

Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2022

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ABSA PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

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EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

KIRSH FAMILY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
in honour of Helen Suzman

ART, SPORT, SCIENCE AND CULTURE AWARD

HUMANITARIAN AWARD
in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris

Absa
Jewish Achiever Awards

2022 

NOMINATIONS CLOSE: 16 September 2022 at 17:00
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ABSA BUSINESS ICON AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has achieved iconic status within the business community.

ABSA BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has played a critical leadership role in business.

ABSA PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has contributed in an extraordinary manner over a long period of time.

ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has a proven track record in entrepreneurial ventures.

HUMANITARIAN AWARD in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris

Awarded to a Jewish or non-Jewish person who has contributed substantially to the betterment of the lives of the people of South Africa.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has served the Jewish community with remarkable distinction.

EUROPCAR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARD

Honouring the leadership, success and overall contributions of distinctive Jewish women in business or in the broader South African community.

KIRSH FAMILY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD in honour of Helen Suzman

Awarded to a Jewish person who has contributed in an extraordinary manner over a long period of time.

ART, SPORT, SCIENCE AND CULTURE AWARD

Awarded to a Jewish person who has excelled in any of these spheres.

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Elderly man narrowly escapes serial arsonist's inferno

TALI FEINBERG
AND NICOLA MILTZ

Elderly Jewish Melrose resident Lewis Neuburger stood helpless on the side of the road in the middle of the night and watched his cherished home of 55 years literally go up in smoke. He had nothing but the clothes on his back and the slippers on his feet.

The fire is believed to be the work of a serial arsonist who allegedly has been terrorising Johannesburg's northern suburbs over the past few years, often getting to know the house and family's habits intimately before spending time in the space and setting it on fire.

The morning after the fire, Neuburger begged a fireman to try and find his treasured, simple gold neck chain given to him by his beloved late wife, Carol, on Valentine's Day in 1971.

"I woke up and reached for it, but it wasn't there," said the 82-year-old man.

The fireman went searching through the rubble in the exact place where he was told it might be.

"After some time, he emerged holding it in his hand," said Neuburger tearfully.

For the past 51 years, before going to sleep each night, Neuburger placed his neck chain with an engraved round disc on the night stand next to his bed. He would start his day exactly the same way by putting it back on first thing in the morning. When his wife passed away last year, he placed her wedding ring on the chain so that he could always feel her presence close to his heart.

He had no time to grab it when the raging fire broke out, leaving him just enough time to scramble to safety.

"Everything is gone. There's nothing left," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "A lifetime of memorabilia, beautiful things that my wife collected over the years, all gone. The only thing I have left is a pair of pyjamas, a pair of slippers, and a gown. I had my cellphone, which I used as a torch. That necklace which I've worn every day of my life, is being cleaned," he said.

There's also a bunch of decorative locks and keys which survived the fire, he said.

"During our travels, we found a bunch of old beautiful locks and keys in Portugal, which we schlepped home starting a new collection that hung on the wall in the living room on either side of a clock. They survived. This is crazy, it's surreal," he said.

Neuburger went to sleep at about 22:30 on Wednesday, 6 September. He woke up to the sound of a strange noise which he thought came from the rafters of his home, built in 1923.

"I got up to inspect where the noise was coming from, and when I opened the entrance-hall door, all I could see was smoke. I dashed back and escaped to the courtyard where I met my gardener, Evans Bipa, who thoughtfully had the keys to the gate to let us out. *Baruch Hashem*, we're alive!"

"All I can say is that in this day and age, people should put their photographs in the cloud because mine are all up in smoke."

A neighbour, speaking on condition of anonymity, said his wife woke him sometime between 04:00 and 05:00. She thought she heard the noise of pattering water droplets, but the sound turned out to be the crackling of flames. The neighbour saw the fire, and went into the street, where he and another neighbour encountered a young, slim, well-spoken, well-dressed man who was wearing dark clothes. The stranger

said he was out jogging.

Only later did the neighbour realise that it was probably the arsonist, who is known to hang around the crime scene, watching his handiwork destroy people's lives.

He said the stranger looked similar to the man in pictures released by the South African Police Service (SAPS) on 10 September. In this media statement from the office of the provincial commissioner of the police in Gauteng, the SAPS asked the public to assist it in "locating Sentious Novans, who is suspected of being involved in multiple cases of arson, murder, and burglary in the east and north parts of Johannesburg in previous months. In all the incidents, the suspect will break into affluent houses and set the houses alight. Novans was previously sentenced to seven years, of which four years was suspended for five years."

CAP said the suspect set the kitchen alight. "The homeowner woke up to loud banging and smelled smoke which resulted in him exiting the property and pressing his panic button, which alerted CAP.

"The fire was extinguished but unfortunately had spread through the house before being doused. A full investigation is underway with teams working hard utilising all data sources and resources to locate the suspect," CAP said.

"Preliminary reports show that the suspect is the same perpetrator from previous arson attacks. We have expended thousands of hours to find this suspect, and will continue to work tirelessly to track and apprehend him."

CAP's Sean Jammy told the *SA Jewish Report* that the arsonist had been involved in multiple incidents across northern

Johannesburg for several years. "The community is deeply affected by this, and the CAP team is conscious that people are looking to us to deliver justice. We take that responsibility to heart, and are absolutely committed to doing that. We hope that we're close to catching him. This is a psychopath, a very sick individual who

Continued on page 7>>



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Banyana Banyana ignites dreams at King David

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Players from the national female soccer team Banyana Banyana attended a soccer clinic on Wednesday, 14 September, for under-14 girls at King David High School Victory Park and two schools from Alexandra: Kwabhekilanga Secondary School and Eastbank High.

Banyana Banyana coach Desiree Ellis spoke of how important it is to recognise that dreams are valid. “We were once in their position. Us being here gives [the pupils] a lot more motivation, drive, and they will remember this for the rest of their lives.”

Banyana Banyana defender Erin Herz said, “I was here once, and I definitely see talent. There are a lot of girls who look like they’ve already learnt a lot.”

Herz conducted, amongst other drills, a pass-and-move exercise. She taught players to call each other by their name when they pass the ball, and advised them to follow through when they pass, and kick the middle of the ball.

The clinic was a collaboration between the school, ForwardZone, and the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.



Banyana Banyana player Erin Herz gives advice to soccer players at King David Victory Park on Wednesday afternoon

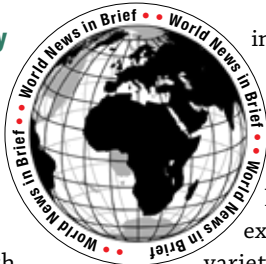
Garner and Goldstein repeat Jewish Emmy winners

Julia Garner and Brett Goldstein were the big Jewish Emmy winners on Monday, 12 September.

Garner scored her third win for best supporting actress in a drama for her role on Netflix’s crime show *Ozark*, which concluded its run this year. She previously won in 2019 and 2020 for the same show, and was additionally nominated this year in the limited-series category for *Inventing Anna* but lost that category to Amanda Seyfried in *The Dropout*.

During her acceptance speech, Garner thanked the *Ozark* writers for crafting her character, whom the actor said “has changed my life.”

Goldstein, also a repeat winner, scored his second award in a row for best supporting actor in a comedy for his role



in Apple TV+’s sports sitcom *Ted Lasso*. Thanking his Jewish family back home in Britain, the famously foul-mouthed Goldstein promised not to swear – before dropping an f-bomb on live television.

NBC’s *Saturday Night Live*, whose creator and long-time showrunner, Lorne Michaels, is Jewish, extended two of its records in the outstanding variety/sketch series category: the most wins and the most consecutive wins (which now stands at six).

Two of the most visibly Jewish shows on TV, Amazon’s *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and HBO’s *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, were both blanked out of the big categories this year.

Zendaya won best lead actress in a drama for *Euphoria*, the popular HBO teen drama based on an Israeli show.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Torah Thought

Long live the king and queen in all of us

It’s the talk of the town, everywhere. Even in our blessed era of liberal democracies, it’s quite amazing how the news about Queen Elizabeth’s passing and King Charles’s ascent to the throne has captured media headlines around the world.

Our people have had a complicated relationship with monarchies throughout history, since the termination of our own sovereignty in Israel two millennia ago. We have endured the cruel heartlessness of dictatorships from certain emperors, czars, and kings, and enjoyed recognition, respect, and favour with others.

Ideally, a monarch is a benevolent benefactor and protector of all their subjects. Maimonides defines a monarch as “the heart of the nation”, its source of life. And, in spite of the role today being largely symbolic, the late queen was still revered.

In 1917, Czar Nicholas II was assassinated by the Bolsheviks in Russia. The czar was renowned for his tyrannical rule. His death was a reprieve welcomed by many. I’m told that at the time, my great grandfather, Reb Dovid Horodoker, cried upon hearing of the czar’s demise. He was no stranger to the czar’s ruthless governance, and acquaintances were shocked at his mourning of this oppressor. Horodoker explained that throughout the texts, prayers, and tales of our heritage, we often find the metaphor of Hashem’s relationship with us as that of a king and his nation. “I mourn the loss of a tangible illustration of this metaphor, the corporeal representation of an ultimate universal king,” he said.

Jewish teaching makes extensive use of metaphors to explain the nature of G-d’s relationship with us. So many liturgies in the high holiday machzor are replete with descriptions of G-d’s sovereignty and kingdom. A central prayer that we recite is *Avinu Malkeinu*, describing G-d as “our father – our king”. In fact, the entire Rosh Hashanah revolves around the idea that G-d is “king of the universe”. Certainly there’s a message

that we can glean from the monarchy.

The Torah teaches that we’re all royal. Each of us in our microcosm is a monarch. When faced with life’s struggles, we ought to consider that perspective for moral clarity. Throughout life, the impact of our personal monarchy broadens. Parents give their children a strong sense of family, communal leaders inspire their followers with a sense of purpose, and so on.

Royals are distinct. They are expected to behave in a more refined manner. Their differences from society are a source of pride.

For us Jewish royals, we also have a

Rabbi Ari
Kievman
– Chabad
Sandton
Central



rule book, the code of Jewish law, which shapes our way of life, such that in all behaviour, we’re recognisable and distinct. As such, we can resist the lesser influences pervading the world around us. Jews live with an inner conviction that our path as outlined by the supreme king of kings is correct, regardless of the opinion of others. That’s genuine royal behaviour.

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Gqeberha	17:52	18:44
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Jews visit the graves of loved ones throughout the month of Elul. This is to remember and honour those people in our past who have inspired us to live more fully in the future.

Much care must be taken to direct one’s personal prayers at the graveside to G-d.

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Government ‘Pandoring’ to antisemitism, Jewish MPs tell taskforce

NICOLA MILTZ

Four Jewish South African members of parliament have laid the blame for an uptick in online antisemitism on the national government, particularly Foreign Minister Dr Naledi Pandor of the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco).

The only four Jewish MPs in Parliament – Madeleine Hicklin; Glynnis Breytenbach; Michael Bagraim; and Darren Bergman – all members of the Democratic Alliance – have been invited to participate in a global inter-parliamentary task force to combat online antisemitism which is taking place in Washington DC this week. They are there in their private capacity.

