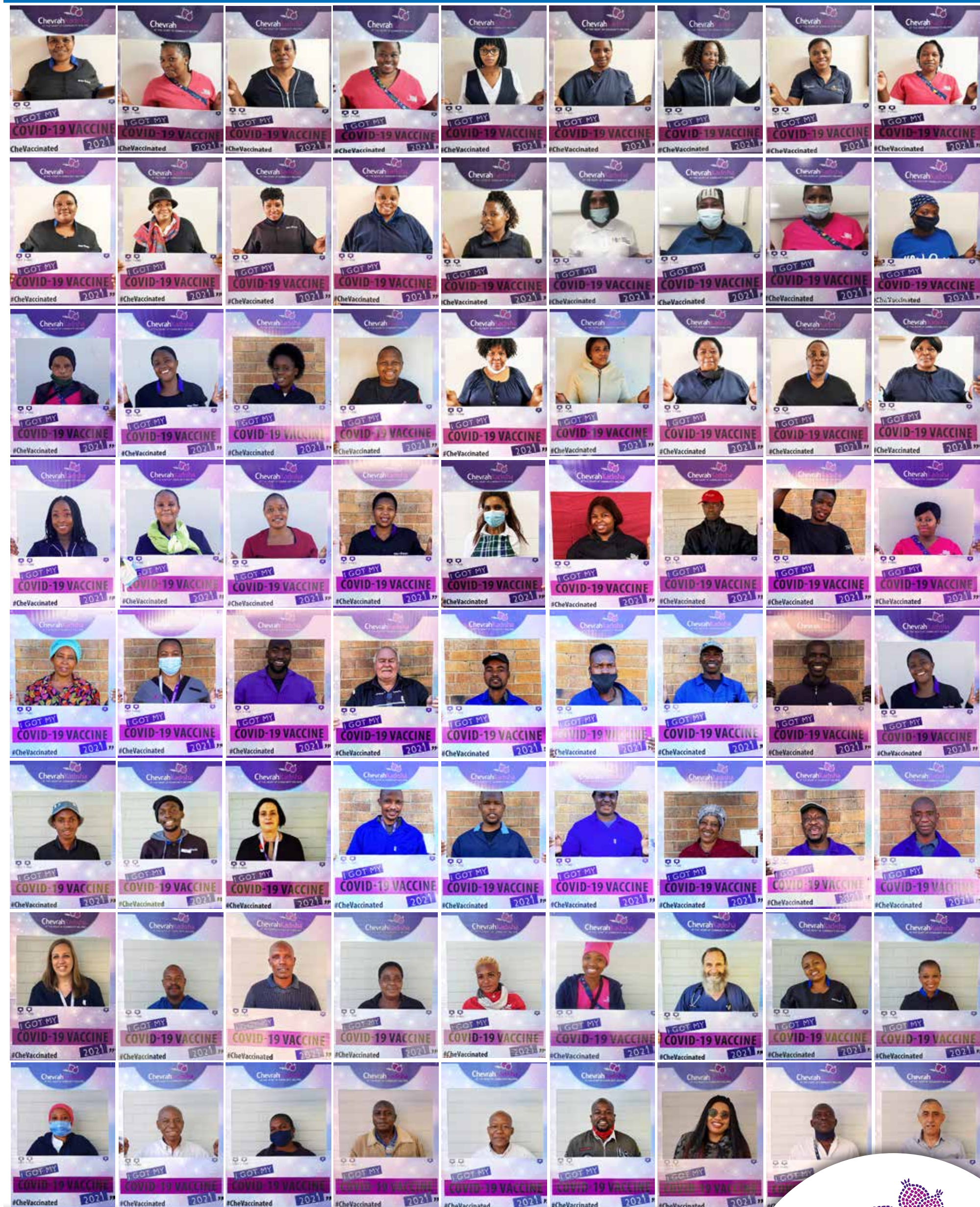


# south african Jewish Report

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Pictures taken before COVID

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Nora, care worker, Our Parents Home



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Ettie, resident, Sandringham Gardens



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Saul Tomson  
CEO, Chevrah Kadisha Group

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Gugulethu, nurse, Sandringham Gardens

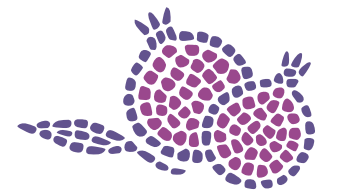


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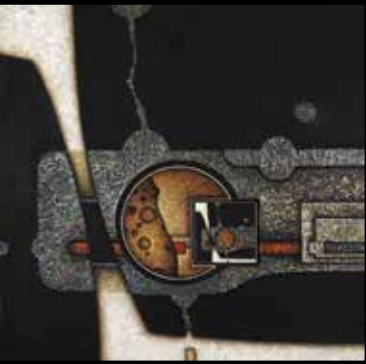
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# South african Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

■ Volume 25 – Number 17 ■ 14 May 2021 ■ 3 Sivan 5781

[www.sajr.co.za](http://www.sajr.co.za)

We will not be publishing the newspaper next week, but will resume the following week (28 May).

## What really happened in Israel this week

PAULA SLIER

It's just gone 03:00 in the morning on Wednesday, 12 May. I'm hunkering down in a bomb shelter which doubles up as my study in Tel Aviv. I've checked a few times that the iron door and window are tightly shut. I can hear the sirens screeching overhead, followed by a pause, and then a massive explosion. Just a few hours ago, I was outside on the streets, which are eerily quiet for this busy city.

An earlier night-time drive into neighbouring Holon was even more unusual. A main thoroughfare was cordoned off by police and firemen who were shouting into their cell phones and at each other. Half an hour earlier, a rocket had hit an empty bus and debris was lying everywhere. The glass windows of nearby shops had been completely shattered, and residents were coming to assess the damage. Four people are being treated in hospital, one of them a five-year-old girl.

It's been chaotic since last Friday night, when clashes erupted outside the Al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem. For five consecutive nights, the pattern has been pretty much the same. Muslim worshippers make their way into the Old City through Damascus Gate while outside, Israeli police and the army take up position. There's even a section where the journalists stand. After the prayers, a group of youngsters inevitably start hurling water bottles, rocks, and glass at the officers who after a while, respond by charging into the crowd, arresting some of the protestors, and firing stun grenades. It's predictable.

Hamas, the rulers in Gaza, are egging on the protestors. The announcement by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas that

**Rockets seen fired from the Gaza strip into Tel Aviv and central Israel, May 11, 2021**

**Rocket attacks across central Israel, including Tel Aviv**



he was postponing Palestinian elections – the first in 15 years – indefinitely, and blaming Israel for it, didn't help. Neither did the fact that this is happening during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a heightened time of religious sensitivity. It also comes after the Supreme Court was meant, on Monday, to give a ruling on the evictions of about 70 Palestinians from houses in the contested East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah that Jews say they owned before 1967. The court has delayed the announcement of its decision.

But still, the result is the worst violence in four years, and it has quickly spread to other Israeli Arab localities. The city of Lod just outside Tel Aviv is in lockdown. The Israeli army imposed a state of emergency after troops had to evacuate some Jewish residents amid clashes between Arabs and police and

after buildings, including a synagogue, were set alight.

At the time of writing, five Israeli civilians and one soldier have been killed. The latter happened after Hamas fired an antitank missile at an Israeli jeep on Wednesday morning. One of the Israeli civilians killed was a pensioner who was too old to get to a shelter and who died alongside her Indian helper in their home.

Hamas has criticised Israel for trying to change the status quo in Jerusalem, but Israeli soldiers insist they are reacting only after coming under fire. They accuse Palestinian youngsters of shoring up stones, rocks, and homemade ammunition inside the Al-Aqsa compound and attacking them with it.

But the international community is clearly more on the side of the Palestinians. Amnesty International has accused Israel of excessive force that I, as a journalist covering

the protests, dispute. There are certainly some instances of the Israeli security forces manhandling and violently attacking protestors but on the whole, certainly outside Damascus Gate where I've been most of the week, it's dangerous for the troops as they are provoked and hit with things that could seriously injure them if they weren't wearing helmets.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he wouldn't give in to rogue elements trying to disrupt Jerusalem, and in his latest speech has threatened that Hamas will pay a "dear price".

I'm on the phone constantly with my colleagues in Gaza. One lives in the Hanadi Tower, a 13-storey residential building in Gaza city, that collapsed on Tuesday after Israeli air strikes targeted an office used by the political leadership of Hamas. An hour before the strike, residents were warned to leave their

Photo: Tomer Neuberger/Flash90



homes by the Israeli Defense Forces and hence there were no reports of injuries. But my colleague is now homeless.

I also have an Israeli friend who phoned me in tears. Her son is among the thousands of soldiers who have been called up to the Gaza border. It's not yet clear if Israel plans a ground offensive but all options are on the table. Five thousand additional reserve troops have also been making their way to beef up the army in the southern Israeli communities and help those maintaining calm in Israeli cities across the country – Haifa, Ramle, Akko, Beer Sheva, and others.

While between 80% to 90% of rockets fired from Gaza – and to date there have been more than 1 200 in total – have been shot down by Israel's anti-missile defence system, the Iron Dome, many Israeli civilians are choosing to move to the north out of harm's way – hopefully.

Several of those I interviewed blame American President Joe Biden for the flare-up. After he took office in January, Biden expressed little interest in pursuing an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. He's also been reluctant to get involved in the current conflict, but is being urged to do so. The clashes have caught his administration on the back foot. By comparison, the Trump administration showed unstinting support for Netanyahu and hostility towards the Palestinians.

"If Trump was in office now," many Israelis tell me, "the Palestinians would be too scared to act like they are now. But they know Biden won't do anything!"

Come tonight – and probably for the rest of the week – I'll be sleeping in my bomb shelter, as will hundreds of thousands of Israelis. Gazans, too, will be hunkering down where they can find shelter. No-one wants another war; but then again no-one's being asked.

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# Rise in anti-Israel sentiment leads to calls for vigilance

NICOLA MILTZ

The Community Security Organisation (CSO) has witnessed a marked increase in anti-Israel rhetoric as well as expressions of hate directed at Jews online following violence in Israel, and has appealed to the community to be extra vigilant and report all incidents.

Jevon Greenblatt, the director of CSO Johannesburg, told the *SA Jewish Report* on 12 May that tension in Israel had escalated

dramatically over the past few days, with levels of open conflict growing exponentially over the past 48 hours.

“It’s not uncommon for anti-Israel anger around a situation like this to spill over into diaspora Jewish communities,” he said.

“Since Monday, we have seen a significant increase in concerning online rhetoric and numerous protest action called for over the coming days across South Africa.

“We are seeing a huge campaign by the anti-Israel lobby to dehumanise Israel with massive distortions about what’s really happening on the ground.”

Political leaders, social-media influencers, and celebrities are lending their voices



to the pro-Palestinian lobby.

“This creates the perfect environment for a potential lone-wolf actor to carry out an attack. Whenever something like this takes place, our concern is that the anger created can be misdirected against the local community.”

He said that while CSO staff and volunteers were working hard to ensure the continued safety and security of the

community, it was a “collective effort”.

“Vigilance is crucial. We should always make sure our facilities are as secure as possible, and we should always be doing the best we can to strengthen our security.

“It’s at times like this that we are reminded always to implement the best safety protocols because the threat is always out there.

“It requires the active participation of all community members. We ask you to maintain heightened awareness and report any emergency, potential threats, suspicious activity, or antisemitism related to the Jewish community or Jewish facilities to the CSO on 086 18 000 18 (or 086 18 911 18 in Cape Town).”

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AUTO AFRICA

## Lakeith Stanfield apologises for antisemitic chatter

Oscar-nominated actor Lakeith Stanfield apologised for moderating a room on the audio app Clubhouse in which participants made a slew of antisemitic remarks.

“I entered an online chat room on Clubhouse about the teachings of Louis Farrakhan,” Stanfield, who was nominated for an Academy Award this year for his role in *Judas and the Black Messiah*, said on Instagram, referring to the antisemitic Nation of Islam leader.

“When the room’s participants noticed me, I was quickly made a moderator. At some point, several users made abhorrent antisemitic statements and at that point, I should have either shut down the discussion, or removed myself from it entirely.”



of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 – the then-British foreign minister’s approval of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine – was a mistake.

“The *Guardian* of 1917 supported, celebrated, and could even be said to have helped facilitate the Balfour declaration,” editorial writer Randeep Ramesh wrote.

“Whatever else can be said, Israel today is not the country the *Guardian* foresaw or would have wanted,” he wrote, arguing that the *Guardian*’s editor at the time, Charles Prestwich Scott, was ignorant about Palestinian rights.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

## Guardian regrets supporting Balfour Declaration

In an article about its “worst errors of judgment” from its 200-year history, a *Guardian* writer implied that the British paper’s editorial support

Shabbat and Yom Tov times this week					
14/15/16/17/18 May					
CL	MS	CL	CL	YTE	
17:11	18:02	17:11	18:01	18:01	Johannesburg
17:36	18:29	17:35	18:28	18:27	Cape Town
16:53	17:45	16:52	17:44	17:43	Durban
17:14	18:05	17:13	18:04	18:04	Bloemfontein
17:07	18:00	17:06	17:59	17:59	Port Elizabeth
17:00	17:53	16:59	17:51	17:51	East London
CL – Candle-lighting		YTE – Yom Tov ends		MS – Motzei Shabbat	

## Torah Thought

### Ten commandments hold something for everyone

Shavuot begins this Sunday night, and the highlight of the festival – apart from cheesecake – is the reading of the ten commandments in synagogues on Monday morning.

The fourth commandment is about Shabbat. When we read the ten commandments from the book of Shemot-Exodus, we are told to “remember the Shabbat to sanctify it”. But when we read the same narrative in Devarim – Deuteronomy, we are told to “keep the Shabbat to sanctify it”.

So, what did G-d say? Did he command that we keep the Shabbat or that we remember it? The sages teach us that both are true. G-d spoke just once, but both words were heard. And as proof that such a thing is possible for G-d, they cite a verse from Tehilim – Psalms chapter 62: “G-d spoke one [thing], I heard two.”

It reminds me of the Yanny or

Laurel auditory illusion that became a sensation in the beginning of 2018. The words were so distinct, it’s hard to imagine that the other person heard something different from what you were hearing. But it’s true!

It didn’t take long before YouTube commentators and audio mavens were explaining how it was possible, that playing the clip on different devices or even changing the frequency settings on a single device could convert Laurel to Yanny and back again.

This Shavuot, in synagogues all over the world, Jewish people will be reading from the Torah, chanting the very verses in the Torah where the ten commandments are recorded.

This is a national event, the moment when we go back to who we really are and what makes us Jewish. It’s something for every single Jew, man, woman, and child.

This is the time, once-a-year, when

we relive that mind-bending experience at Sinai, when heaven kissed earth and people experienced the divine.

Chances are that you will just hear the Torah reader say, “remember the Shabbat” since that’s what it says in the text he will be reading from (in Hebrew of course). But maybe, just maybe, if you listen carefully with your soul, you will tap into that transcendent reality way beyond words, where the static of life fades away and there is but only one sound, the word of G d.

So, make sure you come to shul this Shavuot – no one is too old or too young. Listen to the ten commandments, and let your soul connect to its higher source. Then you can enjoy the physical side of the festival with all the dairy delicacies.



