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# South African Jewish Report

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## Biden's daughter-in-law in SA for mom's funeral

NICOLA MILTZ

The daughter-in-law of United States President Joe Biden was on route to South Africa on Wednesday to attend her beloved mother's funeral in Johannesburg.

Melissa Cohen-Biden, 34, who is married to the president's son, Hunter Biden, was due to arrive in South Africa on Thursday morning, just hours before her mother, Zoe Cohen, was to be laid to rest.

Zoe, 72, passed away on Monday after a short illness.

Although Zoe was the *machatenesta* of the most powerful man in the Western world, she was a formidable woman of strength and inspiration in her own right.

The mother of four was a well-known and highly respected social worker for the Chevrah Kadisha for many years and had her own private practice where she specialised in adoptions and surrogacies.

Messages of support have continued to stream in on social media since her sudden passing. According to her legion of friends, Zoe touched the lives of countless people in her bid to marry babies and children with their forever homes, and helped hundreds of couples become parents.

According to her son, Garyn, a special place has been reserved for his mother at Westpark Cemetery to honour her lifetime achievements and contribution to the community.

Her friends this week said she was "a little woman with a big heart" who never

had a bad word to say about anyone.

"My mother was a special angel who always put other people's needs before her own. Even though she was small in stature, she was larger than life," said Garyn.

the family's own pets. "Our house was sometimes called 'Zoe's Zoo'. This is where my sister Melissa got her love for animals," said Garyn.

hospital after surgery, and stayed for a week in the country with her father, Lee. She was accompanied by security guards wherever she went, and the visit was kept under wraps. She left South Africa with no idea that her mother would take a sudden turn for the worst.

"When Melissa was here, our mother was doing well. She couldn't believe it when we called her to say that our mom was gone. They were very close. She is heartbroken."

At the time of going to press, Melissa was on her way back to South Africa. The family waited for her to arrive before the funeral could take place on Thursday.

She left her baby, Beau, with Hunter in Los Angeles where the couple live.

Said Garyn, "Hunter would have loved to have joined her, but he stayed behind with Beau. He adored my mother. They got on very well from the moment they met. My parents visited Melissa and Hunter in America, and spent time with them there. Unfortunately, they didn't get to meet Joe and Jill Biden at the time."

Melissa's brother, Dalan, and his wife, Amy, who live in Atlanta, joined the couple at the presidential inauguration. Their other brother, Joshua, lives in Canada and has yet to meet the Biden clan.

This will be the first time the four siblings will be together in a long time.

"It's wonderful for us, but our mom will be missing," said Garyn.

As tributes continue to pour in, clinical psychologist Mandy Rodrigues said Zoe was a "legend in the field of fertility".



Source: Facebook

Melissa Cohen-Biden and her mother, Zoe Cohen

He said Zoe insisted on fostering children at the family home every weekend. "We had children from Arcadia and the Princess Alice Adoption Home stay with us every weekend. We used to joke that my friends got confused between them and my real siblings. My mom felt it was important for these children to experience what it was like to be part of a family."

She also adored animals, taking in strays and abandoned animals as well as

The Cohens adopted Melissa when she was three years old. "My parents had three boys and all of a sudden, there was a little sister. Melissa changed the dynamics and completed our home. We adored her from the minute she came into our lives," he said.

Zoe was diagnosed with a brain tumour on 22 April. She had surgery 10 days later, and passed away within weeks from a host of complications.

A devastated Melissa visited her mother in Johannesburg while she recovered in

Continued on page 3>>



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# No ceasefire in SA antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

Anti-Israel incidents continued to occur around South Africa in spite of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, with many turning antisemitic and targeting individuals and businesses.

One message was sent around the globe as South African Jews the world over reeled at the shameless attack on businesspeople who have South Africa's best interests at heart. These include the executive chairperson of Cape Union Mart, Philip Krawitz, and the owner of Dis-Chem.

"Brother and sisters, this fight is far from over. It's time for us not to just talk the talk but also walk the walk. We have Zionist enemies in our midst and we have to educate ourselves and our families as to who they are and how we can counter them," wrote Shukri Darries, in a message riddled with spelling errors that the SA Jewish Report has corrected here.

"Firstly, we cannot boycott all their products because we will become overwhelmed once we discover how much of our country they actually own. We have to be targeted in our approach and hit a few at a time," Darries wrote, amongst many untrue points. "The money we unknowingly/foolishly or wilfully spend here is directly helping to keep our brothers and sisters oppressed. We need a slight mindset change to achieve victory against these Zionists under our noses."

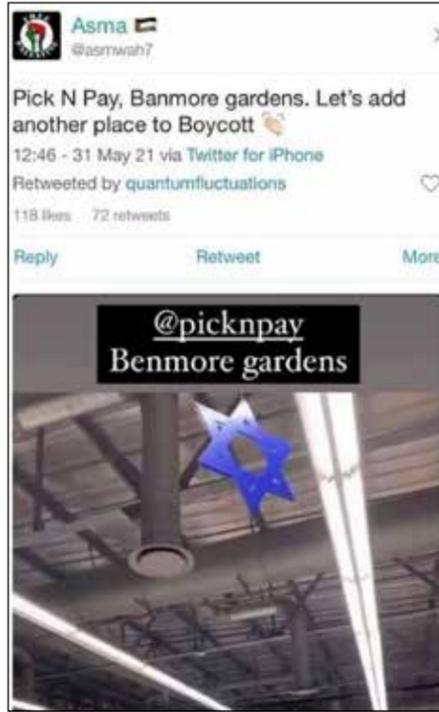
Another message making the rounds on WhatsApp called for a boycott of the Benmore Gardens Pick n Pay, accompanied by an image of a Magen David hanging from the roof of the store (presumably above a kosher section).

Meanwhile, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD) David Saks reports that "the 200 reported antisemitic incidents in South Africa recorded in May almost exceed those logged in the first four months of the year. In addition to direct antisemitic attacks on Jewish individuals or institutions, there has been a predictable upsurge in antisemitic rhetoric on social media. This rhetoric has been characterised by an unusually high degree of religiously-motivated antagonism.

"The incidents recorded to date include one of physical assault, three involving threats of violence, four of verbal abuse, and six of direct abuse on social media," he says. "There have further been numerous calls for Jewish

businesses to be boycotted, and several occasions where calls have been made at public rallies for 'Zionists to be kicked out of South Africa'."

For example, "a community member was punched twice in the face after getting into a verbal altercation with anti-Israel protestors on Louis Botha Avenue in Johannesburg. In addition, a community member was threatened at a Johannesburg gym.



"Protestors gathered outside a community member's home in Rouxville saying that they wanted 'to take his house and bomb him'. They took pictures of his house, and one also said, 'I am a terrorist and will kill you.'"

Norwood bakery Baked on Grant has advertised that the shop will "continuously assess our supply chain to ensure that we don't support Zionists". When a community member queried this, she was told by the owner that she "wouldn't buy from Jews".

Saks says the SAJBD is assisting community members and examining its legal options to respond to incidents.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn says, "BDS [Boycott Divestment Sanctions] activities have zero impact on Israel or on bringing peace to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. All it is doing is attempting to intimidate and threaten

South African Jews. Its ongoing campaigns to demonise and boycott Jewish businesses in South Africa, something it has been attempting for close on a decade, clearly shows its antisemitic intent. As much as it has pitifully tried to mask its antisemitic boycott using the "Zionist" mask, it is exposed again and again. The call on Twitter to boycott Pick n Pay Banmore (sic) because it has a Magen David over the kosher section shows that the boycott is against kosher food and therefore South African Jews. Baked on Grant let the façade slip when the owner told a community member on the phone 'I won't buy from Jews'. BDS, your colours are showing."

While the business owners mentioned in Darries' message felt that they couldn't respond for fear of a backlash, the SA Jewish Report was able to obtain a letter that the executive chairperson of Cape Union Mart, Krawitz, wrote to his staff, bringing sanity and hope amidst the hate to which he was subjected.

"I'm greatly saddened by messages through social media accusing me of providing funds for the Israeli army and therefore calling on Muslims to boycott companies within our group," wrote Krawitz. "It's concerning that such stories can do the rounds without making any attempt to establish the facts. These emails date back to 2014, when a similar smear campaign was launched. There is absolutely no truth whatsoever to the allegation that I have ever donated funds to the Israeli army. On the contrary, I have always adopted a pacifist approach, and have never donated money to any army anywhere in the world. I have often stated that after the battle, peace talks inevitably take place. Why, therefore, should one not start with the peace talks and avoid the tragic loss of lives?"

"Just as I respect all religions, I'm a proud Jew," he continued. "I have a special spiritual connection with Israel, but have equally been a long time protagonist of the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace and mutual co-operation. My publicly-stated views on this subject have been quoted in the media as far back as 2002 (Cape Argus, May 2002). I have repeated these views

Continued on page 7>>

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### Torah Thought

## How to avoid blindness

Do you want to preserve your eyesight? Mishna Berura (24, 7) quotes an ancient custom that will prevent blindness. Passing the tzitzit over our eyes when reciting the third paragraph of the shema will guarantee that we don't lose the ability to see. How are we to understand this blessing?

The final passage of this week's Torah reading teaches us the mitzvah of tzitzit, the fringes we are instructed to attach to the edges of four-cornered garments in order to remember all of Hashem's commandments. After spelling out the details of the laws of tzitzit, the portion concludes with a seemingly unrelated reminder that Hashem took us out of Egypt.

Egypt is actually the embodiment of the polar opposite of remembering. This was the country that forgot all about Joseph and all the blessings he had brought

upon the land, saving them from a certain famine. A generation later, his erstwhile VIP family, who had been invited to settle in Goshen as the king's preferred subjects, were enslaved and committed to hard labour. This was a blatant display of ingratitude – a total lack of appreciation for Joseph's contribution.

Instead, the Egyptians turned a blind eye to the plight of the Hebrews around them, never objecting to the injustices decreed upon them by Pharaoh. This explains why one of the ten plagues was darkness, a physical manifestation of their ingrate sightlessness. The Hebrew word for this plague is *choshech*, which is written with the three letters *chaf-shin-chet*, letters which also spell the words *shachach* (forgot) and *kichesh* (denied).

The precept of tzitzit is about remembering – the antithesis of

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, Oxford Shul



the Egyptians' behaviour. Hashem took us out of that land, physically and spiritually, removing us from and from us the evil of ungratefulness. The tzitzit, on the contrary, are all about gratitude, a reminder of the 613 commandments given to us after the exodus. (The numerical value of the word tzitzit, 600, added to the number of strings, eight, and knots, five, that make up each of the four fringes, serves as a mnemonic of these obligations.)

Hence, the custom to pass these fringes over our eyes each time we call out the word tzitzit when reading the third paragraph of the shema every morning. This will ensure that we aren't struck with the blindness of the Egyptians. And, please G-d, the merit of the mitzvah will also preserve our physical eyesight.

# Nigerian soccer star injured in rocket attack on Israel

PAULA SLIER AND SASHA STAR

"I heard the boom, and then the pressure came, and that was it. I was out," is how former Kaizer Chiefs striker, Ibezito Ogbonna, remembers the moment after a Gaza rocket hit the Ashdod apartment building where he and his family live.

"There was the smell of gas. And everywhere was messed up. The glass was all over. Everything was in a mess."

The Nigerian soccer player says he's lucky to be alive. It was around 14:00, and he, his Israeli wife, and two young daughters aged five and two-and-a-half, were in the middle of eating. After a six-hour lull, Hamas started launching barrages of rockets at southern Israel. The ceasefire was still four days away.

"All I can remember is that when the siren came, I was just doing the usual. And then I was in-between the washing machine and the dining table and there was glass everywhere in front of me. I remember feeling a push like a pressure pushed me all the way to the sitting room, like it

were unharmed, but the 38-year-old was rushed to hospital with injuries. Two weeks later, he is still going for check-ups as he is having problems with his hearing. He is also on heart pills and doctors have identified sounds in his head. His daughters are suffering flashbacks.

"People, rescuers, paramedics, and the fire service responded immediately. Everywhere was packed. They were trying to help everyone evacuate from the building because it was almost on fire. We were just lucky that the rocket didn't hit close to the building's central gas network. It was only a few meters off. If it hit that, I don't think any of us would have survived."

Ogbonna came to live in Israel four years ago to marry his long-time



girlfriend, Katia, whom he met more than a decade ago when he played soccer for Hapoel Tel Aviv. He still has Israeli fans, not least because during the four seasons he played for the club, he kept his title as a "king of goals".

"All my fans were calling me and checking up on me all this time. I got the most massive love I've ever got in my life. My phone was ringing off the hook for

days. Messages were coming. It was crazy. I've never seen such a thing in my life, and if people here can have such love for each other, I don't think we will have a problem in this life."

Ogbonna remembers some rockets being fired at Israel when he lived in the country in the early 2000s, but nothing like what he experienced last month.

"The rockets kept coming, like 300, 500 at a time. Luckily we have the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] using the Iron Dome to protect citizens. I give them the credit. Imagine if all of those rockets hit Israel? Nobody would be here, it

would be like a ghost land."

As for Hamas and those who support its actions, he has some strong words.

"You come to me first, and I have to protect my family, my land, against you. And then you try to make

it look like we're the ones who have been humiliating you. I'll do whatever it takes to take you out, and I give credit to Netanyahu who has been doing whatever it takes to

protect his people, unlike my own president of Nigeria, who doesn't even give a f\*\*\* about his own people. So whoever is talking s\*\*\* about Israel protecting her own people against the terrorists is just talking sh\*\*\*.

