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Court victory for Jewish mother in sordid custody battle

NICOLA MILTZ

A Jewish mother whose weeks' old baby boy was kept from her by her abusive, estranged lover, last week won the right to equal contact with her beloved sons – a two-year-old toddler and a baby of five months.

The foreign mother, 28, with an Israeli passport, who first arrived in South Africa eight years ago, was victorious on Friday, 29 July, in the Johannesburg High Court.

It follows a bitter custody battle between her and the father of their two boys – a wealthy, high profile Johannesburg family and criminal attorney. The man, who has represented the rich and famous in family disputes, found himself embroiled in his own complicated and messy domestic tussle.

"At least I have my babies back with shared custody. It's a start," said the mom this week. The couple's identity may not be revealed according to a court order.

"My boys are my whole heart, my life. I've been through hell and they have been tossed about. I don't know what tomorrow brings, but I'm relieved and happy that with the amazing support of this incredible Jewish community and close friends, my boys will be with their mother, where they belong."

She told the *SA Jewish Report*, "This is a story of a man who used his power and influence to bully a young woman."

The Johannesburg High Court on Friday overturned a provisional order granted on 28 June whereby the children were to live with their father, and allowing their mother supervised visits for only two hours a day.

The dramatic court battle began after the mother took the children to Durban without informing the father on 26 June, allegedly in breach of a contact schedule she claims she was forced into by him under duress.

Leading up to this verbal agreement between them, he had allegedly taken the baby from her for nine days without letting her know where he was in a bid to force her to sign the said contact schedule. "He held my baby for ransom," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The couple's romance started off in the summer of 2018. She was an attractive entrepreneur and he was a high flying attorney with holiday homes, farms, and fancy cars.

They met when he was her divorce attorney in 2017. They began dating the following year, and officially moved in

together in 2019 with no plans to marry but with a desire to start a family together.

Their first son was born just before the start of COVID-19 and things seemed to be going quite well. She was open with him about her bouts of depression and anxiety, and kept it in check with medication.

Things became ugly and abusive during her second pregnancy, she said in court papers, with him becoming distant and less attentive.

She alleged in the court papers that he was having an affair while she was pregnant, and alleged he physically abused her when she was 35 weeks pregnant. He then moved out of their home a week before their second child was born, and broke up with her about five days after giving birth, she alleged in court papers.

**EVEN FROM HIS ALLEGED REFUSAL TO
ALLOW THEIR SONS TO BE BRISSED, TO
WHAT COLOUR SHE SHOULD DYE HER
HAIR, AND WHAT CAR TO DRIVE, THERE
WAS DISAPPROVAL AND BELITTLING.**

The former lovers both allege physical and verbal abuse in court papers. He accused her of having "fits of rage and manic outbursts" and being emotionally unstable.

The toxic and abusive relationship resulted in him obtaining the interim court order on 28 June which enabled him to keep the children under his roof. This order was granted after she took the children to Durban, allegedly without telling him.

She called on the court to reconsider this order, accusing him of separating her from her children. In her papers, she said she was left with no choice but to leave him as things had become intolerable. "Our relationship was tumultuous, and was one in which I had to endure emotional, financial, and even physical abuse," she wrote in court papers. She accused him of abusing her economically, belittling her, and threatening her.

In a dramatic turn of events in the Johannesburg High

Court on Friday, the mother emerged victorious after the judge overturned the provisional order granted on 28 June.

The father was ordered to share the children and pay maintenance. Represented by Ian Levitt Attorneys, this young mother managed to regain the right to equal contact to the children, and the father was ordered to pay costs towards their upkeep.

"He needs to know that complete strangers are looking after the well-being of his children, that the mother of his children is living off charity. He tried to make out that I was an unfit mother. This was heartbreaking in the extreme," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"Though I'm relieved that at least I have shared custody, I know there's still a long way to go. I'm still using my friend's credit card to buy groceries. However, this story is about a strong Jewish mother who is standing up for what's right with the help of the community. It's about standing up to a bully."

Wendy Hendler and Rozanne Sack of Koleinu SA attended court in a show of support for the mother.

"This is a classic, textbook case of domestic abuse. This woman allegedly suffered abuse in almost every area of the relationship from financial, emotional, psychological abuse to real harmful physical

Continued on page 14>>



Parleying with the president

Reeva Forman (right), representing the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, with President Cyril Ramaphosa and Reverend Nongqaba Mosunkutu at the ANC's policy conference last weekend.

See story on page 2

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ANC's summit shows party "locked in revolutionary mode"

TALI FEINBERG

The ruling party firmly placed itself in opposition to Israel while at the same time setting up camp with "rogue" nations like Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, Syria,

and Russia at the African National Congress' (ANC's) sixth National Policy Conference last weekend. However, there was also talk of upgrading South Africa's defence against terrorism. The conference, held from 29 to 31

July, was set up to examine progress on policy since the last national conference in 2017 and work on recommendations to be tabled at the next national conference in December.

Speaking to the media, the party's international relations sub-committee chairperson, Lindiwe Zulu, said, "What's also important here is that we reaffirmed the ANC's 54th conference resolution for downgrading South Africa's relations with Israel, and we supported the cause of lifting punitive and cruel sanctions against Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, Syria and elsewhere, where such sanctions have been imposed unilaterally and unjustly. "One of the issues discussed at length was the position of Israel at the AU [African Union]," she said. "We confirmed that as far as South Africa was concerned, we still believe that Israel shouldn't be given the status that it has been calling for at the AU, and that South Africa needs to continue to fight for the Palestinians."

"We also spoke about the ICC [International Criminal Court], and we said that we can use the ICC to address Israel's actions. On the two-state solution, we were asking ourselves the question whether this was still viable, particularly when you see that Israel has been taking more and more land illegally."

Said political analyst Daniel Silke, "The ANC remains largely locked into a revolutionary mode. There seems to be an increasing gulf between a much more even-handed approach to global affairs and this more revolutionary approach

that I think has been entrenched in the past year or so. It would seem as though the more radical approach is driven partially by an attempt to find unity within the ANC. Foreign policy isn't a major issue in the ANC, but it can bring some of these warring factions together and it's quite easy in a sense to use Israel as a political football, to support the Palestinians, Cubans, and Venezuelans, and ultimately also seem pretty acquiescent of Vladimir Putin.

radical grouping of countries should this continue. It may well be that US [United States] Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's visit to South Africa [from 7 to 9 August] could be an attempt by the US to shift some of this rhetoric on broad-based foreign policy issues."

Local political analyst Steven Gruz said, "We have heard this all before, except perhaps that the ANC sees the ICC as a forum to punish Israel. The ANC is immensely loyal to its international friends from the days of struggle. I find it ironic that the ANC so favoured sanctions when applied to South Africa, yet is so against them when applied to rogue states. This plays into its anti-West rhetoric."

"We're outraged yet not surprised by Zulu's obsessive compulsion with Israel, prioritised over all other international issues, where she once again singled out the Jewish State," said South African Zionist Federation Chairperson Rowan Polovin.

"South Africa's international credibility is increasingly being diminished by Luthuli House's ongoing posturing toward totalitarian dictatorships through its anti-West rhetoric," Polovin said. "Contrary to Zulu's comments, much of Africa and the Arab world is becoming friendlier with Israel."

"We call on the South African government to align its foreign policy with the values of the Constitution, to focus on benefitting the people of South Africa, and to focus on dialogue and

Continued on page 18>>

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The Tisha B'Av paradox

Torah Thought



Rabbi Ryan Goldstein – West Street Shul

Tisha B'Av is a confusing day in the Jewish calendar. It shares some contradictory dimensions. It's known as the saddest day in Jewish history but simultaneously it's called a *moed*, a festival, by the prophet Jeremiah in his book, *Eicha*.

Another question worth pondering is that the sages tell us that during the month of Av, happiness must be decreased. Why do the rabbis use this formulation of language? Why didn't they say that we must be sad or that we must increase our sadness?

During Tisha B'Av itself, there are seemingly many contradictions of behaviour. As mentioned above, the tragedy of the Temple's destruction has to be real for us. We may not busy ourselves with activities that will take our minds off the fasting and meaning of the day.

However, Tisha B'Av is the birthday of Mashiach, which should foster in our minds a promise of hope and an end to our long exile. Tachanun isn't recited as is customary on all festivals.

How do we understand this paradox?

Just as at the height of our greatest *simcha*, a wedding - at least one regarded by most as a happy occasion - a glass is smashed, symbolising our memory of incomplete happiness because of the destruction of the Temple, amid our greatest sorrow, every Tisha B'Av, we're reminded of great *simcha*.

Hashem doesn't want us to grieve excessively or lead miserable lives.

Too much sadness can lead us to spiral into depression. Depression is one of the *yetzer hara's* nefarious tools, preventing us from moving forward in life and from appreciating the good that we have.

The sages, in their wisdom, wanted

to temper the sadness of Tisha B'Av, and remind us that there are times in life where sadness is appropriate but it shouldn't be debilitating.

We excitedly await the end of our exile, knowing and appreciating the need to mourn. We'll merit appreciation for rebuilding of Jerusalem only when we mourn properly for its loss.

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Tisha B'Av, the 9th day of the month of Av, is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar.

- The spies returned from the Promised Land with frightening reports.
- The First Temple was burned and the Second Temple fell to the Romans.
- The Jews of Betar were butchered
- The Temple Mount was plowed.
- The 1290 expulsion of England's Jews and the 1492 banishment from Spain.

Kidnapping in Cape Town ‘an isolated incident’

TALI FEINBERG

The kidnapping of a Jewish mother in Cape Town has shaken the community to its core. The woman, who cannot be named at this point, is the daughter of the owner of a furniture chain.

She was kidnapped on Friday, 22 July, and held for ransom until she was released in the early hours of Wednesday, 27 July. The woman is married and is the mother of young children.

Many members of the community and their families overseas are questioning if this is a “new normal”. But CAP Security Chief Executive Mark van Jaarsveld says there’s no indication that the Jewish community is being targeted.

“It’s an isolated incident. Currently it’s not likely to happen again in the community, and it’s not something we have seen historically,” he says. “Furthermore, the kidnapping of women is very rare. The large majority of victims are men. Targets are usually foreigners lured to South Africa.”

At the same time, the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in Cape Town put out a message to the community. “As the organisation responsible for the safety and security of our community [in Cape Town], we have been planning for these kinds of scenarios for some time,” CSO Chairperson Shane Butlion and Director Loren Raize wrote in their message after the woman was released and back with her family.

“Kidnappings as a modus operandi in South Africa aren’t a new threat. Sadly, it’s a growing reality. Though we completely understand the fear, we want to reiterate that this wasn’t a specific Jewish targeted crime, nor did it happen at any Jewish facility,” they said. “CSO Cape Town remains committed to ensuring the highest possible level of protection for our community and that will never change.”

Says Raize, “Targets are linked to motive. In a kidnapping for ransom, it can be assumed that anyone perceived to have wealth and/or the means to pay can become a target. Every community will therefore have some targets that are more attractive, and this has nothing to do with religion. Jewish communities around the world are perceived to have money, and where this perception exists, so too exists the opportunity for someone to be selected as a target.

“There will be a period of reconnaissance where the perpetrators will need to understand the target’s routine in order to intercept them successfully and take the victim as quickly and efficiently as possible. The groups behind these types of kidnappings are organised and leave little to chance. Human beings are habitual creatures, and it’s this routine that any criminal will capitalise on.

“The first thing the family should do is get the authorities involved, even if they are instructed not to do so,” Raize says. “There are highly trained teams and experts with years of experience that will be able to guide the family through the harrowing process and the steps that need to be followed. Communication will take place via a series of phone calls. Some cases have lasted days and some weeks, even months.”

On social media, Cape Town CSO advised that if you are kidnapped, “keep calm and co-operate. Unless this results in an imminent threat to your life, do exactly as you are told. The best opportunity for escape is at the start of the attack. Try to draw attention to your situation. Don’t become aggressive. Try to build a relationship with the kidnappers without



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community to empower themselves by taking CSO training courses.

Generally, perpetrators will learn as much as possible about their target leading up to the kidnapping, they say, and advise people not to ignore anything that seems out of the ordinary. They also recommend downloading tracking apps, and giving a trusted person information that could be useful in finding you. They advise against flaunting wealth and posting information on social media about current or future locations.

