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Our Parents Home to close after 82 years

TALI FEINBERG

After 80-plus years as a thriving Jewish old aged home in the heart of Norwood, Our Parents Home (OPH) will be closed down and its residents are to move to other Chevrah Kadisha facilities or a facility of their choosing.

This was the decision made by the Chevrah Kadisha (The Chev) – which runs seven care facilities in Johannesburg – because unfortunately it cannot maintain this home at 16% capacity.

“Our community is at an inflection point,” says the Chev’s chief executive, Saul Tomson. “We could either let things run their course, or we could make difficult but responsible decisions at the right time. It’s very sad as OPH has always been a landmark and a very important part of our community. However, there’s just not enough demand for two Jewish old age homes.”

He says OPH is running at 16% of its capacity, which translates to 38 residents. Of these, only about 15 are able to leave their room and interact with others. Over the past five years, there have been very few new admissions.

The Chev announced this news to residents and their families on Wednesday, 11 May, before an official announcement was sent out to the entire community on Friday, 13 May. Some community members expressed shock and dismay on social media, while others expressed support.

“Not only are young people leaving the country, there are also fewer elderly people in the community. More are choosing to stay in their homes for longer, which has led to a dramatic increase in the financial assistance the Chev provides to those ageing at home,” says Tomson.

“We have a strong view that our

community needs to halve its infrastructure, but double the quality. As state services continue to decline, we also have to invest in alternative solutions. Consolidation is key to sustainability.”

Tomson and his senior staff personally met residents and reassured them that they would be there every step of the transition. “We have also given ample time for the transition to take place,” says Tomson – nearly eight months, with the facility closing on 31 December 2022. “We will try to accommodate as many OPH staff as possible in other roles across the organisation.”

After meeting the residents, the care team at the Chev spoke to almost all their families telephonically. “The facility was opened in 1940, initially to welcome Jewish immigrants fleeing from the horrors of the Holocaust,” wrote Tomson. “Since then, Our Parents Home has provided a safe and comfortable haven and home to thousands of residents. Please be assured that this decision wasn’t taken lightly, hastily, or without long and careful consideration and deliberation. In due course, we’ll have a commemorative ceremony for Our Parents Home.

“We have enough space to absorb all the residents at Sandringham Gardens (SG) or Golden Acres,” Tomson says, “and we will assist every resident practically with the move. Some may choose to move to non-Chev facilities, and we will help them with that. Many residents don’t have family here, and we’re sensitive to their anxiety about packing up their lives. We have allocated a social worker and an operations team to assist them emotionally and practically.”

More than a dozen residents have said that they would be happy to move to SG earlier than December.

Anne Kopelowitz (86) has been a resident at OPH for 18 years. “I’m sad to see this



Purim at Our Parents Home

wonderful chapter end, however I have been assured that I will be moving into a lovely room at Sandringham Gardens. I have always loved the camaraderie, beautiful rooms, and good food at Our Parents Home, and I know we’re going to receive the same treatment and luxury. I’m anxious about the move, but it’s an exciting new chapter in my life,” she says.

Lynette Yach, the social worker at OPH, was the first social worker to be employed by the home, and has worked there for 18 years. She was admissions manager at SG for 20 years. In 2021, she returned to OPH as a social worker.

“I always regarded OPH as a home from home for the elderly. It is known to be a

warm and happy place,” she says. “The residents aren’t surprised at the news, and have accepted it with gratitude. They look forward to meeting new residents and their new environment. I’m positive that they will enjoy a new chapter, where they will receive love and care and be showered with comprehensive services to meet their individual needs.”

Tomson says that as residents of OPH saw the numbers dwindling, the uncertainty about the home’s future weighed heavily on them. “So the main emotion I experienced after the meeting with residents was relief. Now they have certainty and a timeline, with committed and dedicated people to help them with this change.”

He points out that though OPH was often very quiet, “Sandringham Gardens is bustling with vibrancy and activity. We have upgraded the common areas, library, and dining room. The range and quality of medical care and services is *par excellence*. Nowhere else can a resident find such a range of services on site. There’s also a very active life-enrichment programme and a thriving shul onsite. Overseas donors have been generous in upgrading our facilities, while the local community’s generosity covers the day to day running costs.”

Tomson notes that the SG campus uses several hundred thousand of litres of water per day, and the Chev has invested in back-up water supplies and capacity for water outages. It has also invested in alternative energy. Nearly 1 000 people live on the SG campus and another almost 1 000 work there, “so it remains the hub of Jewish Johannesburg, with no greater concentration of people. That’s why we’re investing in its sustainability. Seventy percent of what we do is provide services that the elderly or needy should get from government,” he says.

“Operating at full capacity makes a lot of sense, keeps costs down, and improves the quality of care,” Tomson says. “We should be thinking like this in all sectors. Communities always evolve. It doesn’t mean this is the end. Many thousands of Jews live here, and I believe we’re going to run for decades.

“We need to accept the demographics and acknowledge the strength of a community that’s cohesive. We have strong leadership and a committed, supportive community that can achieve what we need by proactively planning with courage and conviction. Young people may leave, but the elderly, indigent and those with disabilities people aren’t going anywhere. For many, we’re their family and support system. We won’t let them down.”

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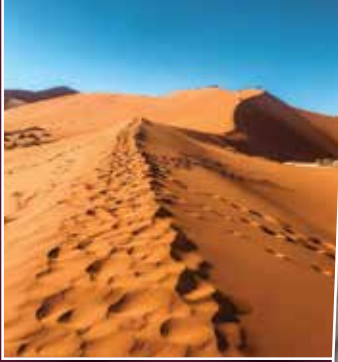
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Desai ups ante against Israel despite JCC complaint

TALI FEINBERG

In contrast to the thunderous condemnation after former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng spoke about the Middle East, the silence was deafening this week when retired Judge Siraj Desai made similar comments. This is after a complaint was laid a year ago about his conduct with the Judicial Conduct Committee (JCC).

Desai was a guest speaker at a “Nakba Day” event in Cape Town on Saturday, 14 May. According to local media, Desai said about the death of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, “I find her death and her murder most appalling, and I reject the savagery of her death. But more than that, it gives me pause to rededicate what remains of my life to the struggle of the Palestinian people and the struggle of people all over the world.”

Solidarity movements, political parties, schools, and the public attended the event, with many wearing a keffiyeh or displaying Palestinian flags. Palestine Solidarity Campaign Chairperson Martin Jansen criticised the African National Congress (ANC) government for expressing outward support for Palestinians while still maintaining ties with Israel. He asked political parties to adopt boycott, divestment, sanctions policies and legislation against Israel.

“In terms of section 12 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, a judge mustn’t get involved in a political controversy,” says advocate Mark Oppenheimer. “Judge Desai’s appearance at this rally is controversial on a few grounds. First, it seems to be an open question at the moment as to how journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed – whether it was by Israeli troops or by Palestinian combatants. So pronouncing on that is

itself controversial. “Second, the organisers of the rally criticise the ANC government for its continued relations with Israel,” says Oppenheimer. “That appears to waive the territory of the executive domain, and it’s that point that Chief Justice Mogoeng was censured for. It would appear that Judge Desai’s involvement in this cause may very well be a controversy of that nature.”

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson

Rolene Marks says, “Siraj Desai continues the politicisation of his judicial office in spite of an ongoing review of his conduct by the JCC. Judge Desai’s support of extremist groups is well known, including the likes of Hamas and rogue regimes, such as Iran. He has also continued to double down his position even after a complaint was filed. This shows little respect

for the judicial process. The SAZF calls on the JCC to conclude its deliberations speedily so as not to be seen as biased, depending on the political issue at play.”

Almost a year ago, the SAZF lodged a complaint against Desai with the JCC, saying Desai’s actions and conduct over many years plainly breached the code of judicial conduct and was “entirely unbecoming of a judicial officer”.

At the time, Desai said through his spokesperson, Professor Usuf Chikte, that he was “unapologetic in his stance in condemnation of apartheid Israel”.



Retired Judge Siraj Desai

Torah Thought

Rabbi Danny Sackstein
– Sunny Road Kehilla



Shoot for the stars

Lionel Messi is arguably the greatest footballer of our generation. Although he may be in the twilight of his career, upon his transfer to Paris Saint-Germain last year, more than a million Messi shirts were sold worldwide. Millions of children and adults look to Messi as their role model. Though they don’t have the physical attributes and talent of Messi, they aspire to reach beyond their limitations and emulate the best.

Striving to be our best selves physically and spiritually is a natural part of the human condition. The Torah teaches that in the realm of spirituality, we need to shoot for the stars and emulate G-d. In several places in the Torah, G-d tells the Jewish people to be holy “because I am holy”. G-d implores us to reach beyond our limitations and strive for spiritual greatness.

The Torah doesn’t leave us in the dark to work out how to do that for ourselves. G-d tells us exactly how to be holy both in the way we treat others and the way we connect to G-d.

Regarding our fellow human beings, the Gemara in Shabbos explains that just as G-d is compassionate, we too should be compassionate, just as G-d is merciful, we too should be merciful. There are many laws that define our behaviour towards others. We’re supposed to treat others with patience and forgiveness, just as G-d is consistently patient and forgiving towards us.

Not only are we required to treat others with respect and dignity, we’re also expected to respect their property. We’re supposed to take responsibility for society and assist those in need. The details of this conduct are clearly laid out in the Torah. In this way, we become holy,

emulating G-d.

Regarding our relationship with G-d, we need to be able to connect to an eternal abstract force that is beyond ourselves. The way we do so is by following G-d’s commandments. The positive commandments bring us close to G-d, like keeping Shabbos and *shmita*, as commanded in this week’s parsha. The negative commandments help us to avoid blocking up the channels that connect us to G-d, like keeping the laws of *kashrut*.

A person who reaches for the stars and strives to emulate G-d lives in a world filled with meaning, light, and purpose. A person without this focus is often left with a sense of worthlessness and futility. The soul or conscience has a deep longing to connect to G-d and the existential truth of the world, and will constantly drive us to search for meaning. Fortunate is the person who reaches for the stars and achieves holiness in their life.

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Havdalah is Hebrew for “separation” and refers to the verbal declaration made at the end of Shabbat, in which the holy day is separated from the mundane period that follows.
Since Jewish days begin and end with nightfall, Havdalah may be said only once darkness has fallen on Saturday night.
*one hour ahead of SA time

Teenager’s mysterious illness unites community in spirit of kindness

NICOLA MILTZ

When Gavi Waksman, 17, opened his “beautiful blue eyes” for the first time in days, the community breathed a collective sigh of relief after experiencing concern across the board since his mysterious collapse more than a week ago.

The well-liked teenager was in Boksburg – 30km from home – on Monday, 9 May, for an athletics cross country meeting for his school, King David High School Linksfield, when he suddenly collapsed during his race.

He was rushed to Life The Glynnwood Medical Centre in Benoni, where he remained in a deep, peaceful sleep, for days on end in the hospital’s intensive-care unit.

Only last Friday, 13 May, he tentatively opened his eyes, and is now alert and even smiles.

“On the way to the hospital, I frantically started what was to become the first of many *tehillim* [prayer] groups,” said his mother, Lauren.

While doctors continue to investigate what lies behind his baffling condition, communities of shuls and schools have rallied around the anguished family, holding it up during this dreadful time of fear and uncertainty.

The incident has united the Johannesburg Jewish community as news of his puzzling condition spread worldwide within minutes. A multitude of random and organised acts of kindness – too many to mention – are taking place daily in a contagious spirit of generosity, all in merit of a *refuah sheleima* (swift healing) for Gavriel Reuven Ben Liora.

There has been an astonishing display of magnanimity and kindness, and the family is literally awestruck by the abundance and growing groundswell of love and support from the community.

“I’m at a loss for words. The community is doing acts of kindness that we don’t even know about. It is astounding how many people have been praying for our

son’s recovery and have been doing so much good in his name,” said his mother.