"I hear people yippy-yapping, talking about the Palestinians. People don't know what we go through here – we who are citizens here."

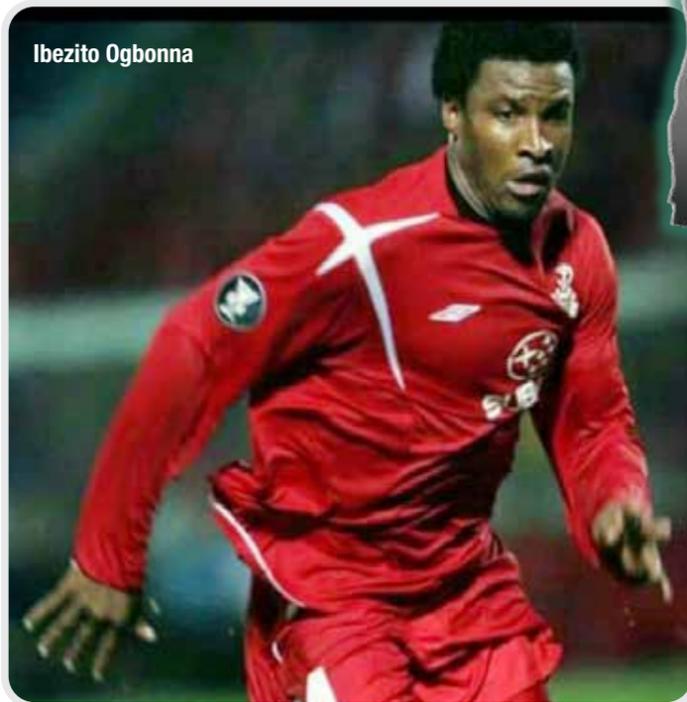
Ogbonna is also angered by accusations that Israel is a racist, apartheid state.

"I've been traveling all my life. I've been to more than 35 different countries, and I think this is the only place where I found love. I've been to countries where a white boy just comes up to me to touch my skin, like maybe I'm dirty or something. And then there're guys who talk shit because I'm black. But I've never, even when I was playing football, had such an experience here, like racism, or words from fans, because I'm black. And so I think that whatever they're talking, it's because they haven't been here to see how people live in harmony. In love. As humans."

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Ibezito Ogbonna

picked me up from the seat."

After Ogbonna regained consciousness, the first thing he did was look for his wife and children.

"My wife grabbed the kids and ran to the bathroom. We didn't even have enough time to run down to the bomb shelter and in the end, we were really lucky that we didn't try, because I guess we would have got hit so badly, maybe we wouldn't have survived. The rocket pulled out all the doors, even the security door was out. Can you imagine the pressure?"

Fortunately, Ogbonna's wife and daughters

## Biden's daughter-in-law in SA for mom's funeral

>>Continued from page 1

"Zoe has been a constant in all our lives in the field [of fertility]. How do you say goodbye to someone who has always been a wise, humble, and dedicated worker in the field you were passionate about? Someone who contributed so much time not only to making us more aware of adoption, but mentoring many of us. You always taught me to act within the confines of the law, no matter how many hearts were broken, and we shared so many cases over the years.

"I remember you as someone with integrity and so much wisdom and kindness. You always made the needs of babies and children in your care your number-one priority. Your name will always be linked to those of us you have blessed families with."

The Cohen siblings and their father will sit *shiva* together at Garyn's Johannesburg house, where, no doubt, they will reminisce about their

colourful childhood.

According to the family, Zoe studied social work at the University of the Witwatersrand and worked at the Princess Alice Adoption Home for many years. She was in private practice for many years where apart from adoptions, she also did grief and trauma counselling. She often opened her home to women who had nowhere to turn, and placed thousands of abandoned children. She also worked with fertility clinics, and helped countless couples on the road to parenthood.

Due to COVID-19, the funeral will be restricted to 100 people, but it's expected many will be turned away as her popularity knew no bounds, say her children.

She is survived by her loving husband of 50 years, Lee, children Dalan, Garyn, Joshua, and Melissa, and eight grandchildren.

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# Third wave batters community, floods hospitals

TALI FEINBERG

Early in the morning of 28 May 2021, Lisa Kowalsky warned the Johannesburg Jewish Mommies Facebook group that there weren't enough COVID-19 beds in Gauteng.

Her desperately ill father was unable to find a bed, and she wanted to alert people to the extent of the third wave.

"Even though we had paramedics and a doctor at the house, we couldn't find a hospital in Joburg or Pretoria to take him to as all the beds are full," she wrote. "You can imagine the panic and sense of helplessness we went through.

"By an absolute miracle, a high-profile doctor I'm fortunate to know managed to convince someone from one of the hospitals to make a space for him in an intensive-care unit (ICU) at one of the hospitals," she wrote.

"What I'm trying to convey to all of you is that there are NO beds. The situation is scary and dangerous. You cannot treat this virus lightly. Do not take chances. Your life is at stake."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on Monday, 31 May, Kowalsky said her father was still battling in high care and might be taken back to ICU if his oxygen levels don't improve.

"He just wants to come home. He is a fit and healthy man, but his oxygen levels continue to go up and down. He was doing so well at first. He went for a COVID-19 test because he was due to have a procedure, otherwise he would never have known. Then two days later, he started to deteriorate."

She said he was taken to hospital a number of times because of dehydration after vomiting, but wasn't admitted because he wasn't ill enough. Eventually, when he needed to be admitted, she was "horrified" when they couldn't find a bed.

Said specialist physician pulmonologist Dr Carron Zinman of Netcare Linksfield Hospital, "What we are seeing this time round is that if somebody comes home with the virus, the vast majority of the household gets infected. We'll also have cases where the blood work is mild, they're getting better, and then 24 hours later, their symptoms get aggressive and we can't turn them around.

"We're seeing more cases under the age of 45 with no co-morbidities who are really sick. Fifty percent of our patients are in ICU, and 80% to 90% are on ventilators in one form or another. Last Monday [24 May], we had four resuscitations in two hours. Two were unsuccessful, two weren't."

Although Hatzolah's numbers are specific to the Johannesburg community, the number of new cases the organisation is dealing with is going up rapidly. Last Friday, it had 123 new cases in the week with 213 patients on home oxygen (active and closed) and 349 admissions to hospital (active and closed). The week before, it had 103 new cases, with 211 on home oxygen, and 333 hospital admissions. The week before that, there were 66 new cases.

The numbers are lower in Cape Town, but that doesn't mean the virus isn't leaving a trail of tragedy in its wake. Fifty-year-old Bram Radowsky's family described him as almost "paranoid" about COVID-19. But a month ago, he let his guard down a little and attended a small gathering to watch sport with friends. Two weeks later he was dead, suffering a heart attack in his sleep as a result of mild COVID-19 pneumonia.

"After the gathering, he was told that a person who was there tested positive for COVID-19," said his brother, Gordon Radowsky. "He went into self-quarantine and didn't have any symptoms. A week later, he tested positive and began to get symptomatic. He called an ambulance, but they said he wasn't sick enough to be admitted. So he drove himself to hospital and checked himself in. The lesson is that if you believe you need advanced medical care, then get the help that you need urgently.

"At no stage did any of us think we would lose him," said their mother, Rose Radowsky (80). "He was overweight but had no other co-morbidities. He was

in ICU on oxygen. On the Saturday [after a week in hospital], the ward sister said they were pleased with his progress. But on the Sunday morning, they called to tell us he had had a heart attack and they couldn't resuscitate him." Losing a child to the pandemic has been "a terrible shock", and she is still reeling.



Dr Carron Zinman assessing a COVID patient's response to ventilatory changes.

Virology expert Professor Barry Schoub confirmed that the country was entering a third wave of COVID-19. "Some provinces have been more seriously affected

than others," Schoub said. "The third wave was predicted to coincide with the winter months, when people are reluctant to be outdoors, or to open doors and windows to improve ventilation in indoor settings."

Dr Darren Joseph, a specialist physician and pulmonology fellow in the department of internal medicine at Steve Biko Academic Hospital, confirmed "bed availability is at the moment a real challenge facing both the public and private sectors".

"Over the past few weeks, we have seen a steady and marked increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases as well as in the proportion of PUI [person under investigation] patients that ultimately test positive. This is in both public and private sectors," Joseph said.

"My hospital's COVID-19 high care and intensive-care units are near full capacity and additional wards are in the process of being reopened to facilitate more critically ill patients," he said. "The profile of patient we are admitting remains incredibly varied. Sadly, this includes the admission of young patients with no known prior illnesses.

"It's heart-breaking that the third wave has arrived before many of the vulnerable in our communities have had the opportunity to receive vaccinations," he said. "Many of us are still emotionally and physically fatigued by previous waves. We are also seeing patients now who return several months after their illness with persistent symptoms and functional impairment. These after-effects are something I feel people don't truly appreciate."

Johannesburg general practitioner (GP) Dr Sheri Fanaroff said, "In the third wave, we are seeing much more school children being infected, especially in the high school age group, many of them infected out of the school setting.

"What is worrying about this is that although teens generally experience mild disease, they then go home and infect parents in their 50s who are much more vulnerable," Fanaroff said.

"I have 10 patients I'm monitoring at the moment, which is a lot for my very small practice. I haven't had anywhere close to this number since the second wave. Two are on oxygen at home, some of the others are on cortisone and anticoagulants. Some of the patients that GPs are treating at home would have been admitted to hospital if there was more bed availability. Every day, my day starts with multiple messages and calls from patients who have been exposed to a positive patient and are now contacts.

"People are making up their own rules of quarantine and really need to follow NICD [National Institute for Communicable Diseases] protocols," said Fanaroff. "If you have been exposed, you need to quarantine for 10 days from the contact, regardless of having a negative test during this time."

Dr Evan Shoul, an infectious-disease specialist at Netcare Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg, said, "We have been getting more calls from other hospitals that are full and [are] sending cases through. We haven't been able to take all the patents referred to us. We are still trying to increase wards and ICUs so that we can manage as many people as possible."

Zinman advises the community to get vaccinated, but warns that it doesn't mean we can become complacent.

"I know 20 people who had the vaccine and got COVID-19. The message is that the vaccine can protect you from severe COVID-19, but it doesn't protect from getting COVID-19 and giving it to the vulnerable. We can't change our behaviour just yet."

## Israel's new president – a friend of SA Jewry

PETA KROST MAUNDER

Israel's new president-elect, Isaac Herzog, is a great friend of South African Jewry and has been determined to mend ties between the South African and Israeli governments for years.

"He is a great friend to the Jewish community here," says Liat Amar Arran, the head of the Israel Centre in South Africa, who worked closely with him in his role as leader of the Jewish Agency for the past two years. "He has strong relationships here in South Africa, and has been tracking all the projects he set for us when he was last here in 2019."

South African Zionist Federation chairperson Rowan Polovin said "President-Elect Herzog is a great friend of the South African Jewish community, and we look forward to strengthening our friendship and partnership with him and the State of Israel."

Herzog – the 11th president of Israel – comes from the so-called Zionist royalty, with his father, General Chaim Herzog, having been a former Israeli president, his uncle, Abba Eban, Israel's first foreign minister and ambassador to the United Nations, and his grandfather Israel's first Ashkenazi chief rabbi.

Herzog, formerly the chairman of the Israeli Labour Party, served as the opposition leader from 2013 until 2018. He served as a member of Knesset between 2003 and 2018, having held several ministerial posts. It was as the head of the Jewish Agency, effectively the leader of the Jewish world, that he visited South Africa in 2019.

Many of his supporters believe that although the presidency is more of a figurehead role, Herzog will focus on building relations between Israel and the Jewish world, and working towards peace in the Middle East.

When he was in South Africa, he told the *SA Jewish Report* that he objected vehemently to the South African government pulling out its ambassador to Israel and moving to downgrade its embassy. He said he was determined to do everything he could to change this.

Herzog, a soft-spoken, no-nonsense leader, told

the *SA Jewish Report* he was passionate about the South African and Israeli connection and its long-term importance. However, he is even more dedicated to the longevity of the Jewish people and ensuring we have a solid future.

"The South African government can contribute hugely toward the advancement of peace in the region if it wants to, but not if it cuts ties," Herzog said.

While he described the South African Jewish community as "hugely impressive", he said it was "being challenged dramatically with an unclear future". He was worried about the "strong anti-Israel line from the African National Congress (ANC), which put a certain cloud over the ability of Jews and Zionists to express themselves and be able to thrive as Jews".



Israel's new president-elect, Isaac Herzog

Herzog said at the time he wanted to "strengthen Jewish communities and enable each and every Jew to feel free as Jews and to express their Zionism with no fear or harassment".

He clarified at the time that South Africa was known as the world leader in the so-called "new antisemitism", which is classic antisemitism intertwined with the delegitimation of Israel. This problem, he said, stemmed from within the ANC.

"Its position is due to historical relations with the Palestinian national movement," Herzog said. "The problem is that it hasn't acknowledged that the

region has changed and many of those countries that called for our annihilation 50 years ago are now some of our best allies. Meanwhile, it's trying to pursue a whole set of resolutions against Israel worldwide."

And then you have the situation, Herzog said, of "the average South African brainwashed by a machine that tells it lies about Israeli democracy".