Van Jaarsveld says highly organised professional groups will spend money, time, and resources in scouting a target, even paying informants. On the other side of the scale, there are amateur groups who may take someone randomly and not have a plan of action, meaning they won’t hold someone for a long time. He says most kidnappings are short – a car may be hijacked or a person taken to draw money from their accounts.

He doesn’t think it’s necessary to employ bodyguards, and says that the kidnapping of children is unlikely because it evokes more emotion and a more aggressive response from law enforcement. He reiterates that families should contact the police or community security organisations even if the kidnappers tell them not to.

“Hostage negotiation requires experience to evaluate the situation and guide the family. They work in the best interest of victims,” Van Jaarsveld says, pointing out that a victim could be held anywhere from a shack to a basement.

He notes that it’s recommended that the family keep quiet about their situation as it limits the information that could be used by perpetrators. He says welfare arms of the community would be brought in to assist the family with trauma counselling and any other needs.

The new national anti-kidnapping task team has been successful, Van Jaarsveld says, and he’s confident in its abilities. The task force was established in November 2021 following a spike in kidnapping cases in which a ransom was demanded.



becoming too familiar. Your senses may be deprived, such as a blindfold/gag. This may be exceptionally frightening. Try to stay composed and keep track of time and movement.”

In their email to the community, she and Butlion advised, “Always be vigilant and aware

systems are working effectively and are checked regularly. Limit the personal information you share on all social-media platforms. Break your daily routine. If you feel unsafe, drive to a safe place, a police station, or flag down a security vehicle.” They have also encouraged the





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Chinese thank SA Jews for assisting in historic hate-speech case

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African Chinese community has expressed gratitude to the Jewish community for supporting it during a protracted hate-speech matter in which it emerged victorious last week.

After a five-year legal battle, The Chinese Association (TCA) last week won a landmark victory in the Equality Court, which ordered 10 people to apologise and pay damages for hate speech for comments posted on Facebook directed at the Chinese community.

A series of vile, hateful comments were posted on social media following a 2017 *Carte Blanche* documentary on gross animal cruelty in the treatment and inhumane slaughter of donkeys raised and killed for the donkey pelt market in China.

According to court papers, comments on Facebook included, “Why don’t these Chinese get the f**k away from our country seriously go skin your own people leave our donkeys alone you mfs”; “Can we stop these slant eyes freaks from coming into the country?”; “Vile, barbaric people. Is there a living thing left in China?”; “They are the most disgusting things on this earth!! I wish they would start wiping themselves out; this earth be better off without them”; and “We need to get rid of Chinese in sa...they not welcome, they steal our economy, dogs, Rhino and now donkeys.”

The hate-speech matter was finally wrapped up last Thursday, 28 July, with judgment by Judge Motsamai Makume carrying with it a strong message about the consequences of spreading hatred and discrimination on social media.

His ruling dealt with the Facebook posts of 12 people who were among the dozens who posted on Facebook in response to the *Carte Blanche* insert.

Makume quoted the Constitutional Court, saying, “Speech is powerful – it has the ability to build, promote, and nurture, but it can also denigrate, humiliate, and destroy. Hate speech is one of the most devastating modes of subverting the dignity and self-worth of human beings.”

He assessed each statement against the law, and determined that 10 of the utterances amounted to hate speech, saying the comments constituted hate speech, harassment, and unfair discrimination against people of the Chinese race, and contravened sections 10, 11, and 7 of the Equality Act.

The respondents were ordered to apologise and pay R50 000 to the Hong Ning Chinese Aged Home. One of the respondents was ordered to pay R150 000.

Jewish communal leadership lent its support, guidance, and knowledge to the Chinese community during the run-up to the trial.

A friendship was formed between the two minority communities at the beginning of COVID-19, when members of the Chinese community were being viciously maligned and discriminated against over the pandemic, which

Masuku cases, our courts have sent out an unequivocal message that hate speech on the basis of people’s intrinsic identity, whether this concerns race, ethnicity, religion or other grounds, won’t be tolerated in our country.

“The SAJBD applauds the Chinese Association on taking up this important matter, and on pursuing it through to a successful conclusion.”



The Chinese Association members outside the Johannesburg High Court

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reportedly began in Wuhan, China, and shocked the world.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) extended a hand of friendship at the time by calling on the Jewish community to show its solidarity against the irrational treatment of the Chinese community by shopping at Chinese markets in Bruma and Amalgam, Johannesburg, in preparation for Purim in 2020.

Erwin Pon, the chairperson of TCA, said at the time that the gesture had “brought back our faith in humanity”.

It was during this time that Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD became aware of the longstanding legal battle in the Equality Court.

“We were saddened to hear the awful comments made on social media directed at this minority community, so we informed them of the Hate Crimes Working Group and the important work being done in this area,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. The Board kept abreast of the case, and continued to lend its support, she said.

Members of the Board were present during last week’s judgment.

Congratulating the TCA on the outcome, it said, “The SAJBD welcomes this important judgment, which represents another significant advance in the ongoing fight against racist hate speech and unfair discrimination in South Africa.

“As with the recently concluded [Jon] Qwelane and [Bongani]

The judgment was hailed as historic by the Chinese community in that it was able to take a stand through the courts against hate speech and discrimination directed at a minority group of South Africans as well as Chinese nationals living in South Africa.

In a letter to the SAJBD last week, TCA said it was grateful for “the hand of friendship and support” given to the Chinese community.

In it, Pon, who was one of the main witnesses, said, “Not only have you provided us with words of support and encouragement, but through your actions in attending yesterday’s court case in person as well as arranging the visit to the China Mall at the start of COVID-19, you have truly extended and held the hand of friendship tightly with our community. For this we’ll forever be grateful.

“It has been a tough road for us [a road which I know too well that you as a Jewish community have unfortunately walked many times],” Pon said. “And at times, it can be extremely lonely and daunting. But during this tough and difficult time, we took solace in the fact that we weren’t alone. We took comfort that we had you beside us on the journey.”

The managing director of TCA, Ernie Lai King, thanked the Board for “walking with us”. In a letter to Kahn, he said, “A landmark day after a long journey which you and the SAJBD shared with us in the fight against prejudice and hate speech.” Pointing out that hate speech had been dealt a severe blow, he said, “No community in South Africa or the rest of the globe must suffer the crime of hate speech.”

Ambassador gets to know SA “outside of government statements”

NICOLA MILTZ

“The South African Jewish community is important to the state of Israel and the country values its support,” says Ambassador Belaynesh Zevadia, the head of the Southern Africa department in the Israel ministry of foreign affairs.

Zevadia was in South Africa this week on a whistle-stop tour “to get a taste” of life here and meet different groups and communities.

She was appointed to the position seven months ago. Her role is to liaise with three Israeli ambassadors in Africa – Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotsercovsky; Israeli ambassador to Angola, Shimon Solomon; and Israeli ambassador to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia, Ofra Farhi.

These ambassadors report to her about their activities and together, they plan projects and activities to strengthen ties and co-operation between their respective countries and Israel.

Zevadia, who was born in Ethiopia, said she believes it’s important to come here to engage with people and form an understanding of differing views.

“It has been a dream of mine to visit South Africa for years, especially since I spent my childhood in Ethiopia and went on to study African Studies which involved learning a lot about this country,” she said. “Talking to people, getting a feel of what they say and believe, will help me understand and see for myself.”

Zevadia, who has her own astonishing personal story of struggle, resilience, and triumph, was hosted by Belotsercovsky.

“In Israel the idea of South Africa is mostly formed by South African government statements,” Belotsercovsky said. “So, it’s important for her to understand that people in South Africa are very friendly, there’s a great deal of interest to work with Israel, to see how we can co-operate. There’s a great deal of awareness of the achievements of Israel and an interest to see how these achievements can be relevant to the developmental challenges of this country and to the lives of ordinary South Africans.”

During her short stay, Zevadia visited Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Eswatini. She met representatives from communal organisations such as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Zionist Federation, and the South African Friends of Israel.

She has had an opportunity to engage with representatives of the Democratic Alliance as well as the Inkatha Freedom Party, the African Christian Democratic Party, and various church and religious groups as well as the media.

According to Belotsercovsky, at the time of going to press the South African government hadn’t responded to the Israeli embassy’s request to introduce Zevadia to officials from the department of international affairs and cooperation.

Zevadia was born in a Jewish village near Gondar in Northern Ethiopia. She was the youngest of eight children who all harboured a deep yearning to make Jerusalem their home one day, all taking very different routes to get there.

When she was 17 years old, her parents decided that she must make aliya and join her brother and sister who were already there.

“It was very difficult time,” she said. “I worried constantly about my family back home. I had to learn Hebrew from scratch, and when I went to university, I recall writing my notes in my mother tongue and

later translating into English and then into Hebrew.” In spite of these difficulties, she obtained her Masters in African Studies and Anthropology at Hebrew University.

Two of her older sisters and their young families walked for nearly a month to a refugee camp in Sudan run by the Israeli government and United States Jewish organisations. It took many years for her whole family to be reunited once again in Israel.

Her father, who was the equivalent of the chief rabbi of Ethiopia in their village, was wheelchair bound and elderly when he finally made it to Israel, where he lived his remaining days in Be’er Sheva before dying three years later.

Her brother, Yosef, was imprisoned for three years during Ethiopia’s Marxist period where he was taken from his school after teaching Hebrew and Judaism. He was her mentor and teacher growing up.

In 1993, Zevadia began her diplomatic career at the Israel ministry of foreign affairs cadet course and served in various positions around the world until she was appointed in 2012 to serve as Israel’s ambassador in Ethiopia – the first Israeli woman of Ethiopian origin to achieve the title of ambassador.

At the time, she said, “I left Ethiopia as a girl, now I’m returning as ambassador.” Zevadia met Israeli President Shimon Perez shortly before taking up the position. He reportedly said, “I’m proud of you and your work. You’re the first blossom of the Ethiopian community. The entire nation congratulates you.”

Asked how she felt about the South African government’s hostility towards Israel she said,

“Sad, very sad. When you read the news from outside, you wonder if everybody is like that. However, when you come here and meet friendly people, you see that we do have friends here in South Africa. Not everybody is against Israel, that’s only politics.”

The ambassador said she was hoping to gain a sense of how people felt on the ground about Israel, to meet people

from different communities, and to understand the situation.

“To be here physically, to see what’s happening here as opposed to only hearing about it on the news. Even to see different lifestyles of people here is something good to know,” she said.

She said the Jewish community here was “unique for us”.

“Even though the situation regarding Israel makes it difficult, the community never stops standing with Israel. Its contribution is meaningful, and Israel cares deeply for the Jewish community.”

Both ambassadors agree that the strong connection with Israel is “something quite unique in a sense that you don’t have so many communities where you can feel it to such an extent”, according to Belotsercovsky.

Zevadia’s wish for the South African Jewish community was to stay strong and united, supporting Israel whichever way possible.


She said it was important for the community to raise its voice when the need arose, and to react immediately to negativity, which was “very important to us as we are there in Israel and you are here”.

She said she would try to use the opportunity to see how Israel could share its experience and expertise in various fields in areas relevant to average South Africans such as agriculture, water management, food security, climate change, and cyber security.



Israeli ambassador to South Africa Eli Belotsecovsky and Ambassador Belaynesh Zevadia

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One big communal family

What we have as a community in this country is unique. I have a good sense that those who know about us, especially ex-South Africans, long for what we have.

We’re a real community of people who care about each other and have a sense of the greater good of the group. We absorb people into the community without much thought, making them feel very much at home. Often you don’t realise what you have until you no longer have it.

Where else do you find people saying *tehillim* for total strangers because someone they know knows that person who is in a life-threatening situation?

Where else do strangers cook food for you when you’re sick just because they were also sick at some point or because they can?

This was happening all the time during lockdown and the height of the pandemic, and is just another example of what this community is about.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen calls for help on social media within the community, and within minutes, the person who made the request is overwhelmed with help.

A few days ago, I had a conversation with a friend who emigrated years back. She enjoys her new home, but is desperately homesick. She has been living in the United States for more than a decade, and is too often reminded of what she left behind. Mostly her sadness has to do with family and the Jewish community being there whenever and wherever she was, and helping without being asked.

Somehow, even if we sling mud at each other, which we do, we back each other against anyone else. We might complain bitterly about this one or that one and even say terrible things behind their backs, but we still care deeply about one another and cherish the community we all belong to.

Somehow, even those of us on the periphery feel the warmth from the centre radiating out.

This is a truly incredible thing!