“The greatest problem we have in South Africa is primarily a confusion between antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment,” said Hicklin, “That’s aggressively fuelled by our national government and in particular the minister of Dirco, Naledi Pandor, because of her pro-Palestinian leanings,” she said.

Launched in 2020, the task force focuses on increasing awareness of and developing responses and solutions to growing online antisemitism. It’s comprised of a multi-partisan group of parliamentarians and legislators from Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

This is the first time that South Africa is participating. The task force will be questioning top global social media leaders such as Meta, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok in their efforts to confront hate during this week’s

in-person hearings on Friday, 16 September. The group works closely with the European Commission’s Working Group on Combating Antisemitism, which is also participating in the hearings.

“After a great degree of research and collaboration with existing structures already doing phenomenal work in this space, my colleagues and I will be the first South African parliamentary representatives to attend the task force congress,” said Hicklin.

In preparation for the congress, Hicklin last week addressed Jewish counterparts from around the world to help contextualise the rise in antisemitism in South Africa.

“Regrettably, incidents of antisemitism or anti-Israel protests are on an upward trajectory in South Africa,” she said, “primarily because there’s ample encouragement from the ANC [African National Congress] government itself. At every opportunity, this anti-Israel rhetoric and sentiment is widely reported locally from a very biased and many would say captured local media – in keeping with the sentiment of a state captured by corruption and maladministration – as well as in the international media.”

She described Pandor as “a virulent and vitriolic critic of ‘apartheid Israel’” and said she and her colleagues in Parliament “drive this racist agenda openly and without censure”.

“She recently called on the international community to take action to put an end to the ongoing ‘grievances the Palestinians are



Photo: Facebook

Madeleine Hicklin, Michael Bagraim, Glynnis Breytenbach, and Darren Bergman

experiencing’ and to ‘hold Israel accountable for the inhumane conditions that the Palestinian people have been subjected to for 73 years,” Hicklin said, pointing out that calls like this would do little to defuse the situation.

“To fuel the flames of hatred and continue to refer to Israel as an ‘apartheid state’ will only serve to make our work as a global taskforce even more difficult,” she told delegates.

“Minister Pandor is aided and abetted by many others within the ANC who are confused about how they see Jews on the one hand and Zionists on the other,” she said.

She said it was clear “the ANC doesn’t

understand the difference between being Jewish and being a Zionist”.

“The attacks by Minister Pandor and her colleagues mean that many of the incidences of antisemitism in South Africa aren’t confined to online attacks and have increased to face-to-face encounters and considerable harassment of religious members of our community,” she said. The government did much to fuel the fire and

no more being bullied or pushed around. The Jewish community represents a significant segment of the global population. We need to demonstrate, by word and deed, that we won’t be pushed around, attacked, insulted, and remain quiet. Never Again!” she said.

Bergman said Jewish MPs didn’t seem to have a forum to caucus, share experiences, and work together.

“Here, we have a seat at the table and can network directly on political and social issues affecting Jewish people in their parliaments and constituents,” he said.

Bagraim, a labour lawyer, said it was important to connect South African Jewry to Jewish legislators around the world. “Although we’re small players in international Jewry, we’re enormously important as the term ‘apartheid Israel’ comes from South Africa, and we’re the people who can explain what apartheid really was. The BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement uses this analogy as the cornerstone of its attack on Israel and Judaism. Sadly,

Pandor is gaining popularity by using Israel as the whipping boy of the world, and it’s upsetting because she holds such a key position,” he said.

It’s understood, the hearings will frame the rise of online antisemitism within the broader global context, focusing on recommendations to decrease antisemitic rhetoric and violence online and tackle issues such as algorithm transparency and potential international regulations to deal with illegal and hate-driven social media.

“We’re humbled to be taking the message about South Africa’s efforts and successes in dealing with this scourge onto the global stage,” said Hicklin.

nothing to defuse tensions, Hicklin said.

“It’s left to the community and members of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to act in defence of the Jewish community – or the South African Human Rights Commission.”

The four-person South African delegation said it was excited to meet Jewish parliamentarians from around the world.

“It is an important conference, a first for South African [Jewish] politicians,” said Breytenbach this week.

“It’s important to stand together, presenting a united front against antisemitism. Sadly, it’s on the rise globally, we see it every day. It’s enough,

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Grieving with a “great heart” as Clegg family faces second loss

TALI FEINBERG

When beloved South African musician Johnny Clegg passed away from cancer in July 2019, the world mourned with the Clegg family. Nobody knew that just three years later, they would lose his son, Jesse's, life partner, Daniella (Dani) Cooperman, to the same disease.

Added to the tragedy is the fact that Clegg and Cooperman welcomed a baby girl, Mylah Thandolwethu Clegg, in March 2021. Introducing her on social media at the time, Clegg, who followed in his dad's footsteps as a singer and songwriter, asked his fans to “help us welcome her into this cruel, crazy, beautiful world”. The phrase was in tribute to his late father's song. But no one imagined how cruel life would be in taking away their baby's mother before Mylah turned two.

A tribute by Cooperman's family announced her passing “after an arduous battle with cancer. Dani passed away at home in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 7 September, surrounded by family. Dani loved life and she lived it to the fullest. She was a seeker who embraced adventure, travel, and family. She always focused on seeing the good in people, and prioritised gathering memories over material things.

“During her brief 44 years, she experienced more than most who live to their 80s. She travelled the world, volunteered in the Vancouver Olympics, and worked on a game reserve in South Africa. Most significantly, she reframed her life's purpose with the birth of her beautiful daughter, Mylah, together with her partner, Jesse.”

Cooperman was born in Johannesburg and grew up in Toronto. “Dani and Jesse met in Canada when he was studying law and then later, she joined him in South Africa,” says Johnny and Jesse's manager, Roddy Quin.

They fell in love, and her story came full circle as she moved back to Johannesburg. There, they established a beautiful life together. On Twitter, Cooperman posted photos of their cats and proudly shared Jesse and Johnny's music. She also shared the heartbreak of Johnny's passing, and the joy of his growing granddaughter. Her second-last post was of Mylah “reading Gramps' book” (his posthumous autobiography), and her last post was of Jesse's Valentine's Day live recording.

She tweeted about going to festivals, visiting Jerusalem, climbing dunes in Namibia, spending time with family in Mexico, hiking the Drakensberg, and enjoying Cape Town, saying she was “loving life”. She and Clegg also hiked in Zululand, the traditional region in the north-east of KwaZulu-Natal, which meant so much to his father.

Cooperman later became Quin's assistant. “I had the privilege of working with Dani for many years, and she was a great friend,” says Quin. “She was the most honourable, ethical, kind, and loving person you could ever meet. She was

also incredibly courageous and independent.

“Jesse and Dani had a committed relationship and loved each other dearly,” he says. “They were an amazing, fun, intelligent couple to spend time with. Mylah was Dani's greatest wish. Dani was diagnosed with cancer eight months ago, and fought an incredibly tough fight to the very end.

“She was an amazing friend to those who were lucky enough to get to know her,” he says. One Joburg-based friend, Thomas Selmer-Olsen, wrote, “While most of the world is mourning Queen Elizabeth, my thoughts are of

Dani Cooperman. I remember her and Jesse Clegg falling in love back in 2010, with late night movies shared in her folks' basement. Our world was brighter for having Dani in it.”

“Dani loved and respected her family so much and spoke about them so often, that I felt I knew them before I even met them,” says Quin. “Naturally, this has

been a devastating time for Jesse, but being the strong and determined person he is, he'll raise Mylah with all the love and care in the world and make sure that she comes to know how wonderful her mother was.”

The couple spent 11 years together. On their last anniversary in January 2022, Clegg wrote, “What an incredible journey it's been. Thank you for your amazing strength, wisdom, compassion, and love. I'm so grateful to be sharing this adventure with you and building our family together. Mylah and I love you like crazy! To many more epic adventures ahead!”

But those adventures weren't to be, although, in announcing her passing, Clegg wrote that “her soul has moved on to its next great adventure, and she is now at peace”. He shared the news “with profound sadness”, describing her as “my beautiful Dani”.

“She fought with incredible courage and grace until the end. She will be dearly missed by her family and the many lives that she touched,” Clegg wrote. “She was the love of my life, and an incredible mother to Mylah. Her beautiful spirit lives on in her. Go well my love, I'll see you on the other side.” At Cooperman's funeral, Clegg stood stoic beside her coffin as the rabbi tore his shirt as a sign of mourning.

Though Clegg didn't share anything online about Cooperman's illness before her death, he wrote on 7 June this year, “Happy birthday dad. Your spirit is always with us. There are different lessons that I draw from you depending on what I'm going through in my life. Today, I think of your strength, courage, and discipline in the face of challenging moments.

Thank you for teaching me how to be strong without losing empathy, and how to face dark moments without losing my faith in the universe. ‘Keep on believing tomorrow brings a better day’ – *Cruel Crazy Beautiful World*.”

The Clegg family also paid tribute to Cooperman, saying, “She was a beautiful spirit who brought an abundance of joy and value to our lives. She was loved and admired by all of us. She was a source of strength and comfort for us during our hardest moments, and a treasured part of our family. She leaves behind her and Jesse's beautiful daughter, Mylah, Johnny's first grandchild, whose legacy lives on through her and Jesse. We will love and miss her forever.”

Cooperman's family said, “She will be missed by Mylah, Jesse, her parents Mike and Linda, brother Evan, sister-in-law also named Dani, and their children, Jax, Leo, and Shael. Dani leaves behind a legacy of love and we ask that you celebrate Dani's life by living in the moment, and treating people with kindness. To honour Dani's spirit and priorities, the Cooperman family has established the Dani Cooperman Memorial Fund at the Toronto Jewish Foundation that will direct proceeds to cancer research and other causes near and dear to Dani's heart.”



Photo: Facebook

Dani Cooperman and Jesse Clegg

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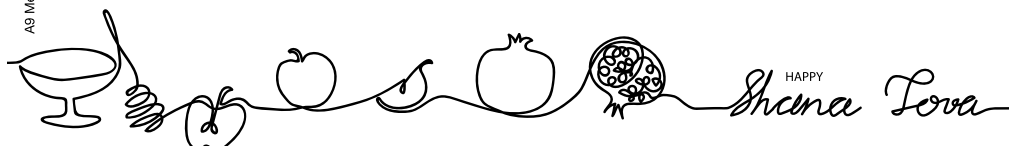
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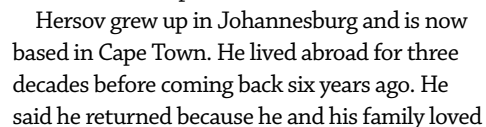
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TALI FEINBERG

Hersov said that though the message was misconstrued, "If these are strategic assets, then the government should sell them as quickly

He said the Cape Winelands Airport is the preferred base for aviation training in the Cape Town region. Of the four original runways, two remain operational while the other two are used for film production.



