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south african Jewish Report

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Some light despite load shedding gloom

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa was plunged into darkness this week, literally and figuratively, as Eskom announced unprecedented stage 6 load shedding in an attempt to keep the lights on.

After a gruelling day of stage 4 load shedding (12 times over a four-day period for two hours at a time, or 12 times over an eight-day period for four hours at a time), the stage 6 announcement was a cruel blow to the businesses, households, and mindsets of South Africans. The fact that stage 6 quickly reverted back to stage 4 only added to the panic and confusion.

“How do we do this? How do I bake cakes and keep 27 people employed at my bakery?” asked Jacqui Biess. “It’s peak season for wedding cakes, and we need at least six hours of uninterrupted electricity to bake them. Stage 6 would have given us only 3.5 hours. We are losing products as the temperature of our cold room heats up, shelf life is shortened, and dairy spoils quickly. Most of our customers are tourists, and they don’t understand. A generator to meet our capacity would cost close to a million rand and take up half our parking lot, and that’s before paying for diesel. I think a lot of places are going to shut down, and we can’t afford any more job losses.”

Lindy Ann Hoffmann in Johannesburg describes how the power cuts have affected her mental state. “I have panic attacks in the dark. I’m on my own, looking after my father and his sister who are in their nineties. I just bought an

inverter, but why should I have to spend R8 000 on that when I pay for electricity?” she asked.

“Besides the economic factors, increased load shedding over the holiday period is a deep psychological blow,” says stockbroker and economist David Shapiro. An eternal realist, he admits that the latest round of load shedding has definitely shaken him.

“In spite of the business community saying things will come right, there’s never been a foundation for that optimism. And now, everyone is silent. My fear is that this [Eskom crisis] has shattered whatever little confidence was left. It’s going to take a massive effort to turn things around. Power drives an economy,” he says.

“Many Jewish businesses have taken a severe pounding against the backdrop of low growth. This year, we contracted in the first quarter, grew slightly in the second, contracted in the third, and we really needed a strong fourth quarter, but this will probably take us into a recession. We can’t catch up with the growth of the rest of the world.”

Furthermore, Shapiro believes there will be severe consequences from mines halting operations because of Eskom’s woes. South African Airways going into business rescue has caused insecurity as the “ecosystem” around it suffers. Added to load shedding, this could only be detrimental to South Africa’s future.

“The government can’t go on like this. It has to change course, and rethink the whole model and economic future of this country. We need to make the best of what we can, but we’ve also got to be real. We have to be outspoken that this

isn’t good enough for us.”

Even the optimistic Mike Abel, chief executive of M&C Saatchi Abel, says he’s not blind to how Eskom is failing all South Africans. “The most worrying thing is that we have no actual sense of where we stand. The president needs to level with the country in an honest way. If we do away with this uncertainty, then we can develop strategies and navigate the way forward,” he says.

“We need an independently-verified expert to explain where we are, so that we know if this is a temporary blip or something worse than we can imagine. Furthermore, we need the entire African National Congress to get behind the president. #ImStaying has 94 000 people who want to fix, build, and change South Africa. That’s not sugar-coating things. We want to be here because it’s home. We don’t want to give up on everything we know and love. We need to hold the government brutally accountable now.”

Jacques Weber, a former Democratic Alliance

ward councillor in Cape Town, was flooded with concerned messages on social media after the stage 6 announcement. “We are not going the way of Zimbabwe,” he says. “We have a functional judicial system and active civil society to hold government to account. Three weeks ago, Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe gave the Western Cape government the go-ahead to explore alternative energy sources.”

Electrical engineer Adam Pantanowitz says that Eskom’s crisis has deep roots. “The apartheid regime didn’t supply power to all South Africans, so when the ANC inherited this system and correctly began supplying power to all, the load was much greater. As government attempted to grow capacity, there were also delays, mismanagement, and corruption.

“There simply isn’t enough capacity, so we are on a knife edge at all times. If anything goes wrong, we feel the effects as consumers. We are under such severe strain, that one simple fault,

Continued on page 3>>

Chag Chanukah Sameach!



Jaryd and Kara Bass get stuck into sufganiyot (doughnuts) while Sienna Diamond lights the chanukiah in preparation for Chanukah. See pages 14 to 22.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Erratum

In our edition of 22 November, we led the newspaper with a story headlined: “UN report calls BDS ‘fundamentally anti-Semitic’” and our introduction claimed the “report stipulated that BDS was ‘fundamentally anti-Semitic’.” This particular quote we used was made by critics of BDS in the report and not the rapporteur himself. While the rapporteur did not express that exact sentiment, he affirmed that “expression which ... rejects the right of Israel to exist ... should be condemned”. We regret the error. – Editor



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Turok dedicated life to welfare of all South Africans

TALI FEINBERG

Veteran African National Congress (ANC) politician, economist, intellectual, and activist, Professor Benjamin (Ben) Turok, passed away in Cape Town on Monday 9 December at the age of 92. His passing marked the end of an epic life story that started in Ukraine and Latvia, and concluded with a legacy that is deeply Jewish and quintessentially South African.

Former Constitutional Court judge and fellow life-long activist, Albie Sachs, was shocked to hear of his friend’s passing. “I presented with him at an event two weeks ago. His body was frail, but he spoke with such passion, eloquence, and focus.

“We met almost 60 years ago when we both belonged to the Modern Youth Society,” Sachs told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I was 17 and he was in his mid-20s. He trained as a land surveyor, but he loved ideas, books, and debate. We both loathed apartheid. We loved climbing Table Mountain and hosting all night parties! And we defied the colour bar.”

Turok was born in Latvia in 1927. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* in 2013, he shared how his parents fled anti-Semitic pogroms in Ukraine. They settled in Latvia, where he and his two older brothers were born, but the family were again victims of pogroms.

“The Union of South Africa was looking to bolster its white population – even with Jewish riffraff from Eastern Europe,” he said wryly. His father came to South Africa in 1930, and brought his family here in 1934. Their home language was Yiddish.

After graduating from the University of Cape Town, Turok worked in London before returning to South Africa in 1953, where he joined the Congress of Democrats (COD) and in 1955, became its secretary for the Cape’s western region, becoming a full-time organiser

for the Congress of the People.

He was arrested for treason in 1956, and stood trial until charges against him were withdrawn in 1958. Although served with a banning order in 1955, he remained active as a trade-union organiser. He became national secretary of the COD in 1958.

“Our first big campaign was writing the Freedom Charter. I remember vividly in 1953, he came to me saying he had just discovered the difference

between liberty and freedom,” recalls Sachs. “He said

that while liberty was simply the absence of control and restraints, freedom was much richer – it gave people the capacity to achieve their goals and work together.”

Sachs and Turok met up again in exile in London. “He did a lot of work teaching at the Open University, which

was a pioneering form of education for people who did not get into university. Ben was in his element,” says Sachs. Turok obtained three degrees – in engineering, philosophy, and political science. He wrote about 20 books on Africa’s development, economics, and politics, and lectured on political economy at various African universities.

“Once, Ben was trying to sell a second-hand car,” recalls Sachs. “He and the buyer came to an agreement, but Ben wanted to show him how well the door closed. He tried to demonstrate this, but the door kept bouncing open. I call this the Turok lesson. Once you’ve come to an agreement, stop! If you push it, the ‘door’ will bounce open again – and this applies to any negotiation,” says Sachs with a smile.

Turok’s wife, Mary, was also a prominent member of the COD. Sachs says said she is both “warm and formidable”, and that their children reflect so much of their parents.

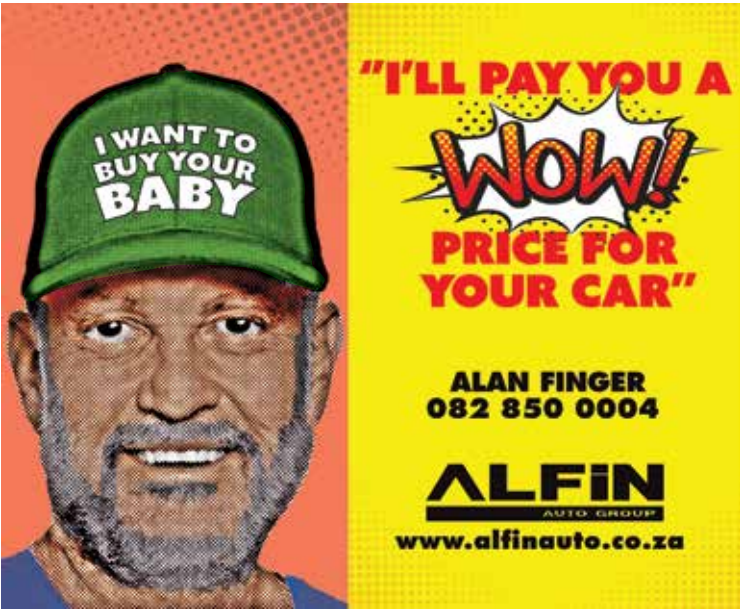
During the 1960 State of Emergency, Turok evaded arrest and went underground. In 1962, he was

convicted under the Explosives Act, and sentenced to three years in prison. After his release, he was placed under house arrest, but escaped via Botswana to Tanzania, where he lived for three years together with his family until they all moved to Britain. He eventually returned to South Africa in 1990, and served as a member of parliament in various capacities from 1995 until 2014.

Former South African politician Andrew Feinstein recalls meeting Turok in the early 1990s when they were both involved with the ANC in Gauteng. “After the 1994 election, we served in the Gauteng legislature together. Ben was responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Programme in the province. We then both moved to national parliament, where we served on a number of committees together as we were both economists by training.”

Feinstein says Turok never wavered in his economic views, in spite of fierce criticism from the ANC leadership. “While others were taking a moderate path, he was absolutely insistent that we needed a far more progressive approach, focused on job creation and addressing inequality. He argued that putting income in people’s pockets would improve their quality of life and at the same time, would promote economic activity by growing the ‘demand side’ of the economy.

“It turned out he was absolutely right. His approach would have led to much less unemployment, and far



greater equality in the South African economy. His views were always about what was best for the greater good of the vast majority of South Africans.”

At the same time, Feinstein says Turok was always watching closely for corruption and cronyism, long before Zuma took centre stage. “He always spoke out against corruption, and epitomised courage”.

His attitude was exemplified by his abstention from voting for the unconstitutional Protection of State Information Bill (also known as the Secrecy Bill) in 2011. The ANC’s disciplinary committee criticised his actions as “ill-discipline” and “counter-revolutionary”.

Feinstein points out that Turok’s Jewish identity influenced his outlook. “Coming from Latvia, he certainly identified with his generation of Jewish intellectuals, but while many of them were from

an Eastern or Middle European milieu, he was deeply rooted in Africa. That Jewish history of suffering – some respond to it by only wanting to look after themselves. But, Ben internalised it as a deep concern for others, whatever their background and history.”

SA Jewish Board of Deputies Director Wendy Kahn agreed. “Professor Turok was a fierce opponent of all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism. In October 2013, he spoke out against Marius Fransman’s anti-Semitic comments against the Jewish community of Cape Town. As the then head of the ANC’s ethics committee in parliament, he requested that disciplinary action be taken against Fransman, who was Deputy Minister of International Affairs. He called Fransman’s comments damaging and divisive,” she said.

Some light despite load shedding gloom

>>Continued from page 1

like wet coal, causes catastrophe.”

Pantanowitz says the ripple effects of substations exploding leads to a “very complex feedback system that cascades into difficulty”. Furthermore, there are too many conflicting variables and agendas at play. These complexities are superimposed over the challenges of just keeping the lights on.

“The only way forward is to unbundle this monopoly, find alternative sources of energy, and start distributing them. Everyone with the means to do so should be taken off the grid using natural resources like solar power, and supply energy back into the grid,” says Pantanowitz.

A punitive approach to citizens using alternative energy is madness, he believes. “Embracing free forms of renewable energy (wind and solar power coupled with batteries to use energy when needed) is the way the world is going. We don’t want coal. Renewables are by no means the panacea to all energy issues, but they should certainly be part

of the energy mix and form part of the solution. The whole picture can change if we tap into this resource. South Africa has unbelievable natural resources that we are irresponsibly squandering.”

SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn was optimistic that Eskom could be improved following a statement at the SAJBD conference last month by Dr Reuel Khoza, a past chairperson of Eskom. “A good number of the people who ran Eskom in its heyday are working in the Pacific Basin, Australia, and New Zealand and they are keen to come home, provided you give them the requisite platform to perform and you stay out of it as a political force,” said Khoza.

“There seems to be recognition in past weeks that experience and bold action needs to be brought into all state-owned enterprises to address the current crises, and we hope that Dr Khoza’s wise words are heard,” Kahn said.

• For load shedding survival tips, see page 9.



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Mayor says gunmen targeted kosher supermarket in Jersey City

MARCY OSTER – JTA

The gunmen who entered a Jersey City kosher supermarket and engaged in a deadly shootout with police deliberately chose the store, the city's mayor said.

“Based on our initial investigation [which is ongoing] we now believe the active shooters targeted the location they attacked,” Steven Fulop said on Twitter on Tuesday night. “Due to an excess of caution, the community may see additional police resources in the days/weeks ahead. We have no indication there are any further threats.”

The mayor's tweet came hours after a news conference at which officials said there was “no indication of terrorism” or a hate crime.

Six people were killed, including a police officer and three civilians, in gunfire on Tuesday afternoon that ended with an hours-long shootout at the JC Kosher Supermarket. The officer had been shot earlier at a nearby cemetery trying to head off two suspects in a homicide. Those two young gunmen were killed in the supermarket shootout.

On Wednesday morning in a new tweet, Fulop said, “Last night, after extensive review of our CCTV system, it has now become clear from the cameras that these two individuals targeted the kosher grocery



Near the site of the shootout between gunmen and police in New Jersey

location on Martin Luther King Drive.

“I'm Jewish and proud to live in a community like #JerseyCity that has always welcomed everyone. It is the home of #EllisIsland, and has always been the golden door to America. Hate and anti-Semitism have never had a place here in JC, and will never have a place in our city,” Fulop said.

According to a report in the *New York Times* on Wednesday evening, one of the suspects involved in the firefight had published anti-Semitic and anti-police posts online prior to the incident. The report confirmed that investigators believed that the attack was motivated by those sentiments.

The dead police officer was identified as Joseph Seals, a married father of five.

Two of the killed civilians were identified by Chabad.org as Leah Minda Ferencz, 33, who owned the store in the Greenville neighbourhood with her

husband, Moshe, and Moshe Deutsch, 24.

Moshe Ferencz had left the store moments before the shooting to pray the afternoon mincha service at the synagogue located next door, according to the report.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio announced late on Tuesday that the New York Police Department (NYPD) would go on high alert following the incident across the Hudson River in New Jersey.

“Although there is no credible or specific threat directed against New York City, I have directed the NYPD to assume a state of high alert. Tonight, NYPD assets are being redeployed to protect key locations in the Jewish community,” he tweeted.

“History teaches us how dangerous it is to ignore this kind of hateful pattern. We must stop anti-Semitism aggressively and decisively, and I call upon all New Yorkers to join in rooting out this threat.”

Can the Dalai Lama play a role in Israeli-Palestinian peace?

JORDAN MOSHE

From his hillside home in India, the exiled Dalai Lama offers religious guidance, provides spiritual counsel and, as of last week, is exploring ways to bring about peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The revered Tibetan icon's philosophy of non-violence may be the key to resolving tension in the Middle East. According to activists, we just need to give it a chance.

This is the vision of Guy Lieberman, South African-born social entrepreneur and activist who last week brought Israeli and Palestinian delegates together in the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamsala, India. They engaged in a week-long exploration of non-violence and exploring how Israeli and Palestinian narratives have points of intersect with the Tibetan narrative.

Lieberman has been an activist for the Tibetan freedom struggle since first meeting the Dalai Lama in 1994 at the age of 23. In mid-2017, he made aliyah with his family from Johannesburg to Zichron Yaakov. He realised along the way the parallels which existed between the Tibetan struggle and that of Israel-Palestine.

The Tibetans were invaded by Maoist China in 1949, and in spite of ongoing oppression, they continue to wage a peaceful campaign for independence and genuine autonomy under China.

Lieberman therefore arranged this special meeting, bringing together his “Tibetan

Zeida” and activists representing Chevron, Gaza, Kabul, and the Israeli settlement of Tekoa.

The group mapped out their respective narratives, finding shared experiences, and discussing ways to use them to solve the impasse faced in the Middle East.

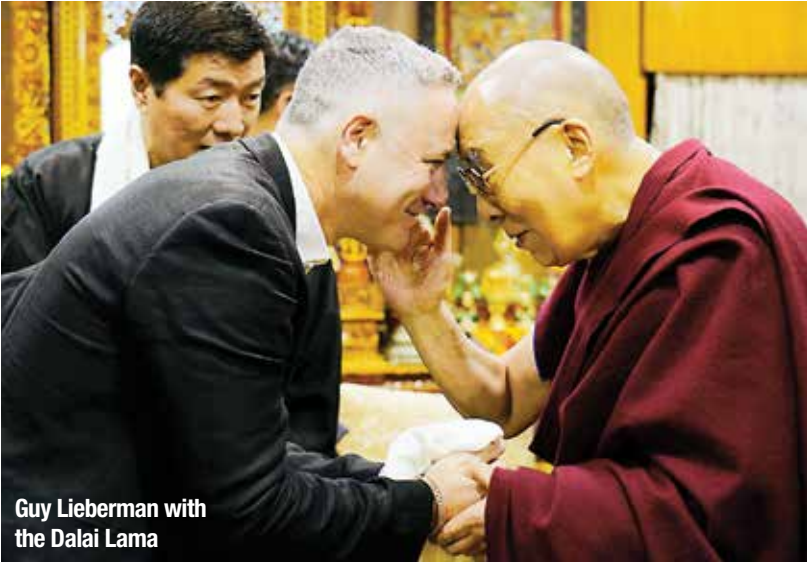
“The Tibetans hope to regain their land, as Jews did for 2 000 years,” says Lieberman. “They look to the Jews as a brave nation that finally got their Holy Land back, and yet they feel simultaneously allied with the Palestinians. The Tibetans have heard both narratives, but they side with neither. It makes sense to explore new modalities to dealing with the conflict with such a neutral yet wise advisor.”

Lieberman said the meeting was inspiring, full of humour and simple wisdom. “It was clear to those in the room that we shared a common humanity based on trust, care, and kindness,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“The Tibetans have taken a view inspired by a deep and compassionate Buddhist perspective that insists that violence begets violence, and karma is infallible; what you give out, you will eventually receive in return, act for act.

“This is a total departure from the approach to conflict that Israelis and Palestinians hold; that we need to kill or die for what's rightfully ours. As the Dalai Lama said, “For how long does this go on? Regardless of your history, the current reality is that you need to live side by side.”

