career in teaching seemed obvious. “I loved the idea of working with children,” she says. Yet after six years of working

as a Grade 4 remedial teacher, she could no longer silence her call to catering. “I always loved cooking. When my friends told me to become a caterer, I secretly loved the idea but laughed it off as a pipe dream,” she says.

“Yet after more encouragement, I began selling desserts, and so Daniella’s Kitchen was born. The business grew, and I decided to follow my passion, give up a stable income, and become a full-time caterer, one of the most exciting but nerve-wracking decisions of my life.” Being her own boss also allowed Getz to spend more time at home

with her then baby son. Two years later, Daniella’s Kitchen is flourishing, catering for Shabbos, Yom Tov, birthday parties, family dinners, and corporate events. The business, which offers varied milk and meat menus, is kosher, but not Beth Din certified.

“With hindsight, starting the business was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” she says. “I often work through the night, but the satisfaction of preparing a delicious meal and getting positive feedback makes it all worth it. Catering is my dream job.”

Daniella Getz

## The Bertha behind the Bill that changed women’s lives

JORDAN MOSHE

Imagine not having legal right to your property, income, or even your children. Just 66 years ago, women were in this position in South Africa. They were minors in the eyes of the law, and their husbands – or fathers if they weren’t married – legally controlled them.

It was a Jewish woman by the name of Bertha Solomon who fought to change this law, and after a long hard fight, ultimately succeeded. Solomon was one of the first women’s-rights activists in the country, whose fight for women to be treated equally remains legendary to this day.

Solomon championed women’s rights in the 1930 and 1940s as an advocate in the Supreme Court, and then in her long career in parliament. She was tireless in her fight to see the Matrimonial Affairs Bill (commonly known as Bertha’s Bill) passed to secure women’s legal rights to their property, income, and children.

Solomon was born in Minsk (then a part of Russia, now Belarus) in 1892. She was one of five children born to Idel and Sonia Schwartz. Together with her mother and an older sister, she arrived in South Africa in 1896 to join her father, a staunch Zionist who had left Tsarist Russia to escape conscription.

Her father’s commitment to noble causes clearly left a mark on his daughter. Solomon’s first-class results won her a scholarship to the Anglican Diocesan College (Bishops) as its only Jewish student.

She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in classics, a post-graduate teachers’ qualification, and a Masters in classics. After qualifying as a teacher, she taught Latin at Milburn House School for Girls in Cape Town for a year. During that time, she met her future husband, Charles Solomon. They were married in 1913, and settled in Johannesburg, where their two children, Frank and Joan, were born.

It was in 1923 that the trajectory of her life shifted dramatically. As a wife and the mother of two children, she reportedly complained over dinner to her friend, Advocate Philip Millin, that she was bored.

According to Gwynne Robins, the deputy director of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, who has conducted research into Solomons’ background, “[Millin] suggested that as a law had just been passed allowing women to practice law,

she should study law, and he sent her books and newly qualified lawyers to coach her.

“In due course, as Advocate Bertha Solomon, she became one of the first women advocates in practice, and loved the work.”

Robins said most of Solomon’s clients were women, and she was horrified to discover their legal disabilities. This was as a result of the Roman Dutch Common Law of Marriage, which regarded women as minors, and gave their husbands marital power over their wives’ money, possessions, and children.

“Feckless husbands could spend the wife’s inheritance, collect her wages, sell her possessions and furniture, remove the children, and nothing could be done,” said Robins. “Bertha realised that the only way to address these legal disabilities was to change the law.”

However, this required ground-breaking change: giving women the vote so their opinions could influence legislators.

Solomon joined the National Council of Women, threw herself into the suffrage movement, and became chairperson of the women’s suffrage campaign. She faced stiff opposition from the Dutch Reformed Church, which opposed votes for women on the basis that their enfranchisement was “in direct conflict with the word of G-d”.

In 1930, after a heated Parliamentary debate in which it was argued that scientific evidence proved women had smaller brains, only white women were given the vote, and were compelled to register as voters.

It caused an outcry. Ruth Alexander, the wife of MP Morris Alexander, stated that she refused to register under the force of a discriminatory law. “When Morris [her husband] told her she could be arrested for non-compliance, she agreed to register under compulsion and on the understanding that she would leave him as soon as their children had finished university – and she did,” says Robins.

Now able to vote, Solomon was elected first as a member of the provincial council in 1933, and later a member of parliament, addressing

women’s rights in her maiden speech. She set out to improve women’s rights in terms of the law.

Unfortunately, World War II broke out at this point, and shelved her Bill. Concern about the rights of women was low on the government’s priorities, particularly with the opposition of the Dutch Reformed Church, and a government divided about South Africa’s entry into the war.

Throughout the war, however, Solomon continued to wage a battle on behalf of women “It was an uphill battle,” says Robins. “General Smuts quipped, ‘What this house needs is more Bertha control’.” In 1944, she managed to get a bill through parliament only to have it rejected by the senate.

Solomon asked Prime Minister Jan Smuts to establish a judicial commission to investigate the position of women in South Africa. The findings were horrifying. Even the commission’s chairman, who had initially been opposed to such a bill, changed his view.

Solomons experienced yet another setback. By the time the commission presented its findings, the conservative National Party had come to power, and it was more interested in legislating apartheid than antagonising the church.

Eventually in 1953, Solomon’s 27-year battle bore fruit, and the Matrimonial Affairs Act, (called Bertha’s Bill by Prime Minister DF Malan), was passed, giving women legal rights to their property, income, and children.

“Having finally achieved the law she set out to achieve 27 years earlier, she retired from parliament five years later,” said Robins.

The battle in Parliament to secure equal rights for women in all areas of South African life was not yet over, however. Until her retirement in 1958, Solomon continued to act as a parliamentary watchdog for women’s rights, and to take government to task when those rights were ignored.

She passed away in 1969 at the age of 77, but her victory on behalf of South African women will ensure that she is never forgotten.



Bertha Solomon



# Creating a ‘new normal’ for mothers

TALI FEINBERG

Social media may have a bad reputation for taking people away from real relationships, but it can also be a tool for good. Thanks to Instagram and Facebook, women have been able to connect, support each other, and build networks that are desperately needed in today’s busy world.

We see this in our own community, as women use the Joburg Jewish Mommies and Cape Town Jewish Mommies groups as a reliable resource to find everything from a plumber to a school. Then there is The Village, begun by Jewish mom Vanessa Raphaely, which allows parents to bare their souls and find solutions as they raise teenagers.

This emotional support is one way that social media can be really powerful. When Genevieve Putter suffered panic attacks and depression after the birth of her son three years ago, she felt “unbelievably let down that no one was upfront with me, or warned me when I was pregnant that I was a prime candidate for a peri-natal anxiety and mood disorder”.

These terms broaden the diagnosis beyond the traditional post-natal depression, including women who suffer mood issues well into the first few years of motherhood. According to Putter, one in three women in South Africa suffers from this condition, but it is rarely discussed by medical professionals or antenatal classes.

After recovering from the challenges she faced in early motherhood, Putter felt it was time to bring this reality into the open. Amidst airbrushed pictures and styled flat-lays on Instagram, her platform would be different: it would create awareness that early motherhood was anything but pretty, and encourage others to seek support in the early days with a newborn.

“I called it ‘The New Normal’, because it was about a new way of being after becoming a mother, and how everything changes.” The response was instantaneous – every day, more mothers from around the country and around the world liked the page on Instagram, which currently has more than 3 000 followers.

The page covers everything from the guilt of moms grieving for their old lives, the need for a “village” of support, the challenges of working mothers, hormonal changes, physical changes, and mental health. In between, there is humour, joy, and comfort – a truly welcoming space for mothers.

Putter has used social media in practical ways, hosting online discussions where women can share their thoughts and experiences anonymously, or connecting mothers living in the same area. “Every day, I get messages from women asking for support,” she says.

While it’s a challenge, it remains her passion. It’s the reason for her shifting from her career as a content creator to training as a post-partum doula. In this role, she will be able to continue the work she began on the web, and help mothers in their homes.

“In most first-world countries, women get free visits from healthcare professionals in the weeks after the birth, but we don’t have that here,” she says. South African women are therefore in desperate need of post-partum support.

While social media is the foundation of this community, Putter has also taken it into the real world. The New Normal hosts support groups for mothers in Cape Town, and talks by professionals. Putter has also teamed up with psychologist Carly

Abramowitz to create an antenatal curriculum on post-birth mental health for mothers, to be presented with the usual classes on birth and baby at antenatal clinics in Cape Town.

Putter says there is a great demand for The New Normal to expand these experiences to Johannesburg, and this is definitely part of the plan. Her ultimate vision, inspired by the book *The Red Tent*, is the creation of a women’s health centre.

“It would cater for all seasons of a woman’s life cycle, from puberty to menopause,” she says. She is currently looking for a patron or investor to support this dream.

To fellow Jewish moms, Putter advises, “draw on the community for support, and be open about your needs”. She believes Jewish women of the older generation need to be more honest with young mothers about the challenges they may face. Asking a new mom if she is “loving” motherhood does nothing to offer real support, but an honest conversation can make a real difference.

“What I’ve learnt on this journey is that being vulnerable and authentic is one of the biggest strengths we can tap into,” says Putter. “We think we can ‘have it all’, but often, something’s got to give. If we’re okay with that, we’ll have a much easier time as women and mothers.”



Genevieve Putter and her son

Photo: Katinka Bester

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# Succeeding in male-dominated industries: it’s all about attitude

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish women in South Africa do it all, often combining high-pressure careers with motherhood, caregiving, and volunteering.

Yet, there are still male-dominated industries where few females make their mark. These South African Jewish women are some of the outliers who have made an impact in these professions.

Ariella Kuper owns her own auction company, Solution Strategists. “The auction sector is almost entirely male-run, as was the international steel trading industry. Rather than being daunted by it, that was what interested me in both career choices – an area where I could make a difference and stand out through professionalism and results,” she says.

“I always recall the story of two salesmen coming to Africa. One calls his boss back home, and says, ‘Everyone is barefoot, don’t waste your time’. The other says, ‘No-one wears shoes; this place will be a goldmine!’ I guess life is about perspective!”

After graduating with a BA joint honours in economics and economic history, Kuper became an international steel trader for Macsteel International. She took a break to do her MBA at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, where she was class president, followed by a scholarship to Columbia Business School in New York. Thereafter, she rejoined Macsteel International, and ran various countries in their South American portfolio, while based in Miami.

On her return to South Africa she joined the auction industry in 2007, and became

a leading specialist in mining, maritime, and heavy commercial steel assets. “By 2012, I had co-founded a company where we represented almost all the major mines and financial institutions in South Africa in disposing of their distressed assets on a global level. By our fourth year, we were selling a billion rand in asset sales annually.”

But in 2016 and again in 2018, Kuper had to deal with a cancer diagnosis. She survived, and in April 2019, decided to focus on her passions: charity and maritime.