There's "a lot of evil" at the top, and "useless

“I call on all South African athletes, celebrities, and stars to take a stand and demand a vote for change and a vote for this coalition. I call on all business people who consider this country worth saving to stand up and denounce the ANC, and support this coalition. I call on South Africans abroad to dig deep and financially support this coalition. I call on Cyril Ramaphosa to resign. I call on the cabinet to resign. I call on all good, decent people in this country to register and vote the ANC out in 2024.”

EL AL
IT'S NOT JUST AN AIRLINE. IT'S ISRAEL

An aerial photograph of a stunning turquoise lake, likely the Dead Sea, with a sandy beach in the foreground. The water is a vibrant blue-green color, and the surrounding landscape is arid with orange-brown mountains in the background. A few palm trees are visible on the shore.

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Leaders keep calm and carry on

If I had a dollar for every time someone prefaced whatever they were going to write or say this week by, “I’m not a royalist, but…” I would suddenly have become very wealthy.

My point is that no matter what people feel about the monarchy, British rule, or colonialism, there appears to be deep respect for a woman who reigned with quiet dignity and was clearly seen to put the service of her people above all else.

She didn’t get involved in day-to-day politicking, and some may criticise her parenting, but she was an excellent example of someone holding her own dignified power while minding her Ps and Qs.

Her reign wasn’t without glitches, many of which emanated from the dramas of her own family, yet she kept her “stiff upper lip” and continued to do what she did best in serving the British people until the end.

I may be going on a tad about this woman who really played no part in my life, but – and here’s my opportunity to say it – I’m not a royalist but, I saw Queen Elizabeth as an example of excellent leadership. In this, she set the groundwork for her heir and the ground rules for future royals. King Charles need have no questions, his job is clearcut.

Leadership is all about setting a good example for those who follow and those who work for you. Falling apart when times are tough, or at least, being seen to fall apart, only makes people panic. Alternatively, holding it together with confidence and a clear strategy can inspire hope and confidence in others.

The truth is, nobody ever saw Queen Elizabeth fall apart. She always looked the picture of calmness and serenity, no matter what was bubbling inside.

Wars, internal strife with British miners, economic crises, and even pandemics, you never saw her falter, and that’s what people require in leaders. A calm confidence and a vision of where to go from here is ideal leadership.

Show me a leader, and I can assure you that stress isn’t far behind. Having to forge a path is never easy when there isn’t a clear route mapped out, and sometimes even the forks in the road get a bit hazy when times are tough.

But when you’re leading, you need to keep the pace and move forward with gusto and strength so that those following will emulate it. Alternatively, if you stumble and fall or show that you lack confidence or are indecisive, staff, citizens, or supporters are more likely to want to jump ship than follow someone who seems not to know what they are doing, where they are going, or how to do things. It’s also vitally important that those closest to you in rank don’t publicly question your authority or challenge you.

This may all sound obvious, but look around us at the leaders of our own country.

We have a leader in President Cyril Ramaphosa, who when he came to power, inspired hope in so many of us. After his dodgy predecessor, Jacob Zuma, it wasn’t difficult.

Since he’s been in charge, I don’t recall ever seeing him appear stressed or flailing, but I have seen him looking almost despairing. He always comes across as calm and confident, but is sometimes absent when he should be at the helm.

He does seem to be challenging corruption, but this country doesn’t seem to be feeling it yet. He also seems to be surrounded by people who want him to fail and want to push him off the throne.

Also, it’s difficult to look up to a leader with confidence when the fundamentals of a country aren’t in place. How tough it is to see light at the end of the tunnel when the country is in darkness and promises of unfettered electricity seem so far off.

However, I still think that as long as the African National Congress (ANC) is in power, he’s the only one who can be trusted to do his best for country, Phala Phala debacle or not.

Does he inspire me with his leadership now? No, but in terms of the ANC, he’s still the best of a bad bunch. Only I worry that he doesn’t particularly want to run this ship. I have a sense that he would rather be in business and not have the stress.

In the background of his party, there are constant rumblings from people challenging his leadership. There’s no solid base under him trusting him to take us into the light.

Leadership is about confidence, and I’m not sure he feels confident in his own leadership while so many are trying to topple him.

I recall banking on his leadership during lockdown. I trusted that he was doing what he believed was best for the country, utilising all the advice he was getting.

At the time, our focus was much narrower. It was a matter of how to get through the pandemic alive and intact. Now, we’re looking around, seeing the rubble and damage done to date, and asking questions about the future, our financial and economic security. And Ramaphosa doesn’t seem convincing in his ability to hold it all together and move us forward. Right now, we desperately need confidence in our leadership, and we don’t have it.

Though this has been a better year than the two preceding it, opening our doors and finding our feet in a new, post-pandemic world has left some of us unstable and nervous.

I would love to see an exemplary leader emerge who has the wisdom to deal with our lack of confidence and the knowledge (albeit from wise advisors) to carry this country forward socially and economically.

Would that this leader possess a strong moral backbone, dignity, and the strength to ensure that the country comes together as one, and moves forward to a better tomorrow!

As we move toward the end of the Jewish year 5782, I wish for such a leader.

Also, as we move through the month of Elul and we consider the year we’ve had, let’s connect with each other. Let’s find the right path forward together. If natural leaders don’t emerge, we have the wherewithal to move forward – as we always have done – without them.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



The greatest Briton

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



“I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great Imperial family, to which we all belong.” – Princess Elizabeth, South Africa, 1947

Though the Imperial family evolved into a Commonwealth of Nations as the British Empire devolved, the 21-year-old princess, who became Britain’s longest reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth, truly dedicated her life to her people. That commitment, as her grandson, the Prince of Wales, said in his emotional tribute, was absolute.

The late Queen, who celebrated her platinum jubilee just several months ago, was universally loved and respected, not just because she could jump out a helicopter with James Bond or take tea with Paddington Bear. She was dedicated to service and duty, and was a constant reassuring presence in our lives when the world became ever more turbulent.

At the height of the pandemic, when the monarch invoked the blitz spirit of her youth and the words of Vera Lynn to say, “We will meet again,” we believed her. Because we did meet again. There she was, that steady, guiding hand that not just her people, realms, and Commonwealth looked to, but the world.

Her trusty hairstyle never changed, neither did her beaming smile or twinkling eyes, and for many, that continuity provided strength and succour.

World leaders, often filled with their own sense of self-importance, jostled each other out of the way and their knees shook when meeting a tiny, old lady whose wisdom they sought and whose leadership they greatly admired, but could never emulate.

The Queen wasn’t just sovereign to the United Kingdom, realms and territories, or head of the Commonwealth, which she held so dear, but Queen, essentially, of the world. Such was the love and admiration she inspired.

What was Her Majesty’s relationship to Jews and Israel?

Many have criticised the Queen for never visiting Israel. What they don’t realise is that foreign trips are made at the request of the British Foreign Office, wanting to deploy the soft diplomacy and convening power that royalty has.



The respected historian, Andrew Roberts, once said that the British government had a de facto ban in place on state visits by Queen Elizabeth II to Israel. “The true reason of course, is that the FO [Foreign Office] has a ban on official royal visits to Israel, which is even more powerful for its being unwritten and unacknowledged. As an act of delegitimisation of Israel, this effective boycott is quite as serious as other similar acts, such as the academic boycott, and is the direct fault of the FO Arabists. It’s therefore no coincidence that although the

Queen has made more than 250 official overseas visits to 129 different countries during her reign, neither has ever been to Israel on an official visit,” said Roberts, addressing attendees at a gala dinner in London.

The Queen received many Israeli dignitaries including former President Shimon Peres, who was awarded an honorary knighthood in 2008. Peres was knighted with the Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George.

For 30 minutes, Peres spoke to the Queen about Israel’s history and situation, and gave the Queen two gifts: a letter written by her father, George VI, upon the official recognition by Britain of the state of Israel, and two silver candlesticks in the shape of pomegranates.

The former president described their meeting as, “friendly and informal”.

“The Queen asked me a lot of questions about Israel.

I was moved to be the representative who received this honour for the state of Israel. The whole ceremony was not for me as an individual but a mark of respect for the country. I felt I was a *shaliach mitzvah* (emissary dispatched to do a *mitzvah*).”

Israel’s current president, Isaac Herzog, who will represent Israel at her state funeral, stated when news of her death broke, “Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was known far and wide simply as ‘The Queen’. Her passing is the end of an era. Together with the Israeli people, I grieve her loss and extend my deepest sympathies to the British people and all nations of the Commonwealth, who have lost their matriarch. Queen Elizabeth was a historic figure: she lived history, she made history, and with her passing, she leaves a magnificent, inspirational legacy.

“My late mother and father had several audiences with the Queen over the years. Her fond welcome and warm hospitality left a profound impression down the generations.”

The Queen had strong ties with the Jewish community (even hiring a Jewish mohel to perform a royal circumcision), and met Holocaust survivors on many occasions.

One such meeting was at an event marking 60 years of liberation of Bergen-Belsen. The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks who was present, later recounted, “When the time came for her to leave, she stayed. And stayed. One of her attendants said that he had never known her to linger so long after her scheduled departure. She gave each survivor – it was a large group – her focused, unhurried attention. She stood with each until they had finished telling their personal story.”

Often referred to as the “mensch who will be king”, then Prince Charles has had an enduring and close relationship with British Jewry. He’s patron of World Jewish Relief as well as the Holocaust Memorial Trust, a patronage that once belonged to the Queen. He’s also patron of the Jewish Museum, JLGB for Jewish youth across Great Britain, and numerous others. To coincide with International Holocaust Memorial Day, the then Prince commissioned portraits to be painted of several Holocaust survivors accompanied by a documentary on the BBC. He gave a very moving speech on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz hosted by Yad Vashem, and met survivors privately, away from the prying eyes of the media. He also gave a notable private donation to The Peres Centre for Peace. His wife, then the Duchess of Cornwall, Camilla, visited Auschwitz, representing the Queen to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

As he bears the enormous responsibility of monarch, I cannot help think that it’s the wise counsel of his great friend, the late Rabbi Sacks, that he will sorely miss.

As the world prepares to bid farewell to the greatest of the greatest generation, there are calls in the media to assign her the moniker, Elizabeth the Great. It’s most fitting, for she was, indeed, the greatest Briton.

• Rolene Marks is the SA Jewish Report’s royal correspondent based in the Middle East.

World Council of Churches refrains from labelling Israel an apartheid state

NICOLA MILTZ

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which has a long history of systemic bias against Israel, stopped short of labelling the Jewish homeland an “apartheid state” at its general assembly last week.

The decision came as the WCC wrapped up its nine-day event last Thursday, 8 September, in Karlsruhe, Germany.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was concerned that the delegates would take Israel bashing too far, issued a warning about the dangers of antisemitism.

“It’s one of the major current tasks of the Christian churches around the world to fight back against antisemitism,” he told the opening session, according to *The Algemeiner*.

“We must be aware that antisemitism can take many forms,” Steinmeier said, “But it always remains a hate ideology with a history of extermination.”

