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# South African Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

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## Left bleeding: the SA medic who helped expose Theranos

TALI FEINBERG

**D**r Adam Rosendorff, who describes himself as “a third-generation South African Ashkenazi Jew”, found himself at the centre of one of the greatest dramas to hit Silicon Valley in recent times. As a whistleblower, he played a key role in bringing down Theranos, an American privately held corporation seen as “the next Apple Inc”. Films, books, and TV series have since been made about Theranos’ rise and fall from grace. Rosendorff, a clinical pathologist and specialist in laboratory medicine, was caught in the middle as a Theranos laboratory director. The ramifications of being a whistleblower had an impact on every area of his life, and he had a breakdown soon after first raising the alarm on Theranos.

Now, he calls on Jewish communities to create “Jewish groups specifically to support whistleblowers”, whose needs are great, especially regarding psychiatric care. He envisions rabbis, community leaders, and professionals working together on such initiatives. He also sees a need for “a more mild mechanism that would allow impartial third parties to adjudicate and mediate between employees and employers”. Theranos was founded in 2003 by then 19-year-old Elizabeth Holmes. It claimed that it had devised rapid, inexpensive blood tests that required just a finger prick. These claims were later proved to be false. Theranos raised more than \$700 million (R11.8 billion) from venture capitalists and private investors, resulting in a \$10 billion (R168.9 billion) valuation at its peak in 2013 and 2014. It all began to fall apart from 2015 in a devastating downfall that resulted in civil and criminal proceedings. Rosendorff says workplaces often mirror family dynamics, and it’s important for employees and employers to be aware of that, as it can often lead to unhealthy

interactions. Delving into his own family history, he says, “My father’s parents, Karlie and Ray, were born and bred Bloemfontein Jews – sports fanatics who drove a tiny Fiat. My grandfather was a boxing referee and my grandma a poker player. My uncle Neil was a renowned South African cricketer who passed away from lymphoma. “My dad started at Wits Medical School when he was 16. He was president of NUSAS [the National Union of South African Students]. He met my mom at a conference in Cape Town. My mom was a nursery school teacher at the time. He immigrated to the United Kingdom in his 20s to continue his training. He then came back to South Africa in the late 1960s. My brother, Peter, and sister, Nicola, were born in London. I was born in Joburg.

“I always had an interest in the human body, biology, science, and how things work,” Rosendorff recalls. “When I was 12, I did a science experiment by mixing all of my mom’s perfumes together. I was also very curious about mixing swimming pool chemicals together!” But he also had a love of the English language. “I went to high school at King David Victory Park with Mr Jeffrey Wolf. I came third in the English Olympiad when I was 16. I did English Literature and Economics at Wits.” His parents moved to New York in 1990. “I was under pressure to do something ‘respectable’, which for many Jewish families is medicine, engineering, or business. At least that was the case for me,” says Rosendorff. Rosendorff followed his parents to the States. where

he did pre-med at Columbia and then medical school at Mount Sinai. “I spent four and a half years as a basic science researcher on the Epstein Barr virus. I then decided to do something more clinical, so I did a residency in blood medicine and clinical pathology. “My first job out of residency was at the University at Pittsburgh, which serves poor, underserved people in Western Pennsylvania,” he recalls. Though he found this work meaningful, there were challenges. “I worked in the basement of a hospital. When the wind blew in, it blew right through you. It was freezing and dreary. There wasn’t a ton of opportunity.” So when he was offered the job at Theranos, he decided to head to Silicon Valley, where it was warmer and where what he thought was an exciting opportunity lay ahead. “Theranos was led by charismatic, intense individuals, but I could tell they were hiding a lot. I didn’t listen to my gut. I asked at the outset if they wanted to go the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] route, but I never got an answer. I quickly became disillusioned with what I saw there. I blew the whistle after leaving the company in 2014. For a period of about nine years, I co-operated with federal government entities to expose Theranos – most recently testifying in trials which resulted in convictions.” Being a whistleblower is complex, he says. On the one hand, he had a “massive need to get it off my chest”, but on the other, the stress of it all led to a breakdown, medication, hospitalisation, and health problems. For eight years, he was interviewed over and over again by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, department of justice, and US Postal Inspection Service. “I was only really able to come off medication when trials were scheduled in early 2020,” Rosendorff says. To other potential whistleblowers, he says, “Try to get some perspective when you’re at a company you suspect is doing something wrong. Talk to people outside the company – former employees, your family – that’s extremely important, and whistleblower lawyers. Really understand the

Continued on page 10>>

## Spring has sprung



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Ryan Bark, Gidon Magid, Tali Boner, and Talia Reeb celebrating spring at King David Primary School Linkfield



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- Rachael

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## Soviet Jews owe freedom to Gorbachev's glasnost

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

**M**ikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader whose reforms, including allowing massive numbers of Jews to emigrate to Israel, changed his country and the world, has died at 91.

Russian media said Gorbachev died on Tuesday, 30 August, in a Moscow hospital.

"Mikhail Gorbachev has died," Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi from 1993 until this year, said on Twitter. "Three million Soviet Jews owe him their freedom."

It was clear when Gorbachev rose to power in 1985 that he would be different from his predecessors as secretary general of the Communist Party. He was younger, more vibrant, and more open to acknowledging where communism had fallen short in the Soviet Union.

But his rise was at first inauspicious for the movement that had sought for decades to allow Jews to emigrate freely against the Soviet regime that prevented them from leaving and often punished them for seeking exit at all.

The number of Jews allowed to emigrate in 1985 was already low – 1 140 – and slipped further to 914 in 1986. The sense among Soviet Jewry activists was that the new and relatively young leader was even more regressive than his predecessors.

His Western outlook seemed cosmetic. Visiting Britain in 1984 as a senior member of the Politburo, a year before his rise to leader, he shopped, joked, and snapped at a legislator who asked him about religious restrictions, saying, "You govern your society, you leave us to govern ours."

But then in 1987, the numbers of Jews emigrating began rising precipitously, reaching 185 000 in 1990, spurred in part by bold advocacy by American Jews that made releasing their Soviet brethren a politically wise manoeuvre for Gorbachev. At the same time, Gorbachev oversaw an end to restrictions on religious worship and most dramatically, opened the gates for the most famous of refuseniks and so-called "prisoners of Zion", or those who had been imprisoned for their Zionist activity, including Natan Sharansky, Ida Nudel, and Yosef Begun.

In a statement an aide delivered in 1991 at Babyn Yar, the killing field in Ukraine where Nazis launched the final solution seeking the annihilation of Jews, Gorbachev condemned all forms of antisemitism.

Gorbachev's reforms affecting Jews were part of a much broader revolution he led to end the Cold War, the decades-long standoff between the Soviet Union and United States that many in the West

feared would heat up into a nuclear conflict.

He and US President Ronald Reagan joined in successful disarmament talks, and Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness) introduced unprecedented freedom of expression and organisation to the Soviet Union. He decentralised the confederation, handing more power to the republics in a move that would eventually lead to their independence.

Gorbachev resigned after a failed coup in December 1991 that sought his ouster. He had bested the plotters, but the economic uncertainty and devolution of power created a sense of chaos and left him open to criticism that he was no longer the right man to lead Russia in an age of monumental transformation. He slipped into the obscurity of private life, much of which he spent with his beloved wife, Raisa, until her death in 1999.

Leaders of American and Western Jewish organisations surprised themselves after his ouster by praising the leader of a nation they had once joined Reagan in reviling as an "evil empire".

"Though Gorbachev was late in breaking out of the human-rights gate, the positive changes he ultimately initiated would have been unthinkable to us in the Soviet human-rights advocacy movement a decade ago," the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, among the most strident of advocacy groups, said at the time.

A pocket of admiration endured in Israel, where Gorbachev got a hero's welcome in 1992.

He got awards, honorary degrees and, much to his bemusement, a new breed of potato named for him.

Gorbachev delivered during that visit a nuanced assessment of the antisemitism that had plagued his country. Antisemitism, he said, was "officially denied in policy but encouraged in practice".

"In the days of Stalin, especially after World War II, antisemitism was introduced into domestic and foreign policy," Gorbachev said. "Even after the death of Stalin, this state of affairs continued, but not in openly repressive forms."

Speaking to a reporter after that speech, he said he also regretted the results. The exodus of what by then was at least 350 000 Jews, was, he said, a "loss for our land and society".

Gorbachev hadn't commented publicly on Russia's invasion this year of Ukraine, formerly part of the country he governed, although his foundation urged its speedy end. The invasion has cooled relations with the West that Gorbachev had warmed, and has spurred yet another wave of Russian Jewish emigration to Israel and elsewhere.



Mikhail Gorbachev

### Torah Thought

## A monumental insight

"And you shall not erect for yourself a monument that the Lord your G-d despises." (16:22).

Rashi explains that the Torah specifies that sacrificial offerings must be brought specifically upon a *mizbeach* (altar) and not a *matzeiva* (monument).

A *mizbeach* is an altar comprised of numerous stones, whereas a *matzeiva* is a single stone.

One of the reasons why the Torah insists on using only a *mizbeach*, Rashi says, is because the pagans made a practice of sacrificing to their deities on single-stone structures.

The Netziv, in his commentary Ha'amek Davar, suggests a different explanation, claiming that *mizbechot* were used in the service of a deity, whereas the *matzeivot* were actually worshipped. The Torah banned sacrificing on monuments because they were looked upon as a kind of deity, as opposed to altars, which were used in pagan worship but were never accorded divine stature.

Great, but how does all this relate to us?

A possible basis for the Torah's attitude toward monuments versus altars is the following:

It's easy to erect a *matzeiva*. It consists of a single stone and it becomes a monument simply by being positioned in a prominent place and formally designated a religious symbol. A *mizbeach*, by contrast, must be assembled. A large collection of stones must be gathered and then formed into an altar.

This gives us a fundamental spiritual insight. Many people think that they need to have

some life-changing encounter to develop an awareness of or dedication to spirituality. A person may believe that spiritual elevation or connection is like a big rock.

We look for these "rock-star" moments. We look for a *maztav* – an experience!

This may be true for our spiritual connection, or just life in general.

"And you shall not erect for yourself a monument that the Lord your G-d despises," teaches

**Rabbi Shmuel  
Ozhekh – Ohr  
Somayach  
Cape Town**



us to tune into the subtleties of life, and look at each moment like the strings on the harp of King David.

A meaningful life isn't about looking for those big stones, rather it's about being able to savour every stone no matter their size, bringing them all together to form a *mizbeach*.

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As part of this preparation, Elul is the time to begin the sometimes difficult process of granting and asking for forgiveness.

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# Oudtshoorn cemetery desecrated again

TALI FEINBERG

The Cape SA Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Board) described “terrible scenes at the Oudtshoorn Jewish Cemetery” in a Facebook post on Wednesday, 24 August, “where more than 30 graves have been desecrated and vandalised. The tombstones have been pushed over and smashed in.” They shared photographs of graves with the headstones knocked over, cracked, and broken.

The chairperson of the Oudtshoorn Hebrew Congregation, Bernard Herman, told the *SA Jewish Report* that his own parents’ graves had been damaged even though the headstones had been laid flat. He says most of the damage in this incident was in the old part of the cemetery. “About ten stones in that section have been broken. Some of them are 100 years old and irreplaceable.”

Cape Board Executive Director Daniel Bloch says, “In this particular case, it would seem that a group of hooligans have simply run amok in the cemetery. There’s no rationale to explain this behaviour as it also occurs in non-Jewish cemeteries. However, acts of antisemitism cannot be ruled out without a thorough investigation. We know it’s antisemitic when we find spray painted images or antisemitic wording in and around the cemetery [which wasn’t found in this case].”

Cape Board Country Communities subcommittee head David King says the incident will be investigated. He says more than 10 000

people have seen the Cape Board’s Facebook post, which means that people really care about vandalism of Jewish graves. And he points out that small Jewish communities around the world face the same problem.

Herman says the perfect storm of crime, drugs, and homelessness leads to vandalism in cemeteries. “Drug addicts get a kick out of it and they also see cemeteries as a place to loiter or steal,” he says. “The Christian cemetery across the road has also been vandalised, and is in much worse condition.”

Herman felt devastated on discovering

the damage in various sections of the large cemetery on Sunday, 21 August. He was visiting the cemetery with well-known former businessman and ostrich farmer, Jack Klass, who was visiting from Australia. His parents, Benjamin and Gladys Klass, are buried in the cemetery. After seeing the destruction, Klass arranged for his parents’ headstones to be laid flat, and this work has already been completed.

