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■ Volume 26 – Number 04 ■ 3 February 2022 ■ 2 Adar I 5782

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Sexual-abuse accusation of Hebrew teacher rocks community

NICOLA MILTZ

Shockwaves have ripped through the community following the allegation on social media last week of a popular Hebrew teacher in Johannesburg who has been implicated in the alleged sexual abuse of adolescents.

The alleged perpetrator, a 57-year-old man, cannot be named in terms of the Sexual Offences Act until charges have been formally laid and he has pleaded to them.

The allegations have divided the tight-knit community into different camps, some feeling shock and disbelief and others disgust. Some were even relieved that this had come to light after years of speculation. Many have this week been made aware of the allegations that an extra lesson Hebrew teacher who resides in Glenhazel has been reported to the authorities.

Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler and Rozanne Sack, who head up Koleinu SA, an organisation that offers a helpline to victims of all forms of abuse in the Jewish community, say that concerns have been brought to their attention. "We urge people to wait patiently and allow authorities to work through the allegations," they say.

It's alleged that the man has been on the radar for some time for systematically grooming adolescents and their families. Multiple stories of alleged inappropriate behaviour have been whispered for years, said insiders this week. It has been a case of rumour, hearsay, and "knowing without knowing", they said.

He is known to administer a *chesed* (kindness) WhatsApp group and to be extremely helpful, especially to young, vulnerable adolescent males, offering them lifts, money, his credit card, and generally looking out for their well-being.

One severely traumatised victim confided in a rabbi more than two years ago about horrific abuse allegedly involving the teacher. The rabbi contacted another rabbi, and the two men encouraged the victim to report the incident to the Chevrah Kadisha Community Social Services (CKCSS) which he did in front of a social worker

and the two rabbis. He didn't sign his statement out of fear and shame.

The victim is still in therapy, petrified of exposure and desperately trying to pick up the pieces and move on with his life, say those he confided in.

Dissatisfied and frustrated with communal and civil institutions and the seemingly slow pace at which cases of this nature progress, members of the community have turned to social media in a bid to spur things on.

Several high-profile cases of abusers in Israel have encouraged members of the community to expose the Glenhazel Hebrew teacher.

Outspoken lawyer David Swartz has taken to social media to vent his frustrations. "I have kids and a wife, and friends and family I love dearly. Nothing in this world matters more to me. I won't stop until I know everything has been done to protect them. I have also met many victims of abuse, and the fact that they feel so alone and their safety, security, and well-being isn't made priority number one is a disgrace, to put it mildly. I also cannot accept our institutions failing us and [showing] no accountability. When offenders and predators are protected and issues swept under the rug, it leaves my family, friends, and all our children and the community even more vulnerable. This isn't just me. There is a wave coming. Change is coming. We have had enough, and we will do everything we can."

Meanwhile, the Hebrew teacher has vehemently denied all allegations.

"I was absolutely shocked and horrified to read the post as the allegations about me are completely false. Until the publication of the post, not one person has ever made these allegations about me or accused me of doing anything improper or inappropriate. I have also not been contacted by the police in spite of the claim on the post that I've been 'reported to the police'. I have most certainly never abused or molested anyone, on any level, physically, emotionally, or otherwise," he said.

"Any abuse, of any person, is totally unacceptable, particularly vulnerable children. There is no question

that I fully support all and any efforts to protect people from sexual or any other abuse."

The teacher said he had always endeavoured to "uplift and assist people" in any way he could.

"I'm deeply concerned for other innocent victims of ostensibly well-intentioned but hugely destructive forces in the community who use social media to try and convict others without substance or even being given an opportunity to deal with allegations that have been made against them," he said.

It was "regrettably part of this awful cancel culture which has gripped the world. It's time now for an organisation to be created to support the innocent victims of cancel culture who also deserve protection.

"It goes without saying that this vicious and unfounded post has caused me and my family immeasurable pain and reputational damage. What has been said is clearly defamatory, and I'm seeking legal advice as to the way forward."

At this point, there have been no arrests or police investigations into this case.



The rare snowfall in Jerusalem this week didn't deter people from praying at the Kotel

Come rain, shine ... or snow

Advocate Liza Segal, the head of the Abuse Review Board set up several years ago by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, told the *SA Jewish Report* that victims were often afraid of the consequences of coming forward and of their identity being revealed. "This is one of the unfortunate and tragic

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ChevrahKadisha

Director of kosher agency start-up resigns over “offensive” comments

NICOLA MILTZ

A director of the recently formed new kosher hechsher resigned in the same week of its launch. Akiva Mallett of Kosher Certified South Africa (KCSA) resigned with immediate effect following the revelation of offensive comments made last year directed at Kenny Rabson, board member of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS), and Rabbi Dovi Goldstein, managing director of the Beth Din’s kosher department. Mallet, an experienced *mashgiach* (kosher supervisor) was summoned to a hearing to answer to charges involving an alleged breach of the *mashgiach* code of conduct, whereby he allegedly provided kosher advice and guidance to a non-certified caterer. He refused to attend the hearing, and instead sent a bitter, hurtful email to Rabson and Goldstein. This followed what he described as years of frustration with the UOS and the kosher department in having the working conditions of *mashgichim* satisfactorily addressed, as well as other issues. In it, he said he wouldn’t subject himself to a “mafia-style kangaroo bush-court system”. He accused Goldstein of being a liar, and said he had no faith in Rabson (referring to the *mashgiach* code of conduct, which had yet to be amended, and the multiple times that working conditions were raised and remained

He said he hoped the community could find it in their hearts to forgive him...

unresolved). “This from a religious organisation. The more I read books on the Holocaust, the clearer it appears [that] Hitler didn’t want to kill all the Jews, just the bad ones, think if you fit in that category.” Mallett was quick to apologise on Facebook to Rabson and Goldstein, and asked to be judged favourably in his moment of weakness and frustration. In a letter addressed to the Jewish community on a KCSA letterhead, he said, “KCSA values truth, integrity, transparency, and accountability above all else. In order for KCSA to be a credible organisation, we hold dear the need for accountability and transparency. Therefore, in light of my offensive statements, which were recently published in the *SA Jewish Report*, which I recognise were deeply hurtful to Rabbi Dovi Goldstein, Kenny Rabson, and the entire Jewish community, I hereby resign from the board of KCSA with immediate effect.” He said he hoped the community could find it in their hearts to forgive him. KCSA was launched last week to compete with the Beth Din, the country’s foremost kosher certification under the UOS. The recently formed business describes itself as a kosher certifying agency under the halachic supervision of Rabbi Avigdor Bokow, the father of one of its directors, Velvy Bokow.

Its directors insist that starting a new kosher certification isn’t about “sour grapes”, it’s about service delivery aimed at being “affordable, reliable, and available” and it’s about “giving back to the community”. Directors Bokow and Aharon Bogatie told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that the business was founded upon “a commitment to transparency”. They have released the results of a survey which they conducted last week which asked consumers whether they would support a new hechsher. Many said they would if prices were lower and the kosher certification was reliable and reputable. Some agreed that competition was healthy. Others said they wouldn’t support it. “It’s clear from the 81.1% who are supportive – as indicated in the results – that there’s a large contingency of the community that would support a new kashrus authority,” said Bokow. “KCSA has already been approached by two companies for certification, and the relevant application forms are being addressed. We are, furthermore, in discussion with close to a dozen more companies. We look forward to providing a competitive service with the best interests of the community at the fore.”

Chevrah Kadisha calls on community to report abuse

The Chevrah Kadisha Community Social Services (CKCSS) is an appointed and authorised Child Protection Organisation (CPO) to deal with alleged and confirmed cases of abuse and to uphold the rights of victims and accused persons in a fair, unbiased, and professional manner. The CPO is governed by the prevailing legislation as well as provisions of the Children’s Act. According to the Act, it’s compulsory for people to report incidents of child abuse and neglect to a registered CPO, the South African Police Service, or the department of social development. The CKCSS calls upon community members and professionals working with children or any other person who has knowledge of abuse to report the matter urgently and immediately, provided allegations are substantiated with reasonable facts and proof and not based on hearsay. If an investigation shows no abuse, the reporter won’t be held accountable, as anyone who discloses alleged abuse is protected by the Children’s Act. The Chev has a team of dedicated professionals who work in this field, with many years of experience, knowledge, and therapeutic skills. For abuse to be dealt with effectively, it requires the co-operation of the community. All details are kept confidential as required. For abuse-related matters, call 011 532 9701 or after hours on 082 499 1010.

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Torah Thought

Torah – our gold (silver and copper) standard

In this week’s parsha, Hashem tells us of the building materials that were required to create the beautiful Mishkan, the tabernacle – opening with gold, silver, and copper. The Midrash comments on this: “There are those who have silver, but not gold, and those who have gold, but not silver, however, the Torah has both silver and gold. There are those who have fields, but not vineyards, and those who have vineyards, but not fields, however, the Torah has both vineyards and fields.” The difficulty of this Midrash, of course, is clear – the Torah is a book! It has neither gold nor silver, neither fields nor vineyards, it has words. The Ishbitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, explains that each of these items refers to a person’s proclivities and talents. Some focus on “gold”, which represents love, and others “silver”, meaning fear; some have a relationship with Hashem and with others that is characterised by love and giving, others have relationships characterised by respect and boundaries, and generally, a person finds herself at home with

one or the other. Although a person can have aspects of both, she cannot be a master of both. So, too, the field and the vineyard – the field represents expansion, creativity, and vision, and the vineyard order, organisation, and precision. If someone wants to master love, where should they look? In the Torah. Reverence? Also in the Torah. And so forth. Somehow, Hashem created a book that speaks to every one of us according to our own path in life and our own unique spiritual and psychological makeup. The trick, of course, is knowing how to read it. It strikes me as most peculiar that people understand the need for intensive study of mathematics, engineering, and genetics in order to properly understand those topics (not virology or epidemiology of course – we have all seen over the past two years that one can become a world-expert on the matter simply by reading Facebook posts, but I digress), yet when it comes to understanding the Torah’s guidance in life, we don’t perceive the correlation between deep study of the Torah, Gemara, halacha, Midrash, Kabbalah

and commentaries and developing clarity and direction in our spiritual strivings and ethical questions. In my experience, the path is twofold: serious study with and acceptance of the authority of a teacher whom you admire and respect deeply; and your own effort and work to understand Torah to the best of your ability. The Gemara says that your teacher of Torah should be in your eyes “like an angel of Hashem”. I was privileged to have such a teacher in Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein of blessed memory, but we’re a blessed generation in that we have many such people who can teach us. Through guidance and hard work, Hashem blesses us with the ability to find relevance and guidance in the Torah that teaches us our own unique and particular path – the treasure of gold (or silver, or copper) that has been there since creation, waiting for you – and you alone – to discover. Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Sam Thurgood, Beit Midrash Morasha



Clover strikers and BDS continue milking anti-Israel rhetoric

NICOLA MILTZ

The protracted Clover strike, which started as a local wage and retrenchment dispute in November, has grown into a full-blown anti-Israel hate fest.

In its third month, hapless striking workers at Clover have been spurred on by the unions that support them and the anti-Israel lobby intent on hijacking the dispute for its own political agenda.

Said Professor Karen Milner of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), “The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [BDS] movement is unashamedly using a labour dispute to try and score petty points against Israel.”



BDS clearly doesn't have the interest of the workers at heart, Milner said.

“Rather, it's attempting to exploit them and prey off them for its own narrow interest of bashing Israel. As is always the case when BDS believes it's not getting its own way, it ups the anti-Israel rhetoric.”

Workers have been picketing outside Clover factories and plants as well as other key points as the strike intensifies and hostilities between Clover management and workers and unions escalates.

Last week, striking workers represented by their unions and joined by anti-Israel activists marched in Johannesburg demanding that the company halt retrenchments and wage cuts.

They took their protest to the Israel Trade and Economic Office as part of a national and international day of action against the dairy producer.

The South African Federation of Trade Unions and several affiliates including, the Food and Allied Workers' Union and the General Industries Workers' Unions of South Africa (GIWUSA), and anti-Israel activists organised the day of action in solidarity with Clover workers.

Unions are calling for a boycott of Clover products to protest against restructuring and loss of jobs.

Clover management has said the decision to restructure was taken in the light of difficult trading conditions.

Among many demands, the workers are insisting that the company stop plans for further retrenchments and

reinstate all workers. They also want it to be independent of the Israeli Central Bottling Company (CBC). Clover was acquired in 2019 by a consortium called Milco SA, which is led by CBC. CBC is an Israeli-based manufacturer and distributor of soft drinks, dairy products, and alcoholic beverages. Calls have also been made for nationalisation of the company.

GIWUSA President Mametlwe Sebei said working conditions and the general treatment of workers had worsened since Milco bought Clover.

“Your enemy is the enemy of the Palestinian people. The brutality you are experiencing under the Milco dictatorship isn't new to Palestinian people who are subjected to the vile system of colonialism, oppression, and brutality under the Israeli regime,” Sebei said while addressing a protesting crowd.

Clover has said it had “explored all possible avenues to minimise retrenchments”.

In a statement, the company said retrenchments were “necessary to enhance Clover's resilience for the benefit of its collective stakeholders”. The company “had been subject to a difficult trading cycle for several years, where economic growth has been poor, costs have generally

been rising above inflation, and consumer spending has been subdued. COVID-19 has added to these pressures and the uncertainty faced.”

Meanwhile police have opened a murder docket following the death of Fidelity security guard Tshephe Molatsi who was killed during one of the protests. According to Clover management, Molatsi was escorting a Clover truck when his car was intercepted by striking workers and he was killed.

Steven Velthuysen, Clover group manager: legal and secretarial, said the violence of the attack “wasn't industrial action but murder” adding that the company had been granted an interdict against the unions to prevent violence, but this was allegedly ignored.

He told Moneyweb last week that the strike, which started as a wage and retrenchment dispute, had become politicised. “This dispute has now reached a level where they politicise the labour issues by taking aim at our shareholders and disseminating a lot of misinformation in the market.”

“It's unfortunate that in a wage and retrenchment dispute, the shareholders are now being pulled into this dispute, and it's becoming an Israel/Palestinian-politics issue that's being raised by all the groups.”

He told GroundUp that Clover had explored “all possible avenues” to minimise retrenchments, but trading conditions and poor economic growth had made things difficult.

