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UN report calls BDS ‘fundamentally anti-Semitic’

TALI FEINBERG

The United Nations (UN) has released its first comprehensive report on anti-Semitism, in which for the first time, it stipulates that the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel is “fundamentally anti-Semitic”.

Israel’s ambassador to South Africa, Lior Keinan, says this is hugely significant because for the first time in the organisation’s history, it has acknowledged that BDS is anti-Semitic and problematic. “The fact that BDS is included in this report symbolises that it is part of the problem and not the solution, while BDS is always claiming to be the latter. It’s excellent that the UN has admitted this.”

The report notes that anti-Semitic elements include the BDS movement’s “objectives, activities, and effects”. It goes on to say that “critics of BDS assert that the architects of the campaign have indicated that one of its core aims is to bring about the end of the state of Israel”. The critics, according to the report, also say “some individuals have employed anti-Semitic narratives, conspiracies, and tropes in the course of expressing support for the BDS campaign”.

“Special Rapporteur [Ahmed Shaheed] ... stresses that expression which draws upon anti-Semitic tropes or stereotypes, rejects the right of Israel to exist, or advocates discrimination against Jewish individuals because of their religion should be condemned,” the report says.

Keinan agreed that the report was relevant to South Africans what with South Africa being the “ground zero” of BDS. He said it wasn’t just the UN that had acknowledged this fact, it had joined a trend around the world in “seeing through” BDS. “The European Union, Germany, Czech Republic, and 27 states in the United States are all seeing that underneath a small layer of ‘let’s take care of the Palestinians’ is strictly anti-Semitism.”

The ambassador said he accepted the fact that countries like South Africa could be critical of Israel and engage a tough approach, but they were still engaging with

the Jewish state. “They are not saying – like BDS – boycott Israel and wipe it off the map. There is a line between these two approaches.”

The ambassador warned that “BDS-SA would like the government here to exclude any dialogue with Israel, but that isn’t happening. Every time we engage with the government, it proves we are a long way from where BDS wants us to be. The world finally understands what Israel has been saying, and hopefully the South African government will acknowledge it soon. The report proves we aren’t biased. Those same countries that are now seeing BDS for what it is are not necessarily ones we see eye to eye with, but the evidence is there for them.”

The ambassador said he always asks people, “If we sign a peace agreement with the Palestinians tomorrow, will BDS go away? It won’t, will it? It will still find a way to fight Israel because it wants the elimination of Israel. BDS will simply find a new façade to keep up its aim of destroying the Jewish state. BDS is here to stay – just as anti-Semitism is here to stay. The fact that it’s no longer just us saying this makes this report a real milestone in the fight against anti-Semitism.”

Meanwhile, our very own South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director, Wendy Kahn, contributed to the UN report when she took part in an “Expert stakeholder consultation on monitoring and combatting anti-Semitism” in Geneva. The one-day meeting took place under the auspices of Shaheed, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, and the American Jewish Committee’s Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights.

“I gave a presentation on the current situation regarding anti-Semitism in South Africa, and how the SAJBD responds to it, with reference to the kind of legal and constitutional remedies that are available for confronting racism and hate speech in the country,” says Kahn. “I was able to explain how in South Africa, a substantial majority of anti-Semitic incidents and rhetoric are linked in some way to anti-Israel sentiment and events in the Middle

East in general. We are delighted that we were listened to, and that BDS anti-Semitism is recognised for what it is.”

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, says, “When the United Nations, a body that as a collective has had a longstanding anti-Israel attitude, expresses concern that the BDS movement could be anti-Semitic, then we should take note. The UN report is part of a growing realisation that the sole purpose of the BDS movement is to use economic and political means to bring about the destruction of the one and only Jewish state. It follows that the BDS movement is rottenly anti-Semitic to the core.”

“The movement is inherently destructive, has no interest in peace, or even in the well-being of the Palestinians. And like all anti-Semitic movements throughout history, it falls on the wrong side of history and will fail.”

Other astounding findings in the report are the fact that 55.98% of Poles surveyed reported that they would not accept a Jew as a family member, and about 42% of Hungarians said they thought Jews held too much sway over the worlds of finance and international affairs. School textbooks in Saudi Arabia contained anti-Semitic passages, with some passages even urging violence against Jews.

Continued on page 5>>

A ‘miraculous’ escape

Screenshot from a cell phone video



See story on page 5

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University of Toronto kosher controversy ‘absurd’

The leaders of Israel’s seven universities are expressing their outrage over the University of Toronto’s Graduate Student Union conflating a kosher food programme with support for Israel.

“Just when we thought that we’d seen it all regarding the ascent of anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism on campus, the Graduate Student Union at the University of Toronto took this theatre of the absurd to new heights by characterising kosher food as ‘pro-Israel,’” Ron Robin, the chairperson of the Committee of University Heads of Israel, said in a statement released on Tuesday. Robin is president of the University of Haifa.

In response to a Jewish student’s request for the union to officially support the Kosher Forward Campaign, the union’s external commissioner suggested that the executive committee might be reluctant to advance such a motion to its board of directors, saying that since [Jewish campus organisation] Hillel was “pro-Israel”, supporting the motion would go against the “will of the membership”.

The union later apologised for “unintentionally caus(ing) harm toward the Jewish community”.

US embassy issues travel warning for Israel

The United States embassy in Jerusalem has issued a travel warning for visiting Americans in the aftermath of the US announcement that the government did not consider the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank as illegal.

The warning issued on Monday said visiting Americans could be targets of “individuals and groups opposed to the secretary of state’s recent announcement”. It covers those visiting or planning to visit Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Israeli restaurant hacked with anti-Semitic message

The phone line and voicemail of a restaurant in

Portland, Oregon, that bills itself as selling Israeli street food was hacked and its greeting changed to an anti-Semitic message.

The Shalom Y’all restaurant said in a message posted on its website that it became aware of the incident on Saturday evening. City police are investigating the incident as a possible bias crime.

The line was repaired and then hacked again on Sunday evening, according to the message, which said the attackers also “committed various hate/prank calls using our phone number”. The calls were made to two other Middle Eastern restaurants in the area, according to KGW8, the local NBC affiliate.

Sacha Baron Cohen to be honoured by ADL



Sacha Baron Cohen was this week honoured by the Anti-Defamation League for “vision, imagination, and creativity”.

Cohen, who most recently portrayed late Israeli spy Eli Cohen in a Netflix series, received the International Leadership Award during the civil rights organisation’s Never is Now summit on anti-Semitism and hate held in New York City on Thursday.

The actor, comedian and director’s political satire includes the films *Borat* and *The Dictator*. “Baron Cohen has used humour and satire to expose people’s inherent biases by depicting racists, anti-Semites, neo-Nazis, Islamophobes, and others as deeply flawed, ordinary people whose prejudices are, ultimately, laughable,” the ADL said in a statement.

World News In Brief

Israel turns Jews into extremists, says politician

A candidate for British parliament representing the Conservative Party said that local Jews who go to Israel “have come back as extremists – as people that are brainwashed”, but has since expressed “deep regret” for his remarks.

In a 2104 speech delivered to the European Parliament in Brussels, Amjad Bashir, who is currently running for parliament in a Leeds constituency, said, “Young men are going over from England where I come from, people of the Jewish faith who my grandchildren have grown up with as decent young men,” according to a report in *The Jewish Chronicle* on Monday. “They will not listen to reason. There is something very peculiar and wrong going on in Israel,” he said, blaming “rabbis and politicians”.

Prague to return Jewish gravestone fragments

Pieces of Jewish gravestones used to pave sidewalks in Prague will be given to the Jewish community to return to the city’s Old Jewish Cemetery.

Headstones from the 19th-century cemetery were cut into cobblestones during roadwork ahead of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit to Czechoslovakia in 1987, *Radio Prague International* reported. The cemetery is no longer used for burials.

The Czech Jewish community has called for the removal and return of the stones for years.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:14	Johannesburg
19:15	20:13	Cape Town
18:15	19:11	Durban
18:15	19:29	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:44	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:32	East London

Torah Thought

Love at second sight

Why are so many marriages failures? And why do so many fail so soon after the wedding?

This week, we read about the first *shidduch* (Jewish arranged marriage) in history. Abraham sends his trusted servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for his son, Isaac. He returns with Rebeccah, and they live happily ever after. The verse tells us, “And [Isaac] took Rebeccah, she became his wife, and he loved her.” So, it would appear that in the Biblical scenario, true love comes after marriage, not before. Before a marriage can take place, there must be a commonality between two people, shared values, mutual aspirations and, yes, certainly a degree of chemistry. But true love must be nurtured over time.

Without doubt, a primary cause of many marital breakdowns today is the unrealistic expectations that people have going into marriage. Our generation has been fed a constant diet of romantic novels, hit-parade love songs, glossy magazine advice, and Hollywood fiction, all of which bear little resemblance to the real world.

“We fell in love!” “It was love at first

sight.” I confess to being a bit of a romantic myself, but surely “love at first sight” has to be a contradiction in terms. “True love” takes years to develop. If you are honest with yourself, the only thing you can feel at first sight is lust. “Love at first sight” is a monumental *bobba meise* (old wives’ tale)!

So, we “fall in love” thinking it’s real, hoping it will be true and lasting, and then at the slightest disappointment, we fall right out of love. Which only proves that it wasn’t true love in the first place. True love takes years. True love is the mature conviction that our lives are intertwined and inseparable no matter what – even if my partner gets wrinkled, goes grey, flabby, or loses his money. That kind of love is measured not in romantics but in long-term commitment.

The first rule is patience. Love takes time. It needs nurturing. Sadly, too many give up too soon.

Second, the Hollywood effect leaves us so naively impressionable that our partners have to be the proverbial Prince Charming or Princess Kate. But then, at the first sign of imperfection, “Hey, I bought a lemon!

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Sydenham Shul



I’m outta here!” Remember, nobody is perfect. Not even you, my dear. In the passage of time we do indeed discover the little imperfections of our chosen partners. Some things can be unlearned with gentle encouragement and, again, patience. Others, we may just have to learn to live with. Acceptance is an art. Weigh up in your mind the relative significance of minor inadequacies against the greater good in the grand scheme of things. You may very well realise that you can actually live with those small, petty irritants. Admittedly, if it’s something major then you may need to go for some serious counselling.

Marriage is the beginning, not the end. If we can be realistic about our relationships, we can find true love. But it takes time, patience, and the wisdom to overlook the little things that annoy us. Then, please G-d, with true commitment will come true love, togetherness, a lifetime of sharing, and the greatest, most enduring contentment and blessing in our personal lives.

South African Jewish Report

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Editor Peta Krost Maunder – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz • Journalists Nicola Miltz • Tali Feinberg Jordan Moshe • Editorial co-ordinator Martine Bass – editorial@sajewishreport.co.za • Proofreader Kim Hatchuel • CEO Dani Kedar

ceo@sajewishreport.co.za • Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za • Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution: Sandy Furman • Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200

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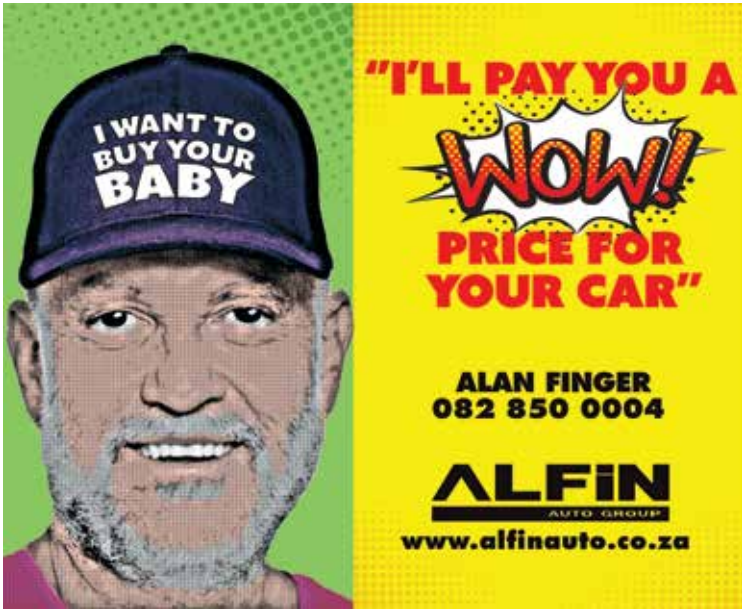
Weekend horror as students held for ransom

NICOLA MILTZ

Internationally acclaimed South African cinematographer Lance Gewer was annoyed when his son and two friends didn’t arrive home early for Friday night supper last week. Little did he know that they had been kidnapped and held for ransom. This King David Linksfield alumnus told the *SA Jewish Report* he was so grateful his son was alright, but he and all concerned are totally shaken after what felt like a horror movie. As the sun set over Johannesburg ushering in the Shabbos Project, Gewer’s son, Ben, 21, of Observatory, and his friend Jesse Elk, 19, of Emmarentia – both first-year students

forced them into a secluded area. After cash had been withdrawn from their accounts using their pin numbers, the attackers tied them up, and demanded a ransom from Elk’s parents. “We feared for our lives,” said Elk, describing what happened in the beautiful viewing spot his friends had been escaping to all their lives. “We were hanging out and chatting. I had written my last exam, and we were having a good time when five men swarmed us with guns,” he said. Their assailants, apparently young men in their mid to late 20s dressed in “township swag”, made them lie face down on the ground. Two of their attackers fled to a nearby automatic teller machine (ATM)

Emdon-Elk went cold as she answered a call from her son. “Hi mom I need you to keep calm,” she heard him say on the line, “this isn’t a joke. This man needs you to pay R8 000 in the next ten minutes, or he will shoot me.” Said Erica, “My initial reaction was anger. I was furious and wanted to call the police. I handed the phone to my husband, who handled the rest of the ransom calls. The whole night is a blur. I was a wreck. I couldn’t think straight. I was hysterical.” There was pandemonium as dinner guests scrambled to assist, making calls to security companies, the police, and doing whatever they could to help. The Elks tried to track down where their



car was stolen from Wits,” he said. A private Muslim security company, Vision Tactical, assisted the families in tracking the movements of the attackers and pinpointing the exact location where they had left the vehicle. In the meantime, the victims managed to untie themselves and walk safely to the Bolton home in Kensington to relay to Ezechial’s mom what had happened to them. Meanwhile, Clifford Elk was still on the phone negotiating with the kidnappers when urgent SMSs from his son to say they were safe were coming through on his phone. Clifford said there was a lot of uncertainty throughout the ordeal. “There was this fear and uncertainty about whether the threats were real or not. When we battled to make the payments, I had a sense the kidnapper might punish us for that. In hindsight, I think we were played, and I feel like a fool and a victim. I’m not sure if I could’ve or should’ve responded differently in the moment. The panic sets in, and you don’t have all the information, you’re not sure if you are doing the right thing, and there’s a lot of uncertainty.”