Lieberman recognises that this is a tough pill for both parties to swallow. Indeed, the participants included a young Jewish mother who was stabbed by a teenage terrorist



Guy Lieberman with the Dalai Lama

while she was pregnant. There was an Arab administrator who handles cases of “collateral damage” on the Arab side, including mistaken killings at checkpoints and respiratory issues

experienced by children and the elderly caused by Israeli teargas.

“We can very easily blame the Palestinians for their part in the struggle as they equally blame us,” says Lieberman. “This blaming has helped very little, and in the meantime, families caught in the conflict are suffering. While we can't expect the mistrust to suddenly turn into friendship, we could commit to putting down the weapons and resisting the urge to return to violence when things get heated.”

Although there are presently no plans for further meetings, Lieberman remains determined to resolve the political impasse, stressing the need to overcome our fear of the other.

“Like many in our community, I believe that there are extremely dangerous elements in the Palestinian world,” he concludes. “I'm not washing over this reality. However, the more I look into it and the more actual human Palestinians I interact with, the more I realise that there is a silent majority that we have not been able to meet and connect with.

“Repairing the human fabric in the region could do wonders for all of us who live here and in the diaspora. It's worth the effort to open our minds and hearts and see what comes.”

Looking forward with ‘2020’ vision

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



As 2019 comes to a close, what’s on the cards for 2020? I’ve gazed into my crystal ball again to select the issues to follow in the new year for South Africa, Israel, and beyond.

The year 2020 will be an important year for South Africa on the international stage. It enters its second year as an elected non-permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council. South Africa will chair the council for the month of November, where the theme will be “Youth, peace, and security”. The country will advocate for African matters like resolving ongoing conflicts in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Libya. It will also have to tackle nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea, meltdown in Latin America, and the repercussions of the trade war between the United States and China. The year 2020 will include reflections on the UN’s five years of Sustainable Development Goals in July and September.

Justice Raymond Zondo



Pretoria will chair the continental club of the African Union (AU) in 2020, as well as the African Peer Review Mechanism, a good-governance promotion tool. The AU’s annual theme for next year is “Silencing the guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development”. We expect South Africa once again to focus on strengthening ties between the AU and UN.

Domestically, resuscitating the ailing economy should be a key priority, including the mess in state-owned enterprises like Eskom and South African Airways, and avoiding further ratings downgrades. The Zondo Commission into state capture should wrap up, but will anyone be held accountable? Former President Jacob Zuma’s efforts to remain out of jail will drag on.

Expect some celebration and soul searching around 2 February, when we reflect on 30 years since former President FW de Klerk’s speech that unbanned liberation movements and propelled the country on its path to democracy.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) will struggle to cope with high-profile walkouts and the loss of control of Tshwane and Johannesburg as its strange bedfellow, the Economic Freedom Fighters, has deserted it. The DA could face a fierce battle to elect a successor to interim leader John Steenhuisen.

The Jewish community will be anxiously watching for any change to the status quo of “no South African ambassador in Israel, but also no formal downgrade of the embassy either”. It’s unlikely that United States President Donald Trump’s Middle East Peace Plan, if and when revealed, will gain the traction he expects it to, given the concessions he has given to the Israeli side so far.

At the time of writing, it seemed that Israel was hurtling inexorably to its third election within a year, as the political stalemate persists. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s indictment for breach of

trust, fraud, and bribery will undoubtedly dominate the Israeli political terrain. How it unfolds could profoundly influence Israeli politics, especially if some kind of immunity deal is reached.

On the security front, Israel unfortunately still faces periodic rocket fire on both its southern and northern flanks, from Hamas and other extremists in Gaza, and from Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon. Iran and Russia in Syria complicates the strategic picture. I wouldn’t hold my breath for much movement on peace with the Palestinians either. It’s been 100 years since violence erupted in Jerusalem when nine were killed and 216 injured in the 1920 “Palestine Riots” under the British Mandate.

The US elections are on 3 November 2020. Trump will fight impeachment with all he has as he seeks a second term. There are at least two strong Jewish contenders in the Democratic primaries, Senator

Bernie Sanders on the left, and the business-friendly former New York Mayor and business tycoon, Michael Bloomberg. The year 2020 also marks 100 years since women won the right to vote in the US.

Britain will have a new government, and the Brexit saga will probably continue.

Some significant commemorations will include the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended World War I, and the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps by the Soviets. It will also be 75 years since the end of World War II and the founding of the UN in 1945.

2 August marks the 30th anniversary of the start of the first Gulf War.

On the sporting front, kick-off of UEFA Euro 2020 will take place in June, to be held in 12 different European countries. On 24 July, the 2020 Summer

Olympics will commence in Tokyo, Japan. The Springboks will eagerly battle everyone wanting to take a crack at the 2019 world champions.

In case you think my predictions are a load of rubbish, may I remind you what I wrote in December 2018 on these very pages. “I ... confidently predict a Springbok win in the

Rugby World Cup in Japan in November. We triumph at 12-year intervals: 1995 and 2007, so we’re due.”

Happy New Year!

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs



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Highs and lows – 2019 a year of extremes

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been one heck of a year – a tumultuous 2019 characterised by heartache and human achievement, political turmoil, and heroism. From wildfires, mass shootings, flash floods, and hurricanes that devastated communities to rescue operations and lunar landings that brought the world together. As South Africa winds down from the grip of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, rolling blackouts, ongoing xenophobia, and economic upheaval, here’s a look back at some of the top stories of 2019.

Writer Khaya Dlanga described South Africa this week as the “country of the year”.

In a tweet, he posted, “The year began with a bang for SA. Makamo on the cover of *Time*. Our netball team crowned African champs. Rugby World Cup. Shomadjozi John Cena. Trevor 1st comedian to fill up Madison Square Garden, Zozi, Miss Universe in December. Country of the year.”

Indeed, South Africa boxes way above her weight in all areas from the arts to culture, science, and recreation. In spite of all the doom and gloom, it continues to be a land of hope and dreams fulfilled.

This week, Zozibini Tunzi was crowned Miss Universe. Say what you like about beauty pageants, Tunzi is an archetypal role model, advocating natural inner beauty, strength, and individualism.

The exquisite feeling of euphoria when one of our own triumphs globally is reminiscent of the victorious Rugby World Cup.

Who can forget that November Shabbos? When countless members of the shomer Shabbat community tested their faith by

holding out for the results of the magical final against England. Many made plans to squeeze in the game come hell or high water as the indomitable Springboks, captained by the inspiring Siya Kolisi, lifted the William Webb Ellis trophy at the International Stadium Yokohama in Yokohama, Japan.

The nation was gripped by a feverish display of unity and togetherness (excluding members of the Economic Freedom Fighters) – exactly what the doctor ordered given the nation’s flailing economy, high crime rates, and widescale corruption.

In March, another Boeing Max, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, crashed after take-off, killing all 157 people on board. Boeing remains under intense scrutiny.

Also in that month, places of worship and peace were turned into spaces filled with violence, fear, and hate. The world was shocked in March after it took a gunman just 21 minutes to end 50 lives and change hundreds of others after he opened fire on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in a carefully planned racist attack. A sickening video was livestreamed by the shooter showing the horrifying attack in detail.

In April, our community and people of all faiths around the world were once again shocked when a gunman opened fire on The Chabad of Poway Synagogue in California on Shabbat on the last day of Pesach, killing Lori Kaye, and injuring three including Rabbi Yisroel Goldstein. Goldstein, who lost a finger in the attack, moved millions with his impassioned speech at the United Nations calling on people to spread light and love.

Also in April, astronomers unveiled the first photo of a black hole. Drawn from mountains of data captured two years earlier by telescopes across the world, it shows a supermassive black hole 50 million light years away.

That same month, the world watched aghast as flames destroyed the spire and roof of Paris’s beloved Notre-Dame cathedral. Heroic scenes of firefighters were splashed on the covers of newspapers as they tried to save the gothic building.

Israel became the seventh country to orbit the moon, and the fourth to reach the moon’s



surface with the Beresheet lunar lander making the first privately funded mission into lunar orbit. Our community held its breath as Beresheet came within a hair’s-breath of a successful lunar landing, sadly crashing moments before, along with our hopes.

In May, we got through another general election. As Ramaphosa’s “new dawn” fades along with crippling domestic issues, we can still celebrate the fact that it was a peaceful election in which democracy was the ultimate winner.

In June, England won the Cricket World Cup, and Botswana decriminalised homosexuality.

While the highs of 2019 have been stratospheric, the lows have been crushing.

With sadness, the community bade farewell to a few whose untimely deaths have left a void in our lives.

In June, the tragic suicide of teenager Adam Seef shook our community to its core, and started a much-needed local and international conversation about mental health, sexuality, and self-acceptance in our youth.

In July, South Africa and the world grieved the devastating passing of one-of-a-kind singer/songwriter/ anthropologist Johnny Clegg – aka the White Zulu – a magnificent human being whose light shone so brightly, it transcended racial fracturing and political disharmony.

In August, our nation mourned the tragic passing of 19-year-old University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana. Nene was raped and bludgeoned to death in a post office in Claremont. Her death sparked the #AmINext movement, and resulted in mass protests against gender-based violence. Her passing was emblematic of the government’s dismal failure to protect women and children.

Devastating August fires ravaged Brazil’s Amazon, and fires in Australia are still ravaging the country. Venice has been swamped by never-seen-before flooding.

Extreme weather has fed climate concerns, and there have been worldwide rallies for action. Many of these were initiated by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg, who stunned world leaders with her now famous “How dare you” speech at the UN Climate Action Summit in September.

Also in September, amid a resurgence of xenophobia, crime, and unemployment, Jarette Petzer started the #ImStaying Facebook movement for positive, like-minded South Africans to come together and inspire hope.

Ongoing international stories including the United States/China trade deal, Brexit and the tenuous balance of power in the United Kingdom, a rise in global anti-Semitism, US President Donald Trump’s impeachment inquiry, the Israeli elections, and Hong Kong extradition protests have dominated world headlines.

Through it all, humour and feel-good stories have united South Africans during this volatile year.

Think back to “My F*k Marelize!” the hysterical reaction of a mom on a video she took of her daughter riding a bicycle into a rugby post. The incredible power of this Afrikaans catch phrase spread fast, uniting South Africans *gatvol* (fed up) with negative news.

The now-famous marriage proposal at a KFC outlet is another classic Mzansi moment that went viral in November. A passerby shared a video of a man on his knees proposing to his girlfriend in a KFC. Mzansi came out in full support, sponsoring everything from clothing to homeware.

Comedian Trevor Noah was the first African comedian to sell out the prestigious Madison Square Garden in New York, and was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Comedy Album.

The outstanding Ndlovu Youth Choir exceeded all expectations when it auditioned for *America’s Got Talent* and blew everyone away by getting to the finals.

In a world completely topsy turvy, we might not have lights, but we have a sense of humour, we have sun, we have water, we are free to express ourselves, so let’s keep paying it forward, and be grateful. ‘Till next year.

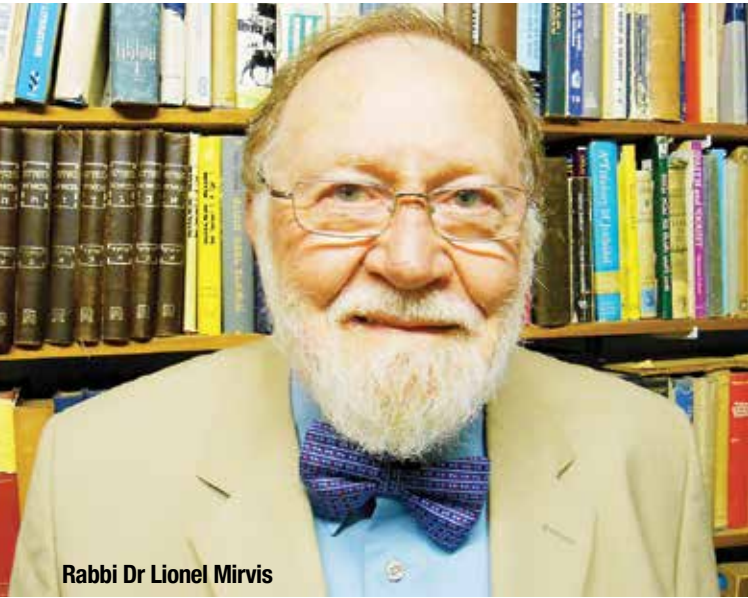
Farewell to a great rabbi and kabbalist

SUZANNE BELLING

Cape Town kabbalist and former congregational rabbi, Dr Lionel Mirvis, died at the age of 93 in his Kenilworth home on 9 December, after a short illness.

Rabbi Mirvis is the father of Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who spoke out recently, asking people not to vote for the Labour Party in England.

Rabbi Mirvis made a name for himself through his unique method of teaching kabbalah, which he began more than 50 years ago. His method involved going back to the source, the *Sefer Hayetzirah*, the *Book of Formation*.



Rabbi Dr Lionel Mirvis

He later developed his method into graphic kabbalah, which he called, “the truth of the Torah, starting with the earliest, in Genesis, to the latest, in science”. He has lectured widely on the

subject, and produced a popular series of DVDs.

He drew people, Jewish and non-Jewish, to his lectures at the Sephardic Kabbalah Foundation in Sea Point. He also addressed many groups at his home, widening people’s thinking from the confines of Calvinism, the Dutch Reformed Church and other churches, to embrace universal and holistic views.

Rabbi Mirvis was a thinker of deep significance. His approach was as far removed from what was popular – or what one of his students termed “Hollywood Kabbalah” – as North America is from the African continent.

One would not have seen a “wannabe” Madonna at his lectures, or those wanting a quick fix of spirituality.

His approach related to the modern world, his compelling

thoughts and interpretations developed through a fusion of Talmudic, mathematic, and scientific knowledge.

Until Rabbi Mirvis opened his approach to general consumption, only academics and students of mysticism had access to the kind of learning he offered.

He developed his system, in which he used two-dimensional drawing to scale, to promote thought change and as a means to resolve current problems. He said in an interview he was helping people cope through Jewish teachings and kabbalah.

“The world in general, and Western civilisation in particular, is struggling to deal with rapid change,” he told me a while back. “People fear the tomorrow, and have difficulty making the correct decisions about crucial issues that have an impact on the future.

“Today’s rapidly-changing world is a consequence of the information explosion. It’s ironic that the genius of the mind that has brought about all these changes knows everything about the external world, yet knows nothing about the world within.

“In contrast, the ancients knew about the inner workings of the human mind and little about the world at large,” Rabbi Mirvis said.

Rabbi Mirvis taught of life beyond life. “I don’t use the word ‘death’, as there is no death,” he said.

The Pretoria-born rabbi’s command of religious teaching and scientific theory stems from his eclectic background. Brought up in an observant home – his father was a *shochet* (kosher slaughterer) in

Pretoria – he qualified as a civil and structural engineer, before turning to the rabbinate in the early 1960s.

Apart from engineering, he had four academic degrees in the humanities, which expanded his knowledge of metaphysics. His early Jewish learning provided his initial knowledge of kabbalah.

After obtaining smicha in Israel, he was spiritual leader of three major congregations, and was also a *dayan* (religious judge) on the Cape Beth Din. He lectured in the department of religious studies at the University of Cape Town, designing courses which included Kabbalah.

He was known for his outspoken anti-apartheid sermons, and even took kosher food to Robben Island to a black political prisoner who professed to be Jewish.

He is the author of a book, *The Gem of Many Facets*, which he wrote under the name of “Yahalom”, which means “diamond” and is the Hebrew acronym of his name, Yehuda Leib Mirvis.

Rabbi Mirvis, who was to be buried in Jerusalem on Thursday, leaves his wife, Raisel. (He lost his first wife, Freida, in the early 1980s.) He also leaves his children, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis (London); Dr Jonathan Mirvis (Israel); Lynette Silverman (London); and Howard Mirvis (Israel).


He had two sisters, Dorothy Mandelzweig, and the late Berenice Slasky.

He leaves 14 grandchildren, and 48 great-grandchildren.

Much a Jew about the ADL survey

OPINION

PROFESSOR MILTON SHAIN



The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Global Survey which recently identified South Africa as second only to Poland in the anti-Jewish stakes has been greeted with disbelief by a range of Jewish voices, including the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. For Professor Karen Milner, the vice-chairperson of the board, “many of the findings concerning South Africa are at best highly questionable and sometimes clearly wrong”. In a powerfully worded statement, the board disparaged the ADL’s methodology, essentially accusing it of Eurocentrism, while pointing out that there have been very few anti-Jewish incidents in South Africa – something the board monitors professionally and closely.

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town, similarly questioned the ADL’s findings, noting that the centre’s own recent survey presented quite different results. Issues of methodology were again raised. The editor of this newspaper, Peta Krost Maunder, believes the survey goes against everything she has experienced and simply “can’t be true”.

In point of fact, this isn’t the first attitudinal survey to reveal disturbing findings. In 1970, Stuart Buxbaum found that coloureds and blacks in a Soweto matriculation group generally held unfavourable attitudes towards Jews, attributed by Buxbaum to a “carry over of a general attitude of social distance of many groups towards Jews” and the phenomenon of “haves” and “have nots”. Jews were “singled out by the non-whites as being the visible symbol of white financial wealth, a direct result of the depressed economic position of the non-whites”. In effect, explained Buxbaum, it was a form of displaced aggression.

A year later, in another survey of (only) black African matriculants in Soweto, sociologist Melville Edelstein found that the pupils he interviewed experienced a greater “social distance” in relation to Jews than towards English-speakers in general. Those interviewed told Edelstein that an African who was loathe to part with his money was described as being as “stingy as a Jew”. In Edelstein’s view, such prejudice arose from New Testament teaching in school and church.

Saths Cooper, a psychiatrist and one-time president of the Azanian People’s Organisation, confirmed this perception in an interview conducted in the late 1980s. “The common reaction, and this is throughout the black community, is to classify any exploiter as a Jew, even if he happens to have a black skin, he appears to be in the Shylock mould,” said Cooper.

Further indications of attitude emerged in a survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in 1994 among urban South African elites. The study showed that black elites harboured substantial antipathy towards Jews. Almost one in five of the respondents said that the Jewish

community “irritated” them because, in descending order of frequency, they were parasites, snobs, racists, anti-Christ, and unpatriotic. Almost the same proportion approved of right-wing anti-Semitic actions, and nearly one in three considered the Jewish community to be “mostly a liability” to South Africa.

Much the same emerged in a Pew Global Attitudes Survey of 2008, which found that South Africans hold some of the most negative views of Jews outside of the Muslim world. According to that survey, 46% of South Africans harbour unfavourable views of Jews, and of that 46%, two-thirds dislike Jews in the extreme. As one headline had it, “South Africa almost tops anti-Semitism charts.”

