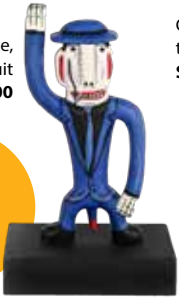


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Mandla Mandela exposes his own antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

Antisemitism experts say it's a sad day for South Africa after Nelson Mandela's grandson, Nkosi Zwelivelile "Mandla" Mandela, spouted anti-Jewish tropes that could have come from the pages of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

"Mandla Mandela's rhetoric has crossed the thin line that separates anti-Zionism from classic antisemitism," notes Milton Shain, antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town.

Mandela, a member of parliament, was speaking at a session of the Pan African Palestinian Solidarity Network on Saturday, 12 March 2022, in Dakar, Senegal. He blamed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on "Neo-Nazis in Ukraine, the apartheid Israel dogs of war, and those in NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] intent on advancing cold-war politics."

He also said among other points, "We must advance our solidarity work by creating greater awareness of Israel's evil actions, not only in Palestine, but in Africa and wherever it suits their pernicious agenda. It has mobilised formidable lobbies in the West and pursued a policy of cheque-book diplomacy in Africa. In the name of development and development assistance, it has spread its tentacles in our continent.

Once a bastion of anti-colonial struggle, the lions of Africa have allowed the wool to be pulled over their eyes.

"We must reflect deeply on what has transpired on our continent and how the apartheid Israel regime and its Zionist lobbying machine has crept insidiously into the African psyche and wormed itself into our structures overtly and covertly," said Mandela. "We must expose the Zionist agenda on the continent and strive to isolate apartheid Israel for the evil pariah state that it is."

Shain says in Mandela's speech, "well-worn antisemitic tropes are employed – tropes that can be found in Edouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Those who have studied Jew-hatred through the ages will recognise phrases like "spread their tentacles", "cheque-book diplomacy", and "wormed itself into our structures".

"Such language is dangerous and unacceptable," he says. "It ought to be condemned by all decent people. In 2009, South Africa's Deputy Foreign Minister Fatima Hajaig had to apologise for the use of similar expressions. Mandla Mandela is welcome to his crude understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but his language betrays a deep-seated hatred of Jews. It certainly confirms the views of those who maintain that anti-Zionism is a fig leaf for old-style *Judenhass*. He's a disgrace to the

revered Mandela name."

Renowned Holocaust scholar Professor Yehuda Bauer told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Obviously, this reeks of antisemitism." One of Mandela's points referred to the nearly seven and a half decades of the *nakba* [catastrophe] – [i.e. Israel's entire existence] – and just last week, the South African Boycott Divestment Sanctions coalition called Israel's existence "a crime against humanity".

Yet Bauer emphasises, "The denial of the right of the Jewish people to political self-definition and self-rule is antisemitic. Zionism is a Jewish national movement that advocates Jewish independence and its free development. Mandela's denial of Zionist legitimacy is in fact a denial of any Jewish national rights whatsoever. Everyone has such rights, according to Mandela, except the Jews. That's antisemitic. The proper response, in my humble view, isn't to defend, but to attack Mandela directly as a racist and nationalistic propagandist. When he implies that the Ukrainians are neo-Nazis, he justifies Russian imperialism, ridiculously, because the current Ukrainian leader is a Jew who was elected in free elections by more than 73% of Ukrainian citizens."

Dr Günther Jikeli, the Erna B Rosenfeld associate professor at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University, told the *SA*



Former Miss Iraq, Sarah Idan, and communal leaders visit the site of the Sharpeville massacre to commemorate Human Rights Day (21 March)

See story on page 3

Jewish Report, "These statements by Mandla Mandela are deeply concerning and sad.

"They are concerning because they show strong indications of an irrational and antisemitic mindset that demonises Israel and accuses Israel and the 'Zionist lobby' – often a codeword for Jews – of conspiring against Africa, the African people, and the world," he says.

"Mandela uses language, such as 'dogs of war' and 'spreading tentacles' that the Nazis used when they demonised Jews. They are also concerning because they show that a leading figure in South Africa has lost any touch with reality and sees the world as a conspiracy fantasy. And it's sad that Mandla Mandela uses his prominent name to spread such antisemitic language."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies Associate Director David Saks says, "Antisemitism is a continually-mutating virus. Initially, it was primarily motivated by religious hatred and then took on a pseudo-racial caste. Now, it mainly targets Jews as a political, collective entity through defaming and delegitimising the Jewish nation state.

"Mandla Mandela's ludicrous rant typifies this kind of modern-day Jew-hatred," he says. "It's redolent with the worst kind of antisemitic stereotypes, particular in its portrayal of Israel – 'the Jew' among the nations – as a sinister, insidious, and corrupting element exercising a malignant, behind-the-scenes control over African affairs. It's a rehashed *Protocols of the Elders of*

Zion for the 21st century, only with 'Israel' in place of 'Jews'."

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, says, "We're appalled but not surprised by Mandla Mandela's atrocious attempt to weaponise the Mandela name as a means to delegitimise the Jewish state, minimise the Holocaust, and exploit the Ukrainian conflict for his own agenda. This is a betrayal of Madiba's legacy as a global statesman and peacemaker who publicly spoke about the legitimacy of Zionism and the right of Israel to have secure borders and live in peace."

• Mandla Mandela's full speech was published on the *AfroPalForum* website.

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Terror disrupts Be’er Sheva’s peace and quiet

TALI FEINBERG

South African *oleh* Gideon Kaufmann was at work on the afternoon of 22 March 2022 when sirens broke the peace of his hometown, Be’er Sheva. “When we heard all the ambulances, we definitely realised something crazy had happened,” he says.

It was the most deadly terrorist attack in Israel in at least half a decade. Four innocent people were killed, two of them mothers each with three children. One was a Chabad rabbi and father of four who ran a soup kitchen. Another was a gentle 67-year-old man. Many others were injured.

The terrorist ran over a man riding a bicycle before driving to a petrol station and stabbing a woman. He then drove to a nearby shopping centre and stabbed another man and a woman. He drove away, crashed into another vehicle, and stabbed another person before being shot and killed by a civilian passerby.

“I work less than a kilometre away from the petrol station which was attacked,” says Kaufmann. “It’s probably at the biggest mall

complex in ‘B7’ as we fondly refer to Be’er Sheva. I’m a chemical engineer, originally from Cape Town. I work with a company which sells laboratory and specialised engineering equipment. Incidentally, the company has a customer-facing shop at the centre where the attack happened. In some of the videos you can actually see the shop sign.”

He, his wife Nicky, and his son, Tuvya, made aliya in 2019. They moved into their house in Be’er Sheva on 1 March 2020, and the first lockdown started 10 days later.

Another South African *oleh* who asked to remain anonymous, says, “Be’er Sheva isn’t big – the attack happened a few minutes’ drive from where we live. We were affected in the sense that these events erode our sense of safety and security and spread hate and distrust among people.”

According to various media outlets, the terrorist was identified as Muhammad Alab Ahmed abu Alkiyan, a Bedouin-Israeli from the town of Hura who had served time in an Israeli prison.

He was arrested in 2015 along with other suspects for supporting and promoting ISIS (Islamic State) to students at the school where he was a teacher.

He appeared to have acted in line with instructions found in ISIS attack manuals which call for “lone-wolf” attackers to use vehicles for ramming attacks, and when these can’t drive any further, to stop and use sharp knives for stabbings. According to ISIS manuals, “this creates maximum carnage”.

But Kaufmann says the city won’t let such an event detract from its peaceful and multicultural essence,

and that it’s a great place to live. “Life is great in B7 – it’s growing in leaps and bounds. Construction is booming, there are top malls, top schools, a great Anglo [English speaking] community, and no matter where you live in B7, you’re always a bus trip away from the centre.

“You have Soroka Hospital, which has some of the best doctors and professors. When I had an operation a few weeks back, my surgical team consisted of two professors - one was Arab and the other Jewish. The nurses were Arab, Jewish [two Russian, one Ethiopian], and my anaesthetist was Russian. I knew I was in good hands.



The scene of a car ramming and stabbing attack outside a shopping centre in Be’er Sheva, Israel, 22 March 2022

“B7 is the epitome of multiculturalism and how well it works,” he says. “We attended a wedding last night where we met a whole bunch of South Africans – some converted and some not – and it was so great to hear people speaking Afrikaans in the middle of B7! One thing that always amazes us is that in December, all the Russian stores have Christmas trees and decorations for sale next to the Chanukah stuff. *Olim* are from Russia, Ukraine, Ethiopia, South America, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, South Africa, Holland, India, and many other places. We know we made one of the best choices in our life to come here.”

Torah Thought

Shame for the scorned swine

A rabbi was walking down the road and couldn’t help noticing how one of his prominent congregants entered a non-kosher restaurant. He couldn’t believe it! So, he peeked inside to see if he was really sitting down to eat. He waited patiently outside. After a while, a waiter came to his table with a big roasting pan and unveiled the “real thing!” A roast pig in full regalia down to the traditional apple stuffed into its mouth. The rabbi was incensed. He rushed inside and accosted his congregant. “You? How could you?!”

“Rabbi,” said the man calmly. “This is such a fancy restaurant. All I ordered was a simple apple, and they made such a fuss!”

If there’s any one food that gets Jewish blood boiling it’s the proverbial pig. Did you know that there are even laws against Jews raising pigs! Jews the world over, even if they may be less than strictly religious, still refrain from eating bacon or pork chops. Pig is repulsive to millions of Jews, including many who aren’t that kosher.

But why single out the poor pig? Halachically, a cheeseburger is worse. Though we may benefit financially from swine, we may not do so from cooked meat-and-milk mixtures.

So why is our poor pig so despised and despicable?

Well, we know that to be kosher, an animal must have split hooves and chew its cud. The swine is the only animal that has split hooves but doesn’t chew its cud. The sages saw it as a model of dishonesty and hypocrisy. The pig wallows in its pen lying on its back and appears to be showing off its feet that have the kosher sign of split hooves. So, it makes itself out to be kosher even though it’s *chazir treif*! The pig is thus compared to Esau who would regularly ask his father, Isaac, halachic questions which made him out to be a scholar and a devout Jew, when in fact he was a murderer.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman,
—life rabbi emeritus,
Sydenham Shul



In other words, it’s not just that the pig is unkosher, but rather that he makes a point of giving the impression that he is kosher!