Rabbi Pini Pink, Chabad of Greenstone



# SA government and politicians show bias as Israel conflict escalates

NICOLA MILTZ

As Israel faced a steady bombardment of deadly rockets fired by terrorist groups in Gaza this week, the South African government, politicians, and activists condemned the Jewish state, ignoring the myriad complexities of the violence.

And as Hamas escalated its barrage of rockets targeting innocent civilians, to which Israel retaliated, there has been no condemnation of Hamas from either the South African government or any of its politicians.

Israel’s right to defend itself and diffuse tensions in a bid to save the lives of all its citizens including Jews, Muslims, and Christians, hasn’t been acknowledged by the government in its condemnation of the Jewish state.

Siding wholly with the Palestinians, the government earlier this week expressed its “deep concern at the continued clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque wherein Israeli soldiers attacked Palestinian worshippers while praying at the holy site”.

The Economic Freedom Fighters said it noted “the genocide” committed by Israel against the Palestinian people during Ramadan, saying “We condemn with contempt the violence perpetrated by the apartheid Israeli state on unarmed Palestinian people.” It called on the government to close down the South African embassy in Israel and recall all its representatives there.

No mention has been made about Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque stockpiling rocks, fireworks, and stone slabs around the site in preparation for violence and attacking Israeli police.

Focusing all its attention on the land dispute and potential eviction of Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah, the government ignored a multitude of issues that have contributed to the rising wave of violence since April.

The department of international relations and cooperation (DIRCO) issued a statement saying, “The South African government strongly condemns the attacks and planned evictions of Palestinians from annexed East Jerusalem to make way for Israeli settlements.

“It’s perplexing that during these unprecedented times, as the international community addresses the global challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel is exploiting the situation to advance its de facto annexation of Palestinian land. These acts aren’t only illegal but also risk undermining the viability of a negotiated two-state solution and will have negative consequences on the entire peace

process.”

In response to this, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) called on the government, all political parties, and the media to show “even-handedness” and acknowledge the complexity of the situation.

In a joint statement, SAJBD National Chairperson Wendy Kahn and SAZF Chairperson Rowan Polovin, said, “In their determination to condemn Israel come what may, the government has reversed cause and effect. The reality – and not for the first time – is



The South African BDS Coalition held a small protest this week outside the Israeli Trade office in Sandton, Johannesburg

Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

that the initial clashes were deliberately orchestrated by the Palestinian leadership and have now culminated in a lethal barrage of missile fire on Jerusalem and other heavily populated cities.

“Rockets are indiscriminate. They imperil the lives of all who live in the Holy City, whether Jew, Christian, or Muslim. In spite of this, the South African government has chosen to single out Israel for exclusive condemnation, disregarding completely the more than 1 200 deadly rockets fired thus far against Israeli civilians.

“The double standards don’t stop there. Whereas countries throughout the world sent condolences to Israel following the tragic loss of 45 lives in Meron, South Africa has yet to follow suit even two weeks later. However, within 24 hours, it was able to issue a statement condemning Israel.

“If the government, and indeed all political parties, wish to be part of ending this latest tragic outburst of violence, they must show genuine even-handedness. Those who unquestioningly endorse the claims and actions of one side while completely ignoring those of the other do nothing to resolve the conflict. In fact, they only make a bad situation worse.”

They went on to say that demonising Israel, as was the case with certain statements, was “irresponsible, inflammatory, and dangerous”.

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The Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Lior Keinan, told the *SA Jewish Report* that no country in the world would tolerate this level of terror.

He has called on the international community and South Africa to condemn the rocket fire and Palestinian terrorism targeting Israeli citizens in the “strongest manner”, as well as to support Israel’s right to self-defence.

Keinan said that these events were part of a “wave of terror” that was being led by Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and were the result of “reckless and irresponsible incitement to violence”.



Children stand in front of a truck decorated with anti-Israel propaganda at a protest organised by Africa4Palestine in front of Parliament in Cape Town on 12 May

Concerning earlier violence, he said, “Israel sought to achieve calm in Jerusalem. We took every measure to prevent conflict or violence and to allow freedom of worship. These measures include postponing the Supreme Court hearing regarding Sheikh Jarrah, blocking Jews from visiting the Temple Mount, changing the route of the flag march, and then cancelling the event. Moreover, Israel acted in a measured manner in response to the rockets and incendiary balloons that had been launched from the Gaza Strip to prevent any escalation during this sensitive period.”

He said responsibility for the situation rested completely with Palestinian terrorist organisations and “on the unrestrained incitement by the Palestinian Authority”.

“No country will allow rockets to be fired on its children, women, and men. Israel will take any action necessary to protect its citizens. It’s the right and the duty of every state.”

Meanwhile, small protests were held by pro-

Palestinian groups at the Israel Trade Offices in Sandton, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, all of which blamed Israel for being solely responsible for the violence.

Interestingly, in an open letter to DIRCO Minister Naledi Pandor, the South African BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) Coalition said it was “extremely disappointed” by DIRCO’s statement about the conflict, calling for more action by the government.

The Democratic Alliance said Israel must “employ maximum restraint in the use of force” adding “violence from both sides must cease in the interest of peace, saving lives, and protecting the human rights of both the Israeli and Palestinian people”.

Dr Corne Mulder of the Freedom Front Plus said, “The ANC government has never tried to hide its hostility towards Israel, and has now once again chosen the terrorist side in the Israel-Palestine conflict. It’s time for the ANC to honour Israel’s sovereignty.

“It’s lamentable that the South African government is always so quick to side with Israel’s opponents and condemn the country,” he said.

In Cape Town, a protest organised by Africa4Palestine (formerly BDS SA), brought a number of anti-Israel groups together. But only about 200 members of the public gathered to condemn Israel, many of them children.

Speaking in front of parliament, the late Nelson Mandela’s grandson, Mandla Mandela called for the closure of the South African embassy in Israel. “We are clearly asking South Africa not to downgrade its embassy in Israel, but to close it down!” he shouted to cheers from the crowd. “We also want to deny [Israeli international carrier] El Al from coming into South Africa!” he said to more cheers of support.

He called for South Africans to “boycott products from apartheid Israel. The only thing we expect from our government is to place sanctions on apartheid Israel!” He then called on the crowd to join him on 18 July in Pretoria (the date marked to celebrate Nelson Mandela’s legacy) outside the Israeli embassy in Pretoria. “We want to see it shut down and for the ambassador to leave. We won’t compromise,” Mandela said.

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# Skies between SA and Israel could open soon, says Israel's COVID-19 chief

TALI FEINBERG

South African Jews and their relatives in Israel are battling yet another travel ban implemented by Israel at the beginning of May, which forbids travel to South Africa and seven other countries. Yet Tomer Lotan, the executive director and policy chief at the Government of Israel National Coronavirus TaskForce, told the *SA Jewish Report* it might shift soon.

"I think it will change pretty soon. The policy is based on the idea of opening as much as we can inside Israel, but being very strict with our borders. We call it the 'inverse watermelon' – the inside is green and the outside is red. It sounds much better in Hebrew!"

"We went through two to three months of relief in daily activity and opening our economy," he says. "This was mainly through the 'green pass', a project that I was privileged to lead [allowing those who are vaccinated access to daily life, sport, and cultural events]. There were about six to seven phases of relief to get our economic activity as close as we could to daily routine."

"But the other side of the equation has been to keep our borders as strict as possible. It's a challenging balance. We've been more conservative about our borders than before because we want to maintain the achievements of our vaccination project. We don't want to risk it with a 'variant scenario' [a COVID-19 variant entering the country]."

He says an Israeli High Court decision two months ago ruled that "we cannot block Israeli citizens from travelling back to Israel. This means we had only one option left: to have a differentiated approach to different countries. This is why we created these criteria, focused on countries that are more dangerous for Israel because of the presence of variants of concern. We also looked at the traffic between these countries and Israel."

In the case of South Africa he says, "the South African COVID-19 variant is still a concern according to our Ministry of Health. However, I must say, over the past week or two, we have seen more evidence that the South African variant may be less dangerous than we originally thought. So I'm more optimistic that in the short term, Israel will update its knowledge on the South African variant. We hope that the evidence will give us confidence that it won't affect those who are vaccinated, and then the policy [on travel between South Africa and Israel] might change. But we've been very conservative because no one wants to make the mistake of 'reading the map' incorrectly."

Lotan says South Africa's recent low COVID-19 numbers don't have a big impact on Israel's assessment of its travel ban. Rather, the traffic between the two countries and strong family ties between people has more of an impact.

"But we want to emphasise that the health ministry and Israeli government are very aware of the need to reconnect communities and families. We hope to make sure that over the coming weeks and into the summer, there is more traffic between South Africa, Israel, and other countries, not only for the Israeli economy, but also because of the very important ties to these Jewish communities. We are making an effort and it's 'on our table'. We

are putting a lot of effort into updating policies."

So is Israel's fight with the pandemic coming to an end? "Most Israelis feel that 'corona is over'. They act like it's over, and there is much sense in that as we are really close to normal routine," he says. "And our numbers are dramatically, fantastically low. The only question mark is the fact that the world is still suffering terribly from COVID-19. So it's still premature to say that it's over."



Tomer Lotan

He says the Israeli government will soon "pilot groups of tourists to start tourism again in Israel. That's the next step. We've done things gradually, in a cautious way. We aren't running forward [without thinking things through]."

Regarding sectors of Israeli society that may have been resistant to vaccines, Lotan says "the Haredim [ultra-Orthodox] do vaccinate. They are at least 60% vaccinated, which is high compared to the rest of the world." He points out that they haven't experienced

**"But we want to emphasise that the health ministry and Israeli government are very aware of the need to reconnect communities and families."**

an increase in COVID-19 numbers after the large gathering at Mount Meron for Lag B'Omer.

"Arab Israeli citizens also have very high vaccination numbers. It took a while to increase numbers – it started slowly, but after we adjusted our messaging and created greater accessibility in Arab villages, there has been increased compliance." These efforts have extended from East Jerusalem to Bedouin families in the Negev. Lotan says Israel has also vaccinated 200 000 Palestinian workers that come in and out of Israel. Although it's in Israel's interest that all Palestinians are vaccinated, this responsibility falls to the Palestinian Authority.

Regarding the large numbers gathered at Mount Meron, Lotan says, "for so many years, the event has been unmanaged. It's like a 'no man's land'. We concluded COVID-19 restrictions for Meron based on the green pass –allowing only those who are vaccinated to attend, restricting numbers, and so on. The plan was agreed with the relevant ministries and the police."

"But then it was disputed at operational level. Who would enforce it? Who would check the green passes? And then the formal restrictions weren't voted in by the government. It was a very good plan, but no one signed it. So the event was unmanaged."

He says this failure is a symbol of "the failures of the Israeli system. It's not just political, it's about the weakness of authorities. So the miracle [of Lag B'Omer] didn't happen this year."

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# SA olim hunker down under a rain of rockets

TALI FEINBERG

As rockets rained down on most of Israel from Monday to Wednesday this week, many South African *olim* hunkered down in safe rooms, bomb shelters, and stairwells. Meanwhile, one healthcare worker was on the frontlines of her hospital, treating the injured in what she called a “miniature mass-casualty event”.

Gila Nussbaum is an emergency physician in a hospital in the south of Israel. “I’m trained to remain calm and work under pressure, but yesterday, that pressure escalated when my own life and those of my colleagues and patients was in danger,” she told the *SA Jewish Report* on Wednesday, 12 May.

“We have had drills, but no amount of simulation can match reality. Yesterday, when the sirens sounded, we were ready to seal the emergency room, stay in the internal corridors, and continue doing what we always do under slightly different circumstances. Then we got notification that rockets had landed in a residential area, people were injured, and they were on their way.

“We activated a mini mass-casualty event. This means we clear an area of the department of usual patients and family members. It also means rushing admissions, moving people to safe areas, and pushing extra beds into corridors and passages. We bring in extra equipment, we activate staff on standby, and we stand at the ready.

“Then they started to come: an elderly man in a wheelchair, a child who was with a babysitter, a mentally disabled lady who didn’t understand what was happening – people injured, scared, and anxious. We treated each one and reunited family members who had been separated. We continued treating patients who came in with strokes, heart attacks, and pneumonia – the usual things don’t stop just because rockets are falling. And so we kept going – doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, radiographers, cleaners, security services – all the personnel required to keep an emergency department running. Through it all, Israelis, Arabs, South Africans, Americans, Brazilians, and Brits worked as a team.

“Thank G-d, most weren’t too severely injured and were able to be discharged, but then we suddenly faced a new dilemma: our usual note of “discharged home with the following instructions” was no longer applicable as the majority of these patients no longer had a home to go to. Their homes were now a pile of rubble. And so we faced the new challenge of finding placement for them.”

Eventually Nussbaum’s gruelling 14-hour shift ended. After arriving home, sirens sounded and “my long day was extended by dragging my three small children out of bed and into our *mamad* [safe room].” On the next evening [Wednesday], she says: “It was a scary drive. I had to stop three times because of rockets, get out the car and lie down on the side of the road.”

“When a rocket falls nearby, you really hear it and feel it. It’s so, so scary,” says grandmother Jolleen Hayon, who lives in Ashkelon and works for the Baltimore-Ashkelon partnership, connecting Jews from both cities. “I’m 14km away from Gaza. A rocket landed on a car, 30m from my house. The car was parked a few metres away from a home for children at risk. If the rocket had exploded there, it would have been a real disaster. We can hear the Israeli army planes and jets going past, and we hear the bombing in Gaza. All of these sounds are the sounds of war ... it’s a horrible noise.”

Like many Israelis, Hayon wishes that things hadn’t escalated to this level, and that both sides could make peace. “I’ve been here for 10 years, but one never really gets used to it. The constant tension of needing to get to the safe room in 28 seconds is tough. And for ages after things quieten down, every time you hear a motorbike revving or a car backfiring, or someone drops something, you just about jump out of your skin. It’s really something that goes deep.”

As she and her husband sheltered in their safe room in 30-degree heat on Tuesday, a rocket hit the power lines and so they had no electricity the whole day. “It was pitch dark and boiling. We slammed the door, locked it, and listened to the booms of the rockets falling.

“The situation in mixed cities is so scary,” she says, referring to civil unrest in cities with Jewish and Arab populations, like Lod. “To think of people’s neighbours

Marching through streets, lynching people, setting cars and shuls alight, throwing rocks ... is very worrying.”

Eighteen-year-old Lexi Price is spending her gap year at Machon Maayan, about a 10-minute drive from Ashdod. “We’ve been hearing a lot of rocket fire. This morning [Tuesday] was the first time that I’ve ever had to go into a bomb shelter. I was stressed out as I wasn’t prepared for it at all. Tonight [Tuesday night] we’re sleeping in the bomb shelter. The *madrichot* were trying to calm everyone down. The siren went off, and the girls started panicking. I asked the ‘house mom’ if we could *tisch* [sing religious songs], so we were singing while we could hear rocket fire and the Iron Dome intercepting it. It was so powerful to be singing while that was happening.”