She and her husband, Larry, were given the keys to the Benoni Shul and house, which luckily is across the road from the hospital. The shul hasn’t seen so much activity in years, and has been the couple’s home away from home during visiting hours.

There has been a steady stream of visitors, even strangers, dropping off food and offering support. Hatzolah, which has been guiding the family through the ordeal, this week helped to transport Gavi to a new hospital in Johannesburg, which will allow the family to be closer to him.

Amid this unfolding personal crisis, this private family has been catapulted into the public eye, as the story of a young boy who slowly climbs his way back to full consciousness has gripped the hearts and minds of hundreds of people far and wide.

Friends of the family immediately rallied to look after the couple’s two younger children, Benji, 13, and Eliana, six, doing homework and arranging extra murals. A soup kitchen in Irvine, California, run by an ex-South African, is even making meals in merit of his full recovery.

To help alleviate his nagging worry about his best friend, Rafi Midzuk, 16, of Yeshiva College immediately got busy expanding the rolling *tehillim* groups, making sure people were praying for his friend’s recovery 24/7. At the last count, there were 1 200 people from all over saying prayers for him.

Rafi described his friend as a well-liked guy with a zest for life and a large amount of interests and hobbies including a love of Formula 1, athletics, volleyball, music, piano, and singing.

“The news came as such a shock, and the worst part is still not knowing what’s wrong and not being able to pick up the phone and give him support. The best I can do is send him voice notes,” he said.

People talk of Gavi as being wise, humble, strong, and a true



Gavi Waksman being held up by his friends (from left): Dean Riesenber, Josh Superfain, Jodan Sweidan, Rafi Midzuk, and Nadav Dredzen

mensh.

There has been a staggering number of initiatives set up in Gavi’s name from blanket, sandwich and food-parcel drives, talent shows, to night-time prayer gatherings.

Gavi’s cousin, King David Linksfield Grade 11 pupil, Ricci Waksman, who is also the co-mayor of the Johannesburg Junior Council, drove a gratitude greeting card initiative delivering hundreds of cards to nurses on International Nurses Day.

“It started off as a small project for the Johannesburg Junior Council and grew as high school kids made an insane amount of beautiful cards to show our support and love for Gavi and his family. Big cards, posters, and messages of encouragement were made for Gavi to read and keep with him as well as for the family to know that we’re there for them.”

The students collected 1 400 cards that were delivered to Milpark Hospital and Life The Glynnwood Hospital, where nurses were “gobsmacked” by the display of gratitude.

King David Linksfield and Gavi’s former school, Yeshiva College, have united in efforts designed in merit

of his speedy recovery, including daily prayer sessions. Last Shabbos, the schools, together with Yeshiva Mizrachi, jointly encouraged the community to light Shabbat candles five minutes earlier.

With the help of some mothers, and for the *refuah sheleima* of others including Gavi, the Grade 11 group at King David Linksfield made 1 100 soup packs which will help feed more than 4 000 people in need this winter. Yeshiva Girls High School held a sandwich making drive for the needy; and Grade 11 pupils at Hirsh Lyons packed food boxes in Gavi’s name.

Messages have been sent encouraging people to give flowers to friends and family over Shabbat. Yeshiva Mizrachi and Yeshiva College hosted a special *seudah shlishit* as well as communal prayer sessions.

“We cannot begin to describe the overwhelming *chesed* and kindness in our special community and across the globe for Gavi’s full *refuah*. We see each day as a miracle, and we continue to pray for his recovery,” said Lauren.

“We have been so moved by the feeling of unity between the two high schools that Gavi has been a part of. The endless campaigns, visits, and messages by students, teachers,



Ricci and Benji Waksman, Gavi’s cousin and brother, handing out cards for World Nurse Appreciation Day

warmed our hearts,” said the couple.

“We have been particularly touched by Gavi’s friends and peers who have opened up their siddurim, put on tefillin and are rebuilding their connections to Hashem,” she said.

“One mother told me that her six-year-old daughter, in lieu of party packs, made lunch packs in Gavi’s name for his recovery, which she gave to guests at her party to give away,” she said.

“We are deeply grateful to Hashem for the miracles we have seen from the moment of Gavi’s incident onwards, accompanied by so much love, kindness, and prayer. While we don’t know what each day will bring, we’re doing all that we can to face this together, with the loving support of the community and the help of Hashem.”

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Court of public opinion rushes to condemn Israel for Abu Akleh’s murder

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been an emotionally charged week since the highly publicised, fatal, and tragic shooting of veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while reporting in the troubled West Bank town of Jenin.

Still, very few people are privy to the facts about the bullet and weapon used which caused her demise. The unconfirmed circumstances surrounding her passing haven’t stopped the vehement politicisation of her death by Israel bashers around the world and in our own backyard, all utterly convinced that Israel is to blame in spite of no actual, solid proof. During a frenzied, highly tense gun battle, the question remains whether she was killed by Israeli or Palestinian gunfire. We don’t know for certain. Numerous investigations are underway involving highly technical forensic video, audio, and GPS location analysis.

The court of international opinion, though, is convinced: Israel is to blame.

Though it’s tragic in every way, Abu Akleh’s memory has been politicised. There has been a lot of hate directed at the Jewish state following her untimely passing. This was coupled with viral distressing scenes taken of her tumultuous funeral procession a couple of days later, in which Israeli riot police armed with batons were seen striking funeral-goers. All of it culminated at a time of heightened emotions as pro-Palestinians marked the annual Nakba Day – the term used by Palestinians to protest the anniversary of the day Israel declared its independence in 1948.

Former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Arthur Lenk tweeted, “I have no idea who killed @AlJazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh last night. You don’t either. Let’s find a real, independent, quick investigation to avoid her tragic death becoming another source of conflict. And all commit to respecting findings.”

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas charged that Israel was responsible for killing her. Israeli officials at first said it was probably Palestinian gunmen that had mistakenly shot her, but later said errant Israeli sniper fire could also have caused her death.

Palestinian officials and witnesses, including journalists who were with her, say she was



Photo: Ronaldo Schemid/AFP via Getty Images



Veteran *Al Jazeera* journalist Shireen Abu Akleh

killed by army fire. A conclusive

ruling isn’t yet possible, the army said.

Israel is reportedly insisting it cannot determine who shot her without being allowed to examine the bullet removed from her.

On Saturday, the PA said that while international bodies could participate in the investigation, Israel wouldn’t be permitted to join the probe into her death.

Abu Akleh, 51, was a longstanding journalist at *Al Jazeera*, and a Catholic, Palestinian-American citizen, who was born and raised in Jerusalem. The Israeli army has escalated its activities in Jenin in recent weeks to try to prevent more deadly terror attacks, several of which – including the fatal shootings of three Israelis at a central Tel Aviv bar on 7 April and the axe murders of three more Israelis in Elad last week – were allegedly carried out by Palestinians from Jenin and surrounds.

Jenin reportedly appears to be the home town of several of the terrorists who carried out a spate of fatal attacks inside Israel in recent months. There have been 19 devastating terror attacks on civilians in Israel.

Within hours of Abu Akleh’s passing, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) condemned Israel for the killing.

Political parties ventured to label her death as “deliberate” and “premeditated” – an

Palestinians carry the flag-draped body of veteran *Al-Jazeera* journalist Shireen Abu Akleh 11 May 2022

assassination even. There was an outcry.

Local journalists, too, were quick to lambaste the Jewish state, bemoaning the senseless killing as an attack on journalism, in spite of having no facts and not providing any context to back their opinions. Abu Akleh has become the latest Palestinian freedom symbol.

Though no journalist should ever face the risk of losing their life in the line of duty, in this instance, truth is the ultimate casualty of war, sidestepped in the crossfire of public opinion.

The South African National Editors’ Forum said in a statement, “We note that journalists, acting honestly as the eyes and ears of the public at large are increasingly being targeted by authoritarian regimes who wish to keep repressive and often murderous actions secret.”

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) said Dirco’s condemnation of Israel without confirmation of the facts was “irresponsible”.

“It was reckless and incendiary in the extreme to allege blame in a region where tensions are running high and easily inflamed. Such actions encourage more violence,” the SAZF said.

It called for calm and caution in reporting the tragedy, and for the media and Dirco to wait for investigations to conclude before assigning responsibility.

While Israel and the Palestinians remain gridlocked in a battle of words over the

circumstances leading to her death, there has been international uproar at the way her chaotic funeral was policed.

Images of police beating mourners at the start of Abu Akleh’s funeral elicited widespread shock and further international condemnation – creating a public-relations disaster for Israel.

Police said they rushed the funeral-goers on Friday, 13 May, because they “disrupted the public order” by throwing stones. Videos quickly went viral of dozens of troops in helmets attacking funeral attendees, at one point nearly causing the pallbearers to drop the coffin.

More than 10 000 Palestinians showed up to pay their respects to Abu Akleh during the long funeral on Friday that moved across Jerusalem to the Mount Zion cemetery. But the day was marred by these police scenes at the St Joseph’s Hospital.

According to *Times of Israel*, in footage from the scene, Palestinians carried her casket forward in an attempt to form an impromptu procession on foot. After a brief standoff – during which some Palestinians hurled objects at police – officers rushed the crowd, beating mourners and firing stun grenades into the crowd.

Israeli police said they had acted against “300 rioters” who had violently seized the coffin, attacked cops, and sought to march on foot to the Old City, in violation of the family’s wishes.

“Israeli police intervened to disperse the mob and prevent them from taking the coffin so that the funeral could proceed as planned in accordance with the wishes of the family,” the Israel police said in a statement.

The late journalist’s brother, Anton Abu Akleh, has disputed these claims, and criticised the police’s attack.

The police announced on Saturday night that they would investigate the officers’ handling of the funeral.

The week has been fraught and nuanced. In the hours and days since this tragedy, there have been endless accusations and counter accusations ending in nakba protests.

As Lenk writes, “I recognise that Palestinians experienced a nakba. That takes nothing away from Israel or our own painful history or legitimacy. We both need to respect each other’s narratives to have any shared future as neighbours.”

David Brinn of the *Jerusalem Post* tweeted, “You only have to look at where someone stands on the Israel-Palestinian conflict to see who they think killed #ShireenAbuAkleh – objectivity is dead in this region.”

Finding out exactly what transpired may not end decades-old hostilities, but it may make a difference for people who still believe in the truth, good or bad.

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Erin Lazarus: from amputation to aspiration

TALI FEINBERG

At the end of 2021, Erin Lazarus (23) had the world at her feet – literally. She had just finished her degree, and was due to start working in the new year. She would never have guessed that in January 2022, her leg would be amputated or that she would bounce back with incredible new goals.

“Either I kept this essentially dead foot which could be detrimental to my health, or I could amputate,” says Lazarus, remembering the moment her life changed. “For me, there wasn’t a choice and as a family, we decided to amputate immediately. I danced when my family came to see me. I was on the walker 12 hours after surgery. This was my new journey, and I would do everything in my power to come back stronger.”

It all started a year before that. Throughout 2021, Lazarus experienced joint pain, migraines, hair loss, rashes, fatigue, redness around her nails and on her feet, and swelling. Multiple blood tests came back clear. “It’s a miracle that my body pushed through to finish my postgraduate degree. The day I finished, my body broke down,” she says.

She had her wisdom teeth removed in the hope that it would alleviate the migraines. “After this, I had a rash all over my body. My calf was very sore – I couldn’t walk for five days. That was when I clotted. In late December 2021, the side of my left foot started forming what looked like a purple bruise. The doctor told me that it was anxiety and gave me anti-anxiety medication, a sleeping pill, and anti-inflammatories.

“Two days later, I started slurring my words. We called Hatzolah. I blacked out from the moment they arrived until the moment I was in the emergency room. The hospital did no further tests, told me I had Raynaud’s Disease, the anxiety medication was too strong, and let me go after an hour.”