Herzog said he believed Israel-hatred should be dealt with on three fronts. First, he said, "We have made sure Jews are well protected and defended. This is clear from the impressive organisation that deals with this in South Africa."

Second, he speaks of fighting antisemitism in the courts, and trying to get governments around the world to adopt the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) resolution on antisemitism.

As for education, "this is complex in a political climate that doesn't want to hear. There are modern-day tools we use like social networks, and we can try and do our best to show the true story of Israel."

When he was here, he spoke of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as "complicated".

"What haven't we tried? We tried peace agreements, unilateral withdrawals, economic packages, and other measures. There is an overwhelming majority in Israel who want peace, but there is a total lack of trust in Palestinians to deliver.

"In 2005, Israelis were out there supporting the unilateral pull-out of Gaza. We uprooted Jewish settlements in the process, we promised there would be a Hong Kong of Middle East, but instead we got 10 000 missiles fired at us.

"Israelis are wary of trying this again. We have to find new ideas. A major development between 2005 and today is that there is a strong political coalition of moderate nations with Israel confronting Iran in the region. These nations – including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and others – once wanted to throw us in the sea, but are now working with us."

It will be interesting to see what, as president of Israel, Herzog does to act on these beliefs.

# Is Netanyahu's reign finally over?

PAULA SLIER

When Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, I remember some people being so flummoxed that they said anyone could now run for the top job.

This week, I've been hearing much the same in Israel.

In a dramatic announcement, Naftali Bennett, a former defence minister and leader of the Yamina (rightwards) party that sits on the far right of the Israeli political spectrum, announced he was joining a coalition with centrist, left-wing, and Arab parties. If he hadn't actually announced it in front of the television cameras, no one would have believed it.

After all, Bennett is a former Israeli commander who once said, "I have killed lots of Arabs in my life – and there is no problem with that." Except he's now joining forces with them, most notably a small Arab Israeli Islamist party, Raam, which has roots in the same religious stream as Hamas. Just two weeks ago, Bennett called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "not to end the current round [of fighting] in Gaza before Hamas pays a heavy price".

So what's the ultranationalist leader's intentions? Does Bennett hate Netanyahu so much that to facilitate his fall from office he's willing to forgo a lot of what he stands for, to the utter disgust and anger of his constituency? Or is Bennett so desperate to

become the next Israeli prime minister that he's willing to do anything?

There's a lot of backroom political wrangling going on in Israel at the moment – and no one knows how it will play out.

Netanyahu's Likud party won the most seats at the last elections held in March, but not enough to give it the 61 out of 120 it needs to govern. Yair Lapid, the leader of the opposition and chairperson of Yesh Atid, a centrist political party he founded in 2012,

came in second. However, unlike Netanyahu, Lapid, with Bennett's support, can form a majority coalition. Which is why Lapid and Bennett have cut a deal in which Bennett would serve as Israel's prime minister until September 2023 after which Lapid would take over until November 2025. But Bennett is gambling with his political

future. If he and Lapid aren't able to form the next government, elections will need to be held – the fifth in two years – and in such a scenario, Bennett is unlikely to muster a lot of support. His voters will never trust him again.

What's more, assuming that the two leaders do put together a government, it will comprise seven relatively small parties whose agendas are so wide ranging – and often clashing – that they will need to avoid any controversial issues. Bennett is a champion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and openly rejects the concept of a sovereign Palestinian state. He advocates annexing West Bank territory. All of these positions are in stark contrast to what parties on the left – and certainly the

Arabs – stand for. In fact, there's very little that they agree on other than ousting Netanyahu. Their work will probably be limited to issues

like the economy, stabilising the recent Hamas ceasefire, and strengthening a post COVID-19 Israel. It's no surprise then that most analysts predict that should such a coalition government be formed, it will last only a few months at the most.

Bennett has justified joining Lapid by arguing that Israel's political crisis is unprecedented and "the madness must end". But what is also mad is to think that out of the nearly three million Israelis who voted back in March, only about 150 000 gave Bennett the nod, garnering him six out of 120 parliamentary seats. And he's the kingmaker potentially set to become the country's next prime minister.

Lapid won 17 mandates, which equals a little more than half a million Israelis, while Netanyahu won the most support with 30 mandates – about one million people.

At the time of going to press on Wednesday morning, Lapid hadn't yet informed Israeli President Reuven Rivlin as to whether or not he could form a government.

Legally, once he does this, he has a week to bring his government to a vote of confidence in parliament. A week is a long time in Israeli politics and at any time, a politician can break rank and decide no longer to support the Lapid-Bennett alliance. Netanyahu has 53 seats and although there's a slim chance he can win more, one would be foolish to rule him out just yet. He's not called the magician by his admirers for nothing.

"Fraud of the century" is how Netanyahu described Bennett's support for a "dangerous, left-wing government. This isn't unity, healing, or democracy," he said. "This is

an opportunistic government. A government of capitulation, a government of fraud, a government of inertia. A government like this must not be formed."

Netanyahu has held on as prime minister for more than a decade, and while most of his Likud party remains unflinchingly loyal to him, another personality worth noting is Gideon Saar. He defected from Likud about half a year ago. Like Bennett, Saar is on the right of the political spectrum, also holding six mandates, and also with people on his list that Netanyahu is appealing to break away and join him.

But if Bennett, Lapid, and Saar successfully form the next government, Netanyahu is likely to go back to being the leader of the opposition, a post he held before the 2009 election. In such a position, Netanyahu is likely to be denied any chance of making changes to his corruption trial, currently underway, that would give him some sort of parliamentary immunity. Also, with a majority in parliament against him, it's possible that legislation will be passed limiting the number of terms a prime minister can serve, or barring any candidate who has been charged with crimes from running for office.

Still, such a coalition won't last long, and it'll only be a matter of time before new elections will need to be held. Should that happen, there's no knowing how Netanyahu might fare. So even if he's forced out in the next week, he might show up again a little down the line. For some time now, the political knives have been out for him, but for his part, Netanyahu has made it clear he intends to fight on. And that fight could continue to drag on for quite some time still.



Gideon Saar

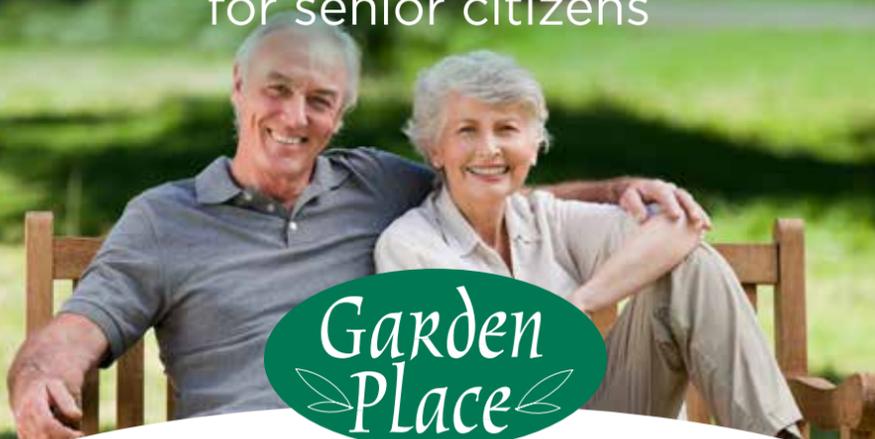


Naftali Bennett



Yair Lapid

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## Getting to the critical, elusive truth

**W**hat's true and what's not? This is getting really confusing. I feel the need to check everything I read or hear because there seems to be so much fake news out there. Even what would appear to be reliable sources don't always seem to get it right.

Yes I know, coming from a journalist and the editor of a newspaper, this could be worrying for our readers. The truth is: I find it distressing. Having said that, we at the *SA Jewish Report* ensure that we check and check again. I know you expect it from us, and I'm grateful for that.

What you don't know about are the stories that have fallen by the wayside because we haven't been able to prove them. Rather than take the chance of getting it wrong or publishing fake news, we let them go or hold them over until we have proof or proper corroboration.

If every story was a page, we would have a mountain of pages on our newsroom floor of stories we don't publish. It's sometimes disheartening for journalists who have put their heart and soul into getting that story for you when it doesn't stand up to the truth test. We don't take chances, and we do our utmost to avoid errors. But errors sometimes unwittingly find their way into our newspaper.

This week, someone wrote to us to ask "what has happened to the standard of journalism" as she pointed out that we had the word "infinity" when it should have been "affinity" in a sentence. She was right. We made a mistake, and we apologised.

This week, we were going to lead the newspaper with a story about an alleged Jewish multi-billionaire who was about to give South Africa a lot of his money, but decided to withhold the funds because the president made anti-Israel statements. We picked the story up in a reputable Israeli newspaper.

We even managed to get a copy of the letter that was allegedly sent to the president, and it was fairly convincing, not least of all considering that those who also got a copy of it were in important positions in the United States government. It was an astonishing story and so convincing.

However, our exceptional journalist on the story, Tali Feinberg, had a hunch that there was something amiss. Ultimately, we learned that the man was a fraud and received articles to prove it.

Suffice to say, I'm still not 100% sure either way. If the man is a fraudster, he's really good at covering his tracks. Either way, we are still digging.

If it's 100% fake, what was the person behind it trying to achieve? Think about it? If you weren't Jewish and you didn't love Israel, what would you think of a Jewish person who decides to withhold money that he had promised to our economy because he wanted to "force" the president to be kinder to Israel? There's a good chance it would reinforce antisemitic stereotypes, don't you think? So, who was behind it? Watch this space!

Then, this week, Facebook removed a post that went viral, getting about 25 000 views. It was said to include an Israeli soldier kneeling on a Palestinian child's head, reminiscent of the George Floyd saga – only worse as this was a child. The words that went with it were: "An Israeli soldier kills a Palestinian child and the world has not moved for him[.] Share the picture until it rotates in the world to show the Zionist brutality in Palestine."

It turns out that if you look carefully, you can see it isn't an Israeli soldier at all, but a Chilean soldier. What's more, it's not the first time this photograph has gone viral under the guise of being an Israeli soldier. It happened in July 2020 and before that. The photograph was apparently taken in 2016 in Chile. This was pure fake news with the clear agenda of communicating how violent and vile Israel and its people are.

There are so many such 'fake' photographs, particularly with wounded children, out there to make Israel look bad. It's a clever tactic, unfortunately, because it works.

Flip that around, and just how many factual stories aren't being told for fear of what they might lead to? There is a great deal of fear out there, and people who prefer to stay under the radar, not wanting to make the news.

We were told that following the protest outside Beyachad two weekends ago, there was a Hatzolah ambulance that was taking an elderly lady to the hospital. They needed to hurry for her sake.

Allegedly, they got caught up in the anti-Israel protest, which slowed them down, but then managed to get onto the highway. This should have been their chance to get to the hospital fast, only people from the protest in large cars allegedly prevented them from take their offramp and causing distress.

We believed this story to be true because if it was, the community and the world should know what certain people are willing to do to us while still insisting that it is Israel and the Jewish nation that are bad. However, as long as nobody was willing to corroborate it, we couldn't tempt fate by publishing the story without it.

Again, if it was made up, it could have been much more elaborate and exciting, but if it wasn't, we should be publishing it. However, it's impossible to force people to speak, even off the record.

I'm saying that, even as a reader, you should check the source of the story. Not every journalist is as ethical as ours. And not every story is as it seems.

I wish you all a great month of June.

**Shabbat Shalom!**  
**Peta Krost Maunder**  
Editor



# Stand up for what you believe, says chief rabbi

**Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein** stood up to President Cyril Ramaphosa's anti-Israel statement in the media, and on 28 May, asked for Muslim leadership to join him in calling for tolerance and non-violence. The reaction was fierce.

## 1. What was your response to Ramaphosa's newsletter about Israel two weeks ago?

The essence of my letter to the president was to present the facts, both in terms of the most recent Gaza war and then in the context of the wider historical frame of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, emphatically rejecting the apartheid accusation against Israel which is utterly without foundation in reality.

## 2. What was it that inspired you to respond to him in the *Sunday Times*?

I believe passionately in the power of facts and the truth. The justice of the cause of Israel is served and strengthened by sharing the facts of the situation. I have shared my views with the president in private meetings. But I felt it was necessary to air these points in the public domain so the rest of the country could benefit because there is so much misunderstanding, confusion, and even outright ignorance of the basic facts.



## 3. What response did you get from the community and others?

I received many warm messages from so many people – inside and outside the community – who appreciated that the other side of the story was being told openly and proudly on the pages of a national newspaper.

## 4. How do you interpret South Africans' reaction to the 11-day battle between Hamas in Gaza and Israel?

You must distinguish between the response of the ruling party and that of the country as a whole, which is much more positive. The African National Congress has taken a one-sided view of the conflict, but in my experience, the majority of South Africans are tremendously sympathetic and supportive of Israel.

## 5. Do you believe there has been a fair, unbiased response in mainstream media?

The problem of media bias is a global one. It comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of who the aggressor is and who the victim is. At the heart of much of the suffering in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the militant theology of Hamas, which openly seeks the genocide of all Jews in Israel and the total eradication of the Jewish state. It's a theology that preaches the targeting of Israeli civilians and the use of its own people as human shields. I don't think this is understood properly. I firmly believe peace is attainable. As I mentioned in my letter to the president, if the issue was land and the establishment of a Palestinian state, it would have happened long ago. There have been multiple opportunities which have been rejected time and again by the Palestinian leadership. The suffering of the Palestinian people is a result of its militant theological leadership. It's a heart-breaking human tragedy.