It’s the deceit and duplicity that make him so reviled, repulsive, and repugnant. In Hebrew, we would call him a *tzovva* (one who paints himself to look pious when inside he is a scoundrel). Just like Esau.

The Torah wants us to be frum. But it also expects us to be honest and not make false impressions.

So, more than simply being unkosher, it’s the dishonesty and hypocrisy of

the swine that make him so abominable. He oozes this holy impression when he is as profane as they come.

I suppose it’s like they say, “Better an enemy you know is your enemy than an enemy who disguises himself as a friend.” There are terrorists in camouflage and there are far more dangerous terrorists who wear pinstriped suits.

Please G-d, we will all be kosher Jews, not only in our kitchens, but in the way we lead our lives.

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Former Miss Iraq challenges Mandla Mandela on conflict

NICOLA MILTZ

Former Miss Iraq, Sarah Idan, an Arab Muslim global peace activist, has challenged the Israel-bashing grandson of Nelson Mandela to a conversation on the conflict in the Middle East.

Idan is in South Africa to spread a message of peace, respect, and tolerance during Israel Apartheid Week (IAW), traditionally a time of heightened anti-Israel sentiment and intimidation on university campuses throughout the country.

She has invited Mandla Mandela, an outspoken lobbyist, to engage with her on the conflict.

In an Instagram post, she said, “While I’m still in South Africa, I’d like to invite Mandla Mandela @nkosizwelivelile to have a conversation about human rights and the conflict.”

This isn’t the first time that Idan, 32, the founder of human rights nongovernmental organisation Humanity Forward has mentioned Mandela on social media.

She made headlines last year when she lambasted him for calling on Miss South Africa, Lalela Mswane, and all African countries to boycott the Miss Universe pageant which was held in Eilat, Israel, in December 2021.

In a fearless Instagram post, she rushed to defend the recently crowned Mswane, and criticised Mandela, saying, “How dare you!”

The courageous former beauty queen is no stranger to controversy and confrontation.

Five years ago, she had the world at her feet with her whole life ahead of her. Widely tipped to become the next Miss Universe, she stole hearts with her extraordinary and unusual life story.

She grew up under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein; was forced to live in exile as a refugee in Syria during the civil war; taught herself English from scratch using the lyrics of American singer Christina Aguilera; joined the United States (US) military on her 18th birthday; and made a life for herself as a musician in America. The stuff of movies. But all of that changed when she posted a selfie

in November 2017 with Miss Israel, Adar Gandelsman, captioned, “Peace and Love from Miss Iraq and Miss Israel #missuniverse.”

The two met in Las Vegas while preparing for the 2017 Miss Universe pageant.

“I could see she was nervous to greet me. When I asked her why she appeared scared of me, she showed me her Israel sash and I felt so ashamed. I told her I had no problem with where she came from. It’s about humanity,” Idan said.

They struck up a friendship, telling each other about life in their respective countries.

The selfie of the two contestants, intended to convey a message of peace and unity, typically triggered an avalanche of hate in Iraq and other Arab countries which still don’t recognise the Jewish state.



Former Miss Iraq, Sarah Idan, hugs a little girl at the Judah House Tabernacle in Vanderbijlpark

“I was called a Zionist dog, considered the worst insult in the Middle East,” Idan recalled this week. She was blocked on social media by other Arab contestants who had been her friends.

Idan said she was labelled a traitor, told she had committed treason, received multiple death threats including from Hamas, and was forced to flee Iraq with her parents and four siblings within three days of posting the selfie.

“It was a less than an enjoyable time. I was anxious, I had panic attacks, and it affected my ability to compete,” she said. However, she remained resolute and refused to take down the selfie, determined to take part in the Miss Universe pageant even though its organisers and those of Miss Iraq tried to persuade her to withdraw, a lot of them pro-Palestinian, she said.

Although she had initially been a clear favourite for one of the top three positions, she didn’t place, which came as no surprise, she said.



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Idan continues to live in political exile in the US and has had her Iraqi citizenship revoked.

Asked this week if she would do it all again knowing that her controversial action would lead to so much pain, fear, and heartache, she said, “Yes, absolutely yes, 100%,” pointing out that it was a life changing moment that opened her eyes.

“[That photo] is way more important than a beauty title. I literally launched a career after that, got to do and see so much and influence so many people.”

Her experience inspired her to commit herself to work for peace between Muslims and Jews, Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East and beyond.

Through her NGO, she has addressed global forums, including the United Nations Human Rights Council.

“I don’t think being Miss Universe I could have done any of that,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Idan said it was important for her to be in South Africa during IAW and have an opportunity to learn about the country’s history.

“My main aim as a Muslim Arab woman is to educate and engage people of all backgrounds and faiths, tell my story, and why I think it’s important to have peace with Israel,” she said.

“People who talk about Israel apartheid need to visit Israel to see the truth for themselves that it’s not apartheid. It’s a place where Jews, Arabs, and Christians co-exist. I wish other Arab countries would be more like Israel. Show me one Arab country that has a true democracy with full human rights for all including women and gays.

“In all my experience, I’ve come to realise that Boycott Divestment Sanctions activists aren’t pro-peace or pro-Palestinian, rather they are

anti-Israel. This needs to change.”

On a trip to Sharpeville marking Human Rights Day, Idan was visibly moved after communicating with church leaders and members of the Sharpeville community.

She posted on Instagram, “It never occurred to me before how when some people call Israel ‘apartheid’ it affects South Africans who experienced the real apartheid.”

As a young girl, Idan knew that life in Iraq wasn’t ideal.

“People lived in fear under Saddam. Graffiti signs everywhere said, ‘Death to America’, ‘Death to Israel.’”

She recalls with horror how Saddam held celebrations for days after 9/11.

“My family was sad seeing innocent people jumping out of a building. Even with all the brainwashing, we still didn’t see things the way he wanted,” she said.

Idan loved playing soccer but as she got older, she said she kept her hair short and strapped down her breasts to look more boy-like.

“After a certain age, girls weren’t allowed to play with the boys outside. I wished I was a boy,” she recalls.

When the American soldiers first arrived in Iraq, she said she was playing soccer in the road and started saying the death prayer.

“We were told they were coming to kill us,” she said.

“The first time I saw American soldiers, I thought they were aliens coming out of their tanks. I couldn’t believe it when one of them gave us flowers, candy, and pamphlets saying we’re here to liberate you not hurt you.”

With the arrival of the soldiers so too came satellite television and American music, which she devoured in order to teach herself English.

“I loved watching the sitcom *Friends* on TV, and thought that I’d like to live like that,” she said.

So, on her 18th birthday, she approached a US check point and joined the US military. It opened the door to her musical and modelling career, which ultimately led to work in human rights.

At the time of going to print, Mandela hadn’t responded to Idan’s invitation.

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No such thing as neutrality in this war: Ukraine ambassador

TALI FEINBERG

She’s a single mother of two young children with a brother in Ukraine and colleagues who have lost their homes to Russian bombings. A woman she knew was killed in recent days. But Ukrainian ambassador to South Africa, Liubov Abravitova, is calm and stoic while watching her country burn at the hands of a heartless dictator.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from her office in Pretoria, Abravitova says she met the South African Jewish Board of Deputies two weeks ago because “this war will affect everyone” and she appreciates the support from all sectors of society.

At the meeting, they discussed the urgent humanitarian needs on the ground, the relentless Russian propaganda, and the myriad Jewish organisations which have offered support since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February.

Abravitova told the *SA Jewish Report* it had been particularly challenging working in a country that had shown by its actions – or lack of actions – that it has sided with Russia.

This is why she appreciates the support of every Jewish organisation that has taken the time to express its dismay or offered to help. She notes that if South Africa continues to trade with Russia, “it will have Ukrainian blood on its hands” because every economic interaction with Russia supports the invasion.

She says although South Africa

may declare itself neutral, there’s no neutrality in a situation like this – especially as South Africa just celebrated Human Rights Day.

She emphasises that South Africa

threw herself over her child during the bombings,” she says. “It’s surreal and hard to believe.”

While it has been a hard time for everyone at the embassy, they

and cooking oil.”

It will also change the “structure of global systems, peace and security, and international law. At the end of the day, if Africa allows Russia to do

this, then Africa will also be challenged with territorial conflict. Neighbouring countries will feel they have the freedom to invade another country to take its resources. So, it affects the security of the continent itself,” Abravitova says.

She says there are about 1 000 known Ukrainians in South Africa and that many have asked for help in bringing their families to South Africa. She has even been contacted by hotels and individual families asking to host Ukrainian refugees. In turn, she has reached out to the department

of international relations and cooperation, but has received no response.

Abravitova was born in Moldova, and remembers her city as a hub for Jewish refugees from the former USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) making their way to Israel and America. Growing up in Odesa, she was aware of the thriving Jewish community there.

She notes that Ukraine is a multicultural society and that the Jewish community makes up an important part of that fabric – now

being torn apart by the invasion. In the context of such a multi-faceted society, she says many Ukrainians welcomed the election of a Jewish president and didn’t see it as unusual. Rather, it was a reflection of a diverse country where everyone is welcome, and where even a Jewish comedian can make it to the highest office in the land.

While many Ukrainians believed Putin wouldn’t invade, Abravitova always knew it could happen. Her brother remains in Odesa. As a male in the 18 to 60 age group, he’s legally obligated to stay and fight. Yet, she points out that many Ukrainians want to stay and wouldn’t flee even if they were allowed to go. Even if her brother wasn’t forced to, he probably would have chosen to stay.

At the same time, she has seen the heartbreak of families having to leave behind husbands, brothers, and even grandfathers on the border as they have crossed over and become refugees.

Seeing families ripped apart, knowing that ordinary people as well as cultural icons are being killed, hearing of communities fleeing en masse, and watching places she knows being flattened are all scenes that haunt her. Yet she gets up every day to continue to speak out on behalf of her people, which she says is “an honour and a privilege”.