I was fortunate enough to spend last weekend with 41 of my closest family members. It was glorious! I’m lucky to have an incredible, loving family, most of whom are right here in Johannesburg. Nothing beats the joy of bringing in the Shabbos together, singing and laughing together. It is so precious a bond that you can be telling someone off one minute and sharing a beautiful moment with them the next. That’s family.

Granted those in the environment around us over the weekend must have thought, “These Yids are a bit mad” as we seem to sing a lot and make a lot of noise. But the warmth emanating from all of us was infectious.

This is a microcosm of our greater communal experience. We’re all like that. Even those of us who don’t have our own families around us could easily slot into this “family” dynamic because we have a shared reality and identity.

I say that in the knowledge that we all have different views on so many things and even carry out our religion in slightly different ways. Somehow, that seems to fall by the wayside when we’re together, sharing our experiences.

Now, after two years of not having shared experiences, I have to be honest, I’m really looking forward to Limmud next weekend. And for those who are likely to pose the question why I’m mentioning Limmud in my editorial, the answer is that nobody asked or paid for me to say this. I write it because I really believe it.

Why, you may ask? It’s simple. I’m the product of Jewish youth movements. I spent some years with Bnei Akiva and then went to Habonim. I love the communal atmosphere, experience, and learning they both brought me.

Limmud, as I have said a number of times, is Habonim or Bnei Akiva for adults, children, and entire families. It’s like a mini-machaneh, but one that as adults, we can play a part in.

That same feeling of community when we bring in the Shabbos and do Havdalah at sunset on Saturday is unbeatable. As I recall from the last in-person Limmud, that feeling is so special. It’s about community. It’s about extended family. It’s about a shared reality and identity, no matter our differences.

It’s a treat to be able to catch up with people you haven’t seen for ages and learn about things you hadn’t even considered before. That’s how it feels for me.

I’m well aware that some people don’t approve of Limmud. I accept that. They don’t have to. This is a world, country, and community where we have free choice and I choose to enjoy learning and participating in Limmud. You don’t not have to.

This community spirit spreads to crises and simchas.

In the past week, when we heard about a Cape Town mom who was kidnapped, the community around the country held its breath until she was safe. Sure, we couldn’t feel the devastation, fear, and anguish her family experienced, but in our way, we held them.

As I understand it, Jewish security organisations around the country were waiting in the wings to help if and when they were called on to do so.

That is our community.

I’m also thrilled to hear how our communal organisations get involved in helping those outside our community. What a pleasure to hear that the Jewish Board of Deputies went all out to help the Chinese community in its court battle against hate speech!

It shows that when we stand up against hate speech, we don’t do it only for our community. *Kol hakavod!*


This is further evident in our outreach projects, that it’s not just our community we care about. We care about the country and fellow South Africans. We don’t ever ignore the plight of others. And we don’t just say, “Shame, that’s sad!” We get off our behinds and help.

With times really tough and people within and without our community battling to make ends meet, let’s all lend a hand where we can.

If you haven’t got money to spare, go and help physically. If you have money and time, do something to help others. Whatever little bit you can do, go and do it.

The amazing thing about helping others is that it doesn’t just uplift those you assist, it’s personally uplifting.

May you have a meaningful fast on Tisha B’Av!



Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost

Editor

Why Tisha B’Av is worth fasting over

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



“*Rabbi, I dare you to give me a convincing argument why I should bother to fast on Tisha B’Av. Just don’t get too preachy and guilt-mongering on me. Good luck!*”

Benny

Dear Benny,

That’s a tall order. I don’t want you making personal choices based on my success or failure to inspire and inform, but I’ll attempt to make the case to care, maybe even fast, on this day.

Let’s start with the facts:

One thousand nine hundred fifty-two years ago, in the year 70 CE, the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Romans. This Temple had been built hundreds of years earlier by Ezra, Nehemiah, and many others, and then later renovated by Herod (a psychopathic dictator who attempted to atone for his cruelty by renovating the Temple). The Romans destroyed the Temple and laid waste to large swaths of the Jewish population in the holy land.

About half a century before that, the Babylonians (modern-day Iraq) came from the east and destroyed the first Temple, built by King Solomon, the son of King David.

Both destructions happened on the same day on the Jewish calendar – the 9th of Av.

Other tragedies occurred on this day, including the 1290 expulsion of England’s Jews, and the 1492 banishment of all Jews from Spain. That’s the history of the day. Let’s explore the relevance.

The Temple in Jerusalem was more than a mere place of beauty, music, and sacrifices. It was the nerve centre of the world. G-d’s light was revealed and palatable in ways we cannot imagine. G-d had a home in this world, and we had a place to be elevated and to expose our best selves.

Every day we live in a world without a holy Temple – Beit Hamikdash – is a day of living in a world without its heart. A world without a heart is a tragedy worth grieving over.

When we fast on this day, we’re making a statement to ourselves and the world that no matter how long it’s been, we’ll never accept a world that has lost its way.

The more time that passes without the light and the heart, the greater the lack that is felt. The fact that almost two millennia have passed since we stood in the Temple is a madness that we’re unwilling to accept.

I would argue that Tisha B’Av is as – or maybe more – relevant as ever. After

the past few years of international and local tragedies, our eyes are opened to the pain of this world. The cocoon and cottonwool were ripped from us, and we were forced to face the pain of this world, often at close range.

Fasting and crying on Tisha B’Av is an act of defiance against the cynicism that could creep in and say, “Get over it! Move on! Let bygones be bygones!”

No! We’ll not accept the terrible deaths that we’ve seen in our community. No, we’ll not accept the horrible rise in suicide and suicide attempts in our community. No, we’ll not accept the demolition of so many marriages, many of which could have



The Western Wall that still stands from the Second Temple (Beit Hamikdash)

and should have survived and thrived. No, we’ll not accept the addictions plaguing our youth (and many adults). No, we don’t accept a world of moral confusion and radical ideologies.

We’re fighting back by declaring that we’re not at peace with war. We cannot accept the unacceptable. We’ll not tolerate the intolerable. We’ll never cease fire.

This is why we fast. This is why we sit on low chairs. This is why we mourn.

And yet, on Tisha B’Av midday, we put away the toddler chairs. We start sitting like *menschen* again, even though the fast is still happening. Why? Because after grief, we must inject hope. Grief without hope is like a joke without a punchline – it leaves you empty. So instead, we turn our focus forward to a story of hope and promise.

And on Monday the music will be blasting again in the car because the music must go on.

Dear Benny,

Wishing you a meaningful Tisha B’Av. More importantly, I ask you to join in prayer that Moshiach comes now so that we walk together into a world of peace and wholesomeness.

Yours truly (and hungry), Rabbi Levi Avtzon

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

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Finding unknown family 70 years on

LAUREN SHAPIRO

Little did Brian Lurie know that, at the time of his death, a search was going on which would result in information that would alter his family history forever. Brian was born in Johannesburg in September 1943 to an unmarried woman, and was put up for adoption. “In those days, having a baby out of wedlock was frowned upon,” says Ora Villalobos, Brian’s biological sister. “She was 19. People do what they think is right. Perhaps she had old-fashioned values. Perhaps she was frightened of being judged.” Brian was adopted by Cessie and Alec Lurie in Durban. Although he knew that he was adopted, he knew nothing about his biological family. His biological mother, Clare Friedland, went on to marry Nathan Wollach in 1945 and raised four daughters in her native Cape Town. The girls knew nothing about the brother that had preceded them. “As kids, we always felt like there was some kind of secret, an invisible barrier between us and our mother. She carried an invisible burden. But not in a million, billion years would we have guessed what it was!” Ora says. About seven decades later, a cousin accidentally spilled the beans in a conversation with Ilana Gaash, Ora’s

younger sister. “She blurted out something about our brother. Ilana had no idea what she was talking about, but as soon as the truth dawned on her, things started to make sense,” Ora recalls. The sisters, now living in the United States and Israel, went on a mission to find their long-lost brother, but they had very little information to go on. “We didn’t even know his name. We just knew that he was born in Johannesburg in the early 1940s,” recounts Ora. “We hired an attorney and a social worker who specialises in this kind of thing, and we had to sue the department of social development to get access to files. Luckily, permission was granted.” At the same time, across the world, Brian’s daughter, Joanne Lurie, was also researching her past. “By some amazing coincidence, Joanne picked us out on a community forum about adoption. What luck and karma was that!” Ora says. They ran DNA tests, which confirmed a match. They had found family! Perhaps the saddest part of this story is that Brian passed away just a month before they found him. “Because the family secret was kept for all those years, we never got to meet him,” says Ora with a sigh. “It was hard to swallow that. It was extremely frustrating.” Ora says she’s not angry with her family for keeping secrets from



Alec Lurie, Ora Villalobos, Richard Friedland, Ian Friedland, Wayne Lurie, Laura Dison, and Janice Friedland at Brian Lurie's memorial

her. “We can’t really blame anyone,” she says. “People did what they thought was best. But it was frustrating, especially the timing. However, we have to look at the positive: we finally got the truth.” After COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, Ora made the journey to South Africa to attend the unveiling of Brian’s tombstone. “It was a wonderful trip and a celebration of Brian’s life,” she says. “We finally got to meet Brian’s family and embraced them into our lives.”

With Joanne living overseas, Ora met her brother, Wayne, and his eight-year-old son, Alec, in Johannesburg. “It felt completely natural,” she says. “He invited me to stay in his home, never having met me before, and it just worked. It wasn’t even awkward during our first meeting at the airport. It was absolutely awesome.” Ora says she felt comfortable around Wayne, and that it was easy to talk to him because their outlooks on life are very similar. “It’s so clear that he’s genetically related to us,” Ora chuckles. “There are shared mannerisms and physical similarities. We even think the same way.” “It’s an incredible story,” Wayne says. “It’s so ironic that I didn’t go looking for it, and yet suddenly, I have all this amazing family. We grew up knowing that my father had no siblings and that our family pool was very small. It’s lovely now to go from almost no family to such a wonderful big family.”

Wayne has loved getting to know his new extended clan in Johannesburg, spending Shabbats and *yom tovs* with them, and learning about each other’s past and present. “I’m dying to visit my aunts in Israel and am planning a trip there soon,” he says.

The quest is on to find more members of the long-lost family. “We keep hearing stories and names, and we’re pursuing every lead,” Ora says. They still don’t know who Brian’s biological father is, for example. “We’re still looking. We won’t give up.” DNA tests point to Brian’s father being of English or Scottish descent. “From what we know from our research, he may have

“It’s lovely now to go from almost no family to such a wonderful big family.”

come from the United Kingdom,” she says. Apparently, Brian had even mentioned that his biological father may have come from England or Scotland. It’s possible that he came as a soldier stationed in South Africa, where he met their mother. It’s unlikely he’s still alive, but there may be descendants of his that would want to know about the family relation. Ora used two global databanks in her search for her family: www.myheritage.com and www.ancestry.com. “You send for a test kit and mail back a swab of cells from the inside of your cheek. The company then analyses it and loads it into the database.” If someone strongly related to the family loads data, it will match. At this point, the process has done everyone an amazing amount of good, says Ora. “Secrets aren’t healthy. We’re so happy to have had the opportunity to

set the record straight.” But the search isn’t over. Ora and her sisters are determined to pursue the hunt for Brian’s paternal family. By raising awareness, they hope to be able to piece more of the puzzle together. Anyone who has any information can contact Ora at orazoe10@gmail.com.



Shabbat family dinner at Richard Friedland's home

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From ventilator to vitality: COVID-19 survivor finally comes home

TALI FEINBERG

Though many of us have moved on from the COVID-19 pandemic, some families are still embroiled in its devastating effects. Cape Town mother Lauri Berman’s family held their breath for the 10 long months that she was in hospital after contracting COVID-19. She spent 172 days in the intensive care unit (ICU), with 150 of those days on a ventilator. Many moments were touch and go.

When Berman finally came off the ventilator, “She couldn’t even move her fingers,” says her sister, Terri Sherman. “She had to learn absolutely everything again.” Her journey has been a rollercoaster ride, from coming off the ventilator to getting out of ICU, which was celebrated by staff, family, and the entire community.

She then spent months in rehab, learning to talk, walk, move, and breathe. In the middle of it all, she had a setback that landed her back in ICU. But a determined spirit, supportive family, and medical miracles got her where she is today. Berman came home at the end of July 2022, almost a year since she contracted COVID-19.

