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Concourt probes appeal court’s U-turn on hate-speech

NICOLA MILTZ

Prominent human-rights organisations this week argued in the Constitutional Court that the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) had made a mistake in overturning the judgement that found Bongani Masuku guilty of hate speech.

These organisations, represented by the country’s top legal counsel, included the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, The Psychological Society of South Africa, the Rule of Law Project, and the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

The arguments in the landmark hate-speech case covered the carrying and burning of swastikas, code words, the difference between Zionists and Jews, freedom of speech, and what constitutes hate speech.

The case goes back to 2009, when Masuku, then head of international relations at Cosatu (the Congress of South African Trade Unions), made a number of highly inflammatory statements in the wake of violence on the Gaza border.

“As we struggle to liberate Palestine from the racists, fascists and Zionists who belong to the era of their friend Hitler! We must not apologise, every Zionist must be made to drink the bitter medicine they are feeding our brothers and sisters in Palestine,” Masuku said in February 2009.

“We must target them, expose them and do all that is needed to subject them to perpetual suffering until they withdraw from the land of others and stop their savage attacks on human dignity. Every Palestinian who suffers is a direct attack on all of us.”

The majority of his statements occurred during Israel Apartheid Week 2009 on the University of the Witwatersrand’s east campus during a lunch-time lecture hosted by the Palestinian Solidarity Committee (PSC) and the Young Communist League.

“Cosatu has got members here even on this campus; we can make sure that for that side it will be hell,” Masuku said. “Any South African family who sends its son

or daughter to be part of the Israel Defence Force must not blame us when something happens to them with immediate effect.

“Cosatu is with you, we will do everything to make sure that whether it is at Wits, whether it’s at Orange Grove, anyone who does not support equality and dignity, who does not support rights of other people, must face the consequences even if it means that we will do something that may necessarily cause what is regarded as harm.”

Masuku reportedly said that Jews who continued to stand up for Israel should “not just be encouraged but forced to leave South Africa”.

threats against Jewish students at Wits, as well as the inflammatory comments made against the community.

Experts agree the case is broader than just about the Jewish community, it’s about the fundamental interpretation of the law prohibiting hate speech in South Africa.

One of the main contentions in the case is whether Masuku’s speech targeted Zionists or Jews. The SAHRC insisted that Masuku’s use of “coded language” could not be interpreted in any other way other than being directed at the Jewish community.

Counsel for the SAHRC, Christiaan Bester, said “Zionist”

of Hitler’ – what else could that mean? It means Jews and nothing else,” he said.

Trengove further submitted that Masuku had referred to the suburb of Orange Grove which is known as being Jewish.

“We cannot analyse this in isolation, we must take each factor together, and we can reasonably conclude that he targeted Jews,” he said.

Judge Johan Froneman asked Trengove if one wanted to attack or criticise the government of Israel, what would one say? To which he replied, “You speak of the government and its supporters.”

Carol Steinberg, junior counsel

“A swastika has nothing to do with a war in Gaza. It is the symbol of the extermination of the Jews in Europe,” she said.

Steinberg said that swastikas also made their way onto Wits campus. The swastika is the ultimate emblem of hatred of Jews, and is banned in a number of European countries.

The Holocaust & Genocide Foundation said in its heads of argument, “Genocide begins with words. Words have consequences. Hate speech, repeated hundreds and thousands of times, becomes incitement to commit genocide. It creates a culture of genocide.”

“We analyse Mr Masuku’s speech in the light of the learning on how, through the millennia, leaders have used words, and in particular proxy words, to prepare the ground for persecuting Jews.”

It said Masuku’s words were “likely to have had the effect of inciting violence against South Africa’s Jewish minority”.

“Speaking to an audience that largely doesn’t differentiate between Zionists and Jews, and avoiding using the word ‘Jew’, he [Masuku] drew on age-old anti-Semitic rhetoric and proxy words to convey to his audience that Jews should be visited with immediate harm,” according to the heads of argument.

“He did so at a moment in time in which, worldwide and barely 70 years after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is on the rise. Even in South Africa, it’s not uncommon for protesters against Israel to brandish swastikas and march on synagogues.”

The SAHRC contended that the appeal court was obliged to analyse Masuku’s statements through the lens of the Equality Act, and not under the auspices of the Constitution. It also contended that the appeal court erred by not considering expert evidence by witnesses such as British anti-Semitism expert David Hirsh.

Anne-Marie De Kok, the counsel for Masuku and Cosatu, said that Masuku’s speech constituted political speech, and did not demonstrate hatred of a religious or ethnic group.

She said Masuku’s statements



Cosatu protestors outside the Constitutional Court

He was found guilty of hate speech by the SAHRC and the Equality Court, and ordered to apologise. Instead, Masuku and Cosatu took the matter to the SCA, which overturned the Equality Court judgement.

This week’s case in the Constitutional Court was the culmination of 10 years of legal action by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in dealing with what it’s certain is hate speech by Masuku. It wants him to be made accountable for

in the South African context means “Jew” because the vast majority of South African Jews are Zionist. He said that when Masuku used the word “Zionist” it was “coded language” for Jews.

Advocate Wim Trengove, counsel for the Holocaust & Genocide Foundation said, “He spoke of Zionists. We submit that, in South Africa at a rowdy political meeting, Zionist in the context meant Jews.

“He didn’t identify them merely as Zionists, he spoke of ‘friends

for the Holocaust & Genocide Foundation explained to the court that the South African Jewish community was smaller in number than the membership of Cosatu.

“Anti-Semitism is a fact in contemporary South Africa, and Jews are a vulnerable community,” she said.

She explained to the court that at a march in the run-up to the speech Masuku gave at Wits, people brandished swastikas and burned a swastika outside a synagogue.

Israel helps Brazil fight Amazon fires

Israel will help Brazil in battling fires raging in the Amazon rain forest.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro on Sunday to offer assistance in extinguishing the blazes. Israel will send a firefighting aircraft and flame-retardant materials to the country.

On Monday, world leaders pledged more than \$22 million (R336 million) to help combat the fires, which many environmentalists and scientists inside and outside the country said were deliberately lit by farmers and loggers, and which they attribute to Bolsonaro’s policies of opening up protected parts of the Amazon rain forest for development.

Under international pressure, Bolsonaro on Friday authorised the use of 44 000 troops to battle the fires, the most serious since 2013, when the country began tracking them using

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Bolsonaro’s supporters say the country’s far left and detractors abroad are using the fires to discredit his right-wing government.

Father-in-law of Hasidic singer attacked



A 64-year-old rabbi, the father-in-law of popular Hasidic singer Benny Friedman, was hit in the head by a stone brick thrown at him while walking in the Crown Heights neighbourhood of Brooklyn on Tuesday morning.

Rabbi Avraham Gopin was hospitalised with “a broken nose, missing teeth, stitches on his head, and lacerations to his body,” Friedman posted on Twitter.

“This morning, at 07:45, my father-in-law went for his morning walk, like he always does. Suddenly a man started yelling at him, and chasing him, holding a huge brick,” Friedman tweeted in a thread that included a photo of his father-in-law’s bloody *tzitit*, (ritual garment).

New York city council member Chaim Deutsch tweeted that the police were investigating the attack as a hate crime. The Anti-Defamation League is offering a reward of up to \$5 000 (R76 500) for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the assailant.

San Francisco flyers blame Jews for 9/11

Anti-Semitic fliers saying that Jews and Israel are behind the 9/11 attacks appeared in Northern California about 30 miles (48km) from San Francisco.

The fliers, discovered last weekend in Novato, a city of about 52 000 in the North Bay area, were plastered on telephone poles, storefronts, and a high-school campus. They said Israelis were seen dancing on the site of the collapsed Twin Towers, that a Jewish-Israeli man made billions in insurance money, and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had praised the attacks. At the bottom of the page, it said, “Wake up USA!”

Police Chief Adam McGill urged citizens to “stand up to hate,” but told the *Marin Independent Journal* that the fliers were protected by the First Amendment, and there would be no investigation. No group has claimed responsibility.

On Tuesday, the mayor, police department, school district and anti-hate group Not In Our Town published an open letter condemning the fliers.

Israeli security officials warn about annexing West Bank

Twenty-five former Israeli senior security and defence officials have thanked congress for passing legislation that endorses a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while condemning efforts to boycott Israel, including those from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

The letter, sent on Tuesday, also weighed in against Israel unilaterally annexing all or part of the West Bank, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said he is considering if re-elected.

“Any unilateral annexation of territory or extension of sovereignty to the West Bank will put Israel’s security and safety along with the well-being of its citizens at risk,” the letter said.

It was signed by the former heads of the Mossad and Israel Security Agency, or Shin Bet, and three former advisers to Netanyahu.

Pope Francis meets Hispanic Jewish world

Pope Francis had an audience at the Vatican with representatives of Hispanic Jewry from his native Argentina, as well as from Spain, and the

United States.

The US delegation included Rabbi Meir Soloveichik of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, also known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. The Spanish delegation featured the president of the Hispanic Jewish Foundation, David Hatchwell Altaras, and former Spanish Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon. Hatchwell gave the pope a copy of the Alba Bible, a manuscript from 1422 of a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Castilian, or Medieval Spanish, by Rabbi Moses Arrajel of Toledo. The text was written to teach Jewish heritage to church members.

New Zealand suspends Palestinian funding

The New Zealand government has suspended funding to the United Nations’ aid agency for Palestinians.

The funding for the Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is on hold until the release of the October report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services on allegations against the agency including misconduct, corruption, links to terror groups, perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and anti-Semitism.

“We expect UNRWA to co-operate fully with the investigation underway, and to report back on the investigation’s findings and recommendations,” the New Zealand ministry of foreign affairs said.

From January to June, New Zealand provided nearly \$1.6 million (R24.5 million) to UNRWA.

Last month, the Netherlands and Switzerland announced the suspension of funding for UNRWA following the damning report.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:36	18:26	Johannesburg
18:09	19:01	Cape Town
17:22	18:13	Durban
17:41	18:32	Bloemfontein
17:40	18:33	Port Elizabeth
17:32	18:24	East London

Torah Thought

The greatest present is the present

As the Hebrew month of Elul approaches, thoughts of the upcoming high holidays fill my head and a mixture of emotions fills my heart. Elul is a time of introspection and preparation. The focus moves to the future and our readiness for the days of judgement and pardon, namely Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

But there is another festival which brings this religious period to a close, and that’s Sukkot, culminating in Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Sukkot is not only the finale in religious terms, it also marks the end of the agricultural season in Israel. For that reason, it’s known as *zman simchateinu* (the time of our happiness) because we look back over the past year, and take stock of the produce we have merited. Happiness is an emotion associated with completion and achievement.

Strangely, the *mitzvot* (good deeds) that are performed on Sukkot symbolise the process, seemingly ignoring the end-point that the festival celebrates. For example, we sit in temporary shelters reminding us

of Hashem’s protection through the clouds of glory, as we travelled the desert for 40 years. These miraculous clouds escorted us as we began our journey after we left Egypt until we reached the destination of the promised land.

Secondly, the etrog, the rare citron fruit we wave as part of the four species, was chosen for such a *mitzvah* because it represents the process. The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah understands the Torah’s description of a “fruit of a beautiful tree” as referring to the etrog because the taste of the fruit is similar to the taste of the tree. The tree represents the medium through which the fruit receives its nourishment and sustenance. The fruit denotes the results as in “the fruits of one’s labour”.

Finally, the Gemara tells us that we haven’t experienced a true *simcha* (celebration) unless we have witnessed the joy of the *Simchat Beit Hasho’eva*. This refers to the procession where the water used during the Sukkot libations were transported from the *gichon* (river) from which it was drawn, to be poured over

the altar of the Beit Hamikdash (Temple). The Jewish people sang and danced, escorting this special water through the streets of Jerusalem, the exuberance ending only once it had reached its destination. Usually joy is felt once the journey is completed, but here the end terminates the celebration.

Sukkot, the festival of joy, teaches us an important lesson about happiness. We shouldn’t wait for it. True, the completion of a process brings with it relief and often ecstasy, but we can’t be sure we will reach the end. We need to find meaning and pleasure in the process. We need to recognise accomplishment along the way, and celebrate what we have achieved while we move forward to the finish.

Let us use this special month of Elul not just as a preparation for what’s next, but to find joy in the present. Sukkot is found at the end of this festive season, but its message to us is not to wait for it to find reason for festivity.

Rabbi Shmuel Kagan, Bnei Akiva



Kiki conquers the channel

NICOLA MILTZ

Johannesburg anaesthetist Karon “Kiki” Marx conquered her childhood dream of swimming the English Channel last weekend, becoming the first South African Jewish woman to do so.

She ploughed her way through the icy waters to reach her destination on French soil while hundreds of people watched her swim via live streaming, and countless WhatsApp messages circulated the globe.



The first picture taken after her swim

“All those mornings waking up at 03.30 and getting into the freezing water throughout winter paid off,” says an elated Marx, who endured two years of extreme training for the ultimate long-distance swimming challenge.

“It took a powerful belief that I have what it takes to do this. It’s a mind-body thing – the will and drive to achieve something that is way beyond my imagination,” she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

Marx celebrated her 50th birthday the day before her swim, on Saturday, 24 August. It was the same day in 1875 that Matthew Webb became the first person to

swim the English Channel in less than 22 hours.

Marx, the 15th South African woman to accomplish this feat, was one of five South African swimmers – three Jewish – to brave the iconic swim last weekend. Johannesburg businessman Jason Lemmer, 52, successfully completed the crossing in 15 hours and 18 minutes, becoming the 68th South African to cross.

Miles Worling completed it in 13 hours, 31 minutes, and Marcelle Stiemens completed it in 11 hours,

forecast was fantastic. The sea was flat a lot of the way. I was in a good head space. But at the very end, I was a bit exhausted after fighting the current,” she said.

This was Marx’s second attempt at the epic 33.5km swim. Her hopes were dashed in 2016, when she was forced to abort the crossing a mere 400m from dry land. This was after a mammoth 19.5 hours, and a gigantic battle against the current which stubbornly pulled her backwards.

“I was absolutely devastated. I begged and pleaded to keep on, but I was warned that safety comes first,” she said.

It didn’t quell her desire to triumph over the tides and try again.