A few days later, her family went away for her sister’s birthday. “I put my feet in the pool and immediately felt my left foot burning. It turned black and I felt excruciating pain. I screamed the entire night with pain I’ll never forget. The tests came back to say I had lupus (an auto-immune disease in which your immune system attacks the body’s healthy tissue).

“My family and I celebrated because, for the first time, we knew what was wrong. The next day, the pain got worse. We went straight to hospital. At this point, morphine didn’t help. They sent me for a CT scan which said I may have a clot, and transferred me to Milpark Hospital because its vascular department was so good.

“Within seconds of arriving at Milpark, I was connected to drips with steroids and medication to help fight the lupus and help my foot. I went for an angiogram to try to dissolve the clot. I had to be awake for this operation. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful. The next night, the vascular surgeon decided to try pick out the clots and reconnect my artery, which had completely cut off in my calf. Again, this was unsuccessful. My foot was completely dead..” It was then that the decision was made to amputate.

Lazarus grew up in the same house she lives in today, with her parents and sister. She went to King David Linksfield from Grade 1 to matric. “Playing sport with my friends and sister have always been my happiest moments,” she says. She excelled in various sports, including gymnastics, netball, soccer, touch rugby, athletics, and cross country. She studied a BCom at the University of the Witwatersrand, and completed



Erin Lazarus during her last rehabilitation session without her prosthetic leg

her honours. “I was due to start working at Investec in January 2022 but then everything happened, so I’ll start in July 2022. They have been phenomenal.”

Since the amputation, “I haven’t felt any pain, thanks to my incredible surgeon. I truly believe that what my family went through having to wait outside theatre is more traumatic than anything I’ve dealt with,” says Lazarus about all her operations, including the second, which took two hours longer than expected. After the amputation, “My family walked in, took the blanket off, and said, ‘We’re going to name it Stompy,’ and gave Stompy a kiss. They made me feel so comfortable with the new and improved me.”

Since that day, she has “realised how privileged I am to go to the most amazing hospital, have the best doctors and nurses, and be able to select my team. Farrell Cohen has always been my physio, so it was a no-brainer for me to do rehab with him. We focused on staying strong and mobile in preparation for my new [prosthetic] leg. After exactly four months, I got my leg. I’m able to walk without crutches – it’s been incredible.”

Not many people have access to this kind of treatment, “which is why I’ve decided to start a foundation which helps people who have lost a

limb get a prosthetic and live the life they would never be able to without the prosthetic. I’ve also committed to running a marathon at the end of 2023 with my dad.”

Lupus can be controlled with medication, which will allow Lazarus to live a completely normal life. “I wake up every day feeling like me again. The medication has completely changed my life. I’ll experience flare-ups here and there, but I now know what to look out for.”

Her life has changed because “I have a completely new outlook. I realise how lucky I am. I didn’t realise the severity of the situation until three days post-amputation when the doctor told me I was no longer in a life-threatening situation. I’m going to live my life with the people I love, do the things I love, and be grateful for the little things in life.”

Her family has played a crucial role in her recovery. “My doctors tease us that my family comes as an entourage. They have been my rock during this. Going through something bad allows you to see who cares for you unconditionally. I have nine friends who have been with me every single day, know my doctors’ names, and know more about lupus than I do. They held my hand for my first steps, and let me be vulnerable.”

Continued on page 13>>

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Finding the way to move forward

I remember being asked to speak to the “youngsters” at Our Parents Home many years ago, and I giggled at the imagery until I got there. I spoke to a crowded room of elderly people who were so energetic and animated, asking brilliant questions. They were ageless.

That’s my overriding memory of Our Parents Home, which will close its doors for the last time at the end of the year (see page 1). Yes, it’s a sad thing to happen, but realistic.

I totally understand that with 16% occupancy, Our Parents Home doesn’t have a future and is potentially a drain on the already stressed pockets of our community. And yes, there’s space in the Chev’s other facilities in Gauteng and nobody will be homeless.

I do understand that when we get older, moving home isn’t quite as much of an adventure as it used to be. So, it’s not necessarily going to be fun to relocate those precious souls living at Our Parents Home. But the Chev has promised to help everyone needing assistance, and I have no doubt that it will.

I also understand that there are black-and-white opinions about downscaling in our community. Some see it as inevitable, and others see it as the road to our demise as a community. I look about me and see what seems to be way too many Jewish schools and shuls to be sustained. And sustainability is the operative word.

Did you know there are dozens of shuls in the greater Glenhazel?

And though the numbers in some Jewish schools are dropping, nobody particularly wants to see a school close. But how do we sustain schools with too few pupils to maintain top teachers and the best resources? Shouldn’t we pool resources and facilities? Shouldn’t we combine schools?

Perhaps one of the answers is to close down the grounds of one school and join two schools on one campus, thereby enabling the pupils to share the best of their teachers. And when it comes to *kodesh*, you separate the kids from the different schools to be taught in the way that fits the Jewish education that you want your children to get.

If *kodesh* isn’t the only difference between schools, then this can also happen in other subjects. But you understand where I’m going with this.

An alternative is to keep all the schools going, but pool the top secular teachers. That way, the best matric English teacher is giving the finest possible education to many pupils, and the same with maths, accountancy, and other subjects. This creates greater sustainability in the schools.

It’s hard to see esteemed institutions like schools, elderly facilities, and shuls closing.

I do understand the thinking that when we start closing down shuls, we’re giving up something special. I understand and I agree that every shul has its own personality and community. I know my shul certainly has. I can meet someone and be so sure that they would fit right into the ethos, values, and community at my shul.

I see this at so many shuls – a real personality emerges that’s particular and unique. So, I understand the reason to hold onto that precious home, community, and feeling of belonging.

It’s the same with a school and a home. It’s a sense of being a part of something special and emotionally enveloping. It’s also about a sense of pride in what the school or shul stands for. I get it.

However, we need to be conscious of being able to sustain what we have. I do think it’s time to think about how we do this, and what the smartest and most cost-effective way of doing it is.

I know I’m touching on a very sensitive area in our community, but it’s time to consider these issues without dishonouring what we have and its importance in our lives.

And really, the bottom line is, as a people and a community, we are what’s most important. Our community is once again proving just how outstanding it is in caring and supporting people in tough times.

Last week, I spoke about wanting a miracle to help someone in need of one.

Well, the community has come together in such an incredible way to support precious Gavi Waksman, 17, who is fighting to heal in hospital after a fall, and his loving parents and family (see page 3).

I’m blown away by the love, *tehillim*, and all round *mitzvot* that have been done in Gavi’s name.

When I spoke to his mother, Lauren, this week, I was thrilled to hear her positivity, and how touched she has felt by this overarching groundswell of love from our community that has honoured the Waksmans with their *mitzvot*.

Can I say that if there’s any chance that *mitzvot* and prayer make a difference to someone’s healing, then Gavi is on his journey back to where he left off? It may take time, but with all this love and *mitzvot*, not only are the Waksmans strengthened and supported, so too are those on the receiving end of the *mitzvot* in Gavi’s name.

I love the fact that Gavi being in hospital has brought together sometime rival schools Yeshiva College and King David Linksfield in *mitzvot*. You see, although Gavi moved to King David this year, he spent most of his formative years at Yeshiva and Yeshiva kids still see him as one of them.

So, instead of arguing whose kid he is, the two schools joined in honouring him and doing good in his name.

Finally, I was inspired this week by the incredible story of Erin Lazarus, who refused to let the awful disease of lupus and losing a leg get in her way of achieving and living life to the full. So many of us are experiencing hardships, some more than others, but our attitude and the way we tackle it makes a great deal of difference.

It’s so easy to get totally absorbed in our sadness, pain, and anguish and the unfairness of it all, or we can say, ‘I will survive and tackle this head on, and nobody will stop me’.

Such is the incredible story of Erin (see page 5.) *Kol hakavod* to Erin and all those incredible *mitzvah* doers in our community!



Shabbat Shalom and I hope your Lag B’Omer has been festive!
Peta Krost
Editor

Israelis divided over Abu Akleh death

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



It was never going to be an innocent Friday funeral procession in Jerusalem. And, from the moment the news broke last Wednesday that Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian-American and a 25-year veteran of the *Al Jazeera* network, had been killed, it was never going to be less than a public-relations disaster for Israel.

The fact is: Abu Akleh was killed while covering an Israeli military raid in the Jenin refugee camp.

From there onwards, the facts are disputed. It’s not even known if she was married and had children. It’s been reported both yes and no.

“The killing of Shireen Abu Akleh has left me furious,” wrote James Zogby, the founder and president of the Arab American Institute. “Furious that a wonderful journalist has been taken from the world. Furious because of the predictable way Israel has responded to this tragedy. And furious at the United States for its failure to take a principled stand in ensuring that the truth is known about Shireen’s death and there’s accountability for it.”

I’m also furious. Though I never knew Shireen personally, I’m furious at the predictable Palestinian and international response. In fact, everything that has transpired in the week since Abu Akleh was killed could have been written before it happened.

“The Israeli response to Shireen’s killing has been predictable,” continued Zogby. “Their *hasbara* [propaganda] machinery went into overdrive, doing what they have always done – a combination of denying, lying, and obfuscating about what may have happened.”

The same charge is levelled by a sizeable part of the Israeli population, predictably those amongst the political right, against the Palestinians and global community. I, for one, agree with the criticism.

First of all, Palestinian officials immediately accused Israel of killing her. But on what basis? Even left-leaning human-rights groups admit they’re not sure who’s to blame.

The Israeli “Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories”, B’Tselem, sent a researcher to Jenin to take a video of the area in which Abu Akleh was shot. It showed that the Palestinian gunmen were about 300m from her, separated by a series of walls and alleyways. While presumably proving she couldn’t have died from Palestinian fire, the group still, until now, admits it hasn’t been able to come to a conclusion about who was behind the shooting. It says it needs the bullet to be matched to the barrel of a gun, but the Palestinians have refused to release the bullet, predictably saying they don’t trust Israel.

Bellingcat, a Dutch-based international consortium of researchers, gathered and analysed video and audio on social media, from both Palestinian and Israeli military sources. The group looked at factors such as time stamps, the locations of the videos, shadows, and a forensic audio analysis of gunshots. It concluded that while Palestinian gunmen and Israeli soldiers were in the same area, it was Israeli fire that killed Abu Akleh. But, importantly, it also acknowledged that it couldn’t be 100% certain. Without the bullet and evidence of the weapons used by the army and GPS locations of Israeli forces, it said it was impossible to make any final conclusions.

The Palestinians have – predictably – refused a joint probe with Israel, saying they will handle the investigation alone and deliver results very soon.

“We refused to have an international investigation because we trust our capabilities as a security institution,” Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh announced. “We won’t hand over any of the evidence to anyone because we know that these people are able to falsify the facts.”

Pointedly, very little has been written about why the Israeli army was in Jenin in the first place. In recent weeks, the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) has escalated its activities in the area in an effort to try and prevent the stream of recent terror attacks. Seventeen Israelis and three foreigners have been killed inside Israel since

March in the worst spate of violence in recent years. Four of the assailants came from Jenin.

CCTV footage released on Monday, 16 May, shows dozens of Israeli police officers rushing into East Jerusalem’s Saint Joseph’s Hospital on Friday, where Abu Akleh’s body was being held prior to her funeral procession. The officers are seen hitting and shoving people inside the hospital, including patients, and firing from the grounds of the medical centre. The scenes set the stage for what was to follow. A large crowd gathered outside to escort her casket to a Catholic church in the nearby Old City. Soon, clashes broke out between Israeli police and mourners, many of whom were holding Palestinian flags and shouting, “Palestine! Palestine!” and “We sacrifice our soul and blood for you, Shireen.” The police hit pallbearers, causing one man to lose control of the casket as it nearly fell to the ground. Police ripped Palestinian flags out of people’s hands and fired stun grenades to disperse the crowd. At least 10 people needed medical assistance.

Like just about every incident that happens in Israel, the public – predictably – is divided.