It all began when Berman contracted the virus in August 2021. She had been diagnosed with lymphoma, completed chemotherapy, and was in remission, but on a maintenance dose of chemotherapy. “She landed in hospital with COVID-19 pneumonia,” remembers Sherman. “Ten days later, she came home. But for the next three days, she had fevers, and was re-admitted to hospital. Doctors weren’t entirely sure what was wrong.”

Berman was sent for a routine investigative procedure. Her husband, Barry, and her sister were told they didn’t need to be there. “But early that morning, Barry phoned to say we had to get to the hospital now,” remembers Sherman.

The procedure never happened as all hell broke loose when Berman’s body suddenly became completely unstable. Her oxygen

saturation was in the 70s. Soon after, doctors said they would have to ventilate. “There was panic and tears. I remember Barry saying, ‘Come back to us!’,” says Sherman.

What was supposed to be a week on the machine turned into five heart-breaking months, with Berman battling numerous infections. Her young sons weren’t allowed to visit and didn’t see her until her birthday in March 2022, soon after she came off the ventilator.

Berman’s birthday, when she turned 45, was a cause for celebration, and the family went all out with cupcakes for the staff and balloons in the ward. It wasn’t just because she was another year older, but because of a deeply held belief in her family. “My grandfather would say that the most you can love someone is 44,” says Sherman. So we always used to say ‘love you 44’. But then my mother died at 44. We always felt

18 – the symbol for *chai* (life). It’s spiritual and significant shifts like these that made all the difference at the darkest moments. For ten long months, community members said *tehillim* for Berman. Sherman added more mezuzot to her home, and took to saying the Shema. Berman’s husband laid tefillin every day. Her family knew that she was a strong believer in the spiritual, and did all they could to bring that into the healing process.

As for Berman, she doesn’t remember anything. “It was like I fell asleep and woke up in a new world, with my boys a lot older,” she says. She doesn’t remember any encounters with a different dimension, but once she felt the presence of loved ones she had lost, keeping her safe.

“We had very different experiences,” says Sherman. “I was completely traumatised, and am full of fear.” Ironically, Berman never experienced that trauma, like one early morning when the family were called to the hospital as she was going into cardiac arrest. “We drove not knowing if she was alive. There were countless times that we were told that ‘the next 24 hours are critical’,” remembers Sherman. Many times they were told to expect the worst.

Berman’s experience was more about frustration at things like not being able to talk. For someone who had an active and busy life

before, she found depending on others difficult. Now that she has come home, her sister wants to help her, but she wants to do everything herself. She’s still on oxygen and has set herself goals to get off it as soon as possible. Her time in rehab was challenging but

also full of joy. “I loved the exercises and the challenges,” says Berman. In a breathtaking video made by her therapists, titled “The story of a survivor”, we see the progress she made, one step at a time. Her therapists also got her family involved. “One day, they wanted me to



step forwards and backwards, but I needed to be supported, so they got Barry to dance with me,” says Berman. “They even played our wedding song.”

It’s medical professionals like these that got Berman and her family over the finish line. When she came out of ICU, her husband thanked “the most dedicated and committed team, fantastic nurses, [and] unbelievable therapists at Cape Town Mediclinic”. The community also played a crucial role, and he thanked everyone from friends to rabbis.

Although the rest of us have left COVID-19 restrictions behind, Berman’s family and friends have to wear masks, sanitise, and take COVID-19 tests, as she is still immune-compromised. Having her home is a dream come true, but it’s not the end of the story. They have had to adapt their house, and she still needs to regain strength and capacity.

After Berman came home, it was finally time for her voice to be heard. Writing to the *tehillim* group, she said amongst other points, “Through your ongoing prayers, positive energy, and unwavering support, every one of you have helped me on my journey of recovery. I now know that there were many times when the odds were against me, yet you all continued with your prayers and positivity to give me the strength I needed to keep fighting.

“You also gave my family unwavering support. I feel so blessed for this gift of life that I have been given, and want to thank you all. I’ll never forget your support and the power of your prayers. As I keep getting stronger, I know you’re all with me on this ongoing journey.”



Lauri Berman leaving the hospital to go to rehab



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In Memory of
Sharon Sack

Sharon Sack was an integral part of the Jewish community for 27 years. She was renowned for her beautiful character and spirit. In her honour, her daughter Jacqui Sack, will be co-hosting this event to recognise her spirit. She passed on the 7th, of the 7th, made her 70th birthday and received 7 blood transfusions. "7" is spiritual and special in so many ways and she hopes to honour that spirituality by having the community support the blood drive-save 3 lives per donation and support just a few amazing NGOs' on the day.

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The power of female mentorship

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

We may mark Women’s Day this Tuesday, 9 August, but the reality is that most women still have to fight that much harder to attain success, recognition, and self-belief. Having the support of a female mentor who’s walked a similar path and triumphed is invaluable.

“Too many women feel like victims of their lives, and literally have no one to turn to sometimes,” says Kira Gelman*. “It’s a game changer to have a strong, loving hand offered to you saying, ‘Let me show you how.’”

Gelman is one of many women who have been mentored by physiotherapist, divorce mediator, and author, Stacey Lewis. “Feminine power is something special,” says Lewis. “There’s nothing more beautiful than when women uplift other women.” A single mother, Lewis is dedicated to mentoring divorced women facing similar challenges. “We speak the same language and we understand the complexities of being single mothers and having to worry about making a living too.”

Mentoring five or six women at any given time, Lewis is part of the Shoshana Foundation, which offers support and assistance to single Jewish mothers – widows and divorcees. “When I went through my first divorce – I’ve been through two – I felt so alone as a single mother,” recalls Lewis.

It was through her own process of healing and working on herself that Lewis realised the value of mentorship. “Having mentors as well as outstanding therapists and coaches made me feel like I wasn’t alone on my journey,” she says.

Lewis is also passionate about empowering women to upskill themselves. “It gives me a tremendous sense of self-satisfaction when I can be part of the process of seeing a woman blossom and transform sometimes from being a scared and helpless individual to becoming a powerful force to be reckoned with.”

Gelman says she’s inspired by the fact that Lewis is driven by the tough times she’s been through. “She became a wise and trusted sounding board for ideas that I had to build my career and also an emotional anchor. After I spent time with her, I felt stronger, because she practices what she preaches and her positive, calm energy is contagious.”

For Stacy Closenberg, operations

director at Cara Saven Wall Design, working with her boss and mentor, company founder Cara Saven, has helped her discover just how much she has to offer. “Cara saw my strengths even when I doubted them,” says Closenberg. “She capitalised on those strengths, helped me discover hidden talents, and gave me more responsibility to grow them.”

“When I started at the company, she taught me how she liked to work but allowed me to find my own path. She mentored me on both fronts. She’s an incredible leader who has genuine care and compassion for her team.”

Saven says that Closenberg inspires her too. “Having a mentee who is open to learning, is strong enough to handle constructive criticism, and puts her all into her work, is a gift,” she says.

“Stacy might have learnt a thing or two from me, but I’ve learnt so much more from her in terms of trust and letting go. She’s always looking at ways to grow herself. Yet, the real reward for me is watching her pass her skills onto those she’s managing.”

Reflecting on the value of female mentorship, Saven says that women are perfectly placed to empathise and look out for each another. “We’re in the unique position of truly understanding how much other women carry, how much we juggle, and how little time we often have for ourselves.”

Mentorship can be powerful not only in business, but in families too. Shayla Katzeff says that learning to trust her gut amidst uncertainty is just one of the invaluable lessons her mother, mentor and business partner Liza Katzeff, has taught her. The two joined forces in 2021 to start beauty business Shalicious Nails.

“Not only does my mom guide me and put my needs before her own, she also supports my decisions and always has my back,” says Shayla.

“She allows me to learn from my mistakes but uses her experience in business to help us get through them and grow. She’s nurturing and everything she does is with 100% commitment, an attitude that has inspired me to grow our business.”

Liza has also helped Shayla temper her A-type personality and explore situations from multiple

perspectives. “I’m very strong minded and confident and like things done there and then,” she says. “My mom has helped me learn sometimes to take a step back, reassess what’s going on around me, and react in a more productive way.”

Liza loves working with her daughter. “I feel blessed as a mother and best friend to have the time and chance to mentor Shayla in the basic skills of working with people on a daily basis as well as addressing aspects of business management together. We bring different strengths together to grow a successful business.”



Cindy Alter and Amanda Blankfield-Koseff

For Amanda Blankfield-Koseff, a social entrepreneur, guitar teacher, and singer, having the support of internationally acclaimed singer-songwriter Cindy Alter has enriched her musical journey. The two initially connected at a songwriter’s night organised by Alter. “She became my mentor and later, my friend,” recalls Blankfield-Koseff. Even though Alter recently moved to Nashville, their relationship continues.

“Cindy inspires me not only because she’s achieved so much in her music career, but also because she’s humble and friendly, unlike many other famous rockstars. She’s encouraged me to continue

my music career and helped me with singing techniques and song writing. She’s given me a platform to perform with her at a few shows, providing experience and exposure.”

Alter says she believes such relationships are the natural way of the world. “Watching someone grow and become the best version of themselves is pure joy to me,” she says. “Mentoring is being of service, which is my passion. It inspires me to see Amanda flourishing and thriving in her life.”



Stacey Lewis

* Name has been changed

Banyana Banyana victory inspires female soccer players

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The victory of South Africa’s women’s football team, Banyana Banyana, at the Women’s Africa Cup of Nations on 23 July shows that women have a place in soccer and the sporting world, says former soccer player Ariel Snoyman, 25.

“For younger women who love the sport, it’s potentially a great opportunity for them to pursue since, for example, there was a pledge to give the women’s soccer team the same pay and treatment that men receive,” says this University of Cape Town Business Science graduate, who captained King David Linksfield’s soccer team in matric and played for Highlands Park and women’s football club JVV FC, founded by Banyana Banyana captain Janine van Wyk.

“It means a lot for women’s rights,” says Snoyman. “It’s a great feeling to know we’ve accomplished something that people would never have thought possible. It’s motivating for anyone in any career where people are against you.”

Snoyman was inspired to play soccer by her late grandfather, who had been a part of a legendary Jewish family soccer team called The Snoyman 11.



Ariel Snoyman

in boys’ teams. The seven-year-old Hannah Brits is currently doing the same.

She trains at Ballers Soccer School in Cape Town five times a week, four of which are with boys, and plays in a league which doesn’t have many girls. “She holds her own with the boys,” says Brits’s mom, Gina. “She’s the only girl, and is treated like a boy now because she basically only plays with them. They all want her on their team as she’s a strong player.”

Also on the books of Green Point Salesian Football Club, Brits started showing signs of wanting to play ball early on. After seeing one of her triplet sisters playing club soccer, she decided to give it a try, and has since been absolutely obsessed with the game.

“In the beginning, I wasn’t sure if this is the kind of sport I wanted her to do,” says Brits’s mom. “I didn’t know anything about soccer. Now I’m completely invested. I absolutely love it. I don’t miss a match. I go to all their practices. I’m thrilled.”

She explains that for her daughter, Banyana Banyana’s win was huge. “In America, she knows women’s football is a big deal. She always says she’ll be a professional soccer player and she’ll live in America. So, when she found out that Banyana Banyana had won, she said, ‘Can I be a professional soccer player here?’ It brought home to her that it does exist here. She got quite excited at the thought of more girls starting to play soccer, and the fact that she’ll eventually be in an all-girls team.”

Snoyman recalled not getting great big crowds to watch their games. “It was more just like internally, the team created a mini family,” she says. “At school, our team used to be called *mishpacha* [family]. It made you feel a part of something bigger and a part of the team that really care about you.”

Valkin says sadly, not a lot of young girls play in South Africa. “Many of those who do are the poorest of the poor. Their development doesn’t come from investment really, it comes from them trying to escape the circumstances that they live in. Hopefully that’s going to change.”

She says she has always been one of the only females in the Jewish community to play soccer over a lengthy period.

“Some people don’t understand it, some are very impressed, but it’s always been nice for me. It made me unique in many ways.

“Soccer changed my life in the sense that it’s easy for Jewish kids living in South Africa to go to King David and stay in the community, but I played in a boys’ team in which I was the only girl and the only white person. All the boys were from Alexandra township. Our coach would bring them to practice in a kombi every day. It showed me another side of South Africa.”

Leaving for America and saying goodbye to these boys has been hard for Valkin. “They became some of my best friends.”

Alongside getting her degree overseas, Valkin hopes to play professional soccer in America or Europe in the future.