During the long, lonely hours at sea, Kiki said, “I thought about the important people in my life. I always connect with my late dad, Richard. I say, ‘Hi dad,’ he is there watching, and we have a huck.”

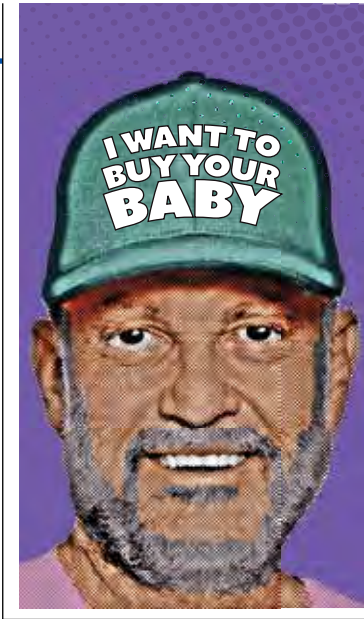
She said she also *davens* (prays) for friends who are ill. “I’m so privileged to have a healthy mind and body. When you don’t, it’s debilitating and sad, so I send them positive thoughts. I think about life, and what I’m doing here.”

Dozens of messages egging her on reached her by phone via the voices of close friend Sharon Wilensky and her partner, Hedley Isserow, who were in the support boat sailing alongside her.

When the going got tough, Derrick and Debbie Frazer, who took care of logistics and assisting with swimming support, both jumped into the water next to Marx. They swam with her to the end. “It gave me the strength I needed to get there,” she said. Derrick, in fact, swam with her three times during the day to motivate her.

The morning afterwards, she told the *SA Jewish Report*, “My arms are a little stiff, but I’m feeling fantastic.”

A toasted cheese made by her mom, Dorothy Marcus, a hot shower, and a good night’s sleep was what the doctor ordered when she returned to the hotel.



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Swimming the channel isn’t for the faint hearted. It’s one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, with hundreds of ferries and tankers passing through every day. Swimmers get stung numerous times by jelly fish.

“You just push through it,” said Marx.

In preparation, Marx was in the pool most days by 04:00. Sundays culminated in an 8km to 10km swim, taking up to three hours. Often she would go to Langebaan in the Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal with Lemmer, where they’d practice swimming

Ein Gedi was organised to create awareness of the rapidly shrinking sea, and to raise money for numerous charities.

In 2012, she joined ORT Jet as part of a 20-strong female team that climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa’s highest mountain, to promote awareness and raise funds for vulnerable single women across all communities.

Lemmer, who has done an Ironman, four Comrades marathons, the Dusi Canoe marathon, the Otter Trail, and the Robben Island swim, told the *SA Jewish Report* he kept negative thoughts at bay while swimming in spite of feeling seasick for the first three hours.

“I hurled like never before. I swam for three hours in darkness, it was a little rough, and the fumes from the boat got to me, but I don’t give up easily. I swam 987km in training for this in a year. I didn’t want to come back telling sad stories,” he said.

He began his swim at 02:35 on 23 August, and when he reached France he took a stone from the beach as a keepsake.

“It’s lonely, and you really need to love water,” he said.

His message to others interested in doing this is to “do what makes you feel good and alive. It’s not only about the event. It’s about the journey, the people.”



Kiki Marx and Jason Lemmer

in the dark, and getting used to open seas.

The two also completed a double Robben Island swim – about 15km – and a compulsory six-hour sea swim in similar channel temperatures.

Marx was also one of 25 swimmers to complete the first-ever swim across the Dead Sea in November 2016. The dangerous 17km swim from Jordan to



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4

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4

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Trump ‘disloyalty’ jab a bridge too far for supporters

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

Of the many Jews unsettled by United States President Donald Trump’s claim that voting for Democrats would demonstrate “disloyalty” to Israel and to other Jews, Lee Zeldin might be in the toughest spot.

The New York congressman, one of only two Jewish Republicans in the US House of Representatives, has been an ardent Trump supporter and defender, but he couldn’t bring himself to say that the term was okay.

“It’s a word that I wouldn’t use, with a long history of being used by others who have a hatred of Jews and Israel,” Zeldin told the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* in an interview. “Even if the person using it is filled with love towards Jews and Israel, I still avoid it because of that history.”

Since Trump dropped the “disloyalty” bomb, a number of Jewish conservatives have defended the use of the term, among them columnists at the conservative Jewish news site, *JNS*; the head of the Republican Jewish Coalition; and Michael Glassner, the former American Israel Public Affairs Committee senior staffer who is chief operating officer of Trump’s re-election campaign.

Other Jewish conservatives, among them David Harsanyi at *The Federalist*, like Zeldin, say the word was poorly chosen, even if they cheer Trump on for taking on Democrats who have relentlessly criticised Israel.

But Zeldin’s discomfort stands out because his party has made him a standard-bearer for its pro-Israel stance. He chairs the House Republican Israel Caucus.

Zeldin also has a good working relationship with Representative Eliot Engel, the Jewish and Democratic chairman of the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, which Zeldin sits on.

There’s a specifically Jewish question arising out of Trump’s contention that Jews who vote for Democrats are disloyal to Israel and to other Jews. Is this how Jews want to talk about one another? A president has two great powers unfettered by law and congress: pardoning criminals, and shaping a discourse. Is “disloyalty” now part of the Jewish vocabulary?

On Tuesday, after attacking two Democratic congresswomen who are highly critical of Israel and who back the boycott-Israel movement, Trump said, “any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat – it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty”.



US Republican representative Lee Zeldin

Reporters wondered the next day, disloyalty to whom? He clarified, “If you vote for a Democrat,” he told reporters, “you’re being disloyal to Jewish people, and you’re being very disloyal to Israel.”

Jewish organisations on the left said from the get-go that putting “Jewish” and “disloyal” in the same sentence, whatever the intention, was anti-Semitic. Then the centrists weighed in. The Anti-Defamation League’s chief executive, Jonathan Greenblatt, said the remarks were anti-Semitic. The American Jewish Committee’s David Harris said they enabled anti-Semites.

The Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) didn’t quibble with Trump’s suggestion that Jews who vote for Democrats are betraying Israel and their fellow Jews.

“President Trump is right, it shows a great deal of disloyalty to oneself to defend a party that protects/emboldens people that hate you for your religion,” the coalition said on Twitter, even before Trump clarified that was what he meant.

Jewish partisans have been fighting for supporters and voters for years. But it’s unlikely that even at the height of the bitterest of battles – over the Iran nuclear deal – one mainstream Jewish leader would have suggested the other was “disloyal” to Israel or their fellow Jews.

Has Trump then reframed such disagreements by using a term, “disloyalty” that is only a skip away from “treason” – and even “self-hatred”?

RJC Director Matt Brooks doesn’t think so, and insists Trump was putting into blunt terms what Jewish Democrats have long said about Republicans.

“The president is not plowing any new fields here,” he said in an interview.

What happens if it sticks? How do you work with someone you

think is disloyal, or who thinks you are disloyal?

Zeldin said he believed Trump was right on policy, and that he hopes that Democrats marginalise – “crush” in his words – the Israel-critical minority Trump was targeting when he made the “disloyalty” comment. But while

Trump keeps insisting that the two pro-boycott congresswomen, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, are the “face” of the Democratic Party, Zeldin notably acknowledges that Democrats have pro-Israel leaders within their ranks.

Two days before the disloyalty

Jews in Hong Kong apathetic about protests

JOSEFIN DOLSTEN – JTA

Since early June, protesters in Hong Kong have been gathering multiple times a week to fight what they see as Chinese attempts to encroach on their freedom. The police have responded violently at times, shooting tear gas and rubber bullets at the crowd.

One demonstration drew an estimated two million protesters in a population of 7.3 million.

But for most members of the Jewish community in Hong Kong, life has gone on without much change.

“That’s the crazy thing about the situation, there is a revolution taking place but actually our lives have continued as normal,” said Ben Freeman, a Glasgow native who has been living in Hong Kong for the past two years.

Hong Kong, a one-time British colony now controlled by China and given limited autonomy, is home to about 5 000 Jews and a number of Jewish institutions. There are seven congregations – orthodox, Chabad and progressive – a Jewish community centre, school, and Holocaust centre. But none of the organisations are located in the areas where protests are happening, and business is operating largely as usual.

“I went for Shabbat dinner on Friday night at a friend’s house, and of course we talk about it, but nothing is happening to expats, so there’s definitely a feeling of safety,” Freeman, who works as a teacher at an international school, told the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (JTA).

They aren’t the only ones who are largely unaffected by the protests. In spite of media coverage surrounding the at times bloody clashes with police, restaurants, malls, and business establishments continue to operate in relative normality. Schools are due to open next week.

The protests started in reaction to the effort by the China-backed government to allow extraditions to China. It led to fears that China could extradite dissenters and government critics taking refuge in the more politically open Hong Kong.

Protesters have since added a number of other demands, including universal suffrage in the city that would allow



its citizens to vote for its leader, the chief executive. The post is now selected by a group of about 1 200 prominent professionals and members of the legislative council, most of whom are loyal to China.

Though some in the Jewish community might support the protesters’ efforts, they tend to stay away like other expats, said David Zweig, a professor emeritus of Chinese politics at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Zweig has participated in two protests, but said he was the exception rather than the rule.

“The safest general statement is that expats don’t get

Continued on page 13>>

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SA and Israel worked closely on Bobroff case

TALI FEINBERG

Israel and South Africa might not always see eye to eye, but over the past two years, the two countries have worked closely on a case that concluded last week in a victory for this country’s National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

Acting Judge Gcina Malindi ruled in favour of the Asset Forfeiture Unit in the Pretoria High Court, ensuring that about R100 million held in two bank accounts in Israel in the names of father and son attorneys, Ronald and Darren Bobroff, must be forfeited to the state and brought back to South Africa. The Bobroffs are appealing the ruling.

“The huge freezing order was the result of excellent co-operation between the South African and Israeli authorities,” the NPA’s chief director of communications, Bulelwa Makeke, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “The Israeli authorities became suspicious after noting the transactions in the Bobroffs’ accounts, and contacted the South African authorities for verification and co-operation.

“In April 2017, Israel requested the assistance of the South African government,” reported Tony Beamish on *Moneyweb* and in the *Citizen* newspaper. “By that stage, it suspected that funds transferred from South Africa to

the Bobroff bank accounts might be the proceeds of the crimes of fraud committed in South Africa.

“The Israeli banks were then ordered, in terms of a mutual-assistance agreement, to pay the money into the Prevention of Organised Crime Act (POCA) Criminal Assets Recovery Account at the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) in Pretoria,” wrote Beamish. “The Bobroffs were ordered to pay the National Director of Public Prosecutions’ (NDPP’s) legal costs.”

Said Makeke, “Court processes ensued since 2017 after the funds were frozen, culminating in last week’s success. Countries usually have bilateral arrangements for mutual legal assistance. That’s what happened with Israel. The money, once released by the Israeli authorities, will be paid into the Criminal Assets Recovery Account, and will be available for the state to use in fighting crime.”

The accounts have been frozen since July 2017, but it’s only with this order that the funds will be forfeited to the state. The money is being kept safe in Israel until the finalisation of forfeiture proceedings.

The Bobroffs fled South Africa in March 2016 for Australia after irregularities were uncovered at Ronald Bobroff & Partners (RBF), a legal firm specialising in personal injury claims. The

Bobroffs were the firm’s directors.

They were struck from the roll of attorneys amid allegations that they charged a contingency fee of 40% of Road Accident Fund payouts, which was above the 25% cap. They are the subject of an Interpol Red Notice (international wanted-person notice). Makeke confirmed that “extradition papers are being processed”.

The Bobroffs’ attorney, John Joseph Finlay Cameron, told the

NPA is proclaiming it as a ‘great victory’, there was no great victory to be had,” said Cameron.

He said certain facts were “beyond dispute”, namely the fact that about R75 million in the accounts had been accrued since the 1980s, like most other white South Africans who moved money offshore in various ways. These funds might not have been “exported” in a fully legal way at the time, but they had nothing

million in the Israeli accounts has question marks over it, but the rest is being wrongly frozen and seized by the state, he said. Cameron believes the affidavit explaining this was a “work of art” and he was disappointed that it had not been considered or accepted by the judge.

In addition, he said the Bobroffs had made this clear when they offered full disclosure as part of the SARB’s exchange control

Special Voluntary Disclosure Programme (SVDP). The Bobroffs received approval in December 2018. They each paid a 10% SVDP administrative penalty to the SARB during 2018.

The Bobroffs haven’t returned to South Africa to fight the case for fear of being arrested without bail, and because Ronald has health problems and Darren has young children, Cameron said.

The NPA’s Makeke said they would not engage with the Bobroffs’ claims. “They have filed notice for leave to appeal. However, their arguments did not convince the judge of the Pretoria High Court.”



Ronald and Darren Bobroff before they left South Africa

SA Jewish Report he was “shocked and devastated” about Malindi’s ruling.

“This is a travesty of justice, which is why we are appealing it. This is deprivation of property of the worst kind. Although the

to do with the Bobroffs’ alleged misconduct in common law contingency fee agreements with clients, he said.