Certainly, the ADL is not alone. But how do we reconcile its findings with local self-assessment? It seems to me that one must distinguish between what the historian Todd Endelman has called “ideational” or “private” from “programmatic” anti-Semitism. The former relates to attitudes, and the latter to political action. It’s important when commenting on the ADL results to keep in mind the difference between the two.

Furthermore, it needs to be said that in the new South Africa, anti-Jewish ideas or attitudes – to the extent that they exist – have never threatened to transform into party-political action. While some politicians have displayed crass Jew-hatred, and while the formal response from the African National Congress to those who have crossed the line has often been limp, at no

time has a “Jewish question” been employed as a political plank as was the case with völkisch (populist) Afrikaner nationalists in the 1930s and early 1940s. On the contrary, in the wake of the long struggle against racism and apartheid, any hint of racism and discrimination has been frowned upon in democratic South Africa. Constitutional (Chapter Nine) institutions, moreover, have been designed to safeguard human rights and uphold the dignity of all. The celebration of diversity encapsulated in the notion of the “rainbow nation” has also served as an antidote to ethnic hatred.

But beneath the surface, things can be different. Under specific conditions, ideas can turn into action. This is what happened in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s. The transformation from “private” to “public” anti-Semitism was related to specific traumas. These were the intensification of poverty among whites following the impact upon South Africa of global depression, the emergence of Nazism in Europe, the rise of an exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism and the upwardly mobility of Jews. But we should never minimise ideas. A slow maturation of an anti-Jewish stereotype dating back to the 19th century prepared the way for a “Jewish problem”.

• *Milton Shain is emeritus professor in the department of historical studies at UCT. His latest book, “A Perfect Storm. Antisemitism in South Africa 1930-1948” was published by Jonathan Ball in 2015.*

Those interviewed told Edelstein that an African who was loathe to part with his money was described as being as “stingy as a Jew”.

Seven tips for surviving load shedding

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- Make sure that your security system including electric fences, alarms, and panic buttons have battery backups. Check them often to ensure that they are operational, and that the backup batteries work optimally.
- Ensure you have locks and chains to secure gates and doors that require electricity to work or lock.
- Make sure that all of your electronics are fully charged including your cell phone and a portable battery pack of at least 10 000mAh capacity.
- Keep your car’s fuel tank topped up as your local station might not be able to pump fuel during load shedding.
- Emergency lighting, torches, lamps, and candles are essential for night-time load shedding. Make sure you have spare batteries and lighters on hand or be environmentally responsible and get some solar powered lights. Ensure that rechargeable emergency lights are always fully charged.
- Invest in a generator to run basic necessities and security systems.
- Keep a well-stocked first aid kit in the house for any accidents that might occur.

For any security or medical emergency, suspicious activity, or potential threats specifically related to the Jewish community or Jewish installations, contact the CSO 24-hour emergency control room on 086 18 000 18. For crime-related issues and emergencies, please contact CAP or your local security provider.



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Tunzi the ambassador we didn’t know we needed

OPINION DAWN NATHAN-JONES

I was privileged to meet Zozibini Tunzi at the FAIRLADY Women of the Future 2019 Awards, where I was one of the judges. She had just been crowned Miss South Africa. It’s no surprise to me therefore that just four months later, she would meet the world as Miss Universe.

When we were introduced, I was awestruck by her humility and softness. So often, women turn to masculine qualities of assertiveness, arrogance, and independence to feel like they take up space in a room. She uses her femininity with pride, a strength that reveals the power of her vulnerability, compassion, and gentleness.



Dawn Nathan-Jones and Zozibini Tunzi

Since her win, I have noticed many opinions on her title. Some believe Miss Universe exploits female beauty, while others applaud her grace and hard work throughout the pageant. Although society has accepted the format and benefits of these events to a large degree, they are still not without controversy.

While it’s easy for us to focus on the negative, as a businesswoman, I’m more interested in the leadership possibilities Tunzi brings not only to the South African rainbow nation, but to the rest of the world.

As a black woman hailing from the Eastern Cape, she literally represents inner (and outer) beauty in diversity. By choosing to keep her natural hair as a symbol of her belief in “fair representation of any shape

and form”, she isn’t only giving a voice to those who have been sidelined in the past, she is actively creating a platform for others to follow suit.

While so many women are struggling to find their place in society, Tunzi is a shining beacon, giving permission to millions that they too can blaze their own way forward.

The messages she advocated throughout the contest were rare in their accessibility, encouraging women to “take up space” and “cement” themselves.

The aspiration of Miss Universe therefore comes not from demonstrating unattainable beauty standards, but from unapologetically exuding a quiet confidence that permeates the entire competition.

I believe that the only way we are going to create systemic, positive change in South Africa is by enabling more people to show up as themselves, like Tunzi is.

Having a status is one thing, using it to better the world is another. Tunzi is using her newfound popularity for good. Not only is she changing the narrative around gender-based violence – she even incorporated the subject into her Miss Universe national costume. This, in conjunction with her call for more female leaders, is yet another reason she is a force for good.

Yes, beauty pageants have dated elements, but I am behind her zest for life, her intelligence and articulate views on women abuse, femicide, and inequality. These, along with many other wonderful qualities, have made her the ambassador we didn’t know we needed.

I can’t wait to see her use this platform to educate and influence young women, and raise awareness that being beautiful is not just an externality – but the building blocks of one’s character.

• Dawn Nathan-Jones is passionate about contributing to economic growth in South Africa. Following an illustrious 35-year career in business, she now assists entrepreneurs to build successful businesses.



SA Muslims need to ‘move away from extremism’

MIRAH LANGER

Dr Taj Hargey, the founder of the Open Mosque in Cape Town, says it’s time for Jews and Muslims to offer each other support and take positive action together.

When it comes to relations between the Jewish and Muslim communities, “All we get is the hateful extremism. There seems to be no counterweight.” However, during a lecture at the Bet David Progressive Jewish Congregation’s campus in Sandton this week, he asked, “Can we join hands to show the world that Muslims and Jews can actually love one another?”

South African Muslims, Hargey said, need to reclaim a sense of identity away from dangerous foreign influences that impose inaccurate religious interpretations. “The time is right for an enlightened, egalitarian Islam to resist the medieval and militant Islam that is peddled by Wahhabis and other foreign sycophants. South African Muslims must resist religious indoctrination and cultural brainwashing.”

Wahhabism is the form of Islam practiced predominantly in Saudi Arabia. It has been characterised as a particularly conservative and severe interpretation of religious practice.

Hargey said its proponents had become extensive donors to Islamic communities internationally, and in South Africa. “It [Wahhabism] may work in Saudi Arabia, but it will never work in a cosmopolitan society like South Africa. If Wahhabism was a benign force for good we wouldn’t be opposing it. It’s actually dangerous as it sets Muslims against other Muslims as well as non-Muslims.”

Going forward, South African Muslims must become “independent interpreters” of their faith. “Localised Islam is critical to the future. We need an Islam that is relevant to this society, and rooted here.”

In South Africa, there is tension between South African-born Muslim community members and Muslim immigrants coming into the country bringing in their own often disparate traditions, Hargey said. The strain between these two segments arises from the fact that ultimately, there is “no such thing as one Islamic culture”.

Instead, the religion is enmeshed with different cultural and national customs. However, some of



Dr Taj Hargey

the “cultural baggage and political conservatism” of different Muslim communities is problematic.

Hargey cited practices such as female genital mutilation, stonings and honour killings, and different types of body and face coverings as examples of customs that have no actual relation to the Qur’anic-based religion. “The chasm between Qur’anic Islam and populist Islam is most frightening,” he said.

At the heart of this chasm lies theological misinterpretation of the core texts in Islam. “If you want to understand what’s happening in the Muslim world today, you have to understand Islamic theology. It’s vital,” Hargey said.

In Islam, the Qur’an is accepted as the word of G-d given by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, proposed Hargey, the fact that other texts, including fatwahs, shariah laws, and the Hadith (sayings of the prophet) have now been given equal stature in the religion is at the heart of its contemporary problems.

These texts are interpretations and compilations shaped by man. For example, Hargey said, the Hadith was compiled three hundred years after Muhammad died. Fatwahs were “opinions” and shariah was “not divine law”, but rather a compilation of rulings dating from the medieval era.

As such, said Hargey, there should be reform to ensure the singular sacred status of the Qur’an. “If Muslims followed only the 6 236 verses of the Qur’an, we would have a far better public-relations image and more importantly, we would live in harmony and peace with everyone, including our Jewish sisters and brothers.”

Hargey said he was part of a reformist group of Muslims who wanted to bring about these changes. About 85% of South African Muslims can be considered Orthodox, while another 5% see themselves as totally assimilated – “When you change your name from Muhammad to Mo,” Hargey quipped.

He is part of the last approximate 10% that wants to ensure that “every Muslim should become theologically self-empowered”.

Hargey, who obtained his doctorate from Oxford University and is a provost of the Oxford Institute of British Islam, founded the Open Mosque in 2014 for this purpose.

While its numbers are still small – at times it has a dozen congregants for Friday prayers and 50 or 60 members for important holy days – its mission remains all the more crucial. “People are fearful [to seek reforms]. You will become a non-person in Muslim society. It’s a lonely task. I should know,” mused Hargey, pointing out that he had received death threats and his premises had been firebombed.

Moreover, he pointed out that reform and change aren’t a one-way road. South African society also has to work on how it positions its Muslim members. “The mainstream [South African society] should acknowledge Muslim grievances relating to racism, rising criminality, and Islamophobia,” Hargey said.

‘31 Years to Peel a Banana’ puts disability in its place

JORDAN MOSHE

How do you free your mind when your body can barely move? This was the reality for Phyllis Woolf, but for her, entrapment was never an option.

Though confined to a motorised scooter, she exudes a zest for life which knows no limitations and is inspiring others to overcome their own restrictions.

“I’m no one special – I’m just me,” says Woolf. “I do what others do, and just happen to use wheels in the process.”

In spite of a doctor’s prediction that she would be lucky to live past 50, this feisty 70-year-old has beaten the odds and continues to amaze.

Afflicted with cerebral palsy, Woolf is a quadriplegic and has only partial use of her right hand while the rest of her body remains inert. In spite of her disability, she recently wrote and published *31 Years to Peel a Banana*, a deeply insightful account of her life’s journey that teaches others how to achieve greatness by taking responsibility for who they are.

It wasn’t always her intention to publish a book, she says. “The whole thing started as a therapy book,” she says. “I began a journal at 35 so that I could understand myself better, and it soon became a mission. I had to write. It was a way of expressing without stress.”

Woolf continued to write for a number of years, developing an understanding of herself and realising that she

of those who had had an impact on my life, family and role models who played a part in my development. I wrote about them, and found out about me in the process.”

Woolf decided to publish the book two years ago when she realised that she had something to give. In charting her journey, she saw that she had experienced something universally

relevant, something she could share with others. “It was a journey in that I realised could help others understand living with a disability and help those with disabilities themselves,” she says.

“We all have some disability – mine you can see. I chose not to write about myself or how I’ve achieved something. This is a book about how we disabled people have to live with able-bodied people, not the reverse. We are on duty 24/7 to show them kindness and help them navigate life. Ultimately, we both benefit, and you walk away better than you were when you first met me, a disabled person.”

The book was launched in November at Retire@Midstream Estate at which Woolf resides, drawing more than 100 guests. In spite of her initial apprehension, Woolf found herself surrounded by admirers who



Phyllis Woolf

had begun a project which was bigger than her. “Essentially, I had begun an autobiography, but got bored with it,” she laughs. “I knew the subject too well. I chose to draw up a list

Continued on page 22>>



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Terror and tranquillity: Gaza-envelope teenagers tell it like it is

TALI FEINBERG

Only 800m from the Gaza Strip, 15 year old Sara* lives on Kibbutz Nachal Oz, the same place where four-year-old Daniel Tregerman was killed by mortar fire during Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

Yet, Sara and her family will never leave as this has been their home for generations, and they have a great quality of life – when rockets aren’t raining down.

She is part of a group of ten teenagers and two *madrichim* (youth leaders) who are in South Africa from the “Gaza envelope” (the region of Israel surrounding the Gaza Strip, which includes the town of Sderot and many kibbutzim and moshavim). They have been given a respite from living under the constant threat of rocket attacks to go to Habonim machaneh, have a holiday in Cape Town, and even a trip to the Aquila Game Reserve.

This is the second year that this initiative has taken place. It was

arranged and sponsored by Silvio Joskowicz (the chairperson of the education department – World Zionist Organization), Habonim Dror Olami, Habonim Dror Southern Africa, and the South African Zionist Federation (Cape Council).

“We hope that one day, you will come here out of choice, not as a respite,” said Tamar Lazarus, who hosted the teens at her home for a braai on the evening of their arrival. She recalled how the Women’s International Zionist Organization evacuated families from this area during Operation Protective Edge (2014). A video was made, and one young girl, Ariella*, was featured in it. Now, this same young teenager is part of this group in Cape Town on another break from her scary reality.

As they enjoyed their first South African braai, the teens shared what life is like living in this volatile part of the world. Their parents asked that they not be named in the press.

“I honestly don’t know anything



different,” said Sara. Only open fields with an iron fence in the middle separate her home from the Gaza Strip. Her parents grew up in this region, and she was born here. “My mom tells stories of going to the beach in Gaza, which is only about 6km away. So much has changed since then. It’s actually a very quiet and peaceful place when there are no rockets. But most importantly, it’s my home, and it always will be.

“We have only about eight seconds to get to a shelter when the siren sounds, so yes, it’s scary. But no

matter what happens in Gaza, this is where I feel most safe. It’s where I grew up, where family and friends are. And if we evacuate, we go together as a community,” she said.

Ariella, age 16, lives on Kibbutz Kfar Aza, about 5km from the Gaza border. “I love it. It’s very quiet, and I love the freedom of walking around the kibbutz. It’s especially beautiful in winter. And it’s our home,” she said.

Along with the other teens, she emphasises that a key strategy of living here is “taking control and being prepared for the possibility

of rockets. You just get used to it.” The group says they refuse to let the situation “get to them”, and they mainly use humour to do this.

“We love joking about it. When we go to Be’ersheva or Arad, we laugh about how much time they have to run to the shelter compared to us!” But only they can joke about it. If other people do, it’s not funny. They recall humorous anecdotes: Sara said she once slept in her sister’s room, which was one of their “protected rooms” (bomb shelters) because the threat of rockets was high. And yet, when the siren went off, she automatically ran to her own unprotected room as she was so used to running from one room to another.

She said that all homes in the area have at least one protected room, and some have two. Her house has two, and her younger siblings’ bedrooms are in these rooms. Sometimes the family will split up between the two rooms, and then check on each other.

The teens said that no one actually uses the underground bomb shelters as they are dark, scary, and often dirty. When they were younger, they saw these times in the protected rooms as a fun sleepover. Looking back, they realise how hard it must have been for their parents to keep their kids happy in one room for days on end. They also said that when they were evacuated, they first saw it as a holiday, but before long they really missed home.

Ariella said there was a dog on her kibbutz that ran to the shelter before it even heard the siren – he was so tuned in and trained to do so, and heard it before they did. At the same time, this dog once had a panic attack and ran 46km away before he was found. In spite of their tough outlook, the story encapsulates what the teens go through on a daily basis.

But unlike the dog, they refuse to run away. “I will continue to play lacrosse, I will continue to live my life – nothing is going to stop me,” said Shira*, age 16. “Yes, if there is a loud noise nearby, I do get a fright. It can be hard, but it’s a good life.” She and her friends emphasise the freedom they have to be out until 05:00 and feel safe, and live in such a beautiful part of the country. They all say they hope to one day raise their own families there.

Ariella said that while Israelis in the north might not understand exactly what life is like in the Gaza envelope, they “always care when there is a situation, and offer to help every time”.

Esta Levitas of the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council thanked all the sponsors and role-players who made this trip possible, including Aquila Game Reserve and community members who showed the young people true Capetonian hospitality.

The organisation DIVOTE (Durban-Israel Victims of Terror Enterprise) sponsored backpacks for the teens, spoiling them with apparel, gifts, and essentials for their trip. DIVOTE was started by prominent Durban community member John Moshal to support victims of terror in Israel.

How to screen your kids’ screen time

TALI FEINBERG

As summer vacation stretches out ahead of us, so do many hours where children and teens might use screens to keep them occupied. Plus, we all need a break, and screens offer it. So, how do you know how much is too much, and what do you do if your kid is already addicted to the screen?

Three South African parenting experts say that taking a break in front of the screen is okay. “It’s vital for parents and caregivers to take a well-deserved break from parenting responsibilities. Being a parent myself, I advocate it – it’s my saving grace,” says Johannesburg-based clinical psychologist Renske Esterhuyse.

Cape Town-based parenting coach Laura Markovitz agrees. “We don’t need to demonise screen time. Adults and kids appreciate the space to be entertained, relax, learn, and connect.” A third expert, Stellenbosch-based clinical psychologist Taryn McGowan, says it’s “absolutely okay” to give kids and parents a break. It all depends on what they’re doing with the screen time, and how much screen time there is.

So, how much is too much? According to the World Health Organization guidelines of April 2019, screen time is not recommended before the age of two, and should be limited to an hour a day from two to four years of age. Kids aged five to 10 years of age can have up to 1.5 hours a day, and teens aged 11 and up can have two hours a day.

“Holiday time means that we can be a bit more flexible, but it doesn’t mean it should be a complete free-for-all,” says Markovitz. “Often parents tell me how games such as Fortnite have taken over their children’s lives. We have to remember that we actually have the power to say no. It’s helpful to come up with parameters so that everyone knows where they stand and it’s not left up to the whims of children and parents on any given day.”

McGowan recommends writing a media plan in which everyone in the household knows what the limits are. This can prevent conflict and the screaming matches that often happen around screen time, and is especially helpful if parents need other caregivers to re-enforce the rules. Media-plan templates can be downloaded.

She also recommends discouraging the use of multiple devices at the same time. We are all guilty of scrolling social media while watching TV. Meaningful screen use – watching educational programmes that challenge a child to think is first prize. Children should also know that they can ask their parents questions, instead of always resorting to Google.

“It’s a good idea to involve kids in deciding how screen time will work so that they take ownership of it. Then it’s up to us, the parents, to ensure that the

screens go off,” says Markovitz.

Besides controlling the amount of time on screen, we also need to think about what children are doing on their screens, says Markovitz. “When kids are being creative and making a movie does this equate to playing a game mindlessly? Here, we need to apply common sense and maintain healthy boundaries. Yes, it’s great when kids are creative or using screens for learning, but we still need to make space for other activities that don’t involve screens.

“Parents should not be fearful of kids saying, “I’m bored”. Boredom isn’t a terrible thing and from boredom, incredible things can grow. A balance of boundaries and empathy (letting them know that you understand that their games or programmes are important to them) is helpful in managing this.”