Left-wing domestic media has been critical of the police’s actions, demanding answers. Citing unnamed police sources, *Haaretz* newspaper reported that the police had been given specific orders to take down any flags they encountered at the funeral. Further orders were issued on the day for police to go, with clubs in their hands, all the way up to the pallbearers.”

Right-wing Israelis, who still comprise the majority of the population, are – if not openly supportive then at least condoning of – the Israeli police’s actions. More than 10 000 Palestinians showed up to pay their respects to Abu Akleh, the largest Palestinian funeral in more than two decades. It was inevitably going to be an opportunity to stir up pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel sentiment, they say, and how could Israeli police not react when you had people throwing stones and waving Palestinian flags on Israeli territory.

“What does the world want,” one bitter Likud supporter challenged me. “That we sit idly by when this happens. That would send a message that we’re okay with it, and we’re not, and never will be. This was an anti-Israel journalist who for 25 years spewed hatred against the state of Israel.”

A left-wing Labour supporter entreated. “The Israeli police has a lot to answer for. This was a funeral, a funeral! So people want to wave Palestinian flags, it’s understandable. Why must our police, every time, be so brutal when it comes to Palestinians? What we saw unfold was nothing short of racism. There are many nationalistic funerals held in Israel and the police never intervene. There was no suggestion that this funeral was going to become violent.”

So at the end of the day, Israeli society remains divided. As Jerusalem and the Palestinians continue to wrangle over the investigations – including the one being conducted by Israel in spite of human-rights groups saying the country has a poor record of investigating wrongdoing by its security forces – one cannot help but assume that no one will change their minds even after the results are published.

- Paula Slier has been the Middle East bureau chief of RT for many years, and is the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International, and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.



Police officers clash with attendees at the funeral of Shireen Abu Akleh

Photo: Amir Levy Getty Images

Israel ambassador meets Zimbabwean president

Newly appointed non-resident Israel ambassador to Zimbabwe, Ofra Farhi, and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft met Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa at State House in Harare last Thursday, 12 May, where the ambassador presented her credentials. She invited Silberhaft to join her at this occasion.

Silberhaft, affectionately known as the “travelling rabbi”, represented the African Jewish Congress and Jewish community in Zimbabwe. He thanked the president for allowing Jews to practise their religion without any hindrance in his country.

Mnangagwa responded that Jews were always welcome in his country. He recalled with fondness the many Jewish individuals who had made great contributions to Zimbabwe and previously southern Rhodesia in various areas including medicine and commerce.

The rabbi presented the president with a kiddush cup, and explained the importance that kiddush and wine play in the Jewish religion. He then blessed the president, and encouraged him to undertake his role with sanctity.



Israeli Ambassador Ofra Farhi with Zimbabwean President Emerson Mnangagwa and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft

Olim welcome after retirement – but it’s a major life transition

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“Israel will never say no to any Jewish person who wants to make aliya, certainly not to older Jews. The reason the country exists is to be a home for Jewish people.”

So says Tanya Ofek, an aliya consultant at the Israel Centre. She spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* following a webinar about “elderly aliya” on 15 May, organised by the Israel Centre and other organisations including the Jewish Agency for Israel and Gvachim Aliyah Prep.

“The only reason Israel may refuse to allow a Jewish person to make aliya is if you committed a crime, or if you were Jewish and you openly practice a different religion,” says Ofek. “Obviously, when you come to the actual process of making aliya, you’ll be asked questions like how you’re going to sustain yourself, do you have a support system, and so on. But they won’t stop you from making aliya even though you’re at pension age or after pension age.

“Making aliya is a major life transition, especially at this age,” says Telfed social worker Ariela Siegel, speaking on the webinar. “There are many considerations to take into account, many questions that one needs to clarify prior to taking this step.”

Siegel says making aliya starts with planning and gathering all the information so you can be prepared and more likely to succeed.



Dr Hymie Ehrlich made aliya last year at age 91

“One of the most important aspects you should be looking at is how emotionally and mentally prepared you are for this and, in fact, how determined you are to make this transition and make it work. There are many obstacles to overcome, so you need sources of support. It’s either family, friends, state support, personnel resources, financial or other, and also various organisations, such as Telfed that offer help for *olim*.”

Siegel says it’s important to make realistic financial plans and research the cost of living in Israel. “Some of the rights and benefits like the old-age pension aren’t always automatic and can be given only if you meet certain criteria.”

Ofek says most retirement homes are expensive. “If you can’t do daily tasks and you’re in a position where you need to be cared for fully, then you can get into a public retirement home where they take care of you. But if you’re still okay, it’s a real problem if you don’t have money.”

Ofek says that when someone who is beyond retirement age wants to make aliya but doesn’t have

money or any means of supporting themselves, the Israel Centre usually says it’s much wiser to stay in South Africa.

“Another important consideration when making aliya is your health and what health services you can expect in Israel,” says Siegel. “Even if the condition is stable now, no one knows what happens in the future. It’s important to know that old-age homes, assisted living arrangements, 24/7 caregivers for the frail, and all these kinds of services aren’t all state-funded.”

Siegel says other considerations when making aliya include finding the right place for you to settle and learn the language. “I know that learning Hebrew at an older age is a challenge, but it’s still very worthwhile to invest in.”

Rafael Schorr, a logistics project manager at Israel Experience, told the webinar that immigrants are eligible for an absorption basket for six months after receiving immigration status. This assistance is provided by the ministry of aliya and immigration. At the airport, retired elderly citizens or those in activity receive 1 250 shekels (R5 937) in cash if they are single, or 2 500 shekels (R11 874) if they are a couple. After they open an account in a bank, they receive 1 443 shekels (R6 853) if they are single or just more than 3 600 shekels (R17 098) if they’re a couple. They then receive six payments, one each month.

The ministry of housing offers rent to *olim* during their first five years of immigration, says Schorr.

Retiree ulpan studies are subsidised by the aliya ministry for 10 months, three times a week, five hours a day.

Those who receive pension or retirement supplements because they don’t have a job or don’t have property in their name in Israel are eligible to receive discounts on essential services such as electricity and water, says Schorr.

Municipal tax discounts are also available. Each municipality has certain co-ordinators who are responsible for offering recreational or leisure activities for free or subsidies.

Schorr says there’s no tax for 10 years on non-Israel sourced (generated abroad) income. After the 10-year tax exemption, your pension tax will be equal to or less than your home country.

In terms of senior housing and elderly care, Schorr says Israel has different options. There are independent senior living centres, old-age homes, mentally frail facilities, and assisted living facilities.

Schorr says Israel’s social services ministry offers the elderly who aren’t in an elderly facility a long-term care benefit to help with daily activities and/or a full-time nursing professional. The ministry is also responsible for the *Kartis Ezrach Vatik*, an Israel senior-citizen card which offers various discounts and benefits.

And the social welfare ministry allocates another card which gives those older than 80 the right to receive customer service without waiting in line at places like banks, post offices, and large stores.

Jews of Lithuanian or Polish heritage eligible for EU citizenship



There’s a common misconception that to get European citizenship and a European Union passport, you need to have documents proving your lineage. **The fact is** not having any documents proving lineage doesn’t necessarily disqualify you from eligibility. In many cases, the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin.

Having European citizenship offers many **benefits** besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we’re looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn’t exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn’t exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one’s ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The descendants of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won’t be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated.

For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

My name is Avi Horesh. I’m well-known in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

With only a four-hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius, I’m able to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I collaborate closely with local professionals in tracing the required documents for your successful application for reinstatement as a European citizen.

Having lived in Poland for seven years, I have in-depth understanding of European immigration laws.

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

My next trip will be around June, July 2022
Contact me on



WhatsApp: +48 783 953 223
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Making it count: *tehillim* groups reveal the power of prayer

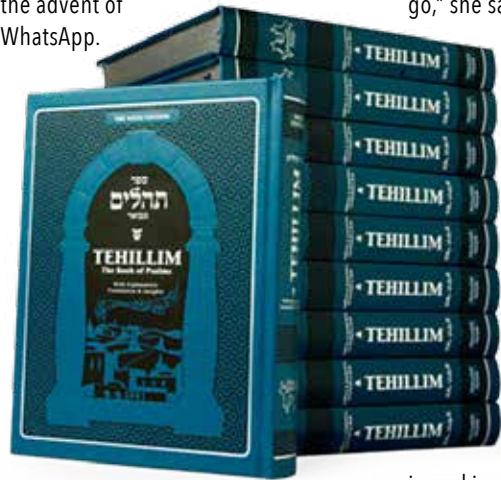
GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Regardless of their religious observance, a growing number of people are joining *tehillim* WhatsApp groups, often in support of the recovery of people they've never even met.

Reciting *tehillim* (psalms) is said to break all barriers in heaven. "Tehillim groups are very powerful," says Eddy Blatt, whose son Raphi underwent neurosurgery after a freak accident almost cost him his life two years ago. "Everything is in Hashem's hands, but if I had to pin down the one thing that helped get our son through his ordeal, it was the *tehillim*, the prayers, and the coming together of the community." Now an active five-year-old, Raphi made a miraculous recovery. "Today you wouldn't know he was in an accident – an absolute blessing."

As word of Raphi's injury spread, people from around the world began to pray. "We were told that there were literally hundreds of thousands of people davening for him. What was also so powerful was when a little child would say *tehillim* for him or just send a well wish. It's said that when a child asks Hashem for help, He listens more closely. We are ever grateful to everybody who prayed for Raphi."

The growing prevalence of *tehillim* WhatsApp groups in South Africa and abroad has coincided with numerous miracles, like the one experienced by the Blatt family. "They've have been a game changer," says Dana*, who started a Facebook *tehillim* group before the advent of WhatsApp.



"Now, the full book of *tehillim* is literally being recited around the clock worldwide. It's not only beneficial to those we pray for, but also for those who pray – it creates unity and becomes a support system."

"More and more people are realising the power of *tehillim*," says Chabad House Director Rabbi David Masinter, who spearheads a campaign aimed at ensuring that each Jewish home has a *tehillim* book. Chabad South Africa's "Psalm 4 That Tehillim App" ensuring *tehillim* are available to all, is also used around the world.

A quote from the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, encapsulates the impact of *tehillim*. "If you only knew the power that lies in the verses of *tehillim* and their effects in the celestial heights, you would recite them all the time."

"Compiled by King David with divine inspiration, these holy words have inspired Jewish people throughout the ages to recite *tehillim* for all eventualities," says Ella Shishler, who runs a *tehillim* group and a project combining *tehillim* and *tzedakah* to double the impact of both *mitzvot*. From giving thanksgiving to Hashem,

to praying for the healing of the sick, for *shidduchim* (matches), for *parnassa* (livelihood), for fertility and more, *tehillim* are used in good times and bad.

There's a psalm for any situation, says Shishler, each rooted in trust in G-d. "It's with this inherent trust that we extend our prayers away from ourselves and include others who may need our prayers to join alongside with theirs, giving them extra power to soar upwards."

WhatsApp *tehillim* groups are either created for a specific individual who may be sick or in need, or they run continuously, with members praying for a regularly updated list of names. *The Book of Psalms* consists of 150 chapters, and is said in sequence.

"*Tehillim* will start with number one, so someone may take one to three, for example," Shishler says. "The next person will commit to saying *tehillim* four to six, and so on, continuing until the book is finished, when the next person will begin again at number one. We're a powerful force made up of individuals who alone cannot achieve what we all can do as a committed, caring, and determined team."

For Andy Toker, running a *tehillim* group has given her purpose. Though she's not religious, Toker is spiritual and feels a strong connection to the power of *tehillim*. After joining a group of people at a hospital praying for a young Jewish boy five years ago, she knew she had to learn more about *tehillim*.

"I felt this could be my boy, and whether I knew him or not, I needed to go," she says. "I left thinking that there are so many heartbreaking stories. People hear about them and say, 'Ag shame!' but that's all they do. I felt like it was time to do something more." Soon, her *tehillim* group was born and today, it consists of 120 men and women praying for whoever may be in need.