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IL

Making their Marx: heroes who beat the odds

The name Kiki Marx is on so many lips this week. I can’t tell you how many times last Saturday I was told that this woman – a local Johannesburg anaesthetist – was challenging herself to swim the English Channel. Interesting, I thought at the time. Little did I know how many top long-distance swimmers have tried and failed to make it across. Little did I know that she would be the first South African Jewish woman to do this. Little did I know how steep the odds were, and that more people have climbed to the top of Everest than have made it across the channel. Little did I know this was her second attempt. Suffice to say, there were many happy, bleary eyed people on Sunday after having watched her (via streamed content) succeed in fulfilling her childhood dream. From then on, I was inundated with people telling me that the newspaper needed to tell Marx’s story, and that she was a hero. I had three of our small pool of journalists asking to do the story, but Nicola Miltz stayed up all of Saturday night watching so that she could tell it. Defying odds is what this is all about... What is it about Marx that captured our imagination? We are looking for stories where good triumphs. We want good news. We want to



see amazing people defying the odds. Generally speaking, life in South Africa is a bit disconcerting and somewhat depressing. Human nature dictates that we find stories that inspire us and capture our imagination. Marx did just that. It’s so inspiring to read about someone who has set a tough goal, one that most people cannot achieve, and succeeds. It’s wonderful to see all the determination, hard work, and effort coming up trumps. Her story is not about someone with a natural-born talent who breezes to success, but someone who put in the whole nine yards and broke through barriers. Marx is not 25, she has just turned 50. She is also not necessarily an Olympic swimmer. It’s sheer guts, grit, and perseverance that got her to the other side of the English Channel. There is obviously something remarkable about innate talent. It’s phenomenal to see child prodigies soaring to success. It’s breathtaking to see natural dancers become prima ballerinas and make looking graceful so easy – because partly it is for them. But, it’s so much more inspiring to see people like Marx who take on a crazy, tough challenge, and train and push themselves to the limits to succeed. (See page 3.) It makes each one of us realise that there is very little that is insurmountable, and that we can realise our dreams if we really put in the effort needed. Marx’s is a story I want to tell my children, and one I hope they tell theirs one day. There is another woman in our newspaper this week who had a dream and fulfilled it. Hayley Elin suffered a terrible loss when her husband, David, died after a long illness. Her sadness and devastation was life-changing. Instead of giving in to it, she decided that the place that had supported her and her husband while he was sick needed her help. HospiceWits in Houghton was dilapidated and, because of that, it was seriously depressing just being in the building. The guardian angels who work there have helped so many over the years, but the state of the building has never been their priority. Elin knew she could help, even though she didn’t have the funds to do it herself. Instead of seeing the huge mountain of money it would take to fix the place, she saw possibilities. She called on friends to help. Today, the place is beautiful, comforting, and offers hope to many more families who will spend countless hours there. (See page 16.) This is all because Elin had a dream and a goal that was going to take a lot of work, passion, and commitment. People like Marx and Elin are role models in our community – or I believe they should be. It doesn’t matter that you and I may never even consider swimming across the Vaal River, never mind the English Channel. It’s about having a clear and positive goal that is tough to accomplish, but evidently doable with a real effort. It could be to find a way to help those who are desperate for food, a job, even survival. It could be finding a job after not having had one for a long time, or achieving any number of things that are personal goals. As much as things are tough in South Africa and we have reason to feel concerned, we can triumph if that’s our mission. We can find our own little – or huge – something to make a difference to our and other people’s lives. We can be a Kiki Marx or a Hayley Elin, and we can inspire others by our actions. We simply need to set our mind to it, and make it happen.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Israel on a knife edge again

Israel’s military is again on high alert. It’s limiting civilian traffic near the country’s border with Lebanon, and has deployed an Iron Dome missile defence battery in the north. But at the time of writing this, it had stopped short of opening bomb shelters for civilians. The dramatic flare-up in tension between Beirut and Jerusalem has left many wondering who’s to blame, and more importantly, what’s next? It started with Israeli airstrikes south of Damascus last Saturday night, killing five people, two of whom were Hezbollah members, and one an Iranian operative. A few hours later, in the early hours of Sunday morning, two drones crashed in a southern suburb of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. Hezbollah was quick to blame Israel. According to foreign news reports, the drones targeted an Iranian-made mixer used for precision guided missiles. It sparked a war of words. “What happened in Syria and Lebano ... is very, very dangerous,” threatened Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. “I tell the Israeli army on the border, wait for our response, which may take place at any time on the border and beyond the border. Be prepared and wait for us,” he said. Lebanon President Michel Aoun declared his country’s right to defend itself in what he called a “declaration of war” from Jerusalem. Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri said the drones were a “blatant attack on Lebanon’s sovereignty” that threatened “regional stability”. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was the only one who tried to de-escalate the situation. He called on Nasrallah to “calm down”, while at the same time warning neighbouring countries that they would be held accountable for any attacks against Israel emanating from their territory. It hasn’t been proven that the drones were Israeli. Had they been, it would be the first such “hostile action” by Israel in Lebanon since the 2006 war. It certainly doesn’t make sense for Netanyahu to provoke the situation right now. What’s more, while the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) took responsibility for Saturday’s airstrikes, it remained mum on the origin of the drones. That in itself doesn’t prove Israel’s innocence, as she often refuses to comment on actions she carries out in Syria. But several Israeli experts have come forward to say that the drones, according to their models, were Iranian-made. The pressing question is if that’s true, were they part of a plot by Tehran to send armed drones into northern Israel? The IDF certainly thinks so. It said its Saturday airstrikes in Syria were aimed at precisely that – preventing a group led by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard from flying drones with explosives into the Jewish state. The IDF identified and released photographs of the two Hezbollah members killed in Saturday’s strikes. It said they had “spent time in Iran on a number of occasions in recent

DATELINE:
MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier



years” during which “they went through specific training programmes in the [Iranian] Quds Force on operating unmanned aerial vehicles and explosive drones”. Their goal, the IDF statement said, was to “carry out drone attacks against targets in Israel”. It confirmed it had foiled the attempt, but declined to specify how. In a tweet, all the military would admit is that it had “confused” the pro-Iranian operatives, suggesting some form of electronic warfare. Nasrallah confirmed that the men were members of his organisation. It is their death he is calling to avenge. He now needs to decide. Does he attack Israel or not? On the one hand, he has no genuine justification for a violent response. It’s more



Lebanese military intelligence inspects the scene where two drones came down in the vicinity of a Hezbollah media centre in the south Beirut

about saving face, protecting his honour and that of his organisation. After years of fighting in Syria, his men, while gaining experience, have suffered heavy losses and are battle-fatigued. The Lebanese government also, despite its quick condemnation of Israel, will not want to be drawn into another war with Jerusalem. Nasrallah’s orders come from Tehran, and it’s very possible they too are not sure what to do. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has been discussing a possible meeting with the United States under some conditions, suggesting that no-one seems to want to fight the war they have declared. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed support for “Israel’s right to defend itself against threats posed by the Iranian [Islamic] Revolutionary Guard Corps, and to take action to prevent imminent attacks against Israeli assets in the region.” He made the comments during a telephone conversation with Netanyahu during the week in which Netanyahu stressed that Israel would strike Iranian targets threatening Israel wherever they were. The latest flare-up is significant, and proves what Israel has been saying for a long time. Iran is intent on spreading its influence throughout Syria and Lebanon, and it’s likely battles will increasingly be fought using drones. The IDF says the ones it thwarted were flown into Syria from Tehran several weeks ago, along with Iranian military officials to act as advisers, and that the plan had been personally overseen by Iran’s military chief. There have been few direct clashes between Israel and Iran in Syria. Until now. That’s likely to change.

Seriti commission’s scrapping shows even judges are not above the law

OPINION

ANDREW FEINSTEIN



The unanimous decision last week by a full bench of the North Gauteng High Court to set aside the report of the Seriti Commission into corruption in the notorious arms deal was a huge victory for accountability.

In late 2011, then President Jacob Zuma – facing 16 charges and 783 counts of fraud, corruption, and racketeering in relation to the arms deal – avoided a Constitutional Court-appointed judicial commission of inquiry into corruption in the transaction by appointing his own commission with Judge Willie Seriti at its helm.

Seriti, a high court judge, had been responsible for authorising the wire-taps which led to the highly controversial dropping of the charges against Zuma and was therefore seen as “a safe pair of hands” by Zuma and his associates.

From the outset of the inquiry into the alleged \$350 million (R5.3 billion) of corruption in the \$6 billion (R91 billion) arms deal, it was clear that the judge and a number of his key appointees had an agenda that was more about concealing than confirming the blatant corruption.

My book, *After the Party*, had documented the lengths to which the African National Congress (ANC) had gone to stop me and the public accounts committee, on which I was the senior ANC member, from investigating corruption in the deal.

After rebuffing a variety of forms of persuasion,

colleague Hennie van Vuuren, our legal representatives were informed by the commission that we wouldn’t be allowed to utilise the evidentiary documents as we hadn’t authored them. We therefore declined to give evidence.

The effect of Judge Seriti’s decision is reflected in his attitude to one of the documents. In a company minute, German defence company ThyssenKrupp acknowledged that “Chippy” Shaik, the head of procurement in the South African National Defence Force at the time of the deal, requested a bribe of \$3 million (R46 million), and that it had agreed to pay it. The commission suggested that only the ThyssenKrupp company secretary who wrote the minute, or Shaik, could submit it, in spite of the fact that it had been reproduced in the German media over many years.

Judge Seriti also decided that the commission would not consider the evidence presented in the trial in which Schabir Shaik, financial adviser to Jacob Zuma and brother of “Chippy”, was found guilty of corrupting Zuma on behalf of a French defence company. The Shaik verdict, confirmed by both the appeal court and the Constitutional Court, was, in Seriti’s view, not relevant to the deliberations of a commission inquiring into corruption in that very transaction.

And, when it came to hearing evidence from the main protagonists in the deal, including former President Thabo Mbeki, who directed the deal, and

Fana Hlongwane, former Defence Minister Joe Modise’s political adviser, who received tens of millions of dollars from companies who won contracts on the deal, the commission allowed them to make outrageous statements that were contradicted by voluminous evidence without meaningfully questioning them.

The withering judgement of the North Gauteng High Court concluded that the Seriti Commission, in spite of spending R140 million of

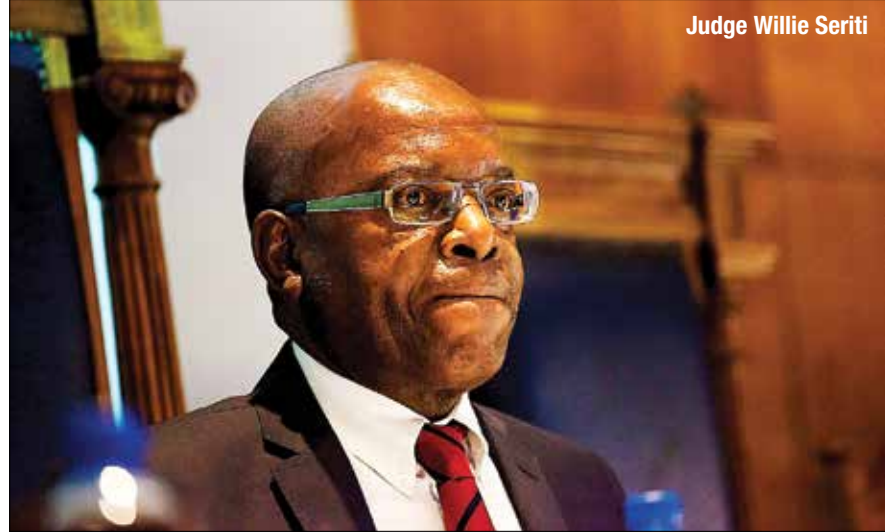
taxpayers’ money, with the judge earning R7 million a year for his efforts, had failed in its duty to meaningfully determine whether there was corruption in the biggest procurement yet concluded in our democratic era.

This damning indictment of the judgement is a highly significant victory for the people of South Africa. It sends a loud and clear message that a politician, even the president of the republic, cannot avoid meaningful scrutiny by the courts after being exonerated by executive-minded commissions of inquiry.

Crucially it means that Zuma will be unable to use the Seriti Commission’s “see no corruption, hear no corruption” report in his defence when he goes on trial later this year for corruption in the arms deal.

I hope that the National Prosecuting Authority will now bring charges against all those implicated in gargantuan corruption in the arms deal, both prominent South Africans from the Mbeki era, and the global defence companies and their intermediaries who paid the bribes.

• *Andrew Feinstein is a former ANC MP who left South Africa after the ANC leadership stopped the investigation into the arms deal.*



intimidation, and finally threats from senior members of the ANC to stop the investigation I had initiated, I was removed from the committee by Tony Yengeni, my chief whip. He was later found to have lied to parliament about his receipt of a massive discount on a luxury SUV from one of the companies bidding for a contract on the arms deal. I was then informed by the party that I was to be removed from parliament. I resigned the night before this was due to happen.

Three senior members of the commission – one of the three judges, a key evidence leader, and a senior researcher – all resigned from the commission. The latter two claimed publicly that the commission had a double agenda: to deny the existence of any corruption in the fraught arms deal, and to discredit the critics of the deal, including me.

My colleague, Paul Holden, and I had initially assisted the commission to contact prosecutors around the world who had compiled evidence of corruption in the deal. We also made a 200 000 word submission to the commission, supplemented by numerous evidentiary documents that laid bare this corruption. (You can see a number of these documents here: <http://armsdealfacts.com>)

As we were preparing to give verbal evidence to the commission with our South African-based



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#MeToo: what Vashti and Esther can teach us about standing up to abuse

TALI FEINBERG

The Book of Esther is filled with examples of women standing up to men, and holding their own in the face of absolute power. This has relevance to us today, Rabba Wendy Amsellem told Limmud in Cape Town last weekend. Amsellem is a Talmud and halacha teacher at Yeshivat Maharat, the first seminary to ordain orthodox women.

Bringing the text to life, Amsellem told how at first, King Achashverosh objectifies Vashti, calling her “the vessel I use”, then asking her to parade herself naked in front of drunken men.

Yet Vashti refuses, and later pleads with him to allow her to wear some form of covering or to remove her crown. She asks that a maid be sent in her place, and says even convicts aren’t forced to be naked. She reminds him that while he used to be a shepherd boy, as a king, he can’t behave like this. “She is trying to hold onto a small shred of self-respect,” says Amsellem.

“Even though the Talmud describes her as evil and similar to Haman, the Midrash later depicts her as a reasonable person holding onto her dignity when she has no power. It’s seen as a form of rebellion, and it eventually gets her killed.” Therefore Vashti’s refusal to appear naked is one of the first, classic moments of the #MeToo resistance movement.

Meanwhile, the King chooses Esther as his new queen. At first, she is portrayed as the opposite to Vashti – obedient, flexible, and “perfect”. She reflects back what people want her to be. Essentially, she has no real sense of self. Yet, all this changes when Mordechai



Rabba Wendy Amsellem

pleads with her to ask the king to save the Jewish people from Haman’s edict.

Esther can’t do this without being summoned to the king, but in an act of bravery, she eventually goes to see him. The king welcomes her, and offers her anything she wants, but instead of begging him to save her people, she asks him and Haman to attend a party. Why?