On Tuesday night, media consultant Darryl Egnal was at a party for international students at Bar-Ilan University’s International School in Ramat Gan. “Twenty minutes after I arrived, sirens could be heard over the music, which was shut down immediately, and we were all ushered down two flights of stairs into the basement bomb shelter which doubles as one of the university’s libraries.”

Egnal made aliyah in 2009, and says that “in the past, there would be one or two sirens with simultaneous explosions being heard as the Iron Dome intercepts the rockets. You’d wait 10 minutes to make sure it was safe, and then go back to whatever you were doing. This time, however, there was siren after siren and explosion after explosion. It didn’t seem to end.



Piece of a rocket that fell 30 metres from Jolleen Hayon’s home in Ashkelon

“Food and drink was brought down, and eventually, the music was too, so the students continued the party in the shelter. Being international students, this was the first time most of them had experienced a rocket attack on Israel. Some were afraid, some took it in their stride.”

Later, she was woken by a siren at 03:00. “Planning to go down to the basement shelter, I opened my front door to see many of my neighbours in the passageway and the stairwell, something I wasn’t expecting. Apparently, if you live on the upper floors of a building and can’t get to the bomb shelter, the safest place to go is the second floor, which is where I live. So I grabbed one of my chairs and joined them. Adults, teenagers, toddlers, babies ... and a dog. We sat there for about 30 minutes while the sirens wailed and rockets exploded.”

Social worker Leanne Manshari has lived in Ashkelon for 12 years. Her son’s birthday fell on Yom Yerushalayim, and his friends had just arrived for a surprise birthday sleepover when the sirens started going off. “The mothers decided the kids could stay, and so they had a sleepover in the safe room. It was an experience we will never forget!”

Manshari is a social worker for a girls’ boarding school. “In the middle of the night, I had to go to the school, which is a half-hour drive from Ashkelon. The girls were traumatised because when they were driving back from Yom Yerushalayim, rocks were thrown at their buses. Driving through Ashkelon under rocket fire was extremely frightening even though I’m not an anxious person.”

She says her eight-year-old daughter is extremely anxious about the rockets. “We were bombarded every ten minutes. At one point they told us not to leave the *mamad* for a few hours because one of the Iron Domes wasn’t working.”

The family has since left to stay with Manshari’s sister-in-law, near Haifa. “I am happy to be here and to see my sister-in-law, but I also want to go home. It’s surreal. You really want to be in your own house but you can’t go home, it’s just not safe.”

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## Works from forty years of international superstar William Kentridge’s career under the hammer in May

The 14 exciting lots by the pre-eminent South African artist on Strauss & Co’s May Virtual Live Auction span nearly 40 years of Kentridge’s evolving career as a print maker of international repute.

The most recent work in the sale, *Refugees (You Will Find No Other Seas)* (estimate R600 000 to R800 000), dating from 2017, was produced as part of *Triumphs and Laments (2016)*, a monumental “drawing” project using large-scale stencils and pressure-cleaning equipment to create images reflecting the artist’s personal interpretation of the history of the city on the walls that line the Tiber River in Rome. The technically distinctive large-scale aquatint etching on the Strauss & Co sale was printed using 36 separate plates on paper, mounted on a raw cotton support, which unusually folds up into a clam-shell presentation box.



The oldest Kentridge work in the sale is *Domestic Scenes – A Wildlife Catalogue* (estimate R200 000 to R300 000), another multiplate image which dates from 1980. It casts a satirical eye at a motley crew of human and animal characters, including cats and a warthog, that sometimes reappear elsewhere in Kentridge’s extensive repertoire. Four single-plate etchings from the same series are also on the sale and, at estimates of R30 000 to R50 000 each, are likely to be snapped up by novice collectors keen to grow their investment in contemporary art.

A highly unusual work dating from 1994, when Kentridge was less famous than Afropop sensation Mango Groove, is a stand-out work on the upcoming sale. The charcoal and pastel drawing was used in the stop-motion animation music video created and directed by Kentridge in support of the band’s studio album, *Another Country*, only months before South Africa’s landmark democratic elections.

The band’s eponymous single, infused with a powerful sense of optimism for the country’s democratic future, became the anthem of the country’s joyful crossover period. Video of Claire Johnston, the band’s vocalist, was inserted into the charcoal-drawn narrative that moved between evocative mine-dump landscapes, banner-carrying crowds, towering pylons, wrapped monuments, and booming megaphones. Poignant images of a violent past flashed across billboards and drive-in screens, but clear starry skies and cleansing rains promised clarity and renewal. The artwork shows a jostling mass of figures surrounding a megaphone-topped pylon, with banners in Kentridge’s familiar colours of red and blue a shock beneath the grey sky. Often seen as a symbol of authoritarian control, this megaphone tower crumbles to dust in the final frame of the video.

Although best known for his drawings and films about Johannesburg, Kentridge’s sensibilities as an artist have also been strongly influenced by his travels. A particularly noteworthy mid-career lot is *Untitled Drawing II Ritorno d’Ulisse* (estimate R5 million to R6 million), which depicts the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. The drawing was one of roughly 40 drawings Kentridge made for the very first opera he directed, *Il Ritorno d’Ulisse*, commissioned by the organisers of the Kunsten Festival des Arts in Brussels in 1998.

Two lots demonstrating Kentridge’s mastery of large-format graphic composition – *Music Box Tondo* (estimate R200 000 to R300 000) and the diptych *Rumours and Impossibilities/Entirely Not So* (estimate R300 000 to R500 000) – will appeal to knowledgeable contemporary art lovers and institutions alike, along with the lithograph *Undo, Unsay, Unremember* (estimate R120 000 to R160 000), which depicts the ubiquitous Kentridge typewriter loosely rendered in sloshy black ink on a “found” book page.



Two characteristic Kentridge *Irises*, an etching and a digital print, round out the artist’s offering on the May Virtual Live sale, which takes place in the company’s Johannesburg offices. The action starts on Sunday, 16 May, when a single-owner private collection of fine wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, Alsace, and Champagne goes under the hammer, and continues with three sessions of modern, post-war, and contemporary art on Monday 17 and Tuesday 18 May.

“The range and breadth in our May catalogue is astonishing,” says Susie Goodman, an executive director at Strauss & Co. “Besides Hugo Naudé’s luscious riverine study of Port St Johns and various otherworldly Namibian landscapes by Keith Alexander, Adolph Jentsch, and Maud Sumner, there is a gorgeous triptych, *Three Views* (estimate R220 000 to R280 000) from Durban artist Andrew Verster’s glorious *Fragile Paradise* series. Another highlight has to be John Meyer’s remarkable photorealist rendering of an eastern Free State landscape at Golden Gate.

All the lots as well as interactive digital catalogues are available on the Strauss & Co website along with easily accessible, user-friendly information about registering for the auction, bidding, and buying.

# Strauss & Co

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# Guarding Jerusalem from the “end of the end” of Israel

MIRAH LANGER

The Golan is the true gatekeeper of Jerusalem, particularly in mitigating against the Iranian threat across the border, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Major (Res) Yaakov Selevan said during a talk to commemorate Yom Yerushalayim this week.

“People who live in the Golan claim that it’s the most naturally beautiful region in Israel. But they aren’t living here for the views; they are here because there is something for which they’re willing to die – the redemption of the heart of the Jewish people.”

Selevan, a Jerusalem born-and-bred military official who now works as a tour guide and public speaker, was hosted for the webinar by Mizrachi SA and the South African Zionist Federation, in collaboration with other partners.

Although Selevan grew up with “the Western Wall as my backyard”, he now lives with his wife and three daughters in the Golan. Over the years, he has come to realise how deeply intertwined the fates of these two Israeli regions are.

Logistically, the Golan has always been a key strategic point, both in its proximity to neighbouring countries and major water sources, including the Sea of Galilee. Politically, its significance is even greater.

Even in the Roman era, when Roman soldiers were unable to penetrate the Jewish resistance in Jerusalem, they elected to try and attack from the periphery and move down. At the time, the Golan was rich in Jewish life with more than 30 synagogues. In the year 67, in spite of the efforts of Jewish revolutionaries, after a number of attempts, the Romans did overtake the ancient city of Gamla in the Golan. “They killed more than 4 000 Jews. Jewish independence fell, and then the Romans started moving down towards the heart of the land – Jerusalem. Three years later, we know, the second temple was destroyed.”

Fast forward thousands of years, when the Golan was redeemed from Syrian control by the IDF in the 1967 war, a number of fascinating ancient Jewish artefacts were found. The most striking of which was an ancient coin from the era of the Jewish revolt against Roman control. Engraved in Hebrew, its inscription reads “for the redemption of Jerusalem, the holy”.

In the modern political landscape, the Golan remains a contested hotspot particularly in relation to Iran and its ongoing incursions into the borderlands of Lebanon and Syria.

Selevan said that for many years, Iran had also used

Israel and Jews symbolically as a strategy to forge allegiances across Muslim and Arab states that otherwise would be divided across Sunni and Shiite ethnic lines. These distinctions are derived from a dispute over the line of succession after Muhammed.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, “Iran wanted to ‘export the revolution’, and it realised it had a problem. While they were Shiites, most of the people around them were Sunni.” So, said Selevan, they chose a “common interest – the holy city of Jerusalem. Who controls the old city of Jerusalem? The filthy Zionists.” Moreover, as enemies across the Arab world sought ways to attack Israel, they turned to Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran.

Iran remains a threat to Israel on a number of levels, Selevan said. The first is its nuclear programme; the second its Precision Guided Munitions project, which designs missiles that use GPS to hit specific targets. Third, is its political take over and proxy power in various countries like Lebanon and Yemen. The next key territory which Iran is looking to control in the region is Syria, itself riddled by a civil war that has been appropriated by a myriad of interests.

In Lebanon, Iran controls networks of tunnels and occupied villages where local people are being used as human shields and whose homes are utilised for the storage of missiles and rockets. It hopes to use the chaos in Syria to take over using a similar model.

However, along with military action, Israel has made huge inroads diplomatically to prevent this, Selevan said.

“Iran used us and Jerusalem as a common interest, a common enemy, and a step in the door to the Sunni world. However, in the past few years, with what’s happening just here in Syria, people in the region are seeing what the Iranians are doing and how they’re taking over this region. They realise that they are next in line: Saudi Arabia, even Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, all these countries said, ‘Oh my G-d, all these years, we thought the Jews were the problem. Now we understand the greatest threat is the Shiites. Who can help us against the Shiites?



Major (Res) Yaakov Selevan with a replica chocolate coin from his daughter's Yom Yerushalayim celebration



The ancient Jewish coin from the Roman Era

The Jews!”

Israel has thus turned Iran into the common interest which is “our step in the door of the Muslim world”. The most recent result is the Abraham Accords peace agreements, said Selevan.

Israel has another way in which it continues to forge towards peace – humanitarian aid.

Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Israel has helped, offering medical services and distributing food, clothing, and other products for basic needs, proving, “you can stop Iran with baby diapers”.

At its core, the motivation for the action is humanitarian, said Selevan. “We did it because we’re Jewish; we cannot stand by when we see people suffering.”

Nevertheless, it also had an impact on political engagement. Terror groups, such as those under Iranian control, are reliant on local populations for support, access to land, and soldiers. As Israel continues to reach out to her neighbours, “there’s a whole generation growing up in Syria knowing that we’re not the devil”.

Although this doesn’t mean there aren’t still many who are against Israel and are manipulating the aid system, nevertheless there are shifts. For Selevan, this is encompassed by a drawing made by a seven-year-old Syrian Muslim girl. Her portrait of the Israel flag, captioned in Arabic, thanks the Israeli who saved her life.

In spite of the huge upswing of attacks on Israel in recent days, Selevan said he was hopeful. His life in the Golan is a contract between him, his country, and his community.

“I’m here at the end of the end of the end of the country because someone needs to be here, because my community is the greatest answer to the Iranian threat. That’s my purpose. That’s my essence.”

Holding out a replica of the Jewish-revolt-era coin, Selevan asserted, “Each and every one of us needs to ask ourselves: what’s my job in the redemption of Jerusalem?”

## Jerusalemmites’ song and prayer drown out the violence

PERSONAL ACCOUNT DANI SACK



Late on Sunday night, a group of young Jewish women gathered on a hill overlooking the Temple Mount, singing “*Im eshkachech Yerushalayim tishkach yemini*” (If I forget you Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.)

Our shoulders, donned in Israeli flags, swayed from side to side. During a brief break in singing, shots rang off in the distance. As the sirens began wailing, I grabbed onto the hand of my friend next to me. We closed our eyes and our voices rose.

I’m fortunate enough to wake up every morning in the Old City of Jerusalem. The view from my window overlooks East Jerusalem, and my neighbour flies an Israeli flag every morning. I can hear the sound of singing from the yeshiva next door, and I feel incredibly grateful to Hashem for the opportunity to be here.

Yom Yerushalayim began here on Sunday night. My *midrasha* group walked along the outer walls of the Old City, singing Tisch songs and looking out over the bright lights of Jerusalem.

We played guitar and banged on drums, our voices rising joyfully every few minutes. At the end of the night, after the shots and sirens had died down, we went down to the Kotel. In spite of the late hour, there were people everywhere. Women crying, men dancing, and children playing at their mothers’ feet.



The air on Monday morning was electrified. A sea of blue and white had taken over the Old City, and as I walked down to the Kotel, beautiful prayers filled my ears.

The davening was joyous, both sections packed with people singing Hallel, praising Hashem for the miracle of the recapture of the Old City.

Possibly the most spiritual part of the day happened right there, at the Kotel. Suddenly, in the midst of our prayer, loud, terrifying bangs rang out from the Temple Mount.

For minutes, these booms didn’t cease. I watched as soldiers ran along the perimeter of Har Habayit, as policemen appeared out of nowhere, and men and women began screaming their *tefillot*, which were being drowned out by the violence.

We were assured of our safety, but still many people got up and ran from the wall. I was one of them. As I looked behind me, however, I noticed the majority hadn’t moved. Their davening had simply been intensified, as they shouted out to Heaven, “The Lord is for me, I will not fear, what will man do to me?”

It was at that moment that I returned to my spot near the wall. The bangs ceased while our praying continued strongly. The day was hot, but as we danced in the streets later on, the sun only intensified our singing and sense of unity.

For three hours we walked, sang, and jumped. Just as we started to advance towards the Old City, I was pushed down onto the ground by my friends.

My phone beeped 10 times in succession, the main notification reading: “Rocket Alert: Jerusalem – East, Centre, and West.” My *madrichim* began shepherding us through the streets, while my WhatsApp went crazy with concerned messages from fellow *midrasha* students and concerned friends and family.

On our way to the safety of the *midrasha*, we passed hundreds of people still singing, dancing, and rejoicing. We all watched in shock and relative silence, processing the events that had taken place. I remarked to my friends, “Isn’t it crazy how they’re still praising Hashem, even in the midst of this chaos?”

It was an epiphany. Walking through the streets of Jerusalem in 30° heat, and all I could think about were the rockets, the fireworks, and the *tefillot*. I kept thinking how, in the face of terror and fear, we Jews place ourselves completely in the hands of G-d.

Trust and faith overcame panic, and we sang to G-d. As I danced and waved Israeli flags in the crowds that dominated Jerusalem that day, I was filled with immense gratitude, awe, and love. Love for Israel, love for *am Yisrael*, and love for G-d.