“We embarked on restructuring as a last resort.

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Our business was materially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we had little – if any – choice in the decision we made, which wasn't made lightly. We cannot and will not reverse our decision if we are to run an economically viable business,” Velthuysen said.

The company said Milco SA had made a “major cash investment in the business” which had enabled it to prevent further job losses.

Leon Louw, the president of the Free Market Foundation, told the *SA Jewish Report* that BDS had “successfully hijacked” a domestic labour matter to promote antisemitism. “BDS is abusing the workers and unions by injecting its antisemitic agenda where it has no relevance,” he said.

“The Jewish/Israeli connection is clearly irrelevant, and concocted to serve antisemitic agendas. The issue is entirely business economics.

“Directors and managers don't sit around ruminating over political treatises about nation states, post-apartheid South Africa, imperialism, and opportunities for racist discrimination. They have no time for that, and any such indulgence would come at the expense of profit and business opportunities,” Louw said.

“All they're interested in is precisely the same as what every entrepreneur, white or black, Jewish or Muslim, rich or poor, philanthropic or greedy, racial or non-racial

is concerned about: profit.”

He said Clover was making what it believed to be optimal business decisions.

“Were it to make any other kind of decision, it would go out of business, and instead of some workers losing jobs, all would,” Louw said.

Furthermore, he said foreign investors must be free to run businesses as businesses and not be expected to serve other interests, “otherwise they are free to invest in more than 200 other countries that welcome them”.

“What unions ought to be demanding of government is to create a maximally seductive investment and employment environment. That would drive wages and working conditions upwards towards the best in the world.”

While retrenchments were a “ghastly” experience, unions and workers should adopt co-operative labour-relations models in which there is a culture of working together to ensure competitiveness and sustainability.

“The adversarial approach here is an apartheid legacy. The new South Africa should long ago have switched to a co-operative model, and enlightened unions should be leading the charge. They certainly shouldn't allow BDS to make things even worse than the failed system we inherited from apartheid.”

Sexual-abuse accusation of Hebrew teacher rocks community

>>Continued from page 1

consequences of sexual abuse, and one which the perpetrator exploits,” she said.

“The victim has to decide, without any pressure being placed on them, to lay a criminal complaint,” said Segal. “As a board, we are painfully aware of the needs and wishes of the victims and that disclosing their identity without their permission would be a further betrayal of them.”

However, she said, in the absence of a victim or witness being prepared to disclose their identity formally by making a statement in writing which is signed by them and which would be handed to the police for a criminal case to be opened, the Abuse Review Board was legally constrained from taking any action, criminal or otherwise.

“It's simply not possible to lay an anonymous criminal charge or for any legal steps to be taken in the absence of a formal written and signed complaint by a victim or witness,” she said.

To date, the board still had not received a formal written complaint about this man. “In the circumstances,

we're hamstrung in the performance of our duties. We're unable to act outside of the confines of our law and in spite of having met senior police officers who deal with cases involving sexual abuse of minors and advising them of the facts of this case, we have been advised that no steps can be taken on the basis of allegations made anonymously. We have been assured by them that as soon as we are able to provide a formal statement signed by the victim or witness, the SAPS will act swiftly and we will assist them in doing so”.

Please see the Chev's statement on page 2.

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

Koleinu has an anonymous and confidential hotline 011 264 0341 in Johannesburg or 074 180 5687 in Cape Town. There is also a confidential WhatsApp line on 082 443 6703/061 975 8473.

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Amnesty International report slammed for extreme bias

TALI FEINBERG

An Amnesty International (AI) report calling Israel an apartheid state has been criticised by leading Jewish organisations and Israeli leaders. Though the report acknowledges Jews’ right to self-determination and doesn’t challenge Israel’s desire to be a home for Jews, it recommends actions that would undermine the reality of a Jewish state.

“Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has pursued a policy of establishing and then maintaining a Jewish demographic majority and maximising control over land and resources to benefit Jewish Israelis. In 1967, Israel extended this policy to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Today, all territories controlled by Israel continue to be administered with the purpose of benefiting Jewish Israelis to the detriment of Palestinians, while Palestinian refugees continue to be excluded,” says the report.

Essentially ignoring Israel’s security needs, the report says, “Amnesty International examined each of the security justifications which Israel cites as the basis for its treatment of Palestinians. The report shows that, while some of Israel’s policies may have been designed to fulfil legitimate security objectives, they have been implemented in a grossly disproportionate and discriminatory way which fails to comply with international law.”

The report calls for Palestinian refugees and their descendants “to return to homes where they or their families once lived”, which would mean Israel would no longer be a Jewish state. It also calls for Israel to be isolated from the international community.

“Categorising Israel as ‘committing the crime of apartheid’ creates the presumption that AI is trying to assist the United Nations [UN] to haul Israel to the International Criminal Court,” said Sara Gon of the Institute for Race Relations.

“The blatant one-sidedness [of the report] is best illustrated by its regard of history since 1948. Much has been written about this period and the responsibility of all sides in the conflict, but it’s astonishing that the history as revealed is literally only good Palestinian victims and aggressive, cruel Jews. There’s no context about the period preceding 1948 and no mention at all of Britain and mandate Palestine.”

She said the report implied that Israel had never been a legal entity, and should never have come into being. “AI supports the ‘right of return’, so one can only conclude

that Israel should cease to exist as a Jewish state and become a Muslim majority state.

“The report reflects the extraordinary bias and malice of AI,” Gon said. “There’s no mention of the genocidal antisemitism of the Palestinian leadership. There’s nothing that indicates that this report was intended to be professional and even-handed. It’s so far from that, it’s cringe-worthy. But let Israel be in no doubt: AI believes that Israel has no right to exist, and Jews don’t even come into the equation.”

Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said the report “effectively denies [Israel’s] right to exist. Israel isn’t perfect, but it’s a democracy committed to international law and open to scrutiny.”

He accused AI of having an antisemitic agenda, saying, “I hate to use the argument that if Israel wasn’t a Jewish state, nobody in Amnesty would dare argue against it, but in this case, there’s no other possibility.”

Diaspora Affairs Minister Dr Nachman Shai also weighed in. “To say that the state of Israel is an apartheid state is detached from reality and antisemitic in every respect. The report is a clear expression of the new antisemitism under the guise of humanitarianism. It’s false, one-sided, completely detached from the daily reality in Israel, and denies the right to exist of the nation-state of the Jewish people. This report is antisemitic propaganda, without a shadow of a doubt.”

Shai also pointed out that AI’s report failed the test of the “three Ds” towards Israel: double standards, delegitimation, and demonisation.

Though the World Jewish Congress (WJC) doesn’t often comment on Israeli politics, the organisation felt it was necessary to do so this time. WJC President Ronald Lauder called the report a “one-sided and blatantly politicised report which totally ignores both Palestinian acts of terrorism and Israel’s obligation to defend its citizens against such terrorism”.

Raheli Baratz-Rix, the head of the department for combating antisemitism at the World Zionist Organisation, noted that “on the one hand, the UN adopts the IHRA [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance] definition of antisemitism, and on the other,

it supports and allows nongovernmental organisations to demonise Israel, spin lies about its conduct, and undermine its sovereignty. There’s no new antisemitism, there’s renewable antisemitism, and this is what it looks like. It’s time to put an end to this so that history doesn’t repeat itself.”

The International Legal Forum, a pro-Israel group, said the report was “tantamount to a blood libel against the

anyone who visits the country, that Israel’s democracy is the absolute antithesis to apartheid,” Ngubane said.

“The rule of law in Israel is sacred and universal, it’s justly and fairly applied, and doesn’t rest upon racial lines. The legislature of Israel is representative of all its citizens. All citizens in Israel have equal voting rights. The Knesset comprises Arab and Muslim parties, including an Islamic party within the ruling coalition government.

There’s no exclusionary parliamentary system, which is one of the hallmarks of an apartheid state. Based upon this system of proportional representation, Israel clearly demonstrates that it cannot be labelled an ‘apartheid’ state, and exceeds many democracies by ensuring the reflection of national demographics in public institutions. In Israel’s latest round of judicial appointments, six of the new justices were from the Israeli-Arab community, and four of these were women.”

The South African Zionist Federation and NGO Monitor released a joint statement on the report, calling it “a fabrication seeking to vilify Jews and undermine the legitimacy of self-



Photo: Magen David Adom

A Jewish paramedic from Beersheba (facing Jerusalem), and an Arab paramedic from Rahat (facing Mecca) praying outside an ambulance of the American Friends of Magen David Adom

Jewish state, and deserves to be placed in the dustbin of antisemitic history”.

South Africans also stood up to the report. South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) General Manager Pamela Ngubane said the report resorted to “hijacking South Africa’s apartheid suffering to defame Israel. Millions of South Africans who suffered and fought under actual apartheid should be angered and insulted by Amnesty’s attempt to dilute their own history and experience of apartheid, and to hijack the term and falsely use it against Israel.

“SAFI rejects in the strongest terms the report that calls into question Israel’s very existence and gives a free pass to terror campaigns against the Jewish state by cloaking the perpetrators in a stolen mantle of victimhood,” she said. “Amnesty itself has an appalling history of hate towards Israel and Jews, with members participating in BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation] campaigns, antisemitic incidents, and the demonisation of Jews and Israel, and thus any report it publishes against Israel has little credibility.

“It’s well-known to Jews and Arabs in Israel and

determination for the Jewish people”.

NGO Monitor is a globally recognised research institute promoting democratic values and good governance.

“Millions of South Africans who suffered, fought, and died under real apartheid should be angered and insulted by Amnesty’s attempt to exploit their own history and experience of apartheid, and to hijack the term to use it against Israel falsely. We reject, in the strongest terms, this report and all efforts that call into question Israel’s existence and gives a free pass to terror campaigns against the Jewish state,” the statement read.

The organisations point out that the report uses antisemitic terminology like “Jewish domination”, calls Israel’s existence into question accusing it of “state-owned segregation ... since 1948”; whitewashes deadly terrorism; and justifies boycotts, sanctions, and other hostile actions against Israel.

“Like every other country, Israel’s existence isn’t open to question,” they emphasised.

Octogenarian awarded for keeping South African *olim* alive

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African-born advocate Hertzel Katz, who turns 90 this year, was deeply moved when he was recognised in December 2021 for his tireless efforts towards sustaining South African *olim* in Israel. However, actually being able to help those in desperate financial straits means a whole lot more to Katz.

Olim in Israel have been able to put food on the table thanks to Katz initiating two different funds, which his wife, Lola, says “would never have existed without his input”.

Katz, who made aliya in 1969 leaving behind a thriving legal practice, couldn’t bear to see other *olim* suffer, and was determined to change their situation. “Hertzel has always done things because he believes it’s important to help,” Lola says. “He has never asked for plaques on the wall in his name or buildings named after him. He has given of his time and leadership qualities.”

In 1982, under the auspices of Telfed (the South African Zionist Federation in Israel), he

initiated the Keren Fund that has managed to assist 400 needy South African *olim* financially every month.

Some have struggled to feed their children. Katz ensured that communal fridges were created to enable those in need to take food without anybody knowing who they were. This staved off the potential humiliation and shame of poverty.

The Telfed team explained that some had fallen into financial ruin following wars in

initiated another fund called SURF (the Special Urgent Relief Fund).

This fund has allocated NIS 210 547 (more than R1 010 000) to South Africans since its inception. It helps between 15 to 20 South African *olim* a year. Generally, its beneficiaries have been in Israel for 30 or 40 years. They have somehow found themselves in urgent need of money, whether it is to fix their glasses, teeth, or to pay rent.

A South African family recently received NIS 3 650 (more than R17 000) to help pay their rent after their landlord threatened to evict them.

The family, whose identity can’t be revealed, has encountered several blows since making aliya.

The husband is finishing his ulpan and hasn’t been able to find a job yet as he has needed to take care of his wife who suffers from various health issues. One of their children also needed significant medical treatment.

Their fridge was empty, and their situation was dire, financially and emotionally.

Their home in South Africa was sold recently for half of its value. They had no funds left from the sale after covering the outstanding bond on the house.

For Katz, a proud Zionist, making aliya was his dream. Says Lola, “In fact, when he proposed to me, he said, ‘I want you to marry me. But you have to know I want to go and live in Israel.’”

He fulfilled his dream with his wife and two sons, leaving behind his widowed father and his wife’s widowed mother.

Katz dedicated most of the following 53 years to working for Telfed as well as advancing the South Africa Israel Chamber of Commerce, Israel-South Africa bilateral relations, and the South African community in Israel and at large.

Though he was fortunate enough to be admitted to the Israel Bar Association the year after he made aliya, he couldn’t bear to see so many *olim* living in Israel in dire need of financial assistance. So he chose to focus on the latter.

Using his involvement with Telfed as a platform, he started Keren Telfed.

The naysayers initially told him, “You’re crazy. It will never work.” Nevertheless, Katz went ahead, launching the fund at the Knesset in front of a special group of invited guests. “Amazingly, people responded to it,” says his wife.

Being part of the administration of Keren Telfed, Katz was all too aware of the lengthy process to apply for funds.

So, when the Telfed team told Katz that it wanted to honour him for his 80th birthday, his wife remembers his response as, “I would like you to set up an urgent relief fund.”

The fund was named SURF because at that point, Katz, never one to seek the limelight, didn’t want to appear the honouree.

However when it was renamed the Hertzel Katz Urgent Relief Fund in tribute to

Katz and his legacy of kindness, compassion, and commitment to the well-being of South African *olim*, he said he felt “really appreciated”.

“I’ve been working for many years in various departments, and normally only the people who work with me appreciate it,” he says. “Now people are making it public, and that’s much more than I had in my past.”

His wife says people who are benefiting from the fund will now know it’s “because of a person who has devoted his whole life, in South Africa and in Israel, to the South African Zionist Federation and helping *olim* in Israel.”

Telfed Chairperson Robby Hilkowitz says there are so many reasons South African *olim* get into financial distress. “As people have tended to live longer, and as yields available on assets and pension funds have declined, a lot of people simply outlive their money,” he says. “It happens a lot in South Africa. It happens in Israel too.

“In Israel, you have additional factors. *Olim* sometimes find the financial needs different to what they were in their home countries. Israel is an expensive place to live. The cost of living here is high, and most cases we deal with have a multitude of factors. Some relate to general economics. Others relate specifically to immigration.”