She says the maritime industry has a relatively high barrier to entry. She entered it “almost in error after assisting a major diamond mine in South Africa which was pulling out of alluvial mining in Namibia, and asked me to dispose of a tanker! I sold it to Russia for four times its reserve price just seven weeks later.” She went on to specialise in the sale of major commercial vessels in South Africa and Namibia. “On

the charity side, I conduct annual auctions in the United States, United Kingdom, and South Africa for various notable foundations. In total, I’ve raised more than R85 million in 11 years.”

Kuper says she has enjoyed the challenge and interaction with male colleagues. “We think differently. That means there’s room for knowledge growth. We inherently underrate our own capabilities, and tend to apologise too quickly. As females, we overwork as we worry we will be overlooked or readily replaced. Often we don’t recognise our own contribution and capabilities.”

“There is definitely a wage gap that needs to be addressed and is too readily exploited if we don’t push for fair remuneration. On the issue of colleagues and clients being disrespectful and sexist, I honestly think it comes down to your personality – how well you manage and tolerate banter, and the boundaries you set from the outset.”

She says there are advantages to being a woman in these industries. “You are unique, a novelty, you stand out, and have your own style. If you are good at what you do, you quickly earn respect and are readily remembered and admired.”

Kuper says her parents’ adherence to a strong Jewish value system gave her a strong sense of identity and belonging. “My father always taught us to believe in the talents we were given, and not waste them. He pushed us to go out and cross frontiers, be bold, stand out amongst the crowd, and be remembered by our actions.”

Her advice to young women who would like to succeed in male-dominated fields is, “Don’t be apologetic, and don’t let fear or barriers block you on your journey. Drop the male-female saga, and judge people by your own experience.”

Professor Amanda Weltman is a theoretical physicist working at the University of Cape Town. She is researching the structure, history, evolution, and fate of our universe using cosmology and theoretical astrophysics. “I’m working on solving the deep puzzle of why the universe appears to be accelerating in its expansion,” she explains.

Weltman is known for her early research proposing a new theory of gravity, and she also won the highly competitive position of South African research chair. Alongside this, she has raised a family, and views her children as her greatest success.

“This field is roughly 10% female. There

are very few women at all levels, but the numbers drop off as you get more senior,” she says.

“I believe I’m the only senior woman working in this area in South Africa. I was the first woman student in my PhD research group, and the only woman in the group for a large part of my degree. I actively try to support and train women students, though it might take years before that translates to real changes in demographics.

“Don’t be apologetic, and don’t let fear or barriers block you on your journey. Drop the male-female saga, and judge people by your own experience.”

“There are so many added challenges to being a woman in my field. Perhaps the greatest is the inherent bias that many men have that woman are less capable at maths and science. Some men find it hard to accept women in the field, and others can be very hostile as a result.

“Perhaps on a more structural level, university and research systems are designed around the typical behaviour patterns of a traditional man who leaves much of the home responsibilities to his wife. There are very few policies in place to accommodate the different needs that some women – and even modern men – may have. Change starts with the will of senior people to make those changes.”

Weltman says her upbringing and background influenced her choices. “My family have always valued education and mathematics in particular. My father, in particular, never treated me any differently as a girl, and certainly didn’t have any lower expectations of me. So, it was kind of a shock to realise that this wasn’t the norm when I studied further.”

In addition, her Judaism has been a strong foundation. “The Jewish philosophy of asking questions and challenging everything, and the culture of debate and discussion, has fed beautifully into what it means for me to be a physicist.”

Her advice to the younger generation is, “It’s important to have integrity, and treat everyone with respect. While a lot of people come into the field because they love the maths, physics, and problem solving, science is ultimately a human endeavour. So, the earlier you figure out how to handle the human side, the better it will be in the long run.”

Weltman’s long-term goal is for the world to have changed because she was in it. “I want to leave behind some lasting legacy. It’s yet to be determined whether science or my children, or both, will be the path to that goal.”



Photo: Andrew Gorman

Ariella Kuper

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# 'Mompreneurs' defy the odds

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Going it alone is never easy, especially for single moms. Yet, armed with determination and self-belief, these strong businesswomen are setting a powerful example for their children.

Nadine Hocter left high school in the middle of Grade 11. "It's still my biggest regret," says the now 36-year-old business owner and single mother of two. "I left because I needed to support myself. I was raised by a single mother who battled to hold down a job. In school, I was waitressing, but I wasn't making enough money." After dropping out, Hocter got an administration job. "I wasn't going to be in an office forever, so I studied beauty therapy because it was a trade."

While studying beauty, Hocter fell pregnant. She had her daughter Robyn shortly before her 19th birthday, and passed her final beauty exams when Robyn was just two weeks old. In 2006, after working in a salon for four years, Hocter decided to go it alone. "Being there for my daughter was my motivation," she says.

"I borrowed a massage bed from a friend, got out the Yellow Pages, and called people offering mobile massages and kids' pamper parties," she recalls. "I'd also heard about corporate massages at offices, so I tried that. For a long time, we lived from hand to mouth, but I grew the business through tenacity and consistency." While it's had ups and downs, today Hocter's corporate and

mobile massage business, Sheer Bliss, is thriving.

"We've recently introduced virtual reality massages. Clients get headsets, and are transported to a beach, for example, with full audio and visual effects," says Hocter speaking of the company's latest innovation. Sheer Bliss counts Discovery, Old Mutual, and MultiChoice among its many clients, and has branches in Joburg and Cape Town. The company's impressive year-on-year growth led to it being named 2018 Business of the Year by ORT Jet, an enterprise development organisation empowering small Jewish business owners.



Mandi Brest

Now divorced, Hocter has another daughter, eight-year-old Bella. Robyn, now 17, is on a scholarship at a private school. Hocter juggles work and motherhood through planning, support, and discipline.

"I always say I have three children," she jokes, "Sheer Bliss, Robyn, and Bella. Sheer Bliss is the iffiest teenager! As an entrepreneur, it's hard to step away from your business, but it's something I've had

to do. In starting the business, I promised myself that I'd give my staff and myself enough flexibility to be there for our kids – it was my driving force. I can't be there for every sports game and function, but I try. Although I work a lot, when I'm present, I'm very present. Because I'm an entrepreneur, my children also have a strong work ethic. You can see it in Robyn's achievements, and how she pushes herself – she's had this example of consistent, hard work. I also now have a live-in boyfriend who's very supportive. The wheel turns eventually."

Hocter now supports the Chevrah Kadisha which financed her own schooling. "It's great to be able to give back to the community that supported me, and to know that I can make a difference to someone else."

Divorced with an eight-year-old son, artist and art teacher Mandi Brest has also built a thriving business – Mandi Brest Art Studio. "Before I had my son, Adam, I was an art director at Ogilvy South Africa," says Brest. Yet, when her son was born two months early with a heart condition, she was forced to quit. "I couldn't continue in advertising and look after my baby," she recalls. "To make money, I started teaching art to the children of family friends in our servant's quarters. I remember asking how I was going to survive with just two kids a week. Yet those two kids became 10, then 20, and eventually I had to build a bigger studio."

When she left her husband, Brest moved in with her parents. "After a year, I bought a small, two-bedroom house

with a beautiful art studio," she says. "Adam and I have lived here for more than four years." Brest currently teaches 150 students, from six-year-olds to grandmothers, and has a growing waiting list.



Nadine Hocter

Giving back is her driving force and every two years, she hosts an exhibition of her students' art to raise money for charity. In their most recent exhibition, Brest and her students raised R100 000 for Woodrock Animal Rescue. "I'm grateful for all I've accomplished, but I've worked my butt off," she says. "I've paid off my house and my car, but I don't have much furniture or anything fancy."

"When it comes to looking after my son, I'm very blessed that my ex-husband is involved, and I also depend on my family a lot in terms of lifts and homework," says Brest. "It's not easy. You don't sit still. You sacrifice a lot. When you're in an unhappy marriage, you stay because you don't think you can do it on your own, but then you're so unhappy, you force yourself to leave. Ultimately, material sacrifices don't matter because you're looking after your son, and if he's

happy, you're happy."

"I was determined to not let my son see an unhappy mother. I struggled in the beginning, but it was worth it. I have a burning passion to do well, to look after myself and my son, and to empower him."

Master stylist Shelene Shaer had already been running hair salon Tanaz Hair for more than a decade when she had her twin sons, now 13. "My commitment to myself and my business partner has always been a driving force," she says.

Becoming a mother made Shaer that much more determined to succeed. "Having children definitely upped the game. It's a financial commitment that no one can prepare you for. It's also important to me to be a role model and instil the right values in my children."

Running a busy salon and being a single mother means having to rely on others. "I outsource to my incredible support system – my family and the people that create a village of function," she says. "I live next door to my salon, which makes me accessible to my children. I have a lady studying to be a teacher to assist with homework. My sister lives with me, and between her and my mother, there's always an ear and a helping hand. I've also established a solid work system."

Her advice for single moms? "Create a network around you, and make your children accountable for their day to day responsibilities. Be kind to yourself – it's not easy, and requires a lot of grit. The love does outweigh the hardship, though."



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# Young, Jewish and Female: What’s changed?

What’s the experience of young Jewish women? In the week of National Women’s Day, the SA Jewish Report asked four young women for their opinions.

## Age-old Judaism can accommodate the modern woman

HANNAH MIDZUK

I was born into an updated and updating society. As a female living in the 21st century, my life is overflowing with privileges that my grandmother and the women before her lacked.

I don’t know about illiteracy and fighting for my right to education. Nor have I had to struggle for the right to vote or earn a seat in parliament. I’m blessed with the opportunity to be an empowered woman who has rights, privileges, opinions, leadership skills, and an education.

Our world still has a long way to go to having an ideal attitude towards women, yet young women today are largely free to determine their careers, are mostly valued in the workplace and at home, and in many places, are viewed as equals.

How does a Jewish woman living in this modern, female-empowered world find her place within our age-old religion?

This is the question being contemplated by young South African Jewish women. These women might find that while secular society has finally established a place for them to be educated, powerful, and independent, their religion seems to be in the same place as it did when Am Yisrael got the Torah.

Judaism is the oldest extant religion. Our traditions stretch back to Moshe, and those established by *chazal* (a collective term referring to the Jewish sages responsible for development of the oral law).

A Jewish woman’s role seems to be described as upholding the household, being the mother and educator of her children. And while young females feel a sense of pride in being Jewish and upholding this important role, sometimes we feel bound by this status.

While women are empowered as strong and outspoken leaders in the secular world, religion seems to be steering us to remain hidden behind men. While women are thriving in the

academic world, we are often told that we lack the ability – or are forbidden to engage in – in-depth Torah learning.

This tension can have dire consequences. While a young Jewess struggles over attuning to her role in the Jewish world, she might feel – due to lack of education, fitting teachers, and role models – that she has no place in Judaism. Unfortunately, this can lead to many rejecting or neglecting their religious identity.

Young Jewish women need to realise that our religion also offers a space for the modern Jewish woman.