As I lay in bed that night, thankful for my safety and so proud of my Zionism, my thoughts kept circling back to one phrase, “Thank you Hashem.”

May we merit to recognise Hashem in our lives always, and may it not take violent attacks to bring about that recognition.

*L’shana haba b’Yerushalayim* in health, safety, and joy.

• Dani Sack is on Bnei Akiva’s MTA gap year programme, studying at Midreshet Harova seminary in Jerusalem.



# Jumping the queue in vaccine free-for-all at Charlotte Maxeke

NICOLA MILTZ

Members of the community – among others – this week flocked to Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital following rumours that the COVID-19 jab was available to anyone who arrived.

Previously, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was only available to healthcare workers in phase 1A of the vaccine rollout as part of the Sisonke Protocol. At the weekend, it was extended to include healthcare personnel and support staff who aren't directly patient facing. Many believed this meant it was extended to include the staff of insurance companies and healthcare providers.

It resulted in a number of regular members of the community arriving and joining the lengthy queues for a jab. Those who were supposed to be vaccinated only in phase 2 arrived at the vaccination centre with high hopes. There were many over the age of 60 who were vaccinated before officials realised what was happening, and started turning people away.

The background to it all is that on Friday, 7 May, all unvaccinated healthcare workers were urged to get vaccinated this week as part of the Sisonke Protocol. The South African Medical Research Council called on them to register and receive the Johnson & Johnson inoculation as the trial was going into its final week this Friday.

"We wish to let health personnel know that we have doses and capacity to extend the Sisonke trial to health workers who aren't directly patient facing," the medical council said. "We urge all health workers



Photo: Jan Ossendryver

and personnel to take up this offer before a resurgence of cases this winter to protect themselves and our health systems."

However, following some broken-telephone misinformation, people believed anyone could be vaccinated and it was a case of first-come-first-served. Many were asked to provide a letter from their employer in the healthcare industry. While some letters were perfectly legitimate, many weren't.

Many senior citizens, who are eligible to get the jab from Monday, 17 May, were lucky to jump the queue. However, while there were people with comorbidities trying their luck, there were also young healthy people in the queues.

"There are a lot of people here who actually shouldn't be here," said a woman in the queue on Tuesday. "Ninety percent of the people here are genuine healthcare workers,

but there are some who have obtained letters stating that they work for a healthcare provider when in fact they don't."

As news of a third wave hits home, so too has rising levels of anxiety.

One elderly man who refused to be named said he and his wife had arrived at the hospital to "try their luck" after about a two-hour long wait, both had been vaccinated. Neither of them are healthcare providers, nor do they work for a healthcare provider. "I don't like to say we *joked* the system, but we got lucky," he said.

At a time when most people can't wait to tell the world that they have been vaccinated, posting pictures of themselves recently vaccinated in front of pretty medical

backdrops, most of those in the hours-long queue refused to speak to the *SA Jewish Report*.

One medical officer who wished to remain anonymous said a message must have gone out stating that anyone could arrive for vaccination.

"This caused chaos. A lot of pensioners arrived because they had received messages with voucher numbers. We allowed some

of them to get vaccinated, but we've had to turn others away because it will affect the trial swell."

One man told the *SA Jewish Report*, "My understanding is that vaccination was now open to all healthcare workers and their staff, from the cleaners at a practice to office administrators. I'm in line to get it through my medical aid in about two weeks' time, but I thought once it was available and open to us, I might as well come and get it. I think that's what everyone's logic is."

Professor Barry Schoub, the head of the ministerial advisory committee on vaccines, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "As for jumping the queue, it's a sad reflection of human behaviour. Sisonke is an implementation study rather than a true trial. The queue-jumpers shouldn't affect the study provided they are honest in their documentation and can be followed up."

Officials at the hospital got wind of people slipping through the cracks and by midday on Tuesday, they started turning away those who didn't have legitimate letters proving they were healthcare personnel or support staff.

On Wednesday, many of those who didn't fit the bill were turned away and told to come back when it was their turn, but others snuck through with fake letters or reasons.



Glenda Sauer, who works for a health care provider, was one of the many people legitimately being vaccinated

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# Israel’s water miracle makes waves in South Africa

STEVEN GRUZD

Toxic politics doesn’t always torpedo good ideas. In spite of the well-known tension between the South African and Israeli governments over the Palestinian conflict, Israel’s world-leading water technologies are already making a big splash in rural villages.

This topic was explored in a webinar on 6 May, co-hosted by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), titled “Hell or high water: the untold story of how Israel is sharing her water miracle with South Africa and the world.”

Although South Africans are rightly preoccupied with poor electricity generation, the next infrastructure crisis is already here – water supply. The host of the meeting, Benji Shulman from the JNF and SAZF, noted that the average municipality loses 37% of piped water due to leaks, and South Africa has chronically under-budgeted for maintenance of the water supply over the next decade.

Israel is already assisting. Sivan Ya’ari is the founder and chief executive of

Innovation: Africa. It’s a remarkable organisation that has brought Israel’s cutting-edge water and solar technology to the continent to provide safe and clean drinking water and electricity to remote villages.

“Lack of energy means no clean water, and women walking many miles to find dirty water that they know will make their families sick,” Ya’ari said. She explained that Innovation: Africa first sinks a borehole

to tap groundwater in a village, and then installs a solar-powered pump, water tower, and reticulation system. They hire local villagers to assist and learn maintenance. The solar panels also generate electricity for medical clinics and light for studying at night. Israeli drip-irrigation technology waters fields efficiently. It costs \$50 000 (R701 675) per village,

and they have many donors, including the United Nations. “Donors get a list of villages where water is needed, and they can choose which ones to adopt. They are invited to join us when we open the taps,” Ya’ari said.

Joining from the United States, Seth Siegel, the author of the bestselling *Let There Be Water: Israel’s Solution for a Water-Starved World*, said that nearly every practical solution to water scarcity had been

invented or enhanced by Israel.

“There is a culture of respect for water in Israel, a recognition that it’s important and precious,” Siegel said, which is one of the factors making tiny Israel a global water superpower and model for all. Israel’s water distribution is controlled by the Israel Water Authority (IWA), an apolitical technocratic agency. “If you leave it to politicians to run, they will reward their friends and hurt their enemies,” Siegel said. They will keep the price of water artificially low and neglect maintenance. “The IWA takes a societal view to get things done.”

Dr Doron Markel, the chief scientist at the Keren Kayemet L’Yisrael/Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), noted that average temperatures in Israel had risen two degrees Celsius since the 1980s, and it was getting hotter and drier. The two key factors in Israel’s water system are five massive seawater desalination plants on the Mediterranean

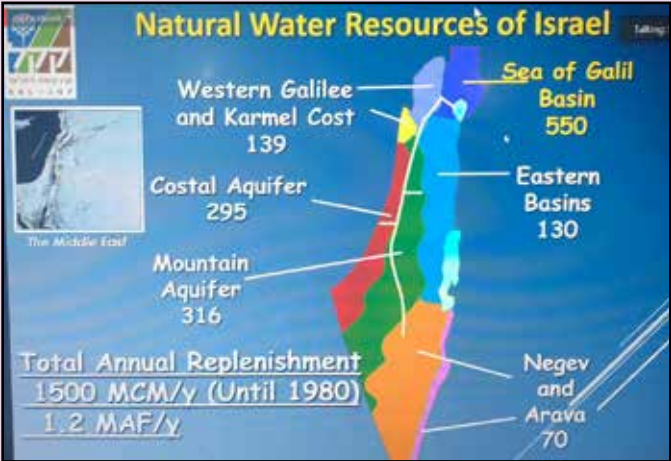
coast, and the recycling of waste water, principally for agriculture. It has built 230 reservoirs, and actively harvests run-off water. About 90% of Israel’s sewage water is recycled. Israel has a clear long-term plan for its water security, and has been teaching it to the world.

Amit Lev, trade and investment consul at the embassy of Israel in Pretoria, said facilitating deals in the South African water sector was more complicated

than most other economic fields, but it could be done.

“You need the right model, the right technology, and the right partners at the right price,” he said. Successful Israeli-South African joint projects include satellite imaging to detect leaks, filtration, working with agricultural co-operatives, and treating rampant algae in dams.

“If you can save them money and lives, they will take it,” Lev said.



Amit Lev



Benji Shulman



Doron Markel



Seth Siegel



Sivan Ya’ari

# Thuli Madonsela speaks some inconvenient truths

STEVEN GRUZD

“We are becoming George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in South Africa, where some animals are more equal than others. People think they are above the law. We must nip this in the bud. Orwell said, ‘In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.’”

These were the words of South Africa’s fearless former public protector, Professor Thuli Madonsela. She was delivering the annual Nadine Gordimer Lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) on 5 May 2021 via Zoom. Her theme was, “The audacity to speak an inconvenient truth”. The lecture, celebrating the life, work, and values of Gordimer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991, was first held from 2004 to 2006. It was revived in 2017 by the Friends of Nadine Gordimer Committee and the Wits School of Literature, Language, and Media.

Madonsela said of the writer, who was a child of Jewish immigrants to South Africa, “I admired and was

inspired by Nadine Gordimer since my student days. She transcended justice as more than ‘just us’. Her literature questioned the order of the day. It moved the needle with regard to justice, especially in South Africa, for black people in their different shades.”

“Nadine was of Jewish descent in a country where whiteness was everything,” said Madonsela. “She was Jewish and white, but she chose to concern herself with the most underprivileged.”

Gordimer’s writing deals with themes of alienation, exile, and personal transformation, and how lives were affected by apartheid. “She understood being privileged in a society anchored in underprivilege ... she used her words to shift consciousness in society. She shed light on inconvenient truths ... she held a torch, small but powerful, to dispel darkness,” Madonsela said.

“When you speak an inconvenient truth, you face the consequences. You may be ostracised for delivering it,” she said. She mentioned the bravery of the late MP, Ben Turok, also the child of Jewish immigrants, who spoke



Professor Thuli Madonsela

out about the excesses of his political party, the African National Congress.

Madonsela said that corruption among public leaders and in the private sector was among the biggest inconvenient truths of our time. “Saving democracy should be at the forefront; defending the rule of law and

integrity in state affairs. Corruption must be hit with the full force of the law. If there ever was a poison, it’s corruption, on justice, social justice, and social cohesion.” But she warned that we can’t win the war on corruption and state capture if it’s divorced from social justice.

Nelson Mandela hadn’t considered treating the multiple institutions for accountability “as an irritation”, Madonsela said. “We need to save democracy, beyond getting Jacob Zuma to obey the law. How do we handle COVID-19, and not grow into an authoritarian state?”

“An inconvenient truth is that we should expose corruption by anyone, including people

who are our friends. In Nkandla and state capture, I had to question people who considered themselves ‘my people’. In the name of remedial and restitutive measures, we have condoned nepotism, political cronyism, and exacerbated polarisation in society.”

In Gordimer’s time, the challenge was social justice, with groups excluded from opportunities and resources. “What’s our inconvenient truth? For me it’s finding sufficient consensus on what we regard as social justice. Some believe that we are all equal now, we should leave the past in the past, and treat everyone the same in an antidiscrimination regime. But this cements unequal power relations. We shouldn’t assume that all are equal – decades of systemic racial discrimination needs positive measures, it needs commitment to overcome that.”

Madonsela pointed out that the way black economic empowerment had been implemented “wasn’t right and a lost cause. It was an assimilationist move, where blacks were absorbed into historically white institutions. But the model was wrong – money went into buying shares.” BEE had also “been corrosive to black and white small business ... BEE is bizarre for family-owned businesses – to artificially have black partners. BEE has enforced white supremacy instead of undermining it.

“Words hurt, sometimes worse than swords,” Madonsela said. “Words can divide and destroy. There would have been no Rwandan genocide without words, no Holocaust. Where do we draw the line in protecting people from hate speech, but not curbing free speech?”

Finally, she asserted that the news media could be regressive or progressive. “The media did an excellent job in exposing apartheid, global injustice, state capture – look at WikiLeaks and GuptaLeaks. They have been amazing. Without them, I couldn’t have done my job as public protector, leading to where the truth was hiding. But we have to realise and recognise our own prejudices and biases ... we are wired to discriminate.”

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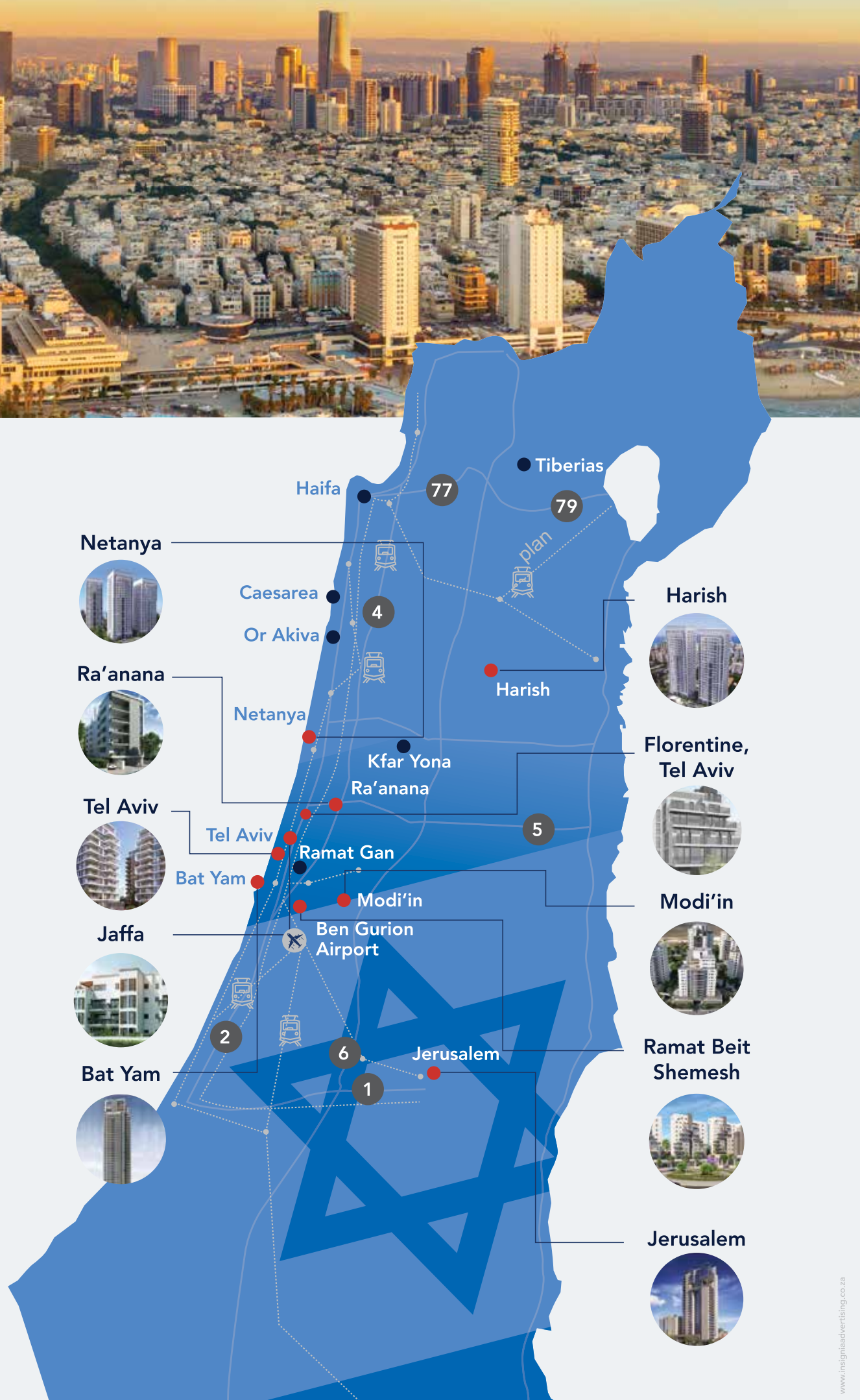
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# US, Australia, Canada shun anniversary of hate-fest Durban conference

TALI FEINBERG

Twenty years ago, the infamous United Nations (UN) World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (or the Durban Conference) descended into a hate-fest against Jews and Israel.