Liat Amar Arran, the director of the Israel Centre South Africa, says, “I believe some people making aliya aren’t really considering the meaning of starting a new life in a new country without knowing

Continued on page 7>>



Hertzel Katz at the Knesset in 2019

New Israeli ambassador – a natural born diplomat

PETA KROST MAUNDER

The new Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotsercovsky, dreamt of being a diplomat from an early age when he was still a child in the Soviet Union.

That is, once he realised that his first dream of being a “discoverer of new lands” was scuppered because most land had already been discovered and well explored before his time.

“Soon after that, I decided that being a diplomat was the right career for me as it enabled me to travel a lot,” Belotsercovsky told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “It was a constant source of amusement when I said this because a Jewish kid in the Soviet Union was unlikely to be able to do this.”

However, once his family made aliya when he was just nine years old, his ambition to have a diplomatic career became possible.

Last week, President Cyril Ramaphosa amiably accepted Belotsercovsky’s credentials as ambassador, a relief for some and a frustration for the Israel-hating lobby.

The new ambassador was pleased with his reception and the warm welcome from the president. “We really got the red-carpet treatment,” he said.

Some would expect South Africa not to be the favoured destination of a diplomat because of the animosity from the ruling party toward the Jewish State, however Belotsercovsky said the opposite was true. “I had fierce competition in getting this post, and perhaps it was my karma that won me the position,” he said.

The ambassador is excited about the prospect of improving relations between

South Africa and Israel, which he sees as a challenge. “So far, I have met very friendly people here who are interested and favourable towards Israel. I will build on this.”

But then, Belotsercovsky clearly doesn’t shy from a challenge. His first official full ambassadorial position was in the Ukraine, and he arrived there at the beginning of the war between Ukraine and Russia. “For a diplomat, it was a fascinating time. It was a nation in transition and had a revolution and a new government that was establishing itself,” he said.

Belotsercovsky was born not too far from there, in Mordova Republic, which like the Ukraine, was part of the former Soviet Union. Like the Ukraine, Mordova had a large Jewish community.

His father was a Zionist and wanted to move to Israel at the first opportunity. “He taught English,” said Belotsercovsky. “He was talented with languages. He would listen to Voice of America and the BBC, which were obviously not allowed, so he knew what was going on in the world.”

The family made aliya in 1973, and got to Israel five days before the start of the Yom Kippur War. “There was such a stark difference between the Soviet Union and Israel,” he said. “Coming from Eastern Europe, which was dark and gloomy, we found Israel full of light and warmth. But coming into a war situation made our absorption much faster. There were lots of alarms going off and running to bomb shelters and worried adults.”

Arriving in a country and not speaking the language wasn’t easy for the young Belotsercovsky. “I would go to school, but I

had no clue what was going on. Fortunately I spoke English, which helped, because my father taught me.”

But it wasn’t easy as they left Mordova with nothing of value beside books, so they had to start from scratch.



Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky

He could be considered a diplomat in training throughout his childhood, as he moved to six schools in different areas, staying just a year or two in each school. They eventually landed up in Tel Aviv. “Our lifestyle was dictated by my dad’s work,” he said. “Settling down is a concept unfamiliar to me.”

After school, he spent four years in the air force, which he said contributed substantially to who he is today. “It was an important part of maturing and learning what you want. I learnt to manage the need to deliver the best I can and on time. There was no time for idiosyncrasies, you had to be on point and precise.”

Thereafter, he got the first real opportunity to travel – as most Israeli youngsters do

after the army – and he went to India, Nepal, Thailand and other nearby countries. He felt a real sense of freedom in that part of the world.

After a year, he returned to Israel to study a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and Chinese Studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The former was obvious, but the Chinese was partially because he was fascinated by the culture and language, but also because his dad – who spoke most European languages fluently – didn’t speak Chinese. “So I knew he wouldn’t be correcting me, and I wouldn’t feel like I was competing with him,” said Belotsercovsky.

He then went on to do a masters in international management. “This was useful because it enabled me to discover that I had no talent for or future in business,” he said with a wry smile.

He then applied and got accepted into the ministry of foreign affairs. His first assignment was to Singapore for three years, which he said was a fascinating place with friendly and curious people. It was also the place he first met the woman who would become his wife, Elena Esteban Oleaga.

He then moved to Cyprus, which was around the time of the Second Intifada, and though “the people were friendly, the media coverage was intense”.

Two years later, he went back to Israel, where he stayed for three years before fulfilling a dream of going to India for four years as deputy ambassador.

“It’s hard to explain what’s so exciting about India. It’s not something rational,

but experiential. India is like a ball with little mosaic shiny pieces that fit together in perfect harmony. It’s such a good example of religious tolerance.” It was in India that he and his wife got together after 10 years of communicating long distance. They married in 2015.

His next posting – after three years in the economic department of the foreign ministry – was his first ambassadorial post to Kiev in the Ukraine. It was a tough time, but he was no stranger to areas that were formerly in the Soviet bloc, and he spoke Russian, which helped. “I learnt a great deal from other diplomats there,” he said. “As a diplomat, being in a country at war is a unique but exciting experience.”

He then found himself as chargé d’affaires in Moscow when the embassy was in between ambassadors, which was a tough time because it was the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. “I was trying to keep the embassy intact and nobody knew how things were going to develop,” he said. “It was essential to take care of the people and control their anxiety.”

After that, South Africa sounded like the perfect destination. So, he applied. “This is one of the most important countries in Africa with interesting relationships and a very prominent Jewish community. As I have said, I have a soft spot for adventure, so this place was perfect.

“I have come here to strengthen relationships, and I believe there’s a great deal that can be done. We are already working in South Africa, sharing Israeli experience and technology, but it’s just a drop in the ocean. We can do so much more.”



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Vigilantism versus being vigilant

I would be first in line to see a paedophile or a sexual offender convicted of the crimes he or she has committed and sentenced to a long time in jail. I'm always willing to help put such people behind bars. I have no sympathy at all for sexual predators, no matter who they are.

Even if they simply can't help themselves, they need to be removed from society so that they cannot harm anyone else. It's incumbent on us to do what we can to protect potential victims from falling prey to these offenders.

However, we need proof that such a person has done these horrible deeds – or even one of them. And that person needs to be charged and tried according to the law before we can find them guilty.

As a community or a society, we aren't judges or jurors, and we can't find people guilty because of rumours. Granted, I do believe that where there's smoke, there's generally fire. But would I put my head on a block that in every case there's fire? Not a chance! I would want the facts and proof.

Now, there has been more than rumblings about a certain male educator in our community who was believed by some to be a hebephile (someone who sexually abuses adolescents), however until now, nobody had laid a charge against this person. So, nothing much could be done.

There was obviously much frustration about this as people feared that while waiting for someone to come forward, other teenagers might fall prey to this alleged perpetrator.

For all I know, this might have happened, or it might not have.

While I, too, feel the frustration of being powerless in protecting our children, it's not for us to find someone guilty.

Charges have to be laid, and people need to follow the law.

As we well know, young or old, it's extremely difficult to come forward about having been sexually abused. And in cases where young men have been groomed into sexual abuse, it's that much tougher because unfortunately, they feel so much unwarranted guilt and shame. There's also so much fear of what others will think of them, and how they will shame those they love.

All too often, those who are abused are vulnerable to start with, a trait that abusers often pick up on before grooming their next victim.

Also, the victim generally has mixed feelings towards his abuser because there's invariably strong emotions involved. It's complicated, but it makes sense that we're in a situation in which we want people to come forward to report an abuser, but so often they believe they can't.

So, if we know that such a person is preying on our youngsters and we can't get victims to come forward, what do we do to protect our young? This is a million-dollar question. I don't have the answer, and we sat with this very question for a long time.

The point is that this week, when a WhatsApp message and then a Facebook post named and shamed a person that is alleged to be a perpetrator, there's a chance they were wrong about this person.

More than that, it's incumbent on us to find other ways of bringing a person before a court of law. Naming and shaming someone without charges against them is vigilantism.

What if there's some mistake and this person isn't guilty? What if he is? Do we have a right to be his judges and executioners? Surely he should be given a chance to be brought before a court of law and/or stand up to his crimes?

This is such a difficult situation, because like every other person in our community, I want to do everything in my power to protect our children and anyone from gender-based violence and sexual abuse. And sometimes it's almost impossible.

When there's a name known of someone believed to be committing these crimes, do we warn people about him?

What if we're wrong? I know I keep saying this, but the reason we have courts is so those wise judges, who are trained to make decisions about who is and isn't guilty, can do their work. Thereafter, the court will decide on a fitting punishment.

Consider this: What happens after the word spreads on social media naming and shaming someone said to be a paedophile, or in this case a hebephile?

People automatically turn against him – en masse. Few might support him, but most will be concerned about spending time with him. They are likely to avoid allowing their young adults, boys, or children anywhere near him.

They effectively destroy his life. And all this before he has been arrested or officially charged. What if they're wrong? What kind of future does such a person have?

If he's guilty, he may never see the inside of a court to be proven one way or another. I understand why some are relieved that his name is out there, but I believe it to be the wrong way to do things.

Hopefully it will bring young men who have been abused out of the woodwork to report their abuse. Perhaps this will lead to a trial.

Perhaps we'll look back at this moment in our community and say the end justified the means.

But perhaps we won't, and perhaps we'll look back on this time and feel ashamed because we weren't judges and juries. We were ordinary, fallible people who had publicly shamed someone – guilty or not.

What we need to do is show those who have been abused that they will have our total loving support in reporting what happened to them as a means to ensure that no other innocent person gets hurt.

Let's help them to put sexual predators away legally.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Remembering to forget the Holocaust in South Africa

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



In 2005, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a resolution designating 27 January as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This is the day the Soviet Union's Red Army liberated the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland in 1945. The UN encourages all its member states to mark this tragedy, and many across the world do so.

The South African government, however, has never issued a media statement around this day. Many other governments don't either. But this comes from a country that says it believes wholeheartedly in collective action, multilateral organisations, and international solidarity. It strongly supports the UN and its plethora of international days. So why is this the day it has decided to skip? Is it incompetence, insensitivity, or ideology? Or does the government demonstrate its position in other ways?

I checked the online press statements of the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco), and not a single one mentions the Holocaust or the UN day. By contrast, almost every year, there has been a Dirco statement at the end of November on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day was established by the UN in 1977, marking 30 years since the UN Partition Plan vote on creating a Jewish and a Palestinian state on 29 November 1947. This should surprise no-one.

The official silence by Pretoria undermines the horrors of the Holocaust, some believe. This has raised questions, including on social media, especially among people who feel the African National Congress (ANC) government's vehement support for the Palestinians veers seamlessly into thinly veiled antisemitism. This is in spite of the ANC having long defended its abhorrence and rejection of any form of racism and discrimination, including antisemitism. Not issuing a statement speaks volumes, they say.



Others speculate that the government's ideological and political closeness to Iran and its proxies is a possible reason for not issuing Holocaust Day statements. Over the years, the ANC government has shifted support from the secular Palestine Liberation Organisation to the far more radical Hamas and Hezbollah. Commemorating dead Jews wouldn't suit these allies at all.

However, it's not fair to say the government ignores the Holocaust itself. Indeed, the ANC government has lent its support to the establishment of not just one but three Holocaust museums in South Africa. The first opened in Cape Town in 1999, followed by one in Durban in 2008, and finally in Johannesburg in 2019. These institutions also commemorate and study other genocides, particularly in Rwanda in 1994, of particular importance in Africa. These museums – renamed as Holocaust and Genocide Centres – would never have been a reality without the

support of the South African government in the respective cities and provinces.

The Holocaust is taught as part of the high school history curriculum – in Grade 9 and Grade 11 – across the country, also requiring government consent and backing. These centres are integral to the teaching of the Holocaust and, COVID-19-permitting, they host hundreds of school groups annually.

And though it may not issue statements, the government has participated at Holocaust memorial events held by these centres, civil society organisations, the UN, and diplomatic missions for many years in South Africa.

IT PUTS THE BLAME FOR EVERYTHING ON ISRAEL'S SHOULDERS. NOTHING THAT ITS COMRADES THE PALESTINIANS DO IS WRONG.

But here's the problem. The Holocaust is inextricably tied up with the founding of the state of Israel just three years after World War II, in 1948. For many, there would be no Israel if there was no Shoah. For some extremists, the Jews have manipulated the Holocaust to unjustly occupy and usurp the land of indigenous occupants, and Jews continue to play the victim to this day.

By openly commemorating the Holocaust, the ANC would be supporting a narrative of Jewish suffering, which doesn't play well within its ranks or those of its supporters, foreign and domestic. After all, this is a party that collectively voted in 2017 to downgrade the South African embassy in Tel Aviv to demonstrate its pique at the Jewish State. Elements of this government openly support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement. It's a government that undoubtedly sees the Middle East

conflict as analogous to its own struggle. Yet this same government warmly accepted the credentials of new Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky last week. Go figure.

Permeated by paradoxes and at war with itself, the ANC is a wounded and confused party that is fast losing political support. The ANC has become more myopic about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the negotiations of the 1990s gave way to stagnation and

stalemate. It puts the blame for everything on Israel's shoulders. Nothing that its comrades the Palestinians do is wrong. The anti-Israel crowd delights, if not in odious Holocaust denial, in drawing analogies between Jewish suffering in the Holocaust and the contemporary plight and treatment of Palestinians by Israel (and 74% of Israelis are Jews, of course). This is victim morphed into perpetrator. Understandably, it rankles a Zionist Jewish community like South Africa's.

But if South Africa was so opposed to the Holocaust, it wouldn't have supported a UN resolution last month to combat Holocaust denialism, adopted by the General Assembly without a vote. Maybe we need to accept that actions speak louder than press releases.

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.

No blacks, dogs, or Jews allowed

OPINION

PETER BAYER



I was born five years after World War II ended, the son of a German Jewish refugee, grandson of two people who barely escaped the Holocaust.

As a child, I learned that many gentiles weren't happy that Hitler's Final Solution had failed. I discovered that the name of my religion was used as an insult. "Jewboy" was the most popular pejorative. When you are eight years old and must confront gangs of antisemitic bullies, life is a puzzle. My father told me about the Holocaust and how he and his siblings escaped before Kristallnacht, how my grandparents went into hiding before they, too, were smuggled out of Germany.