One of the pressing items on the agenda was to consider a controversial statement by the WCC’s public issues committee titled: “Seeking justice and peace for all in the Middle East”.

It prompted vigorous discussion amongst global delegates about whether



World Council of Churches (WCC) General Assembly in Karlsruhe Germany

the assembly should name the situation in Israel and Palestine “apartheid”. Some churches pushed hard for a resolution at the assembly that would define Israel as an apartheid state. Some churches, however, were against this. In the end, no consensus was reached. The WCC assembly is the highest governing body of the WCC.

After much debate, the WCC concluded, “Within this assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the utilisation of this term [apartheid] as accurately describing the reality of the people in Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful, and painful. We’re not of one mind on this matter.” It said it must “continue to struggle with this issue”.

Pamela Ngubane, the general manager of the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), told the *SA Jewish Report*, “SAFI notes the rejection of the apartheid analogy as a characterisation of Israel in its dealing with the Palestinians.”

She said the organisation hoped that it marked the “beginning of a real debate on the nature of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel”.

“We congratulate those members of the general assembly who pushed back against the agenda of an organised anti-Israel church lobby, some of which unfortunately included the South Africa delegation, which seeks to label Israel an apartheid state.”

“Minds must now turn to the nuances in

this situation, with an aim to understand the conflict,” Ngubane said.

“This will enable the WCC to do what’s necessary to foster normalisation and peace between the two sides as opposed to the usual dismissal of Israel’s security concerns. These concerns include the real and present threat to Israel’s national security by extremist aggression emanating from Iran, the West Bank, and Gaza.”

Ngubane said she hoped that the next sitting of the WCC general assembly would result in “this powerful body using its global influence to make a case for peaceful coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians”.

SAFI is a grassroots organisation for South Africans who support Israel.

Reverend Rowan Rennie of the Bethany Fellowship Church, an independent Wesleyan group, told the *SA Jewish Report* that although the WCC didn’t use the word “apartheid” in its statement, it implied it.

“It’s insinuated,” he said, “and real Christians see through this pretence.”

“The WCC is a political institution, not a Christian institution. It’s there to interfere in politics, to push certain agendas as it makes alliances with political parties and governments. The majority of Christians



in South Africa absolutely support Israel and will never stand against Israel. I pray the Jewish people can be comforted by the fact that true Christians stand in solidarity with them and Israel.”

The WCC, known for its anti-Israel stance, brings together churches, denominations, and church fellowships in about 120 countries and territories throughout the world, reportedly representing millions of Christians.

The WCC statement affirmed the “rightful place of the state of Israel in the community of nations and recognised its legitimate security needs” but it also pointed to reports by human rights organisations that described the policies and actions of Israel as amounting to apartheid. Without explicitly accusing the Jewish state of apartheid, it was harshly critical.

Reverend Rennie remains cautious of the WCC’s agenda, saying there were a number of troubling issues in its statement.

“It refers to Christians living in this area in a bid to pull on Christian heart strings. The conflict between Israel and Palestine has nothing to do with Christians. This is manipulation. The WCC also makes out that it’s all up to Israel to bring about peace. Israel’s enemies don’t seek to live in peace with Israel, and this is what’s forcing Israel to defend herself. This isn’t a matter of apartheid,” he said.

Earlier this year, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein called on South African Reverend Professor Dr Jerry Pillay to “retract statements accusing Israel of apartheid and calling for a boycott of the Jewish state” after Pillay was elected general secretary of the WCC on 17 June 2022.

He called on Pillay to use his new position to break with the WCC’s disturbing anti-Israel history and “usher in a new era”.

Elderly man narrowly escapes serial arsonist’s inferno

>>Continued from page 1

apparently derives joy from other people’s misfortune.” He emphasised that this wasn’t a “South African problem” and the Jewish community wasn’t the target. It was something that could happen anywhere in the world.

“CAP has worked closely with the SAPS, and provided the images that the SAPS distributed,” Jammy said.

“It was a massive fire, and it spread very quickly,” said the neighbour. “They contained the fire – it was too late to put it out. The house is totally gutted – the roof caved in. You can still smell burning in the air.”

He said the whole neighbourhood came out to assist the victim and fire-fighters. One person offered the victim a place to stay, and people are delivering meals to him and his gardener.

“It’s terrifying to know the arsonist did this so close to me,” said the neighbour. “It affects the whole neighbourhood. You wonder, ‘Am I next?’”

Andre Snyman, the founder of eblockwatch, a community crime-fighting communication system, has been tracking the arsonist since his first attacks. He thinks the arsonist lives in the area, and has made an effort to blend in.

In January, Fidelity ADT Chief Executive Wahl Bartmann offered a R100 000 reward for information leading to the capture of the arsonist.

According to *Psychology Today*, “Pyromania, the term for pathological fire setting, is a rare disorder characterised by the intentional and repeated setting of fires. People with pyromania are deeply fascinated by fire and related paraphernalia. They may experience feelings of pleasure, gratification, or a release of inner tension or anxiety once a fire is set.

“Individuals with pyromania engage in fire setting, but do so for distinctly personal reasons, often connected to another psychological disorder. They don’t set fires for monetary gain, for ideological reasons, to cover up criminal activity, to express anger or revenge, or as a result of a delusion, a hallucination, or impaired judgement.”

This fits the profile of the arsonist, who isn’t known to steal, even though he often targets wealthy homes. However, his actions have become more extreme, from targeting empty homes, to targeting homes with people inside, to intentionally trying to harm people. One of his victims, the elderly Risto Anjelopolj, died in intensive care.

Anyone with information is urged to contact the investigating officer, Warrant Officer Magongoa on 071 351 4189 or Lieutenant Colonel Prowse on 079 498 2435. The Crime Stop line can also be contacted on 08600 10111. Anonymous tip-offs can be reported via the MySAPS app, which can be downloaded on any smartphone.

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Imagination and responsiveness keep our shuls vital, says chief rabbi

SIMON APFEL

South African Orthodox rabbis and rebbetzins focused their energy at the first in-person SA Rabbinical conference since 2019 on ensuring that South Africa's proud network of shuls rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic and remain at the centre of Jewish life in the country.

A number of sessions were about formulating strategies to improve the shul experience and, as Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein puts it, "reimagining what our shuls can be".

"We need to expand our concept of a shul. What emerged from the discussions is that a vibrant shul comes from being responsive to the needs of our community, meeting people where they are.

"A shul isn't just about prayer services, it's a communal hub; a place where we gather as families; a warm, vibrant, welcoming space for people to connect and be inspired. It's where we develop our capacity to volunteer and reach out to others; to give and grow."

South Africa's rabbis and rebbetzins gathered at the Kruger Gate Hotel in Mpumalanga last week for a vital and productive conference.



Rabbis and rebbetzins on a game drive during the conference

are confronted by the many challenges presented by an increasingly global world, they remain predominantly proud to be Jewish and proud to be associated with Israel," said Seeff. "They have a connection to the Jewish people and Jewish spirituality in general – all solid indicators that the Jewish future of our community is bright if we seize the opportunity to build on this foundation and inspire them further."

"We need to be real about the state of our community – there are imposing challenges and concerns, and we need to confront

them directly, not shy away from them," said the chief rabbi. "But there are also growth opportunities we can seize and considerable strengths we can build on."

In terms of the latest developments in the kosher department, there has been national integration between Cape Town and Johannesburg, enabling the utilisation of shared resources and lowering costs.

Other recent developments include a series of upgrades and improved efficiencies in *shechita* and meat production, a new system to facilitate a smoother and more

coherent relationship with *mashgichim*, and a renewed partnership with retailers Pick n Pay and Woolworths to introduce new kosher products into the market.

"With the help of our partners, we're bringing more than 30 new products online each month," said Kosher SA Managing Director Rabbi Dovi Goldstein. "Our goal is to encourage more people to keep kosher by ensuring that keeping kosher is as easy as possible."

At the Beth Din, the team reported on the recent uptick in mediations and arbitrations,

and the introduction of a new systemised process to track every case and ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

"We're hearing that claimants can't get civil court dates for three years, which is perhaps why the Beth Din is being seen as a more efficient and cost-effective way to resolve monetary disputes," said Rabbi Shmuel Slasky, the Beth Din's new rabbinical director, who alongside the new case manager, Charmaine Campbell, has helped drive improved efficiencies at the Beth Din.

Some of the new Beth Din projects on the go include the introduction of a *mikveh* certification programme and an *eruv* maintenance project to ensure that these vital institutions of halachic practice maintain the highest standards.

But amidst all the brainstorming, strategising, and serious discussion, for Goldstein, the team building aspect of the conference was paramount. "Of course, there are important things to discuss, but the real impact is the bonds of friendship that are forged and reinforced. It's these bonds of friendship that build the unity of our rabbinate and hold us together as a community, and it was heart-warming to reconnect with each other."

Ukraine war takes psychological toll worldwide

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The war in Ukraine hasn't just taken a toll on Ukrainians, but on first responders, survivors of genocide and their descendants, as well as those watching the brutal scenes on television screens across the world.

This was revealed by international psychologists and social policy experts on 13 September, the 201st day since Russia invaded Ukraine. They were speaking at a virtual conference organised by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in partnership with the respective ambassadors of Ukraine, Poland, and Israel to South Africa.

The psychological torment experienced by Ukrainians has been exacerbated by the post-pandemic era, said Professor Larysa Zasiiekina, the vice-president for research and international affairs at Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, and the founder and director of the Ukrainian Psychotrauma Center.

"Ukrainians were going to return to their offline sites, offices, and universities at the end of February," she said. "We didn't have time to do it because on 24 February, the war started. We just transformed from one social isolation to another. We have evidence that social isolation brings a lot of emotional distress for people all around the world."

Hearing about how the war in Ukraine will lead to a deficit of grain and possible food shortages adds further psychological stress, said Zasiiekina. "Of course, it's a great trigger for people who experienced genocide and for people who are descendants of offspring, survivors, or victims of genocide."

Adverse psychological effects have also been felt by those who observed or were close to the happenings of the war in Ukraine, according to Antonia Bifulco, a professor of lifespan psychology and the director of the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies at Middlesex University, London. "This may be other victims, but it also may be first responders such as medical people, firefighters, etc."

Said Ukrainian Ambassador Liubov Abravитova, "Thousands of kilometres away from the conflict, you have been watching the unprovoked brutal, unfair war in my country in real-time, through a TV screen, or through your phone on social media, seeing the images of destruction."

These images and audio clips can trigger everyone psychologically, Abravитova said.

"Wars lead to the degradation of society," said Polish Ambassador Andrzej Kanthak. "By dealing with brutality, death, and helplessness, it brings about changes in the psyche of people who have survived the atrocities of war. Armed conflicts lead to persecution, murder, and injustice, and have a huge impact on the psyche of soldiers and civilians who involuntarily participate in an armed conflict."

According to United Nation official figures, more than 12.3 million people have left Ukraine during the war, said Kanthak. "They left behind everything they had and knew. Today, in our modern time, we see in our country, Poland, the ordeal and trauma of thousands of refugees."