What are the signs of screen addiction? McGowan says that children under 12 can’t get addicted per se, but they can become dependent. This is clear when screen use is so compulsive, that their daily functioning is impaired.

“In general, if the child acts out – a toddler having a meltdown or a young adult becoming passive aggressive when they are not allowed screen time within reasonable age-appropriate boundaries, it’s reason for concern. It can be very tempting to give in to the request and put an emotionally dis-regulated child in front of a screen as it will seem to calm them. But here’s the thing, as parents, we need to make decisions that will be in our children’s best interest over the long-term and not necessarily in our own best interest in the short-term,” says Esterhuyse.

“Instead, physically level with them (make eye-contact), then emotionally level with them by validating their feelings (anger/frustration/disappointment) but nonetheless stick to your boundaries and then offer

them some form of distraction, ideally quality time with you. In the long term, your child will learn to self-regulate and tolerate distress. Both skills are necessary for adulthood.”

If the child is addicted to screens, “I would recommend that initially, parents implement a respite from technology, and to enforce the idea, it may be good to set an example yourself and not engage in any screen time for that period of time (it can be anything from three days to a week),” says Esterhuyse.

“This will probably be the most challenging time as your child will try to change your boundaries and it will be hard to change old patterns, so it will be important to be clear and consistent. After this time, it may be a good idea to formulate a media plan as a family. You can revisit these boundaries over time.

“Help your children to fill their time in ways other than using devices. Expect that they will become bored, knowing that sometimes doing nothing is doing something. If possible, institute technology sabbaticals, or go away for the weekend where there is no reception or Wi-Fi, and offer a reward for time away from technology,” she says.

Finally, “It’s important to make room for emergencies when screen time may be the ‘lesser of two evils’, and not be excessively critical of your parenting skills. Also, be informed about what your child is exposed to online, and set parental controls on devices to allow for age-appropriate viewing.

The bottom line for Esterhuyse is, “Don’t judge a system on its abuse. Technology is an integral part of our everyday lives, and these devices, when used wisely and appropriately, can be advantageous. However, face-to-face time with family, friends, and other significant others plays a pivotal part in children’s emotional and physical well-being, and should be prioritised.”

Kotel inclusivity important, ‘but not only issue’

MIRAH LANGER

While the battle continues for an egalitarian section of the Kotel in Jerusalem, the progressive Jewish movement has made huge strides in other areas, gaining substantive recognition in Israel and the diaspora.

So says Rabbi Lea Mühlstein, the chairperson of Arzenu Olami, the International Federation of Reform and Progressive Religious Zionists, who was in Johannesburg this week. “[The fight for an egalitarian section] is an important symbolic movement, but we shouldn’t lose track of all the important developments, successes, and achievements that we have reached and can reach if we don’t say that we live or die by the Kotel,” says Mühlstein.

The progressive rabbi whose “day job” is serving her congregants at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue in London, was in South Africa to meet her continental constituents from Arzenu Olami.

Mühlstein, who originally qualified and worked as a research chemist, offered various reflections on the political, social, and spiritual landscape of progressive Judaism.

On the significance of the Kotel, she says, “We have prayed for the centrality of Jerusalem as Jews through the centuries when we didn’t have access to Jerusalem. So, Jerusalem is much more than a physical place; it’s also a symbol

within our tradition, and therefore it matters.”

She says the reason there isn’t yet a proper egalitarian section at the Kotel comes down to “realpolitik” – the Israeli government’s dependence on the ultra-Orthodox.

“Within the World Zionist Congress and the Jewish Agency, no one even debates anymore that this [the establishment of the egalitarian section] is the right position.”

If a unity government had been formed in the most recent Israeli elections, she believes the issue would already be resolved. Now, it will be a wait-and-see game as to what happens next on the political front.

But, the progressive community has learnt an important lesson for the future about its public handling of the issue, Mühlstein says.

Referring to the 2016 decision of the Israeli cabinet to approve a proposal to create an egalitarian Kotel section that would not be under the control of the Orthodox rabbinate, she says, “We made mistakes when we got that deal and celebrated too publicly, thus provoking too much of a public response [from communities opposed to the move].”

Nevertheless, asserts Mühlstein, it’s also important to recognise that when it comes to the official acceptance of progressive Jewry in Israel, “we have made huge advances”.

“For the past five or six years, reform rabbis have had access to government funding for their salaries. This is huge,” she says.

Moreover, these rabbis, like those from the Orthodox streams of Judaism, are now also running projects in partnership with the Israeli government.

The strides made in Israel are reflective of equally significant global shifts in the acceptance of progressive Judaism.

After all, notes Mühlstein, who comes from a German family who were at the forefront of establishing the progressive movement in their country in the 1990s, “people were still calling us non-Jews”.

Now, relations between Orthodox and progressive streams are much warmer and “very respectful”. She cites the example of a Holocaust teaching programme for non-Jewish schools that was jointly run by progressive and Orthodox communities in her area.

Asked to define what she understands to be the essence of progressive Judaism, Mühlstein suggests that it’s a worldview whereby you are “deeply committed to your Judaism, but also deeply committed to the society in which you live”.

“There is always this tension between the universal and the particular. For me, what being a progressive Jew is about is that we embrace universal values and give them our particularistic spin. We want to embrace the world as it is and with all its development, including

technology,” she says.

“We want to say, ‘How can we make it part of our Judaism; how can we link that into the chain of our tradition, and still have our own authenticity within it?’”

Mühlstein says this viewpoint is sometimes misinterpreted as



Rabbi Lea Mühlstein

meaning that there are no boundaries to what is accepted within this religious stream.

“It’s not that there are no limits. For example, in my congregation, the choir uses iPads. Some of the congregants are getting older, and can’t hold two heavy books, one for music and the other for prayers, at the same time. So they use technology, but they put the iPads on airplane mode!”

She says the reality is that in many streams of Judaism, what was once seen as out of bounds has gradually become accepted.

She cites the example of how computers were once not accepted in haredi communities, yet now they are used extensively, as seen in the proliferation of ultra-Orthodox websites.

Musing on her own pathway to progressive Judaism, Mühlstein expresses deep gratitude for all facets of her journey of faith.

She recalls how she had the first Batmitzvah of the Munich progressive community in which she grew up. However, it occurred when she was 16, as before that, there was no rabbi.

Even her scientific university studies proved useful, being especially appreciated by her American-born husband, Josh.

“A chemistry degree is a fantastic life lesson for everything. My husband will tell you I am a plumber, an electrician, and an accountant! I still love science very much, it taught me many skills.”

Nevertheless, Mühlstein, who switched career paths after working for a while at a university, says she always knew she wanted to work with people.

“For me, the rabbinate was the perfect choice. You can reinvent your job every day. If you want to spend more time being scholarly or spiritual or political or cultural, you can!”

“I would recommend it to everyone,” she smiles, before amending her suggestion to, “Study chemistry – then become a rabbi!”

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Bringing Chanukah home

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



Where is the centre of Jewish life? Is it the shul or Jewish school? Or the Jewish home? The teachings of a great Jewish hero can guide us. He lived during the events that led up to the miracles of Chanukah, and his teachings connect to the festival.

The story of Chanukah takes place during a dramatic period of Jewish history. The ancient Greek Empire conquered and occupied Israel, and proclaimed various laws prohibiting the practice of Torah.

There were many brave people who defied these laws and fought for their religious rights and freedoms, and who continued to live in accordance with sacred Jewish values and practices. Through the bravery of the Maccabees, blessed by the miracles of G-d, Israel was liberated from Greek occupation and tyranny.

But before that victory, many suffered at the hands of the Greeks. One such hero was the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer, whose teachings are recorded in Pirkei Avot. He lived and taught Torah, and was captured and sentenced to death for his defiance.

The Talmud recounts the devastating moment, as Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer is being led out to his execution, when his own nephew, who had aligned himself with the

Greeks and betrayed his uncle to the Greek authorities, mocks him for his loyalty and faith.

A painful, highly charged exchange ensues between them, which culminates in the heart-wrenching repentance of the nephew.

This episode is a microcosm of the epic battle of ideas between Judaism and Hellenism. Both systems valued wisdom, knowledge, and learning – and yet, they were fundamentally different.


The ancient Greek worldview prized the pursuit of intellectual greatness but in secular academic terms, disconnected from G-d and a way of living. Torah wisdom also has awesome intellectual power, but it’s a wisdom not removed from the human experience.

It’s a system of laws and ethics, given by G-d at Sinai, with the express purpose of integrating them into our lives; the divine blueprint for how to live ethically, morally, and spiritually, and enrich and inspire every facet of human experience.

In essence, Torah is a formula for translating divine wisdom into a way of life, and in so doing, transforming ourselves as people and elevating the world we live in. The pursuit of this divine wisdom is what Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer lived for, and in the end, died for.

It’s the triumph of the Jewish worldview which we celebrate on Chanukah. Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer was brutally executed, yet the mighty Greek empire is no more. Its philosophy, culture, language, and infrastructure are no longer a living part of any society.

And we, the children of Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer, are here learning Torah the way he did, in the same Hebrew language, observing the same *mitzvot* (good deeds), living the same Sinai values and vision. Every aspect of Jewish life as it was then remains intact.



Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer is telling us that every Jewish home can be a *beit midrash*, a house of learning, bustling with the energy and inspiration of Torah study.

It’s a remarkable story. At the time when the Greek empire was in control of the land of Israel (and much of the known world) who would have thought that it would be Yossi ben Yoezer and his legacy and ideals that would outlast them? But here we are today, more than 2 000 years

later, with a deep, enduring connection to the proud legacy of our people.

Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer captures the vision and values of Sinai in one concise statement recorded in Pirkei Avot, “Let your home be a meeting place for the sages.” (Chapter 1, Mishna 4). What he’s advocating is something quite radical: the reimagining of a home not merely as a place of residence, but as a place of Torah learning.

Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer is telling us that Torah learning should not be limited to official institutions – shuls, schools, and yeshivot (which of course are important places to express our Jewish identity). He is telling us that every Jewish home can be a *beit midrash*, a house of learning, bustling with the energy and inspiration of Torah study. Torah learning begins at home.

The home is the heart of Jewish life. It’s the place where history is made, where a new generation is raised with Jewish values. And the values that our children grow up with at home are the values they naturally live by as they chart their own course in life.

A Jewish home has a number of pillars – the beauty and harmony of Shabbos, the positivity of a

loving marriage and nurturing parenting, the values of kindness and integrity, a kosher kitchen. Together with these, Torah learning is central to creating a genuine Jewish atmosphere in the home, an environment in harmony with G-d’s values and vision.

It’s a platform for families to engage with each other on an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual level. The phrase used by the mishna, “meeting place”, implies a space of robust discussion and debate, of real conversations between people. It’s an opportunity to come closer to one another and to connect with each other across the generation gap through our Torah legacy.

And so, as we light our Chanukah candles and remember the miracles of that time, we reflect on the heroism of Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer and those like him who fought bravely for Torah values, taking on a great empire.

The candles symbolise this awesome legacy that we bring into our homes – the places where we live, where Torah with all its values comes alive. This is Rabbi Yossi ben Yoezer’s vision. This is his legacy. And we are here to continue it.

True beauty not in the eye of the beholder

JORDAN MOSHE

If Judaism disapproves of physical beauty, how can the Torah praise the beauty of countless women throughout Jewish history? How can we reconcile an appreciation of natural beauty with a culture that emphasises modesty and shuns externality?

Rabbi Akiva Tatz endeavoured to resolve this in a talk delivered at the Johannesburg Torah Institute in Oaklands last Tuesday. His talk, held in anticipation of Chanukah, engaged with Greek and Jewish philosophies on the subject of beauty. Ultimately, he suggested that we remain locked in an ideological conflict with Western values antithetical to Judaism.

“A facet of the Chanukah story is centred on the battle between Jewish and Greek culture, specifically on their interpretations of beauty,” said Tatz. “Our ideology clashed with that of Greece, its philosophy influential and still the dominant culture of today.”

Tatz explained that our thought framework today is Western, and that Western thought is ultimately Greek in origin. Language, politics, philosophy, architecture, drama, science, and more are rooted in Greek culture, as is our contemporary understanding of aesthetics and appearance.

“One of Greek philosophy’s prime issues was the presentation of aesthetics,” said Tatz. “Greek ideology believed in a beautiful mind and body, which is why the Greek sporting games were played naked. There was a championing of the external and the visible, placing it before intangible spirituality. Judaism has the opposite approach, and champions spirituality, putting us at odds with Greek culture then and now.”

However, Judaism’s approach to beauty is anything but straightforward. When the Torah deals with beauty, in particular womanly beauty, it presents an extreme conflict, said Tatz. “On the one hand, it

praises beauty in extreme terms,” he said. “The matriarchs of the Jewish people were praised for their beauty. The Egyptians were willing to kill for Sarah, so great was her beauty.”

Several others, including Joshua’s wife Rachav, and Avigayil, the second wife of David, are described in similar terms. “The Talmud says that when Avigayil’s skirt lifted slightly, the beauty of her leg lit David’s journey for ten miles,” said Tatz.

“Why does the Torah mention such beauty? It’s a spiritual book of holy teaching. Why is it important to know that these women looked good externally? Surely it’s completely contrary to our value system?”

Tatz went on to illustrate that the same Torah tells us this beauty is problematic. “We learn that charm is a lie, and beauty is vanity,” he said, quoting *Eshet Chayil*, a collection of verses composed by Solomon in praise of women. “We sing this to our wives on Friday night. Even the Talmud teaches us that externality deceives, and the internal is what counts.”

Tatz cited the Gemara, which recounts an incident in which a daughter of the ruling Roman governor of the Middle East questions the sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya, whose ugliness was extremely pronounced.

“She challenged him, asking how intellectual beauty could be contained in such an ugly human vessel,” said Tatz. “She pushed the Greek understanding that physical appearance had to come first and

had to be as beautiful as the wisdom it contained.”

Ultimately, Ben Chananya teaches her that external beauty is problematic because it adversely affects the quality of what it contains, saying that physically attractive scholars have to work harder to perfect their intellectual qualities. “When the vessel makes its own statement, it damages the content,” Tatz summarised. “When it serves only to contain, the contents remain pure. This teaches that external beauty is problematic, that it has an adverse impact on its content.”

Having illustrated the contradiction, Tatz resolved it using an insight gleaned from his teacher, the late Rabbi Moshe Shapiro.

“The story of human history is that of the battle between body and soul,” he said. “At creation, it was made clear that the vessel housing the soul was as important as the soul itself. The body was and remains an important component.”

According to Tatz, the original condition of the human being was a perfect balance between body and soul. As history progressed, however, this changed as the body asserted itself more, and the soul receded further into the background.

“At creation, the body served no purpose other than to house the soul,” he said. “You could see through the body and directly to the soul within. This was why Adam and Eve

didn’t need clothes. After they sinned, the reverse came into effect – the body pushed for priority, and you had to look very hard to see the soul. This remains so today, as the soul is always hijacked by the body.”

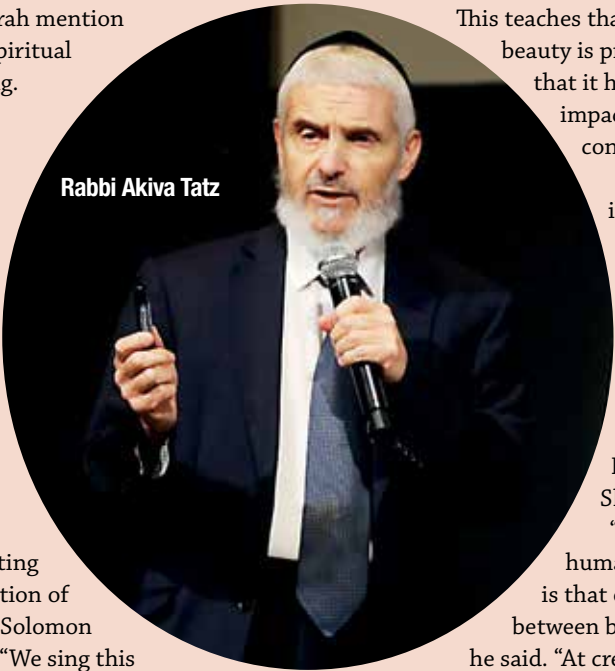
In spite of this, Judaism continues to champion the body, believing it has a place alongside the soul if it can be raised to the same level. “Judaism is about reaching down into the body to lift it back up into holiness,” said Tatz. “The function of a Jew is to reconnect and elevate the body.”

“In other religions, if you’re serious about spirituality, you have to leave the body behind. Christianity is fraught with guilt about the body, Muslims don’t touch alcohol, and Mormons say you can’t drink coffee. They realise that the body is dangerous, and choose to remove the physical. Judaism believes in engaging the body instead, reuniting it with the soul.”

It’s for this reason that beauty – originally on par with spirituality – was the ultimate spiritual value and was praised extensively. “The beauty of the great women in Torah was a mirror of their spirituality, that’s why the Torah praises it,” said Tatz. “As we move through history, it becomes more difficult. We have to be very careful about the body, and need to be sensitive if we want to show spiritual beauty.”

Chanukah, he concludes, is a time to consider our historic battle with Greek culture over what beauty means, a conflict which lasts until today. “It’s all around us,” Tatz said. “You see nakedness today as shameful or vulgar – there’s a clear tension.

“Greek ideology is vested in the material. Judaism goes way beyond that, starting in the spiritual realm, and moving towards the physical. Our ultimate goal is to reunite body and soul in such a way that the lowest aspects of the material show the highest aspects of the spiritual, and true beauty is reasserted.”



Rabbi Akiva Tatz

It has been an exciting and productive few months at Maccabi South Africa, as we continue to provide a valuable sporting service to the community.

A NEW CONSTITUTION AND BOARD

Maccabi SA undertook a review of its constitutional and governance structures, to bring them in line with current organisational needs and best practice. A Memorandum of Incorporation was officially adopted earlier this year, and a new Board of Directors (BoD) elected at the AGM held on Sunday 3 November in Johannesburg. Office bearers were elected at the first meeting of the BoD on Sunday 1 December.

We are proud to announce our new Directors: Clifford Garrun (Chairman), Leslie Cohen (Treasurer), Rosalynne Goldin, Desmond Hyman, Brad Kaftel, Ashley Kotzin, Lawrence Sacke and David Silverman (WP).

Garrun thanked all for their contribution in assisting the organisation to achieve this milestone. "I am confident we have achieved the best structure, together with a talented group of leaders whose knowledge and experience will provide the strategic direction to deliver a commercially viable and sustainable community sports organisation into the future. I am also honoured to be re-elected as Chairman, with my focus on launching our partner programme and delivering another successful Team Maccabi SA performance at Maccabiah 2021".