As Kurtz would have it, "The horror, the horror."



My father's attitude to post-war life was pacifism. He chose to focus on a strategy of debate and the enlightenment of boys whose fathers had convinced them that Jews ritually murder Christian babies (essential ingredients in the making of matzo) and, of course, we killed Jesus.

Discourse wasn't a defence.

Six decades later, antisemitism remains an incurable disease. Holocaust-hoax rhetoric abounds, as do the pejoratives: "cunning Yid lawyers and other Jewboys will keep you out of trouble".

Of course, when a Jew happens to break the eleventh commandment and gets caught – Bernie Madoff springs to mind – then they become quintessential villains. Derek Chauvin and his ilk fast become footnotes. Successful gentiles (Warren Buffet and Bill Gates, for example) are revered. Jewish achievers such as Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, however, have their genius presented as akin to deadly alien viruses.

Well into the 21st century, the hatred continues to grow. We are, arguably, the most globally loathed people simply because we're Jewish. Screeds of hypotheses have discussed the "why". (Remember, we killed Jesus.)

Similarly, Israel's survival is also widely despised. It seems that Israel = Jews = Evil. QED.

Locally, we cannot ignore the fact that the African National Congress' Rivonia trialists (and their attorneys) included a disproportionate number of Jews. Yet, there is today growing antisemitism from within the very party Jews fought alongside to achieve racial and political freedom. Remember, our chief justice was forced to apologise publicly for showing support for Israel.

The four white Rivonia trialists were: Denis Goldberg, Lionel Bernstein, James Kantor, and Bob Hepple. All were Jewish (Hepple's mother was Jewish, his father a gentile).

Add to that: Ben Turok, Albie Sachs, Ruth First, Harold Wolpe, Ronnie Kasrils, Arthur Goldreich, Joe Slovo, Helen Suzman, Rowley

Arenstein, Raymond Suttner, Helen Joseph, and many more. Struggle heroes all, yet a great many black South Africans remain antisemitic. Again, why are we continually tarred with this brush?

Simply stated there is (and always has been) a basic recipe for misinformation and, let's face it, bare-faced lies from some media still beating the hatred drum.

Here is an excerpt from the ironically named Christians for Truth website. It writes:

"Verwoerd's policies had two main opponents. One was a Jew named Harry Oppenheimer, the other a Jew named Anton Rupert. Both controlled banking monopolies in the country, and wanted "rights" extended to black South Africans for the purpose of

extending their money lending business. Oppenheimer had ties to the Rothschild banking family and to the US CIA, which throughout the 1970s through 1990s supported the overthrow of white South African rule, at the direction of the Jew Henry Kissinger.

"In 1963 a group of Jews founded the 'African' National Congress. The ANC was founded by Lionel Bernstein, Bob Hepple, Denis Goldberg, Arthur Goldreich, Hazel Goldreich, and James Kantor, with a few African front men – Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki (father of Thabo Mbeki), Raymond Mhlaba, and Ahmed Kathrada. In this, the ANC followed the model the Jews established when they founded the NAACP in the United States, with the exception that the ANC was a much more violent and openly communist organisation. These Jews and their African National Congress received funding and support from both the Soviet Union and the US CIA."

As can be seen, the article is jam-packed with factual errors.

The entire article can be seen at: <https://christiansfortruth.com/the-hidden-jewish-hand-in-the-destruction-of-white-south-africa/>.

This article and many thousands more are drip-fed into communities which, frankly, need someone to blame for their own failures and Jews have historically been the "chosen people" for them. These shameful examples of hack "journalism" have fostered right-wing fascism across the world, as evidenced by neo-Nazism flourishing during the Trump regime.

The more things change ...

It was with a sense of déjà vu that, some years ago, I went to watch my 16-year-old son, a King David scholar, play a school cricket match against Ferndale High School, whose cricket team had, disgustingly, been instructed to tape swastikas onto their cricket bats.

It was raised as an issue with the school, but no apologies were offered. The traditional "other cheek" was turned.

And again, Kyalami Country Club was established in the 1950s by Jewish sportsmen who were barred from joining several golf clubs in the city. It was a matter of "no blacks, Jews, or dogs allowed". When I arrived in Johannesburg in 1978 to join the *Rand Daily Mail*, I sought out a nearby golf club to join. I called Parkview, whose manager was affable enough ... until I mentioned I played cricket for Jewish Guild.

There was a pause, followed by his pronouncement that there was "a long waiting list" and that I may have to wait "for years" for an opening. A familiar rat was smelled. I called Parkview again the next day and, adapting my voice and accent, introduced myself as Peter Ogilvie-Thompson.

The same gentleman effusively welcomed me to the club.

Fast forward to the late 1980s. The Kyalami league golf team was drawn to play Royal Johannesburg, but because Kyalami (with its Lion of Judah and Magen David logo) was deemed a Jewish club, we had to change in the car park.

I'm still waiting for those restricted golf clubs and antisemitic schools to apologise for their bigotry.

I'm not holding my breath.

• *Peter Bayer is a former mainstream journalist and now an academic, lecturing English literature as well as journalism and creative writing, and is working on his third novel. His debut novel "The Last Mentsch" is a work of historical fiction and was shortlisted for the European Union Literary awards in 2012.*

Octogenarian awarded for keeping South African olim alive

>>>Continued from page 4

Hebrew and without securing a proper job before coming to Israel. If they aren't strong enough to make a good life in Israel, they're falling into distress. Families that are making aliya from South Africa are already carrying a deficit of money. They hope that Israel will give them a better start and opportunities. Some of them succeed, and some of them don't, like everything in life."


Amar Arran says the Israel Centre is finding that some *olim* have to build their life from scratch. "They are washing dishes, they are babysitting, and sometimes they are too proud to do that kind of job. Then they need support. We try as the Israel Centre to emphasise to people how much they need to plan in advance, come to Israel with savings, and understand

that Israel is expensive in some ways."

Amar Arran would never recommend that people make aliya to rely on welfare support in Israel or make aliya if they are relying on welfare services in South Africa. "I always say that if you're not managing, rehabilitate your life in South Africa and then make aliya. Don't think it's going to be better in Israel unless you have a big support system in Israel."

Israel, in general, has a lot of people not earning enough to live a proper life, says Amar Arran. "More than a million kids are under the poverty line. But people usually aren't starving. There's a lot of welfare support. We put the kids into the right educational system, and we give them the psychological or emotional support they need to start looking for a job."

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Jewish roots lost and found in Oudtshoorn

TALI FEINBERG

Blake Andrew grew up in Zimbabwe, was raised Christian, and felt strong ties to the Scottish roots of his grandfather. But his grandmother’s story never came to light until six weeks ago, when Andrew found out that she was the daughter of the late Myer Woolfson, a prominent Oudtshoorn rabbi. His world has been turned upside down, but in many ways, it’s finally making sense for him, as he has always felt a connection to the Jewish community.

Now, that Shabbat message will resonate even more

Now living in Johannesburg with his own family, Andrew (51), told the *SA Jewish Report*, “This has changed something in me. I can’t pinpoint exactly what it is. But the close connection I’ve always had to Jewish friends and the Jewish community feels even stronger. It’s difficult to articulate, but it’s very emotional.”

His story began when Andrew’s sister recently had lunch with her cousin in Cape Town. “My cousin said to my sister, ‘Did you know about your dad’s mom – your gran? She was the daughter of a prominent rabbi in Oudtshoorn in the 1880s.’”

“This was a huge shock. My gran, whose name was Dorothy Woolfson, died in a car accident before I was born. All that my dad knew was that there had been some fallout with her family, and she had run away to Zimbabwe where she married his father. Suddenly, it all made more sense. If this rabbi was so respected in the ‘Little Jerusalem’ of the 1880s, then it’s clear that those ties were cut when she fell in love with my Protestant, Scottish grandfather,” he says. “I found out that my great-grandfather, Myer Woolfson, was head of the shul and Hebrew school for 56 years.”

Andrew says his father’s mother never spoke about her past. His father never knew he was Jewish, and was one of five siblings born in Zimbabwe. However, back in South Africa, the Woolfson family continued to grow, and when Andrew started to do his own research, he soon found them and reconnected with long-lost cousins.

“I posted on a Facebook group called Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy, and was quickly put in touch with my second cousin, David Woolfson, in Cape Town. His grandfather, Henry, was my gran’s brother. David and my father were first cousins, but they had never met or even knew of each other’s existence.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Cape Town, David fills in more of the family history. He says Myer married Pauline Abrahams, whose previous husband had drowned at sea. A widow with one child, she and Myer went on to have seven more children – including Dorothy. But Pauline also died young, and Myer got married twice more. “He was quite a character,” says David. “It was also extremely tragic when Dorothy died

in a car crash.” As someone with a deep interest in genealogy, David is grateful to be reconnected with his long-lost cousin.

“Myer came to South Africa from Lithuania, and was supposed to be posted in Barberton,” says Andrew, who learnt this history from his cousin. “However another rabbi asked him to come to Oudtshoorn to head up the shul there, where there was a thriving Jewish community. He decided to do so, and remained there until his death. He died on 17 January 1947, at the age of 86. Ironically, 17 January is my dad’s

birthday. He was born in 1938, 11 years to the day since his grandfather passed away.”

Andrew would love to go to Oudtshoorn to see his late great-grandfather’s gravestone, and the place where he lived, worked, and died. “I asked my father if his mother ever reconciled with her parents, and he said no. However, I found my

great-grandfather’s will, and he left things to his daughters, including my grandmother. So this suggests she wasn’t totally ex-communicated. People say my gran was an incredibly kind and generous woman, who had a fiery streak in her.”

Strangely enough, Andrew has always felt close to the Jewish community, and over the years, many people have asked him and his father if they were Jewish. His best friend and his sister’s best friend are both Jewish.

“Trevor Jankelow and I have been best friends for 35 years, and I’ve been to so many Shabbat dinners and *yom tovs* at his house,” says Andrew, totally at home with the Jewish lingo. “I grew up in his house, made sure not to mix the meat and milk cutlery, and felt very close to his family.”

As for Jankelow, he says it’s “astonishing and astounding” that his friend actually has Jewish roots. Over the years, they have joked that Andrew would love to be Jewish, and Jankelow has always included him in all aspects of Jewish life along with sending him a “good Shabbos” message every week. Now, that Shabbat message will resonate even more.



Edward, Blake, and Daniel Parker Andrew

Andrew says that when Jankelow told his sister in Israel that Andrew had Jewish roots, she said, “It all makes sense now. I’m not surprised in the least. There has always been such a connection.”

Jankelow wonders how many similar stories there are out there, and encourages anyone with gaps in their family history to delve further. With technology and social media, a simple search can lead to amazing discoveries.

One sad aspect to the story is that although Andrew’s father (84) is 100% Jewish, he has no interest in learning more about his roots or connecting with long-lost family members. “I think in those days, parents didn’t talk about difficult things with their kids,” says Andrew. As the revelations of the past six

weeks have unfolded, it has been a lot for his dad to digest.

Andrew’s parents live in Johannesburg and his mother and brother are both religious Christians. Looking back, he says his mom always told him that his grandmother’s surname was ‘Wilson’, but now he realised it must have got lost in translation from Woolfson.

It’s his mother and siblings who have shown more interest in his discovery. Even though they have their own religious paths, Andrew think they will be open to him exploring this history. “It’s mind blowing,” says Andrew. “I would like to explore it more, and develop a closer relationship with the Jewish community.”

SA entrepreneurs move mountains to list on NYSE

TALI FEINBERG

Many entrepreneurs dream of ringing the bell of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), but not everyone makes it there. Yet this vision became a reality for a group of South African Jewish entrepreneurs and their company, Super Group, which was approved for listing on the NYSE under the symbol SGHC. The company began trading on 28 January 2022. Super Group is the parent company of global online sports betting and gaming platform Betway and multibrand online casino Spin.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from London a few days later, Super Group Chief Executive Neal Menashe says he grew up in Johannesburg and studied accountancy at the University of Cape Town (UCT). It was there that he met Supergroup’s now chief operating officer, Richard Hasson, (now also living in London) who grew up in Cape Town and attended United Herzlia Schools. Hasson also studied accountancy, and it was at UCT that the two formed a friendship they would carry into the business world.

Asked how they felt about reaching this moment, Menashe says, “It’s surreal. It took decades to get here. And now we have to pause and realise it’s actually happening. We literally built this business one step at a time, brick by brick.” At the same time, they don’t have a single brick-and-mortar asset as the entire company was built online on the wave of the fourth industrial revolution – the internet.

“We started with no revenue,” says Menashe. “To get to where we are now, you literally have to eat, sleep, and breathe the business. It’s about dedication from every person in the company across the globe, all pulling in one direction. It’s about staying power.”

“We’ve had our ups and downs over the years,” says Hasson. “This is a culmination of 20 tough

years, but in many ways, it’s just the start. We have a long way to go.”

Looking back, Menashe says what drew them to the business was that it was all online and it was scalable. “Being open 24/7 was a mad concept. Now it’s the norm. At first we operated in unregulated markets because the concept was so new. Now it’s a fully regulated market. So it’s been a massive journey. It sounds obvious, but it’s about hard work and looking at every detail every day. When you’re working online, one change can have a radical impact on people across the world. So it’s crucial to keep customers your number one priority.”

They say deeply ingrained South African Jewish values of family, commitment, friendship, warmth, and openness have been driving factors in their lives and work. “We are like a family, so



Neal Menashe rings the bell of the New York Stock Exchange as his team celebrates around him

while we may disagree, once we make a decision, we all move forward together. There can’t be any Jewish regret!” quips Menashe. “There have been a lot of decisions, which means a lot of debate, but at the end of the day, we are a family.”

He points out that South Africa is often a cocooned environment, saying, “The world can be scary, but you don’t have to be scared of the unknown.” They arrived in the United Kingdom (UK) in their 20s, and said “making the leap” was easier with the support of family, connections, and community. Their families, shuls, and friends have kept them grounded and balanced.

In the UK and United States, the university you went to is everything, but Menashe says he’s

always proud to say they went to varsity “on the foothills of Table Mountain ... and if there wasn’t a cloud in the sky, we went to the beach!” He says it’s important not to take yourself too seriously. “We had a lot of fun along the way. You have to enjoy what you do, and we have enjoyed this from day one.”