What Valkin likes about the sport is that “there’s running and muscle but also a lot of brains.”

“As a girl playing in the boys’ team, I was smaller than them, I wasn’t as quick, as fast, so I loved the element of actually using your brain and thinking in a physical context. It was my escape,” she says.

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Fighting Jewish stereotypes in China TikTok for this rabbi

JORDYN HAIME – JTA

With two degrees in Asian studies and 15 years of his life spent living and working in China – everything “from acting to the diamond business to real estate” – Rabbi Matt Trusch has a lot of experience with China. But antisemitism wasn’t one of those experiences until he began posting on Douyin, China’s TikTok, from his home back in Texas in 2021. Speaking in fluent Mandarin peppered with Chinese idioms and filmed in front of a bookshelf lined with Jewish texts, Trusch passionately shares Jewish parables from the Talmud and the Tanya – a book of Hasidic commentary by the rabbi who founded the Chabad Orthodox movement – and the life and business lessons they may offer Chinese viewers. With nearly 180 000 followers, his videos have accumulated nearly 700 000 likes. But the comment section under Trusch’s videos is revealing. In China, the line between loving Jews and hating them for the same stereotypical traits can be thin. On his most viral video, which has more than seven million views and explains how China helped give refuge to Jews escaping Europe during World War II, comments laced with antisemitic tropes seem to outnumber the ones thanking Trusch for

sharing Jewish culture and wisdom. “You don’t want to take my money, do you?” reads one top comment. “Wall Street elites are all Jews,” another comment says; others call Jews “oily people”, a play on the Chinese characters that spell out the word for “Jew”. Many blame Jews for the mid-19th century Opium Wars between China and foreign powers, or for inflation in pre-World War II Germany. Other commenters repeatedly ask Trusch to address Palestine on videos that have nothing to do with Israel. The comments reflect the fact that in the minds of many in China, the Talmud isn’t a Jewish religious text but a guide to getting rich. The belief has spawned an entire industry of self-help books and private schools that claim to reveal the so-called money-making secrets of the Jews. In his Douyin bio, Trusch appeals to this belief, describing himself as a rabbi who shares “wisdom of the Talmud”, “interesting

facts about the Jewish people”, “business thought”, and “money-making tips”.

And yet, some of the most popular antisemitic comments on Trusch’s videos reference the so-called “Fugu Plan”, a 1930s proposal by several Japanese officials to settle 50 000 German Jews in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. Some in the Japanese leadership were inspired by the antisemitic forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, believing that resettling Jews in occupied China would attract great wealth and the favour of world powers like Britain and America. The Fugu Plan never came to fruition, but the antisemitic and ultranationalist political blogger, Yu Li, (who blogs under the name Sima Nan) has shared the story with his nearly three million followers. In a 20-minute-long antisemitic rant, he said the Fugu Plan was evidence that the Jews colluded with the Japanese to establish a Jewish homeland on Chinese territory – a conspiracy that fits a nationalist narrative that China is constantly under attack by foreign powers. Sima Nan isn’t the only prominent figure known for antisemitism. Even in a country with as few as 2 500 Jews – mostly foreign nationals – among 1.4 billion Chinese, antisemitic conspiracy theories appear to be alive and well, at least among online commenters, anti-Israel leftists, and some prominent Chinese nationalists. Jews living in China are likely to tell you that they’ve rarely experienced what they would consider antisemitism. As in any other country, young people on social media are being introduced to antisemitic ideas and conspiracy theories – such as a correlation between Jews and COVID-19 – that they would be unlikely to encounter elsewhere, said Simon K Li, the executive director of Hong Kong’s Holocaust and Tolerance Centre. One recent study of China’s online “alt-right” community didn’t find signs of significant antisemitism, but Kecheng Fang, a co-author of the study, said it’s no surprise that “sensationalist



Rabbi Matt Trusch explains in Mandarin what Jews have done for the world

Photo: JTA

Trusch told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that appealing to Chinese stereotypes about Jews was a strategic decision meant to expose more Chinese people to Jewish precepts. Appealing to Chinese interest in the Talmud as a business guide is strategic for another reason: religious activity is complicated in China, where Judaism isn’t one of the five recognised religions, and proselytising by foreigners is forbidden. “Pirkei Avot and the Talmud don’t mean religion in China, even though those are Jewish texts that we learn Torah from,” Trusch said. “If I were to say, ‘I’m going to teach Torah concepts in China’, that would probably be forbidden. But if I talk about things from the Talmud, then it’s not threatening.” Trusch always had an interest in China. After getting an undergraduate degree in Asian studies at Dartmouth College and a master’s degree at Harvard University, he spent 12 years in Shanghai doing business in a range of industries. While he was there, he grew closer to Judaism and began flying to Israel every two weeks to study at a yeshiva there. In 2009, Trusch moved back to the United States with his family and settled in Houston, where he’s active at two Chabad centres. Still, he made frequent visits to China on business (including starting his own Chinese “white liquor” company called ByeJoe) until the pandemic struck in 2020. With no way to visit China in person, Trusch and his partner began making videos about Judaism on Douyin as a way to connect with people there. “When I was in China, I very rarely felt anything but a fond appreciation of Jews” from Chinese people, Trusch said. He was aware of the stereotypical way Chinese people think about Jews: as intelligent and business-savvy, paragons of worldwide wealth and power, with control over Wall Street and the media. Much of the time, these traits are viewed with admiration.

Jews living in China are likely to tell you that they’ve rarely experienced what they would consider antisemitism.

nationalist” figures are spewing antisemitism online. Chinese authorities are aware of hate speech online. In June, a BBC investigation into an industry of racist videos popular in China prompted a response from the Chinese government. China’s embassy in Malawi, where one racist video was shot, said it “strongly condemn[s] racism in any form, by anyone or happening anywhere”. Later that month, China released a set of draft rules instructing content platforms to review social-media comments before they are published and to report “illegal and bad information” to authorities. But these developments haven’t seemed to have made much impact, at least on Trusch’s videos, which receive a fresh set of antisemitic comments each time he posts daily.

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Fliss given honorary citizenship of Iași, the city that tried to kill him

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Eighty-one years after Lyonell Fliss and his parents were saved by the skin of their teeth from being murdered during the savage Iași pogrom in Romania, the Johannesburg-based 87-year-old returned to the city to be awarded the honorary citizen of the city of Iași.

He was given the award in front of a capacity crowd of a thousand people at the Bucharest National Opera House in Romania on 29 June.

Fliss was born in the Romanian city of Iași (pronounced Yahsh) 87 years ago during World War II.

"At the time, Iași was the historic capital of Romania, full of palaces, universities, theatres, and opera houses," says Fliss.

However, Romania had been one of the most antisemitic countries in Europe, being the last to grant citizenship to Jews after World War I.

On Sunday, 29 June 1941, already two years into World War II, Iași was the location of one of the worst pogroms in the Holocaust, with 13 000 Jews murdered in the city.

Recalling that day in his article titled *That Sunday*, Fliss wrote, "At dawn, when we were still sleeping in our apartment on Bratianu Street, we heard shooting from the street, followed by shouts and wails that woke us up."

His mother immediately screamed in horror, "It's [a] pogrom!" Then she asked Fliss, six years old at the time, and his dad to hide under a bed.

A while later, German soldiers entered their apartment.

"The first thing they did when they entered the bedroom was to turn the bed upside down, exposing us to the German army," wrote Fliss. "They ordered us to get up and go out on the stairwell. When we got to the stairs, my mother, who had lost sight of me in those moments



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

of panic, turned around to look for me. Then the German, who was now face to face with her, pushed her over the steps and she lost her balance, rolling a whole level [down] to the ground floor.

"Terrified, dad and I went down the steps to help her get up, because, poor thing, she was lying moaning with pain, full of blood and motionlessness. We lifted her up and helped her to walk. Later, the doctors found that she had broken a kneecap, which she suffered from for the rest of her life.

"At the order of the Germans, we went out onto the street with our hands raised, herded from behind by a German soldier with his rifle at point-blank range, yelling all the time and having fun hitting my father in the back."

Fliss and his family were marched to a police station where Jews were ordered to present themselves to be searched, but actually the intention was to murder them.

"After a fairly long time, we arrived in front of the police courtyard gate," wrote Fliss. "From inside the courtyard, we heard shooting, and when the gate was opened, I

could see a mound of corpses.

"My mother immediately realised what was going to happen to us and approached a Romanian officer who was 'keeping order' at the entrance, knelt in front of him, and said to him crying, 'Officer, you can let me and my husband pass through the gate but keep this child [pointing to me] outside, take him and adopt him, and he will love you all his life.' The officer, a young man completely unknown to us, helped her to get up, and said to her, 'I will seek to help you.'

"He kept his word. He took my mother by the hand, she took mine, I took my father's and he led us back, against the stream of people, to the start of the queue, where he left us. This gave us the chance of survival which came about because in a short time, it was announced that an order had come from the government to stop the massacre."

Fliss and his parents survived.

Fliss's article about the pogrom was published in Israeli and Romanian publications. "Writing about how I saw this pogrom with the eyes and the mind of a six-year-old child attracted attention because, until then, all the descriptions of the pogrom were made by historians and journalists, but not by a child. It attracted the attention of the Jewish community of Iași, to which I made a presentation on the article about one and a half months ago in Iași," says Fliss, who, every five years, travels to his university in Romania to meet his fellow alumni of the class of 1957.

"I was invited to make a presentation. The public was impressed and emotional. Some asked the organisers of

this presentation to apply to the mayor of Iași to award me honorary citizenship of the city. So, it wasn't just for the fact that I was a survivor of this tragedy, but the way I presented it.

"I went back to Iași about five weeks ago to receive this award. It was a large, emotional ceremony. The reason it occurred on this particular date [29 June] was because that day was the 81st commemoration of the pogrom, so on the same day I survived the pogrom, I was awarded 81 years later."

The award made Fliss feel honoured and emotional. "I considered that this award wasn't given only to me, but also to the victims of the pogrom on 29 June 1941," he says.

Fliss says survivors of the Holocaust aren't heroes. "Their survival depended on the heroism of those who saved the lives of survivors, or was due to circumstances and good luck. In my case, my parents and I survived due to the heroism of an unknown saviour, a Romanian army officer who saved our lives without receiving any benefits but risking his life. There were some who didn't just risk their life to save Jews, they sacrificed their life."

Today, Fliss lives happily in Johannesburg, his home for 47 years. "Romania after World War II became a communist country, like a big jail. You weren't allowed to leave the county. You were locked in. You had to take great risks to get out. The borders of communist countries was the Iron Curtain, so I took the chance to cross it, and managed, just as I managed to survive the Holocaust. I went to Israel and lived there for six years. Then, for professional reasons as a civil engineer, I chose to come to South Africa where there were better opportunities. This was 47 years ago. I landed in Johannesburg in 1975. I was chief engineer for Murray & Roberts."

Fliss doesn't have any children, but has family including cousins in Israel and Europe.

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Welfare organisations under pressure as poverty levels rise

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

With rising inflation causing the steepest repo rate hike in almost 20 years, those who depend on welfare to make ends meet are hardest hit, and the organisations that assist them are working harder than ever.

The Reserve Bank increased the interest rate 75 basis points in July, meaning that the repo rate is now at 5.5% and the prime lending rate 9%. Economists predict that inflation will probably remain above 7% for the foreseeable future, while rates will likely continue to rise. It exacerbates South Africa’s already staggering poverty crisis, and, speaking to community organisations, it’s clear that the Jewish community is far from immune.

As the largest Jewish welfare organisation on the African continent, the Chevrah Kadisha (the Chev) is at the frontline of increasing needs. “The current inflationary climate means those we’re already helping need more assistance and those that were just managing on their own can no longer do so,” says Saul Tomson, Chev group chief executive.

“The worse the situation becomes with the rising costs of food, fuel, and other necessities, the more people turn to the Chev. We have to be there to assist as there’s often nobody else and there are no government interventions available. The population we serve is vulnerable, and most don’t have family in the country.”



Packing food for families in need

Rising economic pressure is exacerbating an already challenging situation caused by COVID-19. The pandemic led to increased costs to protect the Chev’s 1 000 residents and increased welfare demands as a result of people losing their jobs and businesses.

In the past financial year, says Tomson, financial assistance to community members increased by nearly 30% – including COVID-19-pandemic welfare – totalling R57.1 million compared to R46.5 million the previous year.