The Midrash gives 11 reasons why Esther might have done this, from laying a trap for Haman and “keeping your enemy close”, to arousing the jealousy of the king and casting doubt on Haman, to staying “undercover” so as not to reveal her true intentions.

“Ultimately, this wasn’t Esther ‘losing her nerve’. It was a very deliberate choice.

Esther realised that she couldn’t just plead with the king to save the Jews, she had to destroy the root cause, which was a major abuse of power, and attack the underlying structure that allowed it to happen. She had to shift and shake things up, and dislodge Haman from his position of power,” said Amsellem. The party helped her to show the king that he could no longer trust Haman, and arouse his suspicions about what was going on behind the scenes. Soon after, the king dismissed Haman and lifted the edict to kill the Jews.

In addition, Esther aligns herself with Vashti, saying that in the beginning, Haman wanted to kill Vashti and now he wants to kill her, both for their disobedience. When the Talmud says that the king’s anger was “abated twice”, it was his anger about how

Vashti and Esther were treated.

These texts teach us that #MeToo is not only directed at a single person’s abuse of power, but the network that enables it. Change can be affected only when that entire structure is dismantled. We need less ‘quick fixes’ and more systematic change. In addition, women need to support each other and find allies. “Even though Vashti was totally different to Esther, Esther saw that they had essentially been in the same position,” said Amsellem. Banding together is more powerful than standing apart.

“We need to take control of our own narrative,” she said. “The Book of Esther is unusual as it’s in Esther’s own words. It shows how she changed from someone who was obedient and malleable to someone who stood her ground and took control of her destiny.”

Jerusalem not just a capital, it’s the seat of G-d

TALI FEINBERG

Jerusalem is a focal point of Judaism, Jewish life, Torah, and Israel, but how did it come to have such stature? “Because it’s the place where the presence of the G-d of Israel dwells,” leading archaeologist and historian Jodi Magness told Limmud in Cape Town last weekend.

Magness brought the story of Jerusalem to life, describing its historical importance in the development of Judaism.

She said people have always been drawn to this rocky, isolated mountain town because it has a perennial freshwater spring, and because since antiquity, it has had spiritual significance for the Israelites and Jewish people.

“In antiquity, people had a national patron or deity who was more important than other deities. Over centuries, the Israelites began to believe that the G-d of Israel was more powerful than other deities, and this G-d would protect them if they ignored other g-ds. They saw Jerusalem as the seat of power of that deity.”

Unlike today, when we see divine power as universal, in ancient times, the Israelites saw G-d as very much dwelling in one place. So, when the Israelites divided into the northern kingdom of Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judea, the Judean priests made Jerusalem their “capital”, building the first Temple there as a way to interact with G-d. When the First Temple was destroyed, it ended the Israelite period of Jewish history, and began the exile to Babylon.

These exiled Israelites yearned to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple because they saw it as a crucial meeting point between them and G-d. Without a Temple in Jerusalem, there was no way to interact with a higher power, said Magness. When the Jews returned from exile 65 years later, Jerusalem was again the centre point or “capital” of Judea, thus beginning the era of the Jewish people as opposed to the Israelites.

Magness emphasised that when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to the Temple Mount and built a Temple there, he was literally building a house for Hashem. “The Temple was completely different to what we see as a synagogue today – they are diametrically opposed,” said Magness. While a shul is a meeting point for ordinary people, Temples were the opposite: no ordinary people could enter.

Like other ancient people, the Israelites needed to entice their deity to come down to them, “to open a line of communication”, which is why they built temples on mountaintops and offered sacrifices around the clock. Because of this emphasis on

sacrifice, “if we were to go back in time, the Judaism of the temple period would be almost unrecognisable to us – more different than similar to the Judaism we know today,” said Magness.

But it was also different to other ancient religions as it worshiped one G-d above others, it had one Temple, it had no “cult statue”, and it had a caste system in which only men born as Cohanim could be priests. As the centre of all of this was Jerusalem, the place where the Israelites and then the Jewish people communicated with G-d. When the second Temple was destroyed in 70CE, Josephus wrote that “the G-d of Israel has departed Jerusalem”.



Jodi Magness

Magness said Jews have always expected to build a third Temple because our history shows that this is the natural order of things. Just as a second Temple had been built, Jews felt it would take a few of decades to reach that point again. “All sects of Judaism at the time took for granted that they could only interact with G-d in his ‘home’ in Jerusalem,” she said. “Therefore, when the Temple was not rebuilt, Judaism faced a crisis, eventually evolving into the Judaism we know today.

“Today, we go to the Kotel and put a note between the stones to communicate with G-d. This proves that this idea that Jerusalem is the place where the G-d of Israel dwells is still alive today,” Magness said. “This has been accepted by the other Abrahamic faiths, which is why Jerusalem remains special and central to all three religions.”

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Being Jewish in prison – one woman’s story

TALI FEINBERG

The words “Jew” and “prison” rarely sit together in our community, but the reality is that Jews do land up behind bars.

British educator Connie Webber told a Limmud audience in Cape Town last weekend the sad story of her friend Yehudit (not her real name) who landed up in a British prison due to a series of unfortunate events.

Webber, who was awarded the Silver Cross of Merit from the Polish government for her work on Polish-Jewish relations in 1998, told how her friend was charged with child abduction for trying to keep her son safe.

Yehudit was born and grew up in Hungary, with little education or career prospects. She knew her grandmother and mother were Jewish, and she wore a Magen David around her neck, but never identified as Jewish until the day a rabbi and an Israeli walked into the bar where she was working in Budapest and changed her life.

The rabbi and businessman noticed her Magen David, and when she told them her family history, they said she was definitely Jewish, and should live in Israel. Though they saw it as saving a Jewish soul, their good intentions had a detrimental effect on Yehudit’s life. “The road to disaster is paved with good intentions,” said Webber.

Yehudit did go to Israel, and was quickly married off to a man she didn’t know well, bearing a daughter soon afterwards. The marriage soon dissolved, and Yehudit took

the child with her to the United Kingdom, where she met Webber.

They became friends, but in general, Yehudit was on her own as a young, divorced woman with a child. The British Jewish community didn’t support her, and didn’t see her as a prospect for their sons. So, Yehudit connected with other European Jews, and soon met a non-Jewish man named Joe who swept her off her feet.

In another step towards disaster, Joe’s records were not checked by his employers. If they had done so, they would have discovered that he was a career criminal with many convictions for smuggling heroin. Yehudit also had no idea about his past.

Yehudit married him, and they had a son. The Webbers hosted the *brit milah* (circumcision ceremony), and the couple named their son Harry Jonathan, after Webber’s husband. But Joe soon turned abusive, and the couple divorced, with Yehudit taking her son with her to Hungary. Her daughter went to live with her father in Israel.

Over email, Webber learned that Joe was litigating against Yehudit for abducting their son, but as an ex-convict, he wouldn’t have a case. Yet, Yehudit was encouraged to return to the UK to “sort it out”. Webber later received an email with the subject line “SOS”. Her friend described how she had been arrested at Heathrow, her 11-year-old son Henry separated from her, and was out on bail but had nowhere to turn.

Webber sprang into action, arranging



Connie Webber

her identity proudly. Being Jewish allowed her to receive reading material, kosher snacks, and fresher, kosher meals, which she shared and bartered. “For example, she traded a cucumber for better sheets, which she carefully cared for the whole time in prison.” The reading material and interaction with the prison chaplain “saved her sanity” because she had such limited interaction with the outside world.

But most importantly, Yehudit’s Judaism gave her hope, inspiration, and leadership. She taught the other women about Judaism, and read to them from her texts. She emphasised that we are “all made in G-d’s image”, and during Pesach, she shared her kosher grape juice and the message of freedom.

A rabbi who visited Yehudit told Webber that he went to inspire her, but came back inspired.

Yehudit served only nine months in prison before being deported back to Hungary, where she now lives with her son. The Webbers sent him to a Jewish summer camp for his barmitzvah, and he came back in love with his Jewish heritage. So, in spite of the fact that the path to Judaism was a difficult journey for Yehudit, it was her “saving grace” during her time behind bars, and is now being passed onto her son.

Webber said that if the British Jewish community had offered more support to her friend along the way, she might never have landed up in prison in the first place.

She encouraged community leaders to reach out to those less fortunate who might “fall through the cracks”, and if a Jewish person is in prison, to help in any way they can.

Is BDS still a four-letter word for SA Jews?

What do South African Jews think about criticism of Israel? Traditionally, they have been highly sensitive to criticism. Has this changed? Attitudes have softened, but, it remains a hot topic, even if it involves only a small number of people. A few notorious incidents come to mind. In 2014, a furore erupted in the community when a Jewish student wore a keffiyah (headscarf) in public. In 2018, two Jewish pupils at Herzlia Middle School in Cape Town took a knee during the singing of Hatikvah, causing outrage. In 2018, Limmud dropped three speakers from its programme because they supported BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions), which is intensely hostile to Israel, though they were not scheduled to speak about BDS.

Support for BDS is more serious than mere criticism of Israel, but it isn’t a mass phenomenon in South Africa. However, since Israel regards it as an important enemy in international forums, and actually passed legislation in 2017 barring anyone supporting BDS from entering the country, diaspora Jews are uncertain about what stance to take. BDS characterises itself as a non-violent human rights group. But is its priority human rights, or annihilating Israel? Most portray it as the latter.

What about South Africa? As part of a general survey of attitudes among the Cape Town Jewish community, the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town asked interviewees for their attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and whether the community should engage with Jews who support BDS. The findings were presented at Limmud two weeks ago. The survey didn’t ask about direct engagement with BDS, only the extent of interaction with community members who support BDS. More generally, should diaspora Jews feel free to criticise Israeli policy?

Jews younger than 30 were in general more open to public criticism of Israel and engaging with community members who support BDS than older Jews. It’s possible

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



this results from diaspora Jews’ diminishing attachment or even alienation towards Israel, and a lesser sense of what nationhood means to them generally.

Among the middle-aged group (30-50), attitudes are more mixed. As would be consistent with this age range, one might assume that professionals and academics are more likely to be open to criticism of Israeli policy and BDS, while others still believe BDS’ only aim is Israel’s annihilation. Also, during their entire lives, Israel has been criticised for occupying the West Bank, and they want to know more. Older Jews (50+) are still likely to maintain past attitudes, and oppose public criticism of Israel. It’s likely that this age cohort still considers Israel a precious haven for persecuted Jews after the Holocaust. if Israel acts harshly, it has no choice but to defend itself; and criticism is mostly anti-Semitic.

Aside from the survey, what about South African politics? BDS-SA has loudly pressurised the African National Congress government to sever ties with Israel, often bringing trade unions and similar groups into the picture to paint Israel as an unqualified evil. In a dramatic development in April, the minister of international relations announced the downgrading of South Africa’s embassy in Tel Aviv to a liaison office, to the justified outrage of South African Jews who felt that cutting ties is completely the wrong way to go.

With the Israeli-Palestinian conflict far from resolution, and South African politics in turmoil, attitudes towards Israel will stay fluid and often expedient. Many South African Jews report that in work and social environments, they hesitate to say they support Israel because of the hostile reaction. Unfortunately, the chance for open discussion remains slim, and might have to wait until there is real movement on Israeli-Palestinian peace.

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Remembering a fallen brother 50 years on

ALLAN LEIBOWITZ

Next month, a group of elderly Israelis, mostly *olim* (immigrants) from South Africa, will gather at a graveside on Kibbutz Tzora, as they have for the past 49 years, to mark the death in action of Harold Leibowitz, whose short life was ended by an Egyptian sniper bullet at the Suez Canal in 1969.

I was nine years old at the time, living in East London, and aware of my brother’s activities in Israel from his weekly letters and frequent audio tapes, although I have no real memories of him as he left home when I was much younger.

The 50th anniversary of his death stirred a huge sense of loss for me, and in the lead-up, I became increasingly aware that I knew so little about a sibling who had been more than twice my age at the time of his passing – in the prime of his life.

The only record of his life I had was a book about him published shortly after his death by his kibbutz friends. That publication reflects the profound loss experienced by all those who had been close to him, in the Habonim movement in Johannesburg, on Kibbutz Tzora, and in the army.

Harold rushed to Israel when the Six-Day War broke out in 1967, but missed the war and decided to stay on as a volunteer. When his six-month stint came to an end, he recognised that he was “home at last”, and after settling his affairs in South Africa, he returned to Israel to join Kibbutz Tzora, 20km from Jerusalem, near the city of Beit Shemesh, where he was warmly welcomed. In July 1968, he was drafted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). After basic training, he served in Nachal Golan, and in August 1969, he was posted to the Suez Canal zone where his life ended tragically just weeks before he turned 23, and shortly before his military service was due to end.

Harold is one of almost 90 South Africans who have lost their lives in defence of Israel. Over the years, I have received several invitations to attend memorial services, either organised by South African community organisations in Israel or the Israeli embassy in Canberra. (I emigrated to Australia 28 years ago).

As the anniversary of his death approached, I felt a growing need to learn more about my late brother. My quest to fill in the blanks began in earnest late last year, when I reached out to Harold’s former kibbutz mother on Tzora to find out if there were plans for any special memorial service this year.

That led me to Alan Hoffman, the former chief executive of the Jewish Agency. Hoffman made aliyah with Harold, studied at ulpan on Tzora, went into the army, and did basic training with him, and then served with him in the Nachal settlement of Nachal Golan in the winter of 1968-1969. They then went separate ways.

Harold joined an artillery unit, while Hoffman went on to join the elite paratroopers.

Since Harold’s passing, Hoffman has made a point of attending the annual Yom Hazikaron memorial ceremony at Tzora, and going to Harold’s grave on the anniversary of his passing.

Not only has he honoured Harold’s memory, but in his official capacity with the Jewish Agency, Hoffman was also instrumental in creating an annual commemoration ceremony for Israel’s fallen immigrant soldiers.

The annual service, which attracts more than 5 000 visitors from around the world, was a spin-off of the Masa programme Hoffman started 15 years ago together with then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, which now brings close to 13 000 young Jews aged 18-30 to Israel on programmes of between five months and a year.