Hasson says being able to work with people is key in business, and it’s their “4 000 staff members’ blood, sweat, and tears” that helped them get to where they are today. “The whole is only as great as the sum of its parts,” he says.

Menashe says commitment is a value that the younger generation doesn’t always prioritise, but he advises that people settle in for the long haul. “I worry that by the time people are in their 40s, they’ve had 20 jobs. Rather stay and become an expert at something. We could have done a lot of other things, but we stuck with what we know.”

“We always say the impossible is possible,” says Hasson. He notes that the world is an entrepreneur’s playground and starting in South Africa has many positive factors. At the same time, competing on a global scale means accepting nothing less than the best in everything you do, and the people you choose to join you on your journey.

“One thing we always say is ‘Don’t panic,’” he adds. Although the pandemic took sport off the table worldwide, it was ultimately positive for the company as many more people turned to online entertainment.

Both Menashe and Hasson say social responsibility is key to their business, and preventing gambling addiction is integrated into every aspect of their offerings. Thanks to artificial intelligence, they can even predict problem gamblers before the person realises they have a problem. “At the end of the day, we’re selling hope,” says Menashe. “This is why it’s crucial that we keep monitoring our ecosystems.

“You don’t build huge businesses without being able to work with people from all religions, backgrounds, and ideologies,” Menashe says. “It’s not a one-person show, and you have to be willing to be part of a team. Caring for others and giving back is crucial to what we do. A cheque is easy to write, but giving your time and energy to your people, family, and community is the most important thing of all.”



Photo: Ukrainian Board Guard Press Office

Ukrainian border guards watch as a special vehicle digs a trench on the Ukraine-Russia border close to Sumy, Ukraine on 21 December 2021

Ukrainian Jews remain calm amidst threat of Russian invasion

TALI FEINBERG

The world is holding its breath as it watches Russian troops amassing on Ukraine’s border, threatening invasion or war. Warnings of the possibility that world powers could use nuclear weapons have upped the sense of fear and panic. For Jews living in Ukraine or with ties to the region, it has been a particularly frightening time, but they say much of it is “psychological warfare”, and for now, they’re staying put.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Odessa, a member of the Jewish community, Sana Nelina, said, “The population of Odessa is around one million people. The Jewish population is about 30 000 to 35 000. This means that the Jewish community of Odessa is large and vibrant. We have about 16 different Jewish organisations on the ground including Orthodox, Conservative, Progressive, and non-religious institutions for people of different ages and needs, which is supportive and meaningful.

“SO, CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT PUTIN IS THE MAIN ENEMY OF UKRAINIANS, I DON’T BELIEVE THAT IN THE CURRENT SITUATION, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF UKRAINE CAN BE AFFECTED MUCH.”

“The situation in Ukraine has had a definite influence on our city and its population. All the Jewish organisations feel anxious, but are trying to stay calm to avoid panicking. Partner organisations in the United States and Israel are in the loop, paying close attention to even minor changes or news. The mood of Jewry isn’t yet fully formed, but people are definitely concerned.”

She says she’s fearful, “due to the informational escalation on social media. I haven’t had a TV for more than five years, but the social networks are full of different news. It touched me somehow and shook my confidence.”

Still, she’s staying where she is for now. “My dad lives in the city not far away from me. He’s 75, and it would be hard for him to move. But if we face real danger, we will think of this possibility. I hope there will be no need.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Kyiv, Ilya Bezrucho says “staying is the most responsible thing to do”. The economy has been badly affected by the current crisis, so staying, running a business, and supporting friends and family is “one of the most powerful things you can do”.

He also believes it’s important not to spread panic, and to stay calm. He believes it’s psychological warfare and “a political game” between Russian president Vladimir Putin and other world leaders, and Putin won’t act on his threats.

The main effects have been the hoarding of goods and fuel, which creates even more panic, Bezrucho says. “The elderly are

especially affected as they remember previous wars, and there are many elderly people in our Jewish community.”

Adam Kuleshov, who is from Ukraine but now lives in Israel, says, “I have relatives who live in Odessa. I also have a lot of friends in many cities: Kyiv, Odessa, Lvov, Dnepropetrovsk, and so on. Most of them are worried because Russia regularly uses heavy artillery to shell cities while they are behind the border. They use the same war techniques as the Palestinians – they launch rockets from living areas, near kindergartens and schools.

“It’s important to take into account the fact that Ukraine is a Christian country where Jews have always been in a risk group ‘responsible’ for the crucifixion of Jesus,” Kuleshov says. “This ‘memory’ is alive through Ukrainian history and culture, and far from eradication. Antisemitism is quite common in Ukrainian literature. Especially in Western Ukraine, the attitude to Jews is harsh.

“The second thing to note is that some of the most prominent oligarchs in Ukraine are Jews, such as Dmytro Firtash, Ihor Kolomoyskiy, and current president, Volodymyr Zelensky. And of course, many grievances are associated with their rule. The inability of the current president to govern the country effectively is often confused with his Jewish roots and the conspiracy that he became president in order to ‘harm’.

In addition, there are a huge number of far-right extremist groups in Ukraine. “[Evidence of] their radicalisation emerged during the riots in 2013 to 2014, and their subsequent enrolment into the Ukrainian army to fight Russians. From one point of view it was good, as many volunteers joined the UDF (Ukrainian Defence Forces). From another point of view, these groups were also active in attacking the Jewish community (although these attacks weren’t massive), and blaming them for all bad things,” Kuleshov says.

He says that while the “Soviet regime is over, and there’s no fear of identifying as Jews, there are still many conspiracies and crazy beliefs held by common people that Jews are part of a ‘deep state’ that rules Ukraine and uses it for its own purposes. But, today’s most popular narrative is that the main enemy of Ukraine is Putin.

“So, considering the fact that Putin is the main enemy of Ukrainians, I don’t believe that in the current situation, the Jewish community of Ukraine can be affected much,” he says. “The threat of attacks from extremists always exists. But such attacks will be sporadic and disorganised rather than massive.

“It’s safe to say that on the platforms and forums of the right and radical-right Ukrainians, a surge of antisemitic narratives is noticeable. But there are no complaints about Jews in the media and print media. From this, we conclude that the main threat to the Jewish community of Ukraine is still representatives of fascist, nationalist, and antisemitic underground movements. They aren’t united in their activities, don’t have common command centres, and are scattered across the vast territory of the country.”

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Dov Fedler’s *Gagman* makes its deadline

PETA KROST MAUNDER

When acclaimed veteran South African cartoonist Dov Fedler celebrated his 82nd birthday recently, he received a gift of the first copy of a book he had spent 35 years working on.

Titled *Gagman*, the book isn’t full of political and satirical cartoons as one would expect from Fedler, but a Holocaust story with a difference.

The book was conceived in 1985 when, said Fedler, “the story just jumped into my head” and he sat down and “wrote it in a flash”. The story is about a comedian in a concentration camp who survives by entertaining the commandant. “He would give his soul for a new joke,” said Fedler. “He knew that the moment he was no longer entertaining, he would die.”

Fedler said it took him until 1995 to understand where his idea had come from. “I was living on deadlines and every single day, I had to produce a cartoon and it had to be funny. If you break down the word deadline, you have dead and line. So, the story was a metaphor for myself times a thousand. It was me telling history and my story in a way.”

He revealed this recently in a video conversation with his daughter, Joanne, an accomplished author in her own right, and Lewis Levin, a family friend and the architect of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Museum.

“I felt like I grew up with *Gagman*,” Joanne said. “I remember my dad talking about him when I was a teenager and early adult. I remember writing a poem about him when my dad was 54, and now I’m 54.”

The project went on for many years and took on many iterations. “It wasn’t just the writing of the book but the many illustrations that took time, and it got to a point where it felt like the project was never going to come to fruition,” said Joanne.

Fedler battled to tell a story about someone who had lived through the camps, which wasn’t his own experience. However, the Holocaust certainly played a role in his life.

Fedler was born in 1939, just months before World War II began. “My mother was already getting news of her sister and her family who were in a camp. They perished there,” he said. His mother didn’t have the strength to deal with him as she was emotionally drained and depressed, so his sister brought him up. His mother died when he was 14. Three years later, Fedler’s father married a survivor from Dachau who had lost her husband and child. Fedler couldn’t relate to his stepmother at all.

But in spite of the fact that Fedler knew it had a place in his life, *Gagman* was a long process, and was almost shelved permanently.

Levin, a lifelong friend of Joanne, was the catalyst for getting it back on track.

He knew about the project from when he and Joanne were young adults and it was discussed at the Fedler home. He has a deep interest and involvement in Holocaust education.

“Two years ago, Lewis and I had a conversation in which he said we needed to help Dov finish *Gagman* because we didn’t want the book to die and never get into the world,” Joanne said.

Levin said he understood it was a difficult subject for Fedler to write about, one which included exploring family and collective Jewish trauma.

“For Dov, he was bringing to fullness his own Jewish experience, his autobiography, and journey into this creative process,” said Levin. “But because it’s so enormous and the subject is so uncomfortable for us Jews to manage, it was too big to present and be

done with.”

So, he paid Fedler a visit and asked what had happened to all his books, texts, and drawings for *Gagman*, and Fedler responded that it was “hiding somewhere in boxes”.

Levin encouraged Fedler to get it out of the boxes and show his unique work – which combines graphics with words – to the world.

Joanne then came on board.

“My role was to shepherd, curate, and help take a 35-year-old project and pull it together, to help make narrative decisions and cull things in order to find the essence of the story,” she said.

“This was the first time I had ever written a story,” Fedler said. “Then I had to impose my ego on that so the cartoons came out. Then, I learnt about writing from my mentor, my daughter Joanne, that the characters need to be heard.” So, only 47 of the illustrations remained in the novel.

But Levin points out that unlike other novels, the illustrations in this book are the



Dov Fedler

backbone, not the other way around. “The image of Goebbels and *Gagman* behind the fences – those images were the back story, and you [Fedler] explored the mind and the narrative of the comic character,” Levin said. “And even though there are few illustrations, they haunt you throughout the reading of the novel because they are ultimately about this cartoonist who remakes

himself in this new world and lives in a way as a cartoonist because he invents jokes, puns, he draws through letters in a very Jewish way because Jews draw images through words,” said Levin. “You bring the fullness of the Jewish tradition to paint these images in our minds – which contributes to the richness of reading your book.”

“In the book, we have this incredible tension with these comedic *shpiels*, these *sh_ticks* that the comedian is doing based on what he’s seeing in front of him,” said Joanne. “It’s a literal dead line. Because the minute he’s no longer funny is the minute he could lose his life.”

Joanne felt a kind of “intergenerational responsibility” or calling to work with her father to complete this novel.

It was also something that Fedler believes was urged by the Rebbe himself. When Fedler was given the opportunity to meet the Rebbe in 1979, he told him to “finish

your book” and even when Fedler thought he may have mistaken him for his father, the Rebbe was very clear who he was referring to.

It was six years after that meeting that *Gagman* popped into Fedler’s head.

Levin said he saw *Gagman* as “a kind of *midrash* [interpretation of a text] on Jewish history’s traumatic events”. He believes that it could deliver to students the chance of gathering around a table to interpret the Holocaust, raising uncomfortable and controversial issues.

“Consider Dov’s first statement that he’s a ‘collaborator’. It’s an uncomfortable notion for Jews to know that Jews took this role and participated in their own destruction. How does Dov’s idea of a collaborator affect our understanding of our role in the world?” Levin asks.

Said Joanne, “One of the main questions this book leaves you with is: ‘What would you do? Can you laugh at jokes about the Holocaust, and can you laugh at the *Gagman*’s jokes?’”

Betrayal of Anne Frank gets personal

OPINION

JASON VAN LEEUWEN



My entire adult life I have espoused and jettisoned multiple theologies and philosophies after subjecting them to the ultimate test: would they survive Auschwitz? Sometimes yes, sometimes no, almost always with some kind of caveat. Now Auschwitz presents a new test much closer to home.

This month, the subject of who betrayed Anne Frank and her family has exploded onto the airwaves. A new book, prominently featured on *60 Minutes*, claims that the Franks were betrayed by Arnold van den Bergh, a member of the Joodse Raad, or Jewish Council of the Netherlands. Van den Bergh was a scion of the Dutch-Jewish family that patented margarine and helped found the conglomerate Unilever.

He was also my cousin.

Anne Frank and her father, Otto Frank, were Jewish refugees from Germany who went into hiding in Amsterdam during the Holocaust. They were discovered after two years and sent to concentration camps. Anne and her sister died, probably of typhus, in Bergen-Belsen, where my grandfather also was sent and also contracted typhus but survived. Among the Franks, only Otto survived.

My father is the son of Henri (Opa) and Eva (Oma) van Leeuwen. Opa owned a casings factory in Holland, and Oma was the daughter of Nathan and Rosetta van Zwanenberg (née Van den Bergh). Rosetta was the first cousin of Arnold van den Bergh. The allegations against Arnold and the story of my grandfather is a study in contrasts.

Opa is a hero to us, his descendants. After failing to get a visa to join his wife and children on the last boat out of Holland prior to the Nazi invasion, he forced himself into the Heineken Brewery and hid there as Nazis levelled Rotterdam. He was able to gain a fake identity and posed as a Protestant minister in order to pass notes to and from imprisoned members of the Dutch resistance. He was arrested and sent to Westerbork (a transit camp ironically built as a haven for German Jewish refugees prior to the invasion), then to Bergen-Belsen, where he miraculously survived. He died when I was eight.

My grandfather, unlike most others in the world, believed early on that Hitler meant business. Before the war, he published and wrote for a small publication aimed at his fellow Jews. In the 1930s, he helped to convince scores of German Jews to leave Germany while they could. He established the Dutch-based Jewish Colonization Society (with generous contributions from his in-laws) and went to the infamous Evian Conference in 1938, managing to convince a few delegates to work with him in resettling Jewish refugees. He laid his own life on the line when a guard in Bergen-Belsen discovered a Hebrew Bible belonging to a

child in his barracks. Opa lied and said it belonged to him. For some reason, the officer opened the Bible, recited the first verse in perfect Hebrew, handed it back to him, and walked away.