Security experts this week said kidnappings for ransom were on the rise, and were occurring regularly. Security specialist Mike Bolhuis of Specialised Security Services, who was called to the Friday night scene, told the *SA Jewish Report*: “Kidnappings are on the rise in South Africa. I now deal with up to two cases a week. “Last Friday evening is a terrifying form of random abduction. This type of kidnapping is so new that most victims are taken by complete surprise. Unfortunately, this terrifying crime

is becoming more prevalent.” He said modern technology had paved the way for an increase in this dangerous crime. “Cell phones, EFTs and eWallets allow kidnappers to communicate easily from anywhere, to get the money quickly and remotely, and then to disappear without a trace. The anonymity of the crime makes random kidnapping attractive to criminals.” Based on the latest police statistics, about 16 people are kidnapped or abducted in South Africa daily, according to *ENCA* this week. Not all of them end in ransom demands however, but random, fast, opportunistic kidnappings are a concern, say security insiders. Gauteng police noted a spike in kidnappings for ransom in December 2018. Gauteng spokesperson Brigadier Mathapelo Peters told *Eyewitness News*, “We’ve had kidnappings for ransom where children are kidnapped, and the capturers demand a ransom from parents who end up paying the money.” He urged parents not to pay ransom. “We understand they’re panicking and looking out for their children. We urge them to contact the police because they’ve been trained to deal with such things and not pay. Because by paying, we’re exacerbating the problem.” Bolhuis urged parents to be aware of their children’s whereabouts, know their identity numbers and car registration numbers, and be able to track their whereabouts on their cell phones. The case has been reported to the Jeppe Police Station. Investigations are ongoing.



at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) – and another friend, Ezechial Bolton, 20, of Kensington, were abducted and held for several hours at the Langermann Koppie in Kensington. Their kidnappers wanted their money and a ransom from their parents. The three young men had gone to the mountaintop park, known for sunset and city skyline views, for sundowners. They wanted to discuss details of their upcoming road trip to Plettenberg Bay, where they were headed as soon as their exams finished this week. According to Elk, they were ambushed by five armed assailants who

to withdraw cash using the victims’ pin numbers and bank cards. “I tried to keep the situation calm, and keep them happy. The three of us worked together to do this. We made eye contact and held onto each other,” said Elk. Things became complicated when the men decided to make a ransom call to Elk’s parents, and tied the victims up. “That’s when I thought they might shoot us,” said Elk. Meanwhile, Elk’s parents had just arrived at the home of friends, journalist Kate Sidley and her husband, novelist Steven Boykey Sidley, for dinner at 19:00. As they arrived, Erica

son had been last, and who he was with. All the while, they were fielding aggressive ransom calls and trying to figure out how to make an eWallet transaction. This eventually led them to break the news to Gewer, who had been waiting agitatedly for the boys to arrive for dinner. “I somehow knew Ben would be ok,” said Gewer, who explained that his children have grown up with crime. “I don’t want my children to feel like victims, and I’ve invested a lot of time in this. They have had a lot of crime in their lives. Just two weeks ago, Ben’s



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Yeshiva College right sizes amid rumours

NICOLA MILTZ

Yeshiva College, South Africa’s largest Torah school, has undergone a much-needed transformation in a bid to curb the downward drop in student numbers in recent times.

A steady leak of Yeshiva pupils has fuelled rumours about the future sustainability of the time-honoured educational and religious institution.

Emigration – particularly aliyah – children requiring specific special-needs education, large-scale management changes, retrenchment, and smaller classes, have apparently taken their toll on this school.

There is a percolating fear that the institution is in financial trouble, but the school’s management team this week insisted that it has pulled out all the stops to ensure its survival, long-term growth, and rightful place in the community.

“Regrettably, we have lost children,” said Avrom Krengel, the chairperson of the school board, “and we have had to adapt. However, there are more than 800 pupils, and we are constantly making adjustments and improvements.”

Things like more parent engagement, funding dedicated towards teacher training, sports-

coach training, and special-needs development have taken place at the school. Yeshiva has increased investment into extra-curricular offerings including debating, early morning sports activities, golf, and other activities.

The school’s managing director, Rabbi Leron Bernstein, said that at the beginning of this year, there were 859 pupils down from 927 at the start of 2018. The school currently has 827 pupils split between the pre-primary, primary, and boys and girls high school.

The reasons for children leaving are varied, said Bernstein.

“Many are emigrating, some say the offering is too religious, some say it isn’t religious enough, special needs is a big factor, and many say they move for a variety of social reasons.”

He said Yeshiva College would launch the first remedial stream for Grade 1 classes for 2020 called “Yay” which stands for Yavneh (city of Talmudic sages) at Yeshiva. “This will meet the requirements of a remedial school integrated within the framework of the college,” he said.

One mom who prefers to remain anonymous said she moved her children to King David Linksfield for social reasons. “They wanted to be in a larger environment, have the



Matan Kaplan, Saul Joseph, Gadi Kirkel, Jacob Sacks and Yossi Levitt at the launch of the Yeshiva College Media Centre

opportunity to meet more people, and have more subject choices and cultural offerings,” she said.

Another mom said her children moved because their friends had moved. They felt left behind and wanted to be in a bigger class.

Many, however, have chosen to stay.

“This is one big happy family catering to all my children’s needs. They would never dream of leaving,” said one.

Bernstein said that across the broader community, there were fewer entries into Jewish schools.

Krengel told the *SA Jewish Report* that school fees matched expenses, save for one problem: subsidies. “In

2019, the Yeshiva College Foundation disbursed R19 million in school fee subsidies – we have a third of our kids on subsidies,” he said.

Bernstein said Yeshiva College was the only school in the community that poured resources into all three elements – Torah learning, general studies, and extra-curricular activities. “If full fees were paid by all parents, there would be no funding pressure as the revenue would marginally exceed the cost. However, we then grant subsidies to all deserving pupils without an upper limit on the total subsidy pool. This is different to other schools, which cap it,” he said.

“Unfortunately, with reduced

numbers and the rising need for subsidies in a difficult economic climate, the school can no longer carry the welfare burden to the extent that it has until now,” he said.

“We charge school fees that are in line with comparable private schools. If every parent paid full school fees, with current and predicted numbers for the school, the school would have no need for the Yeshiva College Foundation, which raises money to subsidise fees for deserving learners.

“In previous years, with higher numbers, we were able to more easily support these families as the potential revenue exceeded the expenses by a larger margin. With reduced numbers, the school is closer to break even – as we make about R1 million in profit. There is less margin to carry an increased burden of subsidies.”

Krengel firmly believes that there are too many Torah schools in Johannesburg, and is advocating consolidation.

He says there are more than 3 000-odd children in the King David system, and 2 000 children split between about six Torah schools in a shrinking community.

“However, in the absence of this, we are doing everything in our power to make our school as attractive as possible, and we intend to rebuild and regrow. We have restructured to cater for the fact that the school is smaller. There has had to be retrenchment and rationalisation, and this process is now complete.”

“Under the able leadership of both Rob Long, the principal of the boys’ high school, and Rebbetzin Natalie Altman, the principal of the girls high school, we are hoping to attract and keep new students.”

Coinciding with Rabbi Bernstein’s imminent aliyah, the school this week appointed Dinah Unterslak, the principal of the Yes Centre (support centre), as the acting headmistress of the primary school.

“We are right sizing without compromising,” said Altman, “People get nervous about change, and there have been changes. People often see change as a negative, but we believe the changes we’ve made are for the best.”

Echoing her sentiments, Long said, “We are pruning for growth. We have put the right structures in place. People don’t trust until they see delivery, so we are making sure we deliver. The parent body is starting to shift, and we are starting to see the green trees, fewer people leaving, and more applications.”

Krengel said it was a “demanding school” that strived to reach “an outstanding level in both general studies and religious studies”.

“We have the finest matric results within Jewish schools and arguably around the country. Graduates of Yeshiva College get into any university degree they wish, and at the same time, they can go to the best yeshivot and seminaries in Israel and slot in easily. That is what we aim to achieve. That’s is our *raison d’être* [reason for being],” he said

“It’s a family, it’s a community, it’s a school with a complete ecosystem which gives students an advantage so that when they go out into the world, they are leaders,” said Altman.

Knighted Zapiro’s pen mightier than the sword

TALI FEINBERG

Cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, known by his pen-name Zapiro, last week received France’s most prestigious cultural honour, the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) in Cape Town.

The award was presented by Aurélien Lechevallier, the French Ambassador to South Africa. He said Zapiro was bestowed the order because he shared, “the values that define and guide [the French] Republic. The trilogy equality, liberty, and fraternity resonate perfectly with who you are, what you believe in, and what you stand for.”

The award is intended to recognise significant contributions to the arts and literature, or the propagation of these fields.

“I’m still blown away. It really is overwhelming, it’s an award I never thought I would be getting, so it was a huge surprise,” says Shapiro, who made time to talk to the *SA Jewish Report* despite an intense schedule.

“It made me think about how the French are responsible for many of our concepts of democracy and freedom of expression. At the same time, the worst attack on cartoonists was in France in 2015 – five cartoonists and seven other people were killed in the terrorist attack at *Charlie Hebdo*,” he says.

“There’s a strange correlation, because at the time in 2015 – although I didn’t know it – an assassination attempt was being planned to target me,” referring to alleged jihadists Thulsie twins Brandon-Lee and Tony-Lee. He was on their hit list because he had drawn a cartoon of the prophet Mohammed in 2010.

Shapiro had planned to travel to Kenya around that time, but “I had a gut feeling it wasn’t safe. The Hawks read me a transcript of a guy the Thulsie twins had been in contact with saying that I was a legitimate target for assassination. They could have used small arms, explosives, or poison. And the person they were talking to was in Kenya. It’s had a huge impact ... the extent of the connection.”

Shapiro says that in spite of the backlash he has received from all sectors of society in response

to his cartoons, South Africa is one of the most liberal environments in the world for a cartoonist. Colleagues the world over have told him that some of his work could never be published in other democracies.



Zapiro receives the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters from French Ambassador Aurélien Lechevallier

While this award can be seen as the height of his career, Shapiro says there is a lot more he wants to do. “I’m not tired of the work, and am keen to express my thoughts in other genres. There are also other things I would like to do with cartoons.” Launching his annual book is on the agenda, but he hints that other media and ventures are in the offing.

He says his Jewish identity has played a defining role in his outlook on the world. “My mother was a refugee of the Nazis. She managed to get out of Berlin in about 1938. She taught me that ‘never again’ means ‘never again for anyone, not just Jews’, and that’s an important lesson. Of course, the hugest atrocity was the Holocaust, and it’s all the more incumbent on Jews to look carefully at whether they are participating actively or passively in any form of oppression.”

His ambivalence to Israel is well-known, and he says that even family members haven’t taken kindly to it. “It was far easier to be a white anti-apartheid activist than to be a Jewish activist who

supports Palestinian rights.”

But he is proudly Jewish, and says Jewish humour has been a “massive thing” for him. He has read extensively the work of Jewish cartoonists, writers, comedians, and artists from generations past.

A few years ago, he was invited to be on the TV series *Who Do You think You Are?* In each episode, a different celebrity goes on a journey to trace parts of her or his family tree. He found it fascinating to delve into his roots, and was proud to be the only Jew on the show.

Furthermore, in spite of being vilified, he feels part of the South African Jewish community. His children attended Herzlia, and he has addressed many audiences in Jewish settings.

Though his cartoons gives him a “watchdog” role, Shapiro has not lost hope in South Africa. “I’m primarily a sceptic, not a cynic. While it’s been a horrendous decade, I don’t like to indulge in the notion that that ‘everything is going to the trash’. I think that civil society, artists, writers, and the media have played a massive role in shifting things,” he says.

He currently works only for online news portal *Daily Maverick*, which he sees as playing a vital role in bringing down President Jacob Zuma and the Guptas. Pointing out that editor Branko Brkic is a refugee of Slobodan Milosevic, he believes *Daily Maverick* is a force for democracy in South Africa.”

Though recent developments like the return of Bathabile Dlamini to public office are discouraging, it gives Shapiro more subject matter to aim his “arrows” at. And while he says the economy needs a major turnaround to get back on its feet, “we have to believe it’s possible”.

Shapiro says he is honoured to be amongst past Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres winners like the late Johnny Clegg, William Kentridge, Susan Sontag, and Steven Spielberg. “It’s going to be daunting to live up to these names,” he concludes. He certainly has his work cut out for him.

Photo: Jax Lahoud

Young SA women’s close escape from bus inferno

TALI FEINBERG

On an ordinary Tuesday morning last week, Amanda Porter’s daughter Natanya phoned her twice in succession from Israel. Her blood ran cold. “We have a rule that if it’s an emergency, she must call again if I don’t answer the first time. I didn’t understand what she meant by ‘our bus caught fire’, but when she switched the call to video, we both watched as her bus burst into flames. It was surreal.”

Natanya, 19, was one of three South African young Jewish adults travelling on a bus to Masada when a tyre fell off their bus, starting a fire. All 48 passengers were evacuated just before the bus burst into flames, in what is being described as a real-life miracle. No one was injured.

A tour guide with the group, Eytan Rund, sent a voice note to other guides in the area, describing the situation. “Sorry I have to do this in voicemail but things are getting crazy over here ... I was doing a *tiyul* [excursion] with the girls’ seminary, the back left wheel went off the bus, oh my G-d, and all of a sudden we started smelling smoke, it was very clear we had to get the kids off the bus, we got them off the bus ... and then sure enough, we started seeing flames.”

With the sound of wind, sirens, and crackling flames in the background, he went on to say, “Got the bags and the girls out of the bus ... we didn’t get [the bags] far enough unfortunately ... started blowing all over the place ... didn’t exactly blow up, just burned like crazy. Fire-fighters are here. It’s insane. There was nothing to break the glass to get the fire extinguisher out, so a tour guide had to use the butt of his gun. By the time he got it open, there were way too many flames. It’s crazy.”

Porter is one of about 15 South African women studying at Midreshet Harova Seminary in their post-matric year. They were divided among two buses for the outing. The excursion was originally meant to go further south, but because of rocket attacks that morning, they decided to go to Masada.

“After stopping for 20 minutes at Ein Gedi, we carried on the drive to Masada. Less than 15 minutes into the drive, we heard a loud explosive noise and the bus skidded forward,

while the bus driver slammed on breaks and swerved out the road as much as possible,” she said.

“A few of the girls say they saw a tyre fly off the bus. Almost immediately, those of us sitting at the back of the bus smelled burning rubber. Everything then happened so fast. The bus driver checked the side without the tyre, saw the flames, and opened the doors while our *madrichot* [leaders] told us to get off the bus,” says Porter.

“Within two minutes, the back of the bus was on fire and soon after that, there was a loud bang and the entire bus was engulfed in flames. We didn’t manage to get our backpacks off the bus because we all believed that it was just a faulty tyre and we’d all be back on the bus soon.

“At first we were laughing and joking, but when we saw our bus engulfed in flames – the bus that two minutes prior we were all sitting on – if we hadn’t evacuated when we did, G-d forbid, the outcome would have been unimaginable. And so the laughter stopped. The *tiyul* was supposed to be overnight, so our bags under the bus were filled with purses, clothes and toiletries, glasses, contact lenses, and ID cards. Our tour guide tried to take the bags out of the bus, but the fire grew so quickly, he had to stop and join us further back in the middle of the desert.” All of their possessions were burnt beyond recovery.

Porter said their escape was a real-life miracle. “Every single person got of that bus completely unharmed, and the only things we lost were just that, things! Our tour guide later told us that when the tyre flew off, the bus scraped against the ground, and the friction caused the fire. The entire bus was burnt to smithereens.