To the South African Jewish community, she says, “Everyone’s voice is important in speaking the truth. Please keep supporting us.”



Ukraine Ambassador
Liubov Abravitova


could have taken a strong stand in the early days of the war and made an impact. Now, as the invasion reaches the one-month mark, South Africa’s lack of moral courage has shown the world exactly where the rainbow nation stands.

Meanwhile, Abravitova’s Ukrainian colleagues in Pretoria all have family and friends back home who have been affected by the invasion and know people who have lost their lives.

The woman Abravitova knows who died is someone she worked with in the past. “She was killed because she

continue to focus on ways they can help rather than feeling powerless. “People are frustrated, but we are in South Africa for a reason, and must find ways to help from here,” she says.

The ambassador notes that although we’re far away “South Africans must understand that the war will affect them. Ukraine produces 10% of all the wheat in the world. You may say it’s only 10%, but what about your pasta being made in Italy? We live in a very interconnected world, and we’ll see shortages and price increases of essential items like bread



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African anti-Israel groups attempt to mobilise in Dakar

TALI FEINBERG

When the African Union (AU) admitted Israel as an observer in 2021, a number of African countries were furious, with South Africa leading the charge. And when the AU decided to postpone discussion on the issue at its recent summit, they became even more livid.

Now, anti-Israel activists from 21 African countries have gathered in a new forum called the Pan African Palestinian Solidarity Network (PAPSN), which looks like a desperate reaction to an AU that’s embracing Israel.

Perhaps the biggest sign that this is a rebellion against the AU is that the gathering was hosted in Dakar, Senegal, the same country that AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat hails from. It was he who made the unilateral decision to admit Israel as an observer.

In his official remarks on 6 February 2022 at the AU summit in Addis Ababa, he doubled down on the decision, saying that four-fifths of AU member states had developed a relationship with Israel. “[Observer status] is a faithful reflection of a tangible, irrefutable reality: that of the recognition of Israel on a very large scale in Africa,” Mahamat said.

But last week, delegates attempted to reverse this fact. The gathering was attended by representatives of civil society organisations and groupings from Botswana, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The entire two-day event was a festival of Israel condemnation and an echo chamber of delegates attempting to convince themselves that Israel’s strong ties with Africa could be obliterated. Particularly harsh on their fellow Africans were declarations that Christian support of Israel should be eliminated, and that Israel’s humanitarian support in African countries was unwelcome.

“Ultimately this is a reaction to the AU providing Israel with observer status and taking a rain check on the issue for the next year or so,” says local political analyst Daniel Silke. “There’s contestation on Israel’s observer status, but it’s not going to threaten the cohesiveness of the AU. This is an attempt to elevate the Palestinian issue on the African continent from those seeking to exclude Israel as far as possible. Ukraine has taken the spotlight off Israel, and I think there will be renewed efforts to isolate Israel and raise that particular issue in global alliances.”

Sara Gon, the head of strategic engagement at the Institute of Race Relations, notes that “PAPSN doesn’t seem to be a challenge to the AU as much as it appears to be a super grouping of anti-Israel lobbies and nongovernmental organisations.

“Presumably it intends to put pressure on their 21 respective countries’ governments to boycott Israel, push Israel to be declared an apartheid state by the UN, and, by implication the termination of the Jewish state,” she says. “It’s not a threat to the AU or its members but it’s another irritant in this battle. Although they have taken an antagonistic stand towards Israel-friendly Christian groups, I don’t believe it will

before.”

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, says, “Israel has made significant strides in improving relations with African states. The majority of African countries now have positive and open diplomatic relations with Israel and

collaborate on numerous initiatives to bring water, electricity, and food security to millions of African people. It’s unfortunate that a small, hateful group of extremists are trying to block Africa’s progress, but we can take comfort in the fact that they will almost certainly fail and that Africa’s friendship with Israel will prosper.”



Delegates at the Dakar event

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Follow in the footsteps of an icon

Can I say that if I had a surname with the status of Mandela, I hope I would use it for good? I would like to think I would follow the example of my iconic elder and help the world to forgive, encourage negotiations and peace. But instead, Zwelivelile (Mandla) Mandela has become the face of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement in South Africa and frankly, he does the organisation no favours. Though BDS is constantly proclaiming that it’s not antisemitic (and I reserve judgement on that), Mandela rides roughshod over that notion, coming across as the stormtrooper for antisemitism. The things he says – you can see for yourself on page 1 – are astonishing in their racist nature. He clearly doesn’t care that he comes across as an antisemite. And if we doubted our opinion on this, Tali Feinberg spoke to at least three global experts who were equally astounded at how blatant he was in his derision of Jews. Unlike many others, he doesn’t even try and couch his feeling about Jewish people in anti-Israel rhetoric. He just vomits out his hatred, and I have to wonder why. Surely, as the face of the anti-Israel lobby, he should be a tad more circumspect or even perhaps cautious in his public displays of hatred. Either those within his organisation support his sentiments and have veered off the path of trying to steer clear of being openly antisemitic, or he’s simply a loose cannon and does as he wants. Suffice to say, I can only imagine that his grandfather, the great Nelson Mandela, is turning in his grave because he was so far from being racist or prejudiced. He was the antithesis of that.



But who exactly is Mandla Mandela, and what has he done to deserve any credibility or acclaim? From what I can tell, the only thing positive he has going for him is his grandfather’s name, and he uses it to promote everything I believe his grandfather would hate. Ironically, I was introduced to his iconic grandfather by the then Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Alon Liel, at the time of the first democratic election. They were friends. It was during Mandela’s first visit to the Sea Point – Green Point Shul (commonly known as the Marais Road Shul). There was a *brocha* for Mandela after he spoke in shul and the ambassador managed to get me in as his guest and introduce me to this world icon. I was tongue tied, probably for the first and last time in my life, but then it was hard to think of anything to say when this great statesman was in front of me.

I remember being so amazed at how he treated the chief rabbi, ambassadors, and the cleaning staff in exactly the same way – with respect and dignity. I so remember how he thanked the South African Jewish community for its contribution to the development of the country, and how he called on those of us who had left for anywhere other than Israel to come home. He understood the kinship we have for Israel and our love of South Africa. He also respected us – clearly not something his grandson has learnt. I can’t help but wonder why Mandela junior has taken on this particular cause. Why not fight for the rights of the hungry and desperate in South Africa? Why not make it his business to find employment for those unemployed and destitute? There are so many vital masts he could pin his colours (or name) to and do good, rather than do his damndest to run down the Jewish State and the people in this country who hold it dear. I’m sure some of you might question why we put the story about Mandela junior on the front page, seeing it as giving this dastardly man a platform. I see your point. However, I’ll be damned if I allow someone, particularly as high profile as a Mandela, to say the things that he has said and not challenge him on it. I don’t believe that those who spew antisemitism should be allowed to ride roughshod over us. Antisemitism doesn’t just go away if we say nothing and let people get away with it. Antisemitism is like a festering wound. It gets worse and worse until it is cauterised and cleaned, so that it can heal and be diffused. Now, if we allow the Mandela juniors of the world to get away with ugly antisemitic rhetoric, we give them permission to do it. Well, I won’t sit by and allow antisemitism. I know I’m not alone.

And to those who do their best to couch their antisemitism in Israel hatred, we’re not blind. So, be assured that while we choose not to give you a public platform to grandstand, we won’t give you free rein to run us down. We may be a small community on the southern tip of Africa, but we pack a mean punch when we need to. Ask Bongani Masuku. He’ll tell you, our community doesn’t back down. Meanwhile, as people like Mandela junior go on about us, war is raging in Eastern Europe, and Russia continues to devastate Ukraine and its people.

In fact, this week, one of those killed in a Russian airstrike on Kharkiv in Ukraine was a 96-year-old non-Jewish Holocaust survivor who had spent time at four different concentration camps. The Ukrainian foreign minister tweeted of Borys Romanchenko this week, “Survived Hitler, murdered by Putin.” We must do everything in our power to stop the war, as is made clear on page 4 by the Ukrainian ambassador to South Africa. So, join us at the *SA Jewish Report* this week and until the war ends by lighting an extra Shabbos candle for the Ukrainians. This is such a small thing, but it’s something to keep their flame alive.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

Jewish students shouldn’t cringe from IAW

OPINION

BEN ATIE



The return to campus in 2022 for most students meant the resumption of the annual occurrence that we hoped had been forgotten – Israel Apartheid Week (IAW). I recall two years ago being a first-year student. I walked onto the university campus terrified of what the week would bring. For the first time in my life, my identity as a Zionist Jew wouldn’t just be questioned but challenged. I know I’m not alone. I still receive worried phone calls or messages from students the week of IAW, admitting that they’re fearful of coming onto campus because they are Jewish. Notice that this fear isn’t about their political position or opinion on Israel, it’s because they feel intimidated by a bully organisation like Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions that tries to silence them into complying. I used to believe that Jewish students should ignore the week, keep our heads down, and get on with life – it would make my parents much happier if I spent more time in the library. But as we prepared for this year’s IAW, I realised that that kind of thinking is naïve. If the week is going to go ahead, it’s imperative that Zionist Jewish students speak up. You see, most students in South Africa have an ambivalent, uninformed, or slightly negative opinion of Israel. IAW is an opportunity for us to teach the campus – and by extension the country – about the story of our people. It’s also a chance to debunk or correct many preconceived notions, often predicated on lies told to students. This doesn’t have to be in terms of a fist fight but rather in terms of calm, rational discussion – how 90% of IAW occurs. Furthermore, this is an opportunity for us as Zionist Jewish students to express with pride who we are. And why not be proud to be a Zionist? The state of Israel is nothing short of a modern-day miracle. Besides the countless wars she has survived and the state we have built in spite of living under constant threat of destruction, Israel is the most powerful story of decolonisation ever told. No other people have successfully had their land colonised by other people and then have returned to it to re-establish their homeland with its historic language, culture, and people. That’s a story that should speak to us all in South Africa and is why we place so much emphasis on how Israel can help Africa – another positive message spread during this vitriolic week. Would we rather the week didn’t happen? Absolutely. But does that mean we need to sit down and mope about it? Absolutely not. Part of the Jewish story has always been turning bad situations into an opportunity, and that’s why we must get involved in IAW.