“On Thursday night, [18 August], everything was 100%,” Herman says. “We had the garden service there, so it probably happened on Friday or Saturday night.” He points out that the community has gone to great lengths to secure the site, including installing barbed wire and laser beams, both of which were stolen. It’s now investigating the installation of security cameras. “There’s a “beautiful 1.8m stone wall” around the cemetery, Herman says, and there’s still security at the tahara house.

About 300 of the 800 graves in the cemetery have been laid flat, which makes it more difficult to damage graves. The remaining work would come at enormous cost. Herman says some families have already contributed to repairing the latest damage or to laying gravestones flat. However, “some have responded that they will wait until their parents’ gravestones are knocked down before they pay for them to be laid flat”.

Small Jewish Community Associations

spiritual leader and national director, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, says laying gravestones flat is the only long-term, sustainable solution to a problem that plagues many cemeteries. The Western Cape country communities are overseen by the Cape Board, Silberhaft says, so he cannot intervene.

But he advises the congregation to sell assets to help with costs. “I’ve been imploring them to do this for the past 29 years. It’s a massive cemetery, it has great Jewish history in it, and it’s a pity that there’s vandalism. It must happen. I implore all communities not to wait for this to happen to their cemeteries, and to start setting the stones flat soonest.”



Photos: Bernard Herman



Herman says people visit the cemetery from all over the world as hundreds of South African Jewish families originated in the town, and he hopes they will donate towards the costs.

In 2020, 33 gravestones were vandalised in the Oudtshoorn Jewish Cemetery, and 125 gravestones were found smashed in the Bloemfontein Jewish Cemetery. That community began laying flat its 1 300 gravestones from funds raised by former members now living locally and abroad. Sixty-three gravestones were vandalised in a Jewish cemetery in Wellington in the Western Cape in 2018. “The last act of vandalism within a Jewish cemetery in the Western Cape was March 2021 in Hermanus,” says Bloch.

“The Cape Board works closely with the active Jewish communities like Oudtshoorn as well as municipalities around the Western Cape to ensure that Jewish sites are maintained and secured,” he says. “We’re thankful that the Oudtshoorn community has dedicated members on hand to look after and repair any damages. In areas like Ladismith, Riversdale, Beaufort West, and others, there’s no active Jewish community,

which is why the Board has close relationships with those specific municipalities to ensure our heritage and history is preserved.”

Oudtshoorn’s once thriving Jewish community was established 140 years ago. One of its most prominent spiritual leaders was Reverend Myer Woolfson, who served the community for almost six decades, and died in 1947.

Writing on Facebook from the United States after the recent vandalism incident, former Capetonian Elan Berman said, “I’m sad to learn that the Oudtshoorn Jewish Cemetery was again subjected to vandalism. Once known as the ‘Jerusalem of Africa’, the town is now home to very few Jews. It’s sad to see an assault on the memories of those unable to defend themselves. My family’s history in South Africa began in this town, where my great-great-grandfather [Reverend Myer Woolfson] served as spiritual leader for 59 years. He and many relatives are interred here.”

Woolfson’s family is now spread out around the world. One such relative is Blake Andrew, who grew up in Zimbabwe and was raised Christian. In early 2022, he found out that his grandmother was the daughter of the late Woolfson, but ties with the family were cut when she married a Christian man. Andrew’s story reverberated around the Jewish world, and he connected with many long- lost relatives, including Berman.

Andrew describes the vandalism as “absolutely horrific”, and says he hopes to visit Oudtshoorn and its Jewish cemetery soon on a trip to connect with his long-lost Jewish roots.

Herman is wasting no time repairing the damaged graves. “Thanks to the amazing work of Bernard and his team, the repairs to the tombstones are almost complete,” says Bloch. “However, the repairs to the tombstones and the security upgrade will come at a high cost. The Oudtshoorn community welcomes any and all donations towards the restoration of the Jewish cemetery. We also encourage you to share this with others. Oudtshoorn has a rich history, and many South Africans living locally and abroad will have a connection to this community.”

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# Tides, tankers, and jellyfish – Jewish athletes conquer the English Channel

NICOLA MILTZ

What does a Johannesburg recovering drug addict and former professional cage fighter have in common with the Cape Town-raised grandson of Pick n Pay retail giant Raymond Ackerman?

Both Jewish, Troy Mayers, 51, and Joshua Ackerman, 24, last week conquered the mighty English Channel, considered the ultimate long distance swimming challenge – the Everest of open-sea swims.

Two days apart, they ploughed their way through the bitter, icy waters from the beaches of Dover in England to reach their destination on French soil. Hundreds of relatives and friends watched them swim the daunting 32km stretch via livestreaming – on tenterhooks – adding to countless encouraging WhatsApp messages that went around the world.

The pair were among seven South Africans who swam the Channel in the past month. Of these, five succeeded, while two pulled out due to injury and illness.

“It was an amazing, surreal experience followed by an overwhelming sense of achievement,” said an elated Mayers who reached French shores in 12 hours, 17 minutes on 22 August.

“It was epic,” said Ackerman, who battled a ferocious turning tide, swimming in the dark after sunset to arrive in 12 hours 47 minutes on 24 August.

“I was shattered, it took it all out of me,” said Ackerman who was seconded by world renowned endurance swimmer and ocean advocate, Lewis Pugh, who swam alongside him on three separate occasions for an hour at a stretch. Ackerman’s coach, South African Olympic 10km swimmer Michelle Weber last week broke the South African women’s record for the fastest English Channel crossing on the same day as Ackerman took to the seas.

Pugh gave Ackerman three messages in Dover before he set off. “He told me to leave any doubts on the beach in England; to decide that there was only one place I was getting out – and that was France; and that plodders get to France, sprinters don’t,” Ackerman said.

“My first seven hours were perfect, I had a great stroke and tempo, and everything went swimmingly. But after about eight hours, things changed dramatically and it really became quite tough. I had to quicken my pace to try to make the ideal landing position, but I was pushed by the tide and became dazed and confused. I don’t think I would have made it without my support team,” he said.

Ackerman said he focused on his strokes and breathing, and had to dig deep after being swept along the French coast battling choppy waters and a strong current. “Fatigue set in after about nine hours when the tide turned, adding about an hour and a half onto my swim, which I wasn’t expecting,” he said.

Pugh posted on Facebook, “It’s a great lesson for any endeavour in life. Things change. You somehow need to dig deep and keep going.”

“France couldn’t have felt further away in those last few hours, but I was determined to finish,” Ackerman told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He was supported by his mother, Samantha,

and experienced skipper, Debbie Frazer, who were in the support boat sailing alongside him. His father, Jonathan Ackerman, hired a speed boat and together with other family



Joshua Ackerman

members, sailed out to offer moral support from a distance.

Swimming the Channel isn’t for the faint hearted. It’s one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, with hundreds of ferries and tankers passing through every day.

“I got stung twice by jelly fish, I think, but you just push through it,” said Ackerman, who also managed to sing 80s rock music in his head to while away the time between feeds, including things like sweet canned

hours alone at sea to hear the same sound at the end, when he reached Cap Gris-Nez beach in France.

“I started out with perfect conditions, but then the wind picked up and my last six hours were rough,” he said.

“I told myself there was nothing I could do but surrender and accept the situation, that it would end, and that I must just keep swimming,” he said.

Mayers said he swallowed a lot of the salty



Troy Mayers

peaches, jelly babies, cake, rooibos tea with honey, carbohydrate and protein drinks, to name a few.

For father of two, Mayers, the cold and lonely swim began when a loud foghorn on Shakespeare Beach in Dover signalled the start of his journey. It took gruelling

water, which made his mouth and throat raw.

During the long hours at sea, Mayers, a businessman who has been clean for 15 years, thought about his elderly parents who wanted him to succeed as much as he did and why he was there.

“The why is important out there. I was doing it for my family to show them that anything is possible if you put your mind to it. As a recovering addict, I was also doing it for people who are still battling addiction to show them there are success stories and that recovery is a beautiful thing,” he said.

Chocolates, sweets, biscuits, and burgers were waiting for him when he got back to his hotel provided by his supportive girlfriend, Sam Schoub.

In preparation, Mayers was in the Old Edwardian swimming pool most days,

swimming for two hours in the morning from 05:00 to 07:00 and then another 4km swim in the afternoon.

He said he did a number of swims in and around Langebaan lagoon, which is known to be the perfect training ground for swimmers looking to train for the English Channel.

He also swam from Durban to Umhlanga, and did two double Robben Island crossings.

Ackerman, who moved to London earlier this year, trained at his gym and also did open-sea swims from Dover to get used to conditions.

Mayers and Ackerman also share the thrill of pushing the boundaries of pain and endurance as ice-water swimmers.

“I have a couple of screws loose,” said Ackerman, who loves “testing his mind and body in a sporting environment”.

## Israel insists that foreign medical degree applicants make aliya

TALI FEINBERG

The Israeli government has changed its rules about foreign students coming to Israel to complete their medical degrees with a view to returning home.

To do full medical degrees in Israel now, one has to make aliya, and commit to living and working in Israel after attaining the degree.

The government has now barred foreign students from the English-speaking degrees at Tel Aviv University’s Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Ben-Gurion Faculty of Health Sciences (BGU) in Beersheva, and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology’s Rappaport Faculty of Medicine in Haifa, unless they make aliya.

This follows the *SA Jewish Report* reporting in April 2022 that Telfed (the absorption organisation for South Africans in Israel) had launched a world first – a seven-year medical degree in English in Israel.

The offering was said to be a game changer for South African Jews who wanted to study medicine. They wouldn’t have to do community service, and the degree was highly subsidised. This is still the case, however, at the time, it was also noted that they could take their degree anywhere in the world, including returning to work as doctors in South Africa.

The first three years of the degree – the BSc pre-med at Ariel University – doesn’t require making aliya. The second part – four years of medical study in English at the Medical School of International Health at BGU will require aliya.

Telfed Chief Executive Dorron Kline explains how this change came about.

“The ministry of education looked at the numbers, and saw that about 100 Israelis study medicine overseas every year because they can’t get into medicine in Israel – it’s difficult, there’s a lot of competition, and not many places.

“And then, about 100 or so foreign students come to study medicine at Israel’s international schools every year. So it doesn’t make sense that Israelis are leaving while these spaces are kept for foreigners. So, they came to a decision that all medical schools in Israel – whether they teach in Hebrew or English – can accept only Israeli citizens. They will still be taught in English. Obviously doing their degree in English is probably not Israelis’ first choice, but travelling overseas meant they would have done their degrees in other languages anyway.”

The move, which was approved by the Council for Higher Education, the education ministry, and the health ministry, is expected to increase the number of Israeli medical students by 130 each year, beginning in 2023.

“Israel is in the midst of a deep crisis in terms of medicine as a result of a number of factors, and it requires fundamental treatment in order to ensure that Israel’s population continues to receive good healthcare in the future,” said a spokesperson for the Council for Higher Education.

“There’s already a shortage of doctors, which is expected to get worse in light of the rise in life expectancy (and with it a rise in the elderly population), many doctors retiring, the revocation of recognition for medical degrees from several institutions in Europe, and the

demand for residents to shorten their shifts, which will require more residents.

“This will help tackle Israel’s growing and expanding needs as part of our comprehensive programme to expand the number of medical students,” Education Minister Yifat Shasha-Biton said in a statement.

A Johannesburg Jewish student who asked not to be named told the *SA Jewish Report* that she hoped to do the degree and make aliya, so this wouldn’t have an impact on her plans. “That’s my dream – to make aliya and become an Israeli citizen. Now that it will become just for Israeli citizens, they may make the cost of the degree slightly cheaper. The one concern I have is it may make it more competitive.”

Kline agrees that costs will probably be lowered in light of the new law. Regarding competition, he says “time will tell”, but the entrance

requirements haven’t changed. He points out that by the end of their pre-med, students will probably have such a good level of Hebrew, they could also apply to Hebrew speaking programmes.

As an organisation that encourages aliya, Telfed doesn’t view the change in a negative light. He says he hasn’t had any complaints from people considering the programme. The last time he spoke to Ariel University two weeks ago, it had four applicants from South Africa. The degree is due to start in September.

Regarding funding, nothing has changed. Normally,

the pre-med at Ariel University is expensive, but Telfed managed to negotiate it down to 15 000 shekels (R76 550). “In addition, we have negotiated with the student authority [in the Israel ministry of absorption] that all tuition for the BSc will be paid for. So it’s a free degree,” says Kline.