Aside from facilitating rolling *tehillim* in critical situations to "storm the heavens", Toker also believes

in making prayers specific to each person. In line with the custom where one says the psalm that is one number above their age – so if you're 30, you say psalm 31 – she'll often post the Hebrew name of someone who is unwell together with their *tehillim* number based on this calculation and everyone will say that psalm.

Those who don't understand Hebrew can say *tehillim* in English, she says. All that matters is that you actually mouth the words and say the psalm with absolute intention and purpose.

Inevitably, not all prayers are answered in the way we'd like, which can be disheartening, yet we take comfort in knowing that our prayers paved the way for the person to get an aliya, says Toker.

Once the person has passed on or recovered, groups established in a specific person's name sometimes keep running in the merit of prayers for others. Such is the case for a group started for Sandy* a woman diagnosed with cancer at the age of 36, who is now in remission.

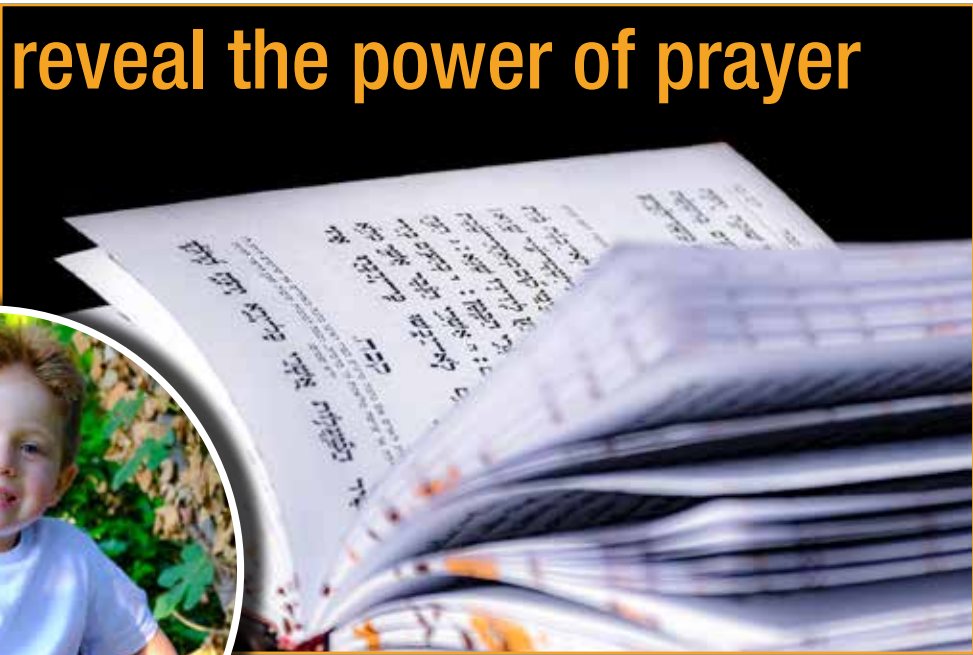
"When Sandy was diagnosed, her friend contacted us and initiated a rolling *tehillim* group – something we had never heard of before," says

Sandy's sister. "Every day, people were posting their number, and *tehillim* were recited continuously.



Raphi Blatt as he is now

This gave us comfort, helped us to find peace, and strengthened our faith as we



turned to a higher power. We felt so supported by our community and overwhelmed by people's kindness and commitment."

*Lisa, the friend who started the group, lives in Israel. "It felt good to be able to do something practical, spiritual, and doable

from afar for someone I care deeply about," she says. "I believe in the power of *tehillim* and in the power of people focused on praying for someone else, directing their loving and caring intention toward their health and healing."

*Names have been changed

Chess a game of resistance in the Holocaust

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Did you know that Holocaust victims used wooden clubs, newspapers, toothpaste tube caps, and bread to create chess sets during World War II?

This was revealed by Dr Rachel Perry on 15 May in a webinar titled "Checkmate: Making, Playing and Picturing Chess in the Holocaust".

Perry, who has a PhD in art history from Harvard University and teaches in the Rights Ignite Graduate Programme in Holocaust Studies at the University of Haifa, was the webinar's guest speaker.

Organised by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in partnership with Ghetto Fighters House and the Jewish Historical Institute, it was the first webinar in the series, "Crafting Heritage – A Homage to David Friedmann."

"A game of war, chess was made, played, and pictured in a time of war by individuals in hiding or in captivity in the ghettos and behind barbed wire in the camps across Nazi-occupied Europe," said Perry. "Instead of throwing the game and giving up, they invented. With do-it-yourself techniques and tools sourced out of found materials and throwaways, they made chess pieces carved out of wood, folded out of paper, etched into tin, and moulded out of bread. They also took up a pen and ink and drew chess games, both real and imagined."

Zigmund Stern, who carved a chess set out of wood while hiding with his family in a bunker in Slovakia in 1944, noted that chess was a reminder of cultural continuity, said Perry.

"By playing chess, victims could recreate a sense of relative normality and stability," said Perry. "They could exercise control over their fate and preserve something of their past world even as it was being destroyed. Like other practices of maintaining social, cultural, and educational life under oppression, chess was a form of resistance. It wasn't just a popular pastime for people in hiding. We find it, surprisingly, in the ghettos, transit camps, concentration camps, and yes, even extermination camps. Photographs document the educational and social function of chess."

A photograph taken in Warsaw during the spring of 1940 shows two Jewish refugee boys playing chess at a Jewish welfare organisation which was established shortly after the city came under German control. Another photo, taken in Amsterdam in early 1943, shows Jewish children playing chess at an extracurricular youth care centre which was set up by the Jewish Council in Tilanusstraat.

"Many more scenes such as these occurred but owning and operating a camera was a rare commodity and often a punishable offence," said Perry. "Drawings and paintings made by the victims fill this gap – like a watercolour made by Leo Yehi in 1944 in the Bellinzona camp. It shows that chess offered a place separate from the everyday, an ideal arena where the contest was civilised and played according to agreed-upon rules."

Found near the Allach-Karsfeld concentration camp, a chessboard was carved on the underside of a small bowl, suggesting that the game was played with small leftovers or even pebbles, said Perry.

"The board is hidden underneath the bowl, speaking to the risk of owning and playing chess. In some cases, the selection of the material was more motivated. Elhanan Ejbuzsye created a chess

set in Auschwitz Birkenau out of wood, but not any wood. He was a carver of miniatures and was transported to the extermination camp in the summer of 1944. He was placed in block 20, whose leader was well known for beating the inmates with a wooden club. One day, Ejbuzsye offered to carve him a chess set from the club, hoping he would appease him. However, before finishing the task, he was transferred to a labour camp where he and his fellow prisoners made use of this set. As he testified, he transformed a tool of punishment into a tool of peace, which allowed his fellow Jews a rare chance to forget their difficult circumstances for a while.

"One of the most innovative chess sets was fashioned by Hermann Rautenberg in KL Buchenwald. It is made out of cardboard and old newspapers. On the inside of the box is a newspaper clipping of a chess problem solved by a German chess master, suggesting that Rautenberg was passionate about both the theory and playing of chess beyond the confines of the camp.

"Other examples testify to innovation and ingenuity. Lieutenant Marian Boglowski and other prisoners made chess pieces out of the blue and black caps of toothpaste tubes."

Robert Bregulla, a prisoner of two camps, crafted chess pieces that resemble solid stone statues, but are actually made from dough, water, salt, and flour. "Bregulla isn't alone in turning bread and dough into the shape of chess pieces," said Perry. "In the camps, we found an enormous variety of chess either being quite literally food for thought or requiring the exchange of food for mental nourishment. Strictly rationed, bread held enormous value. Yet, inmates were willing to forego their hunger to play chess. A prisoner of Bergen Belsen recounts that he sacrificed five whole days of his bread ration for a set of chess, but his gambit paid dividends because he and some of his fellow prisoners concentrated on the game so intensely, they forgot about their hunger."



Chess pieces made out of toothpaste tube caps by prisoners during the Holocaust

"Each individual square on his handmade paper board opened and closed, allowing the chess figures to be slotted into it so that they won't slide off," said Perry. "Every day, a person responsible for the bread delivery would move the chessboard from one cell to another, allowing prisoners separated in different cells to play together."

Chess was also used as a cover for resistance networks, said Perry. Joop Wetsersweel, a Dutch resistance group, had a dummy chessboard with a hole which they used to smuggle documents for members of Zionist youth groups.

"Survivor testimonies describe clandestine resistance meetings held under the pretext of chess competitions," said Perry. "Prisoners could gather around the players and exchange information or hold private conversations without arousing the suspicions of the SS [Schutzstaffel]."

"What we found is that chess also fostered divisions, cliques, and hierarchies among the prisoners. Jewish inmates were too tired, hungry, or sick to play games. It was mostly the non-Jewish privileged [inmates] who had access to materials and the time for leisure activities."

When Edgar Toussaint van Hove was imprisoned in Siegburg prison in Germany, he created an innovative chess set that allowed players in solitary confinement to play together.



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Chief rabbi defends Israel’s ‘weekend survey’

TALI FEINBERG

The SA Jewish Report last week (12 May 2022) detailed how Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein commissioned an independent survey in Israel recently to gauge attitudes towards the idea of creating a shorter work week and Shabbat in general. It told how Goldstein was also called upon to address an official Knesset committee on 10 May about why he believed Sunday should be made a non-workday in Israel.

Though some welcomed Goldstein’s efforts, others questioned why Goldstein was involving himself so extensively in another country’s affairs, especially when there were so many pressing needs within his own community. In the same context, many questioned why precious communal resources were used to conduct a survey in Israel when they could be utilised for many urgent needs at home. Others wondered where the funding came from to conduct the survey, how much it cost, and why the chief rabbi decided to commission it in the first place.

The chief rabbi responded to some of these questions.

“I was proud to accept the invitation to address the Knesset special committee as the chief rabbi of a community renowned the world over for its Zionism and dedication to the state of Israel,” Goldstein said. “My presentation was an opportunity to add a spiritual contribution to the decades of what South African Jews

have done, individually and communally, to strengthen Israel’s economy, welfare, security, and diplomacy. A strong Jewish state also needs Shabbat at its centre as a source of national unity and purpose.

“In my address, I shared, as chief rabbi, the values and ethos we embody as a Jewish community. Through our warm embrace of the Shabbat Project, as with so much else, we showed the world that Shabbat can be a source of unity and pride rather than a source of division and dispute.

“I shared the results of a survey that was conducted as part of the work of the Shabbat Project in Israel, which has the objective of promoting Shabbat in the Jewish state as a source of national purpose and unity. This vital work is supported by international donors who share the vision that Shabbat can uplift and unify the Jewish people, and is especially important for the future of Israel. The survey was wide-ranging, gauging public attitudes towards Shabbat – finding out how many Israelis light candles, make kiddush, etc – and how incorporating Sunday into the weekend might improve those attitudes and increase Shabbat observance.

“I believe passionately that, as a community, contributing to other Jewish communities and especially to Israel is a moral and strategic imperative. It’s the right thing to do, but it’s also in our own best interests. Our interests aren’t advanced in any way by being too inwardly focused, living isolated from the rest of global Jewry. We cannot afford to adopt a ‘laager’, survivalist mentality.

“It’s especially important to maintain our deep connection to Israel, and do whatever we can to strengthen it politically and spiritually.

In the work to promote Shabbat in Israel, I’m honoured to continue the proud Zionist legacy of this community in the same way that I have, on many occasions, defended Israel’s reputation in the media and in the corridors of government. And though I have been criticised in the past for doing so, even from a few within

our own community, I won’t be deterred from that task nor from this sacred task of strengthening Jewish unity and promoting Shabbat in Israel. As a community, we must do what we can to strengthen Israel and world Jewry. We have so much to give, and so much to gain.”