“We are haunted by the reality of what could have been. Many of us are having sleepless nights even five days later. I would be remiss in not expressing complete gratitude to Hashem, to the bus driver, and to Midreshet Harova, which has been supportive in every way.”

The young women had to wait an hour and a half in the desert for a new bus to escort them to Ein Gedi for the night. On

their return to Jerusalem, the girls benched *gomel*, a prayer said after recovering from a serious illness or surviving a dangerous journey.

Porter and another South African girl lost their glasses and contact lenses, and the seminary took them to get new ones the next day. They were given cash to replace lost items, and they have been visited and comforted by their *mashgichot* (seminary

moms), with free counselling and debriefing sessions offered. But it’s only now that the practical losses have been resolved that the trauma is hitting the girls hard.

“Imagine standing in the desert watching the bus you were sitting on two minutes before burn to a skeleton. It’s hard to explain how terrifying that was. A lot of the girls have had nightmares,” she said.

“As a parent, the hardest part is being far away,” said her mother. “It’s so out of my control, and difficult to be there for my

daughter. I feel like I need a de-brief!”

She points out that it has been a traumatic year for these girls, with the tragic passing of peers Adam Seef and Adam Rabinovitch. Some of that trauma has “snowballed” with this event.

The parents and their daughters are consumed by thoughts of what could have been if it weren’t for the quick thinking of the bus driver who evacuated the girls so quickly.



At this stage, the name of the bus driver is not known to the *SA Jewish Report*.

Porter said that when people driving past saw the bus on fire, they abandoned their vehicles as they thought it had been hit by a rocket.

A mother of another young South African woman who was on the bus, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the “aftershock” had been tough. “I think it’s taken them a couple of days to realise what happened and how lucky they were.”

UN report calls BDS ‘fundamentally anti-Semitic’

>>>Continued from page 1

More than 57% of teachers and lecturers and 53.74% of students in Indonesia agreed with a survey statement claiming that, “Jews are the enemies of Islam.” French authorities reported that anti-



BDS South Africa director Muhammed Desai Semitic acts increased by 74% from 2017 to 2018, with anti-Semitic acts constituting half of all documented hate crimes, and close to 15% of the incidents involving physical violence. German authorities reported a 10% rise in documented anti-Semitic acts from 2017 to 2018, including a 70% increase in violent acts. In Australia, there were 366 anti-Semitic incidents logged from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2018.

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of

history at the University of Cape Town and an expert on anti-Semitism, says, “Study after study has shown beyond doubt that anti-Semitism is globally on the rise. It goes beyond simple stereotyping and other hostile acts such as graffiti or vandalism. Today, we read almost daily of attacks on Jews. This report adds to the list.

“The big question is, will manifestations of hostility transform into programmatic or party-political action? Hitherto this has for the most part not been the case, although the language of hatred and exclusion employed by populists is worrying. Attacking George Soros in Hungary, for example, is a ‘hygienic’ form of Jew-hatred. Of particular interest in the UN study is the condemnation of BDS, which is well known for its use of anti-Jewish motifs and tropes in its anti-Zionist propaganda. Social media exacerbates the problem. Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed is to be congratulated.”

• The full report can be read at www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A_74_47921ADV.pdf

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Ethical leadership comes from love, says chief justice

MIRAH LANGER

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng has challenged business leaders to practice ethical leadership with sincerity and conviction.

“There shouldn’t be grudge compliance, it needs to come from the heart ... then you don’t need any law or labour department, you will know the right thing to do,” urged Mogoeng at a keynote address to launch the ethics barometer at GIBS (the Gordon Institute of Business Science) business school in Illovo, Johannesburg, this week.

“Let us not pay lip service to what needs to be done, but develop credible strategies, share them with the public, and tell them what concrete steps we are going to take to turn the tide around,” he said.

“When a nation is as challenged as South Africa is, you need government, civil society, and business working together, sorting out their differences internally for the greater good.”

GIBS’ ethics-barometer project is led by Rabbi Gideon Pogrund. It aims to offer concrete measures of the ethical “fitness” of businesses in South Africa. Based on a Harvard model, it has been adapted for the South African context. The first study of this ongoing initiative looked at 15 major local companies from across a wide variety of sectors, encompassing the experiences of more than 8 000 employees.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Pogrund said the barometer offered opportunities and lessons for all those keen to uplift South Africa, including the Jewish community:

“South Africa’s future is dependent on ethical leadership. It’s because of ethical failure that we have got ourselves into this difficult situation. If we are here, a commitment to improving ethical

behaviour is crucial.”

He said the barometer’s concrete measures of ethical performance turned the topic of ethics from a “soft conversation, to one likely to have more impact”.

“Being ethical in business is basic to being Jewish. Ethics can’t be compartmentalised. The Torah is for life, including business.”

Mogoeng told the GIBS audience that too often, ethics remained theoretical, and when it came to putting it into practice, leaders shirked their duty.

“However inconvenient it may be for you to pursue ethical leadership, however foolish, or even weak some may regard you as being for your absolute commitment to ethical leadership, as long as the critical mass of your people in a nation like South Africa stands to benefit rather than be harmed by what you do, then let the embarrassment come,” Mogoeng urged. “Let the criticism come. Let the ridicule come. [Choose ethical behaviour] so that those who are suffering from hunger, homelessness, sickness, and disease can find the help that you as an important change agent can bring.”

Mogoeng said in South Africa, ethics were deeply tied up with the issue of racism alongside other forms of discrimination. “We had a terrible system. We come from a background where racism caused black and white people to be at each other’s throats.”

The responsibility lies with ethical leaders to deal with this reality.

“We need to work aggressively towards crushing this polarising nonsense called race. We need to use our creativity, our leadership, and our influence to unite our people.”

Mogoeng said that in the business sector, racism and discrimination often occurred in the way, through conscious and unconscious



Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng

bias, we tend to promote those most similar to us. Furthermore, the issue of unequal remuneration remains problematic, whereby people doing the same job are not paid the same amount based on gender or race.

Yet, asserted the chief justice, “It’s not something to condemn one another about; it’s for us to say, as leaders committed to ethics, something is wrong here.”

Then, meaningful, practical, and concrete steps can be taken. The formulation of these steps needs to be guided by a simple, yet profound principle: love, suggested Mogoeng.

“I choose to sow a seed of love, to interact with people without prejudice, not thinking they are this way or the other way,” he asserted, even quipping, “Don’t see apartheid in the eyes of every white person.”

Pogrund said that the significance of the ethics study was that it offered formal measures, rooted in empirical evidence, that

then lent more credibility and practicality to the issue of business ethics.

The study looks at 68 different behaviours in a business, including its treatment of customers, suppliers, employees, as well as the organisation’s culture and practices, its engagement with broader society, and its avoidance of misconduct.

It has found wide consensus in how companies ought to behave. “Ethical values are widely shared. It’s an important point when you think about the polarisation that plagues our country.”

Pogrund spoke of a trend in which employees are more positive about how companies deal with external groups such as customers than how they handle internal matters with employees. “The general picture points to a perceived lack of respect and fairness, and less-than-ideal levels of trust.”

He said the study might point to the presence of the “altitude effect” [whereby] “the higher you go [in a business hierarchy], the more likely you are to have a rosy view and be out of touch”.

Pogrund said that 45% of respondents had said that they had witnessed at least one example of misconduct over the past 24 months. However, only 30% of those who believed they had witnessed misconduct had gone on to report it, citing fear, intimidation, or lack of trust in the company.

He said that while some might question the value of examining perceptions of employees, in fact, it is deeply relevant. “If you want to understand a particular environment, you have to understand what people think.

“It facilitates self-reflection for corporate leaders,” he suggested, pointing out that humility forms a core component of ethical leadership.

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SA in better place 25 years on, says FW de Klerk

STEVEN GRUZD

South Africa’s former President, FW de Klerk, is “deeply concerned” about the country’s current prospects, but says he sees “light at the end of the tunnel”. De Klerk was speaking about “The New South Africa after 25 years” at the Chief Rabbi Harris Community Centre at the Great Park Synagogue in Johannesburg on Tuesday night, co-hosted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. He was the man who took the courageous steps in 1990 of unbanning the African National Congress, releasing political prisoners, and steering the country towards negotiations. At the time, South Africa faced economic ruin, further political isolation, and the prospect of a protracted racial bloodbath. He said, “Let me be clear. If we had not reached a settlement, as soon as possible after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the balance of forces would have inexorably and quite quickly shifted against us ... clinging to power was simply not a rational option.” De Klerk said that despite crises and disappointments, South Africa was in a far better place 25 years on than if the society had not transformed. South Africa is once again part of the international community, with unhindered trade and travel possible. The middle class has grown and prospered enormously. The constitution is surviving. The courts remain independent, and with the media and civil society, they continue to defend human rights. “Indeed,” De Klerk said, “they

played a central role in ensuring the downfall of Jacob Zuma and his state-capture project.” But he also described South Africa’s serious challenges, including almost 40% unemployment, a failing education system, rampant corruption, and indebted, dysfunctional state-owned entities. “Most disturbingly,” he said, “South Africa abandoned the great example of racial reconciliation that was set by Nelson Mandela. “There is no balance. Foolish and unacceptable racist remarks by white non-entities, not intended for public dissemination, are treated far more harshly than incendiary remarks made intentionally in public by prominent political leaders, only sweeping up animosity and inciting harm.” He said the Jewish community “is only too well aware of the danger of [negative] racial stereotypes, particularly when they are propagated and fervently believed by government”. Of the South African Jewish community, he said, “I have enormous respect for the disproportionate support that you so generously give to so many cultural and charitable causes ... I believe that minorities everywhere can learn from the manner in which your community resolutely retains its ancient traditions, beliefs, and identity on the one hand, while continuing to play an active and constructive role as citizens in our vibrant multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multifaith country on the other hand.” “I have always been impressed by the manner in which the Jewish Board of Deputies pounces immediately on anti-Semitic statements or actions, and calls those involved to account. Other communities should follow this example.” De Klerk said the country would have courted disaster had Cyril Ramaphosa not (narrowly) defeated Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in the 2017 ANC leadership battle. He praised

some of Ramaphosa’s decisions, such as reforming the National Prosecuting Authority, pledging to implement the long-forgotten National Development Plan, restructuring the boards of state-owned entities, and attracting investment. But doubts linger. “Expropriation without compensation” abrogates property rights, and the proposed National Health Insurance scheme would bankrupt the country and cause more medical professionals to emigrate. De Klerk called both “fundamental threats”. He said that it was incumbent on all South Africans to be well informed, and exercise their rights and powers as citizens to raise their objections. They should propose workable and affordable land reform and healthcare reform, and “do the right things and support the right causes. We can’t be spectators – we must act.” On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, De Klerk drew the analogy of himself and Nelson Mandela taking bold initiatives, “calculated risks”, that paved the way for meaningful negotiations. He said, “I’m a believer in the two-nation-states solution. I think, however, that the window of opportunity for that is closing.” He said two basic initiatives were necessary. Israel should offer the Palestinians “a reasonable cut of land, with reasonable borders”, stop building settlements, and seek protection for those who might find themselves living in a future Palestinian state. The Palestinians “should acknowledge, unequivocally, the right of the State of Israel to exist”.



FW de Klerk

can no longer be regarded as a non-racial society. Instead, under increasingly onerous black-empowerment laws, the prospects of individuals are once again determined, as Martin Luther King put it, ‘not by the content of their character, but by the colour of their skin’. Our government has virtually

Stem cells, cloning and halacha

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Growing new cells to replace damaged tissues or organs, cloning lifesaving organs, and miracle cures for debilitating diseases are closer than we think. While stem cell research and cloning are vastly different technologies, they are both likely to change the face of medicine. As this reality dawns, Jewish people are faced with how we deal with this from a halachic or Jewish perspective. Halachic specialist and medical doctor, Rabbi Professor Avraham Steinberg, who was in South Africa from Israel recently, gave guidance on these cutting-edge, but ethically challenging technologies. Stem cells are the cells within a foetus which divide and become the 200 cell types that make up the human body, says Steinberg. Once stem cells are differentiated, they’re clearly defined for their task. For example, a cell from the eye placed into the ear won’t hear because it’s already an eye cell. But before stem cells are defined, each of them can differentiate into any one of the cell types throughout the body, he says. While there are a small number of such basic stem cells in our adult bodies, it’s difficult to isolate them, and most of them are infected by the environment, says the rabbi. “The stem cells we’re using in research therefore come from fertilised eggs where original, clean stem cells exist.” These cells can be accessed through the in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) process. “Through IVF, we get up to 20 eggs

from a woman at once. We take them all out and insert the sperm, creating fertilised eggs.” These fertilised eggs begin to divide into more cells. About five days after conception, a little ball that’s as big as a full stop forms the blastocyst. This has an outer layer, which will become the placenta if it’s implanted into a woman’s womb. Beneath this layer is a ball of 30 to 50 stem cells. “If implanted into a womb, they’ll start to differentiate and slowly the foetus will grow into a human being,” says Steinberg. “Yet, no woman will use all 20 eggs, so there’s always an excess of fertilised eggs that she’ll never want. In Israel alone there are currently half a million fertilised eggs in a freezer that no-one claims.”

To do stem cell research, the fertilised egg must be destroyed. “We have to open the outer layer to extract the 50 stem cells,” says Steinberg. “If we know the code to tell one cell to become a brain cell, a heart cell, a liver cell, and so on, then we can cure so many illnesses prevalent in society. A further step would be to programme a cell to become an entire organ like a liver or a heart.” Stem cell research is particularly exciting when it comes to potentially curing degenerative diseases, like Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, diabetes, and those underlying heart attacks and

strokes. Largely associated with age, these diseases have become more prevalent over the past century as the average life expectancy has tripled. While some tissues in the body can regenerate, like the skin which grows again after sunburn and peeling, such regenerative processes don’t exist in the brain, the heart, and in many other

important areas of the body. While stem cell research’s positive potential is incalculable, the ethical and religious implications are significant. “Is it ok to kill a fertilised egg that can potentially become a human being [in order] to extract the stem cells and use them for other purposes?” asks Steinberg. “The Catholics say you’re not allowed to. They believe that at the moment of conception, a full human being is formed. Just like you can’t kill a living person to take his heart to save someone else, you can’t kill this ‘human being,’” he says.

“Yet, Judaism believes that this fertilised egg, that isn’t and will never be in a womb, has no potential to become a human being. Therefore, halachically, it’s not a human being. So, if we can do something good for human beings through stem cells, we should.” Religious tension has impeded

progress in stem cell research, mainly because of the massive funding it requires – funding only countries can afford. There have been various debates within the United States and the European Union because of ethical concerns surrounding the technology. “Israel has been at the forefront of stem cell research and acquiring funding because we have good scientists and it doesn’t go against our beliefs,” said Steinberg.