“In the second year of the programme, we realised that Yom Hazikaron was a difficult day to be in Israel for these young people because all the ceremonies are in Hebrew, and Israelis all go to their own personal memorial services,” he recalls.

What started as a small gathering of 300 people on Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem has grown into a touching



Allan Leibowitz and his sister Maureen Fialkov

where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of Harold’s death. As we fought back tears, we were all struck by the enduring impact he had had on their lives. While I don’t have my own memories of my brother, I came away from that encounter with a deeper

understanding and appreciation – and perhaps an even greater sense of loss.

After the meet-up, we made our way to Latrun to join 5 000 young people and listen to stories of heroism, with families and friends recounting the losses of loved ones in the army, and in terror attacks in Israel. The common themes were unfulfilled potential, and

the sense of loss for children growing up without knowing their siblings.

Maureen and I were asked to lay a wreath in Harold’s honour.

Among the most touching accounts was the story of Sean Carmeli, a 21-year-old lone soldier. The American was killed in a shoot-out with Hamas terrorists in Gaza. He had been a fan of Maccabi Haifa, and the soccer team, fearing no-one would attend his funeral, posted a request on its Facebook page asking fans to go along. That appeal resulted in tens of thousands of people showing up at Carmeli’s funeral.

On Yom Hazikaron, we made our way back to Tzora for the kibbutz’s memorial service. We’ve all seen footage of Israel coming to a standstill as the sirens wail at 11:00, but the emotiveness of it was quite unexpected. We were driving on the highway when the siren sounded, and every single vehicle – cars, trucks, and motorbikes – came to a stop, and their occupants jumped out and stood with bowed heads. As if frozen in time, they remained motionless until the two-minute siren ended, and

then, as quickly as they had stopped, the vehicles were back on their way.

The memorial service at Tzora was a solemn event, bringing together several bereaved families who gathered with the broader kibbutz community to remember their losses. Unlike most Western memorials where mourners wear black or dull colours, almost everyone at the Yom Hazikaron service was wearing a white shirt symbolising the white background of the Israeli flag.

Harold’s grave, once the only military grave on the kibbutz, was thronged by family, including our Israeli cousins who have diligently attended since 1970, kibbutz friends, and several East Londoners living in Israel. And as the ceremony came to an end and we made our way to the dining room for a Middle Eastern dinner provided by the family of another fallen kibbutz soldier, we could see the kibbutz children honing their dances for the Yom Ha’atzmaut festivities a couple of hours later, festivities that 50 years earlier would have been accompanied by Harold’s accordion.

Israel holds fallen soldiers in enormous esteem, and the country is dotted with memorials to its war dead either marking particular battles, the fallen in local communities, or individual army units. We visited one of these, the Nachal Memorial in Pardes Hanna in the north of Israel. The stark and imposing concrete structure commemorates more than

1 000 soldiers from Harold’s military unit who have fallen in battle.

We were also fortunate to visit the national military monument opened last year at the Mount Herzl national cemetery in Jerusalem. The dramatic monument is constructed of thousands of uniform bricks, each bearing the name of a fallen soldier. If anything brings home the tragedy of Israel’s loss, it’s having to search on a computer for the location of the brick designating your loved one.

We were met by a serving soldier who led us to Harold’s name, and read out some documents from his memory box. Again, the efficiency of this process is a reminder that military deaths are now commonplace in Israel (at last count, the tally was 23 741). The army is practised and skilled in dealing with the bereaved – a skill set one would rather was not needed.

As the 50th anniversary of Harold’s death approaches, I’m reminded that our brother is very far from his siblings and immediate family. But at the same time, having come to know the people who still remember and love him, I appreciate that he’s where he wanted to be, and he’s not alone.

• *Allan Leibowitz is a journalist based in Brisbane, Australia. He’s the former deputy editor of Radio 702 News, and has worked in print journalism in Europe. He specialises in business reporting, and contributes to specialist publications around the world.*

Concourt probes appeal court’s U-turn on hate-speech

>>Continued from page 1

should be viewed in the context in that he was subjected to provocation and baiting on a sensitive political issue that resulted in his speech being reactive rather than advocating hatred.

“When Masuku addressed students at Wits, there were Jewish students on the sidelines heckling that he was a racist, and one shouted, ‘Heil Hitler!’ When you are in a political meeting heckling, you should not be surprised when a heated retort comes your way.”

She said that words can be

codes or proxies for other words, but on the facts of this case, that’s not what happened.

The Rule of Law Project said there should be strong protections for free speech and, among other things, a court could not take into account the race of the speaker in determining hate speech. The same rules should apply regardless of the race of the person.

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng presided over the proceedings. Judgement is pending.

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Canings and chaos at first Jewish hostel

JORDAN MOSHE

The boys of Herber House refused to have their football confiscated without a fight. They grabbed makeshift drums and chanted slogans as they marched to protest this gross injustice and deprivation of liberty. Turns out, their ball, seized out of the overenthusiastic enforcement of Shabbat, was promptly returned, and the aspiring revolutionaries resumed their game.

This is a snapshot of life in the 1940s at Herber House, the first ever Johannesburg Jewish hostel for primary school children from country communities. It was the precursor to the King David Linksfield hostel.

The ball scenario is one of many meticulously collected by Stuart Buxbaum, himself a former boarder, who is researching the institution.

“I’ve never stopped being a Herber House boy,” says Buxbaum. “By researching the hostel’s history, I’m telling a story that needs to be told. It’s the story of rural Jewry of South Africa and its life experiences.”

Herber House was originally Eastington Castle in Doornfontein, with cavernous interiors, soaring turrets, and stained-glass windows. The experiences of the then very young residents that Buxbaum collected were at times comical, at others horrendous.

Buxbaum, 71, was born and raised in Leslie, Mpumalanga. He arrived at Herber House in 1958 with his two sisters and spent seven years at the hostel until matriculating from King David school in 1965.

He consulted extensively with the former headmaster of King David Linksfield, Elliot Wolf, who arranged access to minutes of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE)

which was responsible for the hostel’s inception. He also got hold of the unpublished memoirs of Rabbi Philip Heilbrunn, another former boarder, to create a 45-page document which accounts for the history of the institution from its creation.

Buxbaum wanted to discover what kind of experience the children had at the hostel.

“There’s no doubt that there were good intentions from the beginning,” he says. “They wanted to create a model institution for Jewish youth. The people who planned it were noble, but they were hamstrung by circumstances.”

“The brand was good,” he says. “But it was tarnished by the people and reality on the ground. The committee was too high above everything, and people were unsuitable at lower levels.”

Eastington Castle wasn’t an entirely appropriate choice. The mansion was renamed in honour of Harry Herber, then chairperson of the board, but little else was changed. “It was as if [the board] hadn’t actually planned a hostel. It simply bought a castle, put in furniture, and moved children into it without planning sleeping arrangements.”

A gloomy interior full of nooks and crannies, the edifice was reportedly described as being “only fit for bats, bugs and bonfires”.

Add to the mix a terrifying matron and housemaster ill-suited to care for youngsters, and you can understand what these early years might have been like. Until today, the names of “Mrs Dubin” and “Mr Saltzman” strike fear in the hearts of those who experienced life under their care.

“The former was tyrannical, the latter temperamental,” says Buxbaum. “The mention of Mrs Dubin’s name can still make people

turn white. She was strict and scary, and was often the cause of complaints of maltreatment.”

Rabbi Isaac Goss, the then assistant director of the board, said in a report at the time, “Mrs Dubin has done a good job of work, but she has a tendency to let her temper get the better of her. It must be made clear to her that she has to control her temper for the welfare of the institution.”



Herber House, early 1900s

Equally terrifying was one of her assistants, a Mrs Bernstein, who was described as “a tough disciplinarian who would not stand for cheek from anyone. She could pull your ears in a most excruciating way.”

Two visitors, a Mrs Pollard and Dr M Mendelow, penned what they witnessed when they arrived at the hostel at 07:15 in February 1953. “The ban on conversation created a strained atmosphere. We found a pale little girl dressed, standing aimlessly. She appeared to be ill, and we were informed by the matron that she was still not well enough to attend school.

In our opinion, there was no reason why she should have been out of bed.”

Heilbrunn, who attended the hostel between 1959 and 1963, wrote, “The masters were greatly skilled in wielding the cane and lorded it over us, as the Haggadah puts it, “with rigour”. Their great moment was at inspection around 18:00.

“One minute late got you one cut, two minutes, two cuts, and so on.

Buxbaum recalls the mixed emotions food would cause amongst the hostel’s youth. “There was once unhappiness with a particular serving of beef and vegetables at the evening meal. A boycott was called. It was my favourite dish of the week – it dripped with thick, greasy fat. The plates were set in front of us.

“Longingly, I looked at the roast slice, going hungry during those meals

until it was removed from the menu. The kitchen supervisor had got the message.”

Over the years, there were numerous investigations into the living conditions of boarders. Facilities, living standards, and disciplinary measures were subjects of debate for years after its establishment.

Buxbaum says the boarders developed, quoting Heilbrunn, “a feral culture”, which manifested by “*chutzpah* being a trait greatly admired”.

Boarders found ways to stick it to the authorities, by nicknaming their housemaster and matron “Mr and Mrs Oog”. Saltzman would respond in kind by addressing the boarders as *menuvels* (a grossly insulting Yiddish word meaning vile or base).

The contestation between the parties would reach its height on Saturday evenings in shul. Says Buxbaum, “Tension was heightened. Many and varied had been the transgressions of the boarders all week long. We would be reproached as a group of miscreants.

“Silently the boys sat, a nudge-nudge here, a glance there, and a wink at each other. The dénouement came at the conclusion of the evening service. The new week would be ushered in with song. A blessed week! *Shavua Tov!* Little could those who generations ago had ushered in the week with this hopeful message imagine it being corrupted by a bunch of lads singing, ‘Shovel it off, shovel it off!’ with appropriate spade work. The housemaster’s reproaches had missed their target.”

A new hostel opened on the grounds of King David High School in 1966, and the sprawling mansion was sold and razed to the ground. Buxbaum matriculated in 1965, but says his experience at the hostel varied.

“It underwent a culture change,” he says. “People revitalised it, new blood came in, and it made for a different experience.”

SA filmmaker thrives at Jerusalem Film Festival

JORDAN MOSHE

Promising young director and Naledi Awards judge Obett Motaung is defined by a passion for stories. Now he isn’t just telling stories about South Africa, but about Israel as well.

Motaung, still a student, was chosen as one of 24 filmmakers from around the world to go to Israel to showcase their work at the Jerusalem Film Festival in August. A major event for filmmakers, the festival is the leading platform in Israel for presenting the latest cinematic trends to local and international audiences.

Motaung and the other members of the group took part in the Jerusalem Film Workshop, a five-week summer programme designed to enhance their skills. In groups of four, they produced short films in the ancient village of Ein Kerem, today a hub for Israeli artists.

Motaung is a secular Christian who was raised on the East Rand. He says he knew little about Israel, but saw the trip as an opportunity to access unique stories previously untapped. “It was a chance to get into a new space, learn about the people who live in it, and find a way to tell their stories,” he says. “I could step into another world, and listen to different voices.”

Motaung left for Israel at the end of July, sponsored by Tararam, the SA Israel culture fund. From the moment he arrived, he had his work cut out for him. “You don’t have the luxury of time at all,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. “Each group was given context and

a character to create their film, and we got on with it.”

Motaung worked with three other participants from abroad to create *My Playground*, a film centred on the Hadassah Hospital Children’s Ward and Dr Saar Hashavaya, an emergency rescue specialist. This doctor handles the daily confrontations and challenges of working in trauma by developing his inner child.

“Essentially, he’s a child figure in a hospital environment,” says Motaung, who was selected as director. “He has found a way to deal with the trauma which surrounds him daily by working [with an attitude

walks of life and across the religious spectrum in a unique space where their identities became part of a narrative.

“Your space reflects who you are,” says Motaung. “In Israel, religion informs so much, even hospital culture. It creates a holistic view of healing, and looks at people in terms of their different facets. Each person and story is different, and that’s reflected in the space around them.”

While producing the film, workshop participants explored and visited Jerusalem’s environs, including the Old City and West Bank. Motaung found Israelis to be upfront and proud about their narrative.

“Israelis don’t beat around the bush,” he says. “I experienced a sense of truth when interacting with them. They take pride in being upfront with you, and know what their story is. They are proud of their stories, and know who they are.”

Belief in one’s story is something he has brought back to South Africa. He wants more people here to bring their unusual and unique stories to the fore, and take pride in them.

He says that only by reaching beyond the immediate and tapping into stories from further afield can we gain a holistic understanding of others. This way, we can open new doors of understanding.

“We really have it all here,” he says. “Our country is rich in stories. We can all learn from the spectrum of experience available to us. We can learn by merging our worlds, and using our stories to discover universal aspects of human experience.”



Obett Motaung

of childish innocence]. There’s something universal in what he goes through.”

The relatability of Saar’s narrative was further enhanced by the film’s setting – Jerusalem. Motaung says Jerusalem brings together people from different

Why ending occupation is in Israel’s best interests

TALI FEINBERG

Israel is a thriving, modern, and successful country, but it has an unhealthy “appendage” holding it back from achieving its true potential: the occupation of the West Bank.

“The occupation is the number one threat to Israel’s future,” Jessica Montell, a leader in Israeli civil society, said at a talk hosted by the Jewish Democratic Initiative (JDI) at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town recently. Montell was brought to South Africa by Limmud SA, with support from the JDI.

Montell served as director of Israeli human-rights organisation B’Tselem for 13 years, and founded the organisation SISO: Save Israel, Stop the Occupation. She is currently director of human-rights organisation HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual.

In introducing Montell, Josh Hovsha, the director of JDI Cape Town, said Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank was like being in “perpetual purgatory, and a moment lost in time”. He said the possibility of peace during the Oslo Accords has been “25 years of a promise unfulfilled”.

Hovsha asked audience members to imagine the frustration people would have felt if South Africa had never fully transitioned to democracy, and had floundered in limbo between apartheid and democracy for a quarter of a century. This is how it felt for anyone who wanted Israel to end the occupation.

At the same time, he emphasised that “hope is a political action”, and that Jewish communities around the world should hope for change 52 years after Israel occupied these territories in the Six-Day War.