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

Engaging Jewish museums ensures that history isn’t a mystery



The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre

SAUL KAMIONSKY

“A visit to a museum is a search for beauty, truth, and meaning in our lives.” As we commemorate International Museum Day on 18 May, these words from Israeli-born American illustrator, writer, and blogger Maira Kalman resonate with curators and employees of Jewish museums in South Africa.

“Though the Holocaust happened more than 70 years ago, the history of the Holocaust and the lessons we learn from that history are useful in looking at our own history through a contemporary lens,” says Orli Barnett, a museum educator at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC).

The International Council of Museums has organised International Museum Day every year since 1977 to raise awareness about museums as a crucial means of cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures, and development of co-operation and mutual understanding.

The three Holocaust centres in South Africa – the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), the CTHGC, and the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre (DHGC) – are constantly working to draw people into their museums and educate them. They do this to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive, and share lessons learnt from history.

The JHGC holds annual commemoration events on days such as Yom Hashoah. “We also have events for survivors, so they can share their stories,” says Jordan Saltzman, collections manager at the JHGC.

The South African Holocaust centres bring to light other atrocities and genocides that might not otherwise get much publicity, like that of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

“We have a section in our exhibition about South Africa’s apartheid history and antisemitism,” says Barnett.

The South African Jewish Museum (SAJM) is primarily a narrative museum. “The modern museum that was developed by Mendel Kaplan tells the story of our community,” says Gavin Morris, the director of the SAJM. “It primarily uses modern audiovisual elements to convey that story, and effectively tells the narrative of the South African Jewish community in Lithuania and then within the Old Shul, the very first shul that was built in the country. We have on display some of the oldest Judaica within the community in South Africa.”

The Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research in Cape Town has a substantial physical archival collection.

“We have records relating to immigration, arrivals information, personal papers, and institutional records,” says Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the centre. “The collection has been built over decades and decades. We do have extensive online databases which are mostly genealogical focused, looking at cemetery records or shipping and immigration records. They are widely used by genealogists and people researching their family history. In partnership with the SAJM, we also have the SAJM archives, an online archive primarily with photographs, digitised documents, and film.”

“We support the history curriculum by teaching Grade 9s about World War II, the outbreak of war, the Holocaust, and the Final Solution,” says Barnett.

“Grade 11 history students come back to the centre to learn about race theory and case studies about how countries have misused racism.”

Though the DHGC also caters to Grade 9 and 10 students, it offers a Grade 7 programme which specifically focuses on the story of Anne Frank as well as a programme for adult groups. The DHGC recently created a transport fund, enabling it to invite less privileged schools to visit the centre. “Each year, about 5 000 students come through our centre,” says Tanya Altshuler of the DHGC’s communications and marketing department.

Says Saltzman, “We try to share lessons that have a broader message. Though some schools come for the history portion, a lot of the schools come here because we deal with empathy, social action, and personal choices.”

The SAJM’s core function is to bring school children to the museum to learn about Judaism and Jewish communities in South Africa over many generations, says Morris. “We focus primarily on disadvantaged schools in which children may not ever come into contact with a Jewish person. We bring them to the museum and make them a kosher meal. We arrange transport. There’s no cost to the schools whatsoever.”

Morris says one of the museum’s most difficult tasks is encouraging people to visit it. “South Africans are generally not known as museum-goers,” he says.

The Holocaust centres use a variety of platforms to encourage people to come and learn about the Holocaust. “We advertise in various publications, tourism publications, online, through our website, and on social media,” says Barnett.

Says Altshuler, “Word of mouth is our best form of advertising. We also market the centre through social media as well as the Durban Tourism Portal and editorial in various publications.”

The SAJM gives concierges and tour guides specialised tours of the museum so they can tell tourists about it and arrange tours if visitors are interested.

“We have an amazing network of volunteers among Holocaust survivors or their descendants, and Rwandan-genocide survivors,” says Saltzman. “The centre forms a hub for them. Pre COVID-19, we had a Holocaust survivors’ group which would meet every month. With lockdown, we went online, doing loads of webinars, and now we’re going back to having things in the centre. We have people who are maybe more interested in the Armenian genocide who will come to us. We have a lovely coffee shop, so that helps.”

Asked how to keep the centre relevant, Altshuler says the DHGC teaches about modern-day issues such as the consequences of prejudice, racism, antisemitism, homophobia, and the dangers of indifference, apathy, and silence with a wider focus on human rights, racism, and xenophobia.

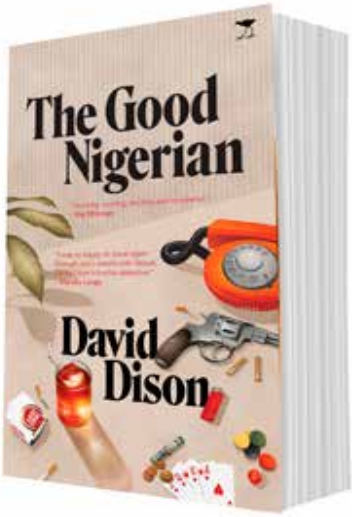
The SAJM runs regular temporary exhibitions which appeal to a broad South African audience. “For example, we’ve got an Ali Bacher exhibition at the moment,” says Morris. “This is of interest not just to the Jewish community, but anybody who is interested in South African cricket.”



BOOK LAUNCH

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Holding the hands of Ukrainian refugees

TALI FEINBERG

Denis Shaporenko is 36 years old, has cerebral palsy, and has lost 50% of his vision. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February, he fled, making aliya to Israel, becoming one of 18 000 refugees who have landed in the Jewish state since the war began.

But what happens to these *olim* who arrive with nothing and need to build a new life? Though the Israeli government is doing what it can to absorb them, many other organisations have also stepped in to help.

One such organisation is *olim* advocacy non-profit Yad L'Olim. In the space of a few days, it created an entire department dedicated to Ukrainian *olim* and is now working on the ground to help them with everything from food vouchers to finding work to ensuring that the government assists them.

Another *oleh* they have helped is a Holocaust survivor who asked not to be named. She escaped the war with a rabbi. They travelled to Russia, Kazakhstan, and then on to Georgia before they were able to get on a plane to Israel with a group of other Jews from her city. She has found social housing, but she's lonely. Yad L'Olim's team of Ukrainian speakers meet her and help her with any of her needs as well as helping her to find social activities, friends, and a community.

And the refugees aren't just from Ukraine. One refugee, whose name is protected for his safety, made aliya from Russia. He fled because he didn't agree with Russia's attack on Ukraine and didn't want to be forced into the army. In Russia he had worked in a large international firm. The Yad L'Olim team helped him with his documents and he has already found work in Israel.

"When the war started, I didn't think that we at Yad L'Olim would have any role to play," says the organisation's founder, Dov Lipman. "But we started getting emails from people who had been in touch with us during the pandemic – we helped people from more than 22 different countries – and we realised that they needed help.

"So I went to some of the hotels where the first *olim* from Ukraine were staying. And I realised that as much as the government is really amazing, they had many, many needs and didn't really understand what was going on around them. They couldn't really communicate with me, so I immediately set out to raise funds and hired a Ukrainian-speaking team.

"We put it together within a few days, and now we have a team that goes around to all the hotels, meets new *olim*, and helps them with everything imaginable: food vouchers and furniture – because they came with nothing; opening a bank account; their documents; medical issues; finding a place to live; and the most important thing, finding a place to work. We have a full database of the *olim* and our entire team works with them on a daily basis. They need someone to hold their hands through the entire process."

Yad L'Olim will even partner with Keter in hosting a free store in Jerusalem where Ukrainian *olim* can "shop" for essentials like clothes, toiletries, and linen.

The organisation is also lobbying the government to ensure that it plays its part. "When the *olim* first came, we realised they weren't getting lunch or laundry services at the hotels, so we took care of that. Now we're hard at work because 2 000 Ukrainian refugee children haven't been placed in schools, so that's another priority. We're working on their immediate needs, housing, employment, and government relations. The government is limited in terms of resources, and that's why non-government organisations like Yad L'Olim are pitching in to help," says Lipman.

He says most Ukrainian *olim* have now left hotels and are dispersed around the country. About 9 000 refugees got their aliya documents before they got to Israel, about 8 000 got them in Israel, and about 1 000 haven't been processed yet.

Another organisation playing a role is Myisrael, which raises money for small charities. South African *olah* Eli Rudolph is project co-ordinator at the organisation. She explains that the refugees that have officially made aliya qualify for *olim* benefits like a monthly stipend and national health insurance.

But those who haven't officially made aliya don't get any benefits. "A lot of what they're getting depends on charities. We're working with a few charities that are helping," says Rudolph. "Some have set up free

'pop-up shops' so Ukrainian refugees can just come in and get supplies that they need. We've been supplying people with underwear, toiletries, and vouchers for basic home items. We've even be able to give laptops to some of them. I hosted a collection at my shul for toiletries."

They have also been asked by a municipality to raise funds for animal therapy for orphans. "These children have been through incredible trauma. They were either orphaned before the war, during the war, or they were separated from their parents for whatever reason. For those separated, the chances are they will never be reunited with their families."

Telfed has also played a role. "During *chol hamoed* Pesach, Telfed's PRAS students met Ukrainian *olim* temporarily residing in Ganei Yerushaliam Hotel in Jerusalem. The students spent hours playing with children of all ages, bringing with them a huge donation of toys and school supplies," says Telfed's head of scholarships, Alona Zamir.



Photo: Tomer Neuberg / Flash90

Holocaust survivors rescued from the war in Ukraine arrive at Ben Gurion Airport

'PRAS' (a Hebrew acronym for 'Assistance Project') is a Telfed scholarship programme where students volunteer with members of the *olim* community.

"As the Ukrainian *olim* don't speak Hebrew or English, communication was done mainly through social games, music, and sport. Telfed's PRAS students have experience volunteering with children of Southern African *olim* as 'big brothers' or 'big sisters', accompanying them throughout the year with their social integration and language acquisition. The skills they've refined through their volunteering was a major contribution for Ukrainian *olim* children.

"The South African *olim* community also generously donated toys, balls, school bags, school supplies, and games. The students took these donations with them when they met with the children. It felt as if Ukrainian *olim* children won a whole toy store at once! Our plan is to continue this activity in the summer holiday with a summer camp for the children run by PRAS students."



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Jews of Lithuanian or Polish heritage eligible for EU citizenship

There's a common misconception that to get European citizenship and a European Union passport, you need to have documents proving your lineage. **The fact is** not having any documents proving lineage doesn't necessarily disqualify you from eligibility. In many cases, the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin.

Having European citizenship offers many **benefits** besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we're looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn't exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn't exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The

descendents of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won't be eligible. In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated. For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

My name is Avi Horesh. I'm well-known in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship. With only a four-hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius, I'm able to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I collaborate closely with local professionals in tracing the required documents for your successful application for reinstatement as a European citizen.

Having lived in Poland for seven years, I have in-depth understanding of European immigration laws. I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

My next trip will be around June, July 2022
Contact me on

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Email: adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com



Horses help humans get back in the saddle

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Having a sometimes inexplicable sixth sense about humans, horses have long been lauded as powerful conduits of healing. Bianca Sigurdsson, an equine specialist and horse-riding instructor, explains the amazing connection between horses and children, especially those with special needs or who are dealing with trauma and significant challenges. “There’s something about the motion of the horse that rocks the rider into a sense of comfort – they say that the heartbeats of the horse and rider synchronise,” says Sigurdsson, who owns and runs Ravenwood Stables at Huddle Park in Linksfield. She’s a former King Davidian who fell in love with riding at the age of three. “Horses are among the world’s most highly emotional animals. If I’m anxious and nervous and near a horse, the horse will mirror that.”