• Ben Atie is the national chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students.

The passing of a Torah giant

TRIBUTE

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This week, South African Jewry joined Jews around the world to mourn the passing of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, of blessed memory, the leading Torah sage of our generation. Torah wisdom, from the nobility of his character, and the sincerity of his deeds. The influence he wielded, the honour he was accorded, the veneration he inspired, resided purely in his spirit. The prophet tells us that he found Later, in 2019, he helped me launch a campaign for Shabbat observant communities to deepen their Shabbat experience through Torah learning. On the occasions I was privileged to meet Kanievsky, I was struck by the modesty of his small apartment in Bnei Brak. No elaborate office with grand views. No plush furniture. Everything was so simple. Books were everywhere – one of which was always open in front of him. The atmosphere was permeated with humility and wisdom. I saw how Reb Chaim was always totally accessible to anyone who wanted to speak to him – to seek his advice, or his blessing, or simply an answer to a Torah question. Whenever I went to meet him, there were lines of people outside his door. The people who stood in those queues day after day were from all walks of life. Young and old, rich and poor, learned and not.



Jewish mourners wait outside Ponevezh community cemetery in Bnei Brak during the funeral of Haredi Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, 20 March 2022

Hundreds gathered at a memorial service in Johannesburg, where there was a tremendous outpouring of emotion and a number of stirring tributes. These emotional scenes were a reflection of the sense of great mourning felt across the Jewish world. Earlier in the week, hundreds of thousands attended Kanievsky’s funeral in Israel, one of the largest public gatherings in the country’s history. Take a moment to reflect how remarkable that is. Reb Chaim, as he was fondly known throughout the world, held no official position, no title other than “rabbi”. He wielded no political power or executive authority. He commanded no budgets, no teams of employees, no press or media operation. And yet, he was one the most influential leaders in the Jewish world. His authority derived not from any financial or political power but simply from the depth and breadth of his Hashem not in the drama of the “howling wind, nor in the raging fire, nor in the tumultuous earthquake” but “in a delicate still voice” (1 Kings 19:12). Kanievsky’s influence came through the “delicate still voice” of his teachings and writings, in his peerless Torah scholarship. He wrote great works of halacha. But with all his remarkable intellectual accomplishments, his “delicate still voice” was also heard in his righteousness, through his living embodiment of the divine values of our Torah. I experienced this personally. I met Reb Chaim on three occasions. When I started my position as a young chief rabbi, he gave me a special blessing that stayed with me and gave me great encouragement. I met him again just as the international Shabbat Project was getting off the ground, and his endorsement meant so much to me personally and also helped draw support for the project.

His wisdom, compassion, and learning moved people, and that’s why they made him their *gadol hador* (the great of the generation). It’s a title that no committee can award you. There’s no election that you stand for. It cannot be bought or attained by any official process. And it comes with no benefits or perks or power in the traditional sense. It’s a title awarded by the people – from the most learned to the least – to a sage who has captured their hearts and minds with his righteousness and learning. Kanievsky did so for decades. The best way for us to pay respects is by learning more Torah in his merit, especially during the *shloshim* (first 30 days of mourning), which he would certainly have regarded as the greatest gift anyone could give him. May his memory be a blessing.

SAUJS call for ‘heal over hate’ snubbed

DANI SACK AND NICOLA MILTZ

A lone, chained student from the University of Pretoria (Tuks) stood with her mouth taped shut and fake blood smeared on her face in front of a peaceful South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) mural promoting dialogue over hate.

Israel haters defaced the mural by daubing red paint under it with the words “From the River to the Sea Palestine will be Free”. The student held a poster which asked, “How are we supposed to talk when our voices have been silenced?”



It demonstrated anti-Israel activists’ unwillingness to engage in dialogue during Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) this week in spite of SAUJS’ attempt to offer an olive branch and encourage conversation about the Middle East conflict.

Though IAW had a fairly muted start, Tuks upped the ante. South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) posted a video of a Tuks student chanting “F*** America and F*** Israel!” accompanied by some cheers.

SAFI tweeted, “Just in case you thought this was about Palestinian rights, they clarified that ‘apartheid week’ is about hate – and of course disrespecting the victims of SA apartheid.”

The “Heal over Hate” mural at Tuks organised by SAUJS was vandalised on the first day of IAW.

In reaction, SAFI posted on Instagram, “Instead of embracing [the mural], the anti-Israel bigot defaced it with calls to destroy Israel. Hate will never lead to healing.”

At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) erected a panelled wall with “#FreePalestine” spray-painted across it, where it held workshops.

According to Joshua Norman, Wits SAUJS events officer, “Their numbers don’t seem to

be as large as previous years, possibly because of this year’s approach of having two separate spaces on campus, one for SAUJS and one for the PSC.”

Meanwhile at Wits, offers of beer were heard coming from the SAUJS camp, eager to promote healthy dialogue and debate.

A colourful invitation was sent out on social media by members of SAUJS saying, “Don’t spread fear, have a beer, heal over hate.” The student body called on students to join them for a chat saying, “Conflict isn’t resolved through hostility and fear mongering campaigns. When we sit down and have a beer with each other, we choose to heal our

and antisemitism. Together, they created this year’s “Heal over Hate” campaign.

A tent outside Wits’ Chamber of Mines building sported tables filled with t-shirts, bracelets, yarmulkes, and booklets about Israel’s history and the reality of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

SAUJS National Chairperson Ben Atie commented that “the point of the week has always been about giving students who know nothing the opportunity to get educated, ask questions, and learn about Israel and Zionism”. SAUJS representatives and delegates from StandWithUs scattered themselves around the outside of the tent, starting conversations

with students who wanted to know more about Israel. Many of them knew only buzzwords like “Israel-Palestine conflict” or “Israel apartheid”.

Noa Raman, the director of partnerships at StandWithUs, said the organisation’s aim was to “support SAUJS students and strategise about the most successful campaign not only to counter anti-Israel rhetoric, but also to raise awareness about Israel. The team of StandWithUs delegates includes Druze, Moroccan, Brazilian, and Jerusalemite Israelis, to name a few. This is in order to expose the diversity within Israeli culture, to showcase the reality of Israelis.”

Raman said that after two years

of IAW online, they hoped this year’s face-to-face connections could help humanise Israel. “Bringing a smile is most important. Israel will still exist after IAW, so this is really about strengthening the pro-Israel community in South Africa and highlighting that there’s more to the story than meets the eye.”

Norman was one of the SAUJS representatives educating students using visual aids, pamphlets, and a friendly attitude. “Most students have been willing to engage,” Norman said. “We’re yet to have someone come here and spread hate. I’m really grateful that I have the platform to educate myself and my fellow students on something that forms such a large part of my Jewish identity.”

The point of this week for Jewish students, according to Atie, is to show them that they can be proud of who they are, that “it’s okay to be Zionist on campus”, and to promote a pro-Israel message.

Wits has a daily schedule with activities such as “Don’t spread fear, have a beer”, yoga workshops, and shoe drives. The University of Cape Town is holding its annual “Spread hummus, not hate” campaign, and both universities will have the opportunity to hear from the 2017 Miss Iraq, Sarah Idan, who has taken a public pro-Israel stance.

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SA oleh there for Ukraine before and during war

TALI FEINBERG

The son of a parent who survived the Holocaust, South African-born Solly Kaplinski is now helping Jews in Ukraine survive the war.

Kaplinski, who grew up in Cape Town, was a principal at United Herzlia Schools, made aliya, and now lives in Jerusalem.

For the past 16 years, he has been executive director of overseas joint ventures at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), where he has been at the forefront of working with impoverished Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Now, as devastation is wreaked upon these communities, he’s doing what he can to ensure their survival.

“As a child of Holocaust survivors, the images emerging from Ukraine with the elderly, families, and young children fleeing for their lives conjures up pictures of my parents and what happened to them during the Shoah,” Kaplinski told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“With my parents and their families’ lives disrupted and fractured by the Shoah, I’m working to restore what was lost, to help build Jewish life and save Jewish lives.”

“This has motivated me to continue doing the best I can to help our fellow Jews on the ground. The scale and impact of this tragedy is devastating. I have colleagues and friends who are working day and night putting their lives on the line to help our clients, and my heart goes out to them.”

Before the invasion, he worked with communities in Odesa, Kyiv, and Lviv. “Bear in mind that within these communities live some of the poorest Jews in the world – many of them living on a pension of just \$2 [R30] a day,” he says. “Our work focused on providing our clients – many of whom are home bound

– with lifesaving essentials such food and medicine, winter relief, and homeware. Our assistance also provides human connection and emotional support through our Heseds – social service centres across the former Soviet Union that offer clients social contacts, cultural events, holiday celebrations, and clubs including choirs and traditional dancing.

“What the COVID-19 pandemic had not already had an impact on in terms of in-person gatherings, the invasion transformed overnight,” Kaplinski says.

“People are now sheltering in place and living through curfews, air raids, and sirens at all hours. So for the Jews we serve, we have



Solly Kaplinski

adapted our online programmes and local hotlines created during COVID-19 to offer remote care and support.

“We also launched new hotlines in Moldova and Israel staffed by Russian-speaking volunteers to deliver remote care and maintain human connection with these clients and the wider Jewish community. These focus on our neediest clients and also on evacuation services. One of the highlights of these responses is a smart-phone programme for the elderly which offers psychosocial support, Shabbat, and community programming to give reprieve during this crisis.”

He continues to do what he can. “I’ve been overwhelmed by the care, concern, and generosity of Jewish communities and countries worldwide who have rallied to the cause. Jewish global solidarity fills my heart with pride.

“I’m continually amazed by my extraordinary colleagues who have remained in the field, in the thick of things, providing support for the Jews of Ukraine through this unimaginable time. They are absolute heroes.”

Asked if the Jewish community of Ukraine will survive this onslaught, Kaplinski says, “It’s hard to make a prediction during the fog of war, but my guess is that it will take a number of years to recover.”

This moment, he says, says a lot about the Jewish nation and our responsibility to each other. “The care and concern, the support of Jews worldwide around Ukraine, is heartwarming and inspiring. At JDC, we say *kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh* (all Jews are responsible for each other). The Hebrew word *areivim* actually means “guarantee”. We therefore have the equivalent of a binding guarantee to get involved and help.”