## 6. Last Friday, you called on Muslim leaders to join you in calling for tolerance, for people not to threaten or harm each other verbally or physically over the conflict in the Middle East. Why did you do this?

It's so disturbing to see Jews around the world attacked and living in fear as they enter shuls and schools. I contacted South African Muslim leaders because I believe that all South Africans, including Jewish and Muslim communities, should live without fear of threats of violence or intimidation. Because of the emotions of this conflict – which run higher than anything else I've seen – it's vital for leaders to come forward – especially religious leaders – to preach peace.

## 7. What was the initial reaction when you contacted the Muslim leaders?

I phoned the senior leadership of the two main Muslim organisations, the Muslim Judicial Council and the Jamiatul Ulama South Africa, and asked them to issue a joint statement with me calling on our communities to respect differences with regards to these issues. Both organisations declined.

## 8. What was their reaction after you put out the statement?

The Muslim Judicial Council publicly rejected my call for a joint statement on unity and tolerance.

## 9. How did you feel about this?

I'm disappointed because religious leaders need to be a force for peace and tolerance in the world. I've had a longstanding relationship with some of the most senior Muslim leaders here, and we have worked well together with the National Religious Leaders Council. Their rejection of my overtures is a real pity. They're letting down their own community and the country.

## 10. Ronnie Kasrils was extremely derogatory in his opinion piece in the *Sunday Times* this week. What's your reaction to that?

Kasrils' response is the perfect example of how so much of the anti-Israel lobby conducts itself – by delegitimising and denigrating their opponents instead of rationally debating the issues and analysing the facts. I will continue to fight for the facts to be heard in a rational and respectful way.

## 11. Why do you think a man like Kasrils, who has Jewish roots, would do such a thing?

The real question is not how Kasrils interacts with me personally. The real question, which only he can answer, is why he has such hatred for Israel. The irrationality of his hatred for the Jewish state comes through in everything that he does and says.

## 12. Are you planning to react to what was said? If so, how?

I don't believe in mudslinging; rather, I speak to the issues. I'm not interested in responding to personal attacks. The facts speak for themselves. And I've laid out the facts very carefully in my letter to the president.

## 13. Following the past few distressing weeks, how do we move forward as a community?

The most important thing to realise as a South African Jewish community is that this is a global problem, felt by Jewish communities throughout the world. There's been a dramatic rise in antisemitic incidents everywhere. It's clear evidence of the deep connection between the global movement to delegitimise and destroy Israel with a virulent antisemitism that has emerged under the guise of anti-Zionism. Criticism of the state of Israel per se can, of course, be made in good faith. But when that criticism becomes a distortion of truth to demonise Israel, it becomes a dangerous form of antisemitism.

One aspect of the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's) definition of antisemitism is to accuse the state of Israel of being founded on racism. The apartheid accusation, ironically, is a form of antisemitism. Isn't it tragic that the hatred of the anti-Israel lobby is so intense that it's using the sacred memory of the victims of racism to perpetrate another form of bigotry.

## 14. What message do you have for the community now?

We must live with pride and dignity in South Africa. We live in an open and free democracy, and we must be proud of our support for the state of Israel. We have to be ready with the facts. We have no one and nothing to fear. We can stand up to this pressure, and we do so as free, independent citizens of this country. We can be proud Jews, proud of our Zionism, not only because our hearts and souls are connected to Israel through our Torah, but also because of the facts which support the justice of the cause of the state of Israel. So, let's go forward with strength and confidence.

# Professor of propaganda

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



An associate professor of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Family Medicine used a university WhatsApp group with his students to propagate the following anti-Israel view.

On 19 May, Professor Shabir Moosa posted a discredited and inaccurate video to the Family Medicine WhatsApp group with the note, "Watch this! Where is our condemnation? Zionists cheer burning of Al-Aqsa Mosque."

The story behind this is linked to Yom Yerushalayim, the annual celebration of the liberation of the Old City of Jerusalem. In 1948, Jordanian forces attacked and illegally occupied Jerusalem in defiance of the United Nations partition plan declaring Jerusalem an international city.

Having captured the Old City, Jordan ethnically cleansed the walled city of its Jewish inhabitants, confiscated Jewish land, and built toilet latrines along the Western Wall, Judaism's most holy site. Jews were forbidden from praying at their most sacred sanctuary, the retaining wall of the Temple complex that had housed both the First and Second Temples.

In 1967, after Jordan attacked Israel during the Six-Day War, the Israel Defense Forces won back the city, bringing the Western Wall back into Jewish hands.

Ever since, tens of thousands of Jews gather at the Western Wall complex every year, singing, dancing, and celebrating the unification of the city.

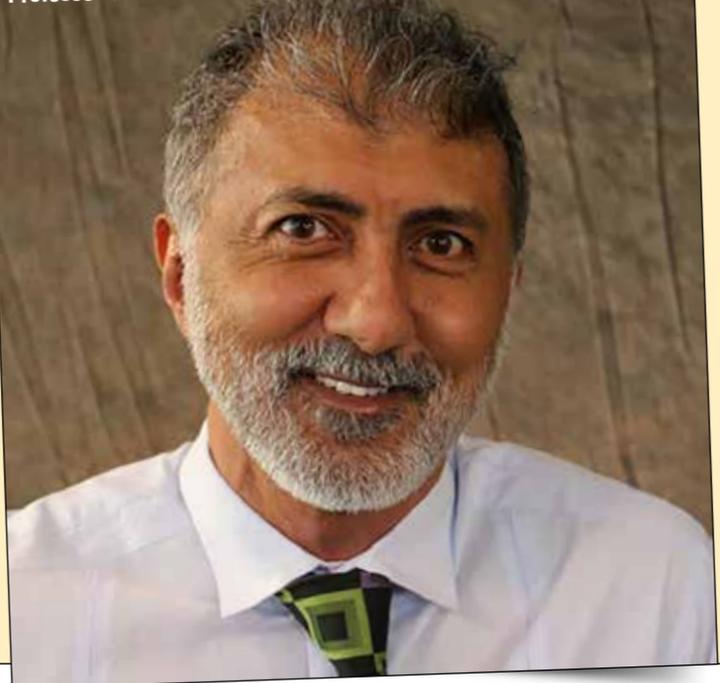
This year, Yom Yerushalayim coincided with Laylatul Qadr (Night of Power) which, by Muslim tradition, marks the time that the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. It also coincided with commemorations after Quds Day, marked on the last Friday of Ramadan, the day declared by the Ayatollah of Iran as a day for the liberation of Jerusalem.

On Monday, 10 May, thousands of Palestinian youth gathered on the Temple Mount, attacking a police post and hurling rocks from the Temple Mount toward a road south of the compound. Police entered the compound, where violent clashes took place between the two sides. The BBC reported that protesters hurled stones at the police at Damascus Gate in the Old City, and officers responded with stun grenades, rubber bullets, and water cannons. In response to these events, Hamas, the Islamic fundamentalist military dictatorship which rules the Gaza strip, unleashed a barrage of rockets towards Jerusalem, igniting a war between the two adversaries.

Amidst these clashes on the Temple Mount, Palestinians fired fireworks, one setting a tree ablaze in the Al-Aqsa complex.

Film crews capturing the singing and dancing for Yom Yerushalayim panned up to see a tree ablaze on the Temple Mount.

Professor Shabir Moosa



Pro-Palestinian activists, not wanting to miss an opportunity, utilised these images claiming that the exuberant crowd singing and dancing at the Western Wall were, in fact, cheering the "burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque".

It was this that Moosa used on WhatsApp. Junior doctors on the WhatsApp group brought this post to the attention of the SA Jewish Report because they believe Moosa had abused his position of authority over them by foisting his own and inaccurate views over them as his subordinates.

They believed Moosa had deliberately made medical interns, who didn't agree with his position, intimidated and uncomfortable.

As the non-executive chairperson of the SA Jewish Report, I contacted Moosa that day, explaining how this had been reported to me, and the inaccuracy of it.

"By sending this fabricated information to this group, by stirring racial and religious hatred, you have deeply offended many of your students and acted completely inappropriately," I wrote.

I said I wanted to give him an opportunity to apologise before we ran the story. Instead, he denied he was spreading propaganda and misinformation, and justified his call.

"The fire was on the platform," he wrote. "Whatever the nature of the fire, the dancing was completely inappropriate given the fire. The singing also spoke volumes about the dancing. My question was simple, 'Just how does anybody justify this? Where is the universal condemnation?' This isn't just any mosque. It's the third holy space of Muslims across the world!" I want peace and tolerance! If you don't condemn that dancing and

singing, then it will be you that is stirring racial and religious hatred. I urge you to publish this response in its entirety."

I replied that clearly, the professor didn't want to promote "peace and tolerance". If he did, he would have no problem correcting his own inaccuracies.

"How can anyone but a propagandist not understand that the celebrations below have happened every year since the liberation of the Western Wall in 1967. What you have done is spread a false narrative stoking religious and racial intolerance and hatred," I wrote. "It's quite clear that you don't want peace and tolerance as you describe as you have been given the opportunity to correct your error, yet you persist as a cheap peddler of lies, misinformation, and hatred. More importantly, you have abused your position on a work group to do this – you have embarrassed your students by your actions."

The professor has now posed my photo on his propaganda page. Of course, by posting my photo and phone number without permission, Moosa committed a criminal offence in terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act.

On the page, he wrote, "I refused to be cowed by his bullying."

Maybe that's the same sort of bullying that he attempted to impose on his interns, over whom he lauded his propaganda?

Meanwhile, given Moosa's approach, I reported him to Wits Medical School and requested disciplinary action against him. I can't help thinking that our doctors deserve a better education, and certainly better educators.

• Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report.

## No ceasefire in SA antisemitism

>>Continued from page 2

in person to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, to whom I was introduced in Cape Town.

"What is true is that I have donated funds in my personal capacity, both in South Africa and in Israel, to entities endeavouring to build relationships between Jews and Muslims, and Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis," wrote Krawitz. He has supported the Peres Centre for Peace through the Israel Tennis Centre, "where children from disadvantaged Palestinian and Israeli communities in and around Jerusalem come together to participate in an educational programme which encourages the values of coexistence and mutual understanding".

He has also given to a technology centre in Ramle, "an economically disadvantaged city with more than 30% Arab residents. This centre specifically aims to bring together Arab and

Jewish Israelis to learn to work towards building co-operation and coexistence."

He supports the Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon, "where Arab and Jewish Israelis are treated side by side", and the Interfaith Intercultural Youth Programme in South Africa, "bringing together all faiths and races with the aim of providing an opportunity to develop understanding, co-operation, and coexistence".

Krawitz said, "Our company employs hundreds of Muslim staff, many of whom occupy senior positions within our group. It's sad that misleading information has been put out in the public domain working against the very ideals that we have striven for at Cape Union Mart. However, I have been greatly heartened by the incredible messages of support from Muslim staff members who know exactly what I stand for. For that, I am extremely grateful!

"As the holy month of Ramadan comes to an end, I hope that you will use the closing hours to reflect on the value of truth, and put an end to the malicious lies which are being spread in an effort to damage our company and put jobs at risk," he wrote. "I wish all our Muslim staff Ramadan Kareem and Eid Mubarak. Let's continue to work together to build a family of mankind, in a world where we all respect each other, and find ways to unite through our commonalities rather than divide ourselves through our differences! Let's continue to create jobs, develop people, and build South Africa."

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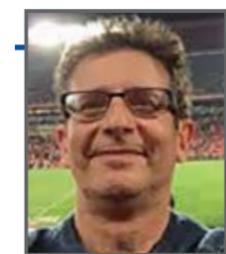
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# The many forms of Zionism

Zionism, the term that has been bandied around by the anti-Israel lobby, isn't a uniform approach to Israel. It has many forms resulting in differences even between individuals with similar political views, but it stands on the belief in the need for Israel, a Jewish state. The *SA Jewish Report* questioned two Zionists to show how different their views are.



**GAVIN ROME**

## 1. What do you believe Zionism is?

Zionism was an ideology that returned historical agency to the Jewish people and led to the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. Today, Zionism's core principle is that it's better for the Jewish people to shape their lives in the state of Israel than to remain scattered minorities among the nation states of the world.

## 2. How do you interpret what happened from 9 to 21 May in Israel?

An avoidable tragic paragraph in the annals of the Jewish/Arab-Palestinian conflict.

## 3. Whose fault is it and why?

Largely, the immediate "fault" lies with Hamas and its eliminationist and expulsionist "river to the sea" ideology. There are nevertheless underlying fault lines for which both sides are to blame. However, the spark for this latest awful episode was Hamas's cynical and missile firing exploitation of tensions in East Jerusalem.

## 7. What do you believe should happen to solve this conflict between Israel and the Palestinians?

A good time out. No grand agreements or accords, but a defined period of time in which both sides do their utmost to avoid antagonising the other. As to how to achieve such a base, I'm sadly at a loss but I'm sure there are those better qualified than I am who could formulate a realistic proposed framework.

## 8. Do you believe the Israeli government is doing enough to solve this conflict? What should it do?

No. Cessation of settlement projects in the West Bank would be the first step. Each new settlement makes the only possible route to the end of the conflict (namely two separate states existing side-by-side) increasingly remote.