Oma’s cousin, Arnold, survived in another way. A prominent philanthropist, he was among the original members of the Joodse Raad, convened by the occupying Nazi forces and its puppet government. Its raison d’être was to communicate and implement all laws and decrees impinging on the Jewish community.

Like similar councils set up across Europe, the Joodse Raad determined that things would go better for the Jewish community if they accommodated these decrees and didn’t resist them. They did manage to get permission to “hire” thousands of people, which initially shielded them from deportation, but they also helped to implement deportation orders and in some cases even determined which Jews would be deported and which would be spared. Their strategy turned out to be a tragic miscalculation of epic proportions. About 75% of Jews in Holland, including some German refugees, ended up being murdered anyway.

The evidence against Van den Bergh appears to be a letter sent anonymously in 1945 to Otto Frank, Anne’s father, claiming that Van den Bergh shared the family’s hiding place with the Nazi-run Central Agency for Jewish Emigration in Amsterdam. Van den Bergh was able to escape deportation, going into hiding until after the war.



Henri and Eva van Leeuwen, seen in a photo from around 1915, when they married

Photo courtesy: Jason van Leeuwen

Holocaust scholars has been quite fierce. Some say the coverage of the book is motivated by a desire to place more blame for the Holocaust on Jews and less on Nazis and their non-Jewish collaborators. Dutch-Jewish scholars have called the report “rubbish” and “slander”. Others say the report is quite credible. The Anne Frank Huis, the museum inhabiting the building Otto Frank once owned and where his family hid, has charted a middle path, praising the investigators for coming up with new evidence and calling for more investigation.

After doing many hours of my own research, and with gratitude to a Jewish genealogy Facebook page for providing ample documentation, I have come to a conclusion: there’s no conclusion.

I have much less confidence than the investigators that there’s a smoking gun. We have no evidence that Van den Bergh was able to trade information in order to stave off deportation; indeed, many in his extended family were murdered by the Nazis, as were most members of the council. He may simply have been able to bribe a few key people and go into hiding without betraying anyone.

However, the Joodse Raad did have information on addresses where Jews were hiding as they were known to pass along letters to them. Van den Bergh is likely to have knowledge of some or more of them. Also, at least two members of that council weren’t sent to Auschwitz, but rather to places like Theresienstadt and Bergen-Belsen, which weren’t extermination camps (cold comfort). The investigators assert that Van den Bergh not only wasn’t deported, but rather lived “openly” in Amsterdam – though I’ve found nothing to corroborate this. And then, of course, there’s that anonymous letter.

I have always tried to model myself after Opa, the fundraiser-diplomat-fighter who embodied Hillel’s dictum, “In a place where there’s not a mensch, strive to be a mensch.”

But now I learn that other members of my family chose a different course – one of accommodation, not defiance. Whether or not he betrayed the Franks, Van den Bergh belonged to a council that helped the Nazis control the Jews. Did he go along to save as many Jews as he could, or to save himself? Certainly, the Nazis knew they were presenting Jewish leaders with an impossible choice.

Although I’m in no position to judge them for their behaviour, I’m left wondering: what would I do? Would I be Opa or Cousin Arnold? The truth is, unless one has personally traversed the crucible of the Holocaust, one cannot possibly know.

I remember something Opa once said: the only ones in the camps he could trust were the criminals and common thieves. I know for a fact that’s not true, because everybody in the camps also trusted Opa. And so do I.

- Jason van Leeuwen is a rabbi and cantor who serves as spiritual leader of Temple B’nai Hayim in Los Angeles. He’s also a chaplain and composer, and publishes on <https://rebjasonblog.wordpress.com>.

Youth movements rebuilding from the ground up

TALI FEINBERG

After two years of no *machanot* and very few in-person events, local Jewish youth movements have reached a precarious turning point. Left battered and bruised by the COVID-19 pandemic, this year is a crucial time of rebuilding, and they are going to need support from the community to do so.

"We're going to need all hands on deck, and the most passionate minds in the South African Jewish community to come together and ensure that the youth movements thrive because they're absolutely key to the future of this community," says Habonim Dror Manhig Wayne Sussman.

"It's going to be incredibly hard for youth movements in 2022," he says. "There's definitely light at the end of this tunnel, but we've got to remember that both *madrichim* and *channichim* have lost two years of connection and experience on their campsites. This is very difficult to replace, so it's going to require a lot of hard work, imagination, and creativity."

Habonim Dror Mazkir (general secretary) Aaron Kruss-van der Heever says, "Having our in-year programming severely lessened as well as the lack of *machanot* has been nothing short of disastrous. My deepest commiserations and respect go out to the 2021 leadership, who worked until the last breath to try to ensure that *machaneh* could happen last December. Unfortunately, with the surge of the fourth wave, an event of such epic scale wasn't possible."

Sussman says it reminds him of his own time as a *madrich*. "I became involved in Habonim in 1999. We inherited a movement

which was largely broken [because of various factors]. It took us about four to six years to rebuild it," he says.

Though Habonim and the other youth movements aren't "broken" today, they still face enormous challenges as a result of the pandemic. "This is a greater challenge than what Habonim experienced in the late 90s and during other seminal events such as World War II," says Sussman. "I say this because during World War II, Habonim was still having activities. *Madrichim* still had the opportunity to form connections. Whereas here, for two years, movements have missed their *machanot* and the leadership hasn't been able to build close connections with *channichim* and fellow leaders.

"The movements have their work cut out for them," he says. "It's going to require a lot of dedication, and it's going to be absolutely crucial that they have a great year. It's a year of rebuilding, of reminding kids what they've missed out on, and how central the youth movement should be to their lives and the community. Ultimately, the best summers of your life will be at a youth movement event or camp." But he has complete faith in Habonim's leadership to take the movement forward.

"The lack of presence at schools and

Jewish community events is definitely being felt," says Kruss-van der Heever. "In addition, we're starting to feel the ripple effect of the cancelled *machanot* in the form

being planned thoroughly for this year [with contingencies of course]," Kruss-van der Heever says. "Our focus is on retaining relationships with our *channichomot*, parents, and *bogromit* [graduates], and to expose our *chevre* to our world-class programming."

Bnei Akiva Rosh Machaneh for 2022, Dena Cohen, says, "Bnei Akiva machaneh is a place where our *maddies* and *channies* can engage deeply with each other, and the lack of them over the past two years has been a challenging experience. However, with all darkness comes light, and we have been able to keep the fires burning. Like our community, we're getting stronger, and the energy and positivity is driving our growth as a movement.

"Bnei Akiva machaneh is central to building Jewish youth who want to contribute to making the world a better place," she says. "We view this year as potentially our most important one. Our youth are desperate for the energy, interaction, and growth that Bnei Akiva provides. We believe that with the continuous support of the community, we can reach new heights this year. There has never been a more exciting and difficult time for Bnei Akiva than now. As a leader of the movement, I feel a responsibility to navigate this terrain and strengthen Bnei Akiva, which

is the heartbeat of the community. I look to the future with excitement and exhilaration at harnessing the opportunities that lie ahead."

Bnei Akiva Manhig Rob Fihrer says, "Across the youth movements, they are galvanising and working hard with leadership teams. I certainly speak for Bnei Akiva when I say we have an excited leadership team that wants to get back to work in the schools through informal education in Cape Town and Johannesburg. There's the feeling that they really can get going, and I think kids are desperate for their input and a sense of community."

Netzer Mazkir Julian Gordon, says, "As someone who has considered the Netzer *machanot* essential to my development and that of the movement, I was greatly disappointed that they were cancelled in 2020 and 2021. For me and others, it's always a highlight of the year and helps to retain members.

"However, Netzer still managed to maintain its presence and relevance during the pandemic through multiple online events. I'm glad that these events happened, as they kept the youth engaged. Moving forward, we hope to increase the number of in-person events and eventually the *machanot*. As the social circumstances of the country become more open and safe, it seems likely that Netzer will continue to have a strong presence, online and physically, in 2022.

"It's incredibly important that the youth movements continue to be supported strongly by the community going forward," Gordon says. "Otherwise, there will be fewer young people to support the community once they are able and old enough to do so."



of a leadership disconnect. Many who last attended *machaneh* in Sollelim (Grade 9) or Sayarim (Grade 10) are now eligible for leadership programmes. But they don't have the necessary bridging of the senior years of being a *channich/ah*."

Habonim is orchestrating a co-ordinated plan to rebuild the movement in 2022. "All our regularly scheduled projects including meetings, events, leadership seminars, Israel trips, as well as stay-over camps are

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Sno’ doubt, there will be lots of Jewish athletes at the Beijing Olympics

EMILY BURACK – JTA

In spite of the continuing COVID-19 chaos and the mounting protests about China’s human-rights record, the 2022 Beijing Olympics are proceeding on schedule, just six months after the delayed Tokyo Games – and we have your guide to the Jewish athletes who are on their way.

In Tokyo, dozens of Jewish athletes competed, and many clinched medals. The Winter Olympics are typically a smaller affair, with fewer sports and fewer countries participating. Nevertheless, we’re excited to cheer on these Jewish athletes from the United States (US), Israel, and Canada.

The Beijing Games begin on 4 February, and run through to 20 February, and the Paralympics will be held from 4 to 13 March.

Jason Brown, figure skating, US

The most well-known Jewish athlete competing in Beijing is 27-year-old figure skater Jason Brown. He competed in the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, winning bronze in the team event with team USA, but narrowly missed competing in 2018 in Pyeongchang (he went as the team’s first alternate). But Brown is back, and qualified after skating to the theme from *Schindler’s List* at the US Figure Skating Championships this month.

“My background, obviously, is Jewish, and the story is so touching,” he said about his decision to skate to the Holocaust movie’s theme. “I grew up learning about the Holocaust and about Oskar Schindler. I always wanted to skate to it, but it has to be when I’m at the level, maturity-wise, that I’m really ready to skate to it.”

(The *Schindler’s List* music is heard regularly in international competitions, but often accompanying non-Jewish skaters. German figure skater Nicole Schott skated to it at the Olympics in 2018, as did Russian Yulia Lipnitskaya in 2014.)



Photo: Stacy Revere/Getty Images

Emery Lehman competes in the men’s 5 000m event during the US speed skating long track Olympic trials in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 5 January 2022

Hailey Kops and Evgeni Krasnopolski, pairs skating, Israel

A year ago, 19-year-old New Jersey native Hailey Kops was studying in a Jerusalem seminary on her gap year before heading to nursing school, thinking her competitive skating days were over.

Israel’s team gave her a call and an opportunity in June, and just more than six months later, she’s heading to Beijing. She teamed up with Evgeni Krasnopolski, a 33-year-old Olympic veteran who was born in the Soviet Union and moved to Israel when he was three years old. He will be Israel’s flag-bearer at the opening ceremony on 4 February.

This is the first Olympics for Kops, who is Modern Orthodox – an extreme rarity in Olympic competition – but skates on Shabbat.

“From a young age, I integrated the two. It’s normal for me,” she said. “When there’s a will, there’s a way,” she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Emery Lehman, speed skating, US

Emery Lehman’s first love was hockey, which he picked up at six years old, growing up in the Oak Park Chicago suburb. A few years later, his Jewish mom – who as of 2018 was a development executive for the American Friends of the Hebrew University of Israel – convinced him to give speed skating a try, and he excelled. (He hasn’t given up hockey, either – in college at Marquette University, he played defence for their club hockey team.)

At the age of 13, he became a national champion, and at 17, he qualified for the 2014 Winter Olympics. He competes in the 5 000m and 10 000m races. At the 2018 Olympics, he also competed in the Team Pursuit race. As he wrote on Instagram after qualifying for Beijing, “About time, I’m one of the old guys on the team.” He’s only 25.

Taylor Gold, snowboarding, US

Taylor Gold is going for gold at the Beijing Winter Olympics. How many times do we think he has heard that joke?

For Gold, 28, this is his second Olympics – he competed in Sochi, and got injured during the 2017-2018 season, which forced him to miss Pyeongchang. At the 2018 Games, his younger sister, Arielle Gold – also a snowboarder – won bronze in the women’s halfpipe event. Arielle retired and won’t be competing this Olympics cycle.

The Golds come from a sporty Jewish family: born and raised in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, their father, Ken, was a professional moguls skier. In Beijing, Gold will be one of 14 athletes from Colorado. He’s involved in Protect Our Winters, a non-profit working to fight climate change.

Josh Ho-Sang, hockey, Canada

This season, Canadian Jewish hockey player Josh Ho-Sang had an impressive debut with the Toronto Marlies, the top affiliate team of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Ho-Sang, 26, is Jamaican and Chinese on his father’s side and Russian-Jewish and Swedish on his mother’s side.

“I’ve grown up Jewish,” Josh once said in an interview. “I have always celebrated the Jewish holidays like Chanukah and the high holidays with family and friends.”

Since the National Hockey League (NHL) announced that its players won’t participate in the Games, it has left Olympic roster spots open for rising stars like Ho-Sang. According to one analysis, “It’s entirely possible that following his Olympic appearance, that the Leafs will get him under contract.” Could Beijing be the start of Ho-Sang’s NHL career?

Alexei Bychenko, figure skating, Israel

Bychenko was born in Kyiv, Ukraine, and represented his native country in international competitions until 2009. But in 2010, he became an Israeli citizen and started skating under the Israeli flag, becoming the first Israeli skater to win a medal at the European Championships – a silver in 2016.

Bychenko competed for Israel in the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics, and the 33-year-old will return to the Olympic stage this February. In 2018, Bychenko served as Israel’s flag-bearer at the Pyeongchang Opening Ceremonies and placed 11th in the men’s competition. He’s aiming to place higher this time around. He will skate to *Words* by Israeli singer-songwriter Harel Skaat for his short programme and the theme from *Pirates of the Caribbean* for his free skate.

Devon Levi, hockey, Canada

Joining Josh Ho-Sang on the Canadian men’s hockey team is Devon Levi, a 20-year-old goalie from the Jewish Montreal suburb of Dollard-Des-Ormeaux, where he attended Hebrew Foundation School, a Modern Orthodox Jewish school. He plays for Northeastern University Huskies, and his spot on the Olympic squad makes him the first men’s hockey Olympian from the Boston school.

In the words of the Northeastern Hockey blog, “Levi is in the midst of the greatest goaltending season in Northeastern programme history, and one of the greatest seasons in NCAA [National Collegiate Athletics Association] history. He has played every minute of every game for the Huskies.” He has notched nine shutouts so far this season, helping the Huskies achieve a 16-5-1 record.