He says growing up in South African Jewish community has been a defining factor in choosing to do the work he does now. “I’m eternally grateful to have grown up and to have been nurtured in a strong, cohesive, Zionist community which wrapped its arms around me and helped to sustain me and develop my values. In many ways, everything I’ve done in my personal and previous professional life has prepared me for working at the JDC. With my parents and their families’ lives disrupted and fractured by the Shoah, I’m working to restore what was lost, to help build Jewish life and save Jewish lives.”

To the South African Jewish community, he says, “We like to say, ‘Wherever Jews are in need, the JDC is there.’ The South African Jewish community has punched way above its weight on all levels: community, philanthropy, leadership, education, welfare, and serving the needs of the larger community. You proudly join the JDC in the above mantra. Please continue your magnificent efforts to continue to support our fellow brethren in need. Please continue to be supportive of the Jews of Ukraine, and influence those who haven’t yet stepped up to do so. For more information on our efforts and how you can help, check out: jdc.org/Ukraine-response.”

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Belarusian Jews divided over war on their doorstep

PAULA SLIER

There's a Jewish "joke" in Belarus that the Jews cried when Ukraine was born. They understood it would lead to bloodshed. Not only has that prophecy come true a few times in history, but we're watching it unfold again before our eyes.

Both Ukraine and neighbouring Belarus trace their heritage to the Kyivan Rus' federation in eastern and northern Europe from the late 9th century to mid-13th century. The countries have much more in common with each other from a historical, cultural, and linguistic perspective than either does with Russia.

My grandmother, Sara Altuska, came from the Belarusian city of Brest. The sole Jewish reminder of her now vanished world are its tombstones that date back to 1830, and even they haven't escaped the vestiges of war.

"As children, we played football with the skulls and bones we found here," a stooped over elderly man, walking past where the old Jewish cemetery used to be, tells me in Russian. A soccer field has since been built with a parking area and sports club at the one end and an open field at the other. As I look around, I see broken Jewish tombstones lying among the unruly grass in the backyard of people's homes. Many used them to pave their basement floors.

"No-one stopped us from taking them," the old Belarusian man continues. "No-one cared about that."

But 86-year-old Frida Reizman cares a great deal. She lost more than 100 close members of her family



A reclaimed headstone

in the Holocaust, and remembers all too clearly that "when we were in the ghetto, we were more afraid of the Ukrainians, Poles, and Lithuanians than the Germans. All the guards in the concentration camps were Ukrainian, and they were so brutal – they just wanted to kill Jews.

"You can't hide a crime. For many years, it was hidden in the Soviet Union and no-one talked about the participation of Ukrainians on the side of Hitler and the Nazis. But now, G-d is punishing them".

Between 10 000 to 25 000 Jews live today across Belarus. The numbers are hard to establish because many don't even know they are of Jewish origin. Most are descendants of survivors.

Thirty-two-year-old Alexandra Astashkevich found out by chance that her great-grandparents were Jewish. A school friend invited her to a Shabbat meal, and after telling her parents how much she enjoyed it, they rather matter-of-factly mentioned the family's Jewish roots. Astashkevich lives in Polotsk, the oldest city in Belarus, which once boasted an 80% Jewish population but today has a community that, "I can count on my fingers. The problem is that a lot of Jewish teenagers don't know they're Jewish," she says.

The links with Ukraine are strong.

"I'm nervous about what's happening there. I have lots of friends there. Ukraine, for me, was always close. We went to the Black Sea several times. I had a lot of vacations there. I like Ukrainian music and TV shows. The Ukrainian people and culture are close to me."

Astashkevich believes the Jewish community, like the broader Belarusian society, is divided over Russian president Vladimir Putin's war against their neighbour.

"Unfortunately, many people in Belarus support

Putin's politics because a lot of older people watch only local TV which is full of propaganda. They can't think critically. Like my mother-in-law. She says, it's on TV, and so it must be true; they only tell the truth.

"But I mix with people who have the same thoughts as me. We all feel scared because at any moment, the war can come to our home and cities. I just don't believe Putin. I don't believe a word he says."

Rabbi Mordechai Raichinstein was born in the Belarusian city of Mohilev and is also a descendant of survivors. He jokes that when people ask him what Putin is thinking, he replies, "I don't know, he hasn't called me in a few weeks."

He's reluctant to give his thoughts on the war because he believes a rabbi's opinion can affect the Jewish community. But he's prepared to say, "It's very complicated. It doesn't matter what side a person is on, I'm very sorry that people are being killed and of course, I want the bloodshed to end immediately because every life has a value."

Like Astashkevich, Raichinstein doesn't believe Nazism is a particular threat in Ukraine, although he feels there's antisemitism everywhere "because people don't like someone who is different. Everyone knows the names of people who were Ukrainian antisemites, and when you walk past and see their names on a bench or a memorial, it doesn't make you feel good. The Ukrainians built a statue of the antisemite Bohdan Khmelnytsky [he unified all spheres of Ukrainian society that led to the National Liberation War of the Ukrainian people in the 17th century]. He's a national hero in Ukraine. I'd prefer that they get rid of the statue, but just because it's there doesn't mean the Ukrainians are Nazis."

In his private capacity, he has helped all those who have phoned from Ukraine, although very few refugees have come to Belarus and the Jewish community hasn't organised a formal response.

"Everyone has his or her own opinion about the war, and it just causes arguments and divisions in the community, so it's better for people not to give their opinion. The connection between Belarus and Russia is

tight, particularly financially. The governments are also close and one can cross the border without any problems. At the same time, Jewish people tend to feel for Ukraine because we understand what it's going through."

As for Belarus, he's never encountered any antisemitism, and says he's not afraid of it. The only comment he's ever received is the question, "How does your kippah not fall off?"

But Holocaust survivor Reizman disagrees.

"My mom always said, 'Watch out and be careful of Ukrainians and Poles'. That's how Jews felt right after the war. I still don't have any connection with them. There's a problem with neo-Nazism in Ukraine. The problem exists everywhere – in the family, in the community, in the country, and of course, the best way to solve it is through dialogue and kindness. But as we see now, that didn't work, and so we have a military conflict.

"The conflict needs to be stopped as soon as possible, but the dialogue and kindness isn't coming from the top. People need to think about who they vote to be their leaders.

"America has a hand in this conflict. It's trying to build its military and if the reports are true, it has also built biological laboratories in Ukraine. Joe Biden is a criminal, and is more responsible for what is happening than the Ukrainians."

As for my grandmother, I walk around the city of her birth, uncovering precious little. It's as if a Jewish community, which accounted for more than half of the city's inhabitants before the Nazis murdered nearly 30 000 of them in 1942, has simply disappeared. In 1944, when the Soviets liberated Brest, only nine Jewish citizens were alive.

The tragedy of the Holocaust is twice-enforced here because so many Jews disappeared into mass pits without a name or outward sign of where they died. My grandmother never knew what happened to her parents, grandparents, and cousins. The only reminder is the tombstones, some broken, others intact, that are still surfacing all over the area. I'm desperately hoping to find my family's name on one.

Call to save Aaron and Eden, the medical mystery siblings

TALI FEINBERG

They say that lightning never strikes the same place twice, but one Jewish family in Cape Town is enduring its worst nightmare for the second time. Aaron Lipschitz (age 7) has faced a plethora of challenges in his young life, including undergoing a bone-marrow transplant and being unable to tolerate food due to a rare Primary Immunodeficiency (PI). He's still primarily fed via a port in his stomach.

Now, in what was at first seen as a statistically improbable scenario, his new sister, Eden (six months old), may be facing even more extreme challenges.

Meeting the *SA Jewish Report* in the paediatric ward of the hospital where she spends 10 hours a day, Taryn Lipschitz explains that she and her husband, Steven, always wanted to give Aaron a sibling. Of course, they were concerned that a second child would have a similar condition to Aaron, although his exact diagnosis is still unknown. They knew he had a PI, but the subtype or variant seems not to have been documented yet worldwide. Furthermore, it doesn't fall under the 400-plus known PIs. After extensive genetic testing, the conclusion was that Aaron's condition was most probably a random phenomenon that didn't have a genetic cause. Of course, this could never be 100% guaranteed, but they were confident based on all the genetic testing that Eden would be a healthy baby.

However, their daughter Eden has been in and out of hospital for half her life, and has already endured six general anaesthetics and overcome a very dangerous case of septicaemia. Aaron has also been in hospital many times over

the past weeks battling a bacterial gut infection and severe abdominal migraines. The cost of a top medical aid plan for a family of four, specialised formula and medications, and a full-time carer are astronomical. Lipschitz should be with their children in hospital, but instead she is having to work to cover their costs. Bringing up a "normal" child is expensive, but with two chronically ill children, they are in need of long-term, extensive financial support.

The cause of the children's condition is a complete mystery to the medical world. Though the family pays for a top medical aid plan, its savings have been quickly depleted and not having a formal diagnosis makes claiming from medical aids more challenging than usual. As a baby, Aaron was able to tolerate a hypoallergenic formula called Neocate LCP, but Eden hasn't even been able to stomach this. Eden's recent 10-week admission was due to severe pain during and after feeds. Her medical team attempted to use both a nasogastric and nasojejunal feeding tube to slow the rate of her feeds down, but this didn't help with her severe pain and vomiting after feeds. As a last resort, her medical team had to resort to TPN (total parenteral nutrition). This is intravenous feeding via a broviac catheter through her heart to keep her alive.

TPN can be very toxic for a baby's liver, so she is having to be weaned off it using a different hypoallergenic formula as well as continuous doses of pain medication to help her manage oral feeds again. She is on one pain medication that actually stops her brain from registering pain during feeds. Her new formula is called Novolac Aminova, and costs R450 a tin, which isn't covered by medical aid due

to her lack of formal diagnosis.

It's been a whirlwind few months of stress and sadness. "We wanted a second child to hopefully have a normal experience this time around," says Lipschitz. "Like other families, we wanted our biggest problem to be sleepless nights. So it has been a huge loss. Yet we all can't imagine life without Eden."