## 9. Do you support a two-state solution, and what does that mean to you? If you don't, what do you support?

I support a two-state solution. This would entail both parties ultimately one day making difficult and anguishing compromises. In contrast, a binational state in which each community has semi-autonomous and equal rights within a



**JONI KOWENSKY**

## 1. What do you believe Zionism is?

A conviction that Jews have an archaeologically visible, ancient connection to Israel, with Judea (where Jews originated) being the epicentre for thousands of years. Israel has a right to exist within safe borders, defend herself, and to be a religious Jewish state (like its Muslim neighbours). Zionism isn't political, its borders and governance is political, but the principle isn't.

## 2. How do you interpret what happened from 9 to 21 May in Israel?

Israel showed extreme restraint in waiting for more than 500 rockets to be fired before retaliating. The Iron Dome saved thousands of people, and Hamas used larger missiles and barrages than before. Israel avoided civilian casualties in densely populated civilian areas, hitting more than 1 500 targets with less than 250 deaths reported by Hamas. This number includes Hamas's own inflicted deaths from its 680 missiles that misfired, committing double war crimes in firing at civilians from its own dense civilian areas. One such situation killed a Gazan family of eight. Israel continues to avoid civilian casualties, while Hamas uses civilian casualties as its modus operandi, helping Hamas to win the world over. Israel needs to prepare better in terms of social media and education.

## 3. Whose fault is it, and why?

Mahmoud Abbas has been in charge of Fatah/the Palestine Liberation Organization since Yasser Arafat. Prior to elections, realising he was losing, he arrested his

opposition and announced that due to riots, elections were cancelled. Days later, his supporters stormed the Temple Mount, triggering incidents of violence throughout Israel, falsely using a private rental dispute in Sheik Jarrah as a pretext. Hamas saw an opportunity to fire rockets into Israel, unprovoked, as it does every few years.

## 4. What do you think about how Israel dealt with it?

Israel needs to focus on social media and hasbara (diplomacy). It has managed riots and attacks on Jews and Arabs in Israel equally. It dealt a large blow to Hamas's more than 100km of terror tunnels, and bought Israel some intermittent peace. Fake media that sent all the terrorists into the tunnels, helping it to save civilians, was genius.

## 5. Who do you support (politically) in Israel and why?

Likud has always successfully defended Israel in the international arena. Global support during the last conflict, as well as the Abraham Accords and warming relations with Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco and others, is a testament to this. Adding an Arab member to the party, and being joined by former Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat, voted "mayor of the world", who was elected by Arabs to be mayor for many years, shows that the party isn't as right wing as some think.

## 6. How do you feel about the occupied territories or Judea and Samaria?

"Occupied territories" isn't a correct description of the three areas in Judea and Samaria, for which Israel, the United States, and Palestinian leadership agreed to the borders during the Oslo Accords. When Jews and Israelis can enter Area A, where Palestinians manage all military and government infrastructure, without risk (like Palestinians can in all the other zones), the situation will improve. You cannot look at these territories in isolation from Gaza. A solution can be reached only when Hamas and Fatah stop fighting each other so that there is one peace agreement.

## 7. What do you believe should happen to solve this conflict between Israel and the Palestinians?

First, Palestinian leaders have to stop calling for Israel's destruction and chanting "from the river to the sea", proving that they want all of the territory of Israel and the country's annihilation. Then, when all their leaders can negotiate as one, the Trump peace plan is the best bet. The Palestinians would get more land, an extra island, a harbour, and airport, if peaceful. Neither party wins as much as they would like, both have to compromise. However, until the Palestinians come to the party, this isn't possible.

## 8. Do you believe the Israeli government is doing enough to solve this conflict? What should it do?

It's in a very tough situation but a new method may be needed as the cycle has repeated itself since Hamas's violent overtake of Gaza. By tackling Iran, the key funder of Hamas, it has greatly weakened it, and communication with regional allies has been strong.

## 9. Do you support a two-state solution and what does it mean to you? If you don't, what do you support?

Though the mandate of Palestine was divided into Jordan and Israel (one for Arabs, one for Jews), Israel's withdrawal from Gaza already represents a three-state solution where Jews compromised a great deal. I support the Trump peace plan in which Israel yet again gives more land for peace, once all preconditions to stop incitement and aggression have been met.

## 10. How do you feel about Benjamin Netanyahu and his way of governing?

Netanyahu's governance of Israel's security and foreign relations has been great. It would be unfair to comment on Israel's internal governance with its complexities, diverse population, and cultures, as I don't live there.

## 11. If you could do two things to improve Israel, what would you do?

There needs to be an education drive among Palestinians to help break down the lies and hate they were taught so we can unite in business, agriculture, and technology. There should also be an Arab-led alliance to disarm Hamas and Fatah to monitor a free election and smooth transition to fairly elected officials.

## 12. Who do you believe should be the next prime minister of Israel and why?

Israeli politics are complicated, and it is tough to say anything while not understanding life in Israel as an Israeli. Netanyahu has done well where mentioned above, and Barkat could be an exciting chapter in Israel's story.

• *Joni Kowensky is the Head of Betar South Africa, Deputy Chairman of the SAZF and WZO General Council.*



## 4. What do you think about the way Israel dealt with it?

Once Hamas had commenced its bomb-all-of-Israel missile campaign, Israel reacted responsibly in fulfilling the basic responsibilities of a nation state, namely to protect its citizens from harm. I'm, however, critical of the ultra-nationalist East Jerusalem settlement project and the government's support for the establishment of belligerent settler enclaves in Arab neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem.

## 5. Who do you support (politically) in Israel and why?

Any of Labour, Meretz, or Yesh Atid. Each of these parties would better protect the institutions of democracy (a free press, the rule of law, respect for the constitutional role of the Supreme Court, and tolerance for dissent), which have been subjected to cynical, populist subversion by the past decade's governing coalitions.

## 6. How do you feel about the occupied territories or Judea and Samaria?

I've been a lifelong opponent of the West Bank settlement project. I remain of the view that civilian settlement of the West Bank has been, to use the phrase of historian Barbara Tuchman, nothing less than "the march of folly".

There should, nonetheless, be no withdrawal if this would lead to the establishment of a hostile armed entity in the West Bank, as would seem to be the case for the foreseeable future.

federation of all of its citizens is a romantic utopia which appears to be desired neither by the Jewish nor the Palestinian polities. Also and in contrast, a Jewish state in which the Arab residents of the West Bank aren't citizens and thus don't have the right to vote would, in my view, amount to a perversion of the Zionist idea.

## 10. How do you feel about Benjamin Netanyahu and his way of governing?

He has undoubtedly achieved much: the liberalisation of the Israeli economy, many years of uninterrupted economic growth, and accords with Arab states. Unfortunately, his exploitation of populist tools has had the effect of weakening Israeli democracy.

## 11. If you could do two things to improve Israel, what would you do?

I would rather not answer this question. Not living in Israel, I'm unqualified to address the practicalities which this question implies.

## 12. Who do you believe should be the next prime minister of Israel and why?

I don't "believe" in any person or politician. Having said that, I have been impressed by Yair Lapid's non-confrontational and quietly respectful leadership style.

• *Gavin Rome is senior counsel at the Johannesburg Bar. He has acted as a judge of the high court on several occasions.*

# Media's version of truth as strange as Japanese fiction



CHARISSE ZEIFERT

OPINION

**R**ashomon, the Japanese movie by Akira Kurosawa, relates the story of a murder whereby four different characters give their version of what happened. Three of them claim to be the killer, placing themselves in the centre of the story and provide first-person eyewitness accounts of the event. Told in the form of flashbacks, their stories seem to have no bearing on reality. Rather, the characters provide personal, unconventional, and self-serving versions of the same incident.

I've thought a lot about this movie while monitoring coverage of the 11-day conflict and afterwards.

Journalists all have their biases. Depending on the media house they work for, such bias could either be tempered or expressed. We all know journalists who already have a jaundiced position on Israel. This latest war has simply given them new impetus to further vilify the country. They never did see a reason to provide another perspective. They won't now.

A presenter at Power FM stated that as he equated Zionism with racism, he wouldn't give "oppressors" a platform. Then, 702, the station that the majority of our community listen to, talked the talk but failed to walk the walk when it came to providing alternate perspectives. In spite of numerous requests, it gave the Jewish community the ultimate middle-finger when, following two short interviews with anti-Israel commentators Ronnie Kasrils and Munir Nuseibeh, it then gave a full hour to the fringe views of historical revisionist Ilan Pappé. It did, later, do an interview with Daniel Pomerantz, the chief executive of Honest Reporting, who was given 12 minutes to state Israel's case.

The problem with this one-sidedness is that it embellishes an already demonised view of Israel, to the extent that their narrative eventually has no bearing on reality. Like the characters in *Rashomon*, the journalists are acting in a self-serving manner. Journalists and columnists are encouraged to have an opinion, but their opinions shouldn't override their obligation to fair-minded, independent journalism.

Let's now look at news coverage. In an ideal world, it shouldn't matter what your news source is, as all news should be factually correct. Sadly, this isn't the case. Even news reporters and stations have their bias. The other day, 702 lifted its report on the conflict from Al-Jazeera. The report was so distorted, it took me a couple of hours to try and verify it. I couldn't. Fact-changing shouldn't be our job. That should be done by the media. Our job as the Jewish organisations should be to ensure that the media provides both sides of story.

The loss of life and the trauma of this latest Israeli war with Gaza is tragic for Palestinians and Israelis. There does, however, need to be an acknowledgement that there are (at least) two sides to this story. This is in the interests of the media profession, which has an obligation to ensure its listeners are fully informed. We all know that, as much as the war is being fought on the ground, it's also being fought in the realm of public opinion. It's not necessary for the media to endorse Israel, but if they wish to be credible, it's necessary for them to ensure that they give both sides of the conflict.

In spite of what I have described above, it's not all bad. In fact, there's plenty of good. This time round, more media (print and electronic) have been scrupulous in approaching the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the South African Zionist Federation for comment, which we have readily supplied. To date, "our side" has appeared more than 40 times, be it in print, online, or radio/TV.

Furthermore, where we have had the opportunity to debate, we have, in fact, won. Olga Meshoe Washington wiped the floor with her opponent from the Al-Jamai Party in a debate on Newzroom Afrika (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-tWZCctmtY>); Rolene Marks exposed her opponent from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions



A scene from the Japanese film *Rashomon*

(BDS) organisation as a name-calling bully in her interview with him on Channel Africa; Zev Krengel rattled his BDS opponent in a debate with him on

SAFM (<https://iono.fm/e/1038530>); and on eNCA, Avrom Krengel showed up his opponent from the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union

(<https://youtu.be/KJoPEkXLIgw>). There's more.

*The Citizen* came out with an editorial (<https://citizen.co.za/news/opinion/opinion-editorials/2498678/israel-palestine-conflict-we-wont-pick-sides-in-our-reporting/>) stating that it wouldn't pick sides on the conflict and would report on the facts as it saw it. This is what our media should be – and many are – doing.

We will continue to strive to develop relationships with media, we'll continue to monitor and engage them, and we'll do our best to ensure that they present balance on the Middle East conflict. Ultimately, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shouldn't be used by self-serving journalists at the expense of the truth as if it were simply a Japanese movie (no matter how good it is), in which the truth is simply unobtainable.

• Charisse Zeifert is the head of communications for the SAJBD.

  
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# Threatened, victimised, and isolated for supporting Israel

TALI FEINBERG

Pretoria teacher Sudesh Mooloo's family member says he fears for his safety and that of his family after he expressed support for Israel and took a stand against Hamas during the recent conflict.

Mooloo was allegedly told by the principal of his workplace the next day that his contract was terminated with immediate effect.

"Sudesh wrote a WhatsApp status saying, 'I'm not anti-Palestine. I'm anti-Hamas. I stand with Israel,'" says the family member, who couldn't be named for their own safety. "He's a person who will always express an opinion. He was coming from a biblical standpoint, not a political standpoint. He's a Christian. He believes others feel the same, but are too scared to express it."

Mooloo has taught Afrikaans, social sciences, and creative arts at Laudium Secondary School (LSS) in Pretoria for 25 years.

Within minutes of him posting the WhatsApp status, messages started streaming in, condemning his words. "There were so many death threats. Most of his family 'wrote him off'. His children were victimised. He had to stop sending his little one to primary school. His daughter was attacked on social media, and his wife at her workplace. It came from all angles. He started getting calls from family members swearing at him. Within an hour, he put an apology on Facebook, but it wasn't accepted."

"You're Nazi like your beloved Israel. DAMN YOU"; "If you do not step down immediately I am coming to the school to make sure you out"; "My mind is focused on jihad, not football [on a soccer WhatsApp group]"; "SUDESH MUST GO. Our source informed us that Sudesh Mooloo the coward that he is left the school early in fear of our action against him"; "I would treat you the same way an Israeli soldier treats a kid in Palestine ... you should feel disgusted about yourself. You whole reputation is gone down the drain. Shame on you!"; "I wanted to inform you that the contract between LSS and Mr Mooloo has been terminated. His last day at LSS was today" [by a member of the school governing body].

These were just some of the messages he received or were posted about him. An article in the *Laudium Sun* on 21 May 2021 headlined, "Calls for teacher supporting Israeli atrocities to be fired", said: "Calls are now growing for Sudesh, an educator at Ladium Secondary, to resign from his post, as it is believed he could influence the youth with incorrect values." In the article, community members also criticised Mooloo. "How do you go against an organisation [Hamas] that fights against an evil regime [Zionist Israel]?" asked Yusuf Mustapha of Radio 1584 and the Islamic Institute of South Africa.