“Since the start of COVID-19, we have supported an additional 17% of Jewish families, and this remains the situation,” says Tomson. “We now reach nearly 900 families monthly, providing almost R60 million per annum in financial assistance.”

The Chev spends close to 10% of its annual R313 million budget on catering, producing

about 2 500 meals a day for residents at Sandringham Gardens as well as for residents at allied Chev facilities, Jewish patients in hospital, and food parcels for those in need.

“Between January 2022 and now, we have experienced enormous increases in the costs of food,” says Tomson. “Increases in the cost of staples such as bread, oil, poultry, hake, and beef have resulted in the Chev now paying about R80 000 a month more today than we did in January this year – about R1 million more per annum. This is in spite of the fact that we benefit from bulk buying and special donor-supplier discounts.”

FUNDRAISING IS A LOT HARDER BECAUSE ALL THE NPOS ARE SUFFERING, SO YOU HAVE TO THINK OUT THE BOX TO GET PEOPLE TO CHOOSE TO GIVE TO YOU – THERE HAS TO BE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.

Jewish Community Services (JCS) fulfils a similar mandate in Cape Town. A non-profit welfare organisation which offers services including social work, material relief, a food bank, accommodation, employment programmes and more, JCS has also observed an increasing need for support.

“More and more people are approaching JCS for assistance,” says Executive Director Hazel Levin. “There are those who are approaching JCS because of loss of income or jobs. We even recently had an evicted community member come to us off the street.”

As was the case at the Chev, JCS also faced added pressure during COVID-19. It spends about R300 000 on food a month. A total of five hundred and fifty people are assisted through the JCS Tikvah Foodbank as well as through the hot meals on wheels made at Highlands House.

Court victory for Jewish mother in sordid custody battle

>>>Continued from page 1

abuse,” said Hendler, Koleinu SA director.

“This is about a man who allegedly wielded his enormous wealth, power, and influence over a vulnerable, isolated woman with no family support in South Africa, with visa issues and no means to earn a living, and he used all this to demean, hurt, punish, humiliate, and denigrate her and ultimately attempt to remove her children from her.

“Domestic abuse is all about power and control, and the red flags were apparent right from the start. Even from his alleged refusal to allow their sons to be brisled, to what colour she should dye her hair, and what car to drive, there was disapproval and belittling. It can be subtle in the beginning. That’s why people don’t see it or tend to dismiss it because most people want to focus on the good in a person, but it always comes back to haunt us in the end. This is what women need to look out for. Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour. It runs over time, and is not just one thing, an abuser

The dwindling Jewish community in Cape Town, which numbers about 13 000 people, many of whom are elderly, poses a challenge. “Everybody is going for the same pot,” says Levin. “The donors are depleting and exhausted, so we need to look for international support and other alternatives. We’re in a crisis, and we know that interest rates are going to hit us soon. We have to stick to firm financial criteria in terms of who we support.”

JCS Financial Manager Bevan Buck believes that we’ll feel the real impact of rising inflation and interest rate hikes only in the next three to six months. Those who are just making it or who aren’t making it will be the worst impacted, he says.

Johannesburg’s leading, independent Jewish food fund, Yad Aharon & Michael, provides food assistance to 700 families in need in the Johannesburg Jewish community.

“The number of people applying for food assistance increases weekly,” says Jody Eberlin, who oversees Yad Aharon’s marketing and food projects. “We’ve had 110 new applicants sign up between September 2021 and July 2022. This number will increase before *yom tov* and beyond, as we’re seeing only the tip of the iceberg in terms of how the economy and after-effects of COVID-19 are limiting people’s ability to earn an income.”

With rising prices, increasing numbers of recipients, and reduced donations as all South Africans take financial strain, NPOs like Yad Aharon have had to increase their fundraising and negotiate with suppliers for lower prices and food donations.

The fact that the elderly make up much of South Africa’s Jewish community poses a challenge, says the Union of Jewish Women’s (UJW) chairperson, Ingrid Koor. “People are living a lot longer but their money isn’t living as long as they are, and they have no income stream,” she says. “A lot of Jewish people are suffering, much more than in the past.”

Among its many projects, the UJW has been providing cooked kosher mobile meals for more than 50 years. It currently provides about 1 500 meals a month to about 100 recipients. “Recipients have to be over 75, in financial need, and unable physically to cook for themselves,” Koor says.

“Fundraising is a lot harder because all the NPOs are suffering, so you have to think out the box to get people to choose to give to you – there has to be an emotional connection,” she says. “Before you never needed a fundraiser or a marketing company, but you have to have that now to compete against everybody else. You have to spend more to make more.”

operates over many areas, all the while putting the person down and making them doubt their own sanity,” said Hendler.

“From Koleinu SA’s perspective, the biggest issue in this case is one of parental alienation in which one party uses the children as pawns in a power struggle to hurt the other party. In this matter, the father removed an infant from the mother’s custody. This is a clear sign of abusive and highly controlling behaviour, and should never be tolerated.”

A forensic psychologist has been appointed to investigate issues of “primary residence, contact, and care of the minor children.”

“Pending finalisation of the investigation, the parties shall have shared residence in respect of the children. The parties shall exercise contact with the children on an intended equal ratio. Neither party shall remove the children from the Republic of South Africa without the express written consent of the other party,” the court ruled.

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Collaboration is key to communal welfare in crisis

STEVEN GRUZD

Jewish welfare organisations are under pressure around the world, facing ageing populations, the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and diminishing assistance from local governments.

Their funding pool is shrinking, many people are heavily indebted, and a global recession looms on the back of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, these organisations continue to provide vital services to Jewish communities and can learn from others facing similar issues.

These key messages emerged in a webinar featuring Jewish communal welfare organisations from South Africa, the United Kingdom, Israel, and the United States on Sunday, 31 July.

They all commented on how their governments had retreated from providing adequate services – a situation exacerbated by the pandemic – creating a void for Jewish organisations to fill.

In Johannesburg, the Chevrah Kadisha

(the Chev) has replaced government services that are insufficient, inefficient, and ineffective. “The Chev provides for the Jewish community from the cradle to the grave,” said Chief Executive Saul Tomson. “Pensions and disability grants are woefully inadequate in South Africa.”

Changing Jewish demographics in South Africa and a desire to avoid duplication led the Chev group to become an umbrella organisation. Tomson noted that the community was greying, with many younger people having emigrated, leaving their ageing parents in South Africa. He said that when a family overseas was concerned about their elderly relatives in South Africa, they should alert the Chev immediately and allow them access to these homes.

Mark Cunningham is the chief executive of the Federation of Jewish Services (the Fed) in Manchester. In existence since 1867, it offers social work, children’s services, mental-health services, and residential and nursing care. As is the case in South Africa, older people are living longer lives, increasing the need for care. People in the 80 to 84-year-old category in Manchester will increase 30%

by 2030, as will those aged over 90. There will be a 22% increase in those living with dementia in this period. More people with disabilities are living longer and need care well into adulthood. Funding becomes stretched with competing needs. “We have a responsibility to design our services to align, not overlap,” Cunningham said.

“Jewish families are floundering from debt, mental-health issues, and COVID-19,” said Bayla Perrin, the chief executive of the London-based Paperweight Trust, which offers legal, financial, and welfare services to Jews in need. “We help fragile families pick up the pieces, especially as some local authorities have shut down,” she said.

Moshe Schapiro, the chief executive of Yedidut Toronto, joined from

Jerusalem. Schapiro identified unmet mental-health needs in the haredi (religious) community as a pressing problem, but said there is an increasing willingness to deal with sexual-abuse issues. Schapiro said services need to be tailored to the cultural sensitivities of each particular community, something that

the government struggles to do. However, he said, the non-governmental organisation sector was competitive in Israel and while these organisations may wish to collaborate, “it doesn’t always happen”.

Rabbi Boruch Bender founded the Achiezer Community Resource Center in New York 13 years ago. It offers services like medical referrals, assistance with insurance, and counselling. He said local government was “in excuse mode” after the pandemic.

How do all these organisations overcome the stigma some people feel when approaching them for help? Bender said they tell people, “You have come very far, and it’s okay to ask for help. It’s okay not to be okay. At the first meeting, people tremble. They have never done this before. I look them in the eye and say, ‘This is a difficult moment for you, you are now on the receiving end. Hopefully you will come back when you can give to others.’”

Perrin said people contact Paperweight “in desperation”. “In England, talking about debt is the last taboo,” she said,

as people have become more accustomed to talking about difficult subjects like mental health and abuse. “They seldom reach out for help before the crisis hits,” she said.

“The amount of volunteerism and *chesed* [compassion, loving-kindness] is unbelievable,” said Chaya Spitz OBE, chief executive of Agudas Yisroel Housing Association in London. “I’m so proud when I take people from outside the community to see what we do – they are bowled over!

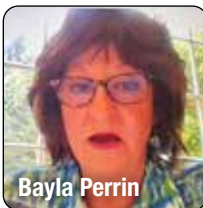
People want to do good, and we need to galvanise that.”

All the organisations stressed the importance of keeping confidential the details of those they assist. Most follow a code of conduct, and those who rely on professionals demand the highest ethical standards. People need to know it’s safe to share their difficulties.

“The concept of *chesed* appears more than 250 times in the Torah. This means we have to look out for those less fortunate,” said the panel moderator, Lord Jonathan Kestenbaum.

In these tough times, Jewish communities the world over know how to look after their most vulnerable members. They need the support of all of us to support others.

• The event was hosted by the UK’s Paperweight Trust, and supported by the Zeev & Paula Racker Social Welfare Initiative.



Bayla Perrin



Moshe Schapiro



Rabbi Boruch Bender



Saul Tomson



Chaya Spitz



Lord Jonathan Kestenbaum



Mark Cunningham

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Swimming against the tide of drowning deaths

TALI FEINBERG


It took only a few seconds for two-year-old Nathaniel 'Natey' Canter to wander to his family's swimming pool on a hot Cape Town December day in 2016, and drown. Now, in light of World Drowning Prevention Day on 25 July, his parents want others to be aware of the dangers of water.

"The biggest thing was how quickly it happened," says his mother, Jane Fraser. "It was silent and undramatic. I was right there." Her message to other parents is "to make your children as water safe as possible, as quickly as possible. You cannot be too careful or too safe. The number of people I see who have pools with no protection is alarming. A lot of hotels and B&Bs have open pools and ponds too.

"Don't assume it's just neglectful parents that these things happen to. There can be a degree of comfort in thinking 'bad things happen to other people'. The sad fact is it could happen in the time it takes to go to the loo. Water is dangerous - way more than you'd expect."

Looking back, "Natey loved water and swimming. We had been actively swimming with him and informally teaching him, but he had not yet actually had formal lessons. We'd approached a few swim schools but had not yet been able to get him in. We had a baby gate on our outside door, and a pool net. We had also just bought a pool fence and were days away from having it installed. "We were drilling him not to go near the water without us, and had repeatedly read *Curious George at the Aquarium*, about a baby penguin that fell into water and needed to be rescued, explaining to him that it happened because the baby penguin didn't listen to his mommy and went to the water without her. Sadly, in the moment, none of it seemed to make any difference.

"Do not let your children have free access to open water at all," she emphasises. "They are compelled by it and will approach it. It seems water and fire have similar innate appeal - and similar catastrophic risks. Absolute vigilance is the necessary condition for parents.



"Knowing CPR is a good idea," she adds. "I still wonder if maybe I did it wrong, focusing too much on mouth-to-mouth and not enough on chest compressions. Know your emergency numbers. We had them printed out and I needed that, because your mind goes blank. Call for help as fast as possible."

One of the most horrific aspects of a drowning death is that "it's classed as a 'preventable death' and also because it's an 'unnatural death', it gets investigated,"

explains Fraser. "This is something we didn't know. Six months after Natey died, and when I had just conceived Benjamin, I was called in to the police station and told that I had to get legal assistance with the case. It was devastating and completely caught me off guard, at a time where we had just started trying to move forward. We now work to try help prevent drowning tragedies, but when it does happen, we help to let the parents know what to expect in the months following, so it's not so additionally traumatic."

She and Natey's father, Andrew Canter, now have Benjamin, "who has bought new joy to our lives. But he hasn't replaced Natey. We still love and miss Natey dearly and think of him daily. We speak of him often, including with Benjamin, who knows all about Natey and even sometimes cries and says he wishes Natey was still here."