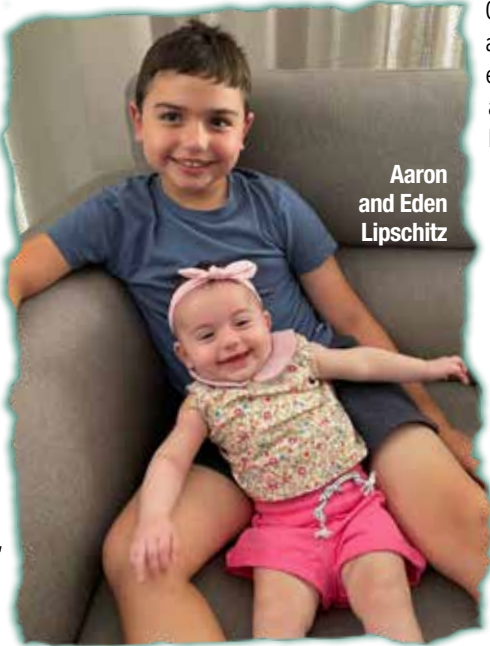
Steven and Taryn have committed to never leaving either of their children alone even with long hospital stays. Steven's parents live in Johannesburg, so it's essentially Steven, Taryn, her mom, and their amazing carer, Leonora, who are there around the clock. One of them will always sleep at the hospital. "We are like ships in the night – more like caregivers than a married couple," says Lipschitz of her and her husband. Still, they are united in their devotion to their children.

"It's never been [a case of] 'Why us?'," she says. "We know these children were sent to us to care for. I'm not angry, and I don't have the time to cry myself to sleep. I have to sleep so I can get up and deal with what the next day brings."

In between, there are bright moments. Aaron, who is in Grade 1 at Herzlia Weizmann, is a whiz at school and a passionate soccer player. "He's tired of missing out. He just gets on with it. Eden adores him, and her eyes follow him wherever he goes," says Lipschitz. "He has such empathy, and will suggest medications for her from his own experience. The other day he said, 'Eden can have my drip stand because it's easier to carry around.'"

At this stage, it's too soon to tell if Eden

also has a PI driving her feeding issues, or if she has severe feeding issues alone. Only time will tell how her immune system develops. The family's worst fear is that Eden will also need a bone-marrow transplant one day. Aaron's bone-marrow transplant in 2018 has ultimately helped



Aaron and Eden Lipschitz

his immunity, but it almost killed him in the process because it resulted in a rare cytokine storm and month-long admission to the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital intensive-care unit.

There are many unknowns. "No one knows why Aaron still needs beriglobin immune treatments weekly to support his immune system after his bone-marrow transplant. And when they grew cultures of the bacteria from Eden's septicaemia, it was bacteria they had never seen before," says Lipschitz. She believes Aaron's condition may have a "spectrum", and that Eden is on the more extreme end of the

feeding issues of this spectrum.

They don't know what the future holds and are taking things day by day. "Each of them is one infection away from becoming extremely ill," says Lipschitz. "When Eden had septicaemia, her infection markers were 41 and they are meant to be under 0.5." But she believes their family has always been watched over. They have experienced many miracles with Aaron, and will continue to see miracles with Eden.

"We never imagined being in this situation again but we are, and we can't ask why, we just have to manage it as best as we can," she says. "The community carried us through Aaron's bone-marrow transplant in so many ways – emotionally, physically, and financially. It took us three years to ask for help from the community when Aaron was born. We've learnt that it wasn't a good idea to try to manage on our own as it put our family under tremendous strain in many ways.

"As much as we would prefer not to ask for financial support, we know it's essential. Thankfully, we haven't needed to ask for help since 2019. We're so blessed and grateful to be part of this community and know that help and support is available. Not everyone is in a position to help financially, but prayer and positivity are also invaluable. Every bit counts, but if people can't give, I'm a big believer in the power of prayer," says Lipschitz. "We've seen many miracles and I'm sure we'll see more. Please continue to pray for Aharon Chaim ben Tanya and Eliyanah bat Tanya."

- *To contribute, please visit: backabuddy.co.za/champion/project/aaron-and-eden-medical-relief-fund*

Bryan Schimmel opens up in *More Than a Handful*

Musical maestro **Bryan Schimmel**, a King David Linksfeld alumnus, is about to launch his new one-man musical show in Johannesburg, *More Than A Handful*. The *SA Jewish Report* caught up with him.

You're a multi award-winning musical director. Which musicals have you directed?

I won awards for *Chicago*, *Jersey Boys*, and *Annie*. Other productions include *We Will Rock You*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Rent*, and *Dreamgirls*.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your career to date.

My career was stalled two years ago when the entertainment industry went into shutdown. Prior to that, I created a niche for myself as a music director, arranger, and orchestrator of major theatre productions and also musically headed up some of the most high-profile corporate events. I'm currently busy with my ninth Bidvest CEO Awards.



Bryan Schimmel

to her dating back to 1973. These letters became one of the story-telling devices and the pathway to adapting the speech into a play. My mother was everything to me, and she becomes a central figure in the play. I don't want to give too much away.

Doing a one-man show can't be easy for the most seasoned actors. How tough is it for you and why?

To be honest, I think it takes it bit of insanity to do a solo show, and that's probably why most seasoned actors have never done it. Perhaps that insanity is what drew me to it. It was tough to rehearse and build the physical and emotional stamina. I'm doing things in this piece I've never done before. But performing it now is actually exhilarating.

You're a musical maestro, skilled at musical direction and playing the piano, but this is a new-ish (considering *A Handful of Keys*) career move for you. Is it a once-off or the start of a newish career and why?

It probably is a once-off. It becomes quite clear in the play that it's something I've always wanted to do but have never really been able to because there aren't many roles written for people with a speech impediment. So it's unlikely to be a career change.

COVID-19 posed the biggest threat to your industry and all its professionals. What impact did it have on you and how did you survive?

COVID-19 didn't pose the threat. Lockdown, a shuttered industry, and a government which left the arts and culture sectors to die, posed the biggest threat. The impact has been incalculable. Many entertainment industry professionals have left the industry out of necessity and found other means of survival. I had to cash in investments, dig deep into my bond, and rely on the kindness of others to get me through. A year ago, I was in a state of grief. Like many in our industry, I felt a profound sense of loss of identity. When your reason for being and living is taken away from you, you feel rudderless, purposeless, and directionless. I had conquered many obstacles in my life but this one seemed overwhelming and insurmountable. I cannot overstate my gratitude to Dr Hanan Bushkin, an absolute genius therapist, who guided me through an unfathomable period in my life.

There was one upside to being in lockdown for so long. Time. We had lots of it. Alan and I would meet every Thursday from May until November last year, and we had the time to carefully craft, structure, and sculpt a script that we're both extremely proud of.

What impact has lockdown had on the future of theatre in South Africa – if at all?

For starters, we're playing to restricted capacity in theatres. This has an impact on revenue and the ability of theatre producers and performers to survive. Solo shows are big right now because they are the most viable. People want to go back to the theatre. We've seen that already. They're tired of looking at a screen. And besides, nothing can ever replace the live theatre experience. It's going to take at least another good few months before we're restored to full capacity. Producers and theatre managements are going to have to work together and collaborate like never before. The model of how we used to do things has changed irrevocably.

• *"More Than a Handful" will be at Theatre on the Square in Sandton from 31 March to 16 April. Book through Computicket.*

Comedian Claudine Ullman takes Mrs SA seriously

DANI SACK

"I get to wake up every morning, model, make people laugh, shoot hilarious content, play with my baby, smooch my husband – what a life I'm living!"

These are the words of comedian Claudine Herman (previously known by her maiden name, Ullman), who recently qualified for the Mrs South Africa semi-finals in 2023. "I'm beyond blessed, and totally living the dream."

Indeed, many young girls dream of finding their prince charming and being a beauty queen.

Mrs South Africa is the number-one pageant for married women in South Africa. Herman, an improv comic and stand-up comedian, initially entered the competition as a means to gain fodder for a comedy sketch show.

"I had a dream about it, and I thought, 'This will be the most brilliant and hilarious thing I've ever done.'" However, after attending the semi-finalist's workshop, Herman says her "why" changed. "Now, this is all about self-confidence, building my business, empowering myself and other women, and doing something that's slightly terrifying, but so much fun."

Herman studied Dramatic Arts and Film at the University of the Witwatersrand before furthering her education at the London International School of Performing Arts; The Second City, a Chicago based improv comedy school; and at the Upright Citizens Brigade in New York.

"I try to go to America every three years to learn, perform, and enrich my own comedy. After seeing what they do there, I decided to bring it back to South Africa and into the corporate world."

In 2011, she began her company, Jittery Citizens, which

provides improv comedy training to corporates and other establishments countrywide. Thereafter, she decided to try her hand at stand-up comedy, and has since then found her comedic voice in alternative and character comedy.

It's her background in improv and stand-up comedy that she says has largely benefitted her in the Mrs South Africa competition. "Performing is in my heart and soul. It definitely does get nerve-wracking, but my improv comedy background has helped me transform my nerves into excitement," she says.

"I'm most in the zone when I'm performing. I just trust in that, and trust in my funny and my silly."

The competition involves walking the runway in gorgeous clothing and swimwear, but also involves partnering with brands and organisations that are close to contestants' hearts.

"A big part of why I'm doing this is to grow my business and empower myself. I'm going to be hitting the runway in my swimwear, and while it's certainly no Milan fashion week – even if it's Parys fashion week – it's going

to be hectic for me to feel okay walking in swimwear," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"If I can get over judgement of myself and get into a space where I can completely accept and love my body, this will be the most empowering thing I've ever done."

Herman describes how among competitors, it feels like a sisterhood rather than a competition. "These ladies are gorgeous. There are all different sizes and shapes, and for me what's so incredible about this whole competition is to have all these women in a room who are so inspiring and powerful."