"He is an upstanding member of his community who has worked closely with the youth," says the family member. "He went to that school, so did his father and grandfather. It's a huge loss to him, and he has a family to provide for. But even if they asked him to come back, he wouldn't be able to. If he disciplined a Muslim pupil, or gave them a bad mark, it would be judged and scrutinised."

The family member says the school governing body came under public pressure to fire Mooloo. They "told him telephonically that his services would be terminated with immediate effect but his contract would

continue until the end of the term. After a couple of days, they saw that the group 'Stand with Sudesh' was growing on Facebook, and he was getting support. So their story changed that his contract was never terminated and that he was just 'off sick'.

"They saw that they needed to be careful.

But he can't go back because his safety isn't assured. This was handled in such an unprofessional way without following protocol, so what safety does he have? He has sent an email to the school governing body and school principal asking for a sit-down meeting to discuss the way forward, but he hasn't heard back."

According to the family member, Grade 9 learners at the school organised a protest to show their support of their teacher. "But the principal quickly shut it down. They don't want the kids to know that he was terminated because of his beliefs. They don't

want to paint that picture to learners."

A community meeting was called at a local mosque on Sunday, 23 May, with dignitaries, religious leaders and the Pretoria Legacy Foundation. According to Maniza Essa, who wrote about the meeting on Facebook, "He [Mooloo] explained that he had no intention of offending anyone and that his support for Israel wasn't from a political perspective but from a biblical perspective.

"He acknowledged that his biblical support for Israel didn't mean he condoned its warfare actions against Palestinians, especially not against women and children. Sudesh further acknowledged that he didn't expect his innocent post to garner such outrage from the community, and explained that he had come under extreme criticism from his own family, 90% of whom are Muslims, about the post.

"Sudesh appealed for forgiveness from the community, and welcomed those who had assisted him to get a clearer picture of the reality happening in Palestine. The meeting ended in unanimous support for resolution of the issue, and it was agreed that peaceful co-existence and social



Scholars at Laudium Secondary School standing up in support of Sudesh Mooloo

cohesion in the community should prevail."

According to the family member, Mooloo wrote he was anti-Hamas because "it's a terrorist group. But apparently you can't say that. It gets people's blood boiling."

The family member says the Jewish community has shown Mooloo "great support".

"He has never met anyone Jewish, and doesn't have a single Jewish friend. But there have been so many messages from people who don't know him that have offered a lot of comfort. He is humbled by them. Meanwhile, people who do know him refuse to say, 'I may disagree with you, but I stand by you.'"

The family member says Mooloo is horrified that the community calls for human rights for Palestinians, but takes away freedom of speech from its own fellow South Africans. The family member also wondered if speaking to the media might endanger the safety of Mooloo and his family.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says, "The dismissal of Mr Mooloo for 'daring' to have a different political view from those in power at the school shows the appalling intolerance and bullying prevalent at this time. To fire someone because they dissent from your views is unconstitutional. Our Constitution states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion'. Mr Mooloo is being deprived these basic rights."

## Farewell to country community's unsung hero

TRIBUTE

MICHAEL KRANSORFF



Perry Feldman, a greatly admired Parys farmer, businessman, and Jewish communal leader was taken from us this week, another casualty of the coronavirus epidemic.

Feldman embodied the very best of South African Jewish country community values. A *kol d'mamah dakah* (a still small voice which speaks the word of G-d) is how Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft described Feldman in his eulogy, his friend and congregant of many years.

A quiet, humble, modest individual, but so full of kindness and of love, burning with encouragement to do the will of the almighty to make this world a better place, with no need for external pomp and circumstance to call attention to his fine qualities.

Feldman grew up in the picturesque Free State dorp of Parys, situated along the banks of the Vaal river. He matriculated from Parys High School in 1961, and went on to study a BCom at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he graduated cum laude and won numerous medals.

He returned to Parys to join his father, Abe, in his successful farming business. His hard work, meticulous planning, and inventiveness earned him the esteem of the South African farming community.

Never one to rest on his laurels, in the early 1990s, Feldman and his wife, Veronica, joined Searle and Lorna Sacks as business partners in Parys Biltong. Together, they grew this into one of the largest suppliers of biltong, dried fruit, and nuts in South Africa.

Even more impressive is that this was achieved

exploitation.

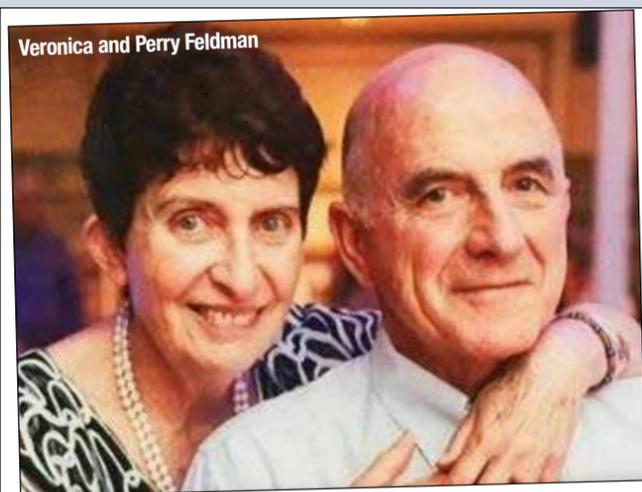
In addition to being a successful businessman, Feldman was a South African patriot in the liberal tradition. In spite of his parents being victims of farm violence in the early 1990s, he was determined to do all he could to build a successful, harmonious, and multiracial future for the country.

During the political unrest in Parys during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Feldman served on the local peace committee. His remarkable ability to listen to everyone and always infuse calm helped to avoid racial clashes and allowed for practical, non-violent solutions. This earned him the enduring friendship of both the town's most *verkrampste* Afrikaner nationalists and radical struggle veterans.

Over the past decade, during his "retirement", Feldman took up the contentious issue of land reform. He believed that giving township dwellers ownership of their homes was key to enhancing human dignity and building a more equitable and sustainable economy. Through the Free Market Foundation's Khaya Lam initiative, his team has raised millions of rands and worked with local municipalities of all political stripes across South Africa to transfer about 11 000 title deeds to township residents. Even during lockdown, the Feldmans continued to travel around the country promoting this tangible land-reform programme.

Family, Yiddishkeit, and community were at his core. He was a devoted husband, and in more than 50 years of marriage, they were rarely apart. They raised two children, Batya and Ari, and have five grandchildren, whom Feldman doted on. He was a pillar of strength to his family and friends – the first person you thought to call when you needed help with almost anything.

Feldman served the Parys Jewish community for many years. At a young age, he was a Habonim madrich, organising Zionist activities for the small but vibrant Jewish community. Always a man of action, he volunteered to go to Israel to help out during the Six-Day War. In later years, as the community dwindled, Feldman took responsibility for its continued functioning.



Veronica and Perry Feldman

he achieved this in spite of the opposition of entrenched communal interest groups. Co-committee member Anne Harris described him as the organisation's "mastermind", and lamented that with his passing "we will all need to shoulder the burden of caring for the country communities which were so dear and important to him".

Feldman loved learning about Jewish history and culture. He had a library of Jewish books to rival a university, and made a point of connecting with Jewish communities in the many off-the-beaten-track places around the world to which he and his wife travelled. It was this same spirit that inspired his mission to preserve and remember Jewish life in the smaller towns across South Africa.

"An unsung hero of the South African Jewish community" is how Silberhaft described him. We shall not see his like again.

• Michael Kransdorff is a Harvard-educated financial innovator and consultant, chairman of the JNF SA and Perry Feldman's cousin. His great grandfather was the found member of the Parys Shul and a former chairman. His family still have a holiday home in the town.



Perry Feldman

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# Secular school scholars deal with anti-Israel sentiment

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a lonely experience for many Jewish scholars at secular private or government schools following the recent conflict in the Middle East. For some it has been tumultuous and for others, eye-opening.

Schools are meant to be politically impartial spaces, but there have been reports of pro-Palestinian activism at some schools and an atmosphere of intimidation and fear mainly online, said Professor Karen Milner, the Gauteng chair of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

"We have been approached by several people mainly concerned with online bullying. This was directed at school children, university students, and adults at small businesses," she said.

Incidents with school kids typically happen within chat groups or on formal social-media platforms such as Instagram. "A child would experience online bullying and mocking even though they responded to a post politely," Milner said.

From the Board's reports, it never moved beyond the online space, but "online bullying is still unacceptable, it's a form of intimidation," said Milner.

Schools have increasingly focused on the conflict in the region, with some head teachers taking measures to safeguard kids against prejudice and antisemitism. It forced teachers to confront the issue and see it as a learning opportunity, especially when children may have been subjected to one-sided, often offensive, and sometimes antisemitic material.

Tzvi Brivik, the chairperson of the Cape SAJBD, said it had been an intense time for students at schools and universities like the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, and the AAA School of Advertising.

"Kids have been targeted online with material which may not fit the description of antisemitism, but still amounts to bullying," he said.

Brivik said there had definitely been an uptick in reports of offensive material being posted online over the past few weeks.

"There has also been the misuse of academic WhatsApp groups for political ends. Students post anti-Israel material on groups designed for sharing academic information."

When students post an Israeli flag, he said, it's usually followed by a slew of online commentary "which can be very hurtful".

"Our approach in the Cape has always been to try build bridges, and there have been some good examples of this taking place at schools in Cape Town."

Two Cape schools stand out in this regard. Rustenburg School for Girls in Rondebosch invited Rabbi Osher Feldman of the Gardens Shul together with two imams and a priest to address the girls.

"There is a diverse student body, and the school was struggling with how things were playing out in the classroom, so they asked us to come," said Feldman this week.

"Many girls were wearing 'Free Palestine' masks. It was clearly a big issue for them," he said.

The faith leaders were led onto the field where there were hundreds of girls.

"We each said a prayer for peace and spoke about the importance of peace in our respective faiths. It was about transcending our differences for the purpose of a shared humanity, and recognising and respecting the humanity of the other.

"What was probably more impactful for the students was the way in which the four of us interacted with one another in a respectful, jovial manner. It was an eye-opener for them to see us up there, getting

along and coming together. We showed them how we could be on different sides and hold different views, but we could still speak to one another as human beings. It was powerful and profound for them," Feldman said.

Kai Amos, 17, the head of the Jewish Student Association at Rondebosch Boys High School, decided that if kids came to school wearing pro-Palestinian masks, he, too, could show support for Israel.

"Some of the Jewish guys and others talked to the head teacher in charge about the best way forward [to encourage] harmony at school. We met with the Muslim Student Association and the principal, and it was decided that we could have a week to show solidarity with whichever side."

Kai and his mother, Carmen, approached the South African Zionist Federation, which provided them with Israeli bracelets, masks, and badges which were handed out to those who wanted to take part.

"It was a very enlightening experience. There was no aggression, everyone was respectful. Discussions were held in Memorial Hall during societies period before break, and a sizeable number of boys attended. These discussions were facilitated by the head of the history society, and they

weren't heated," he said.

Said Carmen, "My kids have young cousins in Israel who have been traumatised, so when my younger son saw disturbing videos of injured Palestinian children on social media, I explained that children were suffering on both sides. This seemed to resonate."

A mother who wished to remain anonymous said her 16-year-old daughter had found the past few weeks traumatic.

"In the beginning at school she felt



Kai Amos of Rondebosch Boys High School wearing his Israeli badge

isolated, intimidated, and harassed. She was mortified by her friends' Instagram posts which showed only one side of the conflict, and became quite anxious. Things have calmed down, but she will never forget this time."

A father who spoke on condition of anonymity has two sons at two different high schools in Johannesburg. For them, it has been an opportunity to learn about the conflict, and has forced them to become knowledgeable.

"I was concerned for both my boys because they were brought into real-world engagement and had to hold their own. They faced the tension up front, and saw first-hand what they will come up against in future. It was intense.

"The biggest issue is what is posted online. It leaves little space for face-to-face conversations which would give children the opportunity to explore their feelings. Offensive and hurtful stuff happens between friend groups, and this becomes tricky. I encouraged my children not to engage with any hate online."

One Grade 9 boy told the SA Jewish Report he felt "uncomfortable" when prefects asked kids during early morning line-up to keep Palestine in their thoughts.

"It was hurtful and insensitive because they don't know the full story," he said.

"Boys that I thought I was close to were also putting up 'Free Palestine' posts on their stories and this surprised me. There's nothing I can do about it, it's their opinion," he said.

"There are a few other Jewish boys, but they feel they'd rather stay quiet because they don't know enough and don't want to say the wrong thing, even though they get upset.

"I like to talk about the conflict and present an alternative view. I'm not afraid. A Muslim boy in my class posted a lot of one-sided pro-Palestinian stuff online, and when I told him I was Jewish, he said that I didn't seem Jewish. In his mind, Jews are all scary people who are violent and want to take everything over."

Said Milner, "People are entitled to express solidarity with either side in the conflict without being harassed and bullied."

She advises children and students to make sure they are informed when engaging with someone who has posted damaging lies online.

"Engagement should be done in a responsible, respectful manner. There is no benefit to getting into slurs and hate."

## Male sexual abuse happening under our noses, says Koleinu

NICOLA MILTZ

"Adult male-on-male abuse is a worrying issue as more incidents involving innocent teenagers and young adult victims are brought to our attention," said Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler of Koleinu, an organisation that offers a helpline for victims of all forms of abuse in the Jewish community.