“In addition, they will be able to apply for Telfed scholarships of up to 10 000 shekels (R51 033). Finally, the first year of the degree is also recognised by the Masa programme. So even if the student doesn’t make aliya, they can get a significant scholarship from Masa to cover their first year.”

The four-year medical degree at BGU usually costs \$40 000 (R675 640) a year – out of reach for most families. “But Telfed has engaged with a generous donor who has dedicated a \$1 million (R16.9 million) fund to help South African Jewish students to do this four-year section at BGU,” says Kline. The money has been set aside, but the details are still being finalised, which is why Telfed cannot name the donor at this stage.

Kline says this donor may also fund other Masters programmes in English at BGU. He says the donor is happy that applicants will make aliya, and that this change has “expanded more opportunities for scholarships and study options”.

Students can email [auinternational@ariel.ac.il](mailto:auinternational@ariel.ac.il) for more information.



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STEVEN GRUZD

The leafy north-eastern suburbs of Waverley and Savoy are soon to become a gated community in an effort to combat crime and take back the streets for those living there.

The Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) has granted permission to transform these areas – which have many Jewish residents – into an estate by early September. They will be surrounded by exterior fencing, with roads closed off and a limited number of controlled entrances and exits.

The campaign to create the estate has been driven by Community Active Protection (CAP) and the residents of these suburbs. CAP will actively patrol the estate, which has about 650 households. CAP’s chief operating officer, Sean Jammy, said that though violent crime had gone down in the area, petty crime such as the theft of lights, gate motors, and security cameras had increased.

“CAP has traditionally focused on serious and violent crime. This is what makes people want to emigrate,” he said. “Our methodology is to understand crime patterns and take the criminals off the streets. We now have to adapt to fighting this petty crime.”

Jammy said the July 2021 riots had led to heightened vigilance and preparedness for future incidents. A gated suburb had defensible boundaries.

“Most tellingly,” said Jammy, “we have witnessed massive degradation of services in Johannesburg. The roadsides aren’t maintained, there are weeds, there’s litter. We need to stop the urban creep.”

Road closures require various steps, starting with a group of residents who want to enclose their roads, followed by extensive stakeholder engagement. A threshold of 70% of residents need to consent to proposed road closures. A formal application and motivation are sent to the city council. A traffic survey must be conducted, and a period for objections must be given. The JRA must give consent for drilling into pavements and roads for the erection of fences and barriers.

This final go-ahead was received last week for CAP to erect and operate the estate. Initial permission is granted for two years. The formal application process for these suburbs took more than a year, compounded by COVID-19 delays.

The application must demonstrate that the road closures would be non-discriminatory and permit freedom of movement. “You can’t treat residents differently from non-residents,” Jammy said, “or paying from non-paying residents. You cannot refuse access or gather information that’s not observable. This is checked and monitored by the city, and permission can be revoked.”

Sol Swartz, a member of the Waverley Residents, Ratepayers & Homeowners Association, said the enclosure was important to reduce crime and allow people to reclaim their streets.

“Waverley has become a throughfare from Glenhazel through to Sandton,” Swartz said, “These streets were never built to be thoroughfares.”

Jammy said road closures get motorists to use the main arterial roads in the way they were designed to be used rather than running through the suburbs. “People get stuck on the traffic issue,” he said. “It’s a non-issue. In the morning and afternoons, extra gates can be opened.”

The enclosure depends on financial contributions from residents, and CAP recommends an average amount of R800 per household per month. Some pay more, some pay less, and some don’t contribute at all. Jammy said the scheme currently had a contribution rate of about 60%. “Everyone should pay their fair share, but you always get free riders. We’re gratified with the response, and people can see the big picture.”

Swartz believes the amount being asked isn’t exorbitant. “What’s unfair is when people don’t pay. We want everyone

to contribute even a little bit, even though we acknowledge that times are tough and there’s donor fatigue. But this isn’t like charity that you’re giving to someone else – you’re effectively paying for your own security.”

Jammy stressed that in spite of being founded



by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, CAP is non-denominational. “It’s about communities coming together to make themselves safer. The community building element is gratifying. A well-run road closure definitely enhances the value of homes.”

Not everyone is happy about the enclosure, however. Desmond Backos, the owner of Savoy Liquors and Paint City, which faces Louis Botha Avenue, said it would kill his business. “They’re proposing to gate off two streets leading into the business area,” he said. “How dare they! It’s not constitutional to block me off. I run a convenience store and depend on passing trade. It’s my livelihood and I have been here for 32 years.”

Backos has vowed to continue to fight against the enclosure. “What I have to do, I will,” he said. He’s demanding written proof of the approval from the JRA.

Though the Savoy-Waverley Estate might be one of the first of such schemes, it won’t be the last. “Suburbs like Sydenham, Sandringham, Glenhazel, Oaklands, and Orchards are also investigating suburb enclosures,” Jammy said.

“No-one wants to be putting up gates, but if you’re staying in Johannesburg, you have to invest in security,” he said. “We implore everyone to contribute. Though we’re commencing with the erection of the enclosure, we’re not at the fundraising target yet.”

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## Scapegoating can’t be tolerated

Dehumanising people because they are somehow different to you is the scourge of the world and it’s at the core of the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and so many horrific mass murders or world disasters caused by human beings.

It’s wholly unacceptable behaviour, and growing in South Africa. And at the helm is our government, which seems to be leading the charge.

Just opening the pages of the *Sunday Times* on the weekend was nauseating, as I read about Limpopo Health MEC Phophi Ramathuba blaming a Zimbabwean woman and her countrymen for problems in healthcare, saying it was their fault that there was such pressure on public hospitals.

She’s unrepentant, and this attitude is just another reflection of the national Afrophobia that exists, in which South Africans blame mostly Zimbabweans for joblessness, economic woes, and now problems in the medical arena.

It doesn’t take much to poke holes in her claims, which are 100% inaccurate, leaving her and so many others to create this falsehood through their Afrophobia.

The truth is that South Africa’s public healthcare system is overburdened, but not because of foreign nationals who constitute about 8% of the total population. The problems are far more about the shortage of personnel, facilities, beds, high workloads, and low morale in public hospitals and clinics.

It also has so much to do with mismanagement of funds, badly governed systems, corruption, and underfunding, according to a report by Corruption Watch.

And if it’s true that women are taking life-threatening chances to get to South African hospitals to get treatment or give birth, then what kind of people are we to even consider denying them?

We’re a country that prides ourselves as being humanitarians and a people who fought for human rights, but somehow this gets lost in translation when it comes to Afrophobia.

I understand that the pressure on our public healthcare facilities is overwhelming, but had the Guptas and their cronies in government not syphoned off so much money, our healthcare system wouldn’t have been jeopardised. There would be money for it.

I’m grateful that our president seems to be putting his foot on the accelerator of corruption fighting, but unfortunately the money is gone. So, Zimbabweans are made to suffer.

Our economy isn’t in good shape, and there are too many people without jobs. But can you really blame Zimbabweans for that? It’s hogwash that Zimbabweans steal South Africans’ jobs. So many of those who are complaining about this still wouldn’t have work even if there were no Zimbabweans here. Let’s be real.

It’s always easy to blame someone else, especially if it means you can scapegoat them for something you aren’t doing or aren’t doing properly.

At the end of this year, about 200 000 Zimbabweans, all of whom have been legitimately working and living here for decades, are suddenly going to be here illegally. If they continue to live and work here, the people employing them will be eligible for huge fines. From being 100% legitimate, contributing members of society, they are being criminalised.

Sound familiar? Something similar happened in Germany at the end of the 1930s, and it was to our people.

Jews appeared to be a threat to working class Germans, much like Zimbabweans appear to be to working class South Africans. The Jews were doing well, while many Germans weren’t. The government there and some leaders here saw a way out in scapegoating these people to appease the population – or themselves.

The South African MEC wouldn’t apologise to the Zimbabweans she humiliated and denigrated. Neither did the German government. Same same, but different. Only in Germany, it didn’t stop there...

This behaviour is appalling and frightening. What does it say about our country? What of the Zimbabweans who are feeding whole families back home on meagre domestic workers’ salaries? What of the heads of departments in top companies in South Africa who are Zimbabwean? Do they lose their jobs? Who’s qualified to replace them?

The bottom line, though, is what kind of people are we to do this to fellow human beings? How do we legitimately treat people this way?

How do you legitimise people with permits and allow them to live here happily and build their lives and then suddenly take it all away?

You know, the African National Congress, our ruling party, once represented freedom fighters, human rights activists, you name it. They all fought a good fight. They were heroes. They had all the right ideas, and their decisions were based on what was honourable. However, since they have been in government, this has slowly but surely been eroded. It has been replaced by some apparently heartless leaders who can do this to their neighbours – people they have been living side by side with for decades.

These neighbours come from a country once not too different from ours, but one which has taken an economic and national nose dive.

There are so many ways to deal with this situation, which I do understand aren’t simple. We could even work with the Zimbabwean government to find ways to increase employment for them and us. The ideas abound, but all that’s happening is a blanket increase of hatred and abuse by a country that prides itself on its human rights record.

When a government legitimises a working class’s hatred or denigration of others, we’re on a losing wicket. It does not bode well!

As the Jewish community, we need to stand up and say no. We can’t let this happen under our noses because we have experienced this before.

I understand that we also feel afraid of the impact it might have on our situation, but how do we allow people to be treated like this without saying anything?

I can’t help but compare this situation to what’s happening in the Middle East. Just this week, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said, “If Israel decides to carry out its threats to destroy Iran’s nuclear programme, it will see if anything from the Zionist regime will remain or not.”

It was an unadulterated threat of annihilation.

Did the world say anything in response? Was there an outcry?

It’s time for us all to look around and weigh up what’s acceptable and what’s not. And if we see unacceptable behaviour, we need to stand up against it. Not cower. Never cower! Stand together against Afrophobia and the dehumanisation of those who are different.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**

**Editor**



# The power of the people

OPINION

RABBI YEHUDA STERN



It’s like a warm-up before a run, or shots in the nets before a cricket match. This is how we view the month of Elul, which sets the tone for the high holiday season.

The more we train for a run or the more we practice for a game, the better we’ll perform when it really counts. This is how we approach the month of Elul: the more focused we are on our relationship with G-d during this month, the more meaningful our experience will be over the high holidays.

During Elul, many spend time studying the Machzor, the special prayer-book with the high holiday services in it. This preparation enables us to familiarise ourselves with the prayers and the words, thereby making the shul experience a whole lot more meaningful.

Every year, as we blow the shofar throughout the month of Elul and prepare ourselves to coronate G-d as king on Rosh Hashanah, the following insight comes to mind. I share this with you, as I hope the message will inspire you as it inspires me.

In the days of old, up until the 20th century, monarchies were the most common form of government. Kings, emperors, and sultans governed countries around the world. Whatever they said was listened to. Sometimes they were merciful, at others they were cruel. Either way, they had the final say.

It therefore wasn’t a surprise to the Jewish community when the men of the great assembly instructed them, during the Second Temple era, to change the wording in our prayers during the ten days of *Teshuvah*. During the Amidah, we usually say, “the holy G-d”, but during the high holiday season, we were told to exchange those words with, “the holy king” as we coronate G-d as our judge and king at this time of the year.



Ultimately, we’re appointing G-d as our monarch, who instructs us to perform His commandments, and we must observe them. Whether we agree or disagree, we’re bound to the word of G-d and to His *mitzvot*.

However, during the 20th century, monarchy was replaced with democracy – a form of government in which the people have the power to decide legislation. The word “democracy” stems from Greek, and stands for two words: “*demos*” (people) and “*kratos*” (rule) as this approach to governance promotes the power of the people over the individual.

No one individual carries power in the democratic world because ultimately, it’s the people who vote him/her into office and it’s the people who can vote a person out of office too.

Though coronating G-d as king and change the wording in the prayers was appropriate in Temple times, it seems that Judaism hasn’t adapted with the latest in societal change as we still say, “the holy king” in our prayers today while the rest of the modern world has long moved on.

This seems strange, as Judaism has always spoken the language of the people. Though it was given more than 3 000 years ago, the Torah’s teachings are always relevant and relatable to the times in which we live.

Rabbis and commentators continuously show us how the most ancient law carries practical relevance. So, what happened with the annual appointment of G-d as king? Haven’t they found a way to modernise this process to suit the progressive times we live in?