Now, as the UN prepares to mark the 20th anniversary this year, the United States (US), Australia, and Canadian governments all announced that they would boycott commemorative events because of the antisemitic essence of the original conference and its legacy.

“The United States will not attend or participate in any events commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action or the World Conference on Racism which preceded it,” a spokesperson for the US State Department told *The Jerusalem Post* on Monday, 3 May 2021.

He said that the US remained “deeply committed to combating antisemitism at home and abroad. Furthermore, the United States stands with Israel and has always shared its concerns about the Durban process’s anti-Israel sentiment, use as a forum for antisemitism, and freedom of expression issues.”

“We won’t associate Australia with one-sided and contentious language that singles out Israel or an event that champions such language,” said Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

“Canada opposes initiatives at the United Nations and in other multilateral forums that unfairly single out and target Israel for criticism,” said Global Affairs Canada spokesperson Grantly Franklin. “Canada is concerned that the Durban process has and continues to be used to push for anti-Israel sentiment and as a forum for antisemitism.”

Reflecting on the significance of the event 20 years ago, Milton Shain, antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, says, “The Durban Conference turned into an extension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was used as a means of inserting wording into draft resolutions portraying

Israel and Zionism as racist, and minimising Jewish suffering and antisemitism. Jewish representatives at the conference were the targets of threatening taunts, and a Syrian delegate openly described the Holocaust as ‘a Jewish lie’ while Israel was portrayed as the world’s ‘central locus of evil’.

“Significantly, it wasn’t only Jews who were outraged at the turn of events. In response to one of the cartoons distributed by the Arab Lawyers Union, UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson stated, ‘When I see something like this, I’m a Jew’. Prominent African National Congress leader Pallo Jordan also found the disruptions ‘disgraceful’, while South Africa’s deputy minister of foreign affairs, Aziz Pahad, lamented some months later that the conference ‘was hijacked and used by some with an anti-Israel agenda to turn it into an antisemitic event!’”

Michael Kransdorff, an office bearer at the South African Zionist Federation says, “The 2001 conference is a major blight on the UN’s very poor record towards Israel and Jews. I remember, as a student delegate [then national treasurer of the South African Union of Jewish Students], being shocked to see for the first time the notorious antisemitic forgery, *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, being sold outside the venue. Inside, posters with antisemitic cartoons straight out of Nazi propaganda pamphlets were ubiquitous.

“And in the conference discussions and declarations, only the Jewish state was singled out as racist, while some of the world’s worst-affected victims of racial discrimination were in attendance and blatantly ignored,” he says.

“Durban was the start of the major campaign for the legitimisation of the new antisemitism: the conflagration



Protestors from the opening of the Durban III Conference in New York in 2011

of anti-Zionism and traditional anti-Jewish hatred,” says Kransdorff. “However, we – a handful of Jewish students and international Jewish leaders at the time – wouldn’t be silenced and fought back by exposing the conference for the anti-Jewish hate-fest it was. In disgust, most democratic nations [sadly not South Africa] pulled out, rendering the conference a major failure.”

Sara Gon, the head of strategic engagement at the Institute of Race Relations, says this isn’t the first time these countries have boycotted this event. As well as walking out of the conference in 2001, the US didn’t participate in Durban II in 2009, nor Durban III in 2011, because of virulent antisemitism.

“The Biden administration’s decision to continue boycotting the 20th anniversary ‘event’ in New York in September is a positive response,” says Gon. “This is particularly so given pressure from those with strong anti-Israel positions in the Democratic Party. The US continues to recognise that the original event was a stain on all those who continued with it and didn’t do enough

to shut it down.

“The US wasn’t alone in boycotting these meetings,” she says. “Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Poland stayed away in both 2009 and 2011. Austria, Britain, Bulgaria, and France boycotted the 2011 event.

“Canada and Australia have been staunch allies to Israel, so their response is gratifying and reassuring,” she says. “Neither gratifying nor assuring is the fact that it doesn’t appear that European countries intend to boycott the event. Currently the lack of response is concerning.”

Says local political analyst Ralph Mathekga, “The conference might not focus much on Israel. I think those who are trying to have a dialogue on racism will want to focus on the issues without allowing the conference to descend into an anti-Israel forum. A lot has changed in the past 20 years, and yet not much progress was made regarding racism. The upcoming conference will also be held under COVID-19 conditions – this might ‘mute’ it to some degree.”

“The irony of Durban 2001 was that a conference designed to address hate and racism, itself heralded a hateful agenda of antisemitism,” says South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn. “The conference will always be remembered for its antisemitic displays and protests. It gave legs to the hideous ‘Israel apartheid’ analogy, and spawned the infamous Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions groups that have spewed their antisemitic venom internationally ever since.

“This toxic event continued its vitriol at the follow-up conference in 2009, which I attended in Geneva,” she recalls. “I remember seeing the despot, [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad, being welcomed into the halls of the United Nations Human Rights Council. To even consider holding yet another hate-fest is a disgrace. I applaud the governments that have taken a principled stance to withdraw from these disgraceful displays of Jew hatred.”

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# A journey to authenticity

OPINION

As South African Jews, we appreciate what it means to be Jewish. We appreciate how Judaism enriches our homes and families, how it connects us to community, how it gives our lives direction, meaning, and purpose. We appreciate, also, how Judaism helps us to become better people – compassionate, giving, loving, moral people. And how it brings us close to our Creator, to those around us, and to our own inner self. Judaism roots us in a rich spiritual, ethical, and historical tradition, and connects us to Jews around the world and our beloved Israel.

Judaism enriches our lives in so many ways. But as Shavuot approaches, we are reminded that being Jewish is connected to certain foundational facts and truths of actual events that happened.

On Shavuot, we celebrate the anniversary of the birth of the Jewish people – the story of who we are, where we come from, and most importantly, why we exist. This year, we mark exactly 3 333 years since G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Shavuot makes a factual claim about the origins of the Jewish people in the same way that Pesach does. At the Pesach seder, we trace the origins of our people from slavery to miraculous redemption through G-d Himself intervening in human history. And on Shavuot, we remind ourselves how three million Jews standing

at the foot of a mountain heard G-d speak and begin the process of revealing His Torah to us and with it our purpose in life.


Take a moment to think about this. It's a radical claim. To be a Jew isn't just to be a member of a particular culture with a shared history. It's to be part of an eternal covenant with G-d, to be the bearers of a Divine mission in the world. This is the essence of Jewish identity and Jewish destiny. This is who we are, where we come from, why we exist.

And so, everything depends on the historical claims we make on Pesach and Shavuot. This is a time to reflect not just on the meaning and the implications of the story of the origin of the Jewish people, but on its authenticity.

Earlier this week, I had a fascinating conversation with Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen. A graduate of the University of California Los Angeles and Harvard, he is a recognised expert on comparative religion. The conversation was about exactly this subject – the authenticity of the origin story of the Jewish people, and in particular of the Divine revelation at Sinai. Kelemen compared it to the origin story and historical claims of other religions and nations, and put forward a compelling, rational-scientific argument for the veracity of the Jewish story.

What moved me in our conversation was his personal life story. He grew up in a traditional family

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



but challenged his parents on beliefs that they took for granted. He began his own journey to search for truth through his academic studies and other sources. In the end, he came to a deep realisation of the truths of Judaism, of G-d's existence, and the authenticity of the Torah. He wrote books – *Permission to Believe* and *Permission to Receive* – to share his findings with others. In our conversation, he told me how he found faith and belief in Judaism through rational analysis of the facts. He reminded me that we are all on individual journeys of deepening our faith. This may be why the festival is called Shavuot, which literally means week, referring to the weeks leading up to Sinai, reminding us that getting to the mountain of truth is a process, an individual journey of faith and connection.

Let this year's Shavuot be a catalysing moment for us individually and collectively as we embark on this journey of faith together.

I'd love to know about your journey. Reach out to me, and I'll share source material that has been valuable to me on my journey. There is so much that has been written and spoken that can guide and illuminate our paths to the foundational truths of our people.

Chag sameach!

# Ten Commandments – season 3 333 – at a synagogue near you

OPINION

RABBI YOSHI CHAIKIN



We love round numbers. The celebration of decades, half centuries, and centuries always takes on special significance. Next week, on Shavuot, we will celebrate, for the 3 333rd time, the anniversary of the gift of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The covenant took place in the year 1948 from creation, (1 313 BCE), hence 33 centuries and 33 years have now elapsed. Besides being an aesthetically pleasing number with a great ring, is there any significance to the number 3 333?

It turns out that the number 33 is very closely connected to the essence of the Sinai covenant. Allow me to take you on a journey into some simple numerology. In Psalms 119, King David begs Hashem to “uncover my eyes so that I can behold wonders in your Torah”. The Hebrew for uncover is *gal* which is spelt *gimmel-lamed*. According to the Gimatria code, which ascribes a numerical value to each of the letters of our alphabet, a gimmel is worth 3 and a lamed 30. That adds up to 33!

On the very first Shavuot, back in the year 1948, the assembled nation at the foot of the mountain had their eyes opened to the true reality of this world, a place where G-dliness permeates and fills all space. Being a physical environment, the realm that we inhabit conceals, by its very nature, its true essence. But there at Sinai, we were shown a glimpse of the hidden divine dimension of this world.

There, we were given the Torah: a set of detailed instructions enabling us to crack the veneer of suppression, to uncover for ourselves the deeper spiritual dimensions of this world. The *mitzvot*, 613 divine instructions (248 obligations and 365 prohibitions) form the code that unlock that reality. Studying this Book of the Law helps us to delve into the G-dliness that's all around us. Following the instructions therein, by all of us across many generations, will

reveal the true reality that comprises this world.

Each generation builds on the achievements of the former. As we move down the course of history, closer and closer to an era when the knowledge of G-d will finally fill the world, we are delving deeper and deeper into loftier and more sublime levels of Torah. The initial unearthing took place at Mount Sinai, one week into our current month of Sivan. Another watershed event in this process was the revelation of the Kabbalah, the inner dimension of Torah, by the great Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. This took place on his final day on this earth. The anniversary of his death, and of the huge exposure of Torah, is the 18th of Iyar, corresponding to the 33rd day of the Omer – a day commonly referred to as Lag B'Omer (*Lag* is spelt *gimmel-lamed* = 33)!

King David prayed for Hashem to open his eyes and reveal to him the wonders that are found in Torah. This year's Shavuot comes to us after a year and a half of what appears to us to be deep concealment, and weeks after a day of Lag B'Omer in which celebration turned into tragedy. As we prepare to celebrate the gift of

this Torah for the 3 333rd time, we beg Hashem to open our eyes and show us the divine within this physical world so that all will finally be understood.

On Monday morning, at a synagogue near you, come hear the ten commandments read from the Torah. May season 3 333 turn out to be the final one, ushering in the era of moshiach that Jews have prayed and hoped for these 33 centuries and 33 years!

Chag sameach

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul and the chairperson of the SA Rabbinical Association.



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# Wake up and smell the coffee

**OPINION**

There’s a well-known adage attributed to the founder of the Chassidic movement that bears reflection. Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov was a hidden mystic who lived in the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine. Unknown to the world initially, he was taught the mystical and hidden aspect of the Torah by none other than Achiya Hashiloni, the famous teacher of Elijah the prophet.

Reb Yisrael was born into a dark world – the Jewish people’s morale and connection to G-d was at an all-time low – and it seemed that they were at a point of simply dying a natural death brought on by the vicissitudes of exile and immeasurable suffering.

Although he worked undercover at first, Reb Yisrael, who eventually got the title Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name), revealed his teachings to the world and through his wisdom and insight, he revived a weary generation of Jews and caused them to flourish.

Today, the Chassidic movement is alive and well, and through principles of serving G-d with joy, seeing the divine hand orchestrating history, and showing genuine care and concern for one’s fellow, a fresh breath of air was blown into the Jewish people.

One of the famous teachings of the Baal Shem Tov is that everything you see and hear is a lesson in divine service. This world is interconnected, and G-d is found in everything and everyone. Also, G-d, whose guiding hand directs mankind, speaks through the natural. Humans just need to be perceptive and connect the dots.

We have and still are going through a very dark period in our history, and recent events often stop us in our tracks and beg the question: why? What’s this all about?

Now I’m no mystic, nor seer, but I’m compelled to ask the question: what lesson is there to be learnt from what I see and hear? This world isn’t haphazard, and there is a recurrent message G-d is trying to give to us.

For me, two themes immediately emerge.

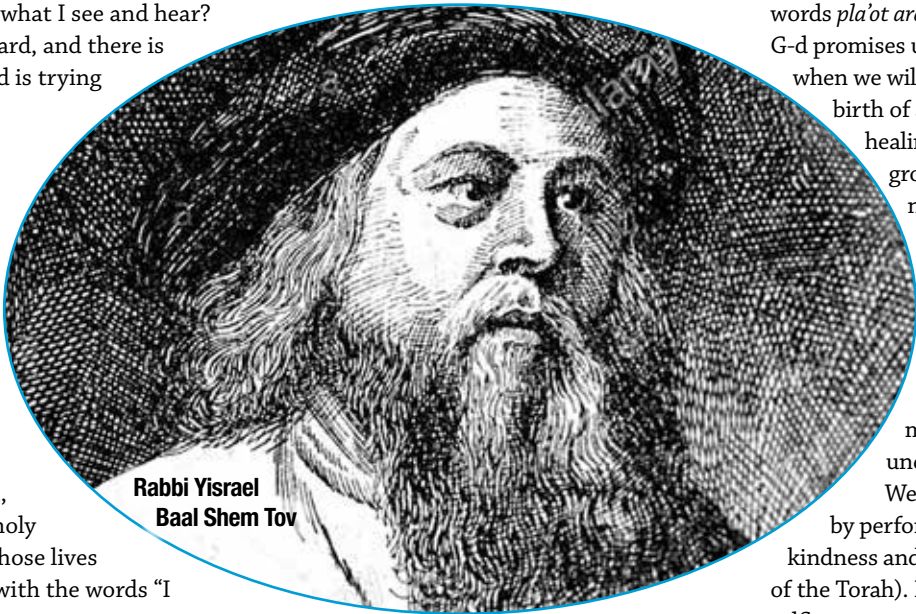
The first is, “I can’t breathe”. It was initially sparked off by the cruel handling of George Floyd that cascaded into unprecedented civil unrest, and just more than a week ago, we witnessed the tragic, inexplicable loss of 45 holy Jews on Lag B’Omer, whose lives too were extinguished with the words “I can’t breathe.”