Mervyn Tankelowitz, who served as Maccabi SA Chairman from 2007–10, and since then as President, will now adopt a new consultancy role as emissary to Maccabi World Union. Winner of the coveted international Yakir Award in 2013 for services to Maccabi, Mervyn's global network of chaverim will assist Maccabi SA to further achieve its objectives.



Board of Directors L-R: David Silverman, Lawrence Sacke, Des Hyman, Les Cohen (Treasurer), Cliff Garrun (Chairman), Ros Goldin, Absent: Brad Kaftel, Ashley Kotzin

MACCABI GOES CAMPING

Maccabi SA is once again providing a variety of sports equipment to the Habonim and Bnei Akiva machanot. Our Youth Committee will also be hosting soccer tournaments for boys and girls, as well as assisting with other sports activities. Many thanks to our Sports Director, Jarred Gronemann for managing the project, to Forwardzone for sponsoring the equipment, to supplier DTR Sports for their excellent service, and to our enthusiastic volunteers Riley Freeman, Romy Unterslak and Ryan Kramer for providing a great machaneh sporting experience.

MACCABIAH 2021 – ARE YOU GAME?

Maccabi SA has kicked off planning for the 21st Games to be held in Israel from 20 July to 3 August 2021. South Africa has successfully competed in every Maccabiah since the 2nd Games in 1935, with a total of 3486 delegates representing SA, bringing home a massive total of 827 medals.

We are exploring competing in up to 22 sports in 2021, and two workshops have been held to draw up initial plans. The Games Committee is also being finalised and will be announced in due course, together with the list of sports, Sports Convenors and applications for available Coaching and Management positions.



The first set of trials are taking place in early 2020. Please check our website and social media pages for further details:

Boys Futsal (u16 and u18):

Johannesburg: Sun 23 February, Discovery Soccer Park, Wanderers.
9-11am and 3-5pm (tbc), both groups.

Cape Town (including selected Jhb players): Sun 19 April, Herzlia High School, 9am-12pm.

Boys Water Polo (u18, born 2003-06):

Cape Town: Sun 15 March, Herzlia High School, 9am-12pm.

For any queries on futsal and water polo, please contact Saul Jackson on 071 671 9916 / sauljackson1997@gmail.com.

Boys and Girls Tennis (born 2003-07):

Dates: 1 March, 8 March, 15 March (pending total entries), 9am onwards.

Johannesburg (King David Linksfield) and Cape Town (The Glen Country Club).

Please register for tennis trials before Friday 21 Feb 2020 by sending your details to admin@maccabi.co.za.

The cost per person for Maccabiah 2021 has not been finalised. We will communicate all financial info as soon as available. In the interim, we encourage all interested persons to attend trials to compete for a place in #TeamMaccabiSA21.

Preparing and taking a team to the Games is a significant undertaking, largely driven by a dedicated group of volunteers. If you are keen to get involved as manager, coach, convenor, medical personnel or general volunteer, please email us – admin@maccabi.co.za.

Following on from our tremendous success at the European Maccabi Games in Budapest earlier this year, we are confident that #TeamMaccabiSA21 is going to be packed with talented, motivated, proudly South African athletes.

Wishing you a Chag Sameach and a very sporting 2020!



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Donut worry, these doughnuts will sweeten your *chag*

JORDAN MOSHE

No matter what dieting trend you follow, the fact is that even Professor Tim Noakes might agree that doughnuts are – and always will be – the exception. Few can resist the doughy goodness of this classic treat, and with Chanukah around the corner, no excuse is needed to indulge.

Celebrated on the 25th of Kislev, Chanukah commemorates one of the great victories of Jewish history. In the 2nd century BCE, a small group of Jews led by Judah Maccabee reconsecrated the desecrated Temple of Jerusalem after a miraculous victory against the ruling Greek powers.

Tradition has it that when they sought to relight the menorah, only one day’s worth of undefiled oil remained. It miraculously burned for eight days, allowing time to prepare more oil. This is where the doughnuts come in, as it’s also customary to eat food fried in oil.

According to Gil Marks’ *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Food*, sufganiyot became the Chanukah food of choice in Israel in the 1920s before the state was established. The Histadrut, the Israeli labour federation, found in the doughnut a unique job opportunity for the underemployed masses living in what was then British controlled Palestine.

The idea was to put people to work preparing, transporting, and selling these fried delicacies and a push was made to produce and sell them starting weeks before the first night of Chanukah, thus extending the holiday season



Dina Diamond, Ayellet Black and Tamar Dakes (Feigels)

and the work opportunities the doughnuts created.

Although virtually synonymous with the festival of lights, the once humble doughnut is today an unrecognisable culinary masterpiece. The traditional round, spongy doughnut, (or sufganiya, as Israelis call it) has evolved into an extravagant gourmet creation worthy of Instagram. Plain jam is no longer the order of the day, with whisky fillings, red velvet toppings, and chocolate infusions dominating the scene.

This is best exemplified in modern-day Israel, where bakeries compete for buyers’ attention with elaborate designs inspired



Reeva Forman and Dina Diamond

Photos: Ilan Ossendryver



Jozi Blue’s ‘bearnut’

by haute patisserie, carrying an equally elaborate price tag.

Supermarkets, restaurants, bakeries, and open-air food markets boast a dizzying doughnut array throughout the holiday period. Angel Bakeries, the largest commercial bakery in Israel, purportedly fries more than 250 000 sufganiyot each day. In total, it’s estimated that about 20 million sufganiyot will be sold in Israel during Chanukah.

Because the contemporary designer-doughnut scene is primarily the preserve of Israel, the *SA Jewish Report* embarked on a mission to create and sample an array of local gourmet doughnuts, establishing whether a doughnut is just a doughnut – or something more.

We invited members of our community to try their hands at creating a gourmet *sufganiya* of their own following a simple mandate: capture the spirit of Chanukah in doughnut form, and use as much creativity as desired.

And so, representatives from Feigels, Frangelicas, Shulas,

Jozi Blue, and Esther Home Catering together with a panel of hand-picked judges, assembled at the *SA Jewish Report*’s offices for Johannesburg’s first sufganiyot tasting. The judges, including Israeli Deputy Ambassador Ayellet Black, cosmetics business icon Reeva Forman, and marketing guru Dina Diamond, evaluated each entry

out of fifty to declare one the winner. This was done without knowing who had prepared the dish, and was based on criteria including originality, flavour, appearance, and Chanukah spirit.

“This is definitely not a pre-summer activity,” laughed Diamond as the tasting commenced. “You can’t get the beach body you want doing something like this.”

Nevertheless, the judges took to their evaluation with zest, sampling each entry in turn and discussing scores between bites. The evening began with a cheesecake cronut, crafted by Frangelicas and featuring a layer of its signature cheesecake sandwiched delicately between two layers of croissant-style pastry and topped with icing and a strawberry slice.

“There’s something about cheesecake that’s very Jewish,” said Diamond. “It adds something to the doughnut that makes it stay a doughnut, while being different. It’s really unique.”

From there, the judges embraced the “bear necessities”, tucking into Jozi Blue’s novel bear-inspired doughnuts – chocolate coated traditional doughnuts complete with adorable chocolate ears and eyes, and a piped mousse muzzle in the centre. Given the cuteness overload, they had a hard time biting into their samples. “I think this is gorgeous, and I just can’t bear to bite it,” laughed Forman.

Black commented on its appeal



The winning Frangelicas cronut

for children, saying her own would be unable to resist its bearish charm. “My kids wouldn’t care what it tastes like,” she said.

“The look alone would have them hooked. The concept is so original, and the design so cute.”

Also taking their cue from the traditional circular doughnut, Esther Home Catering and Shulas captured the warmth of a typical Chanukah with their masterpieces. Presented as bite-size doughnuts drenched in either blueberry syrup or dulce de leche, the creations of Esther Buzaglo reminded judges of the homely Chanukah setting familiar to most of us.

“These are traditional and cute,” Forman commented. “They’re also dangerous – you could eat so many because they’re so small, but they scream Chanukah.” Diamond

concurred, “They’re so warm and inviting. Although standard, you look at these and immediately think of Chanukah. It’s foolproof.”

As for Shulas, the judges admired the creativity of combining a traditional black forest cake with a doughnut, creating a sandwich style, cream filled invention, complete with cherries and cherry syrup. Though slightly rich, the overall effect was well-received, the judges admiring its originality. “There’s a lot of taste in here,” said Black. “The filling has great flavour, and I like the concept.”

Finally, Feigels presented a figurative and literal twist on the Chanukah doughnut, serving up a plaited creation that resembled a braided challah, though this one was topped with blueberries and filled with a strawberry cream filling.

“I like the exterior, and the nod to the healthiness given by the berries,” laughed Black. The judges agreed that the invocation of challah cemented its originality, saying it seemed like something one would eat on Shabbat during Chanukah. “It’s more breadly than doughnuty,” said Diamond.

After rinsing the lingering sweetness from their palates, the judges finalised their scores and agreed that the figures were neck on neck. Frangelicas’ cheesecake cronut emerged victorious, with Esther’s miniature marvels and Jozi Blue’s “bearnut” close on its heels. The judges agreed that the decision was extremely difficult to make, but that every entry paid a fitting tribute to Chanukah and doughnuts.

The Israeli doughnut scene has certainly been given a run for its money. If these masterpieces do become available to Jewish Johannesburg, you should consider staying put this December.



Reeva Forman, Dina Diamond, Ayellet Black and Elana Godley (Frangelicas)



Esther Home Catering's doughnuts

Living in a time of miracles

OPINION

RABBI DAVID MASINTER



One had to be both amused and dismayed at the way world leaders took pot shots at the so-called “leader of the free world” during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization summit last week. Is this what leadership has come to?

The United States is continuing to polarise along dangerous political fault lines as the Democrats seek to impeach their president, only the third such attempt in US history.

England appears to have been put on pause as it wrestles back and forward with Brexit and an upcoming general election, the outcome of which could have far-reaching consequences for its Jewish citizens, about 300 000 strong.

For the first time, a United Kingdom chief rabbi has warned Jews and the public at large to vote with conscience, not to vote for a leader who refers to Hamas as his friends, has failed to stop the rampant anti-Semitism within his party, and refuses to apologise for his indifference towards it.

In Israel, the political process is facing another deadlock, with the threat of a third election on the horizon, all while Iran and its proxies are trying their very best to encircle the Jewish state from all sides.

Here at home, we are dealing with the economic aftermath of state capture as virtually every state enterprise threatens to collapse under the weight of unrestrained looting and mismanagement.

Global warming and weather change loom over the future of our planet like nothing we’ve ever seen or known in recorded history (barring the flood, of course).

So, what should our response be?

As concerned human beings and citizens, we need to get involved and contribute towards

positive change in whatever way we can. As Jews, however, we have an added duty and responsibility.

The Torah tells us clearly that it’s the task of every single Jew to bring light into the



world by performing *mitzvot* (good deeds). Whether in the US, UK, France, Israel, South Africa, or Myanmar (where a Chabad House has just opened its doors), when a Jew fulfils the *mitzvah* of lighting the menorah, light is created.

Bereishit Rabbah 68:5 explains that when it comes to the light of G-d, geography makes no difference. “He is the place of the world, and the world is not His place.” G-d is not found in any particular location, rather, G-d is inherent in all places.

Performing a simple *mitzvah*, like lighting a menorah candle, literally dispels darkness,

confusion, and even hatred wherever it exists.

The great Jewish sages teach us that when we fulfil a *mitzvah* with focused intention, we create a “special space” that invites in divine intervention. By performing a *mitzvah*, we

participate in an act of divine transformation.

When the Gemarah, the classical text of Jewish law, discusses the miracle of Chanukah, it asks: “What is Chanukah?” The answer given is, “When the Hellenists entered the sanctuary, they contaminated all its oil. Then, when the Hasmonean family overpowered and was victorious over them, they searched and found only a single cruse of pure oil that was sealed with the seal of the high priest – enough to light the menorah for a single day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the menorah with this oil for eight days. The following year, they established these [eight days] as days

of festivity and praise and thanksgiving for G-d.”

According to the Gemarah, the festival of Chanukah is not about the military victory of a small band of Jews against one of the mightiest armies on earth. It’s about the miracle of the oil. The Gemarah makes only a passing reference to the military victory (“when the Hasmonean family overpowered and was victorious”) and focuses exclusively on the story of the oil as if this were the only significant event commemorated by the festival of Chanukah.

The miracle of the oil would seem of minor importance relative to the military victory, which appears to have re-established Jewish sovereignty. The story of the oil seems to have mere symbolic value without having any consequences of life, death, and liberty. And yet it is seen and remembered as the essence of Chanukah.

If the oil would have not burnt for eight days, so what? The menorah would have not been kindled.

In truth, the sages chose the candles because true Jewish victory is the light we bring into the world. The light of Torah and *mitzvot* is what defeats the darkness from where all hatred emerges and gains strength.

Through our fulfilment of the *mitzvah* of lighting the menorah over Chanukah, may we merit to witness the lighting of the menorah in our holy temple with the revelation of our righteous Moshiach, may he come speedily.

• Rabbi David Masinter is a rabbi, founder, and director of the Miracle Drive annual charity drive, and Director of Chabad House in Johannesburg.

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Winning the war, one candle at a time

OPINION

RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN



I will always think of Chanukah as a winter *chag*. Going back to my years growing up in Europe, the associations with this holiday are always of super-early dusk, sitting cosily inside watching the gentle snowfall, while consuming way too many of my mother’s boiling hot latkes. By now, I have lived in the southern hemisphere longer than elsewhere in the world, but Chanukah and summer are still not synonymous in my mind.

South African Chanukah parties are more likely to consist of freshly braaied boerewors served with cold

beer, while enjoying the beautiful outdoors. That is, if we even manage to celebrate the holiday.

Most years, it falls in the middle of the long summer vacation, when we are away from friends and family and most definitely in the slow and lazy mode. And holiday season doesn’t just refer to the fact that many are off work, but also to the (decidedly non-Jewish) religious celebrations that most in this country observe at that time.

The atmosphere all around us, from the songs on the radio to the décor in the malls, isn’t supportive

of or conducive to our own rituals and customs.

A few years ago, I was fortunate to spend Chanukah in the Holy Land. Landing on a Friday morning at Ben-Gurion Airport, we were delighted to be greeted by the El Al pilot and crew with the words “Shabbat shalom” and “Chanukah sameach”. The bakeries at the packed Machaneh Yehuda market in Jerusalem that afternoon were filled with dozens of varieties of freshly baked suvganiyot (translating it as simply doughnuts would not do justice). Throughout

the eight days, holiday music and food filled the shopping centres and oversize menorahs were lit in every available public space. (And the weather was cool, the sun set early, although there was no snow.)

Celebrating in the diaspora has been difficult every year since...

It’s often said that all Jewish festivals can be summed up in three short phrases: they tried to kill us; we won; let’s eat. While this may define many of our observances, Chanukah doesn’t quite fit this mould.

The miracle of Chanukah isn’t that we survived an existential threat against our physical survival. Antiochus’ aim was not to exterminate the Jewish people. He wished to Hellenize us – to absorb us into the prevailing Greek culture and practice, dress and faith.

We could continue to be us if we would just be more like them. In other words, it wasn’t our bodies he was after, but our souls. Go ahead and light the menorah in your Holy Temple, they said. We will not destroy this symbol of light, but we will defile all the oil that you have prepared in utmost purity for this ritual. Shine on, but without adhering to a divine Torah and its dictates.

Latkes and doughnuts aside, the main way to observe the Festival of Lights is therefore not by feasting. It’s by commemorating the miracle of the oil, that one little surviving uncontaminated cruse that lasted eight days instead of one. The flames of the menorah, burning on against all odds, symbolise the eternal undefeated and

undefeatable Jewish soul, referred by King Solomon in Proverbs (20:27) as “the candle of Hashem”.

Did we not win against the Syrian-Greek armies and rededicate the Holy Temple? Yes, we won that battle. Miraculously indeed – the few against the many. But we haven’t yet won the war. We still remain small in numbers, dwarfed by other cultures and religions. We pray every day for complete victory – the onset of the Messianic era – when knowledge of G-d will fill the entire world. Until then, we battle on.

This year, the timing of the festival is particularly challenging, as Chanukah is in the last week of December. It’s peak holiday season in every meaning of the word.

So here’s how to win the battle of 2019: don’t allow the many to dictate to the few. Make sure you have a menorah and candles available for the festival. If you are travelling, remember to pack them along with the sunscreen, hats, swimming costumes, and other holidaymakers’ essentials. If you are near a large, or even small, Jewish community, join in their celebrations. If not, gather friends and family, and celebrate on your own. And of course, feast. We always do...

Chanukah Sameach. One battle at a time, we will win this war.

Chanukah more than just doughnuts and dreidels

TALI FEINBERG

Chanukah means latkes, doughnuts, and dreidels, right? Not necessarily. People around the world celebrate the *chag* in all kinds of interesting and unusual ways, honouring all aspects of this festival of light.

Eating latkes also has an interesting history – it’s not just by chance that we eat potato pancakes fried in oil. “Potatoes were embraced by the peasants of Europe in the late 18th century due to a series of crop failures and famine. Potatoes safeguarded them against the unpredictable rise and fall of grain prices and kept them healthy and full,” says Aly Miller on Jewish food website *The Nosher*.

She says that according to food historian Gil Marks, two types of Chanukah food is on record in the 14th century: dairy food and fried food. “Sephardic Jews made many variations of fried sweets for the holiday, while Ashkenazi Jews in Northern Europe made fried blintzes and doughnuts. Italian Jews in the 15th century made fried ricotta-cheese pancakes (cassola) which were arguably the first latkes,” she writes.

“Latke recipes changed from region to region, depending on what resources were plentiful and accessible. In Northern and Eastern Europe, for example, schmaltz (chicken fat) or duck fat was used in place of oil. Along with cheese latkes, buckwheat latkes were the norm. Roasted goose, a seasonally anticipated dish, was also traditional on the Ashkenazi table.”

Potatoes were particularly abundant at this time of year in Eastern Europe, so potatoes fried in oil became the tradition. When people went to South Africa, America, and other places, they took that tradition with them.

A fascinating fact is that for Jews from North African countries (Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia), “the seventh night of Chanukah is set aside as a women’s holiday”, says Simon J. Brenner, a distinguished professor of American studies and folklore at Penn State University.

According to him, that night commemorates Hannah, sometimes spelled Channah, whose story is told in the Book of Maccabees. According to the text, Hannah and her seven sons defied the Syrian Greeks who ruled Jerusalem at the time, and she and her sons were killed for refusing to give up their beliefs. This is also known as Chag Ha’Banot (the Daughters Festival).

Jews in India sometimes light their Chanukiot with wicks that have been dipped in coconut oil to honour the miracle of the oil, similar to traditions for Diwali,

says Brenner. Also, in India, some Jews replace latkes with a food called burfi, a confectionary made with condensed milk and sugar.