She describes an incredibly supportive atmosphere, one

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LIGHT
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CANDLE THIS
SHABBAT FOR
UKRAINE

SA JEWISH REPORT
The spirit of Jewish tradition, hope and insight

SA expat targets COVID-19 with new nasal spray

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Professor Peter Friedland, a much-loved South African emigrant to Australia, has made a major breakthrough in the fight against COVID-19. This King David Linksfield alumnus has discovered a virus-killing nasal spray, called Nasodine Nasal Spray, which could be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Nasodine is based on povidone-iodine, the same active ingredient found in Betadine throat gargle. “The spray isn’t a treatment for COVID-19,” Friedland, an associate professor at the University of Western Australia’s School of Medicine, told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I want to stress that straightaway. This isn’t in place of vaccination as the first line of defence. It’s an adjunct to disinfecting, like masks, gloves and social distancing.”

Friedland and his fellow researchers believe it’s important to disinfect people’s noses. “The virus enters the body through the nose,” he says. “If we can kill the virus there, we can perhaps prevent it from spreading to people who aren’t infected.” About a decade ago in Melbourne, a microbiologist and a pharma developer started researching a nasal spray to prevent and treat the common cold.

Friedland joined the research team in 2017 to start conducting clinical trials on humans to ascertain the spray’s effectiveness against the cold virus.

They embarked on a lengthy process, which involved many rounds of trials. In February 2020, they began researching Nasodine’s effectiveness against COVID-19.

Today, Friedland is the lead author of the study, “In vivo [human] and in vitro inactivation of SARS-CoV-2 with 0.5% povidone-iodine nasal spray”, published by the *Australian Journal of Otolaryngology*.

“We’ve developed a nasal spray that’s safe and effective against common-cold viruses,” says Friedland. “It can decrease the length of common colds by about 50%. At the beginning of 2020, we tested our spray against the COVID-19 virus.”

Laboratory experiments showed a 15-second exposure to the nasal spray reduced infectivity of SARS-CoV-2 by 99.97%, while a 60-second exposure eliminated viral infectivity.

After discovering this, “we embarked on a pilot study to see whether the spray could kill the COVID-19 virus and inhibit the shedding of the virus in the nose,” Friedland says. “It was a multinational trial undertaken in Australia and the United States. The clinical part of the trial took place in South Africa in collaboration with my South African colleagues.”

“We recruited 15 COVID-19-positive patients in South Africa. They only used the spray for one dose. We continually swabbed their noses, and performed viral and COVID-19 testing.”

As the laboratories in South Africa were too inundated with COVID-19 testing, the samples had to be medically couriered at -70 degrees Celsius to Perth to do the cultures. “We were able to culture only six out of the 14 who were actively shedding,” says Friedland. “In five out of those six patients, we found a significant decrease in COVID-19 viral share.”

Although it was a small sample size, this finding was “compelling because it showed that a single dose of the spread, which is four sprays per nostril, was effective”, says Friedland. “We’re about to embark on a very large phase-two trial in the Western Province and Gauteng.”

This involves a placebo-controlled, double-blinded randomised trial on about 200 COVID-19-positive subjects, meaning that

the patients and doctors are unaware whether they are receiving a placebo or the active ingredient.

“This ensures they aren’t biased in terms of reporting what their symptoms are, how they’re feeling, and what their outcome is,” says Friedland. “The laboratory is also blinded because it’s not known which patients the swab tests are coming from.”

Friedland hopes Nasodine will secure the regulatory approval it needs to be sold over the counter. “Since the regulatory authorities are so stringent, we have to prove our efficacy through several trials,” he says. “We’ll perform a phase-three trial if the phase-two trial succeeds. The results should be known within a couple of months. During the winter months, we will also be conducting large phase-three trials in South Africa and Australia on the cold viruses.”

Friedland left South Africa in January 2009 after three of his friends were shot and killed, the last two right in front of him. “Prior to that, I was very committed to South Africa,” he says.

Since 2005, he had been a professor of ear, nose and throat (ENT) at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre. Additionally, he was involved in teaching and dealt with a lot of head and neck traumas at Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg. The highlight of his career was serving as Nelson Mandela’s ENT for about eight years.

“But I was very affected by the personal violence,” he



Professor Peter Friedland

says. “I reluctantly decided to leave South Africa. It took me about a year and I eventually received a six-month job offer in Perth.”

There, he became head of department at one of the major tertiary referral hospitals, the head of department at the University of Notre Dame Australia teaching ENT, and head of department at the University of Western Australia teaching ENT.

Over sixties strike gold at Masters Swimming Championship

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Eighty-four-year-old Russel Wolpe and 79-year-old Salome Hurwitz proved that age is just a number at the South African Masters National Swimming Championships in Cape Town from 9 to 13 March.

They won a combined total of nine gold medals at the 37th edition of the annual long-course swimming event, which took place at the indoor pool in the University of the Western Cape.

The duo’s fellow Johannesburg-based athletes, Joel Finn and Selwyn Sundelowitz, also came out swimming, with Finn winning three gold medals in the 60 to 64 age group, while Sundelowitz bagged four medals in the 70 to 74 age group.

Masters swimming is swum in categories of five-year age groups starting from the age of 18. The event is a highlight on the competitive swimmer’s calendar. It’s about fun, fitness, fellowship, and motivates for a healthy lifestyle.

At this year’s championships, 343 swimmers participated, including a 96-year-old, in the Olympic-standard 50m pool. Participants were from all over South Africa and other countries. Although COVID-19 restrictions meant fewer swimmers competed than in previous editions, the races were competitive, with several ex-Olympians competing.

“You basically swim against the clock, so you aren’t really interested in who’s swimming,” says the Johannesburg-based Hurwitz, who has been a swimming teacher for 56 years. “I could be swimming against 70-year-olds because of the time I put in for my races.”

She swam in the 80 to 84 age group as she will be falling into that category this year. “Not a hell of a lot” of people swam in this age group, she says.

She won gold in the 200m breaststroke, 50m butterfly and 50m and 100m breaststroke. She achieved a further two gold medals as part of the relay team and collected a silver medal in the 50m backstroke.

In the 50m butterfly, she missed the record by 0.01 seconds. “What’s 0.01?” she asks. “They should have given it to me, don’t you think? I should have grown my fingernails or something.”

Wolpe, in his 25th Masters, was one of the six swimmers swimming in the 85 to 90 age group. He won gold in the 50m breaststroke, 50m freestyle, and 800m freestyle. He attained silvers in the 100m freestyle, 400m freestyle, and 200m freestyle.

“I used to be a Comrades runner and all that sort of thing. At the age of about 50, I decided to do something more casual, so I moved from running to swimming,” says



Joel Finn

Wolpe, a chartered accountant who swims about three times a week.

Wolpe, who grew up in Rustenburg, says the key to his longevity in swimming is dedication. “It takes a mindset

that you want to keep fit. It’s easy to just sit on a couch, watch TV, and do nothing. Then you see the consequences.”

Sundelowitz says South Africa’s swimmers are “the best of the best”.

Although this Athlone Boys alumnus claims he’s not one of them, he scooped a gold medal in the three-kilometre open water swim, a silver in the 800m freestyle, as well as a bronze in the 400m freestyle and 200m backstroke at the championships.

“The facility at the University of the Western Cape was excellent,” says Sundelowitz, a retired architect. This was my 24th Masters Championships. I’ve been to 10 World



Russel Wolpe

He’s still there. “I’m still working and teaching in two of the public hospitals. I run a limited private practice as well. Our hospital treated the first COVID-19 patient in Australia.”

While in Australia, Friedland has published more than 55 scientific research and clinical papers.

In 1979, he matriculated from King David Linksfield, with his identical twin brother, Richard, who became the group chief executive of Netcare.

“People always got confused,” says Friedland. “We were always compared with each other. We were identical in our achievements at school, our sporting and academic achievements.”

Friedland and his brother started studying veterinary science at the University of Pretoria. After four years, Friedland changed to studying medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand. “Richard finished veterinary. I specialised. I completed a Master of Medicine degree. Richard came to study medicine and then an MBA

[Master of Business Administration]. The rest is history.” Friedland wasn’t pulled to Australia. “I was pushed,” he

says. “I remain forever grateful and indebted to South Africa.”

Before the pandemic, he regularly visited South Africa, where he supports many institutions. “I’m very proud of the country and its medical profession. We’re working in South Africa because of my proud roots. My Australian research team is impressed with our South African medical colleagues.”

Championships.”

Whereas Sundelowitz started swimming at the age of 14, his fellow four-days-a-week swimmer, Finn, took up the sport as a five-year-old.

A Highlands North Boys alumnus, Finn swam in the 60 to 64 age group, winning gold in the 400m freestyle, 200m individual medley, and 800m freestyle. He also achieved a bronze medal in a relay.

This sales representative says between eight and 10 swimmers participated in each of those swims.

“In the 800m freestyle and 200m individual medley, I broke the long-standing Gauteng provincial records in the 60 to 64 age group,” says Finn. “I’ve been swimming for the past 55 years of my life, so swimming has been a big, big part of my life. Obviously, my lifestyle has revolved around that passion for many years.”

In addition to having participated in Masters events for the past 10 years, Finn says, “I’ve participated in five Masters Nationals now. In the previous four, I achieved golds in most of the events I entered.”

Hurwitz, who has been swimming since the age of five, says she swam at her peak in 1957. “That year, I got a second and a third at the Maccabi Games,” she says.

A qualified schoolteacher who majored in physical education, Hurwitz trains three times a week, depending on how tired she feels after teaching swimming for five hours a day at Pirates Club in Greenside. “I’ve heated and enclosed its swimming pool,” she says, pointing out that she built a pool at Beaconsfield Club, where she used to teach.

She teaches children between the ages of two and a half and 11. “I love the children,” says Hurwitz. “Once they show any promise, I send them to a coach.”

Hurwitz and Finn agree that swimming is an injury-free sport. “Swimming is wonderful,” says Hurwitz.

“It’s an amazing way to keep fit. You know you can’t hurt yourself. You’re weightless in the water. I would like to try and swim for as long as I can.”

Says Finn, “For healthy mind and body, it’s a great sport. You can do it for a long time. It’s my therapy during the week. It’s so good for the muscles, for co-ordination, breathing, for your lungs and heart.”

Comedian Claudine Ullman takes Mrs SA seriously

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that feels as though everyone wants each other to win instead of it being a scramble for the crown. “Nobody is oiling the runway before the girls walk down. We all see the value in having each other’s backs rather than backstabbing one another.”