Torah is an evolution. Our Torah has evolved from Hashem’s word to Moshe, to oral Torah, and numerous modern commentaries. While its lessons are timeless, we have taken the ancient teachings fitting for people living in the desert and about to enter *eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel), and found their application to our 21st century workplace, technology, medicine, modern Israel, and current moral dilemmas. We’ve now found the space for the

modern woman too.

All of this has occurred while still remaining true to the initial commandments, and within the boundaries of halacha. Our Torah is alive. Its foundation of morals and values has grown, developed, and moulded to our world today. While our secular world has taken leaps in terms of women’s role within it, our religion has found a place within its eternal truth for the empowered, intellectual, and independent woman, while still remaining orthodox.

Being a Jew is beautiful, but I have found so much more beauty in it now that I have an empowered place within it. Only once I had studied at Midreshet Harova last year and was exposed to knowledgeable orthodox rabbis and female teachers did I fully understand the role of the Jewish woman. These educators taught me that the strong



modern woman is a recurring character in the ancient world of the Tanach, for example, Deborah, Miriam, and Ester.

It is these female role models who have taught me that there has always been an empowered role for women within the Torah – one in which

intellect, passion, and talent are endorsed and utilised in our daily lives.

I urge young South African Jewish women not to give up. One may be a powerful, educated, inspired woman both in the Jewish orthodox and secular world. Keep searching for answers, teachings, and educators who can direct you towards the updated and updating role of the Jewish woman.

• *Hannah Midzuk matriculated from Yeshiva College in 2017, spent a year at Midreshet Harova in Israel last year, and is now studying at the University of the Witwatersrand.*

## Equal in terms of the law

EDEN PLEIN

We’re told that in 2019, women are freer and more equal than ever before. While in the democratic world women are recognised as equal to men under the law, the reality is that women are still rightfully campaigning to be treated equally in spite of what’s written in our constitutional documents.

We face a dichotomy where gender-equity conversations are met with obvious acknowledgement, and condescending dismissal.

While women’s rights and issues have always been a somewhat



controversial topic, it’s important to recognise that digital technology has given women a voice that cannot be ignored. Media empowerment or access has allowed us to open a dialogue which allows the more general “us” to recognise just how unequal society still is. The perfect example is the #MeToo campaign, which though at first caused an uproar of denial and relegation, ultimately forced engagement with issues of harassment and assault, wages and representation.

As a self-identifying feminist who is committed to the fight against gender inequality in the personal and political sphere, and having thankfully never experienced gender-based trauma, I’ve always been optimistic about the state of women in our community. However, last week, I read an article published in *The South African* titled “SA is the worst country for solo female travel

according to the Women’s Danger Index 2019”.

As a student of the University of the Witwatersrand, who frequently walks the streets of Braamfontein, this article shocked me. The following quotes come to mind: “South Africa topped three of the eight factors as the worst country in women’s safety to walk alone at night”; “Intentional homicide of women”, and “Non-partner sexual violence”. These are clearly not just threats for tourists from abroad, but for every woman in the country.

Political processes still exclude women in certain parts of the developing world, and in the United States and European Union, women’s sexual and reproductive rights are

under threat with the push for greater restriction on access to abortion.

The abovementioned issues are, of course, the major ones facing women today. Another threat comes from the fact that, to a certain extent, the digital platforms that empower us are a double-edged sword, empowering an international movement against “gender ideology” which not only disregards the injustice of the status quo against the feminist movement, but undermines the very concept of equality by positioning it as paradoxical to family and religious values.

In this Women’s Month, I encourage all readers to look inwards, and actively decide to work towards furthering gender equality in all spheres of life.

• *Eden Plein is deputy secretary general of Habonim Dror Southern Africa 2019.*

## Today we have too much choice

HANNAH BLOCH

Being born in Johannesburg in the twenty-first century, I’m experiencing the redefinition of the modern-day-woman.

I’m fortunate to be able to look back at the suffragette’s fight for the right of women to vote, Angela Davis’s crucial part in the civil rights movement, and many other female activists who devoted their lives to equality and freedom for women. They have given me the gift of a future filled to the brim with choices.

As a young woman, I was born with a passion for adventure and a determination to achieve what I set out to do. I made the choice after school to travel alone to South-East Asia to do charity work, a decision that would have previously been looked down upon, but is now applauded.

However, it goes without saying that with choices, come challenges. Today, women have increasing opportunities to be whatever and whoever they want to be. However, many struggle to integrate their passions and aspirations into their identity.

While travelling, I worked with many women who had multiple definitions of what gave meaning to their lives. As women, we are no longer required or expected to be one-dimensional.

Growing up in the suburbs of Johannesburg, I’m not conditioned to seeing women working as part of a construction team. Therefore, when I walked along the streets of Cambodia, I was shocked to see women construction workers leaving the site in an orange vest

and slip slops – evidence of broken stereotypes.

Similarly, I met a mother of two sons whose talent lies in construction, which led her to work in the Philippines as part of a construction team. She told me how often she had to make sacrifices in her career to be a devoted mother and fulfil her sons’ needs.

This balancing act is a modern-day challenge for women. How do you choose between devoting your time to that which gives meaning to your life, and to that which you gave life? The challenge lies in being able to reach your full potential in the workplace, and being present for the milestones of your child.

The irony is that the dilemma facing young women today is brought about by an abundance of choice. Gone are the days when women were expected to play a very specific, narrow role. Now that we have the freedom to dream unconstrained, live without boundaries, and strive for greatness, the challenge is to have the capacity and ability to juggle it all.

• *Hannah Bloch was head student leader at King David Linksfield, and is currently on a journey of self-exploration during her gap year, during which she has been doing volunteer work in Asia. She is registered to study actuarial science next year at Wits.*



## Breaking our silence on abuse

DANIELLA SACK

As a 16-year-old woman still finding my way in the world, it’s hard to make my voice heard. Among the seasoned professionals and outspoken, influential people, my opinion is just one of many, wandering around aimlessly in the comments sections of social-media pages.

However, there is one person who never fails to hear my thoughts – my mother. In spite of her busy schedule, constantly running to interviews and meetings, she listens, no matter what. I put this down to the fact that there was a time that her voice was not heard when it should have been.

My mother, like so many



other women, was a victim of sexual abuse. She was violated by a person in a position of authority and trust, a man my family had known for years. Fortunately, my mother was able to shape her horrific experience into something meaningful. She created Koleinu SA, a helpline for victims of abuse in South Africa, alongside Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler.

Nevertheless, many victims of abuse are unable to make their voices heard, and are forced to suffer in silence.

A 2018 report by Statistics South Africa, “Crime against Women in South Africa”, revealed that 250 out of every 100 000 women are victims of sexual abuse (excluding rape). A worrying finding was that 2.5% of women believe that men are justified in beating women.

Continued on page 20>>



# The woman behind the cosmetics industry



JORDAN MOSHE

There are no ugly women, only lazy ones. This was the maxim that guided international makeup maven Helena Rubinstein’s career.

Rubinstein raised the image of cosmetics from an accessory associated with prostitutes to a desired luxury item that every woman wanted.

When she died at the age of 92, she left behind an international cosmetics business worth millions, as well as a legacy which proves the power of the determined Jewish woman.

Rubinstein, the official queen of the modern cosmetics industry, invented waterproof mascara, and the first moisturising treatment. She also designed the red lipstick worn by the suffragettes as a sign of resistance.

Born Chaya Rubinstein in 1872 to a poor Jewish family in Kraków, she was the eldest of eight daughters born to a strict wholesale food broker and an imposingly beautiful mother.

Mama Augusta Rubinstein would have a tremendous impact on her daughters, especially Helena, insisting they would gain power and influence through beauty and love. She advised them, “If you want to be really clever, listen well, and talk little.”

Rubinstein played an active role in her father’s business, helping him with bookkeeping and taking his place at a business meeting at 15 when he was unwell.

Her dad was determined to see his daughter rise to prominence, and decided that she should study medical science. However, the sights of the hospital sickened her, and when she became thin and unhappy, her father agreed that she could stop her medical studies.

Ever the Jewish father, however, he insisted that she marry, picking out a 35-year-old wealthy widower for his 18-year-old daughter. Rubinstein refused to marry her dad’s choice. Instead, she brought home the man she chose, Stanislaw, a non-Jewish medical student from the University of Kraków.

When papa refused the match, Rubinstein opted to set out for Australia, speaking not a word of English but carrying with her 12 pots of her mother’s beauty cream. These jars of Modjeska cream, named after her mother’s friend, actor Helena Modjeska, would form the foundation of Rubinstein’s fortune, and help her to make a name for herself in the world of cosmetics.

The cream was the creation of Dr Jacob Lykusky, a Hungarian chemist living in Krakow, who used herbs, almonds, and extracts from the bark of the Carpathian fir tree to make it.

For Australian women who suffered from sun-damage, this balm was heaven-sent. Rubinstein dubbed the product Value, which she described as a Hungarian word for “gift from heaven” (although no such word existed). After exhausting the supply provided by her mother, Rubinstein decided to open a shop to sell the cream herself.

She took out a loan of £250 (R4 524) that enabled her to buy a large quantity of the cream

from home, and rent and furnish a shop in Melbourne in 1903. She painted the building, and made the curtains and street sign herself, before opening Helena Rubinstein, Beauty Salon for business.

She blazed a trail across the beauty scene in a very short space of time, not only making enough money to bring over Lykusky to develop more products, but experimenting with creams for different kinds of skin in her kitchen. According to her autobiography, the £250 (R4 524) debt became a £12 000 (R217 171) credit by working 18-hour days for two years.

Rubinstein became so successful, she moved to London. There, she opened a beauty salon in Mayfair in the former home of Lord Salisbury. Her clientele was so upmarket, even Margot Asquith, the prime minister’s wife, was a regular patron.

Rubinstein then opened another salon in Paris, and spent a year studying with experts to learn about skin treatment, facial surgery, and good dietary practices.

In 1908, she married an American journalist, Edward William Titus, and had two sons. With the onset of war in Europe in 1914, they moved to New York City in 1915, and opened branches across the United States.

Movie stars like Theda Bara and Pola Negri consulted Rubinstein frequently, learning how to apply mascara, thereby cementing their image as iconic Hollywood vamps for decades to come.

Rubinstein’s luxury salons became destinations for affluent women who were proud to be seen spending hours undergoing treatment, paying enormous sums for the services she provided.

When her husband announced his intention to leave her for another woman in 1928, Rubinstein hastily sold her American business to Lehman Brothers for \$7.3 million (R108 million). She hoped this would prove to him that she remained loyal, but it made little difference, and they divorced in 1937.

With the stock market crash, Rubinstein bought back her business for only \$1.5 million (R22.3 million), but her personal life improved little. She remained devoted to her work, however, and constantly expanded her empire. She opened the House of Gabrielle for men in a daringly innovative move that proved ahead of its time. She also married a Georgian named Prince Artchil Gourielli-Tchkonია in 1938.