Today, stem cell research is progressing, and stem cell therapy – albeit small scale – is already taking place. Cloning poses even greater ethical concerns. We know it’s possible because of Dolly the sheep, the first mammal to be cloned from an adult cell. Yet currently, no country can clone humans because of a host of ethical concerns, said Steinberg. “Dolly was created after over 300 failed creations that had to be sacrificed. There’s no ethical

justification to create 300 human beings that we’ll have to kill because they’re suffering terribly, just to get one human being that will look normal.” Cloning doesn’t involve a pure sperm and egg. Rather, it comes from taking a mature cell – for example, a skin cell – and bringing it to embryonic stage. “Then you can implant it in an egg, place it in a womb, and it will grow and become another human. Dolly looked like a baby, but she was born at the age of the sheep from whom she was cloned, and had all its diseases.” We can, however, conduct therapeutic cloning, cloning a new organ, not an entire human being. “I can clone my own heart from my own skin cell,” says Steinberg, “and then there’s no problem of rejection.” “Currently, someone who receives an organ donation must take lifelong anti-rejection medication because we fight any foreign entities entering our bodies.” “Most countries won’t allow therapeutic cloning for fear that it will slip into reproductive cloning. Theoretically, if we could contain it and use it only for this purpose, that might be halachically permissible. Yet because there are problems, we don’t want to do it.”

- Steinberg was invited to South Africa by the Malka Ella Fertility Fund. He’s the director of the medical ethics unit and senior paediatric neurologist at the Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem.



Rabbi Professor Avraham Steinberg

Sandton pays tribute to extraordinary rabbi

JORDAN MOSHE

It's difficult for a learned man to be able to guide young boys at school and give life-changing shiurim to elders in a community. Such a man is Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines, who has devastated the community of Ohr Somayach Sandton by resigning as their rabbi after 27 years.

Kraines announced his resignation earlier this month, citing ill health over the past few years as a primary reason for his decision. He and his family are due to relocate to Israel in December.

For 27 years, Kraines was the face of the Sandton Ohr Somayach Jewish community.

On Monday night, the Sandton community gathered to pay tribute to its rabbi, the shul hall packed wall to wall with dozens of people who benefited personally from his years of service.

Ohr Somayach Director Stephen Segal reflected on Kraines' arrival in South Africa. "He was involved in the shul from day one. When he applied for the position, he was perfect," says Segal. "His personality was great, his *davening* [praying] and *leining* [reading from the Torah] were good, and we saw an ideal candidate for the job. That was 27 and a half years ago. We've never looked back on this decision."

The Californian-born Kraines became involved in Ohr Somayach in 1983, when he and his wife,

Nechama, became founding directors of the group's outreach branch in North America. Subsequently, he served as assistant rabbi in Charleston, South Carolina, and principal of Emuna Primary School of Mexico City, Mexico, before heading to South Africa in 1992.

"When the rabbi arrived in South Africa, my brother went out with a combi and trailer to fetch him, tons of bags, and a few kids," says Segal. "Those of us who had started the shul were all sitting there waiting for him to arrive. We'd been told he was from Mexico, and everyone was expecting a man to arrive in a sombrero. He disappointed us, arriving in a black hat only."

Over the years, he also served as *mashgiach* (kashrut supervisor) of the Ohr Somayach Yeshivah & Kollel, and was founding director of Sandton's Maayan Bina Women's Seminary. In 2001, he was appointed principal of Shaarei Torah School, a position he held until 2014. Under his watch, the Sandton Shul grew from 20 members to more than 150 families.

"The Kraines family taught us that it's all about family," said Ohr Somayach Director Maurice Goodman. "Based on the example that the rabbi and Nechama set, the community grew rapidly."

"The Kraines family was a victim of its own success. It created people who wanted more. As you can see tonight, the link has remained strong, and we will build on the legacy that they have created here in Sandton."



Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines addresses the Ohr Somayach Sandton community on Monday night

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein thanked Kraines for his dedicated leadership and service to his shul, Sandton Jewry, and Johannesburg Jewry.

"Each one of us stands here in awe of your achievements, and what you have done in your time here," he said. "As a family, you have had an impact on all of us. This shows it's not just

a job, but a selfless mission and a privilege."

Goldstein cited the establishment of Sandton Sinai School as an illustration of Kraines' selfless philosophy. "A few years ago, there was a big debate about how to start a Torah school in Sandton," he said. "At one of our meetings, Rabbi Kraines offered the nursery school he'd built, saying we could use it to build a primary school. He just gave his nursery school over to us. That then became Sandton Sinai, which today is a beacon of light in Sandton."

"I've never seen anyone who created an institution say on the spur of the moment without thinking: take it, it's yours. He realised that this could be the foundation of something great."

The loss will perhaps be felt most keenly by shul members, whose fond memories shared with the *SA Jewish Report* speak for the sincere passion the rabbi and rebbetzin had for kindling a genuine love for Judaism in others.

"Rabbi Kraines made many people grow in *yiddishkeit* with a gentle but effective approach," says Norman Aronowitz. "He encouraged people

to attend more religious schools even though it meant people moved to Glenhazel – that's selfless."

Tali Goldberg echoes the sentiment. "Rabbi and Rebbetzin Kraines exemplify true *chesed* (compassion) and selflessness," she says. "They taught us love for the Torah, and opened up a whole world of what it means to be a *frum* (observant) Jew."

Kraines thanked his community, and declared his time in South Africa to be a tremendous gift. "We take pride in what our family is about, and we attribute it to being embraced in this loving community," he said. "I have flourished personally thanks to the opportunities I've had here. My involvement with schools, youth organisations, and so many people has made me so much more than what I would have been."

"South Africa has enabled me to work together with my life partner, Nechama, on the same mission. It has brought us much closer together, and there are so many precious memories and deep meaningful relationships we've been able to forge. Those will always be treasured."

"The South African community is facing a challenge," Kraines says. "Our community needs to go forward, and it has all the resources necessary to meet the challenge. We need to keep the Jewish spirit alive. It's all there, it just needs to be kindled. We need everyone to come aboard to make it happen."



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The ‘911 of the Jewish people’ looks south

TALI FEINBERG

You might not have heard of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), but it’s one of the oldest humanitarian Jewish organisations in the world, and it’s there to help every Jew, no matter what their circumstances.

“The JDC is the 911 of the Jewish people. A total of 55 000 people will be helped by the JDC on any given day. If there are Jews in need, we will find a way to get to them,” says Betsy Sheerr, incoming Africa and Asia chairperson of the organisation, which is known colloquially as “the Joint”. She and her husband, Richard, were in Cape Town recently, where they addressed a small group of Jewish community leaders to begin building a stronger connection with the South African Jewish community and understand its needs.

The couple are originally from Philadelphia, but now reside in Florida. In their former city, they encountered some of the poorest Jews in America, where one in four lives below the poverty line. “There is a sense that Jewish poverty doesn’t exist, but it’s prevalent throughout the world,” says Sheerr.

The JDC is 105 years old, having been in existence before World War I. Its main aim is to “go out of business” in other words, no longer be needed. That’s a long way off, however, as it currently works in 70 countries, from Albania to China, Egypt to Kazakhstan, and Panama to Uzbekistan.

Thirty five percent of its budget goes towards Israel, and 35% to the former Soviet Union (FSU), where one will find “the poorest Jews in the world”. The rest of its funds are spread thinly throughout the globe.

Sheer says the organisation has three focus areas: rescue, relief, and renewal. “We’re there with the boots on the ground and know-how to take [people] out of harm’s way. We can be there at a moment’s notice, wherever needed,” she says.

For example, when the tsunami hit Japan in 2011, the country was unprepared. The JDC worked with the Jewish community there to offer immediate aid, and one member of the community was so impressed, he got involved and is now on the organisation’s board.

Renewal is equally important. For example, the JDC has been so successful in getting the Romanian community back on its feet, its assistance is no longer needed there. “We believe that the Jewish part of Jewish life is worth fighting for. That’s why we work hand-in-hand with communities around the world, empowering them to realise their own dreams and care for their most vulnerable,” says Sheerr. “Together, we build new generations of Jewish leaders.”

The organisation’s focus remains on the 86 000 elderly impoverished Jews in the FSU. “It’s across 11 time zones – the scope of this crisis is massive,” says Sheerr. “We ensure that they never have to choose between essentials like food and medicine, and we provide something invaluable – the knowledge that they aren’t forgotten, and remain part of

a global Jewish community that will always have their back.”

Many of these people live alone and are “shut-ins” – they are physically unable to leave their apartment. The food, support, and medical assistance that the JDC provides literally keeps them alive. Many went through horrors during World War II, but aren’t officially classified as Holocaust survivors, so they don’t get aid from organisations that cater for Holocaust survivors. Sheer says they are able to identify these destitute Jews through extensive networks.

The organisation faces the dilemma of “what to do first”.

“If you focus only on immediate needs, how do you cultivate a Jewish identity and a Jewish future? But if you focus only on [the latter], how will people eat?” asks Sheerr rhetorically. The answer is that the JDC does its best to focus on both. Though it used to have offices across the globe, with a tight budget, its offices are now located in New York and Jerusalem, with volunteers and staff travelling extensively.

Turning to Israel, Sheerr says that the country’s future demands that it addresses its most complex social challenges. “At JDC, we break the cycles of poverty among the most vulnerable. We foster inclusion and independence for the elderly and people with disabilities, and provide access to opportunities for all.” The JDC works closely with

the Israeli government, the business sector, and nongovernmental organisations to create these solutions.

The JDC is there during natural disasters, “and we stay long after to make sure those communities get back on their feet. We also bring our expertise to slow-moving crises like economic collapse in Venezuela,” says Sheerr. She provided the startling statistic that inflation in that country is at 10 000 000% as of November 2019. There are about 5 000 Jews still living there, from a community of 21 000 in its heyday.

Closer to home, Sheerr is interested to hear about the challenges faced by Jews in Zimbabwe, and the increase in the need for financial assistance and food banks in our own community. Hazel Levin, the director of Jewish Community Services in Cape Town, told her that the organisation is witnessing a dramatic rise in the need for food parcels and social interventions, and that it has even assisted homeless Jews living on the street. “About 10% of the Cape Town Jewish community is in need of our daily support,” says Levin.

Sheer says that although South African Jewry faces economic challenges and the spectre of a shrinking community, our level of welfare and supportive structures are impressive. She looks forward to learning more about our community, and working closely with us.



Betsy Sheerr

Magical Messi lights up the holy land

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The difference between SuperSport United Captain Dean Furman and Lionel Messi is that the one may be Jewish, but the other has just attracted 30 000 fans to a game he played in Tel Aviv’s Bloomfield Stadium in Israel.

In all seriousness, it was a real coup for Israelis to be able to watch Messi play for Argentina against Uruguay in Israel on Monday.

Furman, who admits to sometimes being compared to Messi because they look similar, told the *SA Jewish Report* that, “it’s understandable” that Israelis

player in the world [Lionel Messi], and Uruguay is also blessed with some fantastic players like Luis Suárez.”

Israel was able to welcome foreign stars like Messi and Suárez into the holy land thanks to the private funding of Canadian-Israeli philanthropist Sylvan Adams and event producer Comtec Group.

Dudi Mor, an Israeli citizen, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the match between the two South American footballing giants was a recipe for success.

“The game attracted a lot of attention in Israel,” says Mor, who has been Israel’s Futbol Five-a-Side World Cup Country Partner, and is

ensured the match was held in Israel, is also the man behind Save A Child’s Heart. This organisation brings children from across the world to Israel for life-changing heart surgery. Adams was able to take children – in Israel for surgery from Senegal, Ethiopia, and Zanzibar – to dinner with Messi and the rest of the Argentinian football team.

The players met the children in Tel Aviv the night before the match, where they were given footballs and Argentina shirts signed by the players. Save A Child’s Heart has to date treated more than 5 000 children from 62 countries.

This organisation is currently working alongside doctors in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to perform life-saving heart surgery and catheterisations for an expected group of 30 children as part of Mission Ethiopia.

Said Adams in a press statement, “In bringing perhaps the world’s most famous athlete, Lionel Messi, to Israel, we are providing excitement for the entire country – for Muslim, Christian, and Jewish citizens of Israel. This is the ‘normal’ Israel that I know and love.”

In spite of the excitement about the game across Israel, it wasn’t clear whether Messi would participate or whether the game would take place at all following a violent flare-up between Israel and Gaza. About 450 rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel over the past two weeks. The Iron Dome intercepted most of them.

A fragile ceasefire was declared on Thursday, and the game went

ahead.

The day before the game, Uruguay’s long-serving coach, Óscar Tabárez, said that he had been concerned about the trip after seeing images of fighting in the Gaza Strip.

Monday’s match came after the cancellation of a pre-World Cup friendly fixture between Argentina and Israel in June 2018 that was hounded by boycott calls from pro-Palestinian activists.

That match was due to be played in Jerusalem, sparking Palestinian anger and criticism of Argentina online.

The 2018 cancellation led to FIFA fining and slapping a 12-month ban on Palestinian Football Association (PFA) head Jibril Rajoub for “inciting hatred and violence” against Messi. The PFA has not complained about Monday’s game.

There was also no moaning about the game from Israelis, who would normally have been required to travel abroad if they wanted to be in the stands for what was the 198th meeting between two sides who contested the very first FIFA World Cup final in 1930.

Uruguay were the winners that day, and it seemed that Suárez, who is infamously remembered for his goal-saving hand-ball against Ghana in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, would add further bragging rights for his country’s supporters when he scored a sublime free-kick to put La Celeste 2-1 ahead after Argentina’s Sergio Agüero cancelled out Cavani’s opener.

But with only four minutes left on the clock, Messi nonchalantly converted a penalty to level the scores at 2-2, and the game remained that way until Roi Reinschreiber, the Israeli referee, sounded his whistle for the final time.

Lionel Messi and Luis Suárez



jumped at the chance to witness star players from two countries that have each been crowned FIFA World Cup champions on two occasions.

“South American countries have always been very strong throughout the history of football, so it’s understandable that their matches would attract good crowds,” says Furman.

“Obviously both countries are incredibly passionate about sport and football, but of course Argentina is blessed with the best

now assisting the municipality of Rosh HaAyin.

“My two sons attended the game. They said it was a super stadium, great game, and an amazing atmosphere. It was probably the first time that the likes of Messi, Suárez, Edinson Cavani, and Kun Agüero have played here.”

Those in attendance were clearly partial to the Barcelona captain, as chants of “Messi! Messi! Messi!” greeted his every action.

Adams, whose financial backing

Jewish citizens of Israel. This is the ‘normal’ Israel that I know and love.”

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Hiding and heroes – Anne Frank’s childhood friend speaks out

EMILY BURACK – JTA

At age 92, Laureen Nussbaum is one of the few people still alive who personally knew Anne Frank.

Nussbaum’s family lived in the same Amsterdam neighbourhood as the Franks, and Anne’s father, Otto, was best man at her 1947 wedding. After the war, Otto spent months trying to find his daughters, Anne and Margot, who had been deported to Bergen-Belsen. With Nussbaum’s husband, Rudi, Otto would go to the train station every day with photos of his children hoping for news of their fate.

“They showed those pictures and asked everyone, “Did you by chance know this woman? Did you by chance know these girls?”” Nussbaum said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). “And that’s how they bonded.”

The effort was ultimately for naught. Of the 100 000 Dutch Jews deported from the Netherlands between 1942 and 1945, only 5 200 survived. Neither Rudi’s mother nor the Frank daughters were among them.

But Nussbaum’s entire Jewish family survived. In her new memoir, *Shedding Our Stars: A Story of Hans Calmeyer and How He Saved Thousands of Families Like Mine* (written with Karen Kirtley), Nussbaum focuses less on her famous friend than on Calmeyer, the little-known German official who saved her family.