With Benjamin, "We were very proactive about water safety," she says. "We had him in swimming classes since he was six months, drilling into him how he may not go near water without us being with him. It took me a full five years to be able to contemplate getting back into our swimming pool. I took Benjamin in for the first time at three-and-a-half years old and he was able to swim across. It was a difficult but cathartic moment."

Fraser finds it difficult to see Benjamin reaching milestones that Natey never got to. "Benjamin is four now, while Natey only got to two years and four months. It's also been bittersweet to see Natey's friends growing up while he remains frozen in time and our memories."

At the time of his passing, Natey had just finished his first year at the Alon Ashel Herzlia play group in Sea Point. "I was absolutely blown away by the support of the Jewish community," says Fraser. "It still gives me goosebumps to think about it. Natey drowned at sunset on the Friday. On Saturday morning, Cheryl Lazarus (Alon Ashel's principal at the time) arrived. She wrapped us in her supportive embrace. From then on there was a steady stream of people, food, and support. When we were dazed and didn't know what to do, the Jewish community gathered around us. I am in awe and indebted to the absolute metaphorical safety net and comfort shawl that the Jewish community provided.

"The death of a child is something that never leaves you," she says. "It's like having a limb amputated. At first it is acutely agonising, almost unbearable, and very hard to accept. But in time you learn to live without it, but there's clearly something missing. Andrew loved Natey with his whole heart - my biggest life regret is being responsible for cutting their great love story short. It was a complete fairy-tale, with the most tragic of endings."

Preventing such a tragedy was the life mission of the late Rikki Kotzen, who almost drowned herself as a child. "Her

domestic worker jumped in to try save her, and also almost drowned," says Cairn King, a swimming teacher at the late Kotzen's Johannesburg school, Infant Aquatics Academy. "She was passionate about ensuring that both children and adults could save themselves in water, and would always give discounts to domestic workers doing the course."

Kotzen trained King, and now King is continuing her legacy. But she needs help getting to the Infant Aquatics headquarters in Boulder, Colorado for a five-week training course in teaching small babies survival swimming. Kotzen's husband, Ryan, managed to raise about \$4 000 (R66 000) towards this, but it costs \$12 000 (R198 000)

just for the course, says King. She would be extremely grateful for any contribution, which would be an investment in making more children water safe in South Africa.

"My own son had just finished the course with Rikki when he fell into a pool in 2019. Thankfully he had done the course, and could save himself," she adds. Her training will allow her to teach babies from the age of six months, specifically, this skill - to turn themselves on their backs and get air while they wait to be rescued. It won't matter what they are wearing - even clothing or a full nappy - they will be able to do this.


If parents can't get their children into a survival swim course, any swimming lesson is better than nothing, says King. However,

she warns parents not to use any flotation devices; they give children a false sense of security and can make it difficult to turn over if they fall in head first. She warns against going with swim schools that use flotation devices. Rather, parents and teachers can hold children in the water. Getting them used to their faces being wet is also vital as soon as possible.

"We've had people from all sectors of South African society lose children to drowning," says King. "Don't wait to get your children water safe. After all, accidents don't wait."

To support King's training in the United States, visit www.gofundme.com/f/rikki-kotzen-saving-childrens-lives

Kai Marks (left) at the SA Lifesaving Champs in Port Elizabeth, March 2022



Life-saving sport makes splash at Maccabiah

SAUL KAMIONSKY

A South African *olah* played a key role in introducing surf life-saving - the only sport with the purpose of saving lives - to this year's Maccabi Games. What's more, Kirah Marks isn't a beach lover.

Marks, who was in Standard Six (Grade 8) at King David Sandton in 1997 when she and her family made aliya, introduced the sport to the games through her role as operations manager of the Israel Life Saving Federation (ILSF), a non-profit volunteer-based organisation that aims to prevent drowning in Israel through education and practical courses for all age groups.

"About two years ago, together with Paul Hakim, one of the co-founders of the organisation, we spoke about bringing surf life-saving to the Maccabiah," says Marks. "It was kind of laughed off because we didn't have a team. We didn't have anything. However, we managed."

About eight months ago, Marks and others at ILSF began speaking to the International Life Saving Federation, the International Life Saving Federation of Europe, and the top international surf life-saving judges from the United Kingdom and Germany to see how to stage the sport at the Maccabiah and make sure everything was "kosher" in terms of international standards.

"Then we got approval from the Maccabi World Union to have it as an exhibition sport," says Marks. "The rest is history. We invited participants from around the world." Surf lifesavers from South Africa, Poland, Morocco, France, and Australia competed in the event. "Through a lot of hard work, passion, and dreaming, we pulled it off. It's been an incredible ride."

The event was held over two days at Poleg Beach, Netanya, at the Maccabiah Village.

"It was an experience I'll never forget," says Marks. "It was historic."

On 21 July, the open and masters' competitions took place, following the previous day's junior contests for about 50 kids between the ages of seven to 17 who have done an ILSF course.

One of them was the Durban-based Kai Marks (no relation to Kira). This 12-year-old received two silvers in the event's swimming and board-rescue competitions, having been introduced to the sport at Umhlanga Rocks Surf Lifesaving Club in KwaZulu-Natal when he was five.

"Their main priority is to get the youngsters well

trained and fit to be able to become lifeguards one day," says Kai's mom, Sam.

This is essential in any seaside country. Every summer, hundreds of Israelis drown or require medical attention after nearly drowning. Drowning is the primary cause of death of children in the country's summer months.

The sport's debut at the Maccabiah came a week after a series of chaotic days on Israel's beaches and waterways as medics dealt with countless drownings and near-drownings which left many in critical or serious condition, including several children. Twenty people have succumbed to drowning in Israel since the start of the beach season on 16 April.

Since 2019, ILSF course graduates have performed more than 70 rescues.

Kai trains on the beach with many forms of exercise including running and swimming. "I swim, I run, I do horse riding, I play hockey and soccer, all different types of sports," he says.

He thoroughly enjoyed the surf life-saving event in Netanya, meeting "tons of new people".

Marks got involved with ILSF by chance. "I started working for one of the co-founders in March 2020 with a martial arts-related non-profit he was running. When COVID-19 happened two weeks into working with him, everything stopped. He and his brother then decided to pursue their dream of building a life-saving organisation. I started helping them with that, and immediately fell in love with the goals of the organisation."

With the sport vying for a place at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and 2032 Brisbane Olympics, Marks says they hope it will be included in future Maccabiah. "We're also considering an annual surf carnival. This way we can raise awareness and have more people become fit enough to contribute to our goal which is to reduce drownings in Israel. We base ourselves on the Australian Surf Lifesaving model by creating a community of lifesavers.

"In Australia, they have life-saving sports to ensure that volunteer lifeguards are fit and able to swim out and rescue. In Israel, the lifeguards sit in their tower. A lot of them are an older generation and have literally been sitting on the same chair since the late 1960s. A lot of them aren't fit enough, but they are expected to rescue someone."

For this reason, the ILSF's goal is to build a community of fit first responders who can save lives.

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Being frum and fit no longer a gymnastic exercise

DANI SACK

Health and fitness are important to most people, but for observant Jewish women, exercise can be a little more complicated.

Many don't feel comfortable working out in gyms, which are often dominated by men. There's also little guidance when it comes to the exercise itself – with many options of weights, machinery, and equipment. The experience can become overwhelming to the point of demotivation.

That's why female-centric workout spaces are important to religious women.

It's where Ronit Garber, a personal trainer who owns her own gym, comes in. "I want to create a space in which women can be in a healthy, accepting environment to work on becoming their best selves through strength and fitness," Garber says.

Garber is a personal trainer whose career, which began at Virgin Active Balfour, has skyrocketed in the past year, with more than 150 members and counting, triple what she had last year.

"I got into strength training after I went to a female-owned gym. The owner was a powerlifter, and she embodied femininity. I was already interested in anatomy. This inspired me."

Garber's gym focuses on strength and fitness training, and has recently expanded to offer boxing as well. "I chose strength training because I believe it's empowering, especially for women, to be able to get out of their heads – not every girl is the athletic or ballerina type."

"Strength training speaks to a lot of people. It's

different and fun, and something that helps you focus on the physical while also chasing mental goals and building resolve outside of the gym."

Garber believes that when women see her following her dreams, especially in a way that still conforms to halacha, it gives them permission to be everything they want to be.

Though Garber has created a space that's new and exciting for the religious community, religious women have for years been enticed by more gentle workouts such as yoga and Pilates.

Thus began the fitness journey of Helene Kangisser, who has a yoga studio. She walked into a yoga class at the gym in 2005, and never looked back. At her instructor's recommendation in 2008, she became a qualified Hatha Vinyasa yoga teacher, and has attended many workshops in other yoga disciplines, such as Iyengar, restorative, and Ashtanga yoga.

"I have danced since I was a child, and tried many other forms of exercise, but I was drawn to yoga because of its depth. I love yoga's ability to spread consciousness throughout your body and make you aware of the

present."

Kangisser, who is also a Hebrew and Jewish Studies teacher, wanted to create a space that merged yoga and Judaism, her two passions.

"I'm proud of the safe space I've created for women to exercise. Yoga has become much more popular in recent

years. Its appeal comes from the mindfulness it teaches, as well as its strength and flexibility training. It's also an excellent way to release stress and anxiety, which is so prevalent in our times."

Kangisser has taught classes to nursery school children and is now also qualified to teach pregnant women. Her studio has hosted many workshops, including for schools and other Jewish organisations.

"There's less of a stigma than there used to be about

Jewish women doing exercise," she says. "Being healthy has become important."

Audrey Gisichen, who runs a Pilates studio, credits Kangisser for beginning her exercise career. "Helene started getting involved in yoga and Pilates, and she got this guy to come teach us both in 2006. I fell in love with Pilates, and after doing it for two years at the gym, I decided to become an instructor."

Gisichen says Pilates appealed to her because of her back and neck issues. "It was a more gentle type of exercise that didn't involve hectic cardio, that made me feel stronger, but didn't hurt."

Gisichen has been teaching Pilates for 14 years. "Fitness is a triangle – strength, stretch, and cardio – and you need all three. People are always looking for miracles, but exercise has to be consistent to get holistic health benefits over a long period of time," she says.

"Of course, you have the Jennifer Anistons and Kate Hudsons who go on E! News and rave about Pilates, and suddenly people want to try it, but I've had constant clients for years."

Gisichen says a lot of religious women come to her studio because of its privacy. "There are no men, and rebbetzins happily take their *tichels* off [in the studio]. Our religion is centred on food, and I have seen a lot more religious women wanting to be healthier and stronger, especially during pregnancy, over the past 10 years."

She says among this cohort, people seek out Pilates for a "full body workout where you feel stretched and stronger, but not sweaty and gross".

Evidently, exercise is more than just physical strength – it's a journey of self-care, motivation, and mental health.



Ronit Garber and her team

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Pretoria's Jaffa remembers those lost to COVID-19

DIANE WOLFSON

Jaffa, Pretoria's home for the elderly, honoured 29 residents who died over the past two years from COVID-19 on Sunday, 31 July. The ceremony was held prior to the organisation's 38th annual general meeting. The majority of those who passed away were unable to say goodbye to their family members, have a proper funeral, or be properly mourned by family and friends. Outgoing Jaffa President Carol Baron described the strain on management, staff, and the committee as well as the heartache, anger, and fear of all as they treaded the unknown waters brought by COVID-19. Photographs of all those lost during this time were projected onto a screen prior to the ceremony, reminding everyone of the beautiful *neshomas* who had passed on. As Jaffa enters its fourth decade of existence, the home is facing many challenges, as with all homes around the country. While the ageing building requires ongoing and much needed maintenance, so too do the



The Silberhaft family enjoying the morning in the Jaffa gardens

residents, whose average age today is 89 years in contrast to 75 in 1988. Many residents are close to 100, and still enjoy life in the beautiful home. It means additional and increased levels of care are required with more nursing staff. With many residents unable to meet their financial commitments to the home, Jaffa is now no longer able to continue subsidising residents and requires financial assistance from family members and donors. "The urgent need for fundraising is the responsibility of everyone," said Baron in her president's report. A generous donation was received from ex-Pretorians Colin and Monica Silberman, now living in Australia, which enabled the frail-care section to be refurbished with new curtains, hospital beds, paint, and linen, resulting in increased levels of comfort. Outgoing Director Mark Isaacs was recognised for the nine years he devoted to Jaffa and its residents, and incoming Director Bryan Dorfman was warmly welcomed. "Jaffa moves forward confidently in the belief that the community of Pretoria and ex-Pretorians worldwide will rally to assist in the maintenance of this remarkable institution, enabling Jaffa to continue to provide high standards of care for our precious aged residents" said Baron.