She continued to purvey beauty products during World War II. Although her critics suggested that her products were unnecessary during such hard times, she insisted that women needed the added lift of makeup more than ever. She quoted President Franklin Roosevelt as saying, “Your war effort ... is to help keep up the morale of our women. And you are doing it splendidly.”

Rubinstein died in 1965. By that time, her cosmetics business was said to be worth somewhere between \$17.5 million and \$60 million (R260.3 million and R892.5 million), with international holdings, laboratories, factories, and salons in 14 countries.

## Bongiwe Gangeni: why banking is the best medicine

From a young age, Bongiwe Gangeni, deputy chief executive of Absa’s Retail and Business Bank (RBB) South Africa, knew she wanted to enter the world of medicine. She wanted to be a pharmacist.

“From as early as Grade 7, when quizzed about my ambition, the response was always pharmacy,” she recalls.

She worked hard to make her dream a reality, and qualified as a pharmacist after finishing her degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

While she enjoyed her first few years of work, she soon realised it wasn’t her true calling. The days were just far too predictable.

“Itching for change, I registered for a Postgraduate Management Diploma (PMD) at Wits Business School, and quickly developed a passion for the business and corporate world,” she says.

Leaving pharmacy to enter the world of business wasn’t an easy decision, but it turned out to be “on the money”.

First, she spent three years as a management consultant at global consulting firm Accenture, where she got first-hand exposure to various industries.

“My time in consulting was a critical juncture. Having previous exposure only to the health sector, it’s here that I acquired the skills and talent to work across a variety of industries.”

She found the banking industry particularly exciting, given its central role in the lives of South Africans and the world, and started working in the small business environment at Absa in 2007.

“Absa has given me the platform to hone my skills, and make a meaningful difference at a JSE Top-40 listed company. Knowing that what I do has an impact on thousands of employees and millions of customers is humbling,” she says.

She also completed a Masters in Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science before joining Absa, and attended the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School while working at the bank.

Absa provided just the right mix of challenge, disruption, and opportunity to keep her engaged. After performing various roles at the bank, including managing executive for distribution in wealth, investment management, and insurance, in 2018, Gangeni was appointed deputy chief executive at Absa RBB SA.

The bank announced a new group strategy on 1 March 2018, just more than a year after it agreed to separate from its British parent, Barclays.

On 27 July 2018, Barclays Africa was officially renamed Absa.

In an effort to become the retail and business bank of choice, RBB SA has embarked on a new path. Layers of management have been

removed from the business to forge closer proximity between management and frontline colleagues. And, business-leading managing executives have been granted end-to-end control of their business units to improve the customer experience.

Gangeni, who is responsible for relationship banking, is excited about having an opportunity to serve customers in the private and business banking market.

With Absa’s new Universal Banker initiative, her team hopes to transform the way the bank serves the needs of this important market. Historically, two bankers assisted self-employed individuals – a private banker looked after the customer’s personal needs, and a business banker took care of business requirements. Universal Banker introduces a single banker to serve customers’ personal and business needs, something that the bank believes will radically transform customer experience.

Absa’s broader efforts to grow market share comes at a time when competition in the banking space has intensified, with various new digital entrants trying to make their mark. While the bank is embracing the opportunities technology provides and remains hard at work to build a scalable, digitally-led business, relationships remain important – inside and outside the bank.

“I was always determined to live a life of significance, and be successful, but what has been most rewarding is the smaller, meaningful difference I’ve made in the lives of those around me,” Gangeni says. “Connecting with people makes the job worthwhile.”

Her mother, a social worker who raised five children, undoubtedly had the biggest influence on her growing up.

“It was through her that I realised that the notion that one cannot be a mother and a professional concurrently is a myth. My mother showed me that it’s possible to have a long and rewarding career balanced with a thriving family life.

“In addition, my mum, being an incredibly strong woman, possessed a fabulous balance between assertiveness and kindness,” she says.

Although it was a tough choice to leave pharmacy, banking – and an extended career at Absa in particular – turned out to be the best medicine.





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# Women come out of the cold in Israeli art

MIRAH LANGER

Female artists are being shifted from the footnotes of Israeli history of art back into the mainstream.

Timna Seligman, a curator at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, was in South Africa recently to share the story.

“In the general history of Israeli art, there is a standard canon in the way the artists are mentioned and the art is presented. Most of the artists are men. There are women as well, but somehow, over the years, they have become sidelined, especially from the earlier part of the 20th century,” says Seligman.

“Now, there is a journey of discovery as we try to find the women who were working alongside the men, but were not included in the narrative that was being told all the time.

“They were sidelined, but we are going back and looking for them, not only in the modern period, but going all the way back into the Renaissance.”

Seligman was giving a presentation about female artists throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre in Oaklands, Johannesburg.

She said that the start of Israeli art is generally marked by the opening of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in 1906. It was established by Bulgarian immigrant

Boris Schatz, who conceived of the institution as “part of the Zionist vision of a new modern art for a new modern Israel – an art form that combines the best of the West and the East”.

In the 1920s, the influx of immigrants from Europe to Israel resulted in the emergence of more female artists. Like men, they often depicted local communities from a very Orientalist point of view: focusing on the idea of their exoticism and traditional dress, for example.

Many of the aspirations and perspectives of Jewish immigrants to Israel were captured by Anna Ticho, an artist who emigrated as a young woman from Moravia to Israel in 1912. In her drawing, “Old City of Jerusalem” from 1927, she depicts the city as “crowded and impenetrable”, says Seligman, who is based at Anna Ticho House at the Israel Museum.

“This is very typical of a lot of the artists who were coming to Israel at the time. As much as they would wander the streets of the old city, when it came to depicting it, they would always do so from the outside, looking in; they will always be the foreigner, they will always be the outsider.”

Ticho’s exploration of nature symbolises her Zionist beliefs, suggested Seligman, who herself



Image courtesy Israel Museum

made aliyah from London to Israel in the 1980s.

In “Olive Tree” (1935), Ticho depicts “the ancient tree that belongs to the land. It’s the tree that is rooted in the land, and it has gone through difficult periods all these years. It’s been damaged, hollowed out, branches are missing, but, still at the top, there are leaves, and there is fruit.

“You can see it very much as an allegory of the Zionist endeavour. This is our land. We come from here. We have had this difficult history in the middle, but we are coming back, and we are going to thrive.”

During the 1940s and 1950s, lyrical abstraction, stemming from

European trends, became the focus of most male – and some female – artists. However, other female artists such as Ticho, as well as Ruth Shloss, explored a style and subject matter different to the norm.

These artists were interested in social awareness. They wanted to capture the realities of the new state of Israel – the huge influx of immigrants to the country and their experiences including poverty and overcrowding. “These kind of portraits aren’t really being done by men, this kind of sensitivity,” Seligman says.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Israeli art reflects worldwide trends, such as conceptual and performance art.

For female artists like Yocheved Weinfeld, feminist concerns were in the foreground. In her work, “Sewn Fingers”, from 1974, she shows a series of images showing a woman’s open hand slowly becoming stitched together until it is totally closed, “from being able to be active, to a hand that no longer functions”.

As the intifadas break out in the 1990s, female artists also began capturing their lived experience of this political environment.

In Hila Lulu Lin’s “Cold Blood: A poem in Three Parts” from 1996, “She has taken this typical view of Jerusalem, of the Dome of the Rock,

the beach at Tel Aviv, and a self-portrait, and put across all of them the [image of a] slab of raw, bloody meat as the sky, as the eyes.

“It’s a disturbing image. It really does show that on the one hand, you are just living your life, there are even tourists going to the beach and having fun. But there is this impending doom, and it’s just hanging over Tel Aviv, hanging over Jerusalem, and within her as well.

“She’s not trying to give a solution or saying these people are right or these people are wrong. She’s just giving a picture of the situation at the time.”

In terms of contemporary art, Nirit Takele is one of many female artists giving a creative voice to traditionally minority communities. An Ethiopian Jew who came to Israel as a child during Operation Solomon, her style is a modernist Western one, and she twists many conventional expectations in her art.

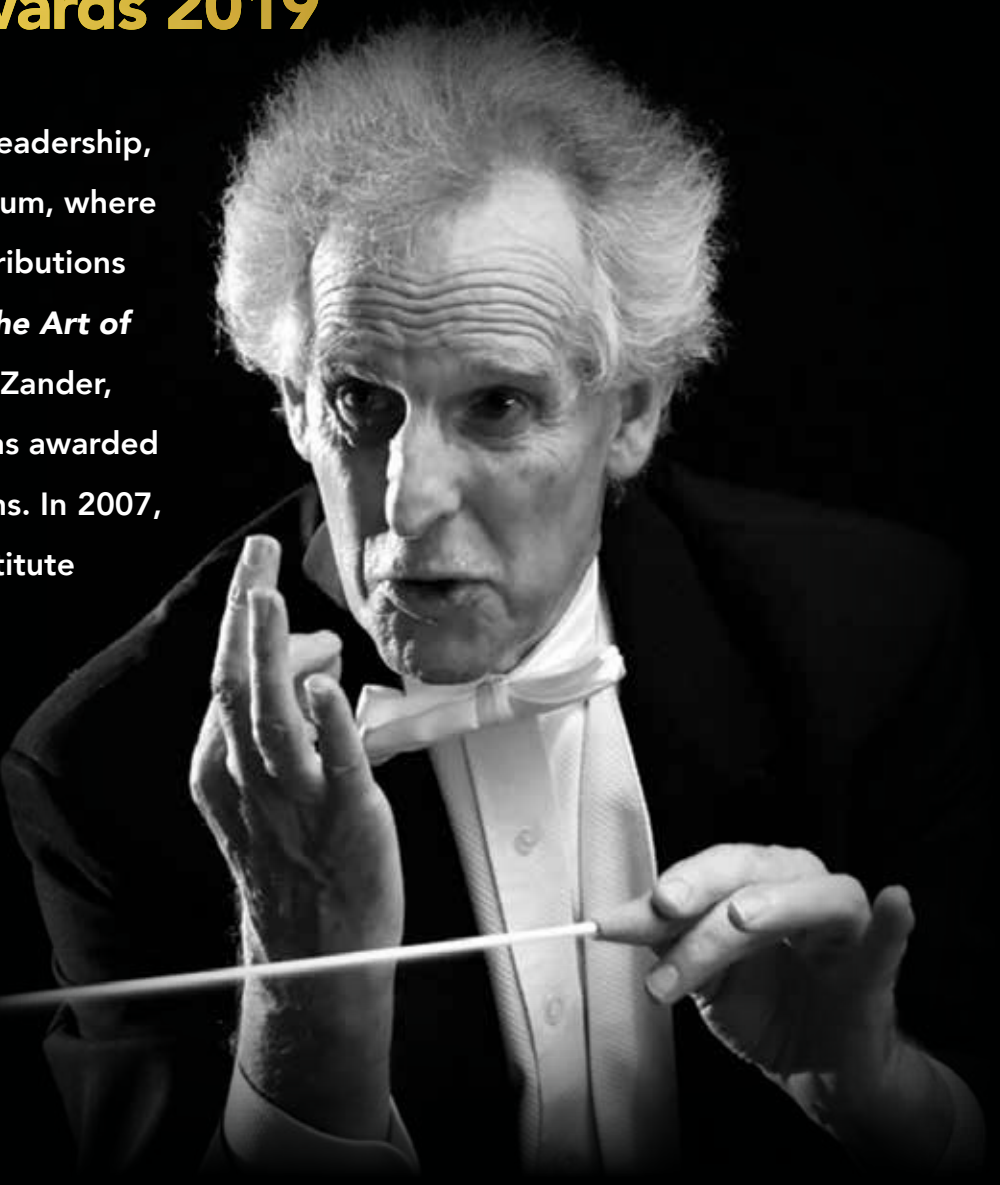
For example, in “Studio Visit with Adam and Eve”, she depicts Adam and Eve as Ethiopian. She then places herself in the painting as a modern Ethiopian woman. “She is saying, ‘Yes, I’m Ethiopian, but I’m also Israeli. I know my history and my background, but I also know the wider background of the culture.’