“So much has been made out of Schindler, who saved 1 200 Jews. People really empathise with him, and made him a hero,” Nussbaum said, speaking of Oskar Schindler, the German factory owner immortalised in the Oscar-winning film *Schindler’s List*. “And I felt that Hans Calmeyer, who has saved more people, is too unknown in the world. There are books about him in Dutch and German, but nothing in English, except for a citation from Yad Vashem when he was declared a Righteous Among the Nations in 1992 – but that’s just four lines. I thought it was time people knew about him.”

Calmeyer was a German lawyer who, starting in March 1941, was assigned to adjudicate cases in which a person’s Jewish status was in doubt. He successfully argued to his superiors that individuals should be permitted to challenge their Jewish status if their grandparents could not be proven to be Jews.

During his tenure, Calmeyer oversaw 5 600 such petitions, and is credited for saving thousands of Jewish lives.

“In two-thirds of the cases, he decided in favour of the petitioner, knowing that he was being cheated,” Nussbaum told JTA, meaning that Calmeyer was making it easier for petitioners to make the claim that they were not Jewish. “He allowed himself to be cheated.”

Nussbaum was born Hannelore Klein in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1927. Even as a child, she had been acutely aware of rising anti-Semitism in her native country. One year, Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend classes with non-Jewish children, and Nussbaum was forced to use a separate entrance to her school.

The girl who walked with her to school each day would no longer walk with her.

“It was quite palpable,” Nussbaum recalls.

The Klein family fled to Amsterdam in 1936, where they moved in near the Franks. The Germans invaded in 1940, and in 1942, Jews were forced to register with the authorities and wear yellow stars on their clothing. In June of that year, the deportations began.

That summer, the Franks went into hiding in the secret annex that Anne would make famous in her diary. But the Kleins had become “Calmeyer Jews”, and were able to continue to live openly.

Calmeyer declared Nussbaum’s mother “not Jewish”, and they were allowed to remove the yellow stars on their clothing. With their new legal classification, the family could move about freely.

“It wasn’t true, my mother was half-Jewish,” Nussbaum said. “But once he had settled it, we were fool proof.”

While her family was not forced into hiding, her then-boyfriend and future husband was. That’s why she wasn’t surprised to read about Anne’s description of her life in hiding.

“I had been so close to it,” Nussbaum said. “I had seen my boyfriend Rudi in hiding, [and] I had taken care of another couple. I knew exactly what it was like to live in hiding. So I did not find this very earth shaking. For me, what was really important was to hear a young person express herself so well.”

The Nussbaums eventually moved to the United States after Rudi completed his doctorate in nuclear physics in 1954, ending up in Portland, Oregon, in

1959.

A scholar of German language and literature, Nussbaum received her doctorate from the University of Washington, and joined the faculty at Portland State University, where her areas of expertise were German literature and German writers in the Netherlands. Most of her scholarship has focused on Anne.

She wrote the afterword to Anne’s novel, *Liebe Kitty*, which has been published only in German, and she has expressed frustration that the version of Anne’s diary that Otto published was adapted and changed from the version Anne herself had prepared for publication.

“I was very upset that he had done that,” Nussbaum said. “Because nobody has the right to mess with anybody else’s text, whether that anybody else is a child or not a child. The author’s last version is what people need to read. And so I have been on my soapbox for a quarter of a century



Laureen Nussbaum

preaching the gospel of Anne’s revised version.”

Nussbaum’s memoir doesn’t dwell on any of this, focusing instead on her own life and that of the man who saved her family. Nussbaum believes Calmeyer’s story is deeply relevant today as a model of resistance.

Calmeyer engaged in a kind of low-key sabotage to thwart the Nazi agenda, working within the existing power structure to save as many Jews as possible. At a time of rising populism across the Western world, Nussbaum hopes Calmeyer’s example can serve as inspiration.

“Sometimes it’s just little things, people within their own realms can find ways to actively stand up for their opinions,” she said.

“Whether we will be successful or not, I cannot predict. But for our own integrity, those of us who are convinced that things are being done the wrong way, I think we have to, each in his or her own way, resist and do our best. That’s all we can do.”

Life-changing Shabbos stories

The expression “life-changing” is thrown about a lot these days. It’s used to describe everything from a jump out of a plane to a self-help seminar to a plate of food. But how often does an experience literally change a person’s life – beyond recognition – so that things will never be the same. Shabbat, as the saying goes, can do that.”

Sandy Zarkin, Mexico City

“This was our first opportunity to observe Shabbat, and it was magical. I identify with Judaism, and try and follow Jewish customs at home. My husband, on the other hand, often expresses reservations about Jewish observance. No longer. From the first taste of the Shabbos Project, he has changed his mind completely. We shared meals and connected with our neighbours. He went to synagogue for the first time, connecting with the community and the rabbi. Every day we learn more and like more. For me, the Shabbos Project isn’t just the gateway to Shabbat. It’s the gateway to a renewed Jewish identity.”



Mumbai

Ilana Panush, Plano, Texas

“Two years ago, my family decided to join the Shabbos Project. We had never kept Shabbos before. After the 25 hours was over, I had such a great feeling. We participated again last year, and for some reason, I felt even better. This year everything just felt right. Tomorrow, we will be moving to a new residence within the Plano eruv and within walking distance of shul so we can keep Shabbos.”

Rabbi Moshe Fhima, Pinsk, Belarus

“Preparations for the Pinsk Shabbaton began a week before the event, once funding was secured. A car was sent out to Moscow (15 hours in the snow in each direction) to buy chicken for Shabbos, and a small advertisement was posted on our website. Within 24 hours, more than 300 spaces were filled. People came from all over the country. Some even travelled 16 hours by train. The event began with mothers and grandmothers preparing challah on Thursday night. Throughout the Shabbos, there were shiurim on various Jewish topics, spirited singing, and uplifting meals. The effect of these experiences will be

felt for many months. At 23:30, five hours after Shabbos, three women were sitting alone in the dining room, crying. When I approached them, they said they didn’t want their first Shabbos to end.”

Richard Noar, Nelson, New Zealand

“I live in Nelson, New Zealand, a town of about 150 Jews, where we’ve tried to ‘keep it together’ over the past three years (sadly, we no longer have a shul – it was closed more than 100 years ago). Last weekend, my family being away, I decided to do the Shabbos Project all by myself. It was a wonderfully peaceful and meaningful 25 hours. Given our geographic location, along with other New Zealanders, I would have been among the first people on the planet to usher in Shabbat.”



Queenstown

Lana Wilder, Phoenix, Arizona

“October 2014 seems a long time ago. Then, I was an unaffiliated, unobservant Jew married to an unaffiliated non-Jew. A friend suggested I check out the Arizona challah bake. When I walked into the room at the Jewish Community Centre, I was overwhelmed by the spirit of hundreds of Jewish women from all walks of life. It sent shivers down my spine. My husband, Chris, and I decided to participate in the whole Shabbos Project that year. We were invited to a community dinner and Shabbat lunch. We walked to shul, and attended my husband’s first Shabbat service, and an amazing havdalah concert. And we have never looked back. Today, I bake challah every week. My husband and I kashered our kitchen and have kept Shabbat every week since that fateful day in 2014. Chris is on the ‘home stretch’ of a conversion.”



Columbia

Ruti Madar, Honolulu, Hawaii

“The Shabbos Project gave us the incentive to invite friends from Honolulu who don’t generally celebrate Shabbat. The dinner was so much fun! I baked a large challah, and served a sumptuous spread – a fusion of Israeli and Hawaiian cuisine with a Japanese flavour (we get kosher meat shipped in from Los Angeles). There was a cholent with Hawaiian Taro, Israeli salad with Big Island fern sprout, and much more. We sang songs, shared thoughts, and spoke and laughed well into the night. It was the first time we’d done something like this, but it won’t be the last.”

Daniel Hecht, Kopparberg, Sweden

“The Shabbos Project means so much because I live alone in the Swedish countryside. The village is called Kopparberg, almost 150 miles (241km) away from the nearest synagogue in Stockholm. No other Jews live here. When I came home from University Hospital after my Friday shift at the Cardiology ER and lit the candles, it felt like I was having Shabbat with a very big family!”



Modi'in

Glittering auction lights up art world

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

The crème de la crème of the art world gathered for the South African Friends of the Israel Museum (SAFIM) gala dinner and charity auction at the swanky Saint Restaurant in Sandton earlier this month.

Dripping in diamond jewellery and bedecked in flowing ball gowns, the stylish and well-heeled gathered at the black and gold pineapple building of The Marc to support local artists and raise money for one of the most iconic museums in the world.

One hundred and sixty-five guests including diplomats, designers, artists, lawyers, and art patrons were seen eating canapes while polishing their credit cards in anticipation of the night. More than one guest was heard calling their private banker to raise their credit limit for the evening.

Money raised from the glittering event supports residencies and internships for local South African art curators in Jerusalem and funds Ethiopian Israeli kids to visit the Israel Museum and its renowned art collection.

For many of these children, this is their first exposure to the various forms of art. The Youth Wing Outreach Programme of the museum, funded entirely by SAFIM South Africa, allows the children of Ethiopian immigrant parents to express themselves, for the first time in art, painting, sculpture, and photography.

The SAFIM board has also ensured that its resources have paid for programmes which bring disabled people to the Israel Museum as well as a project named “Bridging the Gap”, which brings together Jewish and Arab Israelis through the medium of art.

SAFIM is one of 17 such “friends” organisations around the world. Committed to the art scene in South Africa, this non-profit organisation has ensured that, so far, six interns have completed the coveted training and residency programme at the Israel museum, and are making a real impact on the local art scene upon their return to South Africa with jobs at the Zeitz MOCAA, Aspire, and the Norval Foundation.

SAFIM funds the SAFIM Zeitz MOCAA Curatorial Internship Bursary at Africa’s premier collection in the cavernous Silo building in Cape Town, as well as the SAFIM Gallery Assistant Bursary at the Norval Foundation in Tokai.

SAFIM has also ensured that the Israel Museum’s art collection is enriched by the inclusion of South African artists. In 2018, a Zanele Muholi photographic artwork was acquired for the museum’s internationally acclaimed collection and exhibited together with some of the museum’s African

archaeological and cultural artefacts. So impressed was the museum with its new acquisition, it went and purchased a second Muholi photograph itself.

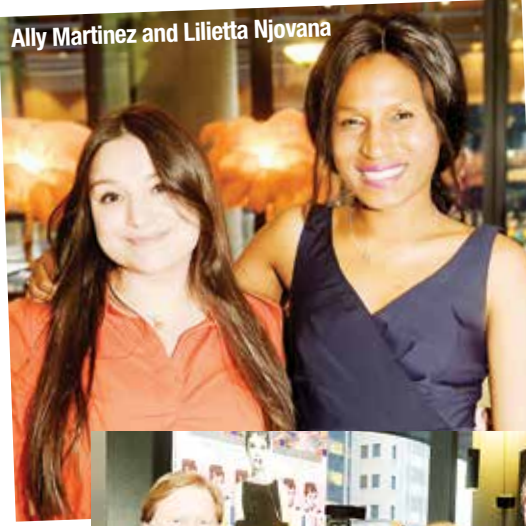
Amongst the works on auction at the charity event were a mixed-media piece

by Chepape Makgato, *Boy Full of Dreams*; internationally acclaimed Gavin Rain’s *At a Glance* screen print on gmund paper; William Kentridge’s *Leaf* from his newest opera *Waiting for the Sibyl*; Candice Kramer’s *Turquoise Girl Hiding* oil paint on copper; and rising star Danielle Rovetti’s *My Hiding Place* crafted from concrete, oils, and resin on a stretch canvas.

At the entrance to the Israel Museum stands the Shrine of the Book, imposing buildings in the shape of an ancient urn in white, mirrored against a black wall. This architectural masterpiece houses the Dead Sea Scrolls, the 2 300-year-old biblical texts in Hebrew and Aramaic excavated from the Qumran Caves in the Judean Desert.

The architecture of this building portends a story narrated in one of the ancient scrolls within. The *War Scroll* tells the apocalyptic prophecy of a war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.

With all the money raised for such amazing causes, on that one night in Sandton, the Sons of Light had clearly won the night.



Narco van Embden, Della Berkowitz, Nina Kovensky, and Ido Bruno

Too young to read, but sings like a dream

JORDAN MOSHE

When pint-sized Judah Brasg stood on the bimah on Shabbos morning and opened his mouth to sing a dulcet rendition of *Anim Zemirot*, he grabbed the attention of everyone in the packed shul.

Astonishingly, this talented six-year-old Yeshiva College scholar can’t yet read or write, but he can obviously sing this particular Shabbos song word perfect.

One of four children born to Stephen and Lara Brasg, Judah has been singing since the age of four, and leaves listeners awestruck every time.

His musical talent took his parents by surprise. They first realised he was musically talented when Stan Brasg, Stephen’s father, celebrated his 76th birthday in 2017.

“His grandsons prepared to sing *Anim Zemirot* together for him in Sydenham Shul, and my elder son, Noah, practiced with Stephen in preparation,” Lara says. Young Judah was considered too young to be involved, but he sat in on the sessions and listened attentively as his brother practised.

When the big day arrived, Judah astonished his parents when he asked if he could join his brother and cousins on the bimah and sing with them.

“We didn’t know he knew it,” says Lara. “We were completely blown away when he asked if he could do it with them, and he actually led the beginning. We never expected it.”

As Judah was then only four, it was obvious he had been learning the music by ear. He’d heard the song sung on a number of occasions, notably when his cousins practiced the song in preparation for their great grandmother’s 90th birthday Shabbat. It is to her that Lara attributes her son’s musicality.

“Stephen’s grandmother, Cecilia Borochowitz, was a Holocaust survivor and a prominent violinist,” she says. “She was the matriarch of his family. All her great grandsons are quite musical, and Judah’s ear for music and auditory memory seems to have come from her. She was the spark.”

His parents are amused at how he puts on a show of reading, when he can’t do so yet. “He looks down, turns pages, and makes as though he’s following words,” says Lara.

Judah sings with confidence. His mother says that though he was shy initially, singing in a quiet voice, he now gives his all when he opens his mouth to sing, often sharing the performance of *Anim Zemirot* with his brother in shul on Shabbat.

“He owns the space now, and is happy to do it,” says Lara. “He always asks to do it, but is also quite humble about it in spite of his age. He walks

to the bimah with his head down, and he always comes to me afterwards to give me a hug before he leaves the shul.”

Judah practises regularly with his father, varying the tunes he uses, and sings regularly at both Sydenham and Great Park Shul. He is already learning other pieces to sing in shul, including *Ein Keloheinu*.

His musical future is unquestionably bright, and if his current performances are anything to go by, the years ahead will be melodious indeed. Eat your heart out, Yaakov Shwekey!



Judah Brasg

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Kosher cuisine in the heart of the Arab world

TALI FEINBERG

When Elli Kriel and her family first moved to Dubai from Johannesburg in 2013, they were the only Jews keeping kosher in the city. But as the community grew and more Jewish travellers passed through the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kriel saw that the need for kosher food in this part of the world was growing by the day.

“Many kosher visitors would come to Dubai, would not know what was available, and would reach out to us. We would often have people eat with us in our home,” she recalls. “Soon enough, business groups started contacting to us and with a kosher kitchen, I realised that I was in a unique position to respond to an existing and growing need.”