“The occupation is removed from the daily lives of Israelis, but it affects us all,” said Montell. “It’s eroding Israeli democracy, and it has a corrosive effect on our institutions, our security, our education, and even our mental health. It violates our own values. Anyone who cares about Israel needs to know that it’s the foremost existential threat to our existence as a Jewish, democratic state. If we want to safeguard Israel’s long-term future, ending the occupation is in our long-term interest.”

“The price we pay is tangible, like the



deaths and injuries [that occur] as the conflict continues, but also intangible,” she said. Sending young Israelis to defend a state of occupation during their military service is unhealthy for society as a whole.

She explained that the situation of 52 years of Israel ruling over another people was made possible because of the temporary nature of occupation. But, ultimately, it needs to be resolved one way or another. Occupation, by its very nature, isn’t a permanent state of being.

The current situation is untenable – Israel can’t remain Jewish and democratic if it continues the occupation, Montell said. The danger at the moment is that Israel’s leaders seem to be steering towards the possibility of letting go of the democratic element. If Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu follows through on his election promise to annex part or all of the West Bank, then Israel will no longer be a democratic state. “Right now, some of our politicians don’t seem to mind,” she said.

Montell described occupation as “essentially a permit bureaucracy, in which the 2.5 million Palestinians living in the West Bank need permits for everything in their daily lives”. In addition, everything is

governed by the law of occupation, which is why the Israeli military is the legislator and judiciary for Jews and Arabs living in this area.

Ultimately, even Israeli settlers living in the West Bank don’t live under Israeli law, they live under military law, said Montell. But, these military orders mirror Israeli laws, while the military orders for Palestinians are often very different.

Montell said that the occupation was sometimes prioritised over standing up to anti-Semitism. For example, when Hungarian Jews and the Israeli ambassador to Hungary criticised Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor

Orbán for anti-Semitism, the ambassador was recalled because Prime Minister Netanyahu preferred Orbán’s support for Israel’s policies.

After the Pittsburgh massacre, when Israel Education Minister Naftali Bennett was told by anti-Semitism watchdog the Anti-Defamation League that anti-Semitism was rising because of white nationalism in the US, Bennett said anti-Semitism was stronger in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. In both of these cases, attention was driven away from real anti-Semitism to protect Israel’s continued occupation.

Montell understands that the South African Jewish community is wary of even imagining the possibility of questioning the occupation. She knows that the BDS movement here is hard-line, extreme, and often anti-Semitic. She understands that our government has historic links to the Palestinians, and is considering downgrading our embassy in Tel Aviv. She gets that we have a fear of Hamas ruling in the West Bank, or being called “self-hating” if we criticise Israel. But she maintains that as Jews, it’s our duty to be brave, and demand that Israel negotiates a way to end the occupation of the West Bank.

If South African Jews want to see change, she said, we should engage with Israeli representatives on the issue whenever possible. This is especially important because ending occupation isn’t high on the agenda of parties in the upcoming Israeli elections. We also need to connect with other Jews around the world who want this to happen. Lastly, she recommends that we engage the South African government to push for a resolution. If we want to tell our children one day that we opposed occupation, we need to start now. “Ethically, there is no alternative,” she said.

Jews in Hong Kong apathetic about protests

>>>Continued from page 4

involved at all,” he told JTA. “Some Jewish expats might be sympathetic to the young people – those would be people who pay attention to politics and realise that Beijing is tightening up – but there are a lot of people who simply look at this from a business perspective, and this hurts business.”

The Jewish community is diverse, with members hailing from Europe, North America, South America, Australia, South Africa, and Israel. Many work in banking, finance, law, and business.

Erica Lyons, the chairperson of the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, said the transiency of the community and the fact that few of them speak Cantonese are among the reasons they don’t get involved in the protests.

“The general feeling is support of [the protesters] but not involvement,” said Lyons, who comes from New Jersey in the United States.

Some community members do get involved. Nicole Izsak attended about 15 protests this summer prior to moving to New York a month ago for her husband’s job.

Most were peaceful, but a few times she clashed with police. On 12 June, Izsak was with a large group of protesters when police started approaching them with batons and tear gas. The crowd was pushed onto a small footbridge,

where Izsak feared she could be crushed by the large mass of people.

“I need to get out of here,” she recalled thinking. But the experience didn’t deter Izsak, a Londoner who lived in Hong Kong for 10 years, from participating again.

“We benefited from freedoms of speech, assembly, [and] the privilege of living there, and we should give back to the community that gave us so much,” she said.

Izsak, who has worked for Hong Kong’s Jewish school, Jewish women’s association, and the Jewish film festival, said her Jewish identity had also played a role in her participation.

“As a Jewish person, I believe in taking a stand,” she said.

Izsak has heard a range of reasons why Jews in Hong Kong prefer to stay out of politics.

“I think it varies between disinterest, feeling it’s not their issue, feeling they don’t have the right to do it, feeling that Jews should keep their heads below the parapet, or not supporting the demonstrations,” she said.

For Freeman, the Scottish Jew who teaches at an international school, safety concerns trump other factors.

“We’re staying away because it’s not necessarily safe,” he said. “To be quite honest, I’d be very nervous to go down to a protest.”



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Iran’s remaining Jews ‘have no plans to leave’

MIRAH LANGER

Most of the small Jewish population still left in Iran plans to stay, seeing it as a home in which they have all the resources to practice their religion. “These 10 000 Jews who remain in Iran – they want to be there. They have nothing to do with other countries. They can tolerate the conditions in Iran as they have accepted that they are a small community which nevertheless has access to all the things necessary to practice being a Jew,” said Iranian Jewish activist and lecturer Arash Abaie. Abaie, who is based in Tehran, surprised the audience at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre in Johannesburg with some unexpected facts about this diminished but highly functioning Jewish community. “We have a chief rabbi to conduct marriages or even oversee divorces; we have a *mohel* [person trained to perform circumcisions], we have a *shochet* (kosher butcher) and kosher slaughterhouse. Everything a Jew wants, they have. We can be independent from other communities, and there’s no worry about the future.”

Abaie, like the majority of Iranian Jews, has a lineage in the country dating back centuries. In fact, it’s estimated that Jews have had an ongoing presence in the region for more than 2 700 years.

Shortly before the Islamic revolution of 1979, the Jewish population of Iran was estimated to be about 100 000. However, after this societal upheaval, the community was hit by waves of immigration – mostly to America and Israel. The result is that the current population is about one tenth of its former size.

It’s a community characterised by high levels of religious practice. In fact, says Abaie somewhat ironically, it was the Islamic revolution that cemented the high level of religious observance in the community. “After the Islamic revolution, public space became more and more religious. Therefore, other religions also become more religious. For example, before the Islamic revolution there were a few mikvahs, but after the revolution, they built many more. They also built many kosher restaurants which had not been there before.”

He said that while there had once been many Jewish schools in Iran, there were nevertheless still two schools open for boys and two for girls, all in Tehran.

Jewish students are allowed to learn about Judaism during state-allocated religious study periods at school, but the education ministry has to approve the textbooks used.

Regarding anti-Semitism in the country, Abaie suggests a complex reality.

Although Jewish men generally will not wear a *kippah* (skullcap) on the street,



synagogues require no security. Yet, they also don’t have public signage identifying them as such.

On an individual basis, for many, it’s irrelevant that he’s Jewish, but others who are more extreme in their religious or political views might show prejudice.

“There is no real serious problem with the people; there are some problems with the government, and Islamic law.

Based on religious beliefs, the law does

openly discriminate against those that are not Muslim in matters such as inheritance.

Meanwhile, while Holocaust denialism erupted after a conference in 2006, in fact, it caused a backlash that had a positive impact on public awareness of the topic, said Abaie.

“After [the Holocaust denialism], many Iranian intellectuals wrote articles or

translated books to show the public that the denialism wasn’t correct.”

The greatest source of animosity between the Jewish community and Islamic state remains the issue of Israel.

Iranian Jews are forbidden to travel to the country, and cannot support it publicly.

Abaie said when it came to understanding their connection to the country, the community made a distinction between politics and religion.



“Like other Jews every day we pray three times for the reconstruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple) and for Jerusalem. We believe in Israel as a holy land, but we don’t necessarily support Netanyahu or everything that the Israeli government does.”

Yet, he pointed out that this was a choice that they might make, no matter where they were living.

How South Africa became a sanctuary for Polish child deportees

MIRAH LANGER

Many know the heroic work of Isaac Ochberg who brought 200 Jewish orphans from Eastern Europe to safety to South Africa in 1921. Yet, during the tumultuous decades that would follow, they weren’t the only large group of orphans to make a new home in South Africa.

In fact, in 1943, 500 Polish children were brought to start a free life in Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape. They had been part of the 1.7 million ordinary Polish citizens deported from their country to forced labour camps in Russian territories in 1939.

“These children came to form the core of the Polish community in South Africa,” said Stefan Szewczuk, the president of the Polish Association of Siberian Deportees in South Africa, who is also the descendent of two of the Polish deportees.

He explained that the children were brought to South Africa at the invitation of then Prime Minister Jan Smuts, who had earlier given permission for Ochberg’s rescue of his orphans. The children, many rescued from slave labour in Siberia, came to settle at a Polish children’s home which was established in a former military barracks.

The children lived at the home until 1947, when some were reunited with their extended families, and others sent to schools around the world.

Szewczuk said that among these Catholic orphans there was one Jewish girl. The Cape Town Jewish community took over her care.

Szewczuk was speaking last week at an event to honour this history at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in



Parktown. A documentary, *A Forgotten Odyssey*, was also screened. It detailed the experience of these citizens, wrested from their homes by the Russian invasion, just three weeks after the German occupation of their country.

“What is well known is the German atrocities in the war; what is less well known are the atrocities that the Russians committed,” said Szewczuk, outlining the aims of the SA Poland History Project, a cross-collaboration between Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, Polish academic Dr Marta Nowakowska, and members of deportee associations. The history project aims to complete research,

cultural activities, and other programmes that honour the legacy of this group.

“The history of the Russian deportation of innocent Polish citizens to Siberia is horrible and heartbreaking, but also interesting,” Polish Vice-Consul Klara Dąbrowska said at the event. Dąbrowska said that she used the word “interesting” in reference to Polish writer Józef Mackiewicz’s decree that “only the truth is interesting”.

She said it was key to “bring this painful history to light”.

“It’s important and needed nowadays, as so many have forgotten our suffering and have tried to build an alternative version of modern history, a version in which Poland is occupied and responsible for the horrible crimes that indeed took place on its land, but not under its jurisdiction,” she said.

“Such meetings don’t only keep the memories of our history fresh, they are an important contribution to Polish political history.”

The Torah shape of tech to come

MIRAH LANGER

From the Sinai tablets to cyberspace scrolls, Google alumni and science writers are the shape-shifters behind the revolutionary digital development of Torah texts.

“Our mission, in short, is to build the future of Torah. We are thinking about what is great about Torah, what is at its essence, what it should be in the future, and how can we use technology to build that,” said Brett Lockspeiser of the aims of the Sefaria organisation.

Lockspeiser is Sefaria’s chief technology officer as well as its co-founder, along with Atlas Obscura website creator Jonathan

Foer. Together, the American duo, who first met during a trip to Israel when they were 17, have founded what they call an online “living library” of Jewish texts.

It’s a digital platform that now hosts about 200 million words from about 3 000 Judaic texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and English. It’s accessed by about one million visitors from almost every county in the world each year.

The open-source collection of texts ranges across the Jewish canon, from translations of the Talmud and Tanach to a wide range of classic and modern commentaries.

For Lockspeiser, instead of taking away from the tradition of Torah study, the digital dimension helps to uphold it.

While the original Torah was a fixed

entity comprising of five books and 80 000 words, usually presented as a scroll affixed to a wooden stem, its true meaning only emerged in the oral tradition. Through face-to-face encounters, people began to engage and interact with analysis of the text.

By treating these texts as data rather than books, they are able to release the content of the texts from the confines of their book format. Instead, the website allows users to click on links between Torah text, translations, related commentary – and even of course the many commentaries on commentary.

The website also has a separate function of allowing users to compile source sheets for Torah study. This utility is so popular,

the site now hosts more than 200 000 of these sheets. Interestingly, most of these study sheets are authored by women.

Ultimately, suggested Lockspeiser, while Sefaria does not use the traditional structure of the Torah, it has made sure its true shape is set free.

“Torah is a network; a conversation where there are lots of voices always talking and referring back to one another. This is something technology is really capable of dealing with – trying to understand these texts not just as books, but as oceans of interconnections. A four-dimensional table across which a conversation spanning continents and time can take place.”

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HospiceWits revamp inspired by personal tragedy

SAUL KAMIONSKY

This week, Hayley Elin can heave a sigh of relief. Ever since her husband, David, passed away at HospiceWits in June 2015, she has been on a mission to give back to the organisation.

The relaunch of the totally refurbished HospiceWits in Houghton last Thursday is the realisation of Elin's dream.

Setting aside her pain and loss, she went all out to refurbish and modernise the establishment she spent so much time in while at her late husband's bedside.

"My husband was diagnosed with cancer, he had multiple myeloma stage four, and was given a few weeks to live," Elin says. "But, because of the wonderful support he got from nephrologists and oncologists, he managed to live for three and a half years.

"Throughout the journey, Hospice was by our side. The support it gives to the family, from grief support to counselling to administering medicine, among other things, is unbelievable. It was available 24/7. We wouldn't have got through this without Hospice."

A year after her husband passed away, Elin began volunteering at the reception of Hospice once or twice a week. Sitting there, she became more and more determined to change the face of the organisation. "It wasn't only lifeless, dull, and dirty, it looked like a mortuary and smelt of death," she says.

Elin envisioned a HospiceWits that would be "like a home away from home for people" who come through

the doors. Knowing that people come to Hospice only for sad reasons, she believes the place should be uplifting and hopeful, not depressing.

Her initial attempt to rejuvenate the institution's bathrooms, starting at the beginning of 2016, ended abruptly with her brother's cancer diagnosis. He survived to tell the story, fortunately, and it gave Elin new determination to redo the Hospice.

At this point, she realised that her dream wasn't a one-woman show. She needed a team.