“It’s new, it’s fresh,” asserts Seligman about the exciting developments that female artists like Takele keep adding to the story of Israeli art.

## The world’s most famous conductor, and musical director of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, will be performing at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2019



Benjamin Zander enjoys an international career as a speaker on leadership, with several keynote speeches at the Davos World Economic Forum, where he was presented with the Crystal Award for “Outstanding Contributions in the Arts and International Relations.” The best-selling book, *The Art of Possibility*, co-authored with leading psychotherapist Rosamund Zander, has been translated into eighteen languages. In 2002, Zander was awarded the Caring Citizen of the Humanities Award by the United Nations. In 2007, he was awarded the Golden Door award by the International Institute of Boston for his “outstanding contribution to American society” as a United States citizen of foreign birth. His TED talk on The Transformative Power of Classical Music has been seen by over ten million people.



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# Helen touched the lives of thousands. I was only one.

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



The last time I spoke to Helen Heldenmuth was when she called me at midnight after the South African Zionist Federation conference opening two Saturdays ago. Only Helen would phone me at midnight – and think nothing of it!

She told me I’d done a great job there and, as my mentor, she was proud of me but had to find something to criticise. We both chuckled. Turns out I’d mispronounced the word “just” – although only once, she pointed out.

It was my flat vowels more than anything that Helen would roll her eyes about. She’d always tell anyone who would listen – and many, many who wouldn’t – that when we first met, I told her I wanted to be on “teleeeevision”.

I was 18 years-old and in first year university when I read a newspaper article about a Jewish community programme, *Shalom TV*, starting on M-Net. I phoned the number listed, and nervously asked to speak to the programme director who, as it turned out, I was already speaking to.

At that time Helen was the boss, chief producer, receptionist, and tea lady. My palms were sweaty, and I’d placed a glass of water next to the phone to calm myself down.

Years later, we’d laugh at how we both remembered the story. She invited me to her office, and I recall arriving as an awkward teenager with a list of story ideas for a youth show. She remembered “this know-it-all Wits student” marching into her office, albeit with those bad vowels.

I begged Helen to give me a chance. I promised to be at her house each morning for speech lessons, and swore I’d do anything she told me to. She gave me more than a chance.

She took a shy teenager with big dreams,

little self-confidence, and no connections – and changed her life.

Helen believed in me. And, because she believed in me, I believed in myself. I always told her I owed my journalism career to her. She’d laugh and say no, I had done it by myself. But it wasn’t true. She gave me the chance. All of us needs someone to give us that first leg up the ladder.

My stint at *Shalom TV* was followed with an anchoring position for *Le Chaim*, the first weekly Jewish programme on the SABC, that Helen also came to produce. My sweetest memories of my career are from this period.

Helen and I must have interviewed the entire Jewish community in South Africa. We travelled to Ukraine, where in the middle of nowhere, Helen embraced a group of – mostly toothless – old Jewish women, and stood speaking to them in Yiddish for two hours.

She woke me up at 02:00 on a plane to record an interview. She forgot the filming tapes on the roof of her car, and we drove for two hours only to return to find them lying in the driveway.

She had a reputation at the SABC among the cameramen that if they were hungry and wanted a home-cooked meal, they must get themselves booked on a shoot with Helen.

Wherever we went, laughter followed.

A certain Mr Oded Guy from the Israel Broadcasting Authority, who we aptly nicknamed “The dead guy” took quite a shine to her on one filming trip to Israel. He arrived one evening at our hotel with a picnic basket and a bottle of wine. “Don’t leave me,” she whispered in panic, promptly announcing to Mr Guy that she’d promised my parents she’d never leave me alone. He was, to put it mildly, rather baffled.

Another time, an important official phoned

looking for her. I answered her phone, and explained she was on the toilet. We both laughed about that for years.

I can’t stop crying as I write this. I knew Helen for two-thirds of my life, and her passing has left a huge hole. When does the student overtake the teacher? Helen often told me that she was now the student, but she was wrong.

Sometimes, when I felt sad, I’d ask Helen how she managed to keep smiling. She told me that each morning when she opened her eyes, she’d think “I’m still alive ... I have one more glorious day to live!”

Helen taught me gratitude. I read somewhere that G-d loves South Africa because he gave us Mandela. I always felt G-d loved me because he gave me Helen.

Whenever an aspiring journalist reaches out to me for advice, I always make myself available,

whether for a cup of coffee or a Skype chat. It’s the best way I know to thank Helen for everything she did for me.

During that last phone call, she told me she loved me. I said “I love you too,” and I find relief knowing she knew that.

We always spoke about watching old VHS tapes of our *Le Chaim* days, but we never did. Well, Mrs Heldenmuth, as I loved to call her, I’m lighting a candle and playing re-runs on an antiquated VHS player I found. You are with me, larger than life, laughing into the lens, and guiding me every step of the way. You might not be opening your eyes again, but your light is shining as bright as it always did.

For the last time, I love you. And thank you for everything.



## The unforgettable Helen Heldenmuth

SUZANNE BELLING

After fighting leukaemia for more than 20 years, actress, TV producer/director, comedienne, children’s poet, drama coach, teacher, and grandmother, Helen Heldenmuth, succumbed to the side-effects of treatment and the disease on Monday, 5 August.

Helen was larger than life. You could hear her coming, with her loud sonorous voice and ever-present cackle. She had special relationships with such a huge variety of personalities. So many people have Helen Heldenmuth stories that on hearing them, listeners land up guffawing in the aisles (much like their originator would have done).

She had a lasting influence on the thousands of children – now adults – who passed through her hands at various Jewish schools where she taught, not to mention the many who went to her private drama classes over the years.

She was once told by someone she called a “weird woman” in a lift that she had a golden aura, and would spend the rest of her life working with children. She did, but that’s not all.

To her endless friends, she gave of herself unstintingly (and her unrivalled home-baked challahs on Fridays), and always had the ability to keep them in stitches.

Helen taught English and Afrikaans at various schools, and wrote and produced children’s musicals and adult satires to mark Jewish celebrations.

She won a best-actress award for her role as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* in 1958, and enjoyed mainstream theatre until, she said, “I decided I was a nice Jewish girl and didn’t fit the backstage lifestyle”. So she kept her immense talent to working for and within the community, which became her passion.

Helen was also the national chairperson of the board of judges for the Naledi Theatre Awards (having been a judge for many years). She was the prime motivator behind the former *Shalom TV*, which was on a pay channel M-Net, and she introduced multi-faith programmes for the SABC.

Before she was taken on board by the SABC, she had a call from the director of religious

programmes who showed interest in her CV. That was until he asked her age – over 60 at the time.

“Sorry, don’t you think you are too old for the position?” he asked. “Not if you think Madiba is too old to be president!” she said.

Helen was a public and private entertainer. Her meals were a gourmet’s delight, but her own delight was spending time with her grandchildren.

“I wish I could spend more time with my son, Gary’s, children in Miami,” she often said. However, she was a daily visitor to her daughter’s children in Glenhazel.

Helen fought her cancer like a true warrior, even joking about her condition while sunbathing in Cape Town, after having had a cancerous kidney removed. A woman told Helen she shouldn’t be baking in the sun. “Why, do you think I could get cancer? Well, don’t worry, I already have two types,” was her retort.

But there was a serious side to her. During apartheid, Helen would have countless visits from the security police, checking on the young black girls living in her home.

Sizie Modise, who lived with her, called her “mommy” and her biological mother, “mama”. Helen did what was necessary to obtain bursaries for the young girl, for whom she became a legal guardian.

One of her more recent achievements was her ongoing production of the children’s show, *Shooby Doob Shloimy*, which she adapted prior to various festivals as a fundraiser.

She was a presenter on *ChaiFM*, excelling in her Yiddish morning *Kumsitz* show. In spite of all her treatment and suffering, she would go straight from chemotherapy sessions to the studio so the show could go on.

“She was a person you never would – or never could – forget,” Rabbi Avraham Tanzer, rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva College and the rabbi of the Glenhazel Area Hebrew Congregation, told the *SA Jewish Report*. Tanzer conducted her funeral at West Park Cemetery on Tuesday.

“Highly talented in so many areas, she was an actress who understood the serious side of life, in spite of her sense of humour. She was a true *eshet chayil* (woman of valour).”

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# Sage advice on Tisha B’Av

OPINION

CALEV BEN-DOR



Henry Kissinger once wrote that the task of statesmen is to recognise the real relationship of forces, to distinguish what is attainable from what is desirable, and to make this knowledge serve their ends. Yet, more than a millennium before Kissinger’s advice, the Babylonian Talmud tried its hand at advising political and national leaders.

In the introduction to the account of the second temple’s destruction, which we mourn on Tisha B’Av, the text quotes a verse from Proverbs, “Happy is the man who is anxious always, but he who hardens his heart falls into misfortune.” Coming as it does before the story of Jerusalem’s destruction, this is clearly meant as advice. But how does it relate to the subsequent story?

The Talmudic tale describes a case of mistaken identity leading inexorably to tragedy: a servant invites the wrong guest to a feast, Bar Kamtza (the host’s enemy) rather than Kamtza (the host’s friend). When the host throws Bar Kamtza out – and the rabbis present do nothing to assuage his shame – he makes a false report to the Romans that the Jews are rebelling.

With Roman legions besieging Jerusalem, the city’s zealots burn the storehouses of grain in a misguided attempt to force the capital’s helpless residents to fight. As famine ensues, the great sage Yochanan ben Zakai flees the city, to “save a little” as he says, and having impressed Roman Emperor Vespasian with his acumen, he is granted one wish. Believing that Jerusalem can’t be saved under any circumstances, Ben Zakai begs to be given “Yavneh and its sages”.

And while this wish is granted, the city and Temple are burned.