Bifulco said the war had engendered trauma on a large scale, with Russia's denial that it was a war only adding insult to injury.

"Fighting at places like Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia, which have nuclear reactors, causes concern of a nuclear catastrophe," she said.

As of 12 September, 6 239 105 refugees have crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border since the beginning of the invasion, with 93% of them women and children, said Kanthak.

Dr Yan Serdtse, a lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, pointed out the price Ukrainian parents and their children were paying. "Fathers are separated from their wives and their children," he said.

Since 24 February, more than 7 000 people have been killed, including 383 children, and 10 000 civilians have been wounded, said Abravитova, pointing out that these figures increase daily.

"Young Ukrainians have suffered from exposure to abuse, violence, and the loss of their closest friends and family members," said Kanthak.

More than 41 000 civilian-infrastructure facilities in Ukraine have been damaged, said Abravитova. "It includes more than 32 000 residential buildings and houses. But when we speak about the facilities, we're forgetting the toll

on lives and damaged souls, which remains unknown."

Kanthak said some victims were battling to put their memories of the tragic events behind them, resulting in harm to their psyche. "Daily pictures and videos of atrocities suffered in Ukraine appear continuously across the media. Fear, anxiety, and depression are prevailing emotions together with grief and even survivor's guilt."

Living in constant fear while struggling to find safety and security has taken a toll on Ukrainians' mental health, said Kanthak. "Their identity has been stripped without any ability to prepare for it."

"The war has caused a historical rift between the two brotherly people, Ukrainians and Russians. As of now, it seems that it will take countless years to heal the wounds," said Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotserkovsky.

Some Ukrainians cannot cope with their hatred of Russia, said Zasiiekina.

She advised them to not think about Russians, but about Ukrainian competence and the Ukrainian military service, which has been courageous and brave.

"When they do this shift from Russians to Ukrainians, they feel proud, with courage and confidence in our victory."

On top of this, Ukrainians weren't well prepared psychologically for the war because they grew up in the Soviet Union, said Zasiiekina. "We had a lot in common or a joint heritage in different fields of life such as economics, the arts, and the mass media. That's why people didn't expect such huge, strange cruelty."

Some of the Ukrainians who migrated during the war have suffered from the psychological effect of double forced migration, said Zasiiekina. "Many people from the east of Ukraine previously migrated to other places in the country, mostly to some central parts of Ukraine. Now, when the counter attack started, all these people had to migrate again, and some just became displaced people or refugees."

On a positive note, Serdtse said, "The end of the conflict is coming soon, so Ukrainians will be in the post-traumatic stage, and will have support to build their nation again."



Photo: LinkedIn

Professor Larysa Zasiiekina



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Volunteering at Brakpan Shul an unexpected blessing

OPINION

ADAM MIDZUK



Working at home since the pandemic struck, it was easy to become absorbed in our own affairs, but sometimes we're given the opportunity to break out of this narrow self-interest and give of ourselves for the sake of others.

I had this opportunity a few weeks ago when along with my 16-year-old cousin, I volunteered at The Harvest Project and Blessings School in Brakpan. I'm grateful I did.

Before doing so, I'd never heard of The Harvest Project nor had I ever visited Brakpan. My aunt sent me a message asking if I was available to accompany my cousin to do some charity work from the shul in Brakpan. He needed to do community service for school, and wanted a familiar face around to keep him company. For whatever reason, perhaps because I didn't have anywhere better to be, I agreed.

I had no idea what to expect, nor the nature of the charity work being done. I, with my painfully middle class sensibilities, imagined we would be put to work ladling soup into the bowls of grateful homeless people and well-mannered school children.

And so, perhaps, it appealed to some bizarre cosmic sense of humour that my Google Maps route led us directly through one of the most impoverished and devastating-looking shanty towns I had ever encountered.

Driving along Main Reef Road coming toward the Brakpan town centre, we came across a stretch of land locals dub "Plastic City". We drove for about a kilometre, with tyres piled high on the pavement, heaps of trash strewn on either side of the road, and the smell of burning plastic thick in the air. Interspersed among a sea of refuse were dozens of ramshackle corrugated iron shacks and shanty dwellings of wood and plastic tarp. Amongst them, we glimpsed the occasional inhabitant, their clothes and faces greyed by soot, ash, and dust.

Plastic City is inhabited primarily by desperate foreign nationals who used to collect and sell plastic for recycling until the municipality stopped buying their plastic. During the 2019 xenophobic attacks, these foreigners, mainly impoverished refugees from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, sought refuge in the town centre, and the Brakpan Shul was one of the few places available.

Since 2002, the Brakpan Hebrew Congregation has been maintained by Ernest and Jeffrey Waner. Until Jeffrey's death in 2020, they kept a *minyan* by busing in Sandringham Gardens residents. Though Ernest still looks after the shul, I don't believe there's been a *minyan* since.

Yakima, his daughter, started The Harvest Project, an initiative to feed the local community sustainably using donations while also training people to grow their own crops. At the height of the lockdown, they provided thousands of free meals a day to those in need.

It was roughly at this time that Yakima joined forces with Jessie and Twinky, two local women who had been running a crèche in Plastic City for the children of foreign nationals. Yakima helped them create Blessings Academy, a charity school run on the shul grounds. They run classes in converted shipping containers on the shul lawns and makeshift classrooms for Grade 1 and Grade 2 in the shul foyer and small shul. In the interests of sustainability, the school maintains a vegetable garden on the shul grounds. The children are taught how to grow, tend, and harvest the garden.

The school now supports and feeds 87 children from toddlers up to Grade 2.

Over our two days in Brakpan, we got involved in helping some of the older children pick string beans from the garden and label the fruit-tree saplings they planted last year. We observed classes, and helped serve and make meals. My cousin and I were required to do manual work in the garden, de-weeding, tilling, and fertilising a patch of soil for planting.

But by far the most rewarding task was working with the kids. They were fascinated and so eager to interact with us.

On the second day, I decided to bring a wad of paper and a few pencils. What started off with me just doing a few doodles soon attracted a few curious kids, which quickly lead to requests from the audience. "Draw a lion!"; "No, a car!"; "I want a snake!"

By the end of the day, my cousin and I found ourselves in front of a blackboard teaching the kids how to draw – a house, a butterfly, a flower. I still recall how their eyes gleamed with pride as they showed off their attempts. It felt good to inspire them. I guess this is the reward of charity work.

Looking back, I have a strange mix of conflicting



Cole Maunder and Adam Midzuk at The Harvest Project in Brakpan

feelings from visiting Brakpan Shul. Entering the shul building itself felt like entering a museum or the grand palace of some once great empire.

The brick walls, the benches, the ark, and bimah are all kept immaculate, yet our footsteps echoed in silence.

It's not hard to imagine Brakpan Shul in its heyday, to picture the throngs of Jews who would attend Shabbat and *yom tov* services, to imagine the sweet sound of the chazzan, and the excited voices of children playing outside on the lawns.

And yet, all that remained was the shul itself, a monument to a community that no longer exists.

On Friday, I made the point of saying the *shema* and *amidah* inside the shul. I had the feeling it had been a while since the last time a Jew had done the same.

Apart from Ernest, Yakima, and a scattered few remaining Jews, there's no longer a Brakpan Jewish community. But the shul still serves a purpose. The sound of children laughing and playing can once more be heard on the premises. They are taught to bless their food and learn about all forms of religion and spirituality, including Judaism. In providing a safe, loving, and sustainable environment for these children, the Brakpan Shul has found a new community.

- Adam Midzuk has a BSc in Archaeology and Biology. He is currently freelancing as a digital artist and designer.
- For more information or to make donations to The Harvest Project, please email Yakima Waner on theharvestp@gmail.com.

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BBYO – the new youth movement on the block

PETA KROST

Starting a youth movement in the heart of a pandemic may seem strange, but BBYO South Africa was launched in the darkest period of lockdown in 2020.

It was at a time when teens were locked into their small myopic worlds of online learning and friendships within the confines of their home, and the world was shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And though they were unable to be in contact in-person with friends and school peers, they were creating new friendships with other Jewish teens around the corner and all over the world through this new-to-South Africa youth movement.

It was all conceived, however, before lockdown, when then Herzlia teen, Lila Fleischmann, was at a dinner party with family friends from the United States (US) and they suggested that she bring BBYO to South Africa. She didn't think much of it until lockdown, when suddenly it seemed to make a lot of sense to her.

"We were all stuck in our homes, longing for something new to be involved in," Fleischmann, 18, recalls. "With that loneliness of COVID-19, we were desperate for connection and to be a part of something outside of ourselves. We were all craving something different, outside of the boundaries we were locked into."

Fleischmann contacted people at BBYO headquarters in the US in the middle of 2020 to find out more, only to learn that it was an international teen-run organisation that didn't focus on any particular political or religious aspect of Judaism. It was for all Jewish kids, no matter their choices or allegiances.

She also discovered that the organisation wasn't focused on an end-of-year camp, but on weekly or bi-weekly events or meetings, which were successfully

happening online during lockdown. "What stood out most for me was how easy it made connecting with people here and around the world, especially during lockdown when it was all virtual. It seemed to be a new way of experiencing leadership. I was excited."

At the time, BBYO was successfully operating



online while other youth movements and communal organisations were trying to figure out a way of operating during lockdown. Fleischmann found that BBYO had an innovative digital platform, BBYO On Demand, where teens could get involved with activities around the world. Its events were on Zoom, and could be accessed via its website.

She did a brief course in BBYO leadership with teens around the world, and was given guidance in starting the movement in South Africa. Word spread fast.

Noah Leibowitz, who was in high school at Yeshiva College at the time, was in an online class when he

got a message from a friend at King David who asked if he would be interested in checking out this new organisation. "I liked the idea that teens planned and arranged teen events, so I said yes, and got onto a Zoom call, which turned out to be the one in which they were planning our first event," Leibowitz says.

"They were speaking about doing a food charity drive. I built up the courage and told them about Yehuda Lazarus and his Fingertips of Africa, and so my involvement with BBYO began."

Leibowitz soon ran for a board position and became head of Jewish enrichment, and is now regional president with Taya Allardice. "I really like the fact that BBYO is a pluralistic Jewish movement because I'm an openminded person and want to learn lots of things. I love that it's teen-led and there are no adults calling the shots."

When Fleischmann first put BBYO out there, there were just a handful of people, which grew when Leibowitz joined to about 30, and it keeps on growing.

"During lockdown, we would schedule mostly virtual events," Fleischmann says. "We would do things like making food together on Zoom, Shabbos events, mixers. We introduced international events. There were so many things to do and people to get to know."

At the beginning of 2021, they began hosting in-person events in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and these are still growing. Going ten-pin bowling, to Bounce, a picnic, those involved are constantly trying to find new and interesting ways to meet, have fun, and connect with other Jewish teens.

Though there are strong youth movements in South Africa, BBYO brings something different to the fray, says Fleischmann. You can be a staunch "Bnei Akivanik" and still be a member of BBYO. In fact, this is welcomed.