Doughnuts are a hugely popular way to celebrate Chanukah in Israel and around the world. In Morocco, these are called sfenj, and are made with the juice and zest of an orange.

In Santa Marta, Columbian Jews eat a traditional dish called patacones, which is plantain slices fried in oil. Iranian Jews make an egg fritter called kuku savri.

In Alsace, a region of France, “double-decker” Chanukah menorahs are common, with space for 16 lights. The two levels, each with spots for eight candles, allow fathers and sons or mothers and daughters to join together as they each light their own candles in one single menorah.

Along with cassola, Italian Jews make a lightly sweetened, olive-oil infused, honey-covered treat called precipizi, and in Turkey, people eat oil-fried fritters known as burmelos. In Istanbul, Jews also sing a song commemorating the eight menorah candles called *Ocho Candelas*.

Chanukah is now publically celebrated in countries where Jews were persecuted in the past. The Chief Rabbi of Moscow lights a giant menorah in the heart of Moscow, in Manezh Square near the Kremlin, and public menorahs are lit in cities throughout Russia.

Since 2003, a large menorah is lit on the first night of Chanukah in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany. Given that it was once the site of anti-Semitic rallies during the Nazi regime, the event not only marks the beginning of a religious holiday, but symbolises the changes that have occurred in German society since the end of World War II.

In America, an underwater menorah was installed at an aquarium in Atlanta, and a “national menorah” is lit near the White House in Washington.

In Israel, some families visit the sites of the events that inspired Chanukah in Modi’in and Jerusalem. Modi’in is mentioned in the Mishnah as home to the Maccabees, and is also where the oldest shul in Israel was discovered. Each year as part of the festivities, nearly 20 families open their homes in Modi’in for special public menorah-lightings and Chanukah-themed activities and lectures, all linked to the city’s central role in the Chanukah story.

One almost universally practiced tradition involves displaying your menorah or Chanukiah for people to see the lights burning. Historically, in countries like Morocco and Algeria, and even some communities in India, it was customary to hang a menorah on a hook on a wall near the doorway on the side of the door across from the mezuzah. In Israel, some neighbourhoods even have spaces cut into the sides of buildings, so Jews can proudly display their Chanukiot to the world.



SARAH GERSHMAN – JTA

While Chanukah is traditionally not one of the most central holidays of the Jewish calendar, it can offer many opportunities for fun. Here are some suggestions how you can make this Chanukah memorable while staying true to the essential meaning of the holiday.

Bring light out of darkness

Chanukah is also a wonderful time to bring light into the lives of those around us. Why not volunteer as a family at a local soup kitchen, shelter, or any place that’s meaningful to you? Jewish homes for the aged often have Chanukah parties or communal menorah lightings. These are an opportunity to connect your

children with the older generation, and help make the celebration more festive for the residents.

Get creative

Chanukah can be a great time for simple, fun family art projects. There is a custom for each member of the family to have his/her own menorah. This year, why not make your own? You can buy lots of small votive candles (yahrzeit candles are an inexpensive way to do this) and decorate the glass with a collage of colourful pieces of tissue paper. When the votives are lit, light shines through the tissue paper like stained glass. This is a great chanukiah for the Friday night of the holiday when the candles are supposed to burn for at least two hours. No matter what kind

Continued on page 20>>

A chance to kindle personal and public possibilities

ADINA ROTH



“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice,” said Martin Luther King Jr. In the mid-1950s in America with all the horrors of institutionalised racism, it took leadership, courage and spiritual attunement for King to trust that the eventual twists and turns of human forces in the tunnel of time tend towards justice. Yet, if we pause to consider it, King’s bold declaration isn’t dissimilar to the message of Chanukah.

Chanukah is borne of a wonderful juxtaposition between a seven-branched menorah which was lit daily in an internal space in the temple, and a nine-branched chanukiah to be lit for eight days of the year in public spaces, at the windows and walls of our homes.

In helping us to distinguish between the notion of a private and a public lighting, Rabbi Zadok of Lublin said that in times of Jewish persecution, it’s halachically permitted to light the chanukiah in a private space. This is because even when it’s felt that light cannot brighten the darkness of our world, we should always remember that light should brighten the innerness of our souls.



When change in the public sphere seems remote and out of reach, there is always an internal and personal light which can and must be kindled.

When change in the public sphere seems remote and out of reach, there is always an internal and personal light which can and must be kindled.

Rabbi Zadok’s affirming of the individual’s responsibility is reflected in the thoughts of psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. In the apocalyptic turmoil which characterised the years preceding World War II, Jung questioned the capacity of the collective to transform. For Jung, like the Rebbe of Lublin, the potential for change needed to be located in the work of each individual to discern her internal capacities for good and evil. In his little book, *The Undiscovered Self*, Jung wrote, “I am neither spurred on by excessive optimism nor in love with high ideals, but am merely concerned with the fate of the individual human being – that infinitesimal unit on whom a world depends.”

Yet, Chanukah isn’t simply a celebration of the individual’s ability to transform. Chanukah celebrates, in a Martin-Luther-King-like manner, the unlikely shifting of the arc of history by a small group of individuals – the mighty Greek army was forced to its knees by a small group of Jewish guerrilla farm boys!

Yet, expecting miracles in the South African environment might be hard for us this holiday season. Indeed, in South Africa, as many of us wind our way towards the coast for a much-needed break, the joy of holiday is accompanied by more sobering concerns on the macro level, namely the very ability of our country to transform itself.

Many of us are struggling to maintain faith in our ruling party to sort out the endless challenges of South Africa 25 years post-apartheid. While talking to a business-man the other day, I was affronted by a list of quantifiable barriers towards South Africa succeeding: Eskom, the Road Accident Fund, South African

Airways. “If you just add up the billions that have been lost, there isn’t even the remotest chance that South Africa can pull itself out of this stupor for the next 20 years,” he said.

The “reality” he hit me with had the effect of rendering me mute. How does one respond? Then I thought to myself, “and yet, here we are ... we have meaningful work, beautiful schools, an engaged community, close family, and special friends”. In spite of everything going on, in the realm of the personal, we are able to somehow find our way and in some small manner contribute to the larger society. But my personal optimism felt dwarfed by his more pessimistic – albeit realistic – approach to the macro challenges.

Yet, if we return to our chanukiah, we are reminded that the Jewish narrative affirms an internal light and a more public light. The chanukiah points to the necessary and fundamental work of our personal lives that needs kindling in our private sphere every single day. It’s the light of good faith, optimism, a commitment to doing good and spreading warmth in our spheres of influence, our homes, our friendships, our businesses, and our communities.

This idea is reinforced by the Sefat Emet, who says that when the Maccabees found a tiny vial of oil which miraculously lasted for eight days, this drop of oil also represented the Jewish spirit which was radically reduced by the culturally oppressive Greeks. With our spirit almost snuffed out, the miracle of the menorah represented not only a physical light, but a revival of the Jewish spirit which burned for eight days, representing a return to spiritual wholeness. It’s this light of optimistic spirit which should be particularly cherished in South Africa right now.

It’s not always easy to believe that our society can shift towards the good. But, let’s remember that the rabbis in our tradition connected the chanukiah to personal and collective potential for transformation. They lived in times of equal turmoil to ours, with perhaps more reason to feel negative. Yet they passed on a message of bold hope.

If people are feeling pessimistic this holiday period, let’s use this time to focus on kindling the lights of our souls,

that light where we have the capacity to influence and make change. Let’s also remember that the Jewish story audaciously connects this inner light to a larger narrative, to a chanukiah, which tells the story of how global change and transformation are always possible.

• Adina Roth runs B’tocham Education in Johannesburg, teaching courses to B’neimtzvah and tanach and midrash to adults. She is also a Melton educator and a clinical psychologist in private practice. She is currently Limmud SA national chair.



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Deck the halls with chanukiahs!

JORDAN MOSHE

With its turkey, tinsel, and trees, no Christian holiday seems to fascinate Jews more than Christmas. The promise of pudding and presents captures our imagination. With the commercialisation and proliferation of Christmas growing every year, bearded Santa Claus starts to look more like a rabbi to some, albeit sporting an unconventional red gaberdine.

With Chanukah falling at the same time (this year starting three days before Christmas), it’s little wonder that the two festivals have developed a curious relationship, even inspiring a pop culture following in the form of the portmanteau holiday, Chrismukkah.

Though they couldn’t be more different, their overlap has generated a rich culture that is not actually a millennial creation, but one which goes back centuries.

Every year, Christmas falls on 25 December of the solar calendar, with Chanukah also falling on the 25th of the month – but of the Hebrew month of Kislev. However, by the time the events of the Gospels took place, Jews had been celebrating their holiday for almost two centuries already, commemorating the military victory of the Hasmoneans over the ruling Hellenistic Greek empire of the time.

Although the two holidays were celebrated at the same time, Jews were initially wary of Christmas. According to Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut, the author of *A Kosher Christmas*, the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe once feared Christmas-time, a reflection of how they felt about their status in society.

“In Eastern Europe, Jews weren’t very assimilated,” Plaut told *Vox* in 2018. “Christmas was a night of possible pogroms and violence, with so many celebrants, often drunk, going

from house to house. Jews didn’t go to the synagogue to study. They stayed at home for safety reasons.”

However, in Western Europe, notably after the French Revolution, Jews were more assimilated. For the Jewish elite, holiday symbols such as the Christmas tree signified secular inclusion in society. As Plaut explains, these Jews had more freedom to ask questions like, “Do I bring a Christmas tree into my home?”



Do I have a holiday meal? Do I give out gifts?” In fact, affluent German Jews often posed for portraits in front of elaborately decorated Christmas trees, even bringing them into their own homes.

Viennese socialite Fanny Arnstein was among the first Jews to introduce a Christmas tree into the home, as was early Zionist Theodor Herzl, who had a Christmas tree in his salon and recorded in his journal in 1895 that he met Vienna’s chief rabbi with the tree in full

view. In Berlin, Gershom Scholem, a scholar of Jewish mysticism, grew up in a home that celebrated Christmas “with roast goose or hare, a decorated Christmas tree” and featured “an aunt who played the piano and treated our cook and servant to *Silent Night*.”

The Christmas following amongst Jews grew, with some Jews celebrating Christmas as a secular festival without religious meaning or transferring Christmas customs to the Chanukah festival. In fact, 19th century German Jews developed Weihnukkah, a combination of Weihnachten (Christmas in German) and Chanukah. The extent of the crossover is shown in the Jewish Museum of Berlin’s exhibit on the subject, which features a vintage picture combining an image of a menorah and a Christmas tree. In reality, Weihnukkah never had a colossal following, and just about disappeared when Hitler came to power in Nazi Germany.

With time, Christmas began to change from essentially a religious to a secular national holiday, particularly in America. The process was accelerated by commercialisation. With Christmas presents beginning to loom larger, Jewish parents, not wanting their children to feel deprived, took to giving their children gifts at Chanukah.

American Jewish families also hosted their own celebrations on the night of 24 December, some of them giving balls and banquets and developing their own traditions, including supping on Chinese food on Christmas Eve. Even Jewish songwriters became involved, with many iconic Christmas carols, from *The Christmas Song* to *Silver Bells* being written by Jews, such songs de-emphasising the religious aspects and celebrating family and simple pleasures.

As celebrations became more centred on presents, grand meals, and general festivity, the perception of two very different holidays began to merge in popular thought once again, and

the spirit of the earlier German hybrid holiday once more came to the fore.

Weihnukkah has been revived in our time with the creation of *Chrismukkah*, a term which found its way into pop culture in the early 2000s. In 2003, the popular television series *The O.C.*’s character, Seth Cohen, who came from a multifaith Jewish and Christian household, decided to combine Christmas and Chanukah instead of choosing to celebrate both festivals separately or only one of them. Chrismukkah was thus coined, and the hybrid holiday re-introduced into the world.

As writer Julia Métraux points out, *The O.C.* continued to have annual Chrismukkah episodes until the series was cancelled, generating its own traditions along the way. These included the creation of a “yamaclaus”, a yarmulke designed to match Santa Claus’ clothing, and the appearance of a Chanukiah above Christmas stockings on the mantelpiece.

Chrismukkah went beyond the silver screen very quickly, and as with all holidays, became considerably commercialised. In 2004, Chrismukkah.com was launched by Ron and Michelle Gompertz, a Jewish-Christian intermarried couple in Montana in the United States. The site sold humorous Chrismukkah greeting cards, peddled detailed mythology about the fictional holiday, and ultimately drew considerable criticism from Christian and Jewish religious authorities alike for “insulting” religious tradition.

In December 2004, Chrismukkah was listed in *Time* magazine as one of the buzzwords of the year, was reportedly added to the authoritative *Chambers* dictionary, and in 2006, was described by *USA Today* as the “newest faux holiday that companies are using to make a buck this season”.

Many American Jews and non-Jews alike continue to celebrate it as an ironic, alternative holiday, continuously developing hybrid customs drawn from Christian and Jewish traditions. For those who prefer not to mix cultures, American Jews have also carved out a place for Chanukah as a standalone holiday in pop culture, with comedians like Jon Lovitz and Adam Sandler creating sketches and songs to perpetuate the Chanukah spirit in the modern age.

Ultimately, there’s something for everybody to celebrate this December, whether you’re an adherent of Santa, Satmar, or something in between.

Making Chanukah with children meaningful

>>>Continued from page 18

of chanukiah you use, try to place it in as visible a spot as possible to fulfil the *mitzvah* (good deed) of *pirsumei nisa* (publicising the miracle).

And don’t forget the decorations. Judaica stores sell lots of colourful Chanukah decorations that make the house feel more festive. You may want to choose your own theme. I know one family that decorates their house with homemade pictures of Jewish holiday objects, which symbolise to them the uniqueness of Judaism – definitely a theme of the holiday.

Make each night special

One of the wonderful things about Chanukah is that it lasts eight days. Giving each night a special theme can increase the excitement. Themes might include *tzedakah* (charity) night, sing-off night, party night and, of course, presents night. I know a family that eats a different kind of potato latke (pancake) for dinner each night. Apples, cauliflower, or even meat can be delicious additions to the traditional potato latke.

Cheese is also a great Chanukah food as it recollects the heroism of Judith, who cleverly fed Holofernes, a general fighting the Maccabees, salty cheese and wine. When the general promptly fell asleep,

Judith cut off his head, and thereby saved her town from his tyranny.

Chanukah is also an ideal time to do fun activities like playing music, taking pictures, or making home movies documenting the annual celebration. One family I know drips Chanukah candle wax each night on their family album. Then, the following year, they take out the album, look at the wax, and try to remember where they were and what they did on each night.

Celebrate our uniqueness as Jews

One of the miracles of Chanukah is that the Jewish people were able to reconsecrate the Temple – our spiritual centre and a powerful symbol of our uniqueness. Chanukah today presents us with the opportunity to reconsecrate our own uniqueness as a religion, a people, and a culture.

Chanukah is a time to discuss as a family some of the blessings and challenges of being Jewish in this country. One way to spark discussion on this subject is to watch a movie that in some way tackles the subject of assimilation. Some suggestions include *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Avalon*, *Keeping the Faith*, *The Jazz Singer*, *Monsoon Wedding* and *American Desi*.

Have a joyous and meaningful Chanukah!

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Finding the positive in negative space

OPINION

AIDEL KAZILSKY



Hey, do you know what negative space is? I’ve thrown out this question to people around me this week, and have received some interesting answers. “It’s when you find yourself in a polluted space where things are negative and uncomfortable.” “It’s a place which feels negative, physically – kind of like squishy and uncomfortable.” “It’s a frame of mind, emotionally or mentally, when things just look negative.” Well, who can argue – they are all correct descriptions.

But there’s another definition of negative space formulated by artists. For them, negative space is the space around and between the subject of an image. Negative space may be most evident when the space around a subject, not the subject itself, forms an interesting or artistically relevant shape, and such space occasionally is used to artistic effect as the “real” subject of an image.

As an example, you are reading words in the newspaper right now. What do you see? Of course, black letters printed on a white background. But what if you stopped, and instead of focusing on the black print, you tried to read the white space found between the letters. It’s hard to change our focus. Train yourself long enough, though, and you will see things that are written between the lines.

As the *SA Jewish Report* goes to print, the vast majority of people are winding down the year. Summer is upon us, and the long-awaited downtime we have been looking forward to, is on our doorstep. Whether you are travelling far or near, or choosing to stay at home, there is an anticipation of long, lazy days, relaxation, and unwinding. For us Jewish South Africans, our vacations are always sprinkled with the celebration of Chanukah. The outdoor public menorahs, Chanukah parties with latkes and doughnuts, and the spinning of the dreidel colour our vacation time.

What’s interesting about the holiday of Chanukah is that it’s not mentioned in the Torah at all. That means that it’s not a commandment we received directly from G-d, as we did with the observance of the

three pilgrim festivals: Pesach, Shavuot, or Sukkot. It’s not like the observance of Shabbat, directly mentioned in the Torah. Chanukah is a rabbinic holiday, instituted during the Second Temple period by the rabbis to commemorate the small vial of oil the Maccabim found after they won the war and wanted to rededicate the temple. You all know the story.

We celebrate another rabbinic holiday, known as Purim. Again, it was instituted by rabbis, this time to remember the evil decree of the murderous Haman, how he wanted to eradicate the Jews, and how we survived.

Now here’s a question: what separates Chanukah from all other *yamim tovim* (Jewish festivals), including Purim? Hint – look for negative space. In fact, the answer is negative space. Let me explain. Every other holiday was either commanded by G-d, in black and white in the Torah, or a recordal of the events of the holiday are found in black and white, as in the megillah of Purim that describes all the events that led to the miraculous salvation of the Jews.

But when it comes to Chanukah, we have nothing in black and white. We may have descriptions of what happened during that time recorded in the Talmud or by eyewitnesses, but we have no direct text that commands us to celebrate the festival, nor do we have an official, authoritative text that forms part of the holiday.

In fact, to take it a step further. Chanukah is obscurely “hinted” at in the Torah. After the Torah enumerates the commandments to keep the festivals, the very next piece of text describes the lighting of the menorah in the Temple. The wording reads, “Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto you pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually ... On the pure Menorah, he shall order the lamps, before G-d continually. (Leviticus 24). Catch the negative space? Change of one lamp to many lamps ... a hint of one small vial of oil, enough for one lamp, that we add to each night of Chanukah until we have eight lamps?

Let’s add one more piece of context here. Why celebrate Chanukah at all? Chanukah takes place while the Jews are under foreign rule and subjugation. A small band of Jews get together and revolt against their oppressors. Whilst the Maccabim are victorious, and restore the Temple into their own hands, their victory is short lived



(about 30 years) and things again go downhill until we have the final destruction of the Temple, and the dispersion into exile – a banishment of people and place, an exile that we still find ourselves in to this very day. So, what’s the meaning behind all of this?