She decided to take the plunge and create a kosher cooking and delivery service in this most unlikely of places. “I tested out the concept, and launched Elli’s Kosher Kitchen in the week that the ‘Year of Tolerance’ was inaugurated in Dubai. The climate was right and since then, there has been a wonderful response!”

This week, she is making her mark at KosherFest in the United States – the biggest trade show for the kosher industry – where people will taste her unique combinations of Jewish and Emirati cuisine which she has dubbed “kosherati” food. Looking back, it has been an exciting journey to get to this point.

“We have now been in Dubai for almost seven years. The Jewish community is small, fledgling, and welcoming, made up of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. It’s diverse in terms of language, background, and nationality. Everybody is excited to be together and connect with other Jews in the city, and many are exploring what it means to be Jewish in their own way. Many people don’t stay long in Dubai, so given the nature of the work scene in the

city, it’s a highly transient place,” she says. When her family first arrived in the UAE, they thought there would be no kosher supplies in Dubai. However, the supermarkets were full of imported kosher products – most coming from the US with a hechsher. “Not all supermarkets carried the same range, so it meant travelling to one supermarket for cream cheese and another for cereals. What is still not available is kosher meat. We have recently



Photos: Mandy Toh



Elli Kriel

started getting kosher wine, and there is a limited range of kosher cheese. The products that we can’t get are brought in for us by visitors. At Pesach, we return to South Africa and fill our bags with the supplies that we need.”

Kriel says she delivers kosher food to visitors, locals, hotels, and restaurants on a weekly basis as demand increases for her produce. “I also provide food for Shabbat and offer a Shabbat parcel consisting of all the items needed for *kiddush* (Shabbat blessing), *hamotzi* [the blessing on bread], and *havdalah* [the ceremony marking the end of Shabbat]. There are two types of visitors that require food: tourists and business travellers who visit Dubai for conferences, expos, and conventions.”

Mostly people hear about her through word of

mouth, but also through social media, which has been a fantastic way to connect with customers. As she can’t import kosher meat, the menu is *milchik* and *parev*. The menu is mouth-watering, with options like crumpets for breakfast, baked salmon for dinner, and chocolate brownies for dessert.

“Orders are dealt with directly with visitors or through travel agents, concierges, and food and beverage managers. The food is packaged in a double wrapping of foil and sent to the hotel where guests are staying. I have good relations with many of the hotel staff, and am able to assist in arranging the heating of food in halachic ways. I can also help stock the hotel room with kosher supplies – this is especially important for families with young kids,” she says.

Food is also packed for the road and on aeroplanes, and can be frozen to last till the next destination. This has been life-changing for many people, who

used to bring canned or packaged kosher food when travelling to this region of the world.

She caters to everyone from business and corporate travellers, to families with young kids, and honeymoon couples in transit on their way to Bali, the Maldives, or Mauritius. “Jewish travellers are coming to Dubai frequently. The busiest period is November to April as the weather is best during this time of the year.”

Kriel has had a very positive response from the Arab population around her. “I have received wonderful support, and many [Arab people] order challah and rugelach from me.

There has been much excitement, and the people that have interacted with me have been delighted to be able to get Jewish food that they have encountered elsewhere. The government of the UAE is tremendously supportive of its locally-based businesses.”

Her children attend an international school with at least 35 nationalities. “Quite a few parents and teachers know that we are Jewish, and we’ve only ever received support. My kids take off school for yom tovs (holidays) and get their *yiddishkeit* (Jewish way of life) from life at home and going to shul every week,” she says. They are having lessons over the phone and internet to prepare for their Bar and Batmitzvahs thanks to the wonders of technology.

Kriel says that the South African Jewish values of hospitality, warmth, and the importance of family are very much part of life in Dubai. “I have lived most of my life in South Africa. It’s a strong part of my identity. I’m a member of the South African Business Council, and work closely with other South Africans in building Elli’s Kosher Kitchen. I also continue to support South African businesses back home when it comes to building my brand and marketing,” she says.

Her goal is to continue growing the kosher travel market in Dubai, and to develop the business with local and international partners. The next step is to get a commercial kitchen and a full-time executive chef and *mashgiach* to give her the time to focus on building the brand and the market in the Gulf region.

“Most importantly, I love the work that I am doing, especially the fusion Emirati-Jewish food that I’m developing,” she says. “Food has a great capacity to cross cultures and bring people closer together.”



The future is greater inclusion, says award-winning scientist

TALI FEINBERG

Professor Leslie Swartz was recently honoured with a Gold Medal Award from the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), which recognises outstanding achievement in scientific thinking to the benefit of society. A leading expert in the field of disability studies from the psychology department at Stellenbosch University, Swartz says he’s honoured by the recognition, which gives him a platform to talk to a broader audience about disability. He says it’s a tribute to his colleagues and all the people working to create a more inclusive world.

A clinical psychologist by training, Swartz has focused on questions of acceptance and participation throughout his career. “I’m interested in what kind of social conditions allow the most opportunities and the most people to participate and give of their best in society. I look at the ways we make the world inaccessible to people, including the physical environment and how to fix this. But the biggest barriers are social barriers, and they determine how we create our spaces. We are working towards a ‘barrier-free’ society.”

The fascination with inclusion comes from his own family history. “They say that if you scratch the surface, you will find that all psychologists are trying to understand their own life, and that’s true for me,” he quips. “My father had a range of physical impairments although he would never have called himself disabled. So I grew up conscious of the ways that people manage difference. It made me ‘research-minded’ as I want to explore why some people don’t fit into the world easily.”

Swartz says disability studies is an exciting field for young people, especially as technology and the digital world play a vital role in making the world more accessible for all. “Disability is linked to other changes in our society – climate change and natural disasters, more people with chronic illnesses and HIV, and an ageing population. There’s no doubt that the next big epidemic will be Alzheimer’s Disease. We need to look at what kind of world we are creating to accommodate a wider range of people who have disabilities of both body and mind. It’s a huge issue for the future.”

It’s astonishing how technology has managed to assist people with disabilities, Swartz says. For example, smartphones weren’t designed with disability in mind, but they help visually-impaired people to access reading through audio books – a world away from the clunky technology of the past. On the other hand, technology can sometimes make life harder for the disabled, so we need to pay attention to making sure everything from websites to devices are more inclusive.

Other exciting, cutting edge developments in the field are the use of “exoskeletons” to assist spinal-cord movement, and the design of wheelchairs for the African context, which often includes unpaved rural roads.

Swartz most enjoys working with younger people who have new ideas and challenge him. He has supervised more than 40 PhDs, many of them black, female, and disabled South Africans, who have in turn become leaders in disability work across southern Africa. His work has been used internationally in documents on disability and inclusion, and he is passionate about the inclusion of more disabled people in academia.

In 2018, he worked closely with the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre on its *Deadly Medicine* exhibition, which focused on the abuse and murder of disabled people during the Holocaust and what this means for us today.

Swartz praises the Jewish community’s efforts at inclusion, particularly in Jewish schools. “We don’t want to have segregated schools or work, we want to include children and adults with a range of abilities. But this won’t work if you don’t have proper support. Jewish schools are really good at supporting inclusion.

“If you put a deaf child in a mainstream class, and don’t support them, that isn’t inclusion, it’s a form of

abandonment. Herzlia in Cape Town has been particularly good at providing appropriate support. We need to scale this up across the community and in workplaces. The Jewish community has an understanding from generations past of what exclusion does to people in general. Just like we don’t want to exclude people on the basis of race or religion, we shouldn’t be excluding them on the basis of disability.”

Turning to mental health, Swartz says there has been an “enormous shift” in realising that mental-health problems



Professor Jonathan Jansen, Professor Leslie Swartz, and Professor Eugene Cloete

are much more common than we used to think. “One in three or four people face a serious mental health problem – it’s extremely common. We need many more psychologists in public health, but often there aren’t jobs. In some African countries, there is one psychiatrist for the whole population! So we need to support ordinary people on the frontline.”

In conclusion, he believes that “every community should be involved in creating a more habitable planet. By allowing as much space and opportunities for people whose bodies and minds are not the same as ours, we will create a richer and much more diverse world.”

Meeting the only Jew in Pakistan

PAULA SLIER

Pakistan is the world's sixth-most populous country. Out of nearly 215 million people, how many Jews would you guess live there?

One.

And he's a Jew by choice.

He's also very open about it, so much so that his Twitter handle reads, "Pakistani Jew fighting for Jewish and minority rights for equal citizen rights in Pakistan."

Fishel Benkhald, formerly Faizel Khalid, is a 32-year-old engineer who lives in Islamabad. He's currently assisting Pakistani food exporters to reach the international kosher market, and has plans to clean up the old Jewish cemetery in his hometown of Karachi.

While never a large community, most Pakistani Jews originally came from India. In an area which borders Pakistan named Yusmarg (Handwara), there still lives a group that to this day calls itself “B’nei Israel”,

SAJBD Pretoria celebrates 70 years

DIANE WOLFSON

Though small, the Pretoria Jewish community is still fighting fit. This was the message of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Pretoria Council on its 70th anniversary and 61st conference and AGM held on 17 November.

SAJBD National Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev confirmed that Pretoria, albeit the smallest of the four regions represented on the national executive, plays an important role in South African Jewry and Jewish life.

Louis Pearlman, the outgoing chairperson of the Pretoria Council, said that over the years, the council's functions had changed along with the diminishing Jewish demographics. "It remains first and foremost, the co-ordinating body for Pretoria's Jewish organisations, the publisher of local community magazine the *Pretoria Jewish Chronicle*, and the organiser of functions including Yom Hashoa," he said.

Assistance is being offered to country communities in an attempt to strengthen not only Pretoria's Jewish community, but South Africa's broader Jewish community.

"In order to maintain relevant, additional projects, namely a Jewish school fee-subsidy programme for Jewish children resident in Pretoria to attend Jewish schools in Johannesburg, as well as six simplex units offering free accommodation to young couples and families wishing to move to Pretoria, are now in place," Pearlman said. Under the auspices of the SAJBD Pretoria Council, a book on the history of the Pretoria community since 1930 is also being compiled.

Howard Sackstein, guest speaker and the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*, said, "You shouldn't be sitting here listening to a guest speaker, but rather sitting around a table with the younger members of the community, strategising on the future of your organisations."

Sackstein said that the South African Jewish community was shrinking with fewer resources, and there was a need to have real and meaningful discussions. "We need to throw away the old rules which no longer apply, and find out how we can sustain our organisations," he said.

Pearlman made presentations to two stalwarts in the community, namely Allan Shankman, for a lifetime of loyal service to the welfare of our community and distinguished service to the Pretoria Chevrah Kadisha; and Victor Gordon, for a lifetime of loyal service to the SAJBD Pretoria Council, the Pretoria Jewish community, and for his love and dedication to Israel.

A certificate of meritorious service and a gift was awarded to Lawrence Nowosenetz prior to him going on aliyah next month. Nowosenetz was awarded for dedicated and unstinting service rendered to the council as a committed and active member for 37 years and as chairperson for nine years.

meaning children of Israel.

The largest Jewish community settled in the country's former capital, Karachi, until the early 1970s when an offer was made by an American sponsor to finance their voyage to the United States. Aside from a handful who remained, the community left en masse.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Islamabad, Benkhald says he remembers his mother lighting Shabbat candles and preparing kosher food at home. He's certain she was from a religious Iranian Jewish family who later moved to Karachi. She died when he was nine years old, so he was never able to corroborate his beliefs with her.

"I would always pray with my mom," he reflects. "I remember her saying that we do it privately inside our home, and I mustn't share it with my friends. After she died, I grew up quite far away from religion but as a teenager, I began to question things."

Searching for answers, he turned to Judaism and Islam. His father was born and raised a Muslim, but lived his life as a secular, agnostic person.

“He was a lovely man with an open mind – a freethinker. He taught us to do good to people, plants and animals, and that they in turn would do good to us. I found that the holes in my heart were not like the moon in Islam, they were more like the Star of David. One of the things I especially liked about Judaism is that it didn’t advocate armed conflict. I felt more comfortable being a Jew.”

When he was 15 years old, Benkhald sought to make it official. He submitted a request to the ministry of interior asking to be listed as a Jew. Apostasy – the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief – is a crime in Pakistan, so it was a bold step to take. But Benkhald felt strongly and used the Pakistani constitution, which upholds freedom of religion, as his defence.

"I was asking for a very logical and ethical thing, but the negotiations were very, very difficult. I kept going back year after year to request it. In the beginning, the official asked me if I was trying to make trouble for Pakistan."

But eventually they acquiesced.
“I don’t know why they changed their
minds. It might just be that I finally got hold
of the right person who wanted to listen
with an open mind. I believe the decision
to recognise me as a Jew was made at the
highest levels of government. Obviously they

want the international community to see that Pakistan is progressing.”

Then began his next battle, taking on the Islamabad government to grant him permission to travel to Israel on a Pakistani passport. The request was turned down three times before being approved. Like all Pakistani passports, his also states that “this passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel”. A few pages later, there’s a letter of permission to travel to the Jewish state.

It's now up to the Israeli government to agree, something Benkhalid insists is a mere formality. Once that happens, he's hoping to be in Jerusalem to celebrate Chanukah by the end of the year.



Fishel Benkhalid

“There are Jews with Pakistani passports that have expired, living in Israel and other countries. They’ve contacted me and want to help, but they don’t want to come back to Pakistan. I understand. Sometimes they visit Pakistan on another passport to take care of their small properties and businesses here or just to enjoy the place, but their children and grandchildren aren’t ready to return to Pakistan, mainly because of economic reasons.”


It's tough being the only Jew in Pakistan. "I try to do the bare minimum. Shabbat is one of the things I try to keep. Most people are tolerant. It is the minority who are quite extreme and because they make so much noise, they're often the only ones who are heard."

It hasn't been easy convincing Pakistanis of his decision to be a Jew and openly Zionist. As a result, he always takes precautions. Once he met a group of people who, after chatting for a while, beat him up badly. Ironically, it gave him the idea to take his fight online, and become even more public about it.

But Benkhald is not naïve, and is quick to admit that anti-Semitism and anti-Israel

sentiment are rife in the country.

“There is also a strong movement against Christians and Hindus. Sadly this is indoctrinated by the books that are taught in school and the speeches from the mosques. It also comes from television, where sometimes well-known people talk about the conniving Jews and the Hind-Jew. The Hind-Jew is taught to be against Muslims and Pakistan. They teach it without any proof.”



For a few months already, rumours have been circulating that Pakistan might recognise Israel. But Prime Minister Imran Khan was quick to refute them, saying that there will be no recognition without a resolution to the Palestinian struggle.

“I tell Pakistanis you accept the British Mandate of Pakistan and India but the British also mandated Israel, so why not accept that? They don’t have a clear answer.

It's funny because they accept the rights of Aborigines in Australia, the rights of Native Americans, and the indigenous rights of people in Pakistan, but when it comes to the Jews in the land of Israel, they totally reject it. Instead they believe all Jews should leave. I tell them Jews have a 3 000-year-old connection to the land, so what about that? They can't answer."


Still, Benkhald believes that Pakistan will eventually recognise the Jewish state because “Pakistan is dependent on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, and they’ve decided to move forward with Israel, so it’s only a matter of time before Pakistan follows suit.”

I ask him if his mother was alive today what she would make of all this.