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Another step forward against hate speech

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly before the lockdown, a delegation from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) visited the China Mall in Johannesburg to do their pre-Purim shopping. Dubbed #ShoppingAgainstPrejudice, the initiative was a demonstration of solidarity with the Chinese community at a time when anti-Chinese xenophobia and fake news was running rampant. Small and symbolic as this gesture was, it was enormously appreciated, particularly as ours was the only community to come out in support of our Chinese fellow citizens during this very difficult time. Pre-COVID-19 paranoia was the main driver of this particular outbreak of Sinophobia, but anti-Chinese prejudice in society had been surfacing well before this. In 2017, The Chinese Association (TCA) lodged a complaint of hate speech with the Equality Court following a spate of vile social media posts in the wake of a *Carte Blanche* programme. Commenting on these posts, the TCA's legal representative, Joyce Nam-Ford, said, "I remember reading those posts and being so hurt and offended then scared because of the sheer torrent of abuse and threats against our children, and that this was happening in a democratic South Africa." It sums up eloquently the emotional and psychological harm that results from racist hate speech, even when not accompanied by direct attacks on the targeted group. It's the reason why the SAJBD takes up these cases when our own community is grossly maligned and ensures that they are carried through to their conclusion, no matter how much time and effort it might take. In its judgment handed down in the Johannesburg High Court last week, the Equality Court unequivocally upheld the TCA's complaint, and imposed appropriate sanctions against 10

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

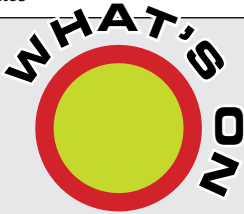


respondents. National Director Wendy Kahn attended the proceedings and was given the warmest of receptions by the TCA's leadership. In our media statement released afterwards, we welcomed the judgment, commenting that it represented another significant advance in the ongoing fight against racist hate speech and unfair discrimination in South Africa. As with the recently concluded Jon Qwelane and Bongani Masuku cases, our courts sent out an unequivocal message that hate speech on the basis of people's intrinsic identity, whether concerning their race, ethnicity, religion, or other grounds, wouldn't be tolerated in our country. We further applaud the Chinese Association for taking up the case and pursuing it through to a successful conclusion. In its judgment upholding the SAJBD's complaint against Masuku in February this year, the Constitutional Court concluded by quoting the Talmudic saying, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." The Equality Court echoed this warning, with Judge Motsamai Makume saying, "This matter is about words and as Professor Karthy Govender, the chairperson of the SA Human Rights Commission, said, "Words convey meaning and do cause hurt and injury." The fight against hate speech in our country is ongoing, but with this latest judgment, we have taken another important step forward. As a result, all South Africans, particularly those belonging to vulnerable minority groups, can feel that their rights to dignity and equality have been strengthened and affirmed.

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

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

Sunday 7 August	• ORT SA presents <i>Business Bootcamp – Personal Styling Workshop and Breakfast</i> with Marinda Aucamp. Time: 09:00 to 11:00. Entry: R200. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za
Monday 8 August	• Union of Jewish Women presents Lesley Rosenthal on "Understanding autism". Time: 10:00. Entry: R40. Contact: info@ujw.co.za or 011 648 1053
Tuesday 9 August	• The SA Jewish Report hosts webinar <i>I Am Here & 101</i> featuring Ella Blumenthal, Jordy Sank, Gabriella Blumberg, and Dr Hanan Bushkin. Time: 19:00. Register at bit.ly/jrlive135 or email admin@sajewishreport.co.za
Wednesday 10 August	• WIZO Cape Town presents Roei Ben-Tolila – <i>From Crisis To Opportunity</i> . Time: 19:00. Contact: bnothz@ctjc.co.za or 064 721 9052
Thursday 11 August	• ORT SA presents <i>Building Tools for EQ (Part 1)</i> with Dr Karina de Bruin. Time: 09:00 to 10:30. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za
Friday 12 August	• ORT SA presents <i>Business Bootcamp</i> webinar – Finance Made Simple with David Zidel. Time: 09:00 to 10:30. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za



ANC's summit shows party "locked in revolutionary mode"

>>>Continued from page 2

engagement with Israel," said Polovin. "South Africa's position is isolating us from the rest of the world." The conference also addressed the threat of terrorism. Mbangiseni David Mahlobo, the chairperson of the ANC's peace and transformation sub-committee, said that South Africa had a serious role to play in ensuring stability not only in Southern Africa, but in the rest of the African continent. Mahlobo said that though South Africa wasn't worried about attacks, the country couldn't be used as a safe haven for recruiting, planning, and funding terrorist activities. "Our borders remain

porous," he said, and security must be tightened. He pointed out that legislation regarding cyberspace needed to be strengthened, and that South African policies need to be readjusted to ensure that there are no loopholes for those seeking to take advantage of lack of legislation. "This is a step in the right direction, however a lot still needs to be done," said the Community Security Organisation's Jevon Greenblatt. "At least the ANC is acknowledging concern that terrorism is a factor in South Africa, but proactive steps taken to prevent terrorism are much more important than acknowledging its existence."

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Playing chicken at the petrol pump

According to my on-board computer, I have 38km left in the tank and I'm not in a good way. It's Monday afternoon, and I'm playing "chicken" with the petrol price. Consider it a form of rebellion, a protest, or maybe it's the embarrassment of filling up just before the decrease of the fuel price on Wednesday, but either way, I intend seeing this one through.

If my anxiety will allow it.

There are two types of people in the world. Those who take their petrol gauge seriously and those who don't. There are those who consider the petrol warning light to be a subtle hint at the fact that maybe – sometime soon – there will be the need to contemplate refuelling. And then there are those like me who consider it a failure. How could I have allowed things to deteriorate to the point that my vehicle had little choice but to shine a light of shame at me? And for the world to see! A light that indicates so much more than the warning of impending cessation of mobility.

My wife, on the other hand, is happy to stare death in the face. She's quite prepared to drive until even the light lacks the energy to glimmer and until, like the vehicle itself, it gives up all hope of salvation. There have been times when I have attempted to drive her car when it has been so low on fuel, that even the light won't go on.

I didn't realise quite how steadfast she was in her approach to her fuel tank until some years ago when she admitted that she had, for some inexplicable reason, run out of fuel while driving. At the time, she had wisely chosen not to call her then new husband but rather to phone her father to act as saviour. And the two of them

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



conspired never to tell me of the incident.

This was a wise decision, considering how I had apparently reacted when I attempted to drive her petrol-less vehicle. "If there's one thing that doesn't have a sense of humour," I would plead, "it's the petrol light." Ninety five unleaded isn't a laugh a minute. It's one of the few things that doesn't mess around – like a blood pressure sleeve. But even that can be fooled by circumstances. A petrol gauge simply doesn't have the capacity for jest.

Which is apt, considering that the petrol price is no laughing matter.

The dramatic swing of the fuel price isn't a uniquely South African problem. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created a global crisis that hasn't been experienced for some time. Coupled with the steady march of inflation and fears of recession in the United States, South Africans are innocent bystanders in an event that isn't within their control. And whereas the government fuel levy is something that should be revisited for the sake of the country, the price of fuel still isn't as onerous as it is in other parts of the world.

That said, this still isn't an excuse to get stuck before Wednesday, when I intend replenishing my gasping tank. And if I do run out before that? It'll be my father-in-law I call. Because I know he can be trusted to not tell.

Elphin Lodge celebrates two second Barmitzvahs

Elphin Lodge shul recently celebrated two second Barmitzvahs in the space of four weeks. The first was for Cecil Shainfeld, whose second Barmitzvah was held on Shabbas Mavorchim on 25 June, and the next was for Leon Bernstein, who celebrated his second Barmitzvah on Shabbas Mavorchim on 23 July.

The Elphin Lodge community celebrated the Barmitzvahs with their respective families. Singing and dancing, some with walkers and some not, were followed by a delicious *brocha* and *shiurim*.



Leon Bernstein and Cecil Shainfeld

Killarney bowls over Hatzolah with fundraising

Raising funds for Hatzolah at the Killarney Bowls Club



Killarney Bowls Club raised about R150 000 for Hatzolah Emergency Medical Rescue at its bowls charity day on Sunday, 31 July. The organisation said it was ecstatic to be able to give back to an organisation that had on many occasions come to the rescue of the people at the club.

Twenty-four teams of four competed, with players of various strengths and abilities, proving that bowls is no longer "old-man marbles".

Darren Kahn, the general manager of Hatzolah, thanked the bowlers and quoted a few statistics, like Hatzolah attended to more than 11 000 patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Virtual reality tour brings Temple to life

The three weeks leading up to Tisha B'Av are a time of learning about the Temple and its history, and this year, Tzivos Hashem South Africa presented the 3D virtual reality Mikdash experience, giving students a virtual reality tour of the Beit Hamikdash.



Students taking part in a 3D virtual reality Beit Hamikdash tour

"Each student is given their own pair of VR goggles and encounters a thrilling tour," says Devorah Leah Wineberg,

the director of Tzivos Hashem. "Kids get to appreciate the full might and power of the holy Temple."

"Teachers are constantly looking for resources to teach children about the Temple structure," Wineberg says. "Yet,

with all these resources, children are still limited in truly appreciating the beauty and vastness of the house of G-d."

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SA Jews dominate Magen David Adom volunteer programme

The southern hemisphere dominated rescue organisation Magen David Adom's volunteer programme in Israel for the first time this year, with 31 among the 85 diaspora Jews hailing from South Africa, and 30 from Australia.

The 85 youngsters from the diaspora, aged 18-30, came to Israel for five weeks to volunteer, in co-operation with the Israel Experience company, a subsidiary of the Jewish Agency.

Said Israel Experience Directory General Amos Hermon, "Dozens of young people from Jewish communities attend an intensive emergency medicine course and then join ambulance teams across Israel."



Magen David Adom volunteers

We know of a number of medics who volunteered here and later joined rescue services in their home communities."

"We're proud of these young people," said Dr Eli Jaffe, Magen David Adom's deputy director-general for community health. "They chose to save lives in Israel. They're also an international reserve force."

Maccabi U16 soccer wins sportsmanship award

The Maccabi U16 Boys Soccer team won the Fair Play (Sportsmanship) Award at the Maccabi games in July. It competed against 16 other countries. The team played with heart, passion, and skill and most importantly, its members supported and



Maccabi U16 boys soccer team

encouraged each other throughout. The award is in recognition of these qualities.

KDVP student and mom in heartwarming blanket drive



Adam Lapedus with Diepsloot residents

Adam Lapedus, a Grade 9 student at King David High School Victory Park, and his mom have collected and distributed 222 blankets for women and children in Diepsloot over the past two months.

Adam wanted to collect blankets for people who couldn't afford them, and since his mom had worked with the Diepsloot Youth Programme for three years, it was the perfect opportunity.

Deputy principal of Yeshiva Girls High appointed

Yeshiva College has appointed Ruth Diner deputy principal of the Girls High School. Diner will have authority over the day-to-day operations of the Girls High School, and will continue to oversee the limudei kodesh. She has a Masters in Education, a diploma in leadership, and has been trained in international schools.



Ruth Diner

New classrooms for Torah Academy Nursery School

Torah Academy Nursery School has built two new classrooms to accommodate its growing playschool. It anticipates that the modern structures will provide many happy moments for its school family.



Newly built nursery school classroom

Diller Teens get close look at Israel's complexities



Diller Teens on a stop off at a Druze village

Twenty-two King David Diller Teen Fellows were in Israel recently to introspect, reflect, and consider their own views on the Jewish State and its complexities.

The trip focused on exploring the many faces of Israel by meeting people and organisations in an intimate setting. Highlights include a talk by a haredi man in Mea She'arim, Jerusalem, about the life choices and sacrifices haredim make; meeting a settler and a Palestinian in Area B of the West Bank with the aim of learning about the conflict; a rainbow tour in Tel Aviv; and engaging with the politics of Israel through conversation with right and left-wing Jews.

Lastly, the students spent a week living with Israeli students, understanding the context of their lives. Finally, all 700 Diller Teen Fellows from across the world came together for a four-day congress, where they learned, debated, and danced together, while exploring Jewish identity, leadership, and *tikkun olam*.

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