There lies a long and winding road of responsibility for the Temple’s destruction: the brutal zealots, the inhospitable host, the vengeful guest, the ambivalent rabbis, and, of course, the imperialist Romans. But Rabbi Akiva points an accusatory finger at the door of Yochanan ben Zakai, who he argues missed a golden opportunity to save the city.

Sixty years later, the same Akiva is one of the main supporters of the unsuccessful revolt against the Romans by Bar Cochba, an event that also ends in tragedy (and is also marked on the 9th of Av). Almost two thousand years on, in a rebuilt Jerusalem, the debate continues over whether Bar Cochba was a brave, daring hero restoring Jewish pride, or the irresponsible harbinger of national suicide.

What lies at the core of the argument between Rabbis Yochanan and Akiva? I believe we should understand it through a political-sociological prism namely, how a nation (and its leaders) should act when its core values are

under existential threat. Should it adapt those values to survive (give me Yavneh)? Or hold on to them even at the risk of death (rebel against Rome)?

In his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to*



Destruction of the Temple

*Fail or Succeed*, author Jared Diamond argues that the key to a society’s survival is its ability to adapt its core values. But he adds that it’s painfully difficult to decide to abandon some of one’s core values when they seem to be becoming incompatible with survival. Diamond explains that all such decisions involve gambles, because one often can’t be certain that clinging to core values will be fatal, or (conversely) that abandoning them will ensure survival.

As an example, he gives the historical cases of five small Eastern European countries faced with the overwhelming might of Russian armies. In this frightening context, the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians

surrendered their independence in 1939 without a fight; the Finns fought from 1939 to 1940, and preserved their independence; and the Hungarians fought in 1956, and lost their independence. Diamond concludes with a searing question: who among us is to say which country was wiser, and who could have predicted in advance that only the Finns would win their gamble?

It’s this question that plagues Ben Zakai when facing Vespasian. As per Kissinger, he tries to recognise the “real relationship of forces” between Judea and Rome, and chooses to adapt his nation’s core values away from Temple worship. And while history generally judges him kindly, at the time – and on his death bed – he is beset with doubt. Because fateful national decisions, including Ben-Gurion’s in May 1948, are always gambles. But they must be taken anyway.

The Talmud suggests that a good political leader should always be anxious: constantly aware that things can (and often do) go wrong, and that even good decisions entail a painful price. But it also warns that if that awareness paralyses them, (if in Talmudic parlance they “harden their heart”) then both they and the nation they represent will fall into misfortune.

A lesson worth remembering as we mark the destruction of the temple, and the Jewish people’s exile from their land.

• *Calev Ben-Dor is director of research at BICOM, an independent British research centre producing analysis on Israel and the Middle East. Ben-Dor has worked as an analyst in the Reut Institute, as well as in the policy planning department of Israel’s foreign ministry.*

## Loss of a shul makes Tisha B’Av more meaningful

OPINION

AVIVA THURGOOD



It’s been eight months since the fire. Enough time for the pain to be less raw, enough time for me to be able to walk past our shul and not cry, yet the hurt still lingers.

It catches me unawares. Shalva, our daughter, will mention that she misses the shul in a random moment while we’re reading *Harry Potter* together, and I have to catch my breath and give her a hug. It catches when I bump into a friend from Joburg or a patient, and they casually ask if the shul has been rebuilt yet, like it wasn’t as devastating as we thought, and everything would be back to normal by now. Unexpectedly, even as I write this, there are tears, and I realise that we are forever changed.



Beit Midrash Morasha fire

There is a line in Eicha (the book we read on Tisha B’Av) that never really made an impression on me before, but considering our experience, I read it with different eyes now. “He cut down in burning anger, all the dignity of Israel; he drew back his right hand in the presence of the enemy; he burned through Jacob like a flaming fire, consuming him on all sides.”

Now I can feel the heat of G-d’s anger, hear the crackling, and smell the smoke. I have a better understanding of the destruction that the prophet Yirmiyahu is describing.

Every Tisha B’Av, we should mourn as if the destruction happened in our time. We should try and understand what we have lost, and attempt to change ourselves so that we are worthy of the third temple being rebuilt and complete peace, finally, in

our beloved Israel.

Dr Yael Ziegler points out that in the Megilla in Eicha, it’s deliberate that no names, dates, or specific events are mentioned. This way, it becomes an exploration for us throughout the ages in how to deal with pain and suffering, and how to find meaning and purpose in difficult times. It also helps us find ways to reconnect to G-d when he seems angry and distant.

A book that has always had a deep impact on my life is *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl. A holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, he writes about his observations of the people around him, and the reasons he believes some people were able to survive while others weren’t. He writes, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms, to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

The holocaust is obviously an extreme example, but it’s our arrogance that makes us believe that we are ever truly in control of our lives. No matter what happens to us, it’s our choice how to respond that makes the difference. It’s the way we choose to lead our lives after a trauma, after the destruction of the temple, or the burning of our shul. It’s how we choose to respond that gives a terrible event meaning and purpose, or ensures that it remains just a traumatic event we have experienced.

The Megilla of Eicha has many themes, but two that stand out for me is the sense of loneliness described, and the fact that we repeatedly hear the words, *ein menachem* (there is no comfort). The Megilla begins with, “Alas, she sits in solitude! The city that was great with people has become like a widow... She weeps bitterly in the night, and the tear is on her cheek. She has no comforter.”

This poetic description of Jerusalem sitting with a single tear running down her cheek, no energy left in her to wipe it away, and no one around to

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# SECURITY CHALLENGES FACING ISRAEL TODAY

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# Leila Bronner’s name lives on at Yeshiva College

JORDAN MOSHE

Community leader and scholar Dr Leila Bronner passed away in Los Angeles in July at the age of 89. The staunch orthodox feminist left her mark on South African Jewry, not least by founding (with her husband, Joseph) Yeshiva College in Johannesburg. Education was her calling, and she was the first woman to receive a doctorate in Bible and Jewish Studies in South Africa.

She was also a prolific author, and contributed innumerable articles to scholarly and popular publications. She was an assistant professor at Los Angeles’ University of Judaism (today the American Jewish University), a visiting professor at Harvard and Bar-Ilan universities, and a frequent presenter at academic conferences around the world. Bronner was born in 1930 in Czechoslovakia, the youngest of seven children. Her father, Rabbi Yitzhak Amsel, a respected Hungarian chassidic leader and scholar, perceived the growing threat of anti-Semitism, and obtained visas for his family to emigrate to the United States in 1936.

At the age of 10, Bronner convinced her father that she should receive a Jewish education like her brothers. After school, she attended a teacher’s seminary, and took classes at Hunter College in New York City. She went on to marry Rabbi Joseph Bronner in 1949. The couple and their newborn daughter moved to Johannesburg in 1951. Together, they founded Yeshiva College, the first religious orthodox school in South Africa. In 1984, Yeshiva College rededicated the Leila Bronner Girl’s High School in her honour, a name which the institution still carries. By 1974, Bronner was a published author who regularly filled auditoriums and synagogues for standing-room-only lectures. She had two more children while earning her Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1955, and a Masters in Jewish History in 1960. She chose to continue studying to achieve her doctorate, only to be

told that women were not welcome in the doctoral program at Wits. She simply transferred to Pretoria University, where in 1964, she earned her doctorate in Northwest Semitic languages. She became an associate professor at Wits. The role of the Torah and Judaism was central to her educational outlook. “The Hebrew Bible has had a great impact on the development of modern civilisation,” she wrote in 1983. “It’s not a book, but a library of books written over a long period of time and dealing with every facet, form, and problem of human life.”



The co-author of Bronner’s memoirs, Julie Gruenbaum-Fax, writes that Bronner was a pioneering Jewish feminist, quoting her writing in a newspaper in 1974, “Let us have less sermons, speeches, and articles teeming with apologetics trying to prove that Judaism places woman on a pedestal, and more concrete actions showing that she has equal opportunity with her male counterpart to develop her talents, and make a meaningful contribution to every sphere of Jewish life.” The family moved to Los Angeles in 1984, where Bronner taught at the University of Judaism and several other educational institutions. She became president of Emunah Women, and was involved in Amit Women, Builders of Jewish Education, and the Jewish Federation. Bronner chose not to retire, publishing a book on the afterlife, *Journey to Heaven*, in 2011, and her memoirs, *The Eternal Students*, in 2017. She continued teaching until just a few months before her death.

# Joburg rabbi a wizard in Oz

STAFF REPORTER

Rabbi Yossy and Rochel Goldman have just returned from a highly successful tour of Australia. Goldman was invited to the country by the Rabbinical Council of Victoria to be guest expert presenter at a rabbinic conference at the seaside resort town of Geelong just more than an hour’s drive from Melbourne.

In the two-day conference, he addressed topics such as: “The power of the pulpit”; “Making life-cycle events meaningful”; “Should rabbis be social workers?” and more. As the longest-serving rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, and as president of the South African Rabbinical Association, Goldman was well-received by his Australian colleagues, who peppered him with questions. “This was a first for the Rabbinical Council of Victoria, which is dominated by Melbourne’s rabbonim and a sprinkling from outlying areas,” said Rabbi Goldman. “We, in South Africa, have a much longer history of rabbinic conferences, which were initiated by late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. “Also, our community is much more ‘organised’, probably one of the most organised in the Jewish world. Many of the rabbinic best practices the Australian rabbis were debating have long been standard policy in South Africa.

experience.” The conference grappled with issues from boosting shul attendance to combating the scourge of intermarriage. Youth programmes were high on the agenda, and as there was a mix of younger and older rabbonim, the sharing of ideas and sense of *chaverschaft* (comaraderie) was helpful and uplifting. “As one of the doyens of the South African



rabbinate, Rabbi Goldman’s wisdom and experience made him one of the most obvious choices as our guest presenter,” said Rabbi Moshe Kahn, the vice-president of the council, and one of the main organisers of the conference. “Rabbi Goldman has inspired our participants, and brought out the best in them,” said Rabbi Philip Heilbrunn, council president. Formerly of Johannesburg’s Northcliff Shul, today he is a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal.

Rabbi Goldman also gave public lectures on anti-Semitism at various shuls. In addition, he and Rochel were guest speakers at a Shabbaton for one of the communities there. “Of course, it was a lecture tour, but it was also a big nostalgia trip,” said Goldman. “Wherever we went, we met old friends from Sydenham Shul and Johannesburg, and couples who told me I had married them. “Suffice to say there was a large attendance at all the lectures, big bear hugs, and lots of selfies! Most emigrants have made new lives for themselves, and many still feel homesick. All my past congregants miss Sydenham Shul, and all of them still support the Springboks!”