He laughs. “She’d probably be proud but at the same time angry with me. Her biggest concern was her children. She’d worry how this would affect me and my brothers.”

His brothers have cut contact with him, and sued him for disgracing the family name.





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Success is sweet for Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream

MIRAH LANGER

“You can’t be fighting for a bigger piece of the pie; you have to fight to make the pie bigger.” This is the vision behind Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream, a home-grown business that has just nabbed a Best of Joburg award for top ice-cream parlour for the third year running.

“We are super-excited about it. We obviously strive to be the best in Joburg – and the best in the world,” says Paul Ballen, the founder of the business.

“The food business is an incredibly creative and exciting space to be in, but it’s also tough and a case of ‘if you can’t take the heat, get out of the kitchen’,” says Danya Amoils, the head of human resources at the company.

“Success is measured by how long you can stay in the kitchen, who you can bring into the kitchen, and how all those people come together to bring creativity into the food space and innovate in an exciting way,” she says.

Ballen and Amoils recently sat down with the *SA Jewish Report* to share some of the key ingredients in their recipe for sweet success.

This year marks the tenth year of a business that began when Ballen received an ice-cream maker as a birthday present from his mother. This serendipitous gift unlocked a creative and entrepreneurial spirit in the Johannesburg-born son of two artist parents.

Ballen began selling his ice-cream creations to friends and family, and soon established an online community of people that were eager to experience the taste sensations being whipped up in his home kitchen.

As an emerging foodie culture was being shaped by the introduction of televised cooking shows, Ballen realised that he was

tapping into a gap in the market for artisanal ice-cream.

“Prior to food television, all people had access to were written recipes in newspapers and magazines. Now, through cooking channels, there is this immersive education of watching people creating food.”

Ballen was inspired by his travels and the exposure it gave him to innovative flavour combinations and dining experiences not yet being explored in South Africa.

“Early on I realised South Africa was really behind in terms of food trends and appreciation. In 2009, it was just probably the beginning of coffee culture in South Africa. It was the perfect timing,” he says.

By 2014, Ballen had teamed up with business partner Josh Amoils, and the company began to increase its reach. Part of its vision for the future is to continue to expand in South Africa, contributing to the “local is lekker” pride.

“What bothers me is that if you come to visit South Africa from anywhere in America or Europe, and you go to a central hub where people socialise and spend their time, like Rosebank, you will walk around and see Krispy Kreme, Starbucks, and Burger King,” says Amoils.

“All these brands and chains exist in other places in the world, and it’s such a shame because South Africa has a very unique style. Why should you opt to get a doughnut if you could get a vetkoek or a koeksister or something that is local? It’s just so uninspiring.”



Beyond pushing for an expanding African agenda, the company also believe that what it creates is special enough eventually to be offered to the global market.

“There are things that we do that are internationally competitive: the look and

feel of stores; the pre-packed ice cream single servings,” cites Ballen as examples.

Ultimately, when it comes to entrepreneurship in South Africa, the company is upbeat.

“We are extremely positive. We think there is huge opportunity, and we wouldn’t want to be anywhere else,” says Ballen.

This attitude is driven by the fact that for the company, true achievement encompasses more than just the sweetness of its award-winning flavours.

“The measure of success is vast. It extends from the product to the upliftment of staff to job creation, those are the aspects that make us feel proud of the business,” says Ballen.

The company runs on a profit-share incentive structure that incorporates everyone from the kitchen staff to the ice-cream scoopers to those running operations at headquarters.

“The better the company does, the more they earn,” says Amoils. “We have maintained from the beginning that you shouldn’t be capped in what you earn if you bring value to the company.”

In particular, the company made sure that it had “epic people in middle management”, as it believes those responsible for motivating staff and overseeing logistics are key to success.

Investing in middle management staff training, “has led to huge growth and resulted in revenue records being broken month-on-month”, Ballen says.

In fact, so eager is it to share the business lessons it has learnt along the way, the company recently launched an academy to offer training programmes to those eager to enter into the retail space.

It’s just one of its current projects. With headquarters based in Orange Grove, Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream is also keen to be part of rejuvenating the neighbourhood.

Having already purchased property that serves as housing for its staff, future plans include building a three storey factory, an entertainment centre, and premises for sister companies among other developments.

“There is going to be so much energy,” says Ballen.

Ultimately, it’s clear that core to Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream is the business of being a mensch.

As both Ballen and Amoils assert, the company is driven by Jewish business ethics when it comes to decision-making, management, and especially staff development.

“There is the potential to really uplift people,” Ballen says.

An example of just such a transformation is the career path of the company’s accountant, Lindani Dube:

“Lindani started off as a scooper at the Gautrain store, and he is now working at headquarters as our accountant,” says Amoils.

Ballen says this transformation was made possible simply by showing a personal interest in an employee’s life.

“We got to know him. We found out he was studying accounting, and that he was getting great marks.”

Ballen says that even in day-to-day encounters with staff, it’s always the small gestures that end up making the biggest difference.

“Small changes ... can make them proud of what they do; it can inspire them and make them love and appreciate their work. By giving them a bit of love, time, training, and empowerment, it turns their whole world around.”

Israeli city started by South Africans turns 70

PETER BAILEY

Imagine driving from Cape Town Street to South Africa Boulevard, and then turning into Johannesburg Street, while the magnificent Mediterranean Sea, a marina, and a superb beach are five minutes away.

This is the case if you are in Israel’s city of Ashkelon with its 140 000-strong community. In fact, on a plinth on Afridar Square, you can read the history of the town in English, Afrikaans, and Hebrew.

The reason for all this is that South African Jewry were responsible for establishing the modern Ashkelon, which will celebrate its 70th birthday in December. While being almost 70, this city has a history going back 3 000 years or more, made evident by its museums and archaeological digs.

The modern Ashkelon story, though, started during World War II with the establishment of the South African Jewish War Appeal, set up by South African Jewry to assist Holocaust survivors as news of the extent of the horrors taking place in Eastern Europe became known.

Originally, the plan was to help survivors to rebuild their lives in Europe, but this changed when the majority headed to the nascent state of Israel. So, the funds were used to provide housing assistance in Israel.

The South Africans didn’t choose where the housing would be, the Israeli government put together a strategic plan that called for the establishment of new population centres in the north and south of the country. These were away from the more densely populated central areas along the coastal belt and adjacent inland areas stretching from Tel Aviv to Haifa.

State planners decided that the South African funds would be used to establish a garden-type village close to where the ancient city of Ashkelon had been located. So, the seed was

sown for the modern city of Ashkelon.

The South African Jewish War Appeal committee established a company called Afridar, a play on the Hebrew words *Darom Africa* (translated as South Africa). Afridar, the development company for the establishment of the new village, built 468 cottages overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.



Avraham Infield and David Zwebner inspect the plaque commemorating the handing back of Ashkelon to the Israeli government in 1959

In 1953, Afridar, as the village was named, merged with the neighbouring town of Migdal Ashkelon in a process completed in 1955. The united towns took the biblical name of Ashkelon. While the direct South African interest in Ashkelon waned after the merger, there was a continued South African presence in the management of the city.

Telfed, The South African Zionist Federation in Israel, played a huge role in the early days

of Afridar in recruiting South Africans to work, manage, and live in the village. The original management committee was headed by South African Max Spitz, who was succeeded by Louis Pincus, also South African born, while Selwyn Lurie served as the managing director of Afridar until 1958.

The first mayor, town clerk, and town treasurer, Henry Sonnabend, Philip Gillon, and Sam Wulfson respectively, were all South Africans. Following the merger of Afridar and Migdal Ashkelon, South African Leo Tager was elected as the second mayor, while compatriot Jack Schneider was appointed as the city engineer. Another South African, Max Decktor, was elected as deputy mayor of the city, serving in that capacity for a number of years.

South African funds were used to assist in the building of the Ashkelon Hospital, currently known as Barzilai Hospital, which boasts a Mary Gordon Maternity Wing, named in honour of world-renowned South African, Dr Mary Gordon.

The Eric and Sheila Samson Emergency Surgical Hospital recently opened its doors as part of the Barzilai Hospital in a continuation of South African interventions in the city.

Telfed is working with several other organisations to arrange a huge 70th birthday bash for Ashkelon, which will highlight the South African contribution to the city since its establishment. One of the aspects of the celebration will be the offer of a unique tour for South Africans, which will not only showcase Ashkelon, but take visitors to parts of Israel off the beaten track which they would not normally visit.

- *Peter Bailey is chairman of the Telfed National Events Committee.*

UJW meets kneads with KosherWorld

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) recently hosted a challah bake for more than 100 women and children in preparation for the Shabbos Project. Challah bakes epitomise the fact that alone we can only do so much, but together, we can make a difference. It shows how single ingredients aren't appreciated, but mixed together with a bit of love, we create a magical taste. It's an ideal that the UJW stands for.

The challah bake, in partnership with KosherWorld, was held in honour of Kosher Mobile Meals, the flagship project of the UJW. The challah bake celebrated coming together as a community and experiencing the Shabbos Project.



Port Elizabeth holds Great Big Challah Bake



More than 70 mothers, children, grannies, aunts, and members of the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) recently gathered at the Theodor Herzl School Hall in Port Elizabeth for a challah bake.

The group was led by Robyn Smookler, who went down from Joburg for the event. The excitement of mixing and stirring was palpable as the kids in particular got stuck into the process.

In celebration of Mitzvah Day in November, attendees were also asked to contribute to the UJW's appeal for firefighters and their families in the greater Port Elizabeth area in the form of bottled water, lip ice, clothing, and dry goods.

Each baker went home with prepared dough and a recipe, an apron, a money tin for home *chesed* (kindness), and a whole lot of happy memories and learning.

Bet David holds inclusive bakeathon

Sandton's Bet David hosted an all-inclusive challah bake last Thursday, welcoming women, men, and children. On Sunday afternoon, Bet David welcomed seniors and their families for a high tea as part of Mensch Mitzvah Day, which included a performance by the Bet David choir, delicious home-baked cakes and more.



Sunday (24 November)

- The Union of Orthodox Synagogues will be having a Hachnosas Sifrei Torah to honour our three retired dayanim: Rabbi Kurstag, Rabbi Rapoport, and Rabbi Suchard, who combined have served the South African Jewish community for more than 100 years. Procession will start at 37 Corbel Crescent, Glenhazel, at 16:45, going up to the Yeshiva College campus where mincha/maariv will be held together with a formal programme and cocktails thereafter. Contact 082 451 6275 for further details.
- Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre book launch *The First Into the Dark* and panel discussion with co-authors Michael Robertson and Edwina Light (School of Public Health, University of Sydney), and local panellists Christine Nxumalo (representing the Life Esidimeni Family Committee), and Dr Gerhard Grobler (the head of clinical unit: psychiatry Steve Biko Academic Hospital). Time: 15:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.
- Second Innings hosts Rochelle Keene, curator of the Adler Museum of Medicine, University of the Witwatersrand, on *Contributions to world medicine by doctors with South African connections*. 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.

- Bet David hosts *Weaving the tapestry – a musical journey with Sean Brokensha*. Time: seated by 13:45. Cost: R175 per person with tea, coffee, and cake after the show. Contact Diane: 011 783 7117, email: admin2@betdavid.org.za



Monday (25 November)

- Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre invites you to a special screening of *Hitler's Children*, an extraordinary documentary about the descendants of Hitler's inner circle. Includes post-screening discussion on the transmission of trauma within and across generations. Time: 19:00. Venue: 1 Duncombe Road, Forest Town. RSVP to dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100. Free admission, donations welcome.
- Second Innings hosts a summer cruise on the Vaal at Stonehaven On Vaal. Time: Bus departs 09:00 sharp. Meet bus in the parking below Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R290 includes return by bus, river cruise, and light lunch. To book, call 011 483 7425.
- The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) hosts entrepreneur and writer Tracey Karsen on *Bobby Locke – a brilliant mind and a great golf swing – stories from his family and friends*. Time: 10:00. Venue: 1 Oak Street, Houghton. Donation: R40. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053.

WIZO brings old and young together on Shabbat

The Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) Johannesburg visited Our Parents Home in The Gardens, Johannesburg, on 15 November with students from King David High School Linksfield and Hirsch Lyons Girls High School in the spirit of the Shabbos Project. They connected the youngest and oldest members of the community, and brought the Shabbos Projects experience to residents.

The visitors handed out gifts to residents of the home and The Sunshine Circle. Each gift was accompanied by a beautiful card with Shabbat wishes made by children



from King David and Yeshiva Primary School. The smiles on residents' faces and the excitement as they opened their gifts matched the enjoyment experienced by volunteers.

WIZO honours Edna Freinkel

The Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) Forum hosted Absa

Jewish Achiever Awards winner Edna Freinkel and her daughter, Corinne Ossendryver, at a function at Beyachad on 12 November.



Freinkel won the Europcar Women in Leadership Award at the awards in September. Ossendryver is CPO of educational organisation Jewish Interactive. Both have excelled in the fields of literacy and education, and have changed thousands of lives.

Brenda Trope, Edna Freinkel, Marcia Parness, and Corinne Ossendryver

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Handling criticism

I gave a talk to the Claremont community in Cape Town over Shabbat on how to embrace criticism. As someone who is no stranger to being on the receiving end, I’m often forced to deliberate whether or not to take the message on board.

As absurd and perhaps sad as it might sound, over the years, I have developed a method to determine how seriously to take negative feedback. Death threats and pure anti-Semitism aside, my approach is simply to differentiate between criticism and insult. The former might be able to assist me in improving my craft and myself, but the latter – insult – most often has no other purpose but to offend. Insult generally says more about the person than it does about me.

In the course of my research into this topic, I was astounded to learn that the “sandwich feedback” approach is almost always unsuccessful. In essence it’s when we provide positive feedback, then negative, and then positive again. The idea is to bring balance to the discussion. Research, however, shows that the person on the receiving end often perceives the positive to be insincere, and doesn’t even “hear” it because they are so anxious about what might follow.

So, what’s the answer? Very simply, to be direct and fair. The ideal approach is to establish the goal you are trying to reach in the difficult conversation so that everyone is on the same page. Once that’s established, express concern. It’s significantly easier to have the conversation if the person has complimented the other party at other times for a job well done. Then there is more credibility in the censure when it is required.

In many ways, the same is required from us as a community. Criticism and complaining is encoded into our DNA in much the same way as anxiety is. We love to have a good moan, for whatever reason. Whether it is about the *SA Jewish Report*, the Shabbos Project, Chai FM, the Chevrah Kadisha, our shuls, rabbis, schools, tuition, restaurants, or anything else that we might

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



find not up to our standards. We have the right to complain, especially if it’s to raise standards. But as the person complaining, it’s equally important to look at ourselves to determine if we are trying to improve the subject of our complaint or if we are just venting in order to insult and cause pain. If the latter is our truth, then we need to understand what our motivation is. More than this, we need to consider if we have paid a compliment to the organisation at other times. Did we give credit where and when it was due, or did we remain silent? Did we compliment the organisers of the Shabbos Project for the incredible work they did, or did we just become vocal when we didn’t like an aspect of the weekend?

Do we commend Maharsha School for lowering school fees, or do we look to denigrate it because it makes us feel better about the fees we are paying? Do we tell our community rabbi and friends when we enjoy a sermon or just mumble to the person next to us when we don’t? The same applies to conversations with our children, our spouses, partners, and even conversations with ourselves – we are, after all, in general our own harshest critics.