So, she approached her friend, Farrell Berson, a financial advisor, "who is a very generous, wonderful man, and can do the most wonderful things. He's a perfectionist. He had just finished working on fundraising for the refurbishment of Linksfield Shul.

"I told him, 'I've got this idea. I want you to come with me to Hospice.' He was appalled at the conditions, became the team leader, and roped in his friend, Saul Haberer, who didn't need much persuasion." Haberer is involved in corporate gifts and branding, and loved the idea.

Elin was then introduced to interior designer Lynne Blumberg, "who was in charge of the interior, along with Saul, while Farrell headed up the team and worked tirelessly

every day. Besides checking that everything was done, he was in charge of the finances.

"We did this phenomenal project as a team," says Elin. "Everyone deserves the same recognition because they all contributed" to the newly refurbished in-patient unit.

The organisation now has a

palliative care and peace of mind. It also gives them the opportunity to spend as much quality time as possible with their family during the critical stages of their illness in a top-class facility.

It offers ten short-stay rooms and two long-stay rooms if needed. The rooms are spacious and fully equipped, allowing a family member

to hold the patient and their family in the palm of their hand, to comfort them, to make them understand the bigger picture, to give them hope, and know we are going to celebrate their life."

According to Berson, money was raised from donations from individuals, a contribution from First National Bank, and R80 000 worth of basins and taps. The plumbing was also donated, and they received discounts on furniture.

"What's possible from a small idea, and a group of community-orientated people who just believe in *chesed* (kindness), is amazing," he says.

Because of the renovations, "life has been brought to Hospice", says HospiceWits board Chairperson Michael Judin. "The greatest gift you can give a human being is hope. That's what this place does."

Elin's labour of love means she won't hang up her generous gloves just yet. "I'm still involved with Hospice. I've just completed its ancillary and dementia course. Hopefully, I'm going to continue working in the in-patient unit on a part-time basis."

Elin's advice to anyone battling to overcome the loss of a loved one is, "At the time, you don't believe you will even get through today. But eventually, you think, 'How I can change my loss into something positive?' You understand your sadness and suffering were worthwhile because you've grown, and realise that you can help so many others."

* Sister Sally and Heather asked that their surnames not be used.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Hayley Elin visiting Nora Hoy at HospiceWits

tranquil and uplifting atmosphere, with the new wallpaper, painting, flooring, artworks, and furniture brightening the lives of patients, their families, and staff.

"It has made the place 10 000% better," sister Sally* said at the relaunch. "The patients' families have been so impressed. Some of the patients have said, 'S'joe, it's a nice place!' or 'Is this my room?'. It brings a bit of class and freshness. It's still family-orientated, and the morale of staff has been lifted."

The new unit has been designed to offer patients the best integrated

space for families to spend time together, while two rooms provide a dedicated place for private prayer, meditation, counselling, or spiritual reflection.

"These features create a better environment for Hospice to provide palliative care to patients who are facing health challenges to live their life to the fullest by providing pain management, symptom control, psychological, emotional, and spiritual care," says HospiceWits Chief Executive Jacqui Kaye.

"The Hospice counsellors are there

'Sport: Greed & Betrayal' has trouble separating fact from innuendo

BOOK REVIEW

JACK MILNER



I had a teacher at King David Linksfield who said he loved giving us tests because "it separates the wheat from the chaff". This came to mind when reading Graeme Joffe's tale of woe about sport in South Africa.

It's not because I believe Joffe is making it all up, but rather because like most conspiracy theorists, he tends to see machinations in every action. At times, he connects the dots on what he believes has happened, rather than what has actually happened. The reader needs to be wary not to be sucked into all the rhetoric.

Having said that, there is no doubt that Joffe is spot on when he claims there is corruption in South African sport. Having spent about 10 years with the South African Press Association (from 1996 to 2006), much of that period as sports editor, we covered a number of stories of theft, corruption, and mismanagement at numerous sporting bodies throughout the country.

For Joffe, the fight arose in the world of rugby, then spread to the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC), and it grew from there.

Once he started to chip away at corruption in that body, it apparently led to exposure of the rot at other South African sports bodies – netball, athletics, even horseracing.

It reached a point, Joffe says, of no return.

"No-one pushed me into this fight," he writes. "I had to put on my big boy pants and fight fire with

fire. I was now more determined than ever to expose these fat cats, but would have to do it using other platforms and social media."

Joffe has an opinion about everything, even Oscar Pistorius, not only as an athlete, but as a felon. Some of his theories are interesting, but this is where deductions become conspiracy theory rather than fact.

For example, he writes, "A top South African cyclist called me the same week these drug allegations surfaced and asked if Oscar had a biological passport (an individual electronic record for professional athletes in which biological profiles of doping tests are collated over a period of time).

"Did he know something?" writes Joffe referring to the cyclist. However, the cyclist could have just been asking out of interest. From there, Joffe goes on to talk about the fact that the South African Institute for Drug Free Sport conducted 42 urine tests on paralympic athletes in 2012.

"Was Oscar Pistorius one of them?" he asks. "If not, when was the last time Oscar was tested?"

He discovered that Pistorius fell under the jurisdiction of the International Paralympic Committee and IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations). "The IAAF and drug testing? I guess we don't want to go there with the whole doping scandal, which brought the sport to its knees in 2015."

All the innuendo is there but, sadly, the facts are not.

Joffe grew up in Highlands North, attended

Fairways Primary School, and then Highlands North Boys' High School. He won an American Field Scholar scholarship to Switzerland. On his return to South Africa, he studied for a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in journalism and German at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

He then went to the United States, where he stayed with his sister in Chicago and sent his CV to about 100 media companies, one of which was CNN. He received a response that it was looking for a sports anchor, so he went for the interview in Atlanta. He got the job that, he admits, set him up for life.

Back in South Africa, he had a show on 94.7 Highveld Stereo, and became quite a celebrity in the world of South African sport.

However, the intrigue started when Joffe picked up what he believed to be a conflict of interest between journalist Mark Keohane, based in Western Province, and rugby player Luke Watson, for whom he was acting as an unregistered agent, setting up deals for which he was getting a 7.5% cut.

In his digging into Keohane's antics, he uncovered more possible dirty dealings and eventually alleged charges of drug abuse and sexual misconduct. It forced Keohane to resign from his post as spokesman for the South African Olympic team ahead of the 2012 London Games.

From there, Joffe progressed into South African rugby, where he picked up conflicts of interests and massive alleged questionable payments in the sport.

As he kept digging, Joffe started to expose layer after layer of alleged corruption and bad faith among local sports administrators. The more he found out, the more he put out there, the more the pressure against him started to build.

Joffe points out that it didn't take long for the personal attacks to begin, including threats to his life. He was also lambasted with a few anti-Semitic

comments, the most vehement of which allegedly came from SuperSport's Imtiaz Patel.

"Imtiaz Patel had already taken a disliking to me back in 2002, when at the end of a work-related meeting that I had requested after being 'blocked' from SuperSport production work, he told me, 'You Jews know what to f-ing do,' he wrote. "I left it there, but you never forget."

At the same meeting, Joffe alleged that Patel ranted about Dr Ali Bacher, whom he felt had previously "done him in for a top job at Cricket SA.

"Amazing, how that relationship all turned around as Bacher got some plum contract work with SuperSport for a series called 'Ali Bacher in conversation with...'," wrote Joffe.

As the threats against him continued, Joffe alleges in his book, blogs were set up by other journalists to discredit him. He also believes that his phone was tapped and emails hacked. This might seem far-fetched, but a number of journalists have suffered similar fates.

With lawsuits and death threats coming his way, Joffe secretly left the country and went to the United States.

A number of journalists who know Joffe well say he has some good arguments, but has lost the plot along the way.

The book's construction, with notes, letters, and emails shoved into the body of the text, doesn't make for fluid reading. However, it's an intriguing insight into the world of South African sport, and even if only 50% of the information can be substantiated, it's clear that sport in this country needs a serious clean out.

• Jack Milner has been a sports journalist for decades.



Jewish teens shrug off comfortable SA for Israeli boarding school

JORDAN MOSHE

If you left home to attend boarding school in a foreign country, what would you be most concerned about? Language barriers, cultural differences, and homesickness probably come to mind for most of us.

However, the group of young Jewish teens setting off to study in Israel told the *SA Jewish Report* there's only one issue foremost on their mind: making a good first impression.

Families said farewell at Beyachad in Johannesburg on Monday to nine young South Africans who will be relocating to Israel this coming Sunday. They, and three Cape Town teens, are leaving behind their family and friends to live and study in Israel. They will complete the senior phase of their high school career at the Naale Elite Academy.



“Besides the educational benefit, this is a personal journey for you,” the director of the Israel Centre in South Africa, Liat Amar-Arran, told the group. “It’s an opportunity to grow, learn, explore, meet new people, go on adventures, and really bring your soul to a bigger place.”

The farewell dinner included brief addresses from the programme’s regional co-ordinator, Livnat Katz; Yeshiva College Principal Rob Long; and Rabbi Motti Hadar, the principal of Torah Academy Boys’ High School.

Each student is carefully selected, going through an intense full day of screening by two clinical psychologists flown from Israel who test their mental and academic agility. They will be based at one of the schools in the academy’s network around the country, experiencing Israel through learning, extracurricular activities, school trips, and educational outings.

“The criteria for Naale is a child who is confident, outgoing, and social,” says Katz. “They need to be independent and a good student. It’s important that they can cope with the transition to a new country, and the challenges of being away from home.”

Jessie Thompson, Shiran Wiessman, Ori Fisher, Kira Levin, Amy Bennett, Montana Abkin, Daniel Glasser, Esther Kushner, and Jade Evans are all eager to embrace the life of a *Sabra* (a Jewish person born in Israel), and achieve a sense of responsibility and independence.

“We’ll learn how to get things done for ourselves,” says Bennett. “We have it easy in South Africa, with parents and maids

looking after us, cleaning for us, and making our beds.

“We have a chance to learn how to do things for ourselves in a new setting, with new people while learning a new language. We have a chance to be responsible, which is scary and exciting.”

The group’s priorities are to learn how to budget, do their washing, and hone other everyday life skills. They don’t lament their new responsibilities, rather they express keenness to learn how to care for themselves. They all smile when they talk about taking care of themselves free from the clutches of “clinging Jewish parents”, who they say they will miss but can live without for a while.

Five of the nine students have never visited Israel before, and in spite of some apprehension, they are all eager to step into a new space and forge independent identities. “You’re making a new name for yourself,” the teens say. “It’s like a new life where nobody knows you. You have new chances outside the bubble of Joburg life, and learn who you really are.”

They say they are undaunted by the potential educational challenges ahead, but they definitely harbour certain fears: frizzy hair and weight gain are among them. “You’re surrounded by good food and constant humidity,” says one teenage girl. “We’ll have to find a way to make a good first impression on complete strangers when our hair is out of control. That’s going to be difficult.”

They say they will miss friends, family, and South African food the most. However, they agree that separation from their siblings and biltong is a small price to pay for the experience of a lifetime.

Technology like WhatsApp will make sure that they can stay in touch, and Israel’s central location makes getting things from home via travelling friends quite easy.

Honorary KDL chefs bake up a storm

King David Pre-Primary Linksfield pupils Yuri Anuchin, Peyton Utian, and Ricky Liebowitz had great fun learning about being chefs while baking chocolate-chip biscuits. The pupils were learning about professions today.



King David heads go to Harvard

The four heads of King David Pre-Primary Schools were given an opportunity by the South African Board of Jewish Education to spend a week at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education summer programme in July.

They formed part of 391 dedicated and experienced educators from 94 countries, brought together with the desire to make their classrooms places where the learners of today (from pre-primary to Grade 12) can become the citizens and potential leaders of tomorrow.

For more than 50 years under the watchful eye of Howard Gardner, a well-known professor of psychology, the Project Zero research project has examined the key facets of human potential, and asked how educators can design learning experiences that are engaging for all students.

Project Zero asks questions about the type of learning experiences and assessment practises that best prepare our learners for the demands of an unpredictable and ever shifting future.

Over five days, through intense plenary sessions, mini-courses,

and study groups, the educators were taken through the core aspects of Project Zero research which included nurturing critical and creative thinking, the development of understanding, what learning looks like, how to make thinking visible, and finally, how to design learning for a variety of students in different contexts.

Studying with such acclaimed academics, walking through the courtyards and gates of Harvard Yard, and spending time with like-minded educators was a privilege and an honour. The educators have brought back substantial information and energy, and hope to be imbue Project Zero ideas into their classrooms and school environments.

Victory Park arts and culture festival a slam dunk

King David High School Victory Park’s week-long arts and culture festival left an epic memento – a colourful graffiti wall painted by the students.

Held from 18 to 25 August, the festival programme included dance and choreography, short film, slam poetry, improvisation, graffiti-painting, special effects and makeup – even Mandala-making.

Competitions including a one-act play, mini monologue, and a sing-off were held during the week, with the highlights showcased on Sunday, 25 August.



High school students are proud of their latest artistic project – the graffiti wall



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CEOs in the kitchen for the community

Teljoy Chief Executive Rami Sassen and Discovery’s CEO Adrian Gore are firm believers in giving back to the community and volunteering their time to help others. They spent time preparing food for underprivileged families this month with Yad Aharon & Michael, South Africa’s largest Jewish food fund.

The organisation’s CEO Soup Kitchen Initiative, also known as Yad’s Soup for the Soul, aims to show that business executives can find the time to give back to the community in a meaningful way by volunteering or donating, and to increase awareness among the community.

Yad Aharon & Michael was created after identifying a significant need for a kosher soup

kitchen in the greater Johannesburg area. It serves soup to individuals in need, feeding more than 590 families a week.



Lights, camera, action at ORT Digital Skills Academy

King David students Elan Kolman and Rivka Berelowitz were recently chosen to travel to Sofia, Bulgaria, for the World ORT Digital Skills Academy. With 27 participants from different countries coming together to learn digital skills in photography and videography, the summer school had a unique buzz to it.

It is one of a number of opportunities for students and teachers created through the affiliation of World ORT and the South African Board of Jewish Education a year ago. These include teacher training, virtual connections, awards, and competitions at various locations across the globe.

ORT SA staff member Lauri Kruger travelled as a chaperone and participant in the academy.