"It's happening under our noses and in our community. We aren't immune to this form of abuse," Hendler said.

Highlighting National Child Protection Week which runs until 6 June, Hendler said it was important for the community to address this unspoken issue.

"This is an area which is seldom discussed or even recognised in our community. Boys and young adults find it unbearable to confront and so difficult to talk about," she said.

"Male-on-female sexual abuse is starting to be reported and spoken about. It's far more difficult to contemplate the idea of male-on-male sexual abuse as it's a taboo topic."

"Abuse thrives in secrecy," Hendler said. "Secrecy keeps the abuser safe. If adults know of abuse and do nothing to report it, they become complicit, and it's against the law."

Hendler together with her partner, Rozanne Sack, became aware of the rising incidence of sexual and other forms of abuse in the Jewish community several years ago.

Sack said that while all victims of sexual abuse experience shame, for male victims, the level of shame and confusion is often greater as their masculinity and sexuality is called into question.

"They are often told by the perpetrator that they wanted the sexual intimacy, that they are to blame, or that they are gay. The child's sexual identity is disturbed, and they experience great self-doubt about their sexual orientation. They often feel disempowered because as males, they believe that they should have stopped the abuse and that they are weak for having allowed it to happen.

"Abuse happens in a community that allows it by turning a blind eye, sweeping it under the carpet, or sending perpetrators overseas to carry on abusing in other communities. It's only through education, raising awareness, reporting, and holding perpetrators criminally accountable that we will be able to stop the cycle of neglect, abuse, violence, and exploitation of children," she said.

Family educational counsellor Rabbi Elimelech Gartner said he was receiving reports of this type of abuse in the community.

"Male-on-male abuse is a reality. This doesn't mean it's widespread, but it's happening, people are coming to me, and I'm hearing complaints. I don't believe I'm the only

one who hears about it."

Rees Mann of the South African Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse said the damage caused by this type of abuse was devastating.

"Adult male survivors of sexual abuse present with huge developmental and psychological issues. There can be mood and behavioural disturbances, many suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. There is anger, rage, and often suicidal thoughts as they grow up.

"The most important thing for adult survivors is to disclose, and find someone they can trust who can show them empathy, someone who will hear and believe them."

Adolescents are more often targets for male sexual abuse he said. One of the biggest reasons for not reporting a male sexual assault is the fear of being seen as a homosexual.

According to Hendler and Sack, there is no typical profile of a sex offender, but a career offender is someone who makes it his life work to gain access to children, groom them, and ultimately sexually abuse them.

"They are often the most personable, likeable people who have gained the full trust and respect of the community," they said.

The offender will probably choose a profession which gives him access to children, for example a teacher, sports coach, or extra-murals teacher.

"He firstly identifies a target victim, often a vulnerable child. He befriends the child, spending time with him or her in the presence of the parents and gaining the trust of the parents. He then starts to spend time alone with the child, showering him with attention, giving him gifts, babysitting him, taking him on outings. He may show physical affection to the child in front of the parents as a way of normalising the behaviour and desensitising them. He will groom the parents as well as the child, showing them how much he cares for their child, and how much he adds to the child's life. He will entrench himself as a special person in that family's life. This behaviour will continue for months or even years before he begins to sexualise the relationship with the child. By this time, it's often too late for the child to be able to resist the perpetrator."

Sadly, even if the child wants to disclose the abuse, "no-one will believe anything bad of the offender as he is beloved by the family and a highly respected member of the community".

The Chevrah Kadisha's Community Social Services (CKCSS) division is the only Jewish organisation



registered to provide services to persons in abusive relationships or who perpetuate abuse, as well as family members impacted by abuse. It's mandated to investigate all reports of abuse and neglect of children.

"For any community member who becomes aware that abuse may be taking place, there is a procedure for obtaining professional and legal help for those who may be impacted. While such situations are deeply unsettling, experienced, court-mandated, and non-court-mandated assistance is readily available to the Jewish community," said Tania Leibovitz, group intake consultant at the Chev.

"Even if a person initially chooses to report the abuse to another person, professional, or organisation, it must still then be reported to CKCSS or another designated child-protection organisation mandated to investigate the case. Failure to report an abuse is deemed a contravention of law," she said.

"By far the most important factor in encouraging a male victim to come forward is unwavering support and belief in their experience," said Hendler.

"Our community needs to do better in making it safe for any victim of abuse to come forward, by not making them go through secondary traumatisation, by not making them feel as if their marriage prospects will be threatened, by not asking how they could have let it happen."

• All cases of abuse or suspected abuse can be reported to CKCSS by contacting the intake line: 011 532 9701, or the Chev emergency helpline 082 499 1010 after hours. An anonymous sexual abuse reporting hotline has also been set up on 011 264 0341.

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# “Liars and Fakes” brings Cape Town teen fame and fortune

TALI FEINBERG

Like most 16-year-olds, Mila Smith has a busy schedule, fitting in hobbies with schoolwork. But unlike most other teens her age, this Herzlia High School Grade 11 pupil also has a chart-topping music single.

Her passion for singing and song writing led her to sign a record deal, make a music video and release her song internationally, and it has now hit number one on 5FM's Top 10 in South Africa pop chart.

“My Jewish identity is a big part of who I am and how I have grown up. It's my connection to family, to family traditions, and it informs me culturally,” Smith told the *SA Jewish Report* shortly after her debut solo single and music video, *Liars and Fakes*, hit number one on 5FM.



Smith recently signed a record deal with Platoon, a London-based record label. Her song is also being promoted internationally, including in Europe, Australia, and the United States.

“I've been musical for as long as I can remember. It became a more serious thing from around the age of 11 when I started a band,” she says. “Song writing came pretty naturally to me – no-one ever taught me how to do

it. I play piano by ear, so I come up with a melody and from there, I establish piano chords. Once I have the chords, I compose the lyrics. I did take some piano lessons at school in Grade 3, but I didn't pursue learning sheet music for very long. I had a singing

coach for a few years, and that was extremely helpful – I learnt a lot. Now, I'm working with producers and other songwriters who help me to refine my song writing or give me support to continue creating music.”

*Liars and Fakes* is her first official single as a solo artist. “I was in a band called Skyscrapers with two boys from my school from the age of 11 to 14. We released an EP, where our single, *Just Kids*, got lots of radio play and we had a music video for it too,” she says.

*Liars and Fakes* “was written about someone who used me for superficial gain as opposed to chasing a real, genuine friendship”, she says. She's “overjoyed” that the single has been on the local pop charts, “where I've been for the past four weeks in a row, one of which at number one. I'm currently number two – and have been for two weeks!”

Regarding her record deal, she says, “I consider myself extremely lucky because it was an opportunity that just came to me at the right time. In 2018, my band broke up and just as I wondered how I would be able to pursue music, I was contacted by Platoon,

an artist services management and digital music-distribution company. It brought me in as an ‘artist in development’, which means that it provided everything in order for me to create music in studio with the goal of releasing it.”

Making a music video during the pandemic was challenging, Smith says. The video shoot was postponed constantly because of COVID-19 and lockdown. “Eventually, we were able to film it when lockdown regulations lessened, and it was worth the wait. It was an incredible, memorable experience.”

The video was made with the help of production company Butterfly Films. It shows Smith and friends “working at a diner and

hating our jobs. Then one day, our mundane work just gets too much, and we escape the diner on our roller skates and cruise through the city. We land up at an abandoned mall where we transform into beautiful outfits and end the music video dancing on the roof of a building in the city.

“It was meaningful because just like we change outfits, our mindsets change too – from being unsatisfied and fake to being content and our true selves.

Considering *Liars and Fakes* has a bit of an 80s sound, the whole music video takes place on roller skates, which was a major highlight!”

Smith aims to pursue a career in music, singing, song writing, and performing. “I would also love to score a movie soundtrack. In the meantime, there will be a remix of *Liars and Fakes* released

on 18 June. In July, a new single and music video will be released. My debut EP release is also in the works, and that will hopefully take place before the end of the year.”



## Sleep webinar has some eye-opening facts

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Sleep should come naturally, yet our inability to get enough of it is an obsession of the modern age.

“Sleep is a smiley faced curve of death,” said Professor Neale Lange, an international thought leader in sleep at the University of Colorado and a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). “Those sleeping too much and those sleeping too little both die earlier than others.” Lange was speaking at the *SA Jewish Report's* webinar, *Sleep*, on 17 May.

Sleep helps to clear the brain of the metabolic products that occur during wakefulness, Lange says, such as amyloid beta and tau proteins which deposit themselves in the brain leading to dementia, alzheimers, and following recent studies, Parkinson's disease.

“The best investment you can make to defer dementia is to invest in adequate amounts of sleep at the correct time.”

What's the right amount of sleep? “The clinical rule of thumb is

nine hours as ‘normal,’” Lange says. “Enough to make you feel good, and this varies over life,” says Dr Kevin Rosman, a neurologist and the founder of The Morningside Sleep Clinic. “By adulthood, you need about 7.5 to eight hours a night.”

We don't have to do that sleeping at night, and we can bank it up for lean times – up to a point. “A ‘nappocino’ is a great idea, especially if you are sleep deprived during the day or you suspect that the quality of your sleep is poor,” says Lange. “Increasing your quantity of naps is perfectly fine. Ultimately, a nap should be for the duration of 30 or 90 minutes.” He explains that 90 minutes allows you to get to a stage of sleep inertia, or deep sleep, but 30 minutes while restful, doesn't allow you to get to that stage.

“The rule of thumb is that you can pay back sleep within 48 hours, so it's good to catch up on weekends, but you may not be paying back Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.”

“You can bank up sleep a few days before a sporting event [which starts early],” says Professor Karine

Scheuermaier, an expert on sleep, circadian rhythms, and health at Wits. “This has been proven by studies in the military, but it's best to work to change your circadian rhythm beforehand.”

We didn't always do all our sleeping in one go. “Before the advent of street lights, we had a bimodal sleep pattern,” says Lange. “We would go to sleep at dark, wake at midnight and interact over a candle, then go back to sleep until the morning. And, we did just fine for centuries. That said, humans have consolidated their sleep into a single period, and we don't really fully understand the implications of breaking up sleep.

“All stages are important, but you are looking for stable sleep in the early part of the night, so the second four

part. So, too, does a poor diet and habits that “reward” you for broken sleep, like waking and eating, looking at your phone, or doing chores so that you don't have to do them tomorrow.

Recent studies have found a link between “long-COVID” and insomnia or excessive sleepiness, which parallels the findings after the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. “When they died, and were dissected, they found that their sleep and awake pathways were affected by the virus,” says Scheuermaier. “Whether we're affected directly by the toxicity of the virus [through the nose], we're not sure yet, but posttraumatic stress disorder [after a stay in intensive care, for example] is part of it.”

Though treatment varies, doctors are united on what constitutes good sleep hygiene.

- Wear loose, comfortable clothing;
- The darker the room the better;
- A lower temperature helps us to fall asleep, about 18 to 19 degrees is best, though women tend to prefer a warmer temperature;
- Silence is best;
- Your mattress should allow you to lie absolutely flat, and your pillow should support the space between your head and shoulder;
- Avoid caffeine or stimulants before going to bed;
- Don't drink alcohol just before bed as it will help put you to sleep, but wake you up after a few hours;
- A hot drink, meditation, progressive relaxation, yoga, or “calm apps” are fine, but avoid vigorous exercise just before going to sleep;
- Get into a sleep routine. Just as it takes the body about 30 minutes to boot up in the morning, it takes a similar time to boot down, says Rosman. You can't go from hyper alert (like working or studying) straight to bed. You need time to wind down;
- Get enough sunshine during the day, especially just after you wake up in the morning, says Scheuermaier, as this helps to set your circadian rhythm;
- If you suffer from “sleep maintenance insomnia” where you wake and can't get back to sleep, don't reward yourself by eating, looking at screens, talking, or doing chores. Go into another, dimly lit, room, and read something boring like a dictionary;
- Taking sleeping tablets once in a while is OK, but every night is too much, as it suppresses slow-wave sleep;
- Lastly, of course, seek help from the experts if you don't come right.



A screenshot from the webinar

hours may have less slow-wave sleep. However, it's better to get broken than reduced sleep.”

You can sleep too much, and after an abnormal amount of time, the “battery stops accepting charge”, the experts say. Hypersomnia is a sign of depression. Insomnia, on the other hand, can cause depression and other mental-health problems.

They blame our epidemic of sleep deprivation on a number of things, including modern technology and social expectation – particularly careers like healthcare or the law, where we are awarded by society and the system if we can function without sleep.

The internet and television are big culprits, giving teens 24-hour connectivity on their phones and undermining their whole notion of sleep. The blue and white light coming off your screens “literally screams at your brain that it's awake”, they say, though blue-light blocking amber-coloured glasses can help.

Disorders and diseases like restless leg syndrome, nocturia, trauma, irritable bowel syndrome, obesity, depression, sleep apnoea, and COVID-19 also play their



Turning to her style, she says, “I love an array of different looks. I'm drawn to sporty, glam looks and I will say that I love a power suit too! I'm not that into makeup (but on a shoot or music video, with the help of the makeup artist, I love it), and I keep my hair natural. I'm drawn to good quality items that I feel good in and know I'll use for a long time.”

“Herzlia has been incredibly helpful in my music journey due to its unwavering support and willingness to help me deal with my demanding schedule,” she says. “I was overwhelmed by everyone's kind words and encouragement. I'm beyond grateful to be part of the Herzlia community.”