One approach to answering these questions is that indeed, the Torah doesn’t adapt to new-age realities. Though the modern world celebrates democracy and the power of the people, Judaism still promotes G-d as our king. Judaism doesn’t believe that power is in the people, but rather in G-d, and we mustn’t allow ourselves to be swept away by modern culture.

However, the holy Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem, otherwise known as the Ba’al Shem Tov, and the Chassidic masters, had a different approach to the coronation of G-d as king. They explained that G-dliness isn’t something abstract and distant from us, but rather within each one of us. We all have a soul, which is part of G-d.

Thus, when we proclaim G-d as king on Rosh Hashanah, we’re also referring to the G-dly spark

inside each one of us. Our deeper selves are revealed during this time of the year and we – the people – are once again given the power and strength to be our true selves, aligned with G-d, and the purpose for which He created us.

The high holidays aren’t just a time when we coronate G-d as king, but rather a time when our true potential shines; when we’re able to reveal “the real me”, and are empowered to tap into the G-dly power that’s part of each of us. *Demos kratos* – the power is in the people, inside you and me.

A few weeks ago, in honour of Tisha B’Av, the national day of mourning, we hosted an evening at our shul focused on overcoming adversity. Two of our guest speakers were Erin Lazarus, who spoke about life with her new prosthetic leg, and Cheryl Green, who spoke about life after her daughter, Hanna’s, passing.

Both of their stories are difficult and challenging,

but we were able to see the inner strength that motivated these two young women during their time of adversity. They are both very strong and have an unbreakable will to live life in spite of the difficulties. This is the true meaning of “the power is in the people”.

Each of us carries a soul inside of us, a part of G-d. As we approach the high holidays, let’s empower this soul to shine forth with confidence and positivity, thereby enabling us to live life to the fullest.

• Rabbi Yehuda Stern is the rabbi of Sydenham Shul, Johannesburg.



# Confessions of a prodigal daughter: my first Limmud

OPINION

LYNN JOFFE



I've always felt a bit like a prodigal daughter. I discovered late that I was 16 ways Lithuanian – a born Litvak. Accused of "killing our Lord" in Aberdeen at seven. Prepared for my Joburg Batmitzvah from scratch from London.

Returned to South Africa in my early teens to be initiated into the United Progressive Jewish Congregation, where my grandfather was a big *macha*. Joined the Reform youth movement, Maginim, where I lost my virginity and learned the tricks of the Zionist trade.

And then, at 20, married a *boychik* who leaned heavily towards Orthodoxy. The first time I was told to "go upstairs" to the women's section, I broke down in tears. Seven years later, after having been cajoled out of the marriage by unfulfilled dreams – it just wouldn't stick – I departed South Africa and bungee-jumped my way into the real world.

Two years later, I returned just before Madiba was released. I thought he'd done it for me personally. I committed to the country as if I'd been born here. Wed my second husband, a non-Jew, and settled down forever, outside the Pale. Now, it's time.

Nobody ever told me about Limmud. Perhaps I didn't look the type. Perhaps I'd strayed too far from my tribal roots. I sometimes lit Shabbat candles for my dead grandparents, or the doggies, but that was about it. And yet. And yet. When I returned to academic study after a 30-year gap, I chose to pen a novel on the very subject of the wandering Jew – that antisemitic myth created by monks in the Middle Ages, rear engineered back to the Bible and dressed, in different garb, to this very day.

I identified with this character: the forever outsider. The immortal wanderer. The eternal scapegoat. But what if the wandering Jew ... was a woman? From this premise, my imagination took flight, and I wrote *The Gospel According to Wanda B. Lazarus* by turning the myth on its head. This was the subject of my talk at Limmud Johannesburg and Cape Town.

I first heard about Limmud as an accidental dinner guest in Cape Town. I'd gone to a launch at the Gitlin Library – Jonathan Ancer's *Mensches in the Trenches* –

and was thrilled at the level of intellectual curiosity the audience had for this seminal work. Afterwards, I sought a dinner spot, and was invited to join a table containing seasoned Limmudniks – they don't wear it on their sleeves. When Janet K told me of this organisation, welcoming, nay encouraging, divergent Jewish points of view, I was intrigued. "So, we don't have to cover our elbows and our knees? We don't have to go behind the veil? We can step out of being barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen?" "Nonsense," Janet said. "Our presence and our opinions are as valued as any other Jew." And this is the very premise of Limmud. Democratisation.

No titles. Acceptance of interrogation where no women has gone before. Women training to be Orthodox rabbis. Same-sex parents. Reform, even.

"Why don't you apply," Janet asked, "to do a talk on your novel, exploring this theme of antisemitism? It's a hot topic in the *gola* right now. I'll put you in touch." And so she did. And so I did. And presented in both Johannesburg and Cape Town in what I call my "virgin trip out" to become a Limmudnik.

And this is what I found: a celebration of Jewish community, learning, and culture, a spirit of enquiry and curiosity, talks, plays, singalongs, *shuirim*. Schmoozing with the locals. Reconnecting with ancient school friends. Making friends with babies. And discovering a cross-section of global minds who all step up to being Jews in the modern world.

Limmud works with volunteers at every tier of preparation. Nobody gets paid. All the *moola* collected goes to having the best conference ever, with speakers from all over the world. I volunteered straight up – it's a great way to get to know people – and my first task was to fetch the Gorfinkels from Orchards to schlep them to the venue. I got 10 very exclusive minutes with the famed Jordan B, the editor of DC Comics' many superheroes, interpreting and applying Jewish values to everything he touches.

I understand there's a *faribel* with certain Orthodox rabbis. I don't want to go into that. They've banned

themselves, it seems. And in spite of this, a *shomrei* Shabbat vibe is entered into, especially in Johannesburg, where we were residential.

We could do what we liked in the privacy of our rooms, we were told. But in the communal space, *bevakashah*, respect the Sabbath. Enjoy the delicious kosher fare. Don't take pics. Stay off social media. Don't put the urn on.

I must admit, it was a challenge to present with no visual aids whatsoever, but I learned a few things, and when I presented in Cape Town the following Sunday, I was more comfortable with a PowerPoint presentation, using visuals to illuminate my points of reference.

Sue – my blind-date roommate – and I strolled to the swimming pool, where I'd promised myself I'd take a dip. There, in the shallows, stood a buxom blonde, dress rolled up, and a hunky Hungarian with a stolen towel. It was Hannah Gaventa, non-government-organisation specialist extraordinaire, and Tomi Büchler, her wingman for the South African leg. They dared me into the water, so what could I do? I dove in in my t-shirt and almost *wrecked* from the shock. What a way to meet those who are likely to become lifelong friends.

The programme was choc-a-bloc with fascination. Hard to choose, but I did a bit of homework before I landed, and saw my favourite internationals in Johannesburg – Yair Rosenberg, who summarised the antisemitism I needed to know about; Jordan B, whose every lecture I attended. The dulcet tones of Maria Camerini; and cultural insights from Emmanuelle Stein, whose voices were touching and Talmudic. Anat Hoffman, tireless activist for the Reform movement in Israel. I wept through Clinton Fein and Bryan Schimmel's brave and crazy two-hander on bullying. Loved Gil Hovav's mesmerising memoirs; Rachael Pass's deep dive into Asherah; and Adina Roth's feminist interpretation of Talmudic texts. I even attended the silent disco, and danced into the early hours with a gaggle of young Limmudniks.

And the food – you know, you must feed Jews. And did we eat! Johannesburg and Cape Town's gala dinners were a true feast, we were kept fed and watered between sessions, and the *gehakte* herring flowed.

In short, through Limmud 2022, I found my people. I'll volunteer for 2023. I'm hooked on the tribe once more. I couldn't be happier. And I never have to go to the back of the shul again.

• *Lynn Joffe is chief executive of Creatrix, a multicultural storytelling agency, and the author of the novel, The Gospel According to Wanda B. Lazarus.*



Anat Hoffman, Jonathan Ancer, and Lynn Joffe shmoozing at Limmud

## Gqeberha Shabbaton an outside-in moment for Jewish youth

OPINION

SASHA RODENACKER



The movie *Inside Out* defines the protagonist's character using core memories. It shows the impact of key experiences in shaping character. However, it's too easy to get swept up in the din of daily life, making those moments of self-reflection rare.

Sometimes situations confront us, forcing deeper consideration of what constitutes our identity. I had such an experience running the Habonim Shabbaton at Theodor Herzl in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth).

In late June, a Habonim group embarked on a road trip up the Garden Route, engaging with various small centres. The last stop on the way was Gqeberha, where we met with the Jewish people at Theodor Herzl School, and gate crashed the school's Jewish sessions.

Our time there was short, but it was the most challenging stop of the trip. However, we did establish a connection with the people who run the Jewish curriculum at the school. They shared our determination to connect small-centre Jews to their Jewish identity and understood the value of youth movements as informal Jewish spaces.

Subsequently, three weeks later, I got a call from our *shaliach*, Lior Agiv, who told us that Theodor Herzl wanted us to run a Shabbaton for the Gqeberha Jewish community.

This greatly increased the value of the Garden Route trip and provided an amazing opportunity for the movement and Jewish youth of Gqeberha.

"The Jewish people exists in all its bewildering complexity because it's both a religion and a nation, a faith and a fate," said the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, and this quote displays the central concept of

Jewish peoplehood nurtured through the Shabbaton.

There were various moments, which spoke to me as a Jew entrenched in the big city Jewish community, but none so much as the following two:

First, a *channicha* explained the value she got from being in a secular, non-Jewish environment. She felt it connected her to the broader South African context, gaining insight into the "real" South Africa.

Her holistic concept of the broader South African struggle at such a young age led me into a world in which these small communities engage much more directly with broader society, unsheltered by the bubble of the larger community in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Second, another *channie* expressed how grateful she was to be in a space where she was immersed in the complexities of being Jewish. To see how privileged we are and how deprived these communities can be of comprehensible Jewish programming, opened my eyes to a different way of experiencing the South African Jewish community.

I'm grateful to be able to establish this lasting partnership with Habonim. However, this wasn't the same Gqeberha Jewish community of yesteryear.

The South African Jewish community once thrived off Jews in small centres. Wayne Sussman, the *manhig* of Habonim, says that in the 1990s, a third of machaneh came from Durban, Zimbabwe, the Vaal, Pretoria, Oudtshoorn, and the Free State. This kind of a situation would be unthinkable nowadays.

Once a stronghold of South African Jewry, the Gqeberha Jewish community has dwindled in number. The Jewish school is mostly populated by those with no Jewish background, and shul services are dominated

by an ageing crowd.

However, small numbers don't equate with a lifeless community. Irrespective of the clustering of Jews into big cities and Jewish schools, wherever there are Jews, there's a manifestation of Jewish life.

As a movement, we've begun to question what we can do to support smaller Jewish communities. How we can engage with each other to bring the Jewish life they desire into these seemingly forgotten communities.

Perhaps it's pertinent for us as a broader South African community to interrogate how we push smaller communities to the fringe. Also, perhaps it's time we began to look at Jews in secular schools as the contemporary creation of "small centres". From this standpoint, we have the ability to move forward in productive ways. It's time we spoke to small community leaders to see how we could best serve them. What events/programmes can we collaborate on that would enrich their Jewish experience?

Through the hard work of those involved with Theodor Herzl and the broader Gqeberha community, we ran a meaningful Shabbaton for young people who had been starved of the informal Jewish spaces so crucial to formulating the South African Jewish youth.

It emphasised the plurality of being Jewish through the nuanced abstraction of Jewish peoplehood, and extended the concept of Judaism beyond religion. This way, we embraced our history, culture, food, and divergent ideas.

• *Sasha Rodenacker is S'gan Rosh Shtilim of Habonim Dror*

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# Israeli president calls on Jews to reclaim Zionism

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Israeli President Isaac Herzog called on the Jewish people of the world to work together to reclaim the term “Zionism”, which he insists means “responsibility”.

In an impassioned plea to the more than 1 400 delegates from 40 countries who attended the World Zionist Organization’s Conference in Basel, he said reclaiming Zionism was the combined “mission of our generation”.

Speaking at the gala event on Monday night, 29 August, that marked the end of the 125th anniversary of the first Zionist Congress held in 1897, he said, “Zionism, both historically and in its modern form, means responsibility. Responsibility that we must bear with pride and etch on our hearts from generation to generation, forevermore.”

The only way the Jewish people can address the issues, hardships, and dilemmas relating to Zionism is together, Herzog said.