“So, besides sharing my own experience of 36 years in the pulpit, I was also able to share much valuable information about the South African

## Breaking our silence on abuse

>>>Continued from page 14

As Jews, we are taught that our rabbis aren’t to be questioned, that it shows a

lack of *derech erez* (common decency) to disrespect your elders. In hasidic communities specifically, it’s seen as shameful to divorce or speak out against your husband. This leaves Jewish women subject to abuse in a difficult position that, most of the time, results in them choosing to stay silent rather than confronting the issue. When a doctor makes her uncomfortable, a rabbi touches her, or her husband deprives her of funds, the Jewish woman is generally left with little option but to keep it to herself. It’s done out of fear of being negated, made to feel silly, or melodramatic. It leads to another issue. When a woman states her opinion, controversial or not,

she is often called “dramatic” or “histrionic”. It begs the question: why would a woman speak up if she is going to be so quickly shut down? It’s our job, as members of the current Jewish community, to make our society one of openness, inclusivity, and warmth. We can’t stand by if we are degraded and violated. We must welcome victims in with open arms and supportive words, ready to listen and help in any way possible. Acknowledging, not denying, the existence of abuse, and creating a safe space for victims to come forward is a challenge. We can overcome it. I hope we will. • Daniella Sack is a Grade 11 pupil at Yeshiva College.

## Loss of a shul makes Tisha B’Av more meaningful

>>>Continued from page 19

do it, should remind us of the people who need our support, and who we often don’t remember. The blessing of being part of a community is that no one should ever feel alone. We should all be that person who wipes away the tears of others when needed. The destruction of the second temple was due to baseless hatred. We should be looking for opportunities to share baseless love. We call the month of Av, Menachem Av. *Menachem* means comfort. Throughout Eicha, there are references to the fact that the pain and suffering experienced are so severe, Jerusalem and her people cannot find comfort. And yet I find it interesting that in contrast to this sense of hopelessness and devastation, Jerusalem is calling out to G-d begging him to “see her”. At the time of our greatest disconnection from G-d, when children are exiled into slavery, dying in the streets, and a holy city is left in ruins, Jerusalem still calls out

to G-d to see her seeking to reconnect to him. Through the chapters of Eicha, Yirmiyahu walks us through the universal emotions of pain and suffering, the human desire to give it meaning and understanding, and ultimately the journey of repentance, *teshuva*. We end Eicha with, “*Hashivaynu Hashem aylecha venashuva, chadesh yamaynu cekedem*” (Bring us back to you, Hashem, and we shall return, renew our days as of old).” Let’s use this Tisha B’Av as an opportunity to give meaning and purpose to the pain and suffering we have experienced individually, as a community, and as a nation. Let’s take the time to reconnect to each other, Hashem, and ourselves. • Aviva Thurgood teaches Eicha (the book we read in shul on Tisha B’Av) on behalf of The Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning in Cape Town.



# Why I dread Tisha B’Av

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



I know it’s pretty much the point, but I hate Tisha B’Av. The fast of the 9th of Av begins on Saturday evening through to Sunday night. It’s one of the two 25-hour fasts in the Jewish cycle, and I’m dreading it much as I have dreaded it year after year after year.

It could be that I find it difficult to get my head around the magnitude of the tragedy that befell the Jewish people on that day – and has continued to befall us throughout time. Perhaps it’s that I struggle not to greet people, which is a requirement of observance, or simply that I generally fair better in happier times.

I wouldn’t have been successful as a professional mourner as I’ve often found myself to be the life and soul of many a funeral. Even sad ones.

My back hurts when I sit on low benches (another requirement of the day) for a sustained period, and the lighting in synagogue tends to give me a headache. It also doesn’t help that I’m possibly the world’s worst faster, as a result of which I suffer from extreme anxiety for about a week before the actual day.

You definitely don’t want to join my family for the meal that precedes the fast. It’s unpleasant in the extreme. And I’m to blame. Fully. The food (in my view) is either too salty or tasteless, and I complain a lot.

I can never remember what I’m meant to do when – whether it be leather shoes off, drink tea in the doorway (I think my grandparents made that one up), and something with ashes at some point. My wife, who is able to fast for three days before remembering that she hasn’t eaten, generally shields our children from my irrational outbursts, but no pet is safe during this dangerous time.

And that’s before my sugar levels drop. I’ve even resorted to acquiring a “fasting coach”. True story. He’s a doula, only you don’t give birth to anything other than a migraine. His plan involves cutting back slowly on coffee for a week before, drinking lots of water the day prior, and some bananas at some point.

My family isn’t supportive of this strategy as it claims that it’s preferable to deal with a miserable me for 25 hours when I’m impossible in any event than to have me at my worst for an entire week as I detox.

It has helped me to fast – somewhat. For the past few fasts, I haven’t been found lying on a random floor at around 14:00 begging that someone end it all for me, “right here, right now”.

I would’ve done it myself, but I’ve never had the strength.

Speaking of desperation, some years ago while living in the United States, I even tried caffeine and Tylenol suppositories. They weren’t pretty, but they were wonderful – but that’s a story for another time. They aren’t available at South African pharmacies, and Takealot doesn’t stock them.

What does help me through the experience is to focus on some of the other messages of the day. We are told that “baseless” hatred has been the cause of many of the tragedies that occurred during this time. The challenge of this is the word itself, as very few of us will admit – even to ourselves – that we hate “without base”. Our brilliant minds are able to construct theoretic reasons for most of our emotions, and dislike of others is no different.

If we strive to take the day a little more seriously than we have in the past, we have to spend a moment trying to be honest with ourselves. To hold the mirror up close. We have to identify the origin of the negative feeling. We have to face why it is that that person causes us to feel the way we do (what it says about us), and we have to try and find a way to let the feeling go.

If we are able to do this, then a difficult and challenging day might be exactly what the fasting coach ordered.

# Return to the era of racism

United States President Donald Trump refers to migrants congregating at the US’s southern border with Mexico as an “invasion”. That, in a word, is what warriors for white nationalism believe, which inspires them to kill people they think are not white, or are migrants seeking entry. They perceive a conspiracy called the “great replacement theory”, in which whites will diminish in numbers and power.

White ethnic nationalism appears to lie at the heart of the massacres in El Paso and Dayton in America over the weekend, in which 20 and nine people respectively died. There have been other, similar attacks. The world watches, alarmed, as this movement grows.

The previous terror wave was Muslim-inspired through ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). Now, domestic terror increasingly originates from what is called the alt-right. It’s as if a previous era has returned which is racist, bigoted, anti-Semitic, anti-Hispanic, homophobic, and so on, encouraged by the attitudes of people such as Trump since 2016, and ethnic nationalists elsewhere.

The internet is its major pathway, such as the website *8chan*, a far-right bastion carrying messages promoting hatred and violence. It’s difficult to stop. There are many hiding places on the internet.

There is rising apprehension about the resurgence of these attitudes, how to prevent atrocities such as El Paso and Dayton, and how to counter the attitudes motivating them. But white nationalism has potent tools such as the internet and social media which it didn’t have before, and powerful adherents.

Previous incidents are a warning. The suspect in the massacre of 51 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March allegedly posted a white nationalist text and link to his Facebook feed on *8chan*. The suspect at a synagogue in Poway, California, who killed one and injured three, allegedly posted an anti-Semitic letter on *8chan*. The website is also believed to have been used by the El Paso suspect to post a white nationalist rant. Platforms for such material are difficult to shut down.

*8chan*’s internet infrastructure was until this week hosted by a US-based company, Cloudflare. Its chief executive, responding to demands to remove the site after the Christchurch massacre, said there were many competitors to Cloudflare, and “the minute that someone isn’t on our network, they’re going to be on someone else’s network...”

Will white nationalism run out of steam against the liberal, multi-ethnic world? Racial, ethnic conflict is as old as time. In history, other long-standing

## TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



conflicts have become so embedded in peoples’ consciousness, they seem endless. The Cold War, an ideological standoff between the west and the Soviet Union, lasted 45 years, threatening a nuclear war.

Another entrenched conflict, between Arabs and Israelis, has lasted more than a century, including pre and post Israel’s establishment. There have been minor successes at resolving it, but the core is firmly in place, and unlikely to dissipate soon. Meanwhile, ordinary Arabs and Jews try to lead normal lives.

Over centuries, writers and artists have expressed the absurdity of this ongoing human reality of living in the imperfect present, while believing in a perfect future. For Judaism, the idea of the moshiah finds implied expression in the play *Waiting for Godot* by playwright Samuel Beckett. Like the concept of total harmony between people such as Jews, Muslims, alt-Right warriors, and so on, Godot is indefinable. Everyone waits, but will it ever come? Meanwhile, the struggle against the mentality fostering alt-right terrorism is here and now.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## Israeli women show the way forward

Over the past few weeks, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has focused on preparing for the visit of a delegation from Women Wage Peace, an Israeli nongovernmental organisation that has brought tens of thousands of Israeli women from across the faith and political spectrum together to work for peaceful co-existence between people in the region.

Comprising two Jewish, one Muslim, and one Christian woman, the delegation was brought out by the board in the lead-up to Women’s Day to share the lessons and experiences of this inspiring grassroots movement, while at the same time drawing on South Africa’s own successful experience in conflict resolution.

The SAJBD put together a packed week-long programme involving high-level engagement with government, academia, civil society, the media, other faith communities, nongovernmental organisations, youth and women’s groups, and the business community. It commenced over the weekend, including an event with Jewish students, high-school students, and members of youth movements, followed by one with prominent women

business leaders and philanthropists. Since then, there has been an interfaith dialogue on the role of women in peace-building at the historic Women’s Jail, tours of Constitution Hill and the Apartheid Museum, and meetings with the department of international relations and co-operation, and speaker in parliament.

The delegation brought the following messages to the fore in their engagements so far: Solutions to conflict can come only from dialogue. Aggressive methods of dealing with conflict might work in the short term, but are never sustainable. Achieving peace is all about respecting others, even – and indeed especially – when you disagree with them. Strive for understanding and empathy, and always look to find common ground.

They are messages that need to be heard, not just in our own country, but in many other parts of our troubled and increasingly polarised world. The delegation has, in turn, gained crucial insight into the South African experience of conflict resolution, which was about involving all parties in a process of dialogue with the aim of arriving at peaceful solutions. While South



## ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



African solutions might not be appropriate for the Israeli-Palestinian situation, the South African process of bringing all parties together in respectful, honest dialogue most certainly is.

Articulate, passionate, and with an in-depth, hands-on knowledge of the issues involved, our guests have more than met the high expectations we had of them. I also warmly commend our professional staff who are working around the clock to ensure that we take the fullest advantage of the wonderful opportunities this ground-breaking visit provides.

At the time of writing, the group is preparing to travel to Cape Town for the second leg of its visit. In next week’s column, I will report back on these events, which we hope will be just as successful and uplifting.

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

## YOUR ANCESTRAL LINK TO LITHUANIA AND POLAND



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# Cecile celebrates turning 100



Cecile Raphaely

Cecile Raphaely celebrated her 100th birthday in Sandton on 31 July with family from around the world, and a special message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The message from the monarch read: “I’m so pleased to know that you are celebrating your 100th birthday on 31 July 2019. I send my congratulations and best wishes to you on such a special occasion.”

Such birthday messages were rare at Willowbrook

Retirement Village in Sandton, where Cecile lives. She was however born in England and she married Dick Raphaely there in June 1939 before she was 20.