The second is the ravaging fires that we have witnessed locally and internationally. Mass destruction has been wrought on institutions of learning and healing, natural resources charred and burned to the ground. Just google “recent fires”, and you will see the world is burning.

What’s happening here, dear Baal Shem Tov?

We are in the midst of the Jewish year 5781 – the numerical value of 81 in Hebrew is made up of two letters, *phey* (80) and *aleph* (1). Together, these two letters spell out the world *af*. *Af* is nose in Hebrew, the aperture through

which we bring in breath and life into our bodies. *Af* can also mean wrath, anger – a destructive force that ravages everything in its path.



Our world and its inhabitants are in turmoil. Our selfish greed to dominate has trampled on the inherent right of every human being to be recognised as a valuable part of society.

Peer pressure, politics, and man’s animal cravings has extinguished the privilege of every individual to be respected with tolerance, acceptance, brotherhood, and love. The world is screaming, “I can’t breathe!” Life has been sucked out of us, we have been trampled on, we are doing the trampling, and the world is calling out for help.

What happens when we continue to live life in this manner – when it’s all about me and nothing about you? We unleash the fires of dissention, hatred, and intolerance, and it becomes so loud and so overwhelming, it destroys everything in its path and leaves a world burned and charred.

The Baal Shem Tov, however, wouldn’t leave it at that. This viewpoint just engenders a sense of hopelessness and inertia. Reb Yisrael also teaches that everything in life is good, G-d is good, and one must look beyond

the surface and expose the divine.

You can take the word *af* and reverse it – *phey*, *aleph*. That’s an acronym for the Hebrew words *pla’ot areinu* (I will show you wonders). G-d promises us that there will come a time when we will see wonders, we will merit the birth of a world that is filled with love, healing, and connection. The burnt ground will sprout new shoots, new life, and a promise of a better brighter world.

This isn’t pie in the sky. It’s a simple reversal of letters. It’s a simple change of attitude. It’s a commitment to live life on a higher consciousness where we make space for another and we understand that we are really one. We translate this into action by performing acts of goodness and kindness and doing *mitzvot* (commandments of the Torah). Each unadulterated act of selflessness and connection brings G-dly light into this world, and it encourages the growth of new shoots.

This weekend, we celebrate the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai (Shavuot). This was a wondrous event, where the Jewish people stood humbly at the foot of a mountain and pledged allegiance to G-d and His law. We promised to be faithful servants of the divine and a light unto the nations.

So, the lesson is clear. Let’s douse the fire of wrath in our hearts, let’s stamp out all the *faribels* we have, big and small, let’s stop trampling on others. Let’s breathe fresh air back into our souls. Let this be the air of a shared common humanity that asks to live in peace with itself, with others, and with G-d!

Come on. Wake up, smell the coffee, a brand-new day is dawning. It’s going to be wonder-full!

Chag sameach!



REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY

• *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.*

## Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted

**OPINION**

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

Next week is the Jewish festival of Shavuot, Pentecost, when we read the biblical book of Ruth, whose theme is kindness. These two things coming together during this time of isolation made me see the book with new eyes and realise what a contemporary text it is though it tells of events more than 3 000 years ago.

It begins with a couple and their two sons forced to leave home because of famine. They go to a foreign country where their two sons marry local women. Then tragedy strikes. All three men die. The woman, whose name is Naomi, is left a childless widow, the most vulnerable of all positions in the ancient world because there was no one to look after you.

She goes back home, but is so changed that her former neighbours hardly recognise her. Can this be Naomi? They ask. Don’t call me Naomi, she replies – the word means pleasant. Call me Mara – bitter.

That’s how the book begins: with bereavement, isolation, and depression. Yet it ends in joy. Naomi now has a grandson. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, and relative, Boaz, have married and had a child. This is no mere child. In the last line of the book, we discover that he is the grandfather of David, Israel’s greatest king and the author of much of the Book of Psalms.

What transforms Naomi’s life from bitterness to happiness is described by the Hebrew word *chesed*. When, in the early 1530s, William Tyndale was translating the Bible into English for the first time, he realised that there was no English equivalent for *chesed*, so he invented one, the word lovingkindness. Two people’s lovingkindness, Ruth and Boaz, rescued Naomi from depression and gave her back her joy. That’s the power of *chesed*, love as deed.

One of the enduring memories of the coronavirus period will be the extraordinary acts of kindness it evoked, from friends, neighbours, and strangers, those who helped us, kept in touch with us, or simply smiled at us. When fate was cruel to us, we were kind to one another. Human goodness emerged when we needed it most. And some need it more than most.

Kindness redeems fate from tragedy and the wonderful thing is that it doesn’t matter whether we are the giver or the recipient. Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted.

Chag sameach!

• *This article was written by Rabbi Lord Sacks before he passed away last year. It’s taken from www.rabbisacks.org*



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# It's Shavuot: Let them eat milchik

LAUREN BOOLKIN

## SNICKERS CHEESECAKE

The Woolies cream cheese in the silvery box works best. It looks like Philadelphia cheese. Be careful not to buy smooth cottage cheese. Snickers could be swapped out for Bar Ones.

### Ingredients

#### Base

- 2 cups digestive biscuits crushed (about 1½ packets)
- 125ml melted butter
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 2 Tbsp cocoa powder



Snickers cheesecake

### Filling

- 4 tubs cream cheese (1kg)
- 1½ cups of castor sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup cream
- 2 tsp vanilla essence
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 3 Snickers bars chopped (150g) I do a bit more as I tend to eat some

### Topping 1

- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ tsp vanilla essence
- 2 Tbsp castor sugar

- 3 Snickers bars chopped
- Roughly chopped salted peanuts

Combine topping ingredients. Pour over the cake and garnish with chopped Snickers bars and the salted peanuts.

### Topping 2 – salted caramel

- 100g unsalted butter
- 75g brown sugar
- 75g castor sugar
- 75g syrup
- ½ cup cream
- 1 tsp vanilla

Stir all ingredients together for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat, and add one teaspoon of coarse salt. Allow to cool, and pour over the cake. Garnish with chopped Snickers bars but no salted peanuts.

## TRIPOLINE PASTA WITH WALNUTS AND PESTO

Fettuccine works just as well but the Tripoline looks so pretty. If your food processor is parev, you can add the parmesan cheese separately instead of into the food processor. If the pesto mixture doesn't come together in the food processor, add a touch more olive oil.

Place the peas in a small pot with cold water. Bring to the boil, and then drain so that they remain crunchy. Drain in a strainer and set aside.

Place the basil, garlic, olive oil, walnuts, parmesan, salt, and pepper in a food processor. Grind until a paste is formed.

### Ingredients

- 2 cups of basil destalked, washed, and dried
- 1 clove of garlic
- 50g walnuts
- ½ cup of olive oil
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 level tsp of salt
- Grind of black pepper
- 1 punnet of baby tomatoes on the vine
- 1 cup of fresh peas
- Pea shoots for garnish

### Method

Preheat your oven to 180C. On a baking sheet, toast your walnuts for about 10 minutes until they are crunchy (start checking on them after eight minutes). In a small oven-proof dish, roast the destalked tomatoes, saving a bunch on the stalk for garnishing. They are done when they begin to pop open.



Tripoline pasta with walnuts and pesto

Bring a large pot of water to the boil. Add the pasta, and cook until it's tender but not mushy. Drain, reserving a small amount of the water to loosen the pesto paste. Toss the pesto and the pasta together. Add the reserved water gradually so that the pasta is well coated. (You may not need it.)

Gently stir in the roasted tomatoes and cooked peas. Garnish with the pea shoots and tomatoes on the vine.

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The (divine) voices inside your head

OPINION RABBI GREG ALEXANDER



If you tell anyone that you have heard the voice of G-d speaking to you, they might give you the name of a good therapist. But the festival of Shavuot is a celebration of the moment that the entire Jewish nation heard the voice of G-d. Wow! What did that feel like? What did G-d's voice even sound like?



Reading the account of it in the Torah, it was a pretty overwhelming – even frightening – moment. The Israelites “saw voices”, “heard lightning”, Mt Sinai was all ablaze (a sight that Capetonians got a taste of only a few weeks ago), and a heavenly shofar called from above the mountain. Some commentators understand that it was so overwhelming, the Israelites fled and heard only the first two commandments – the rest were taught to them by Moses. In fact, one Chassidic master understood that all the Israelites heard was the first letter of the 10 utterances, the letter *aleph* (Rebbe Menachem Mendel of Rimanov – 1745-1815). What did that voice sound like? Can you imagine it? Did it sound like James Earl

Jones (deep and gravelly)? A whisper? Was it like thunder or wind? When I lived in London in the late 1990s, I was part of the programming team for Limmud UK, and we brought out Rabbi Everett Fox as a presenter. Rabbi Fox is an internationally prominent scholar from Brandeis University in Boston. He had recently published a fantastic new translation and commentary on the Torah, and we were excited to have him at Limmud. I still remember one of his sessions, which was on the film *The Prince of Egypt* that had come out that year. It's a big budget, animated version of the Exodus story made by DreamWorks Animation with A-list movie stars like Helen Mirren, Ralph Fiennes, and Michelle Pfeiffer doing the voiceovers.

What made it newsworthy was that it was the first big Hollywood treatment of the story since the classic 1956 Cecil B. DeMille *The Ten Commandments*, and Rabbi Fox was one of the consultants to the studio on the project. He showed us clips from the film, and talked us through some of the decisions that the filmmakers had consulted him on when they had to make “theological” statements in their portrayal of events from the Bible. When we got to the burning bush scene, Rabbi Fox explained that the director had a dilemma. How to portray the voice of G-d? Charlton Heston had famously done the booming voice in 1956, but the director felt

Continued on page 19>>

Closer to G-d in the desert

OPINION ILANA STEIN



It's no coincidence that Shavuot takes place just after we read the portion of Torah called Bamidbar (In the desert). It's the beginning of the book of that name, a book that's filled with the difficult coming-of-age of the Jewish people. But it's also the place that the Jews went to from Egypt. What's this desert experience, then? Desert is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as “A waterless, desolate area of land with little or no vegetation, typically one covered with sand.” I've been in many a desert, and I must beg to differ with the OED (with all due respect to that august work) and its adjective of “desolate”, which has a distinctly negative connotation. For naturalists, the desert has a different definition. Deserts cover about one-fifth of the earth's surface, they usually get at most 50cm (20 inches) of rainfall a year, and the organisms that live in them are adapted to this extremely dry climate. (Courtesy National Geographic). So, the desert, while not being easy to live in, is in fact a place of plants and animals that have overcome its difficulties, not just to survive but thrive. How does Jewish thought see the desert? The midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7) questions the phrase “bemidbar Sinai – in the Sinai Desert” – “And G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert”. (Numbers 1:1). Why the Sinai Desert? From here, the sages taught that the Torah was given through three things: fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know it was given through desert? As it says above, “And G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert”. And why was the Torah given through these three things? Just as (fire, water, and wilderness) are free to all the inhabitants of the world, so too are the words of Torah free to them. Another explanation: “And G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert” is that anyone who doesn't make themselves ownerless like the wilderness cannot acquire the wisdom and the Torah. Therefore, it says, “the Sinai Desert”. The idea of desert, then, is vital to the idea of Torah. In ancient times, no-one owned the desert – it was free to all

who wished to walk it. Just so, the Torah belongs to all who seek its wisdom. Further, no-one can claim to own the true meaning of the Torah, saying “I, and only I, know what the Torah is saying”. After all, as the Talmud in a number of places states, “These and these are the words of the living G-d.” Moreover, there is a psychological element to the statement, “Anyone who doesn't make themselves ownerless (hefker) . . .” True learning of the Torah requires one to rid oneself of ego, to remove all sense of one's own intellectual capabilities, pride, or arrogance. It's so easy to feel that one has learnt “a lot” of Torah, spending time in a yeshiva or school to do so. But the Torah is vast, its horizon a mirage, which makes it difficult to navigate. Just like a desert. In the middle of the Kalahari Desert, I was struck by the vastness of physical space as well as the enormity of the silence. Indeed, the silence was so loud, I felt I could hear the earth spinning on its axis. I was humbled, struck by my smallness in the midst of the power of the desert. This is the mindset that the midrash demands of the students of Torah. Finally, it's in the desert that one can talk to G-d. Life is cleared of all extraneous detail, whittled down to its essentials.



It's only earth, and few creatures and plants. All baggage is cleared, and it's just you, the stillness of the rocks, the wind sifting the grains of sand – and G-d, waiting to speak to you in the silence. • *Ilana Stein is head of education of the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, where she also lectures on Tanach and Jewish environmental ethics.*

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# Celebrating the heroes who help the aged

TALI FEINBERG

When your grandmother isn’t given the care she needs, it will probably have an impact on you. For Lethabo Selowe, the nursing unit manager at Sandringham Gardens, it inspired her to become a nurse and work with the elderly.

Selowe works in the assisted living area. She started working for the Chevrah Kadisha in 2015, and has been a nurse for nine years.

“My grandmother was in a government hospital, and she wasn’t getting the care she needed. No one would feed or bathe her. So I had to go there and take part. And I realised I had a passion for nursing and helping other people.”

Selowe says it’s “a very challenging career, as I didn’t know what to expect”. But she also finds it enormously fulfilling. “When you care for people and it has an impact – that’s the best part. The worst part is dealing with difficult residents and their families.”

Selowe is just one of the 415 nurses and caregivers who work for the Chev looking after the elderly. Many of our elderly Jewish family members and friends live in one of the Chev’s residential facilities. Day and night, these nurses care for their every needs. They travel long distances, and work 12-hour shifts to do this crucial work.

Ahead of International Nurses Day on 12 May, Chev Chief Executive Saul Tomson told the *SA Jewish Report*, “Many of our residents are frail, disabled, and handicapped, mentally or physically. On this special day, we pay tribute to our nurses and carers who are doing the most demanding work caring for them. Of our 1 000 staff members, 95% work with the living. The vast majority of the Chev’s work is centred on care, and recognising these heroes is so important.

“They wake up at the crack of dawn, travel long distances, and do very difficult work with smiles on their faces. Many residents rely heavily on these helpers for their everyday needs – from feeding them, getting them out of bed, to even changing a diaper. While we sleep at night, the nurses and carers stay awake and turn

the residents in their sleep so they don’t get bedsores.”

Nurses and carers offer compassion and dignity to all residents, even those who might not have their full faculties and are sometimes aggressive as a result. Many of these nurses



Residents getting the best care at Sandringham Gardens

dedicated and devoted organisation.”

Siphiwe Nxumalo, a caregiver at Sandringham Gardens, has been a nurse for two years and at the Chev for nine months. “It’s very special, and I’ve learned a lot about the Jewish culture. I feel lucky to be working here. They take care of us in so many ways.”

Like Selowe, Nxumalo was motivated to do the work by personal experience. “I had a baby in 2017, and my care wasn’t pleasing. It wasn’t the care that I was supposed to get, and I had complications. That motivated me. I wanted to be a better nurse than that.”