“Not just because our past was shaped thus, but because this is the only way, and the safest and most responsible way in which we may build a prosperous and promising future for our people and our state, for future generations, and for Zionism,” Herzog said.

He spoke of how ridiculous it was that a “major social media company had considered treating the word ‘Zionist’ as a term of abuse”.

“About a year ago, there was a discussion about whether the word ‘Zionist’ should be censored on social media for fear that it was being used as a term of antisemitic abuse against Jews and Israelis, or whether, to quote the counter argument, the word ‘Zionist’ was a term of legitimate criticism of Israeli policy,” said Herzog. “I heard about this discussion, and was appalled. I was appalled because, inconceivably, at no point did anyone suggest that ‘Zionist’ might actually be a positive term! “We must fight this antisemitic and anti-Zionist

approach. History has already shown what dark depths it can reach,” Herzog said. “We must reclaim the term ‘Zionism’ for ourselves, with our heads held high and our backs straight, as an expression of our own national identity, traditions, hopes, pride, enlightened values, justice, and commitment to *tikkun olam*.”

Herzog repeated the need to breathe new meaning



Israeli President Isaac Herzog

Photo: Haim Zach

into the Zionism, that of responsibility. “Responsibility for our deep-rooted Jewish identity as individuals; responsibility for our cohesion as a diverse, opinionated people, whose deep and binding connection to its ancestral land, Zion, finds expression in the name ‘Zionism’; responsibility for the existence and prosperity of the Jewish and democratic state of Israel, the ultimate sovereign and political expression of the Zionist movement; and no less importantly, responsibility for the fact that we’re part of the family of nations, in an effort to help solve the greatest challenges of humanity, bequeathing *tikkun olam* to the whole world.

“Therefore, from a Jewish and Israeli perspective, Zionism means populating the land of Israel and building Israeli society; it means fortifying Israeli democracy, with a proper culture of debate and discussion; and the perpetual pursuit of peace and

coexistence with members of all people and faiths living in Israel and the whole Middle East.

“It means guaranteeing aliya to the state of Israel, the beating heart of the Jewish people and their firmest foundation; it means fostering Jewish identity among all our nation’s communities, bolstering mutual responsibility in the Jewish world across its many stripes; and of course, the security and prosperity of diaspora Jewry.

“From a universal perspective, our generation’s Zionism is expressed in its essential contribution to building whole worlds of intellect and culture across the world,” Herzog said. And, it means “fighting to solve the global climate crisis; extending assistance to people in disaster zones;

providing economic, medical, and welfare support for those who need it; and waging an all-out war on hatred and violence”.

“That is to say, modern Zionism gives us our sense not only of a shared fate but also a shared destiny, as long as it remains anchored in our deepest roots, weaving together the inseparable threads of peoplehood, land, and state.”

He look back at what Theodor Herzl had done 125 years ago, saying that he “was Zionism’s greatest instigator”.

“He translated Jewish identity into an effective political doctrine, and he opened up the possibility for Jews to experience their identity as an independent political community, as a state,” Herzog said.

Continued on page 14>>

## Arab dignitary reveals Herzl’s letter at World Zionist Conference

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Not only was Ahmed Obaid AlMansoori the first prominent Muslim Arab personality to participate at the World Zionist Organization’s Conference in Basel, Switzerland, this week, he also revealed that he had a rare letter handwritten and signed by Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism.

This revelation occurred this week at the 125th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress held by Herzl himself.

AlMansoori, from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is the founder of the Crossroads of Civilisation Museum and the first Holocaust Memorial Gallery in the Arab world. He’s a former member of the UAE Federal National Council, a national quasi-parliamentary body.

In the authenticated letter, written in 1897, 125 years ago, Herzl writes that he cannot accept a prospective applicant to the Zionist organisation that he had established, days before its first congress in Basel.

During those years, Herzl was extraordinarily busy promoting his Zionist vision and the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people.

AlMansoori acquired the letter in 2016 in Vienna, and has since displayed it in his museum in Dubai. It forms part of a collection of historical Jewish documents and items presented to the many visitors to the museum each year.

“Jews have always been an important part of the Middle East. I’m committed to telling the story of the Jewish people and of Zionism to the Arab world,” said AlMansoori.

He has dedicated his life to advancing peace and promoting the story of the Jewish people as an indigenous part of the Middle East.

Yaakov Hagoel, the chairperson of the World Zionist Organization, said of AlMansoori, “Herzl never dreamed that the day would come that a brave Arab leader would participate in a Zionist Conference together with thousands of Jews from all over the world whose goal is to strengthen and develop the independent and sovereign state of Israel”.

AlMansoori started his museum as a private collection in his own home in 2006 before going public five years later at the Emirati government’s request.

Now, the award-winning museum is located at the Royal House on the main road in the historical area of Dubai.

It has housed historical Jewish documents, letters, and coins since its establishment – long before the signing of the Abraham Accords peace treaties.

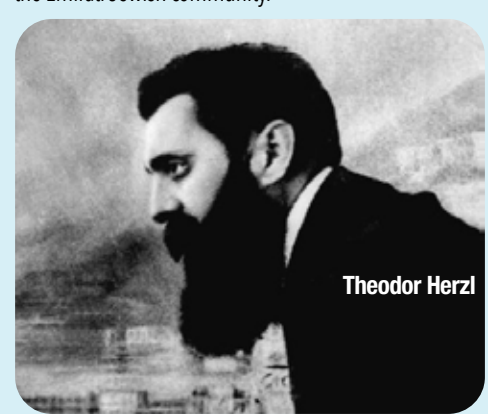
AlMansoori has dedicated a significant portion of his museum to exhibiting the rich history of the Jewish People in the Middle East, emphasising that Jews are an indigenous and important part of the region.

“It’s of upmost importance that the young generations of the Middle East learn about Judaism, Zionism, and Israel,” said AlMansoori. “This will strengthen peace, not only between Israel and the UAE, but in the entire region.”

Ahmed Obaid AlMansoori

On Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2021 and following the peace treaties signed between Israel and the Arab states, AlMansoori took his commitment to promoting Jewish-Arab relations even further by founding the first and only Holocaust Memorial Gallery in the Arab world.

It has grown into an international hub for Holocaust commemoration events and ceremonies; a centre for advancing peace, tolerance, and Jewish-Arab solidarity in the Middle East; and an important place of gathering for the Emirati Jewish community.



Theodor Herzl

“It’s important that we live side-by-side with mutual respect for one another, understanding the history and values of each nation and its people,” said AlMansoori.

During the World Zionist Organization’s Conference this week, businessman and philanthropist Sylvan Adams gave a speech about promoting Israel and the Jewish world through major cultural and sporting events.

Since making aliya in 2016, the Canadian-born Adams has not only brought the first three stages of the 2018 Giro d’Italia Grand Tour bicycle race to Israel, but also managed to get Madonna to perform at the Eurovision Song Contest in Tel Aviv in 2019. He co-founded the Israel World Tour cycling team, and brought big football games and judo grand slams to the country.

“I want to emphasise that Israel belongs to all Jews: Israeli born or Israeli immigrants such as my wife and myself, but also to each and every Jew in the diaspora. Israel belongs to all of us,” said Adams.

“But with my projects, I’m not trying to convince the haters and the antisemites. Rather, I’m speaking to the apolitical silent majority, in their living rooms and on their mobile phones. I’m on the offensive side of the field, and this is where we can score goals with the silent majority.”

Israeli businessman and philanthropist Haim Taib, the founder and president of Mitreli Group, also spoke at the conference. His message was about Zionism’s new global mission and the work his organisation does in Africa devising and carrying out holistic infrastructure development projects for African nations.

“I see clearly the chain that connects the Zionist narrative, our work in Africa, and improving social welfare in Israel,” said Taib, born in Jerusalem in 1960 to Jewish-Tunisian immigrants. “From my point of view, this is the mission of universal Zionism. *Tikkun olam* in the name of Israel and the Jewish people, for a better world.

“After realising the Zionist dream of a strong, democratic, and liberal Jewish state, Zionism’s new mission must be desire and action for a better world.

Herzl himself wrote, ‘Zionism isn’t only the desire for a promised land for our people, but also an aspiration for a moral and spiritual wholeness.’ I believe, therefore, that the role of Jewish leadership today is to bring about *tikkun olam* wherever we can make a difference.”

Photo: Twitter

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# Westpark memorial stone mitzvah warms hearts around the world

TALI FEINBERG

Back in 2014, Johannesburg Jewish community member Mike Said was visiting the cemetery when an idea came to him that was so simple yet so powerful that it has reverberated around the world. He offered to place memorial stones on graves for people who couldn't do so.

Said does this mitzvah every year before yom tov in memory of his mother. He was unable to do it for the past two years because of the pandemic, but is restarting the project this year.

"I'm 60 years old, and grew up and live in Johannesburg. I lost my own mom [who died at 48] when I was 23, to leukaemia. It was only when I turned 48 that I realised just how young she was, how much she had missed out on, and how much of her life still lay before her. Like so many others, my life has been touched by loss and tragedy. Each visit to the cemetery reminds me how fortunate I am, and that there's no time like the present," he says.

It was while he was visiting Westpark Jewish Cemetery that he began to type on Facebook, "I realise there must be so many people unable to visit [graves] because of time or distance. It would be my privilege to do this on your behalf. If you would like a grave visited, a stone placed, a message or prayer said, please send me a message with as much detail as possible. I do this in memory and honour of my late mother, Sheina Chaia.

"Within a few seconds and for days afterwards, the responses poured in," he says. "Heartfelt requests for assistance, messages of gratitude, offers of assistance and encouragement. Some written in



disbelief, some with offers of payment, and some of the most touching stories I have ever read.

"With a little help from friends, I began to compile a list. Next was a call to the Chev [the Chevrah Kadisha] to try to find the grave numbers. And so this little mitzvah took on a life of its own. The requests kept coming, volunteers were offering assistance, and I knew this was going to be an annual event."

When his alarm went off at 05:00, "I suddenly realised that I hadn't seen a sunrise with my mom in more than 30 years. I packed my camera and headed to Westpark. This gave me a chance to take some beautiful images and start the day off as I was planning to finish it, at my mom's grave. I also visited family members: my late bobba and zaida, and my cousin, Michael, who was tragically taken from us.

"My next call was to the children's section of the cemetery to visit four graves. It was

something I wanted to do personally and not ask anyone else to do. It was an emotional experience, and by the time I left, there were simply no more tears to shed."

He and his supporters then split the cemetery into sections, "and armed with phone cameras, stones, lists, prayers, and special requests, we headed out. I have no idea what I expected, but it was just remarkable. It was spiritually uplifting, deeply meaningful, and personally fulfilling. We stopped at each grave, placed a stone, read a prayer, and checked to see if there were any special requests. By 13:00, we had visited more than 100 graves. Just before leaving, a few more requests came in and I headed off to find the last few."

As Said got in his car, he received a last message in an email from Australia. "To my amazement, it was from one of my best friends in high school to visit the grave of his late father. On the way to the final

grave, I passed the grave of the father of one of my best friends in primary school. I stopped at both, took pictures, laid stones, said prayers, and headed home, smiling inside and out."

He has continued the project every year. "When the numbers are high, there are always people that help. Some years I simply go alone." He emphasises that "it's no effort at all, it's simply something I do. In fact, it has become a part of my year that although emotionally difficult, is something I look forward to doing."

"People are simply amazed, which is a little sad in its own way," Said says. "Have we become so closed-off that a simple kindness from a stranger surprises us? If so, I want to be that stranger that makes your day or lifts your spirit. We could all use a bit of that."

He says the Chev is helpful in locating the graves and "makes sure I have access and know where to go. It really is an unbelievable organisation, and it's only when you visit other cemeteries that you realise just how much work it does to keep the cemetery running and looking so good."

He's inspired by others, like "people who visit the cemeteries in small towns around the country. My friend, Julian Rod, always visits with me and then still makes time to ensure any graves in Cape Town are visited."

The project brings up a range of emotions. "First, I'm immensely grateful that I'm able to do this. I'm fit and healthy, and am able to set aside the time and resources. The other

emotions are a tinge of sadness as I read the messages that come in from around the world. I think there's some sadness, regret, and guilt in some that have emigrated, but I completely understand and am just happy to help.

"The day itself can be emotional: visiting graves of people I know, family members and friends is never easy. The hardest part is the visit to the children's section. Seeing the tiny graves, the dates, and the messages always leaves me in tears. But even for that I'm grateful as it reminds me that I'm alive and have so much to be thankful for!"