“I was thrilled to be chosen to accompany the two South African youths to

Bulgaria. For the first time in my life, I could relate to lights, camera, action,” said Lauri. “We also got a taste of the behind-the-scenes atmosphere of a television newsroom when visiting Bulgarian TV. Little did we know that we would appear on the national news! It had us laughing all the way back home.”

Ayla Estreich, a maths teacher from the United Kingdom and an ORT Digital Skills Academy staff member said, “I cannot overstate the value gained from children being able to learn about something that they want to learn about, and to collaborate with peers from around the world with the same passion as them.” The ORT school in Bulgaria boasts a state-of-the-art media centre, and has a fully equipped studio and production facilities.



Lauri Kruger with the lights, camera, action clipboard

‘Sandwich generation’ gives WIZO food for thought

The WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organisation) Forum on 15 August dealt with the challenges of being part of the sandwich generation.

This is the generation of people, typically in their thirties or forties, who are responsible for bringing up their own children and taking care of their ageing parents.

Former WIZO chairperson Janice Leibowitz described the challenges she continues to face as the filling in the sandwich. Forum guest Tova Goldstein reminded us that life is not all good or all bad, we need to reframe our thoughts, and listen to our inner voice.



WHAT'S ON

Sunday (1 September)

- The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre presents a screening of popular documentary, *The Accountant of Auschwitz*, in partnership with the German Embassy. Time: 18:30 for 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. Free admission, donations always welcome. RSVP dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100.
- The Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society and Life, Toast & Chutzpah hosts life strategist Nina Morris Lee, who will tell her awe-inspiring story, share life lessons, insights, and practical take-outs on how she coped when life threw her an extreme curve ball. Time: 10:00 for 10:30. Venue: The Middleton in Morningside. Tickets: R275 each, includes delicious *nasharei* created by Nina. To book, call 011 485 5232/email gloria@jwbs.co.za/message 083 441 7287.
- Second Innings hosts Professor Brian Buch in *A memorable morning of music with the Jewish Guild Orchestra*. Time: 09:45 for tea; 10:30 for the speaker. Venue: the Gerald Horwitz Lounge, second floor, Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R20 members, R40 visitors, includes tea/coffee and refreshments. Contact: 011 483 7425.

Monday (2 September)

- The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) hosts Nicola Galambik, the founder and board chair of the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator on *The challenges and possibilities of tackling youth employment in South Africa*. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office on 011 648 1053.

Thursday (5 September)

- 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.
- Jewish Learning Institute course, *The Kabbalah of prayer. Learn how to pray more effectively and how to regard your personal wishes as part of your relationship with the creator*. Time: 19:15. Venue: Sandton Central Shul, 8 Stella Street, Sandton (opposite Gautrain) Info: 011 440 6600, www.jli.org.za or jli@chabad.org.za

Friday (6 September)

- Hebrew reading crash course with Ephraim Zaslansky. Time: 18:30. Venue: Sandton Central Shul, 8 Stella Street, Sandton (opposite Gautrain). Info: 011 440 6600, www.jli.org.za or jli@chabad.org.za

WIZO donates child-friendly wheelchairs in KwaZulu-Natal

Twenty one children in the Valley of a Thousand Hills were given brightly coloured, child-sized wheelchairs on 20 August. This is part of an initiative of WIZO (the Women’s International Zionist Organisation) South Africa and Wheelchairs of Hope to assist marginalised people and help vulnerable children.

A wheelchair is completely out of reach for most. That’s why WIZO South Africa has joined forces with Israeli non-profit organisation Wheelchairs of Hope to bring the child-sized wheelchairs to the country.

Wheelchairs of Hope provides lightweight, reliable, and child friendly wheelchairs for children in developing countries. They are more than instruments of mobility, they are chariots of hope that help children gain access to education, friends, and peers.

“Our wheelchair is specifically designed for children, as we wish to empower education through mobility,” said Pablo Kaplan who together with Chava Rothstein founded Wheelchairs of Hope in Israel in 2009.

“Mobility from early childhood is a gateway to education. By giving access to education, we create a new generation with better skills, confidence, and hope.”

In 2013, Kaplan and Rothstein presented their idea at the opening day of the United Nations General Assembly, and were selected to serve on Unicef’s (the United Nations Children’s Fund’s) task force for assistive technologies.

This inspired WIZO South Africa, a voluntary

organisation dedicated to the upliftment of the marginalised, to ensure that it could help as many of our vulnerable children as possible.

“WIZO Durban has taken this on as its passion project,” said Laurienne Baitz, co-chairperson. “Many wheelchairs have already been donated in KwaZulu-Natal to children at the Open Air School in Durban, the Give a Child a Family organisation in Margate, recipients in Harding and Ndwedwe, and now to 21 children living in the Valley of a Thousand Hills.”

The children and their parents with their Wheelchairs of Hope donated by WIZO Durban

WIZO partnered with The Valley Trust to identify children in the Valley of Thousand Hills most urgently in need of independent mobility. This collaboration resulted in a big day for the 21 differently abled children when they received their own wheelchairs in a ceremony at The Valley Trust.

“The hand-over of wheelchairs is a fun day-out,” said Baitz, “but more importantly, it gives dignity, control, and self-reliance to 21 children, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Who knows where that independence will lead?”

Blue Box competition wows the judges

An item of jewellery depicting the traditional charity box for raising funds for Israel, the Blue Box, was declared the winner of the Blue Box for Israel competition at King David Linksfield Primary School on 16 August.

The pendant, made to scale using an old Jewish National Fund (JNF) postage stamp and Magen David charms, was made by Leah Bloch and Rebecca Kallner.

The competition, held on Tu B’Av, was the culmination of two months’ work by 105 Grade 5 pupils, who depicted the Blue Box in sculpture, painting and jewellery. More than 60 artworks were entered into the competition. Their work was guided by Enid Shapiro, the head of Hebrew at the school, JNF Education Officer Bev Price, and art teacher Tracy Enslin.

The competition was judged by Isla Feldman, national chairman JNF South Africa; Liat Amar Arran, shaliach of the Jewish Agency for Israel; and Kathy Kaler, chief executive of 101.9 ChaiFM.

Second prize went to Amber Rajak and Chiara Waksman, who made a sculpture titled *Starry Night* from shekels, wood, canvas, and

glitter paper.

Third prize was awarded jointly to Mila Krost, Raquel Bravo, and Rebecca Rabinowitz, who made a sculpture of Lego titled *History of the Blue Box*, and Maya Lowenthal and Noa Belcher for their relief-painting of a Blue Box.

Special mention went to a sculpture made by Sasha Hatzkilson and Mecah Ash.

• If you would like a Blue Box for Israel competition at your school, please contact Bev Price on 011 645 2579 or bevprice@beyachad.co.za

The winning entry

Letters

ISRAEL NOT THE ONLY COUNTRY TO BAN TROUBLEMAKERS

The brouhaha surrounding the on-again, off-again visit of United States congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar has generated diverse opinion on both sides of the political spectrum. As predictable as Pavlov’s dog, the left not only castigated Netanyahu, but gave those hostile to Trump a barrel full of ammunition to attack him.

Israel’s prohibition of groups like the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions campaign – which doesn’t call for a regime change but the demise of the Jewish state – has justification. Perhaps those critics of Netanyahu need to ask what country in the world would allow anyone hell-bent on its destruction to enter that country? Is Israel the only country in the world to ban those with a nefarious agenda from entering with the sole purpose of stirring trouble? This intention has been made abundantly clear by these two women. Other countries have banned visitors for far less than wanting to cause trouble.

The South African government, which boasts the most advanced constitution in the world, has

banned not once but three times a visit from none other than the Dalai Lama, one of the leading lights for peace in the world today. The sole purpose of his visit was to celebrate the birthday of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, attend a gathering of Nobel laureates, and meet the “elders”. Then there was Britain’s banning of Dutch MP Geert Wilders for his right-wing leanings. What about Muhammed Fethullah Gülen, the Turkish Islamic scholar banned from entering Turkey? Of course, no one would highlight the Morrison government’s ban of right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos from entering Australia. One can cite hundreds of similar instances of countries which have banned individuals from entering.

However, did any of these “bannings” make the front page of the *New York Times*? Perhaps the Dalai Lama story made page seven, but if it’s Israel, stop the press! It’s the epitome of double standards. – Allan Wolman, Israel

Time to have the courage of our unpopular convictions

It wasn't my idea, although admittedly it resonated strongly with me. I heard it on BBC radio when a listener called in to suggest that dolphins are show-offs. The caller didn't explain why, but I can see why he thought so. What with their multilingual ability to communicate with each other, their ridiculously fine-tuned hearing, and the constant and irritatingly happy smiles, it's as if they have some information we

couldn't even begin to imagine. It was the epitome of an unpopular opinion. And I loved it. Not because I hate dolphins and want to see them wedged tightly into a tin of Pick n Pay no-name-brand tuna, but because it took courage for the listener to express a view that is (for good reason) unpopular. After all, what kind of psychopath doesn't like dolphins? I was so impressed with the idea that I

decided to introduce the concept to my show at 07:25. I chose this time because this is when children are in the car, and I wanted to encourage parents and children to express a thought that they know might be unpopular, but they felt was worth saying. I knew also that expressing a "unique" thought is much like yawning. Before you have had time to uncover your mouth, half the room has joined you in your need for oxygen.

It began predictably with listeners saying that they enjoy pineapple on pizza, that there is no difference between Pepsi and Coke, and that pink and white marshmallows taste the same. One brave listener claimed to enjoy reading in Times New Roman font, and another mentioned that he hated The Carpenters. It swiftly moved to Trumpian politics, and then back to South Africa.

What I didn't anticipate was the resistance to the very idea of the three-minute slot. One listener called it "negative" in what is normally a positive show, and others said it created divisiveness so early in the morning (the assumption being that divisiveness after 09:00 is perfectly acceptable). It's this view that I found to be the most interesting and valuable. Why? Because we seem to be so far down the road to conformity and fear that the expression of a view that isn't the same as the crowd isn't seen as unique and interesting, but negative and problematic.

Galileo got himself into more than a spot of bother when he suggested (back in the day) that the earth revolved around the sun, and not the other way around, as the church believed. History is bursting with examples of "mavericks" who refused to be echoes of the masses. Many paid a terrible price for

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



their thoughts. Jewish oral law, specifically the Talmud, has taught that debate and robust argument, alternative views, and rational reasoning is one of the quintessential aspects of being human. And, although a dissenting opinion might be discarded, it's valuable to hear, even if it's simply to confirm why the majority is correct. And yet all this is at risk in a global, social-media driven society that worships hashtags and catchy sound bites over substance. This week, the queen of this medium, Kim Kardashian, was forced to change the name of a new brand of clothing from Kimono to Skims because she was accused of cultural appropriation from 14th century Japan. And, because the Pavlovian phrase was used, the masses rose up against the monarch who had to capitulate before serious damage was done. The fact that she has been left with two million garments that are unusable because it has the brand name Kimono on it doesn't bother the warriors, because there is no phrase that can be associated with it. That's why it's important for us to have the courage to voice an opinion that's unpopular. It's vital that our children hear the message, and that we support them when they do. Very rarely do we die from hearing something we don't agree with. Even if it's about dolphins.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Any visit to the Constitutional Court is a stirring experience

Once used as a prison for political activists among them Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, today it serves as an important vehicle for safeguarding the fundamental human rights and freedoms on which our post-apartheid society is founded.

As such, it embodies the miracle of South Africa's democratic transformation. It's an inspiring example of how even instruments of repression can become a means of promoting peace and justice.

This week, after more than a decade of complex legal proceedings that included an initial ruling by the South African Human Rights Commission and two subsequent court cases, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) hate-speech case against Cosatu's (the Congress of South African Trade Union's) Bongani Masuku finally came before the Constitutional Court.

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

one by one, some of this country's most eminent legal practitioners presented their arguments about whether Masuku's comments amounted to hate speech that targeted the mainstream Jewish community. Though the case revolves around certain comments that we believe to have been menacing and defamatory against on our own community, the across-the-board support we have received for our stance is heartening. To quote one of the supportive tweets received this week, "Hate speech has no place in any society that sees itself as free and democratic. You take up the



Leadership of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in the Constitutional Court with the legal teams for the SA Human Rights Commission and SA Holocaust & Genocide Centre

As reported elsewhere in this issue, the matter concerns various threatening and abusive statements made against Jewish supporters of Israel by Masuku in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 Gaza conflict. While Cosatu has sought to portray the matter as an attempt to silence "legitimate criticism" of Israel, what we believe is at stake is the right of Jews to express support for Israel without being threatened with violent reprisal. As such, the court's ruling will have significant implications for how the law concerning the anti-hate speech provisions in the Constitution and Equality Act is interpreted and applied in South Africa. How seriously the Masuku matter is being taken by other civil society organisations, particularly those that involve themselves in combating unfair discrimination, was demonstrated both by the number of *amici curiae* who participated (friends of the court who present expert evidence to assist the bench in coming to its decision), and by the large number of people attending. The Constitutional Court was packed, as

cudgels for every citizen, irrespective of race, colour, creed, or gender."

The Masuku matter is, in fact, the second time that a case of anti-Semitism has been brought by the SAJBD before the Constitutional Court. The previous one concerned our complaint against the Islamic Unity Convention, which was frequently cited by those presenting to the court this week.

When these and other SAJBD cases are taken into account, combined with the important input the board has made into the Constitution and Equality Act, one realises how much of an impact our community has had in terms of influencing the development of anti-hate-speech law in this country. It's one of the ways the board has been able to fulfil its mandate to protect the rights to dignity and equality of the Jewish community and make a meaningful contribution to building South African democracy as a whole.

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

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

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LUKE ALFRED

But here was competition of a whole different order. Did he deserve to be in

Ranked 20th in the over-60 Master's category going into the championships, Lotkin went out in the 400m medley and did the only thing he knew how to – swim as fast as he could. At the end of 400



He was thrilled, but there was more to come. Later, he carried the South African flag at the championship's closing ceremony. "I'm an extremely proud South

After post-military spells in California and with his family in New South Wales,

"Having experienced South Korea, I'm better prepared," he says. "I'm mentally stronger and more self-confident. That medal has done wonders for my self-esteem after being eyeballed by those guys in the holding area."

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