For her, the best part of the work is when “you’re caring for a resident, and they get well and get back to normal life. Losing someone is hard, especially because we build strong relationships. They are part of our family as we spend most of our time at work. So it’s really tough when you get in and hear bad news.”

and carers leave their own families – including elderly parents – to do this work. During the pandemic, the community and residents’ families haven’t been able to visit and in turn, witness this important work. In addition, residents haven’t seen their families for more than a year, so nurses and carers have had to fill that gap.

“You build up a relationship with residents, so it’s very hard when someone passes away,” Selowe says. “You feel confused – lots of big emotions. If you’re not expecting it, it can just break you.” She says the pandemic has been challenging, but they are so used to wearing PPE (personal protective equipment) now “that it’s part of our bodies. Even after COVID-19, we will carry on wearing it because we are so used to it.”

To those thinking of going into nursing as a career, she says, “It’s important to be patient and to want to serve, give, and care.” She believes nurses and carers should be celebrated because of their “hard work and dedication to the world. Working at the Chev is an honour and a privilege. It’s wonderful being part of a

## The (divine) voices inside your head

>>>Continued from page 18

that they needed something less gendered and patriarchal in their film. They experimented with a female voice, but it felt too contrived. They tried to mix a male and female voice, but it sounded too weird. Eventually, they used the voice of Val Kilmer, the actor who plays Moses himself, and mixed in the whispered voices of other actors playing his family and friends.

You might say that this is a humanistic take on G-d, and that it implies that it’s just a voice in our head and not divine. But Rabbi Fox taught the text he showed the filmmakers from a rabbi 1 500 years ago in Eretz Yisrael who explained it like this:

“Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘When G-d’s voice came forth, it split into seventy voices in seventy languages, in order that all of the nations would hear it.’ How did the voice go forth? [It came] to every Israelite according to their strength – to the elders, to the young adults, to the minors, to the children, to the women, each according to their strength; even to Moses according to his strength, as it is said, ‘Moses spoke, and G-d answered him with a voice,’ (Exodus 19:19) a voice that Moses could bear. (Sh’mot Rabbah 5:9)”

G-d didn’t shout or boom. G-d used a voice that each could hear in their way.

Why can’t we hear that voice today? Well, many

spiritual leaders of many faiths would assure you that you can. And many rabbis would agree. Take the Chassidic master, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, who was asked the following question: “Why is Shavuot called zman matan Torateinu (the time the Torah was given) rather than ‘the time we received the Torah’?” He answered, “The giving took place on one day, but the receiving takes place at all times.”

Yes, the revelation at Sinai was a once-in-history event. We are still learning about and processing what happened and what we can learn from it. For that, we have the Torah and 2 000 years of commentaries from the wisest minds of our people.

And yet, every day, every moment, there is an opportunity to hear that voice anew. And there is none better than the festival of Shavuot when we read, “and G-d spoke”, but the challenge to us is how to hear it.

Some hear it from the heavens, some hear it within, some in the call of the wild, and some in cries for help or justice. Some in the sleeping face of a newborn child or the look of their lover. Wherever you hear it, may you have a chag sameach!

•Rabbi Greg Alexander is part of the rabbinic team at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation.

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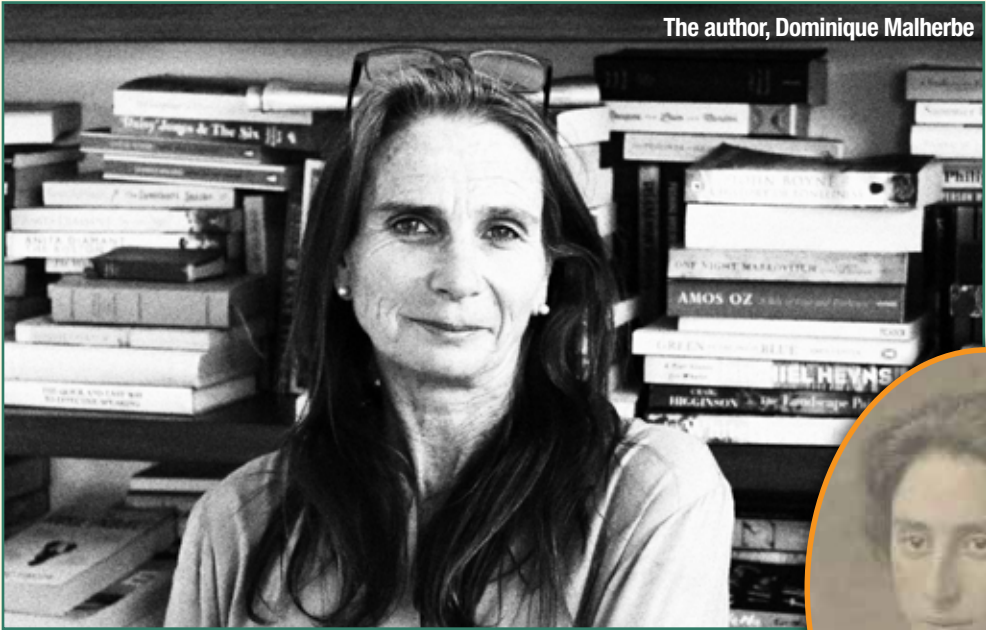
# The Jewish woman behind CJ Langenhoven’s legacy

TALI FEINBERG

They say that behind every great man is a great woman, and in the case of Sarah Goldblatt and the Afrikaans literary legend CJ [Cornelis Jacobus] Langenhoven, it couldn’t be more true. But who was Goldblatt, and why isn’t she known or celebrated by the Jewish and Afrikaner communities that she belonged to and identified with?

These are some of the questions that spurred local lawyer and author Dominique Malherbe to explore the story of her great aunt, who she only met once, and why Goldblatt has been hidden from history. The result is her newly released book, *Searching for Sarah: The Woman Who Loved Langenhoven*. Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, calls it “a forensic tour de force” in which “secrets are unveiled and silences broken”.

The book tells the story of how Afrikaans literary icon CJ Langenhoven (who wrote the words of *Die Stem*) named Sarah Eva Goldblatt executrix of his extensive literary legacy, much to the surprise of the Afrikaner establishment. Langenhoven died suddenly at the age of 58 in July 1932, but “she kept his legacy and work alive as long as she was alive”, says Malherbe. By the time Goldblatt passed away in 1975, more than two million copies of Langenhoven’s books had been sold, one of



the greatest literary successes ever in South Africa. But her role in this success was never acknowledged. Meanwhile, it’s assumed that she had a relationship with Langenhoven, but there is a mystery about whether they had a child together. The author set out to discover Sarah’s story, reclaim her for posterity, and try to find her son.

Malherbe, whose mother is Jewish, explains her connection to Goldblatt. “Sarah arrived in

Cape Town from London in 1897. She was my grandfather’s sister, so my mother’s aunt. We have a large family in Israel. My grandfather, David Goldblatt, was instrumental in getting the Yiddish language recognised in South Africa. Sarah was very devoted to him and to Yiddish, which she spoke growing up. But at some point, there was a falling out in the family



and David went to New York City, where he did quite well. Sarah never heard from him again. There is a lot of mystery around why he left.”

She explains that during her research, “from a Jewish point of view, there was the least amount of information about her. There was one book on the Jews of District Six, and there is one photograph of David in it”. But besides for traces of Sarah Goldblatt in academic theses no one had explored her fascinating story in full – until now.

“Much of what she did was hidden from public view. We have to think about the time she lived. There was a lot of antisemitism in South Africa and around the world,” says Malherbe. “She met Langenhoven, and quickly followed him to Oudtshoorn. She started working for him when she was 21 and he was 35. It’s clear they had a strong bond. They worked together on a newspaper – she was the editor. This was when there was a thriving Jewish community in Oudtshoorn.”

As part of her research, Malherbe travelled to Oudtshoorn and was saddened to see barely a trace of the Jewish life that once blossomed there.

“When the ostrich industry collapsed, Sarah had to leave, and began a long teaching career in Cape Town,” says Malherbe. “But all the time, she would also work on Langenhoven’s manuscripts. He was a prolific writer, parliamentarian, and lawyer. He wrote everything from science fiction to limericks, and played a key role in getting Afrikaans recognised as a language.”

Just like her father attempted to get Yiddish recognised, here was another man championing a language, and again, Goldblatt became deeply involved. “She was devoted to Afrikaans,” says Malherbe. In fact, many knew her by her Afrikaans nickname, ‘Saartjie.’

Langenhoven went on to marry, but whenever he came to Cape Town, he would stay with Goldblatt. “Over a 20-year period, they corresponded almost every day. In the Stellenbosch library, I came across 21 volumes of letters that he wrote to her,” says Malherbe. “But in her catalogue, there are gaps of time. I was intrigued, and from family members and stories over the years, I gathered that those gaps might have been when a child [that they had together] was mentioned.”

Malherbe set out to find out if she had a long lost cousin. “All I had to trace him was a strange Afrikaans name, and I knew the person didn’t have family. He was born in 1925.” The results of her discoveries will need to be read in the book.

Malherbe emphasises that just because someone isn’t included in an official record doesn’t mean they don’t have a fascinating and important life story. This is especially true for women.

“Even the late John Kannemeyer – the great Afrikaans biographer who wrote Langenhoven’s life story – made sure that Sarah assumed her place, which was nowhere. The fact that she was a woman, Jewish, and Langenhoven’s mistress didn’t fit well with the story, so he described her as a mad woman. He totally dismissed her.” But Malherbe feels that “we need to celebrate people and recognise their contributions to this country, especially Jewish women”.

As someone who has written two memoirs, Malherbe chose to write the story in the style of a memoir. “I essentially wrote the story as I was discovering it. There was so much to explore, and as a lawyer, I’m interested in finding answers and seeing justice in the world. All of that culminated in this book.”

Did she find what she was looking for? “I think for the most part, I did. But I think in the telling and reading of the story, more will emerge.”

## Grandpa Witkin’s memoir offers sage advice for any generation

MIRAH LANGER

Azaida’s wit and wisdom, the measured acumen of a South African private equity pioneer, and the strength-in-vulnerability of a cancer survivor are some of the formidable facets of Arnold Witkin.

Now, they have culminated in the business icon’s debut book, *It’s not a Big Thing in Life*, which offers “strategies for coping”. Although framed as “considerations for my adult grandchildren” they are, in fact, universally applicable.

Nevertheless, Witkin’s grandchildren, ranging in age from seven to 16, while still too young to fully imbibe his insight and delight in the wonders of life, are the inspiration behind the work that awaits their perusal.

As Witkin’s eldest grandchild recalls, “When I was a very young child and living in London, my grandpa and I would sit in these big chairs in his and my grandma’s house and ‘contemplate the universe.’”

Witkin, currently based in Cape Town, expresses his enjoyment at being able to engage with his grandchildren in debate and conversation as they find their emerging voices. “We are able to have that kind of relationship where we can really talk about meaningful ideas,” he says. Yet, this is counterbalanced by their hunger for tales from his own experience, “always asking for stories of what happened to me at different ages”.

It’s from this combination that Witkin, aged 76, takes inspiration for the book, which blends personal anecdotes with his musings on various topics. It’s peppered with illustrations by Dov Fedler, and includes an array of references from *Great Expectations*’ Miss Havisham to Kahlil Gibran and the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. At times, the book even offers some key ideas in list form, something which Witkin decided was suitable after realising that even the ten commandments were in bullet points!

Witkin says he has always written notes to himself and as such, the book was essentially decades in the making. However, he did use the time spent in lockdown, when he couldn’t play his beloved golf three times a week, to focus on the project.

The dozens of topics in the book range from success, work, and money, to coping with problems, making decisions, and love, relationships, and sex. The latter, says Witkin, was the hardest section to write as a grandparent. Yet, he felt that it remained a key aspect of experience and as such, to “not say something would be to slice out a gigantic part of people’s lives”.

Witkin also offers much practical advice – one of his proposals being a return to the lost art of letter writing. He illustrates his point with a poignant story of an



interaction between himself and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. At the time, Sacks had been at the centre of controversy following a misleading article published by *The Guardian*. Via a friend who knew them both, Witkin heard that Sacks was depressed about the matter, and he decided to write him a letter in spite of the two never having met.

After receiving the letter, Sacks wrote back expressing his gratitude for the gesture. Three years later, they met at a function, and Witkin introduced himself, mentioning he had once written the chief rabbi a letter.

“He said, ‘I remember it well. I filed it in my ‘good news’ file. Whenever I get a bit low, I open the file, and page through it.”

Witkin says he remains deeply moved by this example. “Sacks could have walked into his library, opened the pages of hundreds of books, and got divine inspiration. But he was so human.” This is the power of letter writing: “Just the words of strangers can move you.”

Ultimately, Witkin hopes the core message of his books is distilled as an understanding that, “You are responsible for yourself.”

With the exception of a criminal act or extreme tragedy, “Whatever happens to you, you can’t blame anybody else. If you’re in a situation in which you don’t know what to do with your career, relationship, or living

situation, you can get help, but you are responsible for getting the help. Moreover, you can have expectations if you want, but you may be disappointed. Ultimately the only question facing you is, ‘What are you going to do now?’”

Even what looks like inaction is a “decision until you change it. There is no such thing as nothing.” This viewpoint helped put life in perspective, says Witkin, pointing out that he has come to realise that most things in life aren’t “a big thing”.

Yet, “If a very big thing happens, acknowledge that it’s a big thing in life. But then, how long does it stay a big thing in life?” is his next question. The answer to this remains a choice. Here’s where his literary example, Miss Havisham – a woman who after being jilted at the altar, spends the rest of her life waiting in her wedding dress, overseeing the rotten remnants of her wedding feast – becomes a critical point of contemplation.

Witkin has tackled some struggles himself, having undergone five operations in the past 18 years following prostate and thyroid cancer. “The definition of inner conflict is when your body and your mind aren’t in the same place. Now [with cancer treatment], my body was here [undergoing an operation in hospital] and my mind was saying, ‘My G-d. I wish this wasn’t happening.’ So, to get my mind to where my body was, there had to be acceptance. There was nothing I could do about this situation, so I had to get on with life.”

For example, after one operation, Witkin was left in immense pain for weeks. He decided to plan how to cope with this reality. One of his strategies was to tell himself, “I love you exactly as you are.”

“‘I love you’ are powerful words. Most of us don’t think we love ourselves. So, to say this to yourself, at a time when you are feeling miserable and sorry for yourself and looking terrible, it makes you feel protected. You are both being loving and being loved.”

His reflections in the book are combined with humour. For example, following an operation that affected his vocal cords, Witkin lost the use of his voice for some time. During this period, he would open business meetings by declaring, “don’t let the softness of my voice detract from the seriousness of my purpose”.

Indeed, Witkin’s hypothesis is that the barometer of any relationship should be how often you share a genuine laugh.

As to his best witticism, it comes down to wordplay: “What do you call an inexplicable phobia of intricately designed groups of buildings?” he teases.

“It’s called a complex complex complex,” he offers with a hearty laugh.

• *Details on where to purchase Witkin’s book can be found at [www.arniewitkin.com](http://www.arniewitkin.com)*



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# Yummy Shavuot from Yaddies



King David Sandton Grade 7 children pack Shavuot treats at Yad Aharon

Seven hundred families in financial difficulty in the community can now enjoy Shavuot treats including cheesecake, mac n cheese, and pizza thanks to generous monetary and food donations from the community, Jewish schools, and the Rabbi Kraines Chessed Challenge (RKCC).