His advice to anyone who wants to do mitzvot but doesn't know where to start is to "start somewhere close. There are so many people that could use a little kindness, a little encouragement, perhaps some small financial assistance. Many of us don't have the financial means to make a big difference, but we can give of our time and skills to make a huge difference in the world."

"Do something today, in fact right now as you finish reading this. Phone a friend, visit someone, make a donation to charity, pay for someone's bread and milk as you stand in the line at the supermarket. Don't wait to be thanked, don't do it for any other reason than the fact that you can. Random acts of kindness go much further than you'll ever imagine."

He hopes that one day, when he can no longer do this, "a new team of volunteers will carry on this mitzvah. Not for themselves and not for me, but for hundreds of strangers they have never met and may never meet, to whom this means so much."

To request a grave visit, email [mike@mikesaidwhat.co.za](mailto:mike@mikesaidwhat.co.za) or fill in the form at <https://tinyurl.com/visits2022>

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# Child with rare condition becomes celebrity “kindness hero”

NICOLA MILTZ

A seven-year-old child who cannot talk due to an extremely rare condition has become a mini celebrity with a kindness campaign.

Shaina Shishler is lovable and engaging and though she hardly talks, her innate kind-heartedness and sweet nature speaks volumes.

The youngest of eight siblings, Shaina has a disorder that damages the nervous system and is progressive. It is called BPAN – beta-propeller protein-associated neurodegeneration – in which iron builds up in the brain and causes a range of serious, often life-threatening problems.

She’s the only person on the continent known to have this condition, and one of a few hundred in the world.

Each day brings with it physical challenges. She has experienced multiple types of debilitating seizures and often has respiratory crises requiring oxygen and hospitalisation. She can say only a few words, and needs help to dress, bath, and eat. Hatzolah is on speed dial on every cellphone in the house.

Shaina remains cheerful, sparkly, and

spunky, say her parents, Rabbi Ari and Rebbetzin Naomi Shishler, who founded and run the Chabad of Strathavon Jewish Life Centre in Sandton.

In a bid to find meaning and make sense of her serious condition, the family took comfort in her special ability to “elicit happiness” in others. They launched a heartwarming campaign aptly called #AKinderWorldNow to help turn her illness into a faith-affirming quest.

“We understood that Shaina’s role is to coach people to be kinder,” said Shishler, who believes his daughter to be acutely

kind to me today, please pass this card on to someone else to spread kindness in our world.”

“People are deeply moved. They want to know more about Shaina and her medical condition. We hoped these cards would ease her interactions with people,” he said. “We hadn’t anticipated how much her cards would inspire them.”

He said Shaina has given coupons to all

will uplift you and bring you joy without her ever having to say a word – living proof that actions speak louder than words,” said principal Leah Lipsker.

Shaina was born seven weeks early and was named Shaina Brocha – “*shaina*” is Yiddish for beautiful and “*brocha*” means blessing. “Doctors tell us her condition is a case of bad luck, we say it’s divine providence,” said Rebbetzin Shishler.

“She chose us. We share her with everyone because she has so much to give and teach, the ability to bring out kindness in people is truly special,” she said.

Initially, the couple thought her developmental delays were due to her premature birth. However niggling concerns about something more sinister grew with each life-threatening emergency.

Her condition remained a medical mystery and it took five years for the couple finally to receive the diagnosis following genetic testing and uncountable blood tests.

“It was very stressful,” said Rebbetzin Shishler, “We didn’t tell anyone for months, including our other children.”

“Shaina’s journey upended our family. We now prioritise differently, feel differently, and expect differently,” writes Shishler in his blog. “As challenging as this journey is, we feel Shaina’s blessings in our lives every day.”

These days, Shaina has good days when her happiness overflows, but she has many bad days too. She recently spent several weeks in intensive care with double pneumonia, followed by a stomach bug and then an ear infection.

Her favourite singer, Choni G, gave her a wonderful surprise when he visited Shaina once she was discharged from hospital. A video posted on her Instagram of him singing to her reached the attention of Reach For A Dream, which recently redecorated Shaina’s sensory room. The organisation surprised her with another visit from Choni G, having flown him up from Cape Town to give her a personal concert at home.

Shaina’s eldest sister, Chayale, wrote on her father’s blog that the worry never ends. However, she said her sister’s personality, her dancing, singing, laughter, and compassion also never ends.

“Strange as it may sound, after two decades of building a community, this is the first time we have really appreciated how important community is,” writes Shishler.

“Some souls enter this world unable to do for themselves to allow others to share kindness with them. We’re blessed to have one such soul in our family, and we hope she’ll inspire people everywhere to share more kindness.”

Follow Shaina on #AKinderWorldNow.



Torah Academy Nursery School Principal Leah Lipsker dancing with Shaina Shishler



Shaina Shishler

Photos: Ian Ossendwyer

kinds of people from pilots on aeroplanes, to shopkeepers, to strangers on the side of the road. The cards have spread all over the world through relatives and friends. The campaign has reached several schools abroad where similar kindness campaigns have been launched.

Her kindness coupons were so well received, they decided to print cards for her friends to share. These cards start by saying, “I’ve been *inspired* by a super-rare kid called Shaina”.

The campaign has been launched at various schools. She has handed cards to celebrities, musicians, and politicians, and inspired a fellow BPAN friend in Vermont in the United States to do the same at her school. Shishler said the family is slowly involving other families of children with severe challenges to build a global network of kindness ambassadors.

Since Shaina’s diagnosis, much of Shishler’s teaching has centred on the life lessons gleaned from his journey with his daughter.

His blog is titled “Shaina’s Brocha – The blessings, lessons (and challenges) of living with a BPAN child.”

“She’s the kid who smiles within seconds of invasive medical procedures. She wakes up with a grin, and beams through most of the day,” writes Shishler in his blog.

Her language is music and dance, and she has a favourite YouTube playlist. Her face lights up when she hears a familiar favourite song, instantly aware of the words, clapping hands, and demanding the same of everyone in her presence.

Her teachers at Torah Academy Nursery School say she brings out a kindness in her peers, and is drawn to them when they are upset. “Shaina captures hearts wherever she goes,” said her school facilitator, Abi Berkowitz. “Just being in Shaina’s presence

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## Left bleeding: the SA medic who helped expose Theranos >>Continued from page 1

benefits and risks of being a whistleblower. “Becoming a whistleblower will change your life completely,” he says. “It will change the way friends, relatives, and co-workers see you. It will change how you view yourself and the world. So weigh the risks and benefits very carefully. There are potentially huge financial gains to blowing the whistle if you’re part of a very large company that is engaged in illegal activity and is trying to co-opt you to be part of it.”

To anyone thinking of going into clinical pathology as a career, Rosendorff’s advice is, “Go for it! It’s an incredible career that’s focused on technology and the patient. It’s also intensively personalised now.”

After he left Theranos, Rosendorff joined the genomics company Invitae as lab director. “Around the time my

daughter was born, I joined a urine toxicology company in San Diego. I was then recruited to lead the COVID-19 testing effort for the state of California in 2021. I ended that public-service job in July 2022. I’m now working for Color Genomics on COVID-19 testing, and I’m back as a consultant for Millennium Health on urine toxicology.

“I live in Walnut Creek, three miles [4.8km] from my daughter, who has just started kindergarten. I blog, give talks, write, consult, and plan to visit South Africa soon.” He describes the South African Jewish community as “wonderfully warm”, one that “plays a pivotal role in transformation in South Africa”.

“I consider myself a public servant and a proud South African,” Rosendorff says. “I hope to extend the lessons I learnt growing up in South Africa in the United States.”



# Eating grasshoppers for Israel: on the bus with TikTok influencers

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

A group of fired-up 20-somethings crush together in the aisle of the bus, singing at the top of their lungs, “We’re going on a field trip!”, while pouting for the dozen or so iPhones set to selfie mode.

It’s 07:00, and far too early for this level of pep. But pep is the name of the game in the influencer business, and this group of 16 Israelis have an endless supply to share with their combined following of 32 million social media users around the world.

The bus driver tells the guy with hair the colour of cycling shorts to sit down for the tenth time, while the girl with the immaculately applied contouring asks, once again, when the next “poop break” is. The trip, which took place at the end of June and was paid for by the Jewish National Fund USA (JNF USA), feels more like an end-of-year school outing than a carefully curated excursion aimed at encouraging tourists to “go north”.

Histrionics aside, these influencers are deeply savvy and know exactly just how hammy to behave when it comes to creating a viral TikTok video for any given scenario. For a trip like this, which aims to showcase the culture, coexistence, and culinary scene of Israel’s north, the content is light and glossy. At one stop, a gaggle of tween girls crowds around Eviatar Ozeri, who has garnered close to 10 million followers largely thanks to his hilarious exchanges with his chihuahua, Niki, (who has more than one million followers in her own right).

Ozeri and the rest of the influencers on the bus may very well be Israel’s most advanced weapon in its war of *hasbara*, the Hebrew term for public diplomacy, the only battlefield where Israel feels it is

losing. Harnessing the enthusiasm and the tremendous reach of these digital warriors is supposed to help deliver a message that official Israel has thus far failed to convey – of a cool, peace-loving nation.

A visit to a cross-border tunnel dug by the Lebanese Hezbollah terror group is an excuse for merriment, as the influencers pose for a group reel, flip the bird, and yell, “F-Hezbollah!”

Their daily content is varied and specialised. One posts about no-makeup makeup, another about water-to-wine chemistry experiments, another about girls with guns, but during flare-ups with the Palestinians, their messaging is uniform and usually involves some iteration of Israel’s right to defend itself.

The global value of influencer marketing in 2021 was estimated at \$13.8 billion (R2.3 trillion) by Influencer Marketing Hub, and American influencers can reportedly command \$20 000 (R337 574) or more for a single promo reel. Yet none in this Israeli crew receives a penny from either JNF USA or the ministry of foreign affairs for their content promoting Israel. They say they feel compelled to do it anyway.

“I started posting [pro-Israel] content out of frustration,” said 20-year-old Guy Rabi,

whose 3.1 million followers watch his alter ego, @coolchemistryguy, blow up gummy bears and melt various other substances. “The lies were pissing me off, so I just began reacting to anti-Israel posts.”

Rabi paid no small price for his activism. The top city in Rabi’s following was Tehran. His first story on Israel lost him 20 000 followers in one fell swoop, and death threats have slid into his DMs on more than one occasion.

classier content.”

Dekel, whose quirky skincare routines and lack of last name are incongruous with her training as a biomedical engineer, maintains that there’s no reason that reels on butt acne can’t share the same social media real estate as pro-Zionism posts.

The influencers on the JNF USA trip are part of a ministry of foreign affairs initiative called the Israeli Influencers Dream Team. According to the ministry’s senior director for



Eviatar Ozeri getting extra toppings on his ice cream

Photo: Deborah Danan

and tours around the country, such as the trip to Israel’s north, where JNF USA’s ultimate goal is to attract 300 000 new residents.

The JNF bus arrives in Kiryat Shmona, a working-class city near the Lebanon border, for a tour of Margalit Startup City Galil, venture capitalist Erel Margalit’s food tech centre. The tour provides plenty of Insta fodder, from grasshopper-eating competitions to slurping sessions with straws made from straw.

The next stop is Buza, a boutique ice cream chain, which in the past partnered with Margalit-funded InnovoPro to create vegan ice cream from chickpea protein. The trip to Buza (ice cream in Arabic) is also a chance to showcase Israeli coexistence. Founded by an Arab Muslim and a Jew, the Galilean ice cream company now has six shops all over Israel.

The Dream Team doesn’t exactly blend in in Kiryat Shmona, and it isn’t long before a group of overexcited Arab schoolchildren swarm them for selfies. At one point, a man with an oversized tattoo on his forearm rolls down his car window to scream with delight at the sight of Orin Julie, an influencer who calls herself the Queen of Guns, and who has more than a passing resemblance to the iconic Tomb Raider character Lara Croft.

At least anecdotally, the exposure benefited Israel’s image. According to Ozeri, it broke stereotypes about Israel and the conflict. The TikToker dedicated a series of stories to a visit at the home of Savta Maha, a naqab-clad Druze woman who serves traditional Druze cuisine (that’s also kosher) – a mashup that he said one Turkish follower deemed “very cool”.

“We’re eating stuffed vine leaves and rosewater malabi and suddenly, my Muslim followers are saying, ‘Hey, you’re eating my food,’” Ozeri said. “It’s entirely new for them.”