This isn’t Levi’s first time representing Canada. Most recently, he played in the 2021 World Junior Championship. It’s unclear whether or not he will be the starter on the Olympic team, as the two other goaltenders are both older and more experienced.

Noa and Barnabás Szöllős, skiing, Israel

Thoughts of Israel usually involve blazing desert sunlight and humidity – not skiing.

But the Szöllős siblings are looking to change that. Known as Israel’s “ski siblings”, they were born in Budapest, Hungary, and now train in Austria. There are three of them: Noa, Barnabás, and Benjamin, who all compete for Israel in the FIS Alpine World Cup. (Benjamin didn’t make the Beijing cut.) Their father, Peter, used to ski professionally for Hungary as well, before earning Israeli citizenship.

At age 16, Noa won two medals at the Youth Olympic Games, becoming the first Israeli athlete to medal at a winter Olympic event. Though it was the youth Games, she said, “I’m very proud to be the first champion from Israel to reach the Winter Games podium. It’s such a strong feeling to be able to represent the country in this way.”

Now 18, Noa and her brother, Barnabás, 23, will both ski for Israel in Beijing.

Jason Demers, hockey, Canada

The third Jewish player on Canada’s hockey team is Jason Demers, a 33-year-old defenceman who spent time in the NHL but currently plays in Russia’s Kontinental Hockey League. He discovered his Jewish roots later in life on his father’s side of the family.

Demers made his NHL debut back in 2009, playing for the San Jose Sharks, and represented Team Canada for the first time in 2013 during an NHL lockout.

Thanks to Demers, Ho-Sang, and Levi, Canada men’s hockey team will be the most Jewish team in Beijing.

Mollie Jepsen, para alpine skiing, Canada

Mollie Jepsen is a phenomenon: she medalled in four out of the five events she competed in at the 2018 Pyeongchang Paralympics.

The West Vancouver, British Columbia native was born missing fingers on her left hand, and competes under the LW6/8-2 classification for skiers with an upper extremity issue. This means she skis with only one pole.

Since her Paralympic debut, she was also diagnosed with Crohn’s disease, and missed an entire season. But she has had a remarkable comeback season ahead of the 2022 Paralympics, so don’t be surprised to see Jepsen on the podium in Beijing.

David Warsofsky, hockey, US

Warsofsky, 31, has played for four different NHL teams, but currently plays in Germany for ERC Ingolstadt – he’s another player benefiting from the NHL’s decision not to let its players enter the Games.

The former captain of the US Under-18 national team in 2007-2008 is married and has a one-year-old son. When he’s not competing in Germany, he resides in Denver.

Vladislav Bykanov, speed skating, Israel

Vladislav “Vlad” Bykanov, like many of his fellow Israeli winter Olympic teammates, was born in the former Soviet Union, in Ukraine. He moved to Israel in 1994, at the age of five, and now splits his time between Kiryat Shmona, Israel, and Heerenveen, in the Netherlands.

Vykanov started speed skating at age eight, and competed for Israel at the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics. In 2014, he was given the honour of serving as Israel’s flag bearer in the opening ceremony. He skates in the 500m, 1 000m, and 1 500m races. His best result was 19th place in the 500m in Sochi.

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Respect the need to mourn a stillborn child

TALI FEINBERG

Thirty-six years ago in South Africa, Karen* gave birth to premature quadruplets, one of whom was stillborn. The baby's body was buried by the Chevrah Kadisha, but Karen and her husband were never told where his grave was.

There was no official mourning, no funeral, and no consecration for this baby boy, because in Judaism, there's no obligation to do so for a child who does not live until 30 days old.

For Karen and her husband, the fact that they never mourned their stillborn child meant they never had closure. Twenty-seven years later, they finally found out where he was buried, had a gravestone made and consecrated, and a local rabbi conducted a ceremony.

Looking back, Karen recalls how just after her baby died, she was obsessed. "It was the only conversation I wanted to have." Yet she had to put her grief aside. "I was told that this was traditional Jewish law. That was how things were. But my soul always said, 'Surely this cannot be law?'" When she finally looked into where her child was buried, "I was filled with guilty thoughts. What kind of mother doesn't acknowledge the loss of her child?"

This lack of obligation means that

many Jewish families, like Karen's, don't mourn stillborn babies, with possibly serious personal ramifications.

In Israel before 2014, Jewish parents weren't allowed to take part in a burial or know where their babies were buried.



After complaints from Israeli families, the health ministry changed the law. Now, parents are entitled to choose whether they wish to participate in a farewell procedure at the hospital or through a funeral and burial. The law insists that the Chevrah Kadisha allow the parents to be present at the funeral and mark the burial plot, and families requesting a civil burial ceremony are permitted to hold one.

In South Africa, there is no law

preventing a Jewish family from mourning a stillborn baby in any way, says Rabbi Gidon Fox of the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation and an expert in halacha and fertility.

"The halachic legalities of mourning are precisely that, legal, with significant constraints placed upon mourners. A lack of obligation to mourn isn't synonymous with a prohibition against mourning. It merely states that we can't impose those duties and responsibilities in such a situation. It shouldn't be misconstrued as Judaism's disregard for the stillbirth and the trauma it causes. The halacha is therefore not saying one isn't allowed to, it's saying one isn't obligated to. There's a big difference."

He says that perhaps the custom of not sitting *shiva* (the week-long mourning period) for a stillborn evolved so as not to confuse the laws around a Levirate marriage. This is when a woman whose husband dies without bearing children would marry his brother. But if a family sat *shiva* for a stillborn, it would make it unclear if that man had borne a child or not, and whether she was obliged to perform this *mitzvah*. These days, this isn't relevant as Levirate marriages are no longer allowed.

Fox says that as far as he knows in South Africa, there is no formal funeral, but usually there is a coffin, a stone marking the grave, parents are told where

the baby is buried, and can visit anytime.

Referring to Karen's case, he says, "This is an iconic case showing why all parents of stillborn babies need pastoral care as this couple was still mourning this baby decades later. Jewish law isn't heartless, and can't be applied in a heartless manner."

"The community needs to provide the family with support and rally behind them," says Fox. "They need everything that we do for a mourner. It's the loss of a life that carried the dreams and aspirations of those parents. Often the tragedy is exacerbated by the mother going through labour to give birth to the opposite of life. It's unimaginable, and the community needs to be supportive."

"In days gone by, it wasn't a given that a pregnancy would result in a healthy baby or even a healthy mother, reducing expectations regarding the outcome," he adds. "Today, we live in a world where, thankfully, that's not the case, so it's a tremendous loss when that expectation doesn't come to fruition. There's no question that the communal attitude has to be to treat it like a loss, and provide emotional and material support."

Fox says that, according to the information provided to him, there are records of all Jewish burials in South Africa certainly since 1940, and anyone should be able to find out where a person is buried.

He says that if a stillborn baby is a boy, he is often given a *brit milah*. "This is

because we are only complete as Jewish men once we have a bris. It wouldn't be fair to allow a baby boy to go to the next world without one."

"There is an interesting law in mourning that for the first three days, you don't start a conversation with the mourner," Fox says. "This is because sometimes there are no words to give solace, and your presence says everything. This is even more so in a situation such as this. We must be wary of platitudes, and the family must be comfortable to ask questions. There are no *treif* (unkosher) questions. Just because we don't have the answer, doesn't mean we can't ask the question."

Rabbi Greg Alexander of the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation affirms that the halacha says parents aren't required to mourn a stillborn, possibly because of higher infant death rates in the past. However, today, it's "crucial that rabbis work sensitively with the family, to guide and be guided by their wishes. The Chevrah Kadisha is open and willing to help. It just needs to be asked," he says.

Alexander hasn't conducted a full funeral for a stillborn, but has performed ceremonies guided by family wishes, which may include saying *kaddish* or throwing sand in the grave. "Traditional mourning rituals aren't required, but neither are they forbidden," he says. "What's definitely required is sensitivity and support."

*Not her real name

UJW gets new home

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg held the official opening of its new home in Percelia Estate on Sunday, 30 January, which included a celebration of the organisation's 90th year.

Honoured guests included Johannesburg Mayor Dr Mpho Phalatse, who spoke about her history and the challenges that lie ahead, and Rebbetzin Gina Goldstein, who officially opened the house. In Goldstein's words, "May the UJW continue to show us the power that Jewish women have to make a positive impact on our community and society."

Chairperson Ingrid Koor said the UJW was inspired and enabled by all the ladies

involved in it past and present, including the very special Shirley Ancer, who has been a committed, active member for 50 years.

The UJW's main projects include Kosher Mobile Meals, the Sewing Empowerment School, the Alexandra Aftercare, Feeding Scheme and Soup Kitchen at the Hillbrow Community Health Centre and of course, Bags for New Beginnings. COVID-19 permitting, it hopes to restart adult-education talks, Brainboost sessions for people with dementia, and so much more.

Thanks were extended to the UJW's wonderful donors, staff, and volunteers who make these special projects happen.



Ingrid Koor, Bev Goldman, and Dr Mpho Phalatse

From Kumzits to Zumzitz at Sandringham Gardens

ESTELLE ZAWATZKY

When the COVID-19 pandemic descended, Sandringham Gardens Shul was enjoying a large weekly turnout of residents and a consistently increasing number of non-residents.

After the Shabbos morning service, they would join the wider Sandringham Gardens community at a sumptuous brocha in the Nosh Café. Rabbi Fox would make kiddush and deliver a drosha, Arnold Garber would lead with Shabbos *zmiros* (songs of praise), and residents and guests would have the opportunity to share stories, tell a joke, and sing.

And then came lockdown, with the weekly gatherings off-limits and participants feeling a profound sense of loss.

Fox and Garber set up a weekly Zoom meeting on a Thursday evening to re-establish the spirit of the brocha. The Zumzitz, as this popular meeting in the Nosh Café has become known, offers the opportunity to interact with participants from all over the world.

Over the past two years, guests such as entertainers Roman Grinberg, Nik Rabinowitz, Jonathan Birin, and Ivor Joffe have joined. And, Sandringham Gardens has celebrated a number of special occasions, such as the surprise presentation for Fox's 50th birthday of more than 50 video clips of residents expressing their sentiments.

Regular features include Les Glassman giving the "Israel Report" and Eric Stillerman the "South Africa Report". Time is set aside for videos showcasing



special events at the different Chevrah Kadisha sites. Jeff Allen sets the Shabbos tone with beautiful *zmiros*, Sandringham Gardens resident David Friedlander delivers a weekly golden oldie, and everyone wants to hear if Allan Buzansky, another Sandringham Gardens resident, has a new joke. Time is allowed for overseas family interaction and most importantly, residents and friends of the Sandringham Gardens Shul have the opportunity to stay connected.

Everyone is welcome to join as an observer or a participant at <https://tinyurl.com/zumzitz>.

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SA sportsmen turn up the Heat at European Super Cup

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Six South African sportsmen represented Israel as part of Tel Aviv Heat, the country's first professional rugby team, in the European Super Cup, which concluded at the end of 2021.

This team, which launched only eight months ago, includes South Africans Jordan Chait, Thomas Berman, Kieron Houlsten, David Geffen, and Brent Kier. The team is also being coached by South African Kevin Musikanth. Berman, Houlsten, Geffen, and Kier represented South Africa under coach Musikanth in either fifteens or sevens rugby at the Maccabi Games in 2017.

In spite of their different home countries, the team has developed a unique kindred spirit evident during the team's three-month campaign in the Europe Super Cup.

The multinational team's players sang songs on the team bus, in the change room, as well as before and after training sessions and matches. The team's six Jewish South African players told the *SA Jewish Report* they had never previously played for a team that sang so much.

"In our team, the Fijians would sing their songs, the Israelis would sing [Hebrew] songs, and Africans would sing songs like Shosholoza," says Sharks fly-half Chait, who had a short stint with the Heat. "So, we had an awesome vibe. Everyone felt like they could be themselves.

"We would sing regardless of whether we won or lost," says flanker Berman, an alumnus of King Edward VII school in Johannesburg. "It was refreshing to have that sort of vibe and team culture. You could just enjoy every moment."

Musikanth, who now juggles his role as coach of the Israel national team with coaching Heat, approached them to join the Tel Aviv-based team.

Soon, they all found themselves competing in the Super Cup against top clubs from Russia and Georgia.

Launched in 2021, the Super Cup is the first ever club competition for the emerging rugby unions in Europe.

Israel didn't make the initial cut for the tournament. When one of the teams dropped out, the likes of Musikanth and South African-born businessmen Barry Seidel and Mike Aron got together to build a team from the ground up.

Their proposal was accepted by Rugby Europe, and Heat became a founding member of the Super Cup. "That means we're there to stay," says Musikanth "By the time 2025 rolls around, it will be a competition with 16 teams, so almost all year-round."

In the build-up to the tournament last year, Musikanth's side only had a few weeks together. When the tournament started, COVID-19 disrupted their schedules. They had to play three games in nine days. "Playing in the Super Cup was tough," says Geffen (no relation to Okey Geffen). "The teams we played against had been playing rugby full-time and had been together for a longer time."

Yet, Heat managed to win three of its six matches, the

last of which being the first professional rugby game in Israel.

"While we probably did three times as well as anybody expected, we did three times as badly as we expected because we wanted to make the semi-finals," says Musikanth.

However, Heat missed out on the semis only courtesy of bonus points, so Musikanth believes his team can be proud of themselves.

"In every single one of our games, we came from behind on the scoreboard, even if we didn't end up winning," he says. "But the magic exists off the field. One of our key signings was Demetri Catrakilis, who I coached when he was 19. He's the attack and kicking coach."

Using their respective networks, they started recruiting players who could bolster the team's Israeli players.

South Africans such as former scrumhalf Nic Groom arrived alongside players from Fiji, Samoa, Namibia, Ireland, England, Scotland, Canada, Ukraine, and Georgia.

They were divided up into three groups. "We had emerging young players from around the world, we had marquee key players like Groom and Josh Strauss, and Israeli guys, some of whom potentially were up for it and some of whom needed to develop," says Musikanth.

Musikanth's technical team also includes an assistant coach, physical therapist, and team manager.

Heat has a culture that puts people first, says Musikanth "We believe that you coach the player but you need to acknowledge that there's a person behind the player."