Her advice to others who want to follow a similar path is “put yourself out there. We are living at a time where you have the world at your fingertips. Make use of it! Whether that means posting a video on Facebook or Instagram or simply performing for family and friends, it can have a big impact. It's also important to have faith in yourself and your own ability. You are your own biggest fan!”

# Judaism helped me survive Survivor, says contestant

MIRAH LANGER

**P**roud ex-King Davidian and corporate lawyer, Amy Eliason, has joined a new tribe, taking her place among the castaways of the latest season of *Survivor South Africa: Immunity Island*.

"I knew on *Survivor* I would call on my faith to give me strength. I believed that this would help me immensely when things seemed to get dark," said Eliason about her strong identification with Judaism.

"I also tried to remember that I wasn't just representing myself on the show, but the community and, of course, my family. I think that helped to keep me grounded and stable," the 33-year-old told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

A born and bred Joburger, Eliason grew up in a religious home and attended King David Victory Park. She then went on to complete a BCom Honours in finance and then her law degree. She now works as a director at a major international law firm.

Eliason said that while she always watched and loved *Survivor*, she had never previously considered taking part, "but one day I was at a braai with friends, and the call for applications came on TV, and somehow I knew that I had to enter and that I would be selected. It was almost written in the stars. When I got the call confirming I was in, though, I nearly had a heart attack!"

What made it even more difficult was that at first, the

contestants weren't allowed to tell many people they had been selected. "It's like winning the lottery and having to wait six months to claim your winnings!" she joked.

Her motivation for taking part in the challenge was to prove to herself that she had "the strength of character it takes to not only survive but thrive in the toughest environment. I wanted to make my family proud of me, but mostly, I wanted to make myself proud of me," said Eliason, who also writes poetry and plays poker as creative outlets alongside her professional career path.

Taking part in *Survivor* was the latest adventure brought on by her "inquisitive nature". "I'm always seeking to experience new things. *Survivor* ended up being more of a challenge than I ever expected, and the pride that I have now is incomparable," she said.

The eighth season of the South African version of this international reality TV show was also the first season to be filmed on South African soil. Eliason was one of 20 chosen to spend 39 days on the Wild Coast in the Eastern Cape in pursuit of R1 million.

Eliason said that when it came to planning for the experience, the COVID-19 lockdown waylaid her best intentions. "When I originally applied for *Survivor*, I was in the best shape of my life. I was training at least five times a week, and I felt prepared for the experience. Then lockdown hit in March, and I ended up spending months on my couch, eating like it was a sport, and forgetting what a dumbbell looked like. So, it's safe to say I didn't feel prepared at all for the island once it all became real!"

Reflecting on her experience of the show, she said the most surprising thing she learnt was that "people can surprise you – in the best and worst ways. But also that I'm stronger and braver than I ever imagined".



Amy Eliason

The season will begin airing on 3 June, and Eliason is preparing herself for the public exposure: "Being on *Survivor* is the most raw and vulnerable situation to be in. Knowing that the public will be able to see all of that is scary at times, but also liberating and exciting."

"I hope people are kind and remember that I'm not just a character on TV but also a human being who was just trying her best."

## Yeshiva proud of student leaders

**Y**eshiva College has appointed its new student leaders for 2021/2022, and the school wishes them mazeltov and every success for the year ahead. The girls: Ariella Friendland, Ariella Feinblum, Talya Shlesinger, Tali Kozinsky, Carrie Goldstein, Batsheva Levy, Hannah Farber, Liora Rsodenberg.

The boys: Josh Sachs, Asher Levenstein, Gidon Ralph, Benji Chazen, Daniel Sacks, Joseph Levin, Joshua Hirschowitz, Jonathan Lewis.



Liat Lew  
Head Girl



Gabriel Kohlberg  
Head Boy

## Pirkei Avot programme kicks off at KDPSVP and Ariel



**S**tudents at King David Ariel and King David Primary School Victory Park (KDPSVP) were on Friday, 28 May, introduced to an interactive learning programme to do at home with their families at the launch of the Pirkei Avot – Ethics programme.

Students were also gifted magnificent books to take home, and directed where to draw daily practical lessons from Torah.

Weekly prizes and incentives are on offer to keep everyone motivated and excited. The programme will culminate with a national arts and culture competition, in which students are encouraged to express their talents in any form based on what they have studied in the five-week programme.

**Devorah Wineberg, the director of Tzivos Hashem and co-ordinator of National Pirkei Avot programme and arts and culture competition addresses students**

## Letters

### KASRILS THROWS JEWISH PEOPLE UNDER THE BUS

Dear Ronnie Kasrils  
I've read your post in the *Sunday Times*.  
It's with much pain that I'm called to draft a response.  
In the name of peace and dialogue for a better future for all, let me begin with an understanding of your view. Rather than correct you, I wish to connect with you.  
So, Israel is the ultimate re-incarnation of the devil, the perfection of an apartheid regime, an occupier beyond measure, the quintessential case study for colonialism, and the most inhumane entity above and beyond Assad in Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, above and beyond the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in Mozambique, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, to mention only a few of the competitors for this prestige competition for obsessive focus and singularity.  
In the spirit of dialogue, I'll entertain your point of view.  
Let's say that Israel is the devil.  
The problem I have is the way in which you throw us Jewish people under the bus.  
Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is a learned and sensitive man. Throughout COVID-19 and lockdown, we were privy on a Sunday afternoon to webinars focused

solely on the upliftment and wellness of the community. The rabbi was also the innovator of a security system which has kept us safe for many years, and a project which has unified and brought us much joy.  
The issue I have with you is your lack of sensitivity to the rabbi and Jewish community in an atmosphere of intensified antisemitism and global violence towards the Jewish people.  
Your noble humanitarian, egalitarian, and progressive liberal views don't add value to the healing of a fracture, but rather increase the dividedness and brokenness.  
On this deficit in the strategic import of your so-called passionate call for justice, you fail miserably. You behave like the very Israel you so (incorrectly) label an apartheid, genocidal country. You use your now outdated, expired, heroic stance towards apartheid to stand against your own people, however wrong, in a conceptual genocide and apartheid against the Jewish people and yourself.  
When faced with the dilemma of truth versus peace, you choose truth – which is debatable – and it's not peaceful.  
How noble. Indeed, so just!  
- **Dr Joel Shapiro, Johannesburg**

### WE ARE LOSING SUPPORT DUE TO INCOMPETENT PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

Anton,  
I read your recent article on the Israeli and Palestinian conflict and the media relating thereto. Although it's obviously erudite and well thought out, I disagree with you totally regarding your statement that Israel is starting to lose the media war.  
The mass media has never been on the side of Israel, and basically never will be.  
The mass media is on the side of whomsoever it feels will best suit its pockets. As has always been the case, in these instances, it's the Palestinian cause.

What I simply cannot understand is the total incompetence of the Israeli/Jewish system in this regard.  
We have some of the best marketing and advertising companies in the world, and instead of using their know-how and experience, they choose to ignore these and issue incompetent and unintelligible "reports".  
Until someone competent is put in charge to handle one of the most important aspects of any conflict – public relations – we will continue to lose support.  
- **Clive Varejes, Johannesburg**

### THE BIGGEST LOSERS IN VIOLENT ACTS ARE THE PERPETRATORS

Whether momentary, temporary, or permanent, antisemitism is mental illness. When it translates into violent acts against Jews and worse, their murder, it's an inexcusable crime, an unforgivable one.  
The biggest losers are the perpetrators themselves, who invariably inflict their rages on members of their own families – spouses, siblings, and children – and they are hated, whether openly or secretly by them. The perpetrators of this terror, which harms all around them, die a lonely death.  
Just as bigotry in all its form is hateful, the words of my late father come to mind: not to discriminate against someone for something he cannot account for by birth, whether race, religion, or sex. I would add disability to the mix.  
Like any anger, any rage, the inconvenience of it is forgetfulness, such as in this latest upsurge in the Gaza-Israeli conflict about who began the violence.  
This is a time to heal, to return to sanity. - **Alison Goldberg, Johannesburg**

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המחלקה לפעילות בחו"ל Department for Diaspora Activities

# The Good Jew list

I'm not a "Good Jew". I know this because my name doesn't appear on the ever-increasing list of "Good Jews" published in various forms. The list of "Good Jews" is determined by those who are desperate to separate their obsession with Israel with any allegation of antisemitism. It's a modern version of "Some of my best friends are Jewish", or "I can't be racist, because I voted for Obama."

The Not in My Name organisation is case in point. It wasted little time in dredging up anyone who had ever met a Jew, and who could claim to be one because they drove through Glenhazel one Friday, and paraded their names with the pride of a protestor with a Hezbollah flag. Only, in its haste to hoist it, it failed to go through the list. If it had done so, it would have seen what I saw, which was the least sounding "Jewish" name imaginable.

AM Quisling appears at the bottom right. I couldn't ask my mom as she's no longer around, but I have no recollection of hearing about the Quislings from Sannishof, or Yeoville, or Bethal, or even Emmarentia. The name, however, sounded vaguely familiar, and so in the absence of a "Jewish geography" expert, I turned to Google as the next best thing. Which is when I realised why I knew the name.

Quisling is a term originating in Norway, which is used in Scandinavian languages and in English for a person who collaborates with an enemy occupying force – or more generally as a synonym for traitor. The word originates from the surname of the Norwegian war-time leader Vidkun Quisling, who headed a domestic Nazi collaborationist regime during World War II.

Someone was clearly playing with them. And in all their seriousness, and in all desire to name names, it never occurred to them to check.

I wonder what academics like Max Price or Raymond Suttner who are "Good Jews", would feel about that.

It didn't stop there. Integrity clearly wasn't a cornerstone of this petition. One of the signatories to the list, Rachel Glaser, posted the following message in response to the publication of the "Good Jew" list. "I signed the petition based on the text in Mailchimp, but I'm not 'opposed to the state of Israel' per the QR scanner request. I think it should be changed to 'actions of Israel' as opposed to 'the state of Israel' as it makes it look like Israel shouldn't exist. I don't agree with this. Please change the wording as it wasn't in the petition. Thank you."

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



The petition, Glaser is correct, was changed after people placed their names. And not in a subtle way. As Glaser (correctly) points out, it's one thing to criticise the actions of a country or a government, and an entirely different matter to deny its right to exist. Another matter entirely.

And if Glaser was hoodwinked, who else might have been? I wonder what academics and "Good Jews" Price and Suttner would feel about that.

We are no stranger to this. In every generation, there are those who have risen up to destroy us. In every generation, they have used "social justice" as an excuse. And in every generation, the "Good Jew" list has been used as a tool to convince those in doubt that some of their best friends are Jewish.

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The fact is, according to the 2019 Kaplan Survey, 90% of South African Jews have an attachment to Israel. Whether Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, whether they agree with every action or hardly any, they believe that Israel is central to our faith

and believe without question that the Jewish state has a right to exist and defend itself. Most Jews wouldn't appear on the "Good Jew" list.

I, for one, am not a "Good Jew". And that makes me proud.

### A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## Open season on Jews

As expected, the Gaza conflict resulted in a sharp upsurge in antisemitic attacks the world over. The focus of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) over the past week has been on following up several of the more serious instances of anti-Jewish abuse and intimidation. We assisted a university student in laying criminal charges against two classmates who cyberbullied and threatened him, and are assisting a community member who was threatened in a Johannesburg gym and subjected to disturbing rhetoric. We have further worked closely with children at non-Jewish schools, university students, professionals, and business people who have likewise been victimised.

Another area of concern has been the growing prevalence of calls for Jewish-owned businesses to be boycotted. It's noteworthy that the ostensible distinction that Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS)-aligned activists routinely make between "Zionists" and Jews has been distinctly absent regarding these initiatives. Those responsible have quite unabashedly identified those they wish to target on the basis of them being Jewish. In one case that has come to our attention, a store was singled out for boycott because it stocks kosher

products. These actions very obviously amount to incitement to cause harm on the basis of both religion and ethnicity, and as such, are expressly prohibited in South African law.

Such is the intensity of the anti-Israel frenzy whipped up in times of heightened conflict in the Middle East, many consider it to be open season on anyone who takes a contrary position. In practice, that usually means Jews, although we are now also seeing people outside of our community targeted, most notably a Laudium school teacher who was reportedly fired for expressing what was no more than a mildly pro-Israel view.

Fortunately, in a democratic society, the law states otherwise, and in cases where people have crossed the line, the Board has always gone to whatever lengths necessary to hold them accountable. Among those who have learned this to their cost are former Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Fatima Hajaig; Bongani Masuku, the international relations secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU); and international relations secretary and former COSATU Western Cape leader Tony Ehrenreich.

Upholding the right of the Jewish community to dignity and equality is the core mandate of the

## ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



SAJBD, and that includes safeguarding the right of its members to support and identify with Israel without being threatened, racially abused, or unfairly disadvantaged.

Striving to inject more balance in the media is another area in which the Board, in tandem with the South African Zionist Federation and other communal organisations working in that field, continues to be much involved. This week, we have co-ordinated a united response by leading Jewish organisations to a scurrilous and thoroughly disgraceful attack on our chief rabbi that appeared in a leading weekly newspaper over the weekend. This, together with the many interviews and comments provided by our spokespeople and opinion pieces published have at least got our community's voice out there and ensured that the media's coverage of issues hasn't been one-way traffic.

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

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

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