This brings a sense of self-awareness to the person who interacts with the animal – and with the help of a therapeutic team, the person can then identify and process these emotions and relate them to their everyday life. “Horses hold space very well, they don’t judge, they’re not there to tell the kids what they’re doing wrong,” says Sigurdsson. “They’re incredibly emotional animals, and are able to facilitate people making changes themselves.”

Mandy Laskey, an educational psychologist and mental health professional specialising in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), works alongside Sigurdsson to facilitate therapeutic processes among children facing a range of physical, mental, and general life challenges. EAP doesn’t involve riding horses, rather interacting with a horse or horses and two other members of a therapeutic team, says Laskey. She explains why horses are so good at reflecting human emotions.

“Being herd or prey animals, horses are very sensitive to their environment and incredibly perceptive and adept at picking up on peoples’ emotions,” she says. “This is particularly true when clients might prefer for these emotions to stay hidden from the therapeutic team or from themselves, or even when they might not actually be conscious of what they’re feeling.” That’s why interacting with horses can be especially effective for children. “Children sometimes find it difficult to put their feelings into words, and EAP can be helpful,” says Laskey. “That’s because it bypasses the need for the child to verbalise feelings that they

sometimes have little vocabulary for. It also allows the child to ‘see’ patterns of which they are a part in a very dynamic way, and helps them to take responsibility for the part they might be playing in the process.”

As revealed by studies, this explains why adolescents and at-risk youth have benefitted significantly from EAP. “The unconditional positive regard that children and individuals in general need to have a healthy self-esteem is provided by the horses and human therapeutic team, who accept the client just as they are, with no expectations or conditions of worth,” says Laskey. “This unconditional acceptance is something that children or adolescents with disabilities, behavioural difficulties, and difficult family circumstances often don’t experience.”

By observing the way horses respond to their requests and directions, children also develop better communication skills, face their fears, manage their emotions, and behave more consistently. This is why the process can be such a beneficial alternative to more traditional forms of therapy.

What’s more, equine therapy and horse-riding teaches kids confidence and boosts their leadership skills, no matter what trials they face, says Sigurdsson. For example, she has witnessed phenomenal changes in a little girl with cerebral palsy who comes for weekly horse-riding lessons. “She rides one particular horse, and we have an extra supportive saddle for her to ride on,” she says. “We simply go around and teach her balance and leadership; she loves the motion. Whenever she comes, she gets into this zone where she starts having fun and getting louder. She’s so proud of herself when she does the smallest task and she’s doing fantastically well – learning to stand up on the horse and do trotting and bouncing. We often get feedback from parents on how their children have shifted their behaviour in other parts of their lives too. This child has woken up at home, her aggression issues are decreasing, and she’s living her life a lot more confidently. She has something for herself.”

Another area of the business close to Sigurdsson’s heart is the pony camp it runs which has pro bono slots for kids who can’t afford it. “When I was growing up, I couldn’t afford to do all of these things and I was always volunteering,” she recalls. Whether it be through these camps, or through offering special social-skills workshops and EAP sessions for children’s homes, Sigurdsson is now able to expose children from all walks of life to the magical power of horses.



Gabi Serman in the paddock

Paper graves speak to the heart

Artist **Jennifer Kopping's** exhibition at the Holocaust & Genocide Centre in Johannesburg is magical and poignant. Titled "Heartsounds", it's made up of intricate collages that use photos, passports, poetry, and other documents to reconstruct her family's experience of the Holocaust, survival, emigration, and reinvention. The *SA Jewish Report* asked her more.

Where does the title, "Heartsounds", come from?
From a line of my grandmother, Mina Zlotnick's, poetry. She wrote, "... from my own heart's sounds". I found the phrase so poignant and profound.

You use many family heirlooms/documents in the work. What did you want to convey?
I was fortunate to have all these heirlooms, and they partly provided the inspiration for the artworks. Because they held such personal significance, they offered a conduit to the past and to memory. From an artistic point of view, I wanted to show the powerful connection between objects and memory, and how they carry meaning and can be transposed and applied to artmaking.



What inspired you to make collages?
I was inspired by a literary rather than an artistic genre – magic realism. Magic realism conflates time, place, and people from various geographic locales. It's imbued with a sense of the mythological and spiritual. Using this as a starting point, I would describe my work as an innovative representation of how memory and a family, namely the Zlotnick and Bloch family's diasporic narrative, is expressed – specifically within the context of the Holocaust, South Africa, and America. In my works, I converge and juxtapose a variety of locales, symbols, and times that intersect in my family's diasporic journey from the *shtetls* of Lubcha and Iwye, in what was then Poland to South Africa and America.

The works are incredibly intricate. How long did they take you to produce? What materials did you use?
I used a range of media: paper, oil painting, collage, drawing, and embroidery. Most of the works are made from paper. The Yizkor memorial books (which were written by survivors or former residents of the towns who gathered in *landsleit* groups mainly in Israel, the United States, and South America) are poignantly described as "paper graves", as no physical graves exist for those murdered in the Holocaust. I use paper metaphorically as a symbol of that loss. My works are, in a sense, paper graves.
The work evolved from two previous exhibitions submitted for examination as part of my PhD in practice-led research at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The first in New York at the Hebrew Union College and exhibited at the Dr Heller Museum in 2019. This exhibition

was titled *Scattered Breath – The Red Thread*. It took a year to produce. The second body was exhibited at the Unisa Gallery in Pretoria (2021). It took another year. "Heartsounds" is an evolution of the previous exhibitions – in total, it took two years.

You did a lot of research - into Jewish history, mysticism, and so on. Where did you get your information?

Research is like doing a giant puzzle or detective work, so I consulted various websites on Jewish history, memory, and the Holocaust. I also consulted archives from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and JewishGen provided valuable information on the Yizkor Books of the *shtetls* of Lubcha and Iwye. Unisa has an extensive library as well, and was most helpful.
Family members such as my aunt, Rachel Maister, and her son, Johnathan, in Canada provided photographs and transcripts of an interview with my grandfather, Isaac Zlotnick, who was a reverend for the Riversdale Jewish Community from the early 1930s. New York relatives Jean Rosensaft and Gloria Golan also shared their remarkable family history of their father, Samuel Bloch, uncle Martin Bloch, and grandmother, Sonia Bloch, and their experiences with the partisans in the Naliboki Forest.

Is there a best way for us to enjoy your works?
I use a mixture of vibrant colour and the sepia of old photographs to communicate the duality of life and death, which is the human condition. I want to give a sense of life affirmation and hope in the midst of trauma. The works are immersive, and so they allow the viewer to engage with them close up due to their detail, and from afar, in their totality. There's a certain theatricality of the works derived from photography of the early 1900s, which were called *tableau vivant* (living pictures).

The subject matter - the Holocaust and its impact on your family - is sombre. But these works are warm and uplifting. Why?
The contrast of the bright colour and sepia gives a sense of life affirmation in the midst of death and loss and in so doing, is poignant and hopeful. Also this approach to my artmaking gives agency to the lost rather than victimhood.

Where are you planning to take the exhibition after this?
I would love it to be seen in Tel Aviv, Poland, and in the rest of South Africa, depending on funding. It has an important message about hope and remembrance of the Holocaust primarily, but also for all genocides and sites of trauma, as we see unfolding before us right now in Ukraine. Furthermore, it adds a familial dimension to how the personal and the collective are interconnected.
It has been a privilege to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust, to give admiration and respect to the survivors, and to commemorate those that perished so that we can be aware of the dangers of prejudice and stereotyping. I also wanted to share the rich cultural and mythical beauty of Judaism.

- "Heartsounds" is at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre until 3 August.

Erin Lazarus: from amputation to aspiration

>>>Continued from page 5
Ninety percent of the time, she feels positive, "but there is that 10% that's still upset that everything had to go so far. When I'm down, I lean on friends and family. I find that humour has been a huge coping mechanism. I make jokes about how now I can get 50% off a pedicure!"
Her advice to anyone going through something difficult is to "let yourself feel whatever you need to feel, and let those close to you help you. But don't allow yourself to

become a victim. Feeling sorry for myself isn't going to get rid of lupus or grow my leg back. Surround yourself with a support system and distract yourself by doing the things you love."
She says the community's kindness has helped in many ways. "Knowing how many people took the time to wish me well made me feel like I wasn't alone. We also need to be more conscious of building facilities that are disability-friendly."
"When you hear in the news that

blood is in short supply, it really is a call for help," she says. "I was unable to have a blood transfusion the night after my operation because there was no suitable blood available. The Hatzolah blood drives are a wonderful way of giving back. There is a blood drive happening on 22 May. Please donate if you're able to."
Finally, she says, "Don't stare and wonder of you can talk to me. Come ask questions. I'm still little Erin from Norwood. Nothing's changed."



Eventful, impactful, empathetic – WIZO SA has a busy six months

WIZO South Africa has had an industrious and fruitful first half of 2022. We're an organisation full of dynamic women with a passion for Israel and a desire to make a positive impact on the lives of those who need it most.

As president, Shelley Trope-Friedman is constantly inspired by the work of WIZO across the country. "Over 18 months ago, I stepped into the role of president of WIZO South Africa and I remain committed and privileged to still be holding this role. Our federation includes our societies in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, and Port Elizabeth, and I'm honoured to preside over them all. Our WIZO women are resourceful and pro-active, and I applaud them all for their contributions to the improvement of social justice for women and children in Israel and in South Africa."



Over the past several months as the war in Ukraine unfolded before our eyes, it has been shocking and heartbreaking to see the trauma and devastation unleashed on the Ukrainian people.

We have all been impressed at how WIZO has responded. The organisation has been pro-active, and is implementing measures to provide comfort and support to Ukrainians in Israel.

In order to understand this, we must all be aware that when Jewish children anywhere are in distress, the eyes of the Jewish world turn to WIZO. As the Women's International Zionist Organisation (the most influential social-welfare organisation in Israel), we have been caring for Jewish children in crisis, in Israel and the diaspora, for more than 100 years. This is who we are. Through all the decades, all the wars, persecutions, and crises – including in the aftermath of the Holocaust - WIZO was there with a loving embrace, food, shelter, education, pride, and independence.

Today, once again, we are witnessing the destruction and turmoil of war and are seeing children victimised. Yes, we at WIZO are there for them!

We may be unable to give tangible love and comfort as we are all in South Africa, but what we can do is give practical assistance by raising funds for WIZO. All our donations, no matter how small, go directly to Israel to help our Youth Villages and other projects that are assisting these refugees. This way, we can play a part even from afar to relieve the burden and trauma experienced by these young Ukrainians and all others in Israel who are suffering.

Our WIZO Youth Villages will continue to receive and welcome young refugees from Ukraine. At a time in their lives where they are broken and desperate, WIZO is there to take their hand and guide them through the heartache and trauma.

Shelley Trope-Friedman
President of WIZO South Africa

In order to tell this story to local South Africans, WIZO South Africa organised two successful radio interviews on Christian radio stations. Rolene Marks, world WIZO head of public diplomacy, was interviewed about Israel's mediation and humanitarian role in the conflict as well as WIZO's role in assisting Ukrainian refugees pouring into Israel. WIZO South Africa is proud to have played a pivotal role in educating and informing the broader South African audience on topical issues pertaining to Israel, which is of the utmost importance at a time when antisemitism is at an all-time high in our country.

The president and our WIZO women were excited when the The Woven Destiny Concert, which was such an exemplary musical held during Sukkot last year, was aired on a leading television station in the United Kingdom in April. Our WIZO Christian Zionist branch, headed by Elizabeth Campbell, was responsible for this incredible event. Shelley Trope-Friedman is thrilled at this development, and delighted that people across the UK have had the opportunity to learn more about WIZO South Africa and the beautiful friendship and partnership that we have with Campbell and our WIZO Christian Zionist women.