The club has a proper professional setup, says Brent Kier, a King David Linksfield alumnus who played for the Lions Sevens team in 2009.

Kier trained with Heat at every practice, but never made Musikanth's matchday squad, so he played for an amateur club to stay match fit. He says interest in rugby is growing in Israel. "Over the past four years, the growth

has been unreal. New clubs are popping up all over, and the league in Israel is more competitive each year."

According to Seidel, who has loved sport from a young age and has used its analogies to motivate his staff in business, "Heat's vision is to make Israel a rugby nation. The long-term view is to be in a position to qualify Israel for the World Cup."

The team's mission is to use "start-up-nation" innovation to build a world-class rugby team. "We hope to use technology," says Seidel. "For, example, we are speaking to a company that has technology to measure the forcefulness of a kick in karate and judo. What we are looking to do is to track the data of, for example, the force of a tackle of a rugby player."

Heat's backline player, Houlston, who wore a cap signed by his role-model, Catrakilis, to many of his rugby practices at St John's College in Johannesburg, says, "You play for teams that have been around for years. But we can say we were the first group of boys to play for the Heat."

Versatile prop Jared Sichel is a national team player for Israel. This alumnus of the Durban-based Glenwood High School got Israeli citizenship because his grandmother was born in Israel. He says, "The longer-term goal is to win the Super Cup, grow the sport of rugby in Israel, and ensure that there's a long standing professional Israeli outfit in other competitions."

Players of all colours and religions are travelling to Israel to play for Heat. "A player of colour wasn't able to be contracted by the Blue Bulls," mentions Seidel. "He's going to come play rugby for us and live on a kibbutz."

Israelis, meanwhile, now have a chance to shine for a professional rugby team in their own country. "You need to stage to sign," says Musikanth, whose original family name was "Muzikant", which means "musician" in Russian. "You can be the best singer in the world, but if you don't have a stage to sing from, the world won't hear you."

Letters

NO NEED TO PUBLICISE DISTINCTIONS – ALL STUDENTS ACHIEVED REMARKABLY

I want to thank Andrew Baker of King David Victory Park for not putting the number of distinctions next to each successful student's name; and the same goes to Marc Falconer of Herzlia; Rob Long of Yeshiva; and Rebecca Sarchi and Rabbi Motti Hadar of Torah Academy.

All the students achieved – there were no failures. It's a remarkable success story, but I have no doubt that those who gained only one or two distinctions won't be as happy to be up there in the spotlight.

Our schools and educators are excellent, and the student results are excellent. Their names and photos should be enough and give sufficient *naches* to parents and grandparents.

Sometimes we take steps that aren't always in the best interests of our children (my children are adults, so I gain nothing from speaking my voice.)

- Bev Goldman, national president, Union of Jewish Women South Africa

RAMAPHOSA FADE-OUT ON FRONT PAGE INSULTING

I can quite understand why the *SA Jewish Report* would want to show the Israeli ambassador with the president of South Africa and the African National Congress on the front page, and record what said ambassador told our president (I can see him wagging his finger like PW Botha as I write this).

However, it would also be a good idea if you bothered to make sure that Cyril Ramaphosa, as a black person, can actually be seen. As it stands, only the pale persons are to be (vaguely) observed in the photo. It's actually insulting to the president, I feel.

I do understand that your newsprint isn't of the best quality which is why much more effort needs to be put into getting the contrast right. Mind you, there doesn't seem to be an issue with all the many pictures of white people in the paper.

- Ruth (Nathanya) Muller, Johannesburg

NEW KASHRUT AUTHORITY COULD DIVIDE COMMUNITY

There is an unfunny joke that where there are two Jews, there are three shuls.

It was recently reported that three former Beth Din kosher supervisors have started a new kashrut authority.

Until now, South African Jewry was internationally admired for its unity with a single kosher hechsher (certification).

A new kashrut authority could divide families and the community as a result of people not being able to break bread with families and friends who follow a different hechsher, or attend each other's simchas.

The South African Jewish community is unique in that different groups attend the same functions and mingle like the old friends which they are. It hardly

matters if someone is Chabad, Haredi, Modern Orthodox, or secular.

Some time ago, the Beth Din discovered non-kosher chickens in the kitchen of a popular, certified caterer. This gave it a wake-up call, and led to the strengthening of its processes. Unfortunately, there are members of the community who refuse to let go, and are demanding a new hechsher. If there's no loyalty to our own, how are we going to live in peace and harmony?

The Beth Din has the infrastructure and experience to run a successful operation, and is trusted by international kashrut authorities.

Let's have the grace to rise above these types of challenges, and be a light unto the nations.

- Martin Zagnoev, Johannesburg

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Lead, Ramaphosa, lead!

If President Cyril Ramaphosa had a Jewish mother, he would probably be a doctor today. Whether it was his profession or not, he would have been told from the day of his birth that he was a gift to mankind. If he had a Jewish mom, he would have the confidence to fire Lindiwe Sisulu. And if he didn't dismiss her because he was too busy with more important things (her words, not mine), then she would have done it herself.

When Ramaphosa achieved the top spot of the African National Congress (ANC), it wasn't by a large margin. The situation was perilous, with South Africa balancing on the precipice of disaster. From within his own party, the win was far from confident. Based on those who surrounded him, it was clear that he would have little option but to rule with a level of diplomatic tentativeness that would require the patience of a saint.

The reaction to his appointment was nothing short of euphoria, spurning the "Ramaphoria" description that accurately captured the sentiment of the nation. Finally, there would be an honest leader of a dishonest party that was begging for reform.

In the heady days that followed, hearts and hope triumphed over the reality that he wasn't free to make the choices he might have wanted to, and that not everyone within the ANC wanted the change that was required.

To be fair, there have been several significant and vital improvements. The recapturing of the South African Revenue Services, the National Prosecuting Authority, and the Hawks, allowing independent power producers to supply the country with electricity, and in dealing with the "RET" faction within his own party.

But progress has been slow and frustrating. Corruption remains a significant concern within the ANC, and the recent theft of COVID-19 funds are a sad reminder that theft is far from over.

Strangely, even with the poor public image of the party there seems to be a willingness to give it and Ramaphosa a "pass". The construct of the "good ANC" versus the "bad ANC" has been solidified with the identification of the RET group within the party.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



The notion that Ramaphosa is an anti-corruption crusader has been maintained, resulting in significant underutilised collateral in this regard, collateral that both Ramaphosa and the ANC should be harnessing to further the party and the country.

It's worth considering why Ramaphosa doesn't seem to recognise the support he has. South Africans, for the most part, continue to look to him for guidance. His initial handling of the COVID-19 crisis is case in point, where his "family meeting" invitations became part of the South African vernacular.

Support was overwhelming, and there was a sense of pride in the president and the approach taken. Irrational and bizarre decisions that included limits on buying open-toe shoes, smoking bans, and the closure of some beaches, along with the theft of funds, eroded confidence.

Coupled with his refusal to answer questions, the term "family meeting" suddenly became ironic, because family allow each other to speak, ask questions, and family doesn't steal from the medical-aid jar.

I have often compared Ramaphosa to Prince Hamlet. He begins his journey having just lost his father, who has probably been murdered by his uncle. He has our hearts and our support. He's on a mission to seek justice, and we are with him on his quest. But then he procrastinates and procrastinates. Until pretty much the end of the play, when everyone lies dead on the stage. If Hamlet had acted, if only he had recognised his strength and support, the outcome would have been completely different.

Ramaphosa needs to be aware of the immense power he has. And he needs to act. He needs to regain the confidence of the country and demonstrate that he has the ability to make difficult decisions. He might not be a doctor, but he is the president of a country that's looking to him to lead.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

New home for UJW Johannesburg

On Sunday, I joined my colleagues in the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in attending the official opening of the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg branch's new premises in Percelia Estate. Over the past nine decades, the UJW has been of our community's most active and respected social-upliftment institutions. Founded during the difficult years of the Great Depression, it immediately set itself apart from other Jewish welfare bodies at the time by devoting itself to helping all South Africans, regardless of colour or creed. Today, there are many Jewish organisations that run outreach projects on behalf of the needy in the wider society, but it was the UJW that blazed the trail.

The UJW is an important affiliate of the SAJBD, with representation on all our national and regional councils. Over the years, we have had the opportunity of partnering with it in various meaningful outreach and educational initiatives, a recent example being in assisting victims of the unrest and looting that erupted in KwaZulu-Natal last July. We wish the UJW Johannesburg many more good years of service and accomplishment in its new home.

Extending a helping hand

At the start of the COVID-19 lockdown the Board, with the generous assistance of certain donors, established the Food Relief Fund to help alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic. Since then, in close partnership with The Angel Network, we have been able to support a range of relief projects and welfare bodies countrywide. Last week, members of the SAJBD Gauteng Council and professional staff visited one of these projects, the Fingertips of Africa soup kitchen in Protea

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



South, Soweto. While there, they assisted by working in the soup kitchen and distributed uniforms, stationery, and sanitary pads to students in the area. Fingertips of Africa was founded by Yehuda Lazarus in response to the pandemic. It supports seven organisations whose beneficiaries include the homeless in and around the Edenvale/Greenstone area, grandparents in Alexandra informal settlements who are taking care of younger generations, and orphaned and child-headed homes. We are grateful to be able to support the critical work that it and other such organisations are doing, and thank all those generous benefactors in our community who have provided us with the means to do so.

Amnesty International's latest report

Once a highly regarded human-rights watchdog that, theoretically at least, was strictly apolitical, Amnesty International's credibility has been progressively eroded by its obsessive antipathy towards Israel. This week, the organisation released a report that crossed the line by portraying the Jewish state as an illegitimate entity whose very existence is a problem that the international community needs to deal with. In anticipation of the expected media reports, the Board has been working with local organisations as well as its international colleagues in assessing the document and formulating appropriate responses.

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

KDVP assembles to remember



King David High School Victory Park held a special assembly last week themed "We Remember" to commemorate International Holocaust Day on 27 January, the day Auschwitz was liberated. From left: Morah Hannah Ben-Moshe, Liron Krawitz, Andrew Baker (headmaster), Jarrod Kapeluschnik, Megan Gruz, Shalhevet Zur, Leah Meyerowitz, Keren Katzew, Liora Scop, Ariella Scop, and Nadav Sundy

Yeshiva College students commemorate Holocaust



Yeshiva College Grade 11 history students held an assembly to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, giving students insight into the Holocaust and emphasising the importance of remembering the atrocities that took place.

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Gavin Kaplan strikes out for WP cricket

LUKE ALFRED

After five years of dogged toil, Gavin Kaplan has just begun to create a name for himself in Western Province cricket circles. An upper-order batsman, he made his four-day debut for Western Province against Northerns at Newlands before Christmas, and is hoping to play a healthy part in the white-ball campaigns through February and March.

Kaplan doesn't quite know how the breakthrough from being a good club cricketer to a provincial one came about, but he says that he's had a couple of "good" T20 club tournaments playing for Western Province Cricket Club in the Cape Town Premier League. These have got him noticed but he's also managed to come to terms with the demon of failure – and he feels liberated as a result.

"I can't really put my finger on it, but I finished my studies [a Bachelor of Business Administration] in July last year," he said. "That might have something to do with it."

"It's probably a mental thing, though. I'm playing with more freedom and less fear of failure now. Fear of failure in a game like cricket can really eat you up."

Kaplan said his four-day debut was enjoyable, and although he didn't score many runs in a big home defeat to Northerns, he came away from the experience feeling that he wasn't out of place in such company. "I didn't feel

like a deer in the headlights, if I can put it that way," he said with the hint of a smile down the telephone line.

When the summer is over here in South Africa, he's off to the Netherlands for a season playing as a professional for HBS in The Hague. The gig came about through the recommendation of Ryan Klein, a good friend of his, who spoke to the chairman of HBS and

Gavin Kaplan



sung Kaplan's praises.

"Ryan and I have been playing together since we were young," said Kaplan.

"He has a Dutch passport and he played his first game for the Netherlands against Afghanistan two days ago – he's a bowling all-rounder."

Having played for Western Province in all the age-group teams, Kaplan matriculated from Rondebosch Boy's High in 2016. His first year out was spent at Gary Kirsten's High-Performance Academy but after that, it was a case of two steps forward and one back as he struggled to take the step up to regular provincial cricket – a state of affairs that has befallen many a young cricketer before him.

Even though he's played for Western Province recently, he isn't on a contract at the union, rather playing on a pay-as-you-play basis. He's hoping that this will change, but he's likely to remain on a match-by-match contract certainly until the end of the season.



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He has much to thank parents Paul and Robyn for, he said, but he reserves special plaudits for his older brother, Michael, who is 26. Michael, he said, was always an unstinting source of good cheer and support. "It wasn't so much competition with Michael, he gave up cricket in Standard 9 [Grade 11]," said Kaplan. "It was more a case of him just being so supportive. He helps me up rather than brings me down."

The only mildly critical thing of Michael that his younger brother manages to tell the *SA Jewish Report* is that he's a Manchester United supporter. For this, we offer him our condolences this time of conspicuous under-achievement at Old Trafford (Gavin supports Arsenal).

Sport has always been an integral part of Kaplan family life because Paul and Robyn opened Disa Sports, a sports equipment company, way back in 1998. Gavin said they imported most of what they sold from India and China.

When asked if, now that he's completed his degree, there's any chance of him going into the family business, he's slightly non-committal, although he does say that there's a sentimental pull for him, given

that Disa Sports has been a family business for more than 20 years.

When I put it to him that Western Province cricket is under-performing, and with its facilities, history, and gene pool should be doing better, he gives an immaculate answer any opening batter would be proud of: "I suppose when you put it that way, they have been under-performing, although I think there are important people other than myself who should be answering that question. They have to give answers, while I think I have to be part of the answer – if I can put it that way."

The domestic T20 competition will be played in a bio-bubble in Port Elizabeth later this month, and given that he's had local Cape success with the form, Kaplan could conceivably use the tournament to grow both his game and name. Cricket South Africa's One-Day Cup happens in March, and he's likely to play a role for Western Province there too. All in all, it's going to be a busy few months for Kaplan.

Finally he's got the fear of failure monkey off his back. He can now start enjoying his time at the crease and enjoying the work that it takes for him to get there.

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