Leibowitz says he has made many new friends through BBYO, and reconnected with people he hasn't seen since nursery school. "A big part of BBYO is being able to break out of your shell and get to know people. I see people who wouldn't speak in public before now comfortable doing that and also doing things they hadn't thought of before."

BBYO has in fact existed globally for almost a century and it did have a chapter in South Africa between the 1960s and 1980s, but fizzled out.

Fleischmann, who recently gave up her regional presidency after a two-year run, says, "I was introduced to a world of opportunity through BBYO and given an outlet to channel my passions and explore my interests.



I've become closer to my Jewish identity and heritage, I've gained leadership skills, I've learned more about the person I am today, I've even made lifelong friends from around the world (some of whom I recently met for the first time in America).

"I was never sure how I could become more involved in the South African Jewish community, but when I found BBYO, I found the way to

do it. I now feel more connected to my community than ever."

African Jews should leave defence of Israel to ambassador, says Silberhaft

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, affectionately known as "the travelling rabbi", shocked a Union of Jewish Women audience on 12 September by saying that South African Jews should stop defending Israel and leave it to the ambassador.

Silberhaft, the national director of the Small Jewish Communities Association (SJCA) and the African Jewish Congress (AJC), said that although "we're all passionate Zionists, we [as the AJC] have a policy that if a government in Africa speaks out against Israel – which in most cases they don't – it's not for us to say, 'What are you talking about, Israel doesn't practice apartheid, etc?' Yes, if we didn't have the state of Israel, we would all be back in the gas chambers. There's no question about it."

He went on to say, "In our African communities, whenever there's anything anti-Israel, we contact the Israeli ambassador and ask him to deal with it. That's why our small Jewish communities in Africa live a free and safe life. There isn't that link between Jews defending Israel and it being a political issue. I can see you [the audience] are unhappy with what I'm saying, but it's a fact, it's a reality."

"Israel needs to stand up for itself. We can't be the messengers of Israelis, even though we can't tolerate anti-Israel speech. We, as the remnants of a once very powerful community, need to find our perspective, our place, and tread carefully because the government and all the people around us don't like us."

Silberhaft expressed concern about people leaving South Africa.

"It blows my mind how when people left [South Africa in the past], most left because they couldn't handle apartheid. They were so morally upstanding," he said.

"My question is, why don't they come back now that apartheid is over? They've realised that was a *bubbe-meise* [fable] to get out of here. But they've abandoned their families, they've abandoned their parents' graves. How do you do that? My message is that we've got to make sure our children don't do it to us."

Silberhaft said the first identified Jews arrived in South Africa in 1820. "We went on to have a great 200 years as a Jewish community. The fact is that things have changed here, and people are moving. Jews are always on the move. The minute there's uncertainty, Jews move because we all know that nobody ever comes to our assistance – not even Jews come to our assistance – so we have to survive ourselves."


Silberhaft said Jews were on the move in other African countries as well. "Zimbabwe at its peak had 7 500 Jews, now it has less than 200. In country communities in the Free State in 1950, there were 45 active Jewish communities, everyone had a shul and a cemetery. Today, there are probably four. Zambia at its peak had 18 000 Jews, today there are 30."

A couple of months ago, Silberhaft travelled to Zimbabwe with the Israeli ambassador and met President Emmerson Mnangagwa.



"In a meeting, there were eight ministers, and every one of them had something positive to say about Jews while they were growing up. Most of them had Jewish doctors on their farms or little dorpiess. Even the minister of foreign affairs told us that he fell out of a tree and a Jewish doctor saved him."

Continued on page 12>>

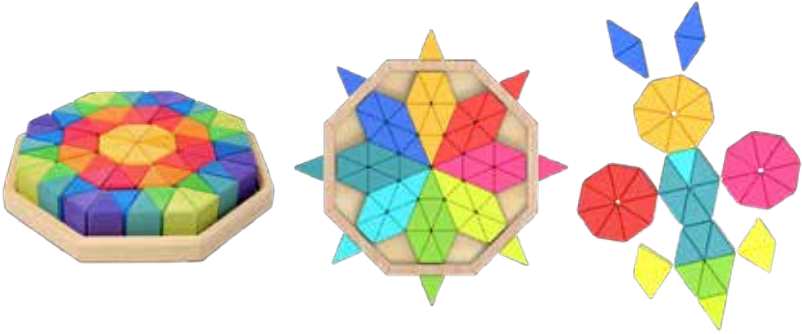


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Celebrities trumpet positive messages about SA for Elul

SAUL KAMIONSKY

By the end of Elul (25 September), Rabbi Eitan Ash, the rabbi of Chabad of Savoy in Johannesburg, will have spread 30 positive messages about South Africa from as many South African celebrities.

Each day of Elul, he has made a point of meeting a well-known personality to get a message from them and blow the shofar for them. He has met the likes of veteran stockbroker David Shapiro; Miss South Africa Ndavi Nokeri; boxer Kevin Lerena; former South African Revenue Service executive Johann van Loggerenberg; Nando's founder Robbie Brozin; and South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Vice-President Zev Krengel to allow them to share their message ahead of the Jewish new year.

He then uploads the video of the message and his shofar blowing to all his social media platforms – Instagram (@rabbiwithabackpack), Facebook, and LinkedIn.

"I also have five WhatsApp groups that I'm admin of, and post the videos there," he says. "They're going viral. People are sending them to everyone all over the place. I'm getting messages from countries throughout the world."

During the month of Elul in 2020 and 2021, Ash sent out videos of rabbis and people in different cities around the world blowing a shofar. "This year, I felt South Africa was so in need of positivity, that instead of continuing this idea, we could get different influential people to give a short positive message – not a Jewish message, just a positive South African message – and if I blew the shofar afterwards, we could create the same viral effect and positivity in the country."

Ash says the SAJBD has been supportive of the project.

The blowing of the shofar serves as a spiritual wake-up call, helping us to reflect on our past year, learn from our mistakes, and prepare for the new year.

Ash met ActionSA President Herman Mashaba and nine-times Comrades Marathon winner Bruce Fordyce at their respective houses; legendary golfer Gary Player at Killarney Country Club; and Blue Bulls hooker Bismarck du Plessis at Loftus Versveld Stadium. Ash even stood in a Springbok shirt with 2007 Rugby World Cup-winning Springbok captain John Smit in front of a painting of some Springbok legends.

Said Mashaba, "One thing we must never forget is that in 1996, we produced one of the finest Constitutions, which guarantees that we can change our government, so we're now in the process as ActionSA to build the non-racial South Africa we fought for."

He expressed confidence that after the 2024 South African general election, "we will have a new country".

Award-winning journalist, author, and radio host, Mandy Wiener, said, "There are great stories to tell in South Africa. Sure, it's absolutely important to hold power to account and expose wrongdoing, but there are what I like to call the 'hope dealers' – the whistle-blowers, civil society organisations, active citizens, and entrepreneurs."

International Performance Consultant Richard Sutton said, "If we can go into this new year with self-awareness and self-control while reflecting on three things – how do I want to feel, how do I want to think, and how do I want to act when I'm confronted with a challenge or adversity – we can shape the future we want for ourselves and create the reality that we all aspire to."

Four-time Premier Soccer League-winning coach Gavin Hunt said the football fraternity in South Africa needed to get behind Banyana, the team which just won the Women's African Cup of Nations and are heading to the FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand next year. "They have done exceptionally well and are really something to be proud of. All we need to do now is get our men's team right. There so many players with so much talent in this country," he said.

Said Smit, "The shofar starts with something simple and small and becomes something quite significant at the end from a noise point of view. When I look at rugby, it takes a bunch of individuals to come together and create synergy and something special."

Said Fordyce, "The weather is glorious. I can't see anything to be negative about. Last month, we had the Comrades Marathon, which is the biggest example of South Africans all coming together. I think this is the



Dovber Unterslak, Bismarck du Plessis, and Rabbi Eitan Ash

most amazing place."

Asked how he got celebrities to share their messages, Ash said, "I've spent a lot of time finding different people who know some of the different celebrities. I had numbers for some

Blowing the shofar for Herman Mashaba

Eitan Ash

#rabbiwithabackpack

of them and contacted them directly. Other people have called me, saying, 'I know this person. Can I get them for you?' Then I contact

them, and we set up a time."

He says it hasn't all been plain sailing, as some celebrities are busy or outside Johannesburg. "Also, I've organised a message every single day this month, so it does come with a workload. But most celebs have been amazing and happy to try to fit into their diaries the three or four minutes it takes to do these videos."

South Africa is one of the best countries in the world, Ash says. "There's so much potential and energy here. We have so much. We get so caught up in all the negativity and the problems. In life, if we think positive, we create a positive vibe which can make a difference to all of us in this incredible country."

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Suicide-prevention experts call on community to change the narrative

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

A woman who has battled mental-health issues and suicide attempts since her teen years; a mother grieving the loss of her son to suicide; and a rabbi determined to change narratives that have the potential to kill were all brought together by Hatzolah to save lives by speaking the unspeakable.

“Mental health and suicide needs to be seen as a community issue requiring a community solution,” said Sheri Hanson, Hatzolah’s mental-health co-ordinator, at a talk in Joburg this week arranged by Hatzolah Connect, an anonymous chatline for teens and young adults battling mental-health issues.

Lyr Weltsman, the founder of Breaking the Chalk, a digital mental-health company that counsels youth and families, shared her struggle with mental illness.

Her roller coaster journey started when she was just 14. “My condition was so extreme and so sudden, that we had no idea what was going on,” she said. Though she had a happy home and a close-knit family, everything shifted. “Internally, it felt like something had died. High school was a pressure pot with so much self-expectation. I was on a high and not stopping, but everything that goes up has to come down, and I smashed down.” She was later diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Her parents took her to a therapist, something that saved her in the long-term. Yet at the time, suicidal thoughts soon became part of her everyday life. “Mental-illness symptoms can be breathtakingly strong. Think about it as a disability,” she said.



Jodi Seef and Rabbi Levi Avtzon

Weltsman soon stopped attending school. She argued that if the school had enough mental-health support or resources, it would have been life-changing.

Weltsman became stuck in a cycle of self-harm, something she describes as an addiction. “It’s the place you go to for any sort of release of your inner pain. I was petrified of what I was doing, I didn’t know what I was doing, but I knew I needed it, and it’s never left me since.” She ended

up in hospital more than ten times after multiple suicide attempts.

“When someone is suicidal, there’s a deep sense of loss which brings helplessness and hopelessness,” she said. “It’s not about not wanting to live life, it’s [about] not being able to cope or fathom that you’ll continue life in that pain. Life doesn’t seem worth it. You try everything to get better, but you don’t see the light. The pain and numbness is immense, it overtakes everything.”

“The only way to prevent suicide and get people to ask for help and support them is by speaking about it. We cannot rationalise it, we can only attempt to understand and learn without judgement.”

When Jodi Seef and her husband, Justin, lost their son, Adam, to suicide in 2019 – a loss that shocked the community – their world was shattered. Yet, Jodi has found catharsis by speaking about Adam.