I’m not suggesting that it’s an easy balance to achieve. As a social commentator, I know this well. Whereas I try and attain some sort of equilibrium of fairness, I probably don’t succeed fully.

What I’m suggesting – or asking in this column – is that you join me in that struggle. I should also possibly add that sending a message that, “It’s because of you that Jews get killed” contributes as much to conversation as does photoshopping me into a gas chamber with the words, “Coming soon”. It has an impact, but it’s not going to be taken seriously.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Pretoria Council turns ‘three-score-and-ten’



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

The recent South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) national conference marked the fiftieth such biennial gathering of Jewish community leadership since the establishment of a united, nationally-based board in 1912. At its annual general meeting on Sunday, the SAJBD Pretoria Council likewise celebrated a significant milestone: its 70th anniversary as a distinct regional council of the board. Prior to that, Pretoria had been considered part of the greater Johannesburg region.

In spite of being located so close to the primary hub of Jewish communal life in South Africa, Pretoria Jewry has succeeded in maintaining its own distinctive character and independence. It constitutes one of the four main regional branches of the board, and in spite of reduced numbers, it remains a vibrant, contributing component of South African Jewry as a whole.

Of particular note this year is the extensive assistance rendered by the community to victims both of xenophobic violence in Pretoria’s Marabastad area and the Mozambique flood disaster. In my congratulatory message, I paid tribute to the community for everything it is accomplishing, making specific reference to those members, past and present, who have made so distinctive a contribution to the board’s national councils over decades. They include current chairman Louis Pearlman, past chairmen Victor Gordon and Lawrence Nowosenetz (both of whom received special community service awards at the

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

AGM) and long-serving secretary Diane Wolfson. We wish our Pretoria colleagues continued success in the years to come, and look forward to working with them in building on our common South African Jewish heritage.

Chevrah Kadisha tribute evening

Also taking place this week was the annual Chevrah Kadisha tribute dinner, which SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn and I attended. As always, it was an inspiring occasion, one that highlighted the extraordinary and multifaceted work carried out by this remarkable organisation, together with the outstanding individuals, including lay leaders, professional staff, donors, and volunteers, who make it all possible.

At our recent national conference, I said that the Chevrah Kadisha has no equivalent in the diaspora, and this is surely true. In terms of the comprehensive range of services it provides, combined with how well it has succeeded in bringing so many different aspects of community welfare under one umbrella, it is indeed a unique organisation. What also stood out for me at the event was how the Chevrah Kadisha is developing strategies to ensure its sustainability for the next decade and beyond. The lesson we should take from this is that when it comes to ensuring the viability of our communal organisations, we can’t rely solely on idealism and good intentions, but must also strive to run them in the most efficient, practical, and cost-effective way that we can – in other words, like any other business.

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

WIZO South Africa column

Visitors praise Neve WIZO

The Johannesburg treasurer of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO), Maxine Laffer, last month spent time in Israel visiting Neve WIZO, one of WIZO South Africa’s projects. She was accompanied by Steven Swart, the South African member of parliament for the African Christian Democratic Party, his wife Louise, and their daughter, Siobhan.

Said Laffer, “I was excited to be given the opportunity to visit Neve WIZO, a WIZO South Africa project in Herzlia. It was a special experience. The children are well-adjusted and happy. I take my hat off to the ‘parents’ of these youngsters, the social workers, and everyone involved in this special project. They turn so many lives around. On a personal note, I want to say how lucky we are to have such good friends as the Swarts, whose undying love for Israel and WIZO isn’t taken for granted. They are true Zionists.”

Said Louise, “What a wonderful trip for Steven, Siobhan, and I to visit Neve WIZO, an incredible project that provides loving homes for children from broken or dysfunctional homes. We visited two of the five homes today which each have up to eight children with loving parents. It was pure joy for us to visit our South African WIZO family today. Thank you Avital Blumethal and Janine Gelley for today. Our hearts are thankful to see what you are doing.”

The children of Neve WIZO wrote the following letter, “We, the children of Neve WIZO are thankful and grateful to you for finding the time to visit us and hear about our lives here at the family home. We would like to share with you some of our day to day routine. This place has become our safe place with the



couple of great parents who are always here for us and for everything we need.

“Everyone has a secure corner here. We’re getting warmth and attention, and all the things we couldn’t and wouldn’t get in our former homes. Our clothes are always clean. We get good, healthy, fresh food every day,

a warm clean bed, and a personal corner to call our own. There is always someone here to listen to us, share our problems, offer help, and a kind word. We also have private lessons to support school studies, extra curriculum activities of our choice, and fun experiences with all the people at Neve WIZO. We would like to tell you about the

significant relationships that have been formed between us kids. It’s a lifelong true friendship like the bond between brother and sister. It’s something we’ll take with us for the rest of our lives. We couldn’t have asked or dreamed of a better place to be.”

We were fortunate to host Eden Ben Shitrit as our guest speaker for the Rebecca Sieff Awards in Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Johannesburg. Eden is one of the many success stories of Neve WIZO. She served in the Israel Defense Forces, and is currently studying at university with the aim of specialising in veterinary science.

We invite all WIZO members to join us at our upcoming 100th World WIZO anniversary conference. Come see our wonderful projects firsthand, including Neve WIZO. Contact Hayley, 011 645 2513, for details.

We wish the youth movements with whom WIZO is affiliated happy camping, and everyone happy holidays and a chag Chanukah sameach. May our beloved Israel have peace, quiet, and the freedom from fear and war.

This column paid for by WIZO SA

Words can be poisonous weapons

What is a “location”? To most people, it’s a place. But in South Africa, it was once an area inhabited by mainly desperately poor black people. When many South Africans used that word, it suggested a dirty, unsafe area, where poor people cooked pap outdoors.

The dictionary can never be an unbiased book. Every word that appears in it is coloured by history, politics, connotations, and context, and fuelled by fashion.

South Africans aren’t foreign to how words can be poisoned and meanings changed by politicians. During apartheid, the word “native” was used pejoratively for black people as an official government term. There was even a native affairs department under the authority of then Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd.

The apartheid government struggled repeatedly to coin euphemisms for black people. Terms such as “natives”, “bantus”, “non-Europeans” and “plurals” all had their day. The latter was called “hilarious” by the *Sunday Times* in 1978. There was once a department of plural relations and development.’

But the shoe always tends to slide to the other foot eventually. Many black South Africans and politicians today are too easily tempted to call a white person who disagrees with them about anything a racist, often without cause. And in spite of losing power, Afrikaners are still famous for using the ugly “k-word” to refer to black people, although doing so publically might get them into serious trouble.

The slippery, politicised meanings of ordinary words are not a South African invention, however. Is the word “Zionism” an ordinary word? Not so long ago, the ideology had to be inherently part of an Israeli government platform for it to succeed. But what about an Arab government party? It

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



would be absurd to expect it to call itself Zionist. Zionism is a particularly loaded word in South Africa, where the African National Congress, trade unions, leftist academics, and nongovernmental organisations are intensely hostile to Israel. Among politicised activists in black communities, it provokes awkwardness even among people who accept Israel’s existence. For the more extreme, Zionism is akin to a four-letter word. Every word has an implied back story: many South Africans who use Zionism as a pejorative are veiling anti-Semitism.

Ever since Theodor Herzl’s day in 1897, the word Zionism was the most central expression of Jews’ fight for a state. Israel now exists, but ironically among Jews, the word is being reconsidered amidst the hurly-burly of Israeli politics. Ask Israelis if they are Zionists, and many might say they aren’t, Israel is simply the Jewish country where they live, and they will fight to keep it secure. Increasing numbers of American Jews, alienated from Israel because of differences in world view, would not describe themselves as Zionists.

Is Zionism just a term which was once important, but isn’t anymore? Some people will angrily reject this, saying that discarding the word is a betrayal of people who gave their lives for it. But did they fight for something that existed then, but has changed now, and must they change too?

Words are always a weapon or tool, depending on who uses them. What would happen if the “Z-word” became forbidden in contemporary society? Or fell into disuse, like “plurals”? Would the anti-Semitic thread simply be expressed through a different word?

Brilliant year for tennis champ

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Mikayla Plitt, a King David Linksfield 15-year-old tennis champion, “just doesn’t like losing”, and so has racked up a number of achievements this year, culminating in her playing for South Africa against the United Kingdom in London.

“Mikayla is one of those youngsters who quietly gets on with things, and makes it happen,”



says her father, Rory. But, behind that quiet, humble exterior lies a fierce competitiveness. “When Mikayla gets on the tennis court, that’s when her competitiveness comes out,” he says. “She loves the adrenaline. It’s win or nothing with her, actually, with everything – Monopoly, Scrabble. She can be 4-0 down in a match, and she’ll come back.” Playing at this level requires commitment. Mikayla trains six days a week, for four hours a day after school. Certainly, it helps to love the

game. “When you’re doing something you want to do, it’s easy,” Mikayla says. She has been playing tennis since she begged her mom to let her play at the age of five when passing the courts on the way to nursery school.

Mikayla has consistently been ranked top-15 in her respective age group since the under-10 category. In Grade 7, she qualified to play for Maccabi, but was deemed too young to do so. This year, she represented South Africa at the European Maccabi Games in Budapest, where she won bronze playing against girls in Grade 12. Overall, it has been a dream year for this young athlete, who lives by the mantra of being passionate about what she does, believing in herself, and working hard. She represented Gauteng at the national interprovincial under-15 tournament. Gauteng won, beating KwaZulu-Natal in the finals. Mikayla was subsequently chosen to represent the South African high-school team against British school champs in London, where she won both her matches, and was awarded full South African colours. Her greatest challenge so far has been a shoulder injury she had last year, when she had to take a break for four months. She counts making the South African team as her greatest triumph.

“She has played so many tournaments at the highest level, but the smile on her face at the South African capping ceremony topped everything,” Rory says. “It was moving, when they introduced each player, to hear Mikayla proudly say, ‘I’m from King David Linksfield.’”

KDL in baking spirit

Grade Rs at King David Pre-Primary School Linksfield get into the spirit of the Shabbos Project by baking their own challahs. Kneading with love are Mia Sandler, Kim Fleiser, and Georgia Zlotnick.



Baking bread at Eden



Lea Ben Yehuda and Kyale-Jade Sachs at Eden Preparatory School making challah as part of the Shabbos Project.

Letters

PAMENSKY STORY UNNECESSARY AND UNJUSTIFIED

I’m referring to the article dated titled “Pamensky admits to ratifying Eskom’s dodgy R43 million New Age deal” (*SA Jewish Report*, 8 November 2019). While I understand that the *SA Jewish Report* is a respected paper covering news relevant to the Jewish community, I feel that higher degrees of sensitivity could be used when publishing certain stories. The length and “airtime” given to the Pamensky article feels unnecessary and unjustified. We’ll all be fully informed about Pamensky in the national newspapers, we don’t need our community paper to fulfil that role. The bottom line is that there won’t be a Shabbos table this week that won’t be discussing that article. So as the editor of a Jewish community newspaper, I guess I’m asking you to really dig deep and ask yourself if a story like this is necessary, or if you should and could rather focus on stories that unite, not divide our people – of which there are many. Yes, perhaps not as “juicy”, but they certainly won’t lead to sin. Perhaps it’s also your responsibility as the official newspaper of the Jewish community to enquire about the halachic parameters in which publishing articles that will lead to *lashon*

hara (derogatory speech about a person) are allowed. I would be interested to know. People will treat any negative story like a tabloid saga. It fuels rumour, and stimulates *lashon hara* – a most grievous – if not the most grievous – sin in our Torah. I’m not suggesting that you falsely publish stories or limit freedom of speech. Perhaps just re-think the wider ramifications of publishing a story whose only outcome is to name and shame a fellow member of our community, a fellow member of *klal Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood). The rest of the world does a good enough job of slandering us in the media on a daily basis, why do it to ourselves? – **Angie Segal, Johannesburg**

• *The SA Jewish Report puts a great deal of effort in deciding whether to cover such stories or not, but in this case it was very clear that the person concerned is part of the community and what he has done has huge national and communal ramifications. We would be remiss in not covering it. If we were to ignore it or whitewash it, how can we expect our readers to trust us? Suffice to say, we literally gave you the bare bones of the story, without any of what you call the “juicy” details. – Editor*

No shades of grey at Sydenham’s Shabbos Project event

Preparation for the Shabbos Project was a black and white affair at Sydenham Hebrew Pre-Primary School last Friday. Children, dressed in black and white, baked black and white challah, enjoyed a Shabbos play by the teachers, and gathered around the Shabbos table to sing Shabbos songs.



Colourful history lesson wows Torah Academy

Torah Academy Boys’ High School recently attended a presentation by English historian, educationalist, and author, Christopher Lloyd, at St John’s College. Lloyd is best known for his unique method of teaching the greatest moments in nature, science, sport, and history, with wall books that fold out into 2m-long visual timelines. Key historical events are marked by pictures and captions, encouraging curiosity to flow and enabling children to make instant connections between the past and present. One of Lloyd’s innovative teaching aids is his Cambridge graduation coat, which has been modified with 20 coloured pockets. Pupils can “pick a pocket or two”, which contain everyday objects

such as toilet paper – linking China to the Guttenberg Press – and other mundane objects such as a plastic bowl or bottled water, which he masterfully connects to key periods in history, causing a “wow” response from the audience. Torah Academy is looking forward to Lloyd’s return in May 2020 for the Kingsmead Book Fair.



Christopher Lloyd, Gideon Mannie from Torah Academy, and Urdin Johaar from Jonathan Ball Publishing

Chanukah prep at Victory Park

The Division of Informal Jewish Education (DIJE) at King David Primary School Victory Park ran various activities this week relating to Chanukah. Grade 1s were taught how to make olive oil; Grades 2 and 3 made menorahs out of various materials such as wood, bolts, and paint; Grade 4s made paper dreidals; and Grade 5s decorated doughnuts and had a brocha party.



Ella Passman, Demi Cohen, Safriel Ndzingani, Demi Ermann, and Ruby Fine make paper dreidals

KDL twins on Joburg mini council

Twins Tayla and Aidan Cohen were elected Johannesburg Mini Councillors for 2020, representing King David Senior Primary School Linksfield.



PANDERING TO ANTI-SEMITISM

Pandor is ANC (African National Congress) through and through. Given that, her attitude to Israel and Jews is not surprising or new. She appears to have been educated about Israel and the conflict by reading the literature of Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. An ostensibly educated and intelligent woman, she has clearly missed the impartiality boat in favour of the rocket to anti-Semitism. The ANC is clear on this. It’s not clear about anything else save for beating up Israel. It’s a hobby for this despotic regime. The ANC can’t offer anything to the international arena to assist with the Israeli-Arab issue. It has neither

the acumen nor the impartiality required to comment in a positive and meaningful way. The ANC presence at the United Nations Security Council is an international joke. It can’t control the plight in South Africa nor the chicanery within its ranks, yet it would rather lecture the world on morality and ethics. Go figure. The ANC supports terrorism, end of story. While I understand that the attitude of the South African Zionist Federation and South African Jewish Board of Directors towards the ANC is one of pandering to the political masters of this country, I feel a stronger stance should be taken against this kind of rhetoric in the interests of the South African Jewish community. – **Steve Marks, Johannesburg**