It’s only in the negative space that we can find the answer. In fact, it’s the negative space itself that teaches us the lesson.

It’s not about what you see and what you get. Not everything is spelt out in black and white. Chanukah teaches us that in between the lines of life’s trials and tribulations, one can find light. We are in exile, in mind and soul, even sometimes trapped in body. This world is a dark place, and apparent good is rare. Our job is to search beyond the obvious, and kindle a light of positivity. That one step will give impetus to kindle yet another light, and then another,

until we have brightened the world. Sometimes it may look like we take two steps forward, and then three back. But rest assured, there is meaning behind the seeming darkness. In the negative spaces of our lives is a G-d written script which seeks out our

welfare and well-being, a hand that holds us, guides us, and directs us.

In the northern hemisphere, Chanukah comes around in a time of darkness, cold, and snow. In our part of the world, there is light, warmth, and sun. Don’t be fooled in either place. Look beyond your circumstances, read between the lines, and find your purpose and direction. Light your lamp, your soul, and then go out and light the lamps of others. There’s a reason why you were created. Go out and find it.

Wishing you an illuminating Chanukah (and a well-deserved rest).

• *Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah and applies it to contemporary times.*

Torah Thought

Rabbi Ari Kievman, Kirsh Goodness and Kindness Centre



Light up your holiday with Judaism

The end of the year is upon us; and it’s finally time for a break. Relaxation from school lifts, appointments, and traffic. Maybe even some time off work. Whether you are going to Romania or going to “remain here”, I hope you will get some diversion from your daily routine.

When I first arrived in this country in 2002, acclimatising to the local vernacular was fun. By now, I’m comfortable with South Africanisms like “braai”, “eish” and “robot”. A particular favourite of mine, besides “lekker” is “going on holiday”, whereas I previously used to say “vacation”.

The truth is in the words. I appreciate the idea of holiday much more than a vacation because the former implies a hallowed upliftment, whereas the latter indicates a state of emptiness, escaping life’s responsibilities.

So, for the next few weeks, I hope you enjoy a good quality holiday. Without the burden of work, we can relax and reflect on our greater mission and purpose of existence beyond the immediate visors of the daily job. We can make a commitment to spend

quality time with family and friends, the luxury car of unrushed prayer, the chance to invest in more Torah study.

During this interlude in the year, free from some of the conventional pressures, bonding with our children is a priority. In doing so, recognise the opportunity for Judaism to transcend the limits of being a “subject” or “lesson”, and become the joyful reality of identifying as a Jew and living a Jewish life.

Travel time can be filled with meaningful family discussions, Jewish themed family games, or a great Jewish story around the bonfire in which the lines between fun and study become blurred and the message of Judaism is most absorbed. You can download many amazing audio and video Torah classes and fun kids games on chabadsouthafrica.org, for never a dull spiritual moment.

Make sure to pack Chanukah supplies. Gather with your family each night to light the menorah. Go to communal menorah lightings, here in Joburg or wherever you’ll be, bringing the light of Judaism to every corner of

the globe. In current Torah portions, we read of our great ancestors, the forbearers of Judaism. In spite of their struggles and hardships, they remained steadfast, exemplifying the ever-enduring quality of the Jewish soul, the spark within each of us that not only can never be extinguished, but, like the menorah candles, can actually ignite the souls of others. We should do that every day of the year, but Chanukah serves as an annual reminder that we have been tasked with keeping the world illuminated.

The message of Chanukah is to spread light. Wherever you are, by kindling the menorah, you illuminate the world. You can also spread the light in cyberspace. Whether on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat, raise awareness of the *pirsumei nisa*, publicising G-d’s immanent presence and constant miracles, then and now.

Wishing everyone a wonderful holiday, and a lekker Chanukah wherever your travels take you!

‘31 Years to Peel a Banana’ puts disability in its place

>>>Continued from page 10

simply couldn’t get enough of her writing.

“I still get the shivers when I think of the compliments I’ve been paid,” she says. “I got a call after the launch in which someone complained that my book was too good, that she couldn’t put it down. I’ve been told I made people cry.

“It’s when I hear this that it really feels real. The book represents my values, and carries a truth I want to get across. When I hear that people are finding this out for themselves in their lives, I feel I’ve done something right.”

What matters most to Woolf is that people understand that they are responsible for their own lives, and how they respond to their reality. “Responsibility means carrying something in spite of it being heavy,” she says. “It means finding a way to carry it that ensures you are true to yourself, thinking beyond your limitations, and yielding to life. We all go through something at some point,

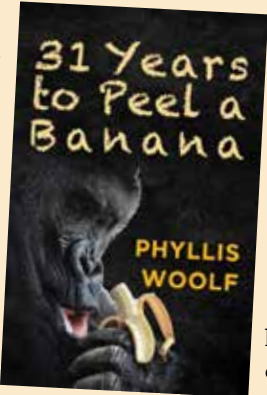
and we handle it differently. No matter who you are or what your circumstances, it’s possible to overcome anything that happens on your journey.”

“I found my way, and I just happened to use wheels while I did.”

Plans are in place to release the book in audio and electronic format, and Woolf admits that

she is considering another writing venture, this time penning short stories. Whatever she chooses to write, Woolf knows that writing has helped her grow, and she hopes to continue her journey of self-discovery.

“When I look back at my early work, I can see how far I’ve come,” she says. “Not only has the quality of my work improved, but I can see that I’m a different person. This journey has pushed me, and though it’s been lonely until now, I can finally share it with others and enable them do to the same.”



Games going retro for the holidays

MIRAH LANGER

The holidays are here and soon parents will face a perennial plight: how to keep their children busy.

This year, why not choose to have a “tech-no” time, and entertain your children with some of these classic games of yesteryear. Remember hide and seek and hopscotch; gumi jump rope and jacks; tag; tin can telephones; tree climbing; I spy; and mud pies?

The SA Jewish Report spoke to some once-upon-a-childhood connoisseurs au fait with the art of good-old-fashioned fun for ideas and suggestions.

“We used to play outside the Standard 2 classrooms next to the tennis courts,” reminisces Bev Rosenfeld, a native Johannesburger and gumi champion of note circa the 1970s.

Gumi, which is the Hebrew word for elastic, is a game of jumping skills that swops out the skipping rope for its namesake material. A piece of elastic is tied together on either end, two people hold it, with one person showing their jumping skills.

The two holding the gumi stand with the elastic stretched between them a few metres apart, with the elastic held open around the back of their ankles. Then as the person showing her skills performs, the players raise the elastic to their knees, hips, waists, even shoulders to make it harder for the jumper.

“When you jump, you have to land with both feet at the same time, otherwise you are out, and you then have your turn at the elastic, while one of those who had been holding it has their turn at showing their skills.”

The size of the gap in the elastic becomes smaller, and the number of bounces when

jumping doubles in variations of the game which begin to sound Olympian in their scope.

“It was a challenge, but as children, we were always fit!” Rosenfeld says.

Another one of Rosenfeld’s childhood memories includes an ingenious early precursor to WhatsApp.

She recalls how when it was past their bedtime, she and her brother found a way to keep chatting: “We tied a string, with an envelope attached, that ran outside from his window to mine. We used to pass notes to each other using this system when we were supposed to be sleeping.”

When it came to long car trips, the family kept things sporty. “We would play car cricket. Different cars that you see on the road have a different score. If you spot a fancy sports car, you strike a six; if you see a truck, it’s a four, and so on. But if a white car passes you by, you’re out!”

This type of creativity, imagination, and interaction is at the core of many of the childhood games and capers of yesteryear.

“Fun for many children today is, ‘We went shopping; we went to the movies; we went to this show; we played that computer game.’ When I was a child, we literally made our own fun. We entertained ourselves growing up in Glenhazel.

“We made up the games: shop-shop, school-school. My best game was playing library-library. I took books from my mother’s shelf, and I made little cards for the library, and then my dolly would come and I would stamp the piece of paper.”

Mandy Lampert Rosin says that she and her two older brothers would put on plays and performed “silly tricks”, even charging the no-doubt eager neighbours who served as an audience.

One time, “I remember someone threw water over my brother, and that was the highlight of the play!”

Marbles was a pursuit that took great dedication and, when played at school, led to a speedy rush out of the classroom for break.

“At home, we closed all the interleading doors from the passage and played. At school, we used to run out at break to get our spot and declare, ‘Roll up, roll up: come win a marble’.”

Although there are numerous types of games played with marbles, the most common is to place marbles from all the players in a circle. You



then use another marble to try and knock one of the marbles out the circle. If you are playing ‘for friendlies’, the accolade is your only reward, but if you are playing ‘for keeps’, well then, that marble becomes yours.

For Esther Gluckmann, some of the games she played as a child in Lyndhurst form the basis of activities she employs in her teaching. “We had a game with a ball where you bounce it according to the letters of the alphabet. You say the same phrase, but keep changing the first letter of the names. So you bounce, and start by saying, ‘A my name is Anthea and my husband’s name is Andrew. We live in Alberton and we sell apples.’ You are only allowed one bounce

for each word that changes. If you bounce more because you are thinking, you are out, and it’s the next person’s turn.”

Gluckmann recalls enjoying crafts such as coin and leaf rubbings. For this, she remembers raiding the garden to pick petals worthy of Picasso. “We would pick flowers and leaves and put them in between encyclopedias, and then leave them for a week. Once they were pressed, we would stick them on paper and make pictures and cards.”

Ultimately, Gluckmann believes that their type of play was privileged. “We were a lot more mobile, and we spent a lot more time outdoors. Also, we learnt to play fair, and with good sportsmanship. We learned that it was okay not to win, and it was okay if a game was just for the fun of it.”

Indeed, psychologist Bianca Blumberg, who works extensively with children and teenagers, corroborates the gut instinct of these glory-day gamers. “Non-tech, old school games allow face-to-face interaction that helps build social skills which otherwise get lost or are quite different to those obtained from sitting behind a computer or video game.

“Children are also able to learn patience as they wait for turns. They are able to tune into the emotional atmosphere of what is going on with the people around them. They learn to read nuance in facial expression and gesture.”

Ultimately, for parents, beyond the specifics of the games they play, “the most important gift that one can give their child is just quality time: for them to know they have your undivided attention,” says Blumberg.

“Really getting involved, just having fun and laughing, sends such a wonderful message to your child. It’s a memory that your child will hold in their mind for years to come.”

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On holiday, don't forget to follow your gut

It's holiday time! Whether you are sweltering in the summer heat, gearing up for a white winter, almost en-route to your grand vacation, or visiting the infamous "remain here", December is here!

Many feel that December is the pinnacle of all that they have worked for in terms of their health and wellness. At the end of the year, I tend to hear anxious quivers of, "I have worked so hard the whole year on my body, what am I going to do in December?"

The answer is simple – live a little

Your health – body and mind – should be a lifetime investment, not a sporadic, short-lived purchase, and letting loose over the holidays is an understandable concern. Here are some tips for feeling your best and staying on track.

Eat mindfully

Eating in a mindful way and understanding your hunger levels is a healthy way to prevent the holiday's bottomless-stomach syndrome. It's all about assessing how hungry you are before you reach for that juicy braaied food, and then dishing up according to your hunger and not your deceiving eyes. Try to tune into your body as much as possible, and when you reach the point of being 80% full, put your plate away. This not only prevents you from feeling overfull and uncomfortable when you should be feeling glitzed and glammed up to socialise, it helps keep your weight under control. Holidays are a great opportunity to notice the colours, textures, and flavours on your plate, and enjoy your food. It's all about honouring your hunger, and respecting your fullness.

Beyond gut feelings

There's nothing worse than feeling tired, bloated, and having an

unsettled tummy while you are on holiday. Don't underestimate the effect that gut health can have on feeling your best. Gut health is important for many functions such as mood stabilisation, inflammation, and detoxification. Appetite control is connected to gut-brain signalling, with the gut's bacteria contributing to the messages being sent to your satiety and hunger centres in your brain. Evidence shows a key link between the bacteria that makes up your gut and obesity. Research also shows that your mood and

apple cider vinegar as a base for your dressings to decrease the acidity building up from festive indulgences.

Stay hydrated

In between your champagne or wine sipping, be sure to stay hydrated. This is important in summer and winter. The adult body is made up of up to 60% water, and it is involved in every reaction that takes place in your body. If you don't remain hydrated, you will deprive your body of what it needs to keep you energised, promote digestion, and keep your

exploring a city, or walking on a beach. Those extra steps aren't only an enjoyable adventure, but you will feel more energised, promote gut motility, and help keep your calories in check. Moderate exercise protects you from developing chronic diseases and regulates your metabolism.

Promote natural detoxification

There is no denying that cocktails will be drunk, braais will be enjoyed, coffee dates will be made, and overindulgence might occur. In fact, your exposure to environmental toxins might increase depending on where you go on holiday. Unfortunately, although enjoyable, these things put pressure on your innate detoxification system. This acts like a cleaning service that spruces up your Airbnb after the previous night's mess. Just like a cleaning service needs its equipment, so too does your liver.

Although long-term impaired detoxification can result in the development of chronic diseases, over the short term, it can affect energy levels, cause headaches, and affect mood, skin, sleep, and weight regulation. Supporting your natural detoxification system doesn't mean juice cleanses, but rather including foods that help "switch on" the genes involved in detoxing your liver as well as optimising your gut health. Try to keep coffee down to a maximum of two cups per day. Put cruciferous vegetables such as bok choy, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, and other green leafy vegetables into the spotlight. Pile up on those raw summer salads or pop them into a vegetable juice or smoothie.

Variety

Variety is key to providing your body with all the nutrients it needs for the holiday period. By choosing a variety of food items, you aren't only keeping your meals interesting,

ON NOURISHING NOSH

Hilit Milner

you are also feeding your body with different nutrients. Every food group has different health benefits, while varying foods within each group provides different key nutrients needed for optimal health and wellness.

Plate up those vegetables

Try to have one vegetable-heavy meal a day. Alternatively, always ensure you have a side of vegetables included in a meal, and make sure some of them are raw. Vegetables are loaded with antioxidants, minerals, and vitamins. They also provide the fibre needed to keep your gut healthy and stabilise blood sugar, keeping you fuller for longer.

Review your restaurants

Eating out often is a holiday fact. Slowly but surely, those restaurant meals add up. Don't forget to re-think your drink, choosing ones that are lower in sugar. Check out the menu, and weigh up your options. Try choosing a grilled piece of protein with a low GI starch and/or a side salad. Tread lightly with creamy dishes, dressings and rich, fried food choices. Going for the pasta or a dessert? That's great. Remember that it's always an option to share these dishes with someone else, and when you do enjoy them, which you should, eat mindfully, whole-heartedly, and without guilt.

Oh wait, I forgot one thing. Enjoy. Relax. Recharge. Isn't that what holidays are for?

• *Hilit Milner is a registered clinical dietitian who runs a private practice, works in a top private hospital, and has founded a wellness blog called 'Sunrise by HM'. She views health holistically, starting from a cellular level and working her way out.*



anxiety levels hinge on that gut-brain connection.

Wherever you are this holiday, keep a lookout for natural sources of probiotics (fermented or pickled products such as kefir, sauerkraut, pickled vegetables, and kombucha) which naturally "plant" healthy bacteria into your gut. Also include prebiotics such as whole-grain products, asparagus, garlic, artichoke, leeks, onions, and shallots, which serve to "feed" the healthy bacteria. Lastly, it's always an option to use

metabolism ticking. Water is also a key component in the natural excretion of toxins that build-up over the holidays from our kidneys and liver, preventing headaches and hangovers after a big night, as well as keeping hunger cues at bay, as often, we are thirsty not hungry.

Keep moving

What better way to explore a place than by foot. Holidays are a great opportunity to get active, whether it be hiking, swimming, biking,

The layers and layers of Bev Michel

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

Bev Michel is extraordinary. Age forgot to extract its toll on her flawless skin, her striking designer frames, and her immaculate dress sense. Her manicured fingernails show no hint of paint, and her calm exterior masks a burning passion and obsession with art that smoulders within. Michel is an artist possessed.

Michel was one of the most popular art teachers in Johannesburg for 33 years until she gave it all up at the end of last year to focus on her own art.

She decided that she owed it to her soul to focus on her own creativity.

With an honours degree from the University of the Witwatersrand in fine art and painting, Michel has trained hundreds of young pupils. Mothers would actually call her from the Park Lane Clinic to book space in her art classes for their newborn children. She has taught children and adults for decades,

but one of her teachers and mentors, Fema Gavin, changed all of that.

Teaching takes time, and there was no time left to create and evolve as an artist. Michel would work on six huge canvasses at the same time in her studio and then, the pupils would arrive, and the momentum was lost.

Michel needed to focus.

Doing this was obviously something she had thought about, but didn't do for many years. When she effectively changed careers, she recalled how Gavin said to her about 10 years earlier, "You are so gifted, you are so talented. Stop wasting your time, give up your art school, and go to your studio and paint."

Michel was so energised by Gavin's advice, knowing she would never say something she didn't mean, that she took all the artwork she had crafted under this mentor's tutelage, and painted over it. It's not that she didn't like what she had done, but she wanted to do something unique.

That was part of her journey.

She began to layer. She put layer over layer of paint over her original paintings in a technique known as palimpsest. Michel uses water wash transparent glazes and works up towards a thick impasto made up of gooey viscose layers of paint applied with a pallet knife scraped onto the canvas. "It is an amazing effect, [and I] never know exactly what the end process will look like," she says.

All Michel's canvasses are massive. Her style defies description, combining abstract, modern, contemporary, and quasi impressionist art. Her work unites layers of textures and palimpsest over a previous artwork highlighting the parts of the painting that protrude from the canvas, thereby creating inexplicable depth, sensuality, and three-dimensional texture.

Some works have more than 300 layers of paint, creating an



Bev Michel with her daughter Tanna at her most recent solo exhibition

interplay between shadow and light.

Michel's solo exhibition at the mmARThouse in Craighall in early November showed 40 mammoth works. Although much of her work is based on flora, it's more about texture and depth.

Everything inspires Michel. When she gets to her studio, she has to focus on one thing, but her attention deficit disorder allows her to work on six or seven paintings at the same time, as she sweats away, layering each painting, then moving to the next, giving each layer three days to dry.

"Nothing in life is original. Every artist takes something from the artists that came before them," she says. "What teaches you is copying artists to learn from their experience and techniques." She has taught this lesson to hundreds of her students. But Michel's art is truly unique. Her life and art has evolved from her time in Bethal, with no art teacher and a teach-it-yourself art book, to a modernist accomplished artist and that, says Michel, "is the river".