“How do I get up in the morning and carry on?” she asked. “I get up because I don’t want another family to endure the tragedy that my husband, Justin, my daughter, Megan, and I have endured. I get up for you, Adam, to share your story. If just one life can be saved due to awareness of suicide prevention and the reduction of stigma around mental health, then Adam has fulfilled his purpose.”

Through his suicide note, Jodi gained

insight into her son’s silent struggle. “Everyone around him thought that Adam had it all together. But to Adam, it wasn’t so. In that note, Adam revealed the struggle he had with anxiety and mental health and that he was so, so tired,” she said. “All Adam wanted was to escape the unbearable pain. Adam felt lost. I’m certain that he couldn’t reconcile the person he portrayed to those around him with the person he was inside. He didn’t feel safe sharing his inner demons for fear that he would push loved ones away, and this left him feeling even more isolated. He chose not to share with anyone, and he had every opportunity – there were so many people in his life. Obviously, we would have accepted all his intricacies and would have done everything in our power to help him.

“Adam had it all, was popular with his peers, excelled academically, and he had his whole future ahead of him. That still wasn’t enough for him. He was self-critical. In spite of all the love, support, and light that Adam was surrounded by, Adam lived his life in pitch darkness,” she said.

The Seef family is in awe of the continued impact Adam has had on suicide prevention through his cousin and closest friends’ initiative, Adam’s Forum, an anonymous platform free of hierarchy and judgement where you can feel comfortable sharing your innermost thoughts and demons.

Adam’s death had a huge impact on Rabbi Levi Avtzon of Linksfield Shul. “It turned me from a person awkward about death and totally unfamiliar with the darkness of suicide to someone who, unfortunately, is at the forefront of it,” he said.

To help ourselves and our children to not be overwhelmed by this world, we need to change the way we look at the challenges we face, Avtzon said. “There’s an incredible amount of anxiety that we put on ourselves as a culture, and we’re not asking the mental-health cost. One of the challenges facing our community is a culture of fear. This world is already so hard to navigate, but many people aren’t conscious of how much harder we make it for our children. What narratives are we telling them? That you’re not coping? You won’t get a job, get out?”

“We also have a narrative of what a good life is supposed to be – about having to be extraordinary – but only G-d knows what a good life is. When you take narratives of what it means to be good enough and compound them with serious underlying mental-health conditions, it’s a witch’s brew. Our community narratives are killing people.”

Ordinary is good enough, Avtzon said. “We’re all good enough.”

African Jews should leave defence of Israel to ambassador, says Silberhaft

>>Continued from page 10

Today, 195 Jews reside in Mauritius, said Silberhaft. “It’s the only country [in Africa] where the number of Jews is growing. The reason for that is that it’s a tax haven, so lots of Jews are hiding there. We built a museum to record the history of Jews in Mauritius. We’ve managed to get the education ministries in Mauritius and Zambia to include a six-week course on the history of Jews in both those countries.

“We now have a Jewish museum in Livingstone, Zambia. Edwin Wulfsohn, who has turned 80, sold his bank in London and wants to bring 80 items of interest to his family to the museum. We’re busy negotiating a new museum in Livingstone to preserve the history of the once active and prominent Jewish community there.”

Asked by the SA Jewish Report if Jewish customs differ in small communities across South Africa, Silberhaft said, “We’re lot more tolerant. Unfortunately, the Jewish leadership today believes that South African

Jewry is Sandton, Glenhazel, and Sea Point, as opposed to Rabbi Cyril Harris, who travelled to every Jewish community.”

The SJCA makes sure that Jews in far-flung communities are safe and can worship uninterrupted, said Silberhaft. It organises Jewish activities, but is also involved with the wider community, helping to feed local kids and do other outreach programmes, he said.

“We give out calendars, yahrzeit candles, and Chanukah candles. We look after almost 200 Jewish cemeteries in South Africa, nearly 30 000 graves,” said Silberhaft, pointing out that “I cannot allow, during my reign of terror, for cemeteries to be neglected.”

Silberhaft spoke of cases in which Jewish people had given instructions that they wanted to be cremated. “We know that’s the greatest Jewish sin and, in one case, we actually stole the body from the funeral parlour and buried the person before the kids arrived to make sure they weren’t cremated.”

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Kabbalah not just “for men over 40”

STEVEN GRUZD

Studying Kabbalah, the 4 000-year-old system of Jewish mysticism, has exploded in popularity since the COVID-19 lockdowns.

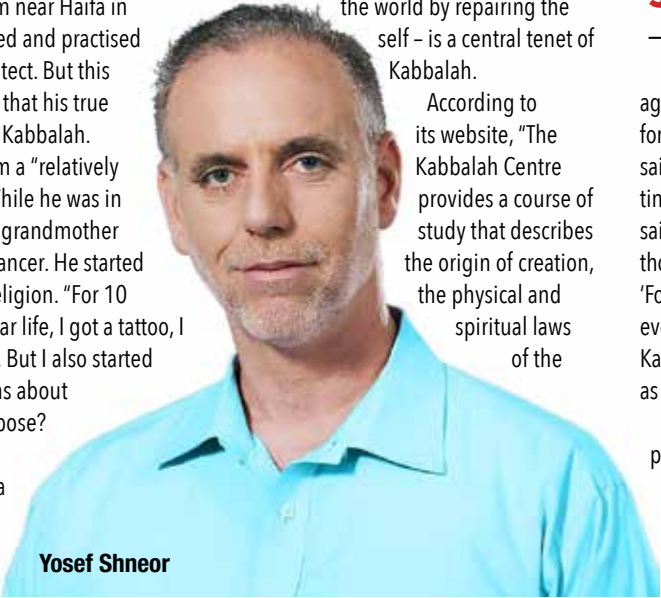
Both in-person and online, thousands around the world are seeking Kabbalah’s answers to the big questions, like, “Why are we here? Why is there pain and suffering? What is the meaning of life?” But this esoteric wisdom has its gatekeepers, who believe that it’s only for those steeped in Jewish learning. It also has its sceptics, who see Kabbalah as a fad or a cult.

Ahead of his trip to Johannesburg, the *SA Jewish Report* spoke to Yosef Shneur, a teacher at the Kabbalah Centre in Tel Aviv, about his personal journey and what makes this mysticism so mesmerising.

Born in Kiryat Yam near Haifa in 1971, Shneur studied and practised as a landscape architect. But this father of four found that his true calling was to teach Kabbalah.

Shneur came from a “relatively Orthodox family”. While he was in the Israeli army, his grandmother passed away from cancer. He started to drift away from religion. “For 10 years, I lived a secular life, I got a tattoo, I loved discotheques. But I also started having big questions about life: What’s our purpose? What are we doing here? I was feeling a lack of fulfilment.”

Searching for meaning in



Yosef Shneur

his life, one day in 1997, Shneur found a leaflet about the Kabbalah Centre. He started attending sessions. “At first, it was annoying,” he said. “I was getting even more questions than answers. But I felt like I had reached home. It’s the same feeling I get when I’ve been abroad and land back in Israel.” He eventually became a full-time Kabbalah teacher in 2002.

“The essence of Kabbalah,” Shneur says, “is to reach the goal of creation – it wasn’t just a random explosion. Every living creature should enjoy every moment with health and happiness. There should be no war, no violence, only good deeds, only unity. Kabbalah offers advice on how to live life the right way. It teaches that there’s a spiritual mechanism operating 24/7 in the world. Learn its dynamics and how to adjust and connect to it.”

The concept of *tikkun olam* – repairing the world by repairing the self – is a central tenet of Kabbalah.

According to its website, “The Kabbalah Centre provides a course of study that describes the origin of creation, the physical and spiritual laws of the

universe, including human existence, and the journey of the soul.” The Kabbalah Centre seeks to make Kabbalistic principles accessible and relevant to everyone, whatever their faith, by relating them to the real world in understandable language and tangible concepts.

The centre was founded by Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag in 1922, who translated the Zohar – a 2 000-year-old seminal text of Kabbalah – from Aramaic to Hebrew. The centre today has branches in more than 40 cities, including Mexico City, Moscow, Paris, Tel Aviv, and Toronto, and a major online offering at www.kabbalah.com.

Orthodox Judaism has prohibitions against studying Kabbalah – that it’s only for learned men over the age of 40. Shneur said he was living a secular lifestyle at the time and didn’t really care what rabbis said or thought. “My mother freaked out though, and called her rabbi. He said, ‘For Yosef, it’s OK.’” Shneur believes that everyone has the right and ability to study Kabbalah, and that it shouldn’t been seen as arcane wisdom for only the few.

There has been resistance to the popularisation of Kabbalah from rabbinical authorities, including in South Africa. Teachers have been threatened with excommunication (*cherem*).

“I was physically attacked some

years ago by religious bullies,” Shneur said. “But thank G-d, today it’s different. It’s more relaxed.” He said there was more tolerance and acceptance. “Kabbalah is [now] being taught in many yeshivot these days. I guess they thought, ‘If you can’t beat them, join them.’”

Shneur notes how interest in Kabbalah surged with lockdowns worldwide. “We had 2 000 to 3 000 people online. We never had this before.” He said people had more time to introspect, and many were searching for meaning while pent up, making them more accepting of Kabbalah and curious about what it offered them. “COVID-19 facilitated the opening of the

spirit. When there is the most darkness, you also find the most light. The Zohar teaches that when the body becomes weak, the soul becomes stronger,” said Shneur.

More than 70% of the Kabbalah Centre’s students are not Jewish, and it focuses on the universal wisdom of Kabbalah. Shneur has no problem teaching Kabbalah to non-Jews, and believes it can help anyone, anywhere. “Israelis are a bit more difficult [to teach],” he said. “It’s as if they came to teach you! They think they know better. Non-Jews come to it more humbly – they don’t have the background. They’re like sponges. Jews tend to want things proven to them.”

One of the best-known celebrities

to study Kabbalah is the entertainer, Madonna. “She’s a dedicated student of Kabbalah,” Shneur said. “She talks about how it saved her from a life of drugs. She’s learning and applying it. So she’s famous – what can we do?”

Many people are sceptical about Kabbalah. “I’m a sceptical person too,” said Shneur. “I had a sense of urgency, and was at a demanding stage of my life when I really needed support and answers. I had the patience to stick with it. We tell our students to doubt everything, be sceptical. We don’t need believers, but people with open minds who ask questions and have doubts.”

So isn’t it like a cult? “When you see us lock the doors, start panicking!” Shneur said. “It’s so non-cultish. We want people to be independent and open minded. We don’t want to take, but just to give. We want to give wisdom and love, to give meaning. If people don’t find value, they don’t have to stay. We never force or coerce people.”

While in Johannesburg this week, Shneur gave seminars applying Kabbalistic principles and approaches to the world of money and business, with entrepreneur Faith Khanyile. “There’s so much financial chaos, pain, and corruption” he said, “because many people in business don’t know the rules, and don’t apply them.”

Shneur’s message is for people to come to Kabbalah without pre-judgement. “Realise that the purpose of any challenge is to grow. Take accountability and responsibility for your life. And tap into the language of the soul.”