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# Comrades medallists share life-changing experience

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Nearly 16 000 runners took on the challenge of the Comrades Marathon 2022 last Sunday, 28 August. Emotions ran high as people beat their best times, others were tearful when they fell out of the race before the end, but most finished exhausted with a smile.

Among those was Johannesburg doctor Yossi Unterslak, who started running only two years ago. He completed the 95th edition of the Comrades Marathon on Sunday in 10 hours, 22 minutes, with an average pace of 6:58 minutes per kilometre.

Capetonian avid runner Sarah Silber, in her debut Comrades, crossed the finish line in just less than eight hours, and Johannesburg businessman Shaun Matisonn, completing his first Comrades since 1995, crossed the finish line in just more than eight hours. Both ran at less than 5:30 minutes per kilometre, an impressive average pace for most people to run one kilometre, let alone 89.885km.

Barry Holland and Vic Boston completed their 48th and 44th consecutive Comrades respectively. They are in first and third place respectively in both the most medals and consecutive medals category for male runners.

Toni Hesp, the owner of Toni Hesp Physiotherapy in Johannesburg, completed her thirtieth Comrades, and now needs five more to surpass Kleintjie van Schalkwyk as the female with the most Comrades medals. However, she says, “Comrades has never been about how many medals I could earn. It’s more than a running race, it’s an experience that will change your life.”

For Matisonn, Sunday’s Comrades was “fantastic and the best South Africa has got to offer. It was an extraordinary collection of happiness, especially at the end.”

Silber now understands why the Comrades is called “the ultimate human race.”



“It took everything out of me, and I fought with every piece of my heart and legs to get to the finish. I knew it was going to be difficult, but I didn’t think it would be that brutal! The hills were never ending, and whoever called it a ‘down run’ was definitely lying. We climbed for basically the entire first half, and by the time we did reach some downs, my legs were cramping so much, I could hardly walk.”

For Unterslak, “The environment, *gees*, and the South Africanism of the race was incredible. You know, you stand at the start, and they play the anthem, then Shosholoza. You feel completely patriotic. You barely go a kilometre without seeing supporters on the side of the road cheering for you. They scream your name even though they don’t know you.”

Unterslak, a reproductive physician at Vitalab Fertility Clinic in Sandton, started running around his garden during the

lockdown to “sort out” his fitness and health. “The first run that I recorded on my watch was 3km. I just slowly built from then on. Eventually, I built up to a half marathon. After running the Cape Town Marathon in October last year, I

start was, as always, a highly emotional experience, and for the thirtieth time, I shed some tears.”

This year’s Comrades felt in some ways very different, says Hesp. “Comrades moving to August turned the familiar running calendar upside down and created almost a feeling of uncertainty in my training programme even though I knew I was still doing what I have always done in my build-up to the marathon. Winter training brought real challenges. The kind of weather conditions we would experience in August was also a point of concern. On top of this, I was under a bit more pressure with this being my thirtieth run. To mitigate some of the stress, I decided not to focus on any specific time but rather aim for a comfortable finish. A long-time running friend, Hilton, came all the way from Melbourne to join me for my thirtieth, and together with his brother, Selwyn, and my running partner, Charmaine, we came up with a race plan.”



Matisonn’s most memorable moments were the start, stopping to put on tefillin, and the finish. “You don’t get anything like this in the world,” he says.

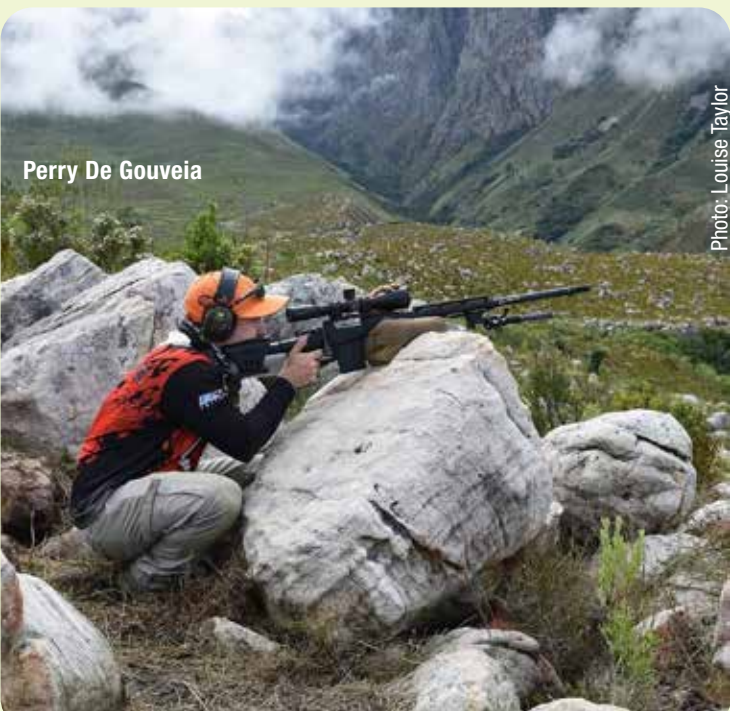
Having last completed the Comrades 27 years ago, Matisonn says he committed to run this year’s race only at the last moment. “I was in decent shape, so it was an opportunity not to forego. It’s a unique experience. If you can do it, you should.”

Saul Mervis, the co-owner of The Grillhouse in Johannesburg, last ran the Comrades in 1997, 25 years ago, but decided to run this year after promising his wife, Karin, that once she received her green

## Sharpshooter Perry De Gouveia hits target at world championship

SAUL KAMIONSKY

In just six years, Johannesburg Jewish rifle shooter Perry De Gouveia has shot the lights out in his sport. Having received National Protea Colours from the South African Precision Rifle Federation in July, this project manager placed second behind Great Britain’s Lawrence Barnes in his category at the 2022 Precision Rifle World Championships, which took place at a military base in Bitche, France, in early August.



top-notch results since being selected to shoot for South Africa courtesy of placing first in his division during the qualification period that ended earlier this year.

“It’s been a big pick-me-up, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it. It’s been an amazing honour and experience to be part of the South African shooting team.”

De Gouveia generally finds himself training at a shooting range every Wednesday and second Sunday. Originating in the United States, rifle shooting has grown internationally, with more than 5 000 competitive shooters worldwide. De Gouveia says the sport has existed for about a decade. “It involves extreme consistency in your body and in the manipulation of the firearm. You shoot off strange obstacles and barricades to simulate a different height or position and then engage a steel target at a variety of distances, anything from 200m to 1.4km.”

Along with meeting “amazing” people, the absolute concentration needed to shoot are what De Gouveia loves about the sport. “I can enjoy an event while not worrying about work or anything else. Being in that space in that time is something to truly appreciate.”

On his next goal, to host the next world championships in South Africa, he says, “I need to approach all the shooting bodies in South Africa for funding. I also need to bring a whole lot of events companies on board, find a location, venue, and then run the event. I’ve run about 40-odd shooting events in the past five years. This is just going to be on a bigger scale.”

On top of that, he has been voted vice-chairperson of the South African Precision Rifle Shooting Federation and the International Shooting Sport Federation. “For some reason, people seem to believe in my abilities,” he says.

Rifles are the most common firearm in South Africa because of the scale of the hunting industry in the country, De Gouveia says. “Most people prefer a rifle to a shotgun or a pistol. Even if it’s just sentimental value from a grandparent, parent, or friend, a rifle generally isn’t as intimidating as an AR15 or anything like that. It’s just a bolt action, manually operated rifle.”

decided that I’d like to see if I could run the Comrades.”

He managed to finish the Comrades within the 10.5 hours he targeted even though he picked up a little injury during the run and his race plans fell apart because, “The guy I was running with got sick, meaning I had to run on my own most of the way.”

“Aside from the aches and pains, of which there were many, Comrades was truly a life-changing experience,” says Silber. “It showed me the power of the human spirit and how crowd support can push you so far even when you feel like giving up. The people on the sidelines made the race – at the ready with oranges, bananas, water, Deep Heat spray, salt, ice, and the loudest voices

which could just carry you through to the finish. I did say to myself numerous times that I would never run again, but now I’m already looking at entries for next year.”

Her most memorable moment was the start of the race. “The camaraderie was like nothing I’d ever experienced. I did shed a few tears. So many other runners were crying too.”

“It was wonderful to have the return of Comrades, and standing at the start, there was the feeling that life as we knew it had returned,” says Hesp. “The



number for completing 10 Comrades, he would run when she attempted her eleventh. This happened on Sunday, and ended with them running the last 15km together and crossing the finish line hand in hand.

“A very, very special memory to cherish,” says Karin. “We don’t run together as we have different paces but somehow, fate intervened and ensured we met up and ‘enjoyed’ the last 15 together. Totally unplanned, but meant to be!”



## Sydenham Preschool celebrates its young artists

Sydenham Hebrew Preschool is celebrating children's art at its annual art exhibition at Norwood Mall from 29 August to 4 September. The show, themed "Every child is an artist" (Pablo Picasso) celebrates creativity. Every scribble tells a story, the school says. "Art is a process rather than a product. The greatest value is in the free exploration, creative process, and hands-on experience."

Each child at Sydenham from 18 months to six years created at least three masterpieces (including one three-dimensional piece) to be displayed. The developmental stages of children's drawings can be observed in their pictures. They have been exposed to the different art styles of Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian, Andy Warhol, Joan Miró, and Damien Hirst.



The art exhibition at Norwood Mall

## Ladies of Hirsch Lyons do high tea

Hirsch Lyons School hosted a bevy of beautiful ladies and their daughters for high tea on Rosh Chodesh on Sunday, 28 August, as part of its Elul programme. Thanks to Lauren Saltz, whose brainchild it was.



Elul high tea hosted by Hirsch Lyons School

## UJW and KDL donate comfort packs for Women's Month

King David Primary School Linksfield children and the Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg collected sanitary towels, soaps, facecloths, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and deodorants in comfort packs for Women's Month. The packs were handed out to Grade 7 girls at Summerwood Primary, and will also go to girls at Houghton Primary.

Bev Cohen, executive member of the UJW Johannesburg, spoke about the organisation's special projects, and encouraged the children to get involved at any age. The guest speaker was Amanda from the Glow Movement, who runs antenatal and postnatal classes and has benefited from the UJW's Bags for New Beginnings initiative.



Students helping to assemble Bags for New Beginnings

## King David Sandton gets into spring with veggy garden

King David Sandton has got into the gardening spirit for spring, with Grade 7 pupils on 30 August planting a herb and vegetable garden on the school grounds. The pupils worked in teams to plant, and made colourful labels for all the different herbs. They cannot wait for the garden to flourish, for the fresh herbs and veggies to be used in its tuckshop, and to feed the school's 15 resident bunnies.



King David Sandton students working in the herb and vegetable garden

## Patting puppies for a cause

Students at Torah Academy got to cuddle puppies and learn life skills during a visit by the South African Guide Dogs Association on Tuesday, 23 August. The organisation, which helps to train puppies and puppy raisers to create service dogs, helped to create awareness about different kinds of disability.



Sara Drishner, Hodaya Asseraf, and Avigail Harli with Jo Kiggell of SA Guide Dogs

## Yeshiva Pre-Primary fishes for Rosh Chodesh treats

Yeshiva College Pre-Primary School launched a Rosh Chodesh fishing game in which every child fished and received a prize in honour of Rosh Chodesh, a time for increased happiness. The school also held a Rosh Chodesh tuckshop in which parents and children could buy a treat.



Noa Schneider with Batya Gisichen

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# Barmitzvah movies raise the bar on coming-of-age theme

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

“Raise your voice, even if it cracks.” Building on a tagline that’s imminently relatable for anyone who has ever had – or attended – a Barmitzvah, recent Netflix release *13: The Musical* embodies the themes that this Jewish rite of passage offers filmmakers. And it’s not the only recent film to do so.

“Old and young, modern and traditional. These contrasts seem like a perfect vehicle for a movie because that’s what good movies are all about – conflict. A Barmitzvah lends itself so well to that. There’s tension, drama, and humour.” So says local media expert Gus Silber, speaking about the current Barmitzvah movie trend.

Based on a 2008 Broadway musical, a collaboration between Jewish writers Robert Horn and Dan Elish and composer and lyricist Jason Robert Brown, *13: The Musical* has been adapted to suit 2022 Netflix audiences. A quintessential family movie very much aimed at tweens and young teens, it examines universal challenges such as fitting in, starting over, and coming of age.