They settled in Johannesburg just before the outbreak of World War II. Dick was part of the South African Defence Force Permanent Force, and they spent most of the war years stationed in George in the Eastern Cape. After the war, they returned to Johannesburg, where she has lived ever since. Dick passed away in 1985.

Cecile has two children, Peter, who lives in Johannesburg, and Sue, who lives in Sydney. She has five grandchildren, and nine great grandchildren.

Although Cecile can’t see owing to macular degeneration, she is sharp witted, and keeps up to date with current news as best she can. She exercises regularly, has her hair done every week, and has regular facials.

She used to be a keen bridge player and an avid reader, but because of her sight impairment, she now spends her days listening to audio books, and socialising with friends at the home.

## Jewish Agency emissaries heading to King David

Four young Jewish Agency *shinshinim* (service-year emissaries) will soon arrive in Johannesburg for 10 months of service, working within the King David school network.

The *shinshinim* are Israeli high school graduates who travel abroad to cultivate stronger connections to Israel in diaspora communities. Noga Yadin, Lior Knino, Maya Yitshak, and Linoy Ben Basat all delayed mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces to serve as emissaries, and were chosen after a long and meticulous selection process by the Jewish Agency.

They will arrive in South Africa this month, and work within King David in Johannesburg. The school network educates more than 3 300 students across five campuses. The Jewish Agency’s *shinshinim* programme enables diaspora communities – including in South Africa, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and elsewhere – to cultivate authentic relationships with these young Israeli ambassadors before they enter the army. Last Thursday, all 200 *shinshinim* who are serving worldwide this year



Lior Knino, Noga Yadin, Jewish Agency Chair Isaac Herzog, Linoy Ben Basat, and Maya Yitshak

completed a six-month course.

“When it comes to fostering deeper relationships between Israel and world Jewry, we have learned that there is simply no substitute for the genuine, educational, and growth-promoting person-to-person interactions between Israeli emissaries and the communities they serve,” said Herzog. He was in South Africa for the conference of the South African Zionist Federation.

## IT educator raises the bar at Ed Tech Summit

King David Victory Park information technology teacher Kevin Baloyi held a workshop on integrating technology into the classroom at an Ed Tech Summit at the primary school on 28 July.

Baloyi’s workshop focused on maximising the use of apps in teaching. He is also one of four producers of EdTech Summit Africa, which aims to improve classroom best practice by exposing teachers to creative, technology-rich strategies, and innovative solutions.

More than 100 educators from public and private schools attended the summit. Facilitators presented interactive workshops for educators seeking to grow not only their teaching toolkit, but their understanding of what is possible in order to improve ideas and strategies, and get better results and engagement from students.

According to Baloyi, the most efficient and effective use of apps in the classroom is by means of a teacher who guides their use. In his workshop, teachers were

able to design lessons that use apps in the school day as well as for homework – even in preparation for tests.



Kevin Baloyi, Kareen Sandler-Gordon, and Akiva Carr

By giving South African teachers valuable opportunities to learn, teach, and grow, the Ed Tech summits are an opportunity for continued professional development, a neglected area in many schools.

## KDL kids spread a little kindness at Yad Aharon

Grade 6 students from King David Linksfield Senior Primary School visited food fund Yad Aharon & Michael recently to make sandwiches and assist in preparing vegetables for soup and meals to feed those in our community who are in need.

Their visit supported the Grade 6 theme for the year, which is that everything we do makes a difference and has an impact on the world. We have to decide what kind of difference we want to make, so let’s all choose kindness.



The KDL students making sandwiches

## WIZO donates wheelchairs to Red Cross and Tygerberg Hospitals

WIZO (the Women’s International Zionist Organisation) Cape Town donated four wheelchairs to the paediatric oncology wards at the Red Cross and Tygerberg Hospitals this week as part of its local outreach programme.

The child-size chairs will give those patients who cannot walk dignity, control, and self-reliance.

Manufactured by Israeli non-profit organisation and humanitarian mission, Wheelchairs of Hope, these lightweight, robust chairs are designed by specialist Israeli doctors and engineers from ALYN Hospital, Israel’s leading paediatric and adolescent rehabilitation centre, specifically to help disabled children in developing countries.

Janene Currie, the chairperson of BZA (Bnoth Zion Association) WIZO Cape Town said, “The donation of these wheelchairs from Israel offers these young children the life-changing gift of mobility and self-reliance. They will also be a great help to staff and nurses who care for these precious youngsters. They are bright and colourful, specifically designed in the style of a high-chair for kids, and not just a miniaturised adult wheelchair.”



Linda Saban, Dominique Gamsu, Felicity Isserow, Kim Daitsh, and Tamar Lazarus with doctors and sisters of the paediatric oncology ward at Tygerberg Hospital

## ORT SA day an all-round winner

One hundred and twenty scholars from five high schools in Alexandra spent the day at King David Victory Park High School (KDVPHS) for the first ORT SA day.

The day was inspired by the school’s ORT South Africa youth ambassadors, following their visit to the World ORT Youth Summit in Argentina last year. Visiting students came from schools where ORT SA runs maths and coding projects.

“This is certainly a first for King David Victory Park,” said KDVPHS Principal Andrew Baker. “It’s a wonderful initiative, which I would like to see become an annual event. It’s an opportunity to host and share with others. It’s of so much value to all the children.”

“It’s important to expose our kids to different cultural views and languages. We appreciate a Jewish school opening up to the outside,” said Botho Molahloe, a teacher at Alexandra Secondary School.

The afternoon kicked off with an ice breaker, after which Alex students took over with singing and dancing, inspiring everyone to join in. Thereafter, there was some light training and games with

coaches from Discovery Soccer Park. Slam poetry encouraged further interaction, with students holding hands. The challah-making – especially the tasting – was an all-round winner.

“The pupils didn’t want to leave, and the buses back to Alex left late. We had to literally push them onto the buses”, said Percy Nkosi, one of ORT SA’s facilitators. “There was shouting and hugging, and they sang all the way home. The atmosphere was electric.”



<b>Saturday (10 August)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bet David Morningside hosts a shiur with Rabbi Adrian Schell titled, <i>Tisha B'Av: should we mourn for the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple? Making meaning of Tisha B'Av through the lens of progressive Judaism.</i> Time: 12:00. Venue: Bet David, 3 Middle Road, Morningside, Sandton. Contact: 011 783 7117.</li></ul>	
<b>Monday (12 August)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) hosts Caroline Green, English teacher, student counsellor and the founder of the Butterfly Formations transformational movement, who is working with the Roedeane Academy on encouraging encounters at an inner-city high school. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053.</li></ul>	
<b>Tuesday (13 August)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) Women Inspired branch hosts nutritionist and dietitian Chett Goldin on <i>Cannabis – all you want to know.</i> Time: 09:30 for 10:00 at the home of Joceline Basserabie (call for venue details) Cost: R250. Bookings: Joceline 082 441 4375, Lorraine 083 268 8016, or Isarae 083 375 1212.</li></ul>	
<b>Wednesday (14 August)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre is hosting an event related to the exhibition, <i>Portraits of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg</i>, with</li></ul>	
photographer Julian Pokroy, and testimony from Holocaust survivor Irene Klass. Time: 18:30 for 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP to dawi@jhbholocaust.co.za or call 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.	
<b>Thursday (15 August)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>WIZO Forum hosts two amazing speakers, Tova Goldstein and Janice Leibowitz, on <i>The sandwich generation: are your dual responsibilities pulling you apart?</i> Time: 09:30 for 10:00. Venue: Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Cost: R45, includes tea and refreshments. Bookings: Lauren 011 645 2515/ wizojhb@beyachad.co.za</li><li>Join WIZO every Thursday for a <i>Lunch &amp; Learn</i> shiur with Rabbi Michael Katz. Time: 13:00 at Beyachad, 2 Elray Street, Raedene. Contact: WIZO office 011 645 2515.</li><li>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.</li></ul>	



# INVITATION

20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Absa Jewish achiever awards  
2019



Please join us on 8 September for the  
**ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVER AWARDS 2019**

We invite you or your company to purchase a table or seats for the event of the year! All money raised supports the free publication and distribution of the *SA Jewish Report* newspaper.

## BOOK NOW

DATE: 8 SEPTEMBER 2019 | COCKTAILS: 16H30  
DINNER AND AWARDS: 18H00 | DRESS: FORMAL

[rsvp@sajewishreport.co.za](mailto:rsvp@sajewishreport.co.za)





**LUKE ALFRED**

It was a busy week for Gottschalk because she and her partner,

Also over on the clay courts at the Park Tennis Club, former South African Alan Rechtman (71) won gold in the Men's 65+ Singles and bronze in the Doubles. Rechtman participated for Great Britain (he emigrated to the UK in 1986) but is originally a Capetonian, growing up in Camps Bay and learning his tennis at a variety of clubs on the Atlantic seaboard. "It's great to come to

• A comprehensive wrap of #TeamMaccabiSA's currently unverified 49 medals (15 golds) in the swimming pool will appear in next week's edition of the SA Jewish Report. All the results were not available at the time of going to press.

TRULY KOSHER

Feigels  
a taste tradition

5 Falafel Balls  
& 200g Israeli Salad

Yummy!

49<sup>99</sup>

McCain  
Carrots Julienne

McCain Carrots Julienne  
1kg

McCain  
Slap Chips

McCain Slap Chips  
1.5kg

ALL GOLD  
TOMATO COCKTAIL

ALL GOLD TOMATO COCKTAIL  
1L

FutureLife  
SMART FOOD

FutureLife Smart Food Assorted Flavs  
500g

FRY'S  
CRUMBED SCHNITZEL

FRY'S CRUMBED SCHNITZEL  
320g

AV'S  
CRUMBED NAT. HAKE FILLETS

AV'S CRUMBED NAT. HAKE FILLETS  
480g

Montagu  
RAW ALMONDS

MONTAGU RAW ALMONDS  
100g

Montagu  
RAW CASHEWS

MONTAGU RAW CASHEWS  
250g

SALAD FARM  
ASSORTED SPREADS

SALAD FARM ASSORTED SPREADS  
250g

IMANA  
NO.1 SOUP

IMANA NO.1 SOUP ASSORTED FLAVS  
200g

SONKO  
Rice cakes

SONKO RICE CAKES ASSORTED FLAVOURS  
130g

SONKO  
Rice cakes

SONKO RICE CAKES ASSORTED FLAVOURS  
130g

CAPE POINT  
TUNA IN BRINE SHREDDED

CAPE POINT TUNA IN BRINE SHREDDED  
170g

Hummus

Hummus

FRY'S  
MEAT FREE 4 GOLDEN CRUMBED SCHNITZELS

FRY'S MEAT FREE 4 GOLDEN CRUMBED SCHNITZELS  
320g

FutureLife  
SMART FOOD

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McCain  
Carrots Julienne

McCain Carrots Julienne  
1kg

McCain  
Slap Chips

McCain Slap Chips  
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