“The concept of tikkun olam - repairing the world by repairing the self - is a central tenet of Kabbalah.”

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IUA-UCF appoints fundraising head

The Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund (IUA-UCF) has appointed Janine Levy as its executive director, primarily responsible for developing a comprehensive fundraising strategy for the IUA-UCF and its allied organisations, the SAZF (South African Zionist Federation), and SAJBD (South African Jewish Board of Deputies), and similarly assisting associated organisations such as SAFI (the South African Friends of Israel), and SAUJS (the South African Union of Jewish Students).

Levy's career started in marketing and activations, liaising with service providers such as Airports Company South Africa and Metrorail, after which she spent 15 years as head of advertising sales at a leading business publication. She subsequently decided to focus



Janine Levy

her career closer to heart, spending the past four years putting her experience to use at the King David Schools' Foundation, where her activities cemented her passion for community fundraising and interaction.

"I'm honoured to be taking on this pivotal role, both for the IUA-UCF and for South Africa's Jewish community," Levy says. "The Jewish organisations which fall under the IUA-UCF are central to the local community. Global socioeconomic and political challenges and local challenges reinforce the need for fundraising

to ensure the longevity and relevance of these respected organisations, which are part of the bedrock of our community's security, freedom, and future," she said.

Janine is an ex-King Davidian, and lives in Johannesburg with her husband and two children, both of whom are at King David Victory Park.

Hirsch Lyons holds chess friendly with Jewish schools

Hirsch Lyons held its first annual friendly chess tournament on Sunday, 11 September. Thirty players from Jewish schools participated in a round robin of four games. Two arbiters were present, and were most efficient in doing the draws and dealing with disputes.



Inter-school chess tournament held at Hirsch Lyons

Ice hockey champ keeps Judaism in the net

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South Africa isn't widely known for its prowess in ice hockey, nor are local Jewish teens usually recognised for their talent in this sport.

That is, until 17-year-old Hirsh Lyons Grade 11 student Yuval Levi came into his own, representing South Africa in the international sporting arena.

Although Levi was selected for the national side when he was only 14, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented him from making his debut until the end of March this year in Bosnia.

What a debut it was! He shone so brightly, he was selected Best South African Player by the chairperson of the International Ice Hockey Federation. This was in spite of choosing to bow out of one of his games for South Africa because it fell on Shabbos.

"It was one of the hardest decisions of my life. It tore at me when I realised I was expected to play on Shabbos. I knew how hard I had worked and trained to represent South Africa, but I also knew that it was Hashem who got me there," Levi told the SA Jewish Report this week.

"I sat by myself for a long time trying to work it out because it wasn't that I couldn't play, but it was not in the spirit of Shabbos. I know I made the right decision and, amazingly, my team mates supported me 100%. They respected me for it, even if it may have had an impact on their game."

Levi wasn't just there over Shabbat, the tournament fell over Pesach. So, every day, he walked 26 flights of stairs to his dad's room in the hotel so that he could get his kosher le Pesach food and take it down to eat with his team mates. "It gave me an opportunity to teach them about my religion and to learn more about theirs," he says.

Levi was the star of South African team in Bosnia for "creating a lot of plays". He scored two hattricks in two games, two goals in a third game, and assisted in two other goals. Not bad for only three games in the tournament!

Making his debut on the international arena wasn't plain sailing, however. "It was nerve-wracking," Levi says. "I didn't know what to expect, but it was a great experience. Even though you're in a different country and you have just about 10 supporters – the parents who come and watch – you can feel the love and honour in playing for your country."

Ice hockey is a tough game, with players gliding across the ice at breakneck speed, others diving on their knees and stomachs to try to stop the puck from sliding into the back of the net, and a forward swerving around a defender before swiping the puck past the goaltender. In between it all, players take off their gloves and start brawling with their opponents.

Gauteng, Western Province, KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Province each host leagues for various age groups in ice hockey. There are annual national leagues and competitions for all age groups from under-12 to senior level.

"There are about 1 500 ice hockey players in the whole country," says Levi. "We have about seven teams

in our local league in Gauteng. In Cape Town, they have only one ice rink and only two teams, which play games against each other every weekend."

When Levi was six, his family started a skating academy in Johannesburg. "If you follow through with the skating academy, you become a figure skater," he says. "It wasn't something I was looking to do. One of my coaches was also a hockey player, so he told me to try out, and I did at about the age of seven. I have stuck to the sport since."

He would play for inter-provincial teams where there were scouts for the national side. Levi was invited to go to a camp of 45 to 50 players, from which they would select a team to represent South Africa. He was selected at the age of 14, and was meant to play for South Africa in Luxembourg when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the week before they were meant to leave, it was cancelled.

Today, besides playing for the national team, Levi captains the inter-provincial under-18 and under-20 teams. He also plays under-18 and first (adult) division for Sabres Ice Hockey Club in Kempton Park. "And I play under-20 ice hockey for a team called Miners. I play in the Premier Hockey League [PHL], which is for the elite adults in Gauteng."

If that isn't enough, he plays for the Wild Cats in the Super League, South Africa's top ice hockey competition, which features teams from

Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Cape Town.

Levi practices on Tuesday nights from 18:30 to 20:30. "If I'm not busy with school, I go on a Thursday night to practice in Pretoria from 17:30 to 19:30. Games for our local league are usually on a Sunday."

He's not your average Hirsh Lyons pupil, Levi admits. However, though he's the only person in his grade playing for a national side, his grade is quite sporty. "They all support me and are proud of me," he says.

He's not the only person in the community who plays ice hockey. In fact, 14-year-old Shaarei Torah student Noam Levin plays under-20 ice hockey for the Sabres and Miners, while Benji Pilatowsky, a Yeshiva College alumnus who was involved in running the Achim youth movement, plays in the PHL.

They both train at Festival Mall in Kempton Park, with games sometimes taking place at Forest Hill City Mall in Centurion or the Grove Mall in Pretoria.

Levin, who followed in his brother's footsteps by playing ice hockey, says that to succeed in ice hockey, "You need to be a good skater, have good coordination, and have good hands."

Pilatowsky and Levi like the speed of the game. "It's a full contact sport, so it doesn't allow players to hang on to the puck for long," says the former, who took up the sport while growing up in Mexico City. "There's always passing, you're always on your feet."

Levi also enjoys the quick decision-making and adrenaline rush one experiences during the game.

In this game, there's no resting on laurels. So, this Friday through to Sunday, there are try outs for the under-20s national side and then two weeks later for the under-18s, and Levi will be there (except on Saturday).

Ultimately, he hopes to get a scholarship to pay in a top college in the United States.



Yuval Levi



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Yad Aharon's pop-up shop delights recipients



Yad Aharon & Michael recipients enjoyed pre yom tov shopping at a unique and exquisite pop-up shop, where they chose outfits for the whole family at no cost.

Genesis sponsored the space, which Yad's team of volunteers transformed into an upmarket boutique. "Thanks to the community's generous donation of more than 2 000 new and gently worn, top-quality items of clothing and accessories for men, ladies, and children, the shop's success was beyond our wildest dreams," says Yad Aharon Chief Executive Lauren Silberman.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

New antisemitism thinktank takes fight to academia

participated in the inaugural conference of the new London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA) on 11 September, together with South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Vice-President Mary Kluk and National Director Wendy Kahn. I was among those presenting papers at the conference, my subject being the Bongani Masuku case and its implications for international Jewry.

The centre was established by our good friend and esteemed colleague, Dr David Hirsh, who for many years has been among those at the forefront of combating antisemitism in the academic sphere, including boycotts driven by the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement of Israeli scholars and their supporters. David would have been familiar with my topic, having been one of the expert witnesses we brought out to testify at our Masuku hearing in the Equality Court. A few years prior to that, he testified on our behalf in another high-profile hate speech case, namely the equally long running (and from the point of view of South African jurisprudence just as significant) Radio 786 matter. Much of the success we achieved in those two cases can be attributed to his erudition and expertise, as well as the respect for and scrupulous adherence to fundamental scholarly norms and standards that characterises all his work.

The stated mission of the LCSCA is “to challenge the intellectual underpinnings of antisemitism in public life and to confront the hostile environment for Jews in universities”. Elaborating on this in his

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

message of support, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis commented that for one’s words to carry weight, they must be backed up by authoritative and reliable facts and figures. The battle against antisemitism frequently had to be waged within the arena of ideas, he said, and nowhere was this more evident than on university campuses. For this reason, the establishment of the LCSCA was to be greatly welcomed. We fully concur with Mirvis’ words, wish Dr Hirsh and the LCSCA every success, and look forward to what we hope will be many fruitful collaborations between our two organisations in future.

The dominant global news story of the past week has been the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the succession of King Charles III. It was thus extremely meaningful for us to be in London at this defining moment in contemporary British history and to be able to join with innumerable well-wishers in paying our respects at Buckingham Palace. The SAJBD has extended its condolences to the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the British government, emphasising the late Queen’s unswerving devotion to duty and how she made herself a symbol and standard bearer of the values of civility, loyalty, and ethical behaviour, both in her official capacity and in her private life.

• 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

A JoJo tank half full

JoJo tank owners are like vegans. No sooner you meet them, they tell you their storage capacity. Which is why Brian was excited. He had finally joined the club and had spent an impressive amount of money on a JoJo tank, along with a pump and filter. At last, he would be prepared for water outages.

After weeks of irritatingly stable supply, it finally happened. The Glenhazel area had had all the pipes replaced and the switchover would result in a few days of sporadic water.

This was his time to shine.

And it would have been, had his gardener not noticed that his swimming pool was looking a little undernourished and had he not decided that it needed to be filled. Which is why with great enthusiasm, he turned on the tap putting the JoJo tank to remarkable use.

For Moshe, it was a similar, but different story. His gardener had used the entire tank to water the lawn that probably could have managed without nourishment for a day or two. Moshe wasn’t happy but being the boy scout he is, he called in a plumber to reverse pump some water from his swimming pool into his JoJo tank so that they could at least have water to flush the toilets.

Smart and resourceful. Until his pool guy arrived and noticed that his pool was empty and, you guessed it, filled the pool with water from the same tank. Leaving him pretty much back where he started and in the same position as Brian. And the rest of us without JoJo tanks.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

Both are true stories. And both are quintessential examples of what it means to be South African. They are stories that reflect our privilege and our disadvantage.

As an aside, we’re fortunate to have no need for a JoJo tank, as the half-filled bottles of mineral water scattered strategically around the inside of my wife’s car are enough not only to sustain us, but to fill our pool should it spring a sudden and dramatic leak.

It’s unsurprising that the recent water challenges have put people on edge. The increase in loadshedding and the fact that there’s hardly enough power to shine a light at the end of the tunnel is concerning and infuriating. But it’s important to distinguish between what is lack of provision based on failure and incompetence, and what is a few days of scant supply because of a systems upgrade. And whereas both appear to result in the same thing, they couldn’t be more different.

The water supply issues were difficult to manage. But it was part of an upgrade to the area that was needed, and that will place the area in strong position in the future. And that’s worth celebrating. With or without a JoJo tank.

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