Herman hasn’t just experienced this type of support from her competitors, she has also been supported by the Jewish community.

“So many people have said, ‘We have

your back, we’re there for you.’ They’ve told me that they feel I’m giving them a voice and showing them that society isn’t just about patriarchy and having strong men around, that having women in the community to look up to is incredible. That’s so touching for me.”

When asked if she would do this all over again, Herman responds with a definitive “absolutely”. She says that while people – her husband, for one – don’t seem to believe she’s taking the competition seriously, she is.

“Being funny and comedic is my superpower,” she says. “I’m constantly thinking about how I can use that superpower to make other people laugh, partner with brands, help give them a voice, and ensure that my voice isn’t lost in the process.” For her, the crown is a great bonus, but it isn’t everything.

“This is more than a pageant, it’s like an MBA in life – how do you brand yourself, how can you get companies to believe in you and your offering, how do you believe

in yourself. It really is a masterclass in not caring about what other people think of you and being authentically you anyway. I’ve walked on hot coals, given birth to a baby, and now I’ve entered Mrs South Africa. What in the world can I not do?”

To vote for Herman, follow the instructions on the Mrs South Africa Facebook page, and look out for her upcoming comedy show, *Artificially Infeminated*, on 24 March 2022. Tickets available via Quicket.co.za.

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A not-so-frilling encounter

I have long held the view that men are stupid. Especially when it comes to relationships. Many a friend, married for years, has been shocked to hear that their marriage wasn't a good one, and that they missed all the signs that were obvious to almost everyone but them.

So often, it came as an unpleasant surprise that their home wasn't happy and that things had deteriorated beyond repair. In each case, there was disbelief and amazement that when she told him she was miserable, she actually meant it.

I had no idea how this could happen until it happened to me. Imagine my surprise when I realised that I had been blind to the reality that there was now an additional party in our marriage, and that my wife was in another relationship.

Her thoughts were dedicated not to us or our family home but to her new obsession. Worse than that, my competition wasn't another bloke, perhaps younger and thinner and with a head of ridiculous but enviable hair, but rather a London-based dress that was now occupying each waking moment.

And that when she stared absentmindedly into the distance it wasn't sunset beach walks that she was thinking of, but the occasions that she and her dress could be at together. It's said that long-distance relationships don't last, yet this one proves the contrary.

To be fair, we're blessed to have two family weddings in the next few months, which as wonderful as that is, is also a great cause of stress. Especially in the "what to wear" department.

Or it was until this lone dress, based somewhere in London, provided the answer to at least one of the dilemmas. The price aside, with travel minimised because of COVID-19, getting it here wasn't that simple.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



But I'm married to someone who's tenacious, determined, and perhaps a tad obsessive. And so, a kind soul was found and before we knew it, the dress of our dreams was secured.

And then it arrived. With great flourish and excitement, the two of them retreated to the bedroom to get to know each other while the rest of the family waited in anticipation. I need not have felt threatened, as no sooner had they emerged, the look on her face told me that this relationship was not only over, but that she couldn't believe that she had dallied with it in the first place.

To say that the dress looked like it was purchased in Boksburg South is unfair on the residents of Ekurhuleni, because even they wouldn't have had the courage to engage in that much lace. They would have, no doubt, drawn the line when, having reached the 50th layer of frills, they would have realised that even the Benoni crowd would look down on them for those sleeves.

The story is no different to a couple who have met and dated online. And then when they finally do get together, they realise that they would make an incredibly poor couple. And so, because one of them might have travelled great distances to meet, they try a bit harder, put in that much more effort, and take it from there.

I have no idea how my wife's relationship with this dress will end. I don't know if Benoni will take it back if they decide to part ways. What I do know is that when I see her staring into the distance, I'm confident it's not that London-based dress that she's dreaming of.

Iraq beauty queen – the face of tolerance

At the height of the clamour against Miss South Africa Lalela Mswane competing in the Miss Universe pageant in Israel last year, there was unexpected support from a courageous young woman from Iraq who had experienced something similar. During the 2017 Miss Universe, Sarah Idan was vilified and even subjected to death threats after posting a picture of herself with fellow contestant, Miss Israel. Rather than backing down in this face of this intimidation, she stood by what she intended to be a gesture of peace and friendship, not a political statement. Now living in the United States, Idan has become a global ambassador for peace and tolerance and a staunch advocate for Jewish-Arab reconciliation in the Middle East.

At a time when we're confronted by a resurgence of violent conflict in Europe and a persistent erosion of democracy and the values of human rights in many parts of the world, Idan's message has never been more important. It's for this reason that she has been in South Africa over the past week as a guest of the Jewish community. During her visit, Idan has spoken to university students in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and met a range of youth and women's rights groups, the media, community leaders, and nongovernmental organisations. The primary purpose of her visit has been to counterbalance the toxic "Israel Apartheid Week" (IAW) campaign that has become an annual fixture on our university campuses and further afield.

One of the high points of Idan's stay was taking part in a Jewish delegation that visited Sharpeville ahead of Human Rights Day. The site of one of the worst atrocities of the apartheid era, when 69 peaceful protestors were killed and many more injured, Sharpeville has become a global symbol of

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



the struggle against racism and oppression. During her visit, Idan met local pastors and community leaders, hearing their stories and sharing her own, and laid a wreath at the monument commemorating the victims of the massacre. South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn was part of the delegation, and delivered a message from the Jewish community. The Board has for a number of years arranged for a delegation of Jewish communal and youth leaders to take part in the annual Human Rights Day memorial events at Sharpeville. For participants, the experience has always been extremely moving, and this latest visit was especially memorable.

Over the past few years, the South African Union of Jewish Students, working closely with the SAJBD, South African Zionist Federation, and allied organisations, has run effective counter-campaigns in response to IAW. Its consistent approach has been to stress the importance of peaceful dialogue and tolerance for diverse viewpoints in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian question. These are just the values and principles that Idan has been conveying throughout her stay, and the fact that she speaks from personal experience as a Muslim Arab woman gives her message particular resonance. They are values that we as a community must likewise firmly adhere to, regardless of the invective and intimidation that may confront us from the other side.

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

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Tel Aviv Heat in action against the Rhinos

SA gives Israeli rugby team a warm welcome

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Tel Aviv Heat director of rugby and head coach Kevin Musikanth says he and his 38-man squad have had a great reception since arriving in South Africa earlier this month for their four-match tour against three Blue Bulls Rugby Union clubs.

Having been invited by the Pretoria-based union, the Heat lost 40-17 and 17-15 in its two matches against Northam Rhinos at Northam Rhino's Rugby Club stadium in Limpopo on Saturday, 19 March.

In Pretoria, The Heat will also play two games against ABE Midas Naka Bulle on 23 March, and one game against Loftus on 26 March.

"The Bulls have been fantastic and looked after us," Musikanth told the *SA Jewish Report* on Human Rights Day. "The Rhinos were great."

The Heat's versatile prop, Jared Sichel, says, "The reception we have received since being in South Africa has been nothing short of amazing. The hospitality of the various rugby clubs, specifically the Rhinos, has been great. It's obviously nice to have some really good training facilities available to us, as well as our Super Cup physio, who is based in Johannesburg. In terms of the playing level against the Rhinos, it was probably what we expected."

The Rhinos, the 2021 Carlton Cup runners-up, have "a really strong setup," says Musikanth. "We split our group into two – the Reds and the Blues – as many players are new to the squad."

The Blues were stronger than the Reds, and played in the second match. Captained by Renaldo Bothma, a former Sharks and Blue Bulls Super Rugby forward, the Blues dominated most of the game and led 12-5 at half-time.

In the last minute, the Rhinos' replacement hooker, Khwezi Mfaku, collected the ball at the back of a rolling maul and scored a try, which his side converted to secure a 17-15 win.

Some of the Heat's players who played on Saturday were, Musikanth says, "our exciting new half-backs Marc Morrison and Bradley Thain, both junior Lions players. We have some solid Namibian internationals here."

The South African Jewish players who got on to the field against the Rhinos were Thomas Berman of the Wits Varsity Cup team and Israel national team players Dan Stein and Sichel.

"I wouldn't say that the match against the Rhinos was tougher than the Super Cup in Europe and some of the Russian and Georgian teams. Definitely not as tough as that level. But I think it was something that we perhaps could have been a bit more prepared for," says Sichel, who plays for Hamiltons Rugby Club in Cape Town when not playing for the Heat. "We had only two days together before that first Rhinos game. There's an extended squad playing. It's not the final Heat team that's involved because they're trialling a couple of guys."

The Heat's touring squad doesn't include many of its contracted Major League Rugby, Currie Cup, and Varsity Cup players. Its Fijian players are also not in South Africa.

"As much as we wanted to win and played to win against the Rhinos, for the coaching staff, it was an opportunity for us to see new players and potential new squad members for the Heat going forward," says Musikanth. "We also have most of the Israeli

international players on the trip, so we are trying to develop the younger guys and give them a taste of high levels of rugby that they aren't used to."

Asked how the Heat will prepare for the matches against Naka Bulle and Loftus 200, Musikanth says, "We have a very heavy schedule with lots to get through. The guys had their first training session only on Thursday last week. It has been nonstop since then."

Consequently, not much time has been available for the Heat's South African players to show their teammates the country. "We went to a Varsity Cup game yesterday [on Human Rights Day], but I don't know if that counts," says Berman.

For the game against Naka Bulle, Berman and Sichel will be on the bench for the Blues, while Stein will start the match as the fly-half for the Reds.

Berman told the *SA Jewish Report* recently, "The Heat is a very player-driven team. It has one of the best team cultures I've ever played for in terms of the vibe, everyone getting along, and enjoying each other."

Next on the team's schedule is a tour to Portugal for their Europe Super Cup semifinal against Lusitanos in Lisbon on 16 April.

"What's great about rugby is travelling the world, meeting new people, and playing with the Heat's players who have played at a seriously high level," Sichel said recently. "They're all fantastic guys. They're also human. As a player, I've definitely improved by playing alongside those types of guys. Also, just getting to know them as mates was great."

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