The State Theatre: bullies in the wings

Why would a professional who has given a whole career to the arts industry suddenly be deemed racist? On Sunday, I attended a performance by South African-born performance artist Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza at Pretoria’s South African State Theatre, accompanied by arts journalist Robyn Sassen.

Khoza is well known throughout Europe and elsewhere, and collaborates frequently with South African-born choreographer Robyn Orlin.

We expected to watch the piece as we would in any theatre, based on the criteria of theatres worldwide. This includes audience safety, production age limits, or where the exit is in case of emergency.

When we arrived at the State Theatre, however, we were confronted by a frightening array of experiences: as white theatre-goers,

we were treated with obvious hostility; and the theatre is mostly in a state of horrible neglect.

Sassen is a veteran journalist who has covered the arts extensively for more than 20 years, including productions at this same theatre. She has written about its condition previously.

The work, *Red Femicycle*, which focuses on South African femicide and bullying, was hosted in an unusual space in the theatre complex. Ushers took us there via a convoluted route, which they clearly weren’t sure of themselves. Eventually we arrived at the venue’s appallingly shabby reception area.

It was clear that as whites, we stood out like a sore thumb. When I picked up my cell phone to photograph the room’s state, I was aggressively confronted by a black man who told me he hadn’t granted me permission

to do that. I said we were from the media, this was a public place, and the pictures weren’t for publication but a record of the room’s condition. Others had also been photographing. I asked why he had confronted me, not them. At that moment, the work began. He threatened, “We will continue this afterwards!”

Sassen decided to write a story on her blog, www.robynsassenmyview.com, about the theatre itself before she reviewed the work. It was published and immediately went viral.

The next morning, one Maseko Sello, who according to his Facebook page is associated with the regional secretariat of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League, said in one of several rambling vitriolic Facebook posts, “This Woman called Robyn Sassen is of no difference to a vulture of doom that is hovers over black lives ... a scavenger that moves with great menace toward anything that represents black excellence!!! ... we do not need an opinion of a bloody racist and bias agent ...” [sic] A picture follows this text, of several angry-looking men, led by one holding a spear menacingly.

Clearly, Sello is only one voice. But on Facebook, responses get polarised in the face of controversy.

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



People publicly take a side or privately extend support by contacting one side or the other, as many did in the case of Sassen. Khoza and his cast went out of their way to offer Sassen support.

We come from a ghastly racial history. The ANC hasn’t yet learnt how to run a country, nor cherish the arts which it treats with disdain. It also hasn’t learnt to bring to book troublemakers and thugs who are embarrassing its good name – or what’s left of it.

The purpose of this article isn’t to make gross generalisations. It’s to present a snapshot of an incident which left a deep, troubling impression.

Arts journalism is already beleaguered as an important critical field of art making. Sassen says she will not review anything at the State Theatre again. It has, to date, not reacted officially to her story other than “likes” from Artistic Director Aubrey Sekhabi for some of the hostile Facebook comments.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

2019 in retrospect

Modern life moves at a bewilderingly fast pace. No sooner has one come to the end of one project than it is time to embark on the next, leaving little time to reflect on what has been accomplished. The year’s final “Above Board” column is thus always an opportune time to reflect on the highlights of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies’ (SAJBD’s) activities during the previous 12 months.

To help our community participate in this year’s elections, we again ran a multifaceted election education and awareness campaign. Dubbed #MakeUsCount, this included multiparty election debates, a Freedom Seder, public meetings with party representatives, and voter registration drives. It culminated with an SAJBD-headed interfaith and multinational observer team assisting the Independent Electoral Commission at hundreds of polling stations across seven provinces.

In August, we hosted a delegation from Women Wage Peace, an Israeli non-governmental organisation (NGO) that brings many thousands of Israeli women from across the spectrum together in the common cause of working for peace. The delegation was brought out in the lead-up to Women’s Day to share the lessons of this inspiring grassroots movement.

Last month, the long-running campaign by anti-Israel lobbyists to get the University of Cape Town to boycott Israeli academic institutions was finally conclusively defeated. For the board and its partners, including the South African Zionist Federation and the South African Union of Jewish Students, it was a satisfying culmination of extensive efforts to oppose this immoral initiative. Another encouraging push-back against the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement on campus was the striking success of the

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



counter-campaign against “Israel Apartheid Week”, which effectively eclipsed the distinctly muted activities of the other side. In terms of combating anti-Semitism, in August, the board’s ten year-long case against the Congress of South African Trade Union’s Bongani Masuku culminated in a hearing before the Constitutional Court. We are waiting for the finding in this matter, which will have significant implications for how laws prohibiting hate speech in our country are interpreted and applied.

There was an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to the SAJBD’s 50th biennial national conference, in which a distinguished panel of experts in their field “unpacked” the challenges and enduring strengths of our society. The message was that while undoing the destructive legacy of state capture will take time, progress is taking place, and overall, South Africa is in a much better place than it was two years ago. Also on the communal front, the board was involved in the establishment of the Small Jewish Communities Association to ensure the continuance of services to Jews living in country areas. This week, we had the satisfaction of resolving a difficult dispute between the Bnei Akiva campsite and its neighbours, ensuring that Bnei Akiva’s end-of-year camp activities would continue as before.

I conclude by thanking my SAJBD colleagues and professional staff for all their support and good work, and wish everyone a pleasant, relaxing, and safe December break.

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

This year was captured by Marelize

TS Eliot would have been proud of 2019. He would have sat up straight and taken notice. About the year that was, Eliot could never have written his now famous words, “This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang, but with a whimper.”

Although poetry is immortal and timeless, his words do little to capture the essence of the past few months.

Eliot would have gotten it completely wrong had he lived through the past 12 months. Which for a poet (social commentator or blogger of that time), would have been problematic. He would have lost all credibility, because if anything, 2019 is leaving us with a bang, not a whimper.

Perhaps there is another poet who could do better.

In the dying days of the year alone, load shedding stage 6 visited us for a few hours. Pretoria and many parts of Johannesburg have experienced unprecedented flooding, with rescues being conducted to get people to safety. The national airline, South African Airways, has gone into business rescue, and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa, we are told, is being administered (whatever that means). In the same month, Zozibini Tunzi from South Africa was crowned Miss Universe, and Charlize Theron was nominated for a Golden Globe Award. And it’s not even the 15th of the month.

Earlier in the year, the Ndlovu Youth Choir made South Africans proud by making it to the finals of America’s Got Talent. The Boks united the country in an almost unprecedented way by winning the Rugby World Cup, and by showing the country that together we are stronger. And if that wasn’t enough, it was also then that South Africa introduced Prince

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



Harry to local beer and cheer, and proudly exposed South Africa’s finest – in his cozzie – decorated with the flag, thankfully at half-mast.

2019 has been the year that saw South Africans get funnier – Trevor Noah aside. In March this year, a young woman, Marelize, struggling to ride a bicycle, was filmed riding into a goal post by her mother. The field was empty, which made the likelihood of her being able to hit into the pole much less likely than hitting it. But she did. And as she graciously smashed into that pole and then fell over, the video records her mom saying the now immortal words, “My F*k Marelize!”

TS Eliot couldn’t have captured the moment better than her mom did. In fact, if anything says 2019, it’s the words of the mom as she watched her daughter ride towards the rugby post on that empty field somewhere in Namibia, and then, as if drawn by an invisible force, smash headlong into it.

2019 might be the year that South Africa won the Rugby World Cup, it might be the year in which SAA failed, and it might be the year of Zozibini Tunzi, but there’s little doubt that it is Marelize and her mom who captured the sentiment with three immortal words.

Through this year, however, we managed to see the absurdity of it all. We managed to laugh at things that were too serious to get upset about. It’s the year that proved that together, indeed, we are stronger and funnier.

I wish us all a good and safe holiday.

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KDVP Holocaust memorial almost in the can



Collections of can tabs at King David Victory Park

Inspired by the movie *Paper Clips*, the Judaica committee of King David Victory Park (KDVP) High School initiated a project in 2007 to collect six million can tabs to build a monument in memory of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust. The committee was headed at the time by Elinor Shklaz and Joshua Benjamin. The monument was designed by past student Amir Livne, who subsequently qualified as an architect. Morah Hanna Ben-Moshe, the head of Hebrew at KDVP High, worked diligently to meet this target. Later, it was decided to build a monument to the children that perished in the Holocaust, and the target was subsequently changed to 1.5 million tabs. The school is now really close to its target, with only an additional 150 000 tabs needed. It has appealed to the community to support this phenomenal initiative by collecting tabs.

For more information, please contact benmosheh@sabje.co.za

Sunday (15 December)

- The Big Band Music Appreciation Society hosts a programme presented by Harry Fidler, *The Melody Lingers (Broadway and Beyond)* – a brief history of Broadway shows and Hollywood movies from the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musical era to the late 50s and early 60s. Time: 14:15. Venue: Beit Emanuel Slome Auditorium, 38 Oxford Road, Parktown (entrance on Third Avenue). Contact: Marilyn 072 243 7436 or Jack 082 450 7622.
- All participants who have attended Nechama – Growth from Grief support groups during 2019 are invited to a meaningful and heart-warming final group session of the year. Time: tea from 09:30, the group starts at 10:00 to 11:30. Venue: Jossel Card Room, Ground Floor, Golden Acres, George Avenue, Sandringham. No need to book. Men and women welcome. Contact: Linda Fleishman 011 532 9701.

WHAT'S ON

UAE summit fosters tolerance

The United Arab Emirates announced that 2019 would officially be proclaimed the Year of Tolerance to highlight the country’s decision to welcome people of all backgrounds and beliefs, and its role in encouraging peace and stability in the Middle East.

The concept of tolerance was taken further last week in a leadership summit hosted by the UAE embassy and Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria with the theme, “Year of tolerance; prospects for peace and stability in Africa.”

At the event, His Excellency Mahash Saeed Alhameli, the UAE ambassador to South Africa, opened the colloquium with messages of acceptance and understanding.

The country is conscious of its religious and cultural diversity, and aims to promote its values globally. It was a great privilege to be invited to represent the Jewish faith. I was asked to talk about peace, living together, and the doctrines of progressive Judaism.

The conference focused on how education and knowledge-sharing can be a powerful tool to raise tolerance of diversity. We analysed tolerance and peaceful co-existence, and their impact on the social fabric of society. Knowledge is power, and if I managed to educate the audience to view Judaism from my perspective, and see the religious angle as inclusive, then I achieved my goal.

The conference was warm and welcoming,



Rabbi Julia Margolis with UAE Ambassador Mahash Saeed Alhameli fostering feelings of hope, mutual respect, understanding, and a focus on commonalities. Delegates left workshops and sessions with a better understanding of one another, and their cultural and religious beliefs.

WIZO pays tribute to Annette Price



Annette Price and Raya Ravid

WIZO (the Women’s International Zionist Organization) Johannesburg celebrated its culmination lunch on Thursday 28 November at Frangelicas in Johannesburg. It was a festive lunch in which WIZO South Africa’s honorary life chairperson, Annette Price, was honoured on her 90th birthday. Executive member Yvonne Jawitz wrote and read out a wonderful ode to Annette, which sums up what an amazing lady she is:

*I’d like to pay a tribute to a lady we hold dear
Who’s devoted time to WIZO for many, many a year
She’s always on the lookout for unsuspecting prey
And signs them up at bridge or shul or even at a play*

*She’s known as the “orchids” lady who ran a florist empire
Created arrangements for every occasion, until she chose to retire
Tall and always elegant; committed and unafraid
She’s shown us all at meetings, how strong Zionist women are made
Shake the Tzedakah tins girls ... it’s music to her ears
And as you shake, a picture of Annette instantly appears
She holds the title of honorary life ... which she so deservedly earned
And at 90, in her love of Israel, she still leaves no stone unturned
We wish you many more years, Annette, of involvement in all that we do
You’re not allowed to retire just yet, but can have a holiday or two*

Sandringham Gardens honours volunteer ‘angels’

The Chevrah Kadisha (Chev) honoured Les Markowitz, Jenny Lichtenstein, and Sylvia Lefevre at a special kiddush at Sandringham Gardens Shul recently for the joy they have brought to the residents of Sandringham Gardens.

Lefevre and Lichtenstein are often called the “Tuesday angels” because every week, they visit frail residents at the home in six care units as well as those in acute care, bringing with them confectionery, donated magazines, books, and even puzzles. Lefevre believes that their visits are as much about the chatting as the treats.

“Everyone has a history, and a unique set of circumstances. Relating a memory or being able to share in a current event with someone who is willing to listen is so important to the people we visit,” she says.

Lefevre began making the visits in 1993, and Lichtenstein joined her in 2001. Lichtenstein had recently lost her mother who had suffered from Alzheimer’s disease for several years, and therefore understood the importance of befriending vulnerable people.

Les Markowitz, “The Bingo Man”,

is an even longer serving volunteer. Markowitz has been running bingo evenings every alternate Wednesday night for 30 years.

On a good evening, he attracts between 30 and 50 people. “We don’t play for money at Sandringham Gardens. The chocolate prizes are courtesy of the Chev,” he says.



Sylvia and Jenny have handed out more than 10 000 cakes over the years, and Les has called out about 3 500 games of Bingo!

The kiddush was attended by Colin Datnow, the chairperson of the Chev, and his wife Lorraine. Chev Group Rabbi Jonathan Fox spoke about how much the residents look forward to the Tuesday cakes and Wednesday evening Bingo, and the mitzvah of bringing joy and sweetness into the lives of residents.

Letters

KNEE-JERK REJECTION OF ADL REPORT UNHELPFUL

I don’t lightly critique the views of Jewish organisations, especially of those with feet on the ground in their own country. While any survey about attitudes can be challenged, for 50 years, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has used a set of 11 standard survey questions worldwide, across language groups and cultures, with the goal of raising awareness, alerting governments to bigotry, and increasing efforts to fight anti-Semitic attitudes.

In this regard, I offer the following comments regarding the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) rejection of the ADL Global 100 Survey’s report of a 47% rate of anti-Semitism in South Africa. The SAJBD called the report “deeply misleading and unreliable”.

The SAJBD declares that in South Africa, “Jews walk around proudly and visibly Jewish” without fear of anti-Semitic threat or violence. But there’s not necessarily a correlation between feeling safe on the street as Jews and anti-Semitic attitudes, which are readily expressed covertly, including in blogs, social media, or surveys. The ADL study looks at attitudes, not hate crimes.

Some anti-Semitism in South Africa still emanates from the traditional source: the far right. But in recent years, most of it – especially the overt, high-profile anti-Semitism – has come from the hard left. In 2001, at the Durban United Nations World Conference on Racism, large crowds of keffiyeh-wearing South Africans of all

races demonstrated support for Islamist terrorist organisations dedicated to the elimination of the only Jewish state in the world.

Delegates reported being “deeply disturbed by the hateful anti-Semitic atmosphere that plagued the conference”. In 2014, a pig’s head was placed in the kosher-meat section of Woolworths in Cape Town by militants of the Congress of South African Students, an African National Congress (ANC)-affiliate.

In 2015, the students council at a university in Durban called for Jews who didn’t disavow support for Israel to be expelled. In 2015/16, during the “RhodesMustFall” era, in spite of his ill-fated capitulations to the radical left at the University of Cape Town, vice-chancellor Max Price was often vilified for his Jewishness and his connection to Israel.

Zapiro’s cartoons show an obsession with selectively portraying Israel as a genocidal child-killer and an evil state, often with a Magen David displayed. With regularity, the ANC government selectively threatens to expel Israeli diplomats and “downgrade” relations with Israel, while totalitarian governments get a pass. In September 2014, in an article for the *Mail & Guardian*, Benjamin Pogrund, the anti-apartheid hero, graphically described the strangling, oppressive attitude of the press in South Africa, singularly biased against Israel.

This is anti-Semitism. It’s in the ether, pervasive. How can this not affect peoples’

attitudes, conscious or otherwise?

Regarding the ADL study, David Saks of the SAJBD asserts, “Most of those interviewed have never met a Jew and know far too little about them to have been able to answer the fairly complex questions put to them in the ADL survey.” This is naïve at best. A defining element of anti-Semitism is that it’s not based on knowledge. In whatever manner anti-Semitic attitudes propagate and travel, they do so, and there’s no evidence people have to know something about Jews to be anti-Semitic. Further, when the SAJBD alleges that respondents didn’t understand the questions, it’s condescending and based on no evidence.

Saks also said, “Every second South African you meet is anti-Semitically inclined? We know that’s not true.” Professor Karen Miller said, “We know ... that we have one of the lowest incidences of anti-Semitism in the world.” They “know”. Given their daily lived experiences as Jews in South Africa, it’s understandable why they say it doesn’t feel accurate to them, and why it’s upsetting. But they are definitive, they just “know”.

Their gold standard is a 2016 study of 40 households by the Kaplan Institute – blacks only, no whites, no Muslims, a much narrower focus than the ADL sample size of 515, stratified across races. In the absence of a study group comparable to the ADL’s, how can they “know”? The data is the data. The SAJBD is simply choosing to disbelieve peoples’ answers to professionals applying the same questions in

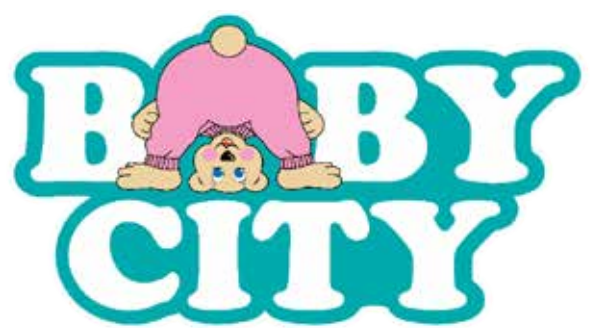
many countries across many cultures and ethnic groups in the world.

The ADL figure for South Africa in 2014 was 38%. Did the SAJBD reject that finding? If not, why now? The point is, does it matter whether the “real” figure is 30% or 38% or 47%? It’s high. There’s no denying that there are powerful and prevalent anti-Semitic forces at work in South Africa, including in the press, the ANC government, and the Economic Freedom Fighters, not to mention the far right. The press and government don’t necessarily assault you in the street, but they can profoundly and broadly undermine attitudes and tolerance.

Bari Weiss, of the *New York Times*, in her recent book *How to Fight Anti-Semitism*, shows how in times of conflict, economic hardship, or immigrant issues, anti-Semitism rises. She also shows how in recent years, the traditional perpetrators – the far right – have been more than matched by hard left/Corbynite-types and radical Islam.

Jews are ill-served by underplaying the prevalence and threat of anti-Semitism, whatever its manifestations. The goal is to recognise it – and fight it. – **Dr Eric Hassall, San Francisco, CA**

• *Dr Eric Hassall, MBChB (UCT), FRCP is emeritus professor of Paediatrics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver BC. He grew up in South Africa and in Rhodesia, before it was Zimbabwe.*



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