The film doesn’t just examine the trials and tribulations faced by a boy dealing with his parents’ divorce, life in a new town, and his impending Barmitzvah, it also boasts a host of catchy musical numbers and a touch of quintessentially Jewish humour. We wouldn’t be surprised to see it on our own schools’ stages in the not-too-distant future.

“The idea of a musical centred on a Barmitzvah is a very good one,” says Silber. “Musicals have made somewhat of a return, especially on streaming media. A good musical will always get audiences because good songs and dancing coupled with a good storyline is a traditional formula that one can always revive and have fun with.”

Also released this year and centred on the world of Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, *Cha Cha Real Smooth* – available on Apple TV+ – is geared more towards adult audiences. It’s about a 22-year-old man who lacks direction and starts working as a party starter at these events, getting people out of their seats and onto the



Eli Golden as Evan Goldman in *13: The Musical*

Photo: Screenshot from YouTube

13, you’re like not grown up and you’re also not a kid, and then suddenly, you have this massive, ancient ritual of which you’re a part – becoming a man – and it’s scary. A good Barmitzvah movie will play on that fear as well.”

Naturally the popular coming-of-age theme implicit

in any Barmitzvah movie has long been a popular Hollywood trope, but there’s more to it than that, he says. “It’s not some random teenager experience. A Barmitzvah movie has a very specific occasion at a very definite age at its heart, which makes it slightly different to other coming-of-age movies. There’s the whole tradition, the ritual.

“What’s key is that these films work very well as Jewish movies but they’re also completely universal. You don’t need to understand a single word of Hebrew or the intricacies of a Barmitzvah, you just buy into an experience.”

With multiple Jewish screenwriters and directors wanting to relive their experiences, there have long been films and TV shows that have delved into the world of Barmitzvahs, says Silber. Yet the current trend brings them into the realm of popular culture for a new generation. They’re also capitalising on the rich storytelling potential they offer as well as their cross-cultural resonance.

dance floor. Yes, it’s a real job – at least it is in the United States. Along the way, he falls for a single mother, played by Dakota Johnson.

The film “takes the Barmitzvah’s central coming-of-age idea, that a single ritual at the appropriate time marks the true threshold of adulthood, and runs with it in an unexpected manner”, writes Andrew Lapin in a JTA article. It applies this idea to a man in his early 20s navigating the complexities that come with truly becoming an adult.

Writer-director Cooper Raiff, who also stars in the film, is, in fact, not Jewish but loved the opportunities such a setting presented. Growing up in a wealthy Jewish community in Dallas, he was exposed to the Barmitzvah ceremony itself as well as the social implications of the celebration.

As Silber says, “Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs aren’t just coming-of-age occasions in many communities, they’re also huge social and cultural events. There’s a lot of criticism about this.” That’s mainly because over-the-top celebrations often usurp the actual meaning of the day. “For somebody making a movie, there’s so much material.”

Raiff, however, was reportedly intrigued by the Barmitzvah itself as well as the impact of placing significant attention and expectation on a 13-year-old. “It’s such an awkward time,” says Silber. “Everyone remembers being

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## Letters

### SA GOVT SPEAKS WITH FORKED TONGUE ON SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

I refer to the article, “SA government delegation to Middle East ignores Israel”, (*SA Jewish Report*, 25 August 2022).

It’s indisputable that the African National Congress (ANC) supports terrorist organisations who target Israel – both Hamas and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation have visited our country as presidential guests; Mandla Mandela received an award from the Iranian government; a Jewish judge was refused a position on the Constitutional Court because of his association with Jewish organisations; Israel is blamed for instigating while rockets rain on it from Gaza; and the ANC repeatedly refers to Israel as an “apartheid

state” Meanwhile, Priyal Singh, senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, notes that “South Africa (referring to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation) is proud of being a constitutional democracy that prizes human rights”.

Well, then, I wonder why the racist laws of Black Economic Empowerment and Employment Equity – apartheid laws that discriminate against minorities – are allowed, and why the ANC tacitly supports the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet and its abhorrent treatment of Uyghur Muslims?

– Mark Wade, Johannesburg

## Israeli president calls on Jews to reclaim Zionism

>>>Continued from page 8

World Zionist Organization Chairperson Yaakov Hagoel said, “Herzl’s vision included not only the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel, but also the establishment of a model Zionist, leadership committed to creating a better world. Herzl’s vision spoke of the establishment of Jewish leaders who would lead the Jews of the world to one national home. Exactly 50 years after the establishment of his dream, the state of Israel was established.”

Herzog said Herzl sought to create a new space for the Jewish people, “a space that was at once political, diplomatic, territorial, and cultural. A space in which the Jewish people could continue arguing, debating, and making decisions about their great dilemma between normality and individuality, but without the fear that had haunted this polemic until then – fear of antisemitism and persecution on the one hand, and fear of assimilation to the point of the erasure of identity, culture, and spirituality on the other. In other words, Herzl transcended the debate about individuality and created the infrastructure for something more existential – independence!”

As a result of the threat of anti-Israel demonstrations, the Swiss government allocated more than SF5 million (R86.9 million) towards security for the gala event.

Guy Parmelin, a member of the Swiss Federal Council and the former president of the country, said, “Bilateral relations between Israel and Switzerland are excellent. We enjoy close co-operation in agriculture, business, and science. We both invest in education, in creating knowledge and something new for the world.”

“In the Swiss government’s view, only a negotiated two-state solution can bring about a just, lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.”

Beat Jans, the president of the Government of the Canton of Basel, said, “Peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians remains a remote prospect. Current events in particular have made this clear. Still, setbacks and disappointments shouldn’t discourage and prevent us from continuing to peruse dialogue and search for sustainable solutions. Basel remains a constant partner in providing dialogue and exchange on the path towards peace.”



# Possessed by Padel

If this was an agony aunt letter, I would begin as follows: “Dear Aunt Ruchama, I’m worried that my friend has become a Padel slut. Unable to say no to a game, we often find him lurking hopefully at the side of the court, waiting to be invited to play.

“Last night, he arrived at an arranged game sporting a new racquet, which he denied was his. He said he was holding it for a friend. But I remain unconvinced. When I mentioned my concern to him and asked him how often he played, he tried to obfuscate before admitting that he had played three times in 24 hours. Am I overreacting?”

Padel has become a drug for Jewish men (and some women) looking to escape the monotony of their lives.

Why predominantly Jewish men? Because I’m yet to see a court occupied by anyone outside of the faith. Which is fascinating, considering that with our tendency to pronate and our propensity for asthma and shortened Achilles tendons, we’re not exactly world’s most talented sportsmen and women.

Yet what we lack in talent we make up in enthusiasm.

It’s unclear to me if the non-Jewish community is even aware that they’re allowed to play the game and that it’s not a “Jews-only” affair. I’m amazed each time I play that the courts seem entirely occupied by members of the community.

Non-Jewish South Africans seem oblivious to the fact that there are alternatives to golf and cricket, and to the fact that Padel is significantly safer than water polo. Especially in that the only risk of grooming is someone trying to invite you for

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

a Shabbat meal and the only rub down you’ll be offered might be from the physio because no one is as young as they used to be. And have never been.

Not with the family history. It’s not a joke. I’m frankly quite surprised and even a little disappointed that there’s no Chabad of Padel already set up, functioning, and offering the opportunity to put on tefillin between sets.

There is no mikveh fund and no appeal from the Jewish National Fund. Nor, I have noticed, is there a CSO presence, which there should be, considering that Padel courts are unquestionably Jewish installations.

I wouldn’t even be surprised if in the next few weeks, Padel operators don’t release their high holiday specials. Along with a menu.

Padel is a racquet sport typically played in doubles on an enclosed court roughly one-third the size of a tennis court. Scoring is the same as normal tennis, and the balls used are similar but with a little less pressure. It began in Acapulco in Mexico in 1969, but has only recently arrived in South Africa.

There’s nothing intrinsically Jewish about Padel. There’s nothing that links the sport to Israel or to faith or to anything remotely biblical.

But it has been adopted by the local community for all the right reasons. It’s healthy, it’s fun, and it has the potential to become an obsession. What more could anyone ask for?



# Tribute to Holocaust centres and educators

We had the pleasure last week of congratulating our esteemed associate, Tali Nates, the founder and long-serving director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), on being awarded the prestigious Goethe Medal. Presented annually by the Goethe-Institut, the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany, this is an official decoration honouring global public figures deemed to have rendered outstanding services to the teaching of the German language and to international cultural exchange. Tali was chosen for her contributions in the fields of Holocaust and genocide education, dialogue, and memory, both in South Africa and globally. She’s the first South African to receive the award.

Tali’s involvement in Holocaust education is motivated by a deep-seated understanding of the importance of learning from history in order to create a better today and tomorrow, in her words, “to connect the past and the present, and learn lessons for humanity”. This, indeed, is central to the mission of the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation (SAHGF) and its regional centres in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. It’s a message that has special resonance in societies like our own, which must come to terms with their own legacies of divisive conflict, oppression, and injustice.

Though the immediate focus of the SAHGF is to teach about the Holocaust and the rabidly antisemitic ideology that led to it, its broader mission is to use these lessons to teach South Africans across the board about the evils of racism, bigotry, and intolerance and what it can lead to if allowed to fester unchecked. For this reason alone, it has been an invaluable resource to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in fulfilling its own mandate of combatting antisemitism and fostering ties of friendship and understanding between our community and the wider society.

In post-apartheid South Africa, demonstrating how

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



prejudice against Jews is, in essence, another form of racism is an effective way of reaching those who might not know much about Jews and their history, but well understand what it means to be demeaned and oppressed on the basis of such immutable physical characteristics as skin colour.

In many cases, offensive behaviour is the result of simple ignorance rather than deliberate malice. Recognising this, the SAJBD frequently advocates a restorative-justice approach to dealing with such cases through which perpetrators are helped to understand why their actions are unacceptable and to make a sincerely apology.

One of the most effective remedies, which we frequently recommend and facilitate, is for those concerned to visit the Holocaust & Genocide Centre for a facilitated session. Over the past week, we have been involved in resolving two instances of offensive behaviour in this way, one concerning Nazi salutes by pupils at Rustenburg High School, and the other a case of Holocaust denialism and pro-Hitler sentiment on the part of a university student. We’re fortunate to have such outstanding institutions as the JHGC and its counterparts in Cape Town and Durban through which we can constructively and amicably resolve issues of this nature. Since the effectiveness of any organisation is dependent on the quality of those who work for it, this, in turn, is a tribute to the passion, commitment, and professionalism of the SAHGF staff in all three centres, as well as the dedicated efforts of the many volunteer educators who have participated in its programmes over the years.

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

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

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## Maroubra Synagogue

VIBRANT | RELEVANT | COMMUNITY

### MAROUBRA SYNAGOGUE (SYDNEY)

#### Rabbinic Couple

Maroubra Synagogue is seeking a dynamic and experienced Rabbinic couple to lead our vibrant Modern Orthodox and Zionist community, located in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, Australia.

Maroubra is a welcoming and inclusive community with approximately 350 member families who come from diverse backgrounds and levels of observance. With many younger families moving to the area, there is enormous potential for communal growth both in size and spiritual connection, requiring motivated Rabbinic direction at its forefront.

The congregation is looking for a Modern Orthodox Rabbi and Rebbetzin team who will provide spiritual leadership to our community and can connect with members of all backgrounds and at all stages of life. The successful team must be willing to become an integral part of the community and dedicate themselves to the challenge of meeting the congregation’s spiritual and intellectual needs.

The ideal couple will have post-ordination experience in a leadership capacity within a synagogue, and a proven ability to attract and build strong, enduring relationships with members. In particular, you must have a caring, open and accepting personality, an engaging sense of humour and a warm communication style.

The Rabbi will also hold the position of College Rabbi at Mount Sinai College (ages 2 to 12), which neighbours the synagogue. This role is to contribute to and maintain the Jewish ethos of the College and the close and long-standing relationship that exists between the Synagogue and school.

**The Rabbi and Rebbetzin need to:**

- Be role models for Torah values and live a Torah life
- Provide positive and inclusive leadership for the community
- Provide a warm, inclusive and open home
- Motivate and inspire all groups to become more involved with their religion and community
- Provide and coordinate education for the community

Leining is also an essential part of the role.

**For more information:** <https://www.maroubrasynagogue.org.au/rabbi-job-description/>

To submit your C.V. and cover letter in strict confidence, please email: [apply@maroubrasynagogue.org.au](mailto:apply@maroubrasynagogue.org.au)



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