Their generosity made it possible for Yad Aharon to distribute these special treats, as well as healthy, nutritious food, to community members to make sure that they also have a joyful *chag*.

RKCC is an initiative which has challenged the community to maximise acts of good deeds and

loving kindness during the 49 days of the Omer. The initiative was formed in honour of Rabbi Kraines (zt"l), whose untimely passing left a void in the Johannesburg community. It celebrates the legacy of a man who was known to be a champion of the *mitzvah* of *chesed*. In addition to the RKCC, Yad Aharon's Shavuot drive has involved more than 20 Jewish schools as well as local and international donors who realise the importance it plays in alleviating nutritional insecurity in the community. • To contribute towards the Shavuot drive, visit [www.yadaharon.co.za](http://www.yadaharon.co.za)

# KDVP high school celebrates Jerusalem Day

King David High School Victory Park celebrated Yom Yerushalayim on Monday, 10 May, with a special assembly that highlighted the holiness and beauty of this city, the religious and cultural centre of Judaism, and the capital of Israel since the time of King David 3 000 years ago. The assembly was followed by many activities on the field such as writing notes to the Kotel and letters to soldiers, and painting the image of the wall around the old city.



KDVP students Romy Zidel, Daniella Hellman, Dina Kay, Micayla Taylor, and Hannah Berger celebrate Yom Yerushalayim

# KDVP Pre-Primary views Ark and its treasures

King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park's senior group had an enjoyable outing to the Victory Park Shul last week, accompanied by Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk. Shavuot is about receiving the Torah, and the children were allowed to sit on the Aron Kodesh and see all the magnificently covered Torahs inside. Uzvolk taught the children interesting facts about the Torah, allowing them to see the scrolls and showing them the *yad* (pointer). The children also enjoyed looking at the *ner tamid* (eternal light) while Uzvolk explained that it symbolises that Hashem is



Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk with KDVP Pre-Primary children always with us. The visit ended with seeing the Omer counters behind the rabbi's chair.

## Letters

### LOOKING FOR LONG LOST FAMILY IN AFRICA

I live in the United States, and recently found a letter and postcard that my late mother had shown me many years ago, but we didn't put two and two together that we had lost family somewhere! My mother, Anneliese Nossbaum (nee Winterberg), was from Germany. Although she never lived there (she and her parents lived first in Guben, then Bonn), the other Winterbergs lived in a town called Witzhausen. My mother was a Holocaust survivor, and several members of her family (including the Winterbergs) were interned or died in camps. Her grandmother, Hannchen Winterberg (nee Lomnitz), had a brother, B. Lomnitz, who emigrated with his family to Africa before 1900.

My mother knew that he lived in Johannesburg. Hannchen had three children: Siegfried, my mother's father, perished in Dachau. Amalie married Moritz Vogel, who escaped to New York after Kristallnacht. Gerda married Menna (Max) Goldschmidt, and since he was a communist, escaped with him first to what was then Palestine, and later to New York. I was wondering if anyone knows the Lomnitz family, and how I could be in touch. They could be anywhere now, I know. I'm also writing to Yad Vashem to enquire what is known. I'd be happy to provide more information. – Ivette Moaz, [ivette.maoz@gmail.com](mailto:ivette.maoz@gmail.com)

# Zaka honoured for bravery in Bank of Lisbon inferno

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Jewish rescue and recovery organisation Zaka SA has been awarded a medal of bravery by the Gauteng province for its assistance with the fire in the Bank of Lisbon building in the Johannesburg CBD more than two years ago.

Zaka SA was honoured on International Firefighters Day on 4 May, a day in which the City of Joburg remembered all firefighters who had "courageously put others' lives before their own, saluting them for their selfless dedication and bravery".

Three firefighters lost their lives in the blaze, one plunging to his death on the pavement below, after trying to put out the fire near the top of the high-rise building. The building was subsequently found to be only minimally compliant with health and safety regulations, and firefighters faced a lack of water and oxygen. It has since been demolished.

Zaka SA "rescued the rescuers" by offering psychological support to devastated and exhausted city firefighters, and food for 100 firefighters, with the assistance of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

However, when they reached the scene, Zaka and the SAJBD discovered that 700 students housed in a building next door needed to be evacuated for fear of smoke inhalation, and more food was urgently required to feed them. Zaka was honoured for assisting with the evacuation of these students, and for providing necessary relief. "Bank of Lisbon was a complicated story," said Daniel Forman, the head of Zaka SA. "There was a vacuum of resources including water availability, and we encountered a challenging scene as the



The Medal of Bravery

three firefighters lost their lives soon into the crisis but firefighters had to continue to fight the fire. The biggest challenge was that the fire was so high up in the building, so firefighters had to preserve their oxygen supplies going up."

Zaka SA was set up in 2015 to assist the community with emergency search and rescue, body identification and recovery, and fire-containment

services. Like Zaka around the world, it's entirely staffed by volunteers, and relies on communal support to keep going.

It has two trailers which each hold 600 litres of water, and is often the first responder in suburban fires, where early detection and response can eliminate the need to call city firefighters. However, Forman cautions that 600 litres is used up in just seven minutes, and a house can burn down in minutes, making additional resources mandatory.

Zaka is sometimes called on to fight more than six fires a month, he said, particularly in the winter

months when people rely on heating devices in their homes, and fires are lit by the homeless and security guards to keep warm.

"Zaka's fire-containment unit came about through challenges which exist in the system," Forman said, "including the long wait for firefighters." Another of these challenges is theft of brass parts from neighbourhood fire hydrants, rendering them ineffective.

However, he stressed that the City of Joburg had been involved in a major upgrade of these hydrants, and was amazingly supportive of Zaka generally. He praised the Gauteng government for exposing the organisation's communal efforts.

"Not once have they not responded to our call or thanked us for our help," he said of Joburg's firefighters. "They do an amazing job."

# Germany's antisemitism commissioner urges ban on wearing yellow star

TOBY AXELROD – JTA

Germany's antisemitism commissioner is urging a crackdown on protesters who don yellow stars to complain about the pandemic lockdown.

Speaking on Friday, 7 May, Felix Klein urged authorities across Germany to bar protesters from using the symbol, saying it "relativises" the Holocaust. The Nazis forced Jews to wear a yellow Star of David as a means of humiliating them and marking them for further persecution, deportation, and murder.

Some demonstrators have used the star, emblazoned with the words "non-vaccinated" in a Hebraicised script, to boost their claim of being persecuted for opposing coronavirus policies.

Germany doesn't require that citizens be vaccinated, but is offering to loosen social-distancing restrictions for those who get the shots.

"If people pin so-called Jewish stars on themselves, thereby drawing comparisons that relativise the Holocaust, then the means provided by law should be applied against them," Klein told Germany's *Tagesspiegel* newspaper.

While Holocaust denial is against the law in Germany, relativisation skirts the legal boundaries. But it's important to ban this particular abuse of history, German political scientist and antisemitism expert Hajo Funke said in a telephone interview.

"If you combine the yellow star and 'not vaccinated', this can easily be banned" in Germany, Funke told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. But to ensure success in court, he said, "I would do it as an order of the police and the ministry of the interior," and not as matter of national law.

For example, "I would advise the president of the police

in Berlin to forbid the wearing of the yellow star in that kind of demonstration, full stop."

Klein first raised the issue of a ban last year, and Jewish leaders have been supportive.

Munich banned the practice in June, and Wiesbaden followed suit in July. Wiesbaden mayor Oliver Franz said at the time that the comparison relativised the Nazi crimes "in an absolutely intolerable way".

It goes beyond the yellow star: demonstrators have compared themselves to Sophie Scholl and other



Photo: @ZSKBerlin/Twitter

A man protests against coronavirus restrictions with a yellow star and photo of Anne Frank outside the Holocaust memorial in Berlin

executed members of the German White Rose resistance group, as well as to Anne Frank, the Jewish teenager who died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her diary, published after the war, made her a Holocaust icon.

The abuse of these symbols of resistance and suffering "is all the same shit", Funke said. "To put it more diplomatically, it's utterly historically wrong."

It's fair to protest against government measures, he said, but "they cannot pretend they are in the resistance or they are persecuted compared to the Jews in the Nazi period – not at all. It's dangerous."



**Baby City**

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF WISH YOU



CHAG  
*Shavuot*  
SAMEACH





A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Conflict and media bias pose greater risk for Shavuot

As we count down the final days to Shavuot, we are also keeping an anxious eye on events in the Middle East, where after a long period of relative quiet on the Israeli-Palestinian front, there is again an upsurge in deadly violence. As in years gone by, Jerusalem and in particular the Temple Mount area provided the spark leading to a renewed wave of hostilities against the Jewish state, including a resumption of missile fire on Israeli cities from Gaza.

The media coverage of events has yet again been characterised by an uncritical acceptance of Palestinians’ claims while those of Israel have, as usual, been downplayed or ignored altogether. As ever, it’s Israeli retaliation rather than Palestinian provocation that the mainstream media appear to regard as a cause for righteous indignation. Working with the South African Zionist Federation, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is doing as much as possible to bring greater balance to the coverage, including arranging for local and international spokespeople to appear on various radio stations around the country.

Times of intensified conflict in Israel are always deeply disquieting for Jewish communities everywhere, not only because of natural distress over the danger in which the Israeli people find themselves, but because of the heightened risk of retaliatory attacks against Jews in general. In South Africa, we have always witnessed a sharp spike in antisemitic activity during periods of serious violence in the region. The SAJBD is carefully monitoring events, especially discourse in social media, to identify and, where required,

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



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev




respond to any antisemitic threats. We ask that members of our community assist us by keeping their ears to the ground, and alert us via [sajbd@sajbd.org](mailto:sajbd@sajbd.org) to any incidents that come to their attention.

In addition to concerns about the possible fall-out from the conflict, we need to be aware that *yom tov* is a time when we need to be especially vigilant against possible attacks. All those who will be going to shul should therefore be sure to comply strictly with the guidelines provided by the Community Security Organisation and their congregations, including not gathering outside one’s shul before and after services.

A second area where we need to be extra cautious is meticulous adherence to COVID-19 restrictions, which involves social distancing before, during, and after services. With winter upon us and infection rates starting to climb once more including within our own community, we have a responsibility to ourselves and those around us to do everything we can to minimise any risk of contracting or spreading the disease.

In closing, I wish you a chag Shavuot sameach. May it be a safe, peaceful, and fulfilling *yom tov* for all of us.

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



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## Friends can do no wrong


I keep trying to muster up notable outrage at the South African government for its one sided and biased approach to Israel. I keep trying to shake my head in disgust and pen witty and wonderful one-liners that will hurt it more than it will hurt me. I keep trying to be disappointed that it’s quick to point out Israel’s faults, but falls silent when Hamas rockets fall. But I haven’t managed so far. And the reason might be that I no longer care.

For all the right reason, I want to be bothered by the uneven response. I’m a South African, I adore all the people of the country, and I continue to invest in its growth and success. I’m, however, also acutely aware of how little standing we have and how irrelevant we have become on the international stage. In some ways it’s like we’ve undertaken a 12-step programme to discredit ourselves globally and we’ve finally reached our goal. Sadly.

South Africa’s obsession with Cuba hasn’t helped. Embracing a country whose citizens are denied basic democratic rights is perplexing, especially given that that is the very thing it accuses Israel of doing. The harbouring of Omar al Bashir when a warrant for his arrest for war crimes was known to the African National Congress (ANC), something that South Africa accuses Israel of, is another. Then, the refusal of the government to voice horror at China’s treatment of the Uighur Muslims when it maintains that Israel is somehow guilty of “ethnic cleansing” all illustrates the inconsistency and hypocrisy of the government. Add to that the murderous

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



silence when it comes to treatment of Zimbabweans, and the pattern isn’t difficult to see.

Very simply, friends of the ANC can do no wrong. And Israel can do no right.

What has exacerbated the situation is the ANC’s lack of understanding of the facts. Just as the ANC was captured by the Guptas and anyone else willing to open their wallets, so too has it been captured by the “anti-Israel” lobby.

Just as it was quick to share the country’s wealth with those who didn’t deserve it, so too has it shared our apartheid history and allowed those not entitled to it to use it. And because “apartheid” doesn’t apply to the Israeli context, facts needed to be changed so that it does. Misinformation, untruths, and emotional manipulation are all employed to make sure that an ill-fitting glove is made to fit.

I would love the ANC to stand for truth and integrity. I would love it to be able to play a meaningful role in some way internationally. I would love it to be the voice of reason that calms Hamas, limits death, and reduces terror. I would love nothing more than for it to be the organisation that it has the potential to be, and not what it is today. Until that time, as much as I would like to care about its utterings, I really don’t.

## Pew study shows 75% of Orthodox Jews identify as Republicans

SHIRA HANAU – JTA

Among the findings of the Pew Research Center’s new survey of American Jews is one that has become increasingly self-evident in recent years: orthodox Jews in the United States overwhelmingly affiliate with the Republican Party.

According to the newest study, 75% of orthodox Jews surveyed said they were Republicans or leaned Republican. In 2013, the last year in which Pew conducted a survey of American Jews, 57% of orthodox Jews said they were Republicans or leaned Republican.

The Pew survey was conducted between November 19 2019 and 3 June 2020, a period of dramatic polarisation across America in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential election. It found a large political polarisation by denomination in American Jewry: among all Jews, 71% are or lean Democratic, and 26% identify more with Republicans.

While orthodox Jews have been moving rightward politically for years, the data from Pew suggests that politically progressive orthodox Jews aren’t just outnumbered but are a shrinking minority within their communities. And it demonstrates the strikingly different ways that orthodox and non-orthodox Jews viewed Donald Trump’s presidency.

While non-orthodox Jews largely disapproved of Trump’s handling of nearly every aspect of the role, orthodox Jews were the only ones to give overwhelming approval for his job performance, particularly on Israel. Among orthodox Jews,

86% rated Trump’s handling of policy on Israel as “excellent” or “good” compared with 40% overall of respondents who rated his handling of Israel policy as good or excellent.

Matt Williams, the director of the Orthodox Union’s Center for Communal Research and an adviser on the new Pew study, said that orthodox Jewish affinity with the Republican Party shouldn’t be attributed entirely to the party’s stance on Israel.

“If you look at the Pew lines on things like same-sex marriage, you see significantly strong alignment between the orthodox community and what we think of as the Republican platform or conservative value or ethos on that score,” Williams said.

The new Pew numbers come with a giant asterisk, as the researchers worked from a small sample size of 430 Orthodox Jews nationwide out of 4 718 American Jews surveyed overall. Due to the sample size, the margin of error among orthodox Jews is 8.8 points – nearly three times as large as the margin of error for the data on all American Jews. The new study also was conducted using a different methodology than the 2013 study, making it harder to draw direct comparisons between the two data sets.

But, according to Williams, the data showing the jump in Republican affiliation among Orthodox Jews from the 2013 study to this year’s survey is large enough to rely on.


The Trump administration has embraced the orthodox Jewish community with unusual warmth. There was even a minyan on the White House lawn at the signing of the Abraham Accords.

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