WIZO SA has enabled children with disabilities to become mobile, remain healthy, and participate more fully in community life. This has been done through a project to donate wheelchairs to children in our underprivileged communities. The name of the project, Wheelchairs of Hope, perfectly sums up the spirit of hope we're seeking to give. When we were specifically looking for an outreach project that would benefit South Africa and Israel, WIZO's close relationships with the various Israeli ambassadors was clearly in evidence when the Israeli embassy willingly introduced us to this wonderful project. Shelley Trope-Friedman and the WIZO South Africa leadership were privileged to enjoy a Zoom meeting with the Israeli Ambassador Eliav Belotsercovsky. Having met him personally at a previous meeting hosted by the South African Zionist Federation (Cape Council), the president found him to be more than amenable to assist her and WIZO SA in our various endeavours. This meeting cemented the previous working relationship which will now continue between WIZO SA and the Israeli embassy, and will reap much benefit for all involved.

WIZO South Africa is committed to being an agent of change and part of the solution that creates a safer and more beautiful society in Israel and here in our own backyard. Says Shelley Trope-Friedman, "As WIZO women, we will always work diligently and give of our time and finances to support and build up our Israel by empowering women to become overcomers and to fulfil their hopes and dreams. We will also never cease nurturing and protecting the young and vulnerable across Israeli society.

Thank you to all the SA Jewish Report readers who so lovingly and generously support WIZO South Africa."



A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Tribute to Ann Harris

Ann Harris' recent move to Israel truly marked the end of an era for our community. Arriving with her esteemed husband, Rabbi Cyril Harris, in the late 1980s, from the outset, Ann made herself an intricate part both of our Jewish community and the country as a whole. Like Rabbi Harris, she did so through whole-hearted identification with what was happening in the wider society, with all the problems, challenges, and opportunities it presented, and her energy and commitment to making a practical difference.

Ann made her mark in various ways, as a Jewish communal leader who as president of the African Jewish Congress represented southern African Jewry on the global stage; as a social-justice and human-rights activist; or as an accomplished lawyer and legal academic. Perhaps her most visible achievement was in being part of the husband-and-wife team who, as the public face of the Jewish-faith community, did so much to lead South African Jewry into the democratic era. During these difficult years, she and Rabbi Harris led by example, encouraging other Jews to be an active, identifying part of the transformation and to do so with optimism and pride. She was likewise extensively involved in the healing and nation building process after the transition, particularly through the social upliftment organisation co-founded by her husband, Afrika Tikkun.

Ann's acumen and abilities went hand in hand with an unswerving integrity and the highest ethical values. We salute her for all she contributed, and wish her many more good years of health, happiness, and success.

American Jewish Committee

Since its founding in 2006, the American Jewish Committee's (AJC's) Africa Institute has helped to educate American Jews about the African continent

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

and its challenges and opportunities, facilitating technical co-operation between Israel and Africa and involving itself in human-rights lobbying. It was a former South African, Stanley Bergman, who took the lead in establishing this body during his tenure as AJC president. Both he and his wife, Marion, have remained closely connected to our community, and we have frequently had the opportunity to work with them. Until recently, the Africa Institute was headed by Eliseo Neumann, with whom the Board likewise frequently worked with over many years. We were delighted to learn that Wayne Sussman has been appointed as his successor. Wayne has been involved in many aspects of Jewish communal life, including in Habonim and Limmud SA. In recent years, he has emerged as one of the country's foremost experts on elections. We met Wayne last week to exchange views and discuss how our organisations could further collaborate going forward, and wish him all success in his new position.

Dangerous incitement

The scenes emerging from Israel following the tragic killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh are devastating. However, certain responses have ratcheted up to outright incitement, with one local political party going so far as to call for Israel's destruction. Such hate-fuelled and inflammatory statements cross the line and at the time of writing, a response is being formulated.

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



Rabbi Thurgood to head Jewish life at Herzlia

Rabbi Sam Thurgood has been appointed head of Jewish Life and Learning (JLL) at United Herzlia Schools in Cape Town from 1 July 2022. Thurgood is known to many in the community as the rabbi of Beit Midrash Morasha (Arthurs Road Shul), where he has served since October 2012 and will remain involved for a mutually agreed transitional period.

"My connection to Herzlia goes back a long way," Thurgood says. "My aunt, Helaine Gorin, taught at Herzlia and my cousin is Jos Horwitz, principal at Alon Ashel. During my time in Cape Town, I've also taken many opportunities to be involved in the school – teaching Lego Torah stories at the pre-primaries, serving as Etgar quizmaster, speaking at a Herzlia seder, or visiting a school on Purim, so I'm no stranger to the schools. I also never truly left the educational sector even while working as a full-time community rabbi. However, over the past few years, I have longed to return to education full-time, so the timing was perfect."

"JLL is at the heart of Herzlia," Thurgood says. "The reason Herzlia exists as a school is that generations of our community have been committed to the educational and spiritual development of our youth. My approach to Judaism is to create a welcoming environment in which Jews feel that their Judaism is valuable and life-affirming, and those who aren't Jewish feel that Judaism cares about them and the broader world. At Herzlia, I envision a learning space in which Judaism will be vibrant and compelling, where pupils will be co-creators of learning. Torah and

Jewish life will be seen as the way to open many doors to a meaningful life and a just and healthy society. We are blessed with a wonderful JLL team who, led by Rabbi Sean Cannon and under the directorship of Geoff Cohen, have achieved wonderful results. I'm looking forward to working with them. My first task will be to become more familiar with the pupils, staff, parents, and educational infrastructure to see how best to make this a reality."

Says Andries van Renssen, Herzlia's executive director, "With the arrival of a new leader in the JLL department comes the opportunity to re-examine everything at the school related to Jewish identity – to assess what's done well, what should be done more of or improved, and what has become irrelevant and should be changed. During the leadership period of Rabbi Cannon, a beautiful strategy for JLL encapsulating Hebrew, Zionism and JLL [informal and formal] has seen the light. I'm looking forward to Rabbi Thurgood's fresh look at this. His involvement on the board of the South African Zionist Federation also dovetails well with Herzlia's Israel education."

Says Geoff Cohen, Herzlia's director of Jewish identity and community, "Rabbi Sam is a highly qualified and experienced educator, but he's also a family man and a *mensch* who seeks to be an inclusive and engaging JLL leader for our Herzlia community."



Rabbi Sam Thurgood

Yeshiva's Yeish centre boosts curricula learning

Yeshiva College opened its Yeish (Yeshiva Extension, Innovation, and Support High School) centre on Wednesday, 11 May, to provide curricula support for students.

On the understanding that every child has strengths and weaknesses in different areas, the centre offers differentiated learning experiences or personalised learning, with support and extension offered.

"There isn't one educational system or curriculum that will suit every child," Sheryl Cohen, an educational psychology and Yeshiva College board member, said at the opening of the Yeish centre this week. "Education has moved towards what is called differentiated learning experiences or personalised learning. At Yeish, we're committed to teaching the whole child by offering support in areas of weakness and extension in areas of strength or interest."

The centre is accessible to pupils during and after the school day.

Yeish offers one-on-one lessons, small group lessons for specific subjects, functional Judaism for those who are new to a Jewish school, and functional Hebrew to navigate davening.

This will be offered through teachers, therapists, and technology. An example of the latter is using online platforms to review recorded lessons to practise and revise concepts.

Yeish is also offering a huge menu of subjects for matric through the IEB (Independent Examinations Board) online portal. This means that during and after the school day, children are



Dinah Unterslak, Sheryl Cohen, and Rob Long at the Yeish centre opening

able to access any IEB subject online at the centre, Cohen says.

"We are also aiming to offer a variety of short courses that interest or extend students. This is being investigated."

Yeish has launched the Eye Brain Gym programme, an online programme designed to improve reading and comprehension skills, as part of its extension offering. Forty four students have already signed up for the programme.

Situated on the ground floor of the Girls High School, the centre is accessible to boys and girls. It includes small group learning spaces as well as booths for individual learning opportunities (such as online lessons) and exam writing needs such as concessions.

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Hatred for the hunter

Imagine that the story began with the wolf lying peacefully in bed. Perhaps he's reading a story, flipping channels, or mindlessly scrolling through his Instagram account. It's a tranquil scene. All of a sudden, the night's calm is shattered as a door bursts open. A silhouette of a red faced angry hunter blocks the doorway. He's large, threatening, and armed, locked and loaded, and ready for a fight. Before the wolf has time to react, the hunter rushes over to the wolf who is now cowering under the duvet. And there the hunter slaughters. If that wasn't brutal enough, he then proceeds to rip open its stomach with his hunting knife.

Imagine that's where the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* begins and ends.

That, for the most part is the South African media's approach to Israel. And that's what explains the hatred for the hunter.

The spate of terror attacks over the past few months have largely gone unreported. So much so that South Africans would be surprised to hear that five people were killed in Bnei Brak at the end of May, three were murdered in central Tel Aviv in Dizengoff Street, a Jew was murdered in

Ariel, and a further three souls lost their lives in a terror attack in Elad on 5 May. South Africans will be unaware that the terrorists used guns, knives, and axes and that the murders were agnostic in terms of the geography and cared little if they were within or without the "disputed" territories.

Without this context, Israel's operation in Jenin seems random and without cause, and adds to the narrative. This undoubtedly contributed to the reaction to the death of Shireen Abu Akleh, the *Al Jazeera* reporter killed in the crossfire.

Supporters of Israel have noted the fact that whereas there's been little reaction to the death of many other journalists in Ukraine, the death of a reporter in Israel has captured the world's attention. Whereas this might signify an anti-Israel bias, I believe that it also speaks to a lack of context. No one is shocked (sadly) when a member of the media is killed in war-torn Ukraine, but it makes no sense in Israel where, because of a gap in reporting, it appears that Israel is indiscriminately marching into Jenin. There seems to be no reason for it, and that makes the death so much more perplexing and seemingly outrageous.

To this information vacuum add the

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



visuals of the funeral, in which Israeli police are seen attacking mourners. Few viewers have insight into the trauma and stress experienced by the nation and the police responsible for their safety. Most are unaware what would happen if they were to lose control over the event. All they see is the hunter bursting into the room and hacking the wolf as though in a fit of hatred and rage. And whereas I might be at a loss to explain what happened at the funeral, I can hardly imagine what someone less exposed to the facts might think.

South African media needs to tell the story. They have the responsibility to check their sources and to note when publishing an article submitted by a partisan entity. By not doing so and by focusing on only parts of a complicated story, they become complicit in misleading their readers and peddling half-truths. Only when media houses are held to account do we stand a chance of living happily forever after.

Chev celebrates nurses and carers

The Chevrah Kadisha celebrated its beloved nurses and carers on International Nurses Day (Thursday, 12 May). These carers, an integral part of the Chev team, were treated to goodie bags, a delicious lunch, entertainment, and given the opportunity to say why they love doing what they do. The Chev is blessed and grateful to have such wonderful people in its organisation.



Tuesday 24 May

- Union of Jewish Women hosts Brain Boost – a brain stimulation group. Time: 10:00. Entry R100. Contact: UJW office 011 648 1053
- ORT Jet hosts webinar, LinkedIn with Tilly Davies (Part 1). Time 09:00 to 10:00. Entry: free. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

Wednesday 25 May

- ORT Jet presents The Impact of Personal Finance On The Work Force with Gary Kayle. Time 09:00 to 10:00. Entry: free. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

Thursday 26 May

- Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts webinar, "Remembering the Holocaust in Austria". Time: 20:00. Contact: 011 640 3100 or dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za
- ORT Jet presents Behavioural Economics with David Zidel.

Time 16:00 to 17:00. Entry: free.
Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

Sunday 29 May

- King David Primary School Victory Park hosts its Open Day. Time: 10:00 to 12:00. Contact vpmarketing@sabje.co.za or 011 446 7865
- Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts the book launch of Gagman by Dov Fedler. Time: 10:30. Contact: dowi@jhbholocaust.co.za or 011 640 3100
- King David Primary School Victory Park hosts Yom Yerushalayim Fest. Time: 12:00 to 16:00. Contact vpmarketing@sabje.co.za or 011 446 7865



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