

■ Volume 26 – Number 43 ■ 8 December 2022 ■ 14 Kislev 5783

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King David alumni take musical ‘Mandela’ to the global stage

**SHIRA DRUION AND SA JEWISH
REPORT TEAM**

It was the dream of two King David Victory Park brothers. And, on Monday night, Greg and Shaun Borowsky, brought their dream, *Mandela the Musical*, to fruition on the international stage. By all accounts, their production at the Young Vic in South London is about to become a huge hit.

There were ups and downs over the 17 years it took these visionaries to bring the show about South Africa's icon of peace to the stage. Some questioned whether it was ever going to happen, but there were those who had no doubts.

"I knew it from the moment I met them," says

Raelene Tradonsky, the director of the King David Schools Foundation, who has been keeping an eye on the show over the past few years of its brewing. "They were bound for stardom, and I was overcome with emotion watching the show after the years of it [being] in utero."

At the premier, Greg told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Shaun came up with the idea in 2005 when I was doing articles at PWC in Johannesburg and he was living in London.

"I came to visit him, and we saw some shows on the West End, but wondered why Madiba and South Africa's story had never been told through a musical. There are so many books, movies, and documentaries, but never a musical," he said. They recognised that the story lent itself to musical theatre because song was critical in the anti-apartheid struggle, being central to protests and getting integral messages across.

"So, we began to research as much as we could and once we started, we just couldn't stop. It was a passion

project for the first few years, but then we focused ourselves and partnered up with Nandi Mandela and Luvuyo Madasa in 2014 as well as Shaun Hurwitz, Ronen Zekry, and Ron Goldstein, who became our producers."

In 2014, Greg moved to New York to begin working on the show, and Shaun arrived in 2016. "We've spent the past eight years in New York writing the show and building our team. In 2019, we were invited to do a showcase at the Lincoln Center as part of its monthly series called "Broadway's Future". The Young Vic Theatre caught wind of it, and here we are."

They took their proposition to Madasa, Mandela's great-grandson, and asked him to listen to their

demo tapes, according to an article in *The Sunday Times* in Britain. The Borowskys were nervous about doing this, but the response from Madasa was encouraging. He and his mother, Nandi, became producers of the show.

Nandi, who was in London for the premier, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The theme of the Mandela musical is love and commitment, pain and endurance, and ultimately, the triumph of the human spirit against all odds. This isn't Mandela the icon, it's Mandela the husband, the father, and grandfather.

"On his first day at school, my grandfather wore his dad's trousers which were cut at the knees because he didn't have a school uniform. In spite

of his humble beginnings, he lifted himself up by his bootstraps to become an icon loved by many throughout the world. The message of the show is relevant to us all. We can all overcome adversity."

Greg tells how their love of musical theatre was inspired by their days at King David Victory Park where they took part in school plays.

Barbara Wolf, former King David High School Victory Park deputy headmaster, remembers this well, and says the Borowsky boys and their sister, Robyn, came from a very musical family. "Their grandfather, Jules Borowsky, and great uncle, Bob, were founding members of the renowned Johannesburg Jewish Male Choir and Bob, a baritone, performed in *La Traviata*, *Aida* and other

operas, in South Africa and after he emigrated to Sydney some years ago," Wolf told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"Greg, Shaun, and big brother Wayne were highly motivated and extremely talented young students who involved themselves in many areas of school life. They all participated in the musicals we staged at King David Victory Park in the 1990s," Wolf said.

She said Wayne, a good drummer, was a member of the school band, while Shaun always played straight acting roles and was part of the Sound and Light Team. Greg, however, she referred to as "drama's triple-threat young man" because he could sing, act, and dance so well. Because of that, "while still young, he was cast as the talented, dyslexic Tyrone in the musical, *Fame*, and while only in Grade 11 he carried off with aplomb the extremely difficult role of the master of ceremonies in our production of *Cabaret*."

Wayne, an acclaimed chiropractor in Johannesburg, was King David's deputy head boy in 1994, and received provincial colours for cricket. Shaun, who was also a member of the school's public speaking team, was head

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Photo: Aaron Imuere

At the first day of rehearsals (left to right): Greg Dean Borowsky, Laiona Michelle and Shaun Borowsky

From *Mandela the Musical*



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Kiss or curse?



Rabbi Yossy Goldman
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Which is the greater test of faith, affluence or poverty? Is it harder to be a good Jew when you're successful or when you're struggling? Surely, we prefer the test of affluence, but let's take an objective historical look.

In the early 19th century, Napoleon was conquering Europe and promising liberty and equality for all. When he squared up against Russia, many Jewish leaders sided with him, hoping he would finally bring an end to Czarist persecution and enable Russian Jewry to enjoy full civil rights. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi thought differently. He actively opposed Napoleon, and even had his Chassidim assist in intelligence gathering for the Russian army.

He argued that while Napoleon might be good for the Jews materially, his victory would result in spiritual disaster. And history proved him correct. Minus the "Little Emperor", Russian Jews remained staunchly Jewish, while French Jewry virtually vanished. Most of French Jewry today hails from North Africa. The originals are few and far between.

There's a fascinating Midrashic interpretation in our *parshah* about the dramatic encounter between Jacob and Esau. "And Esau ran towards him [Jacob] and embraced him ... and he kissed him." The Hebrew word for "and he kissed him" is *vayishakayhu*. In the Torah, this word is written with a line of dots above it. Says the Midrash, these dots are there to indicate that the word should be understood differently;

Torah Thought

not *vayishakayhu*, he kissed him, but rather *vayishachayhu*, he bit him!

But how can the Midrash change the meaning of the word? A kiss is an expression of love, and a bite is the opposite? Says the *Sfat Emet*, "When Esau kisses, Jacob is bitten!"

The American experience confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that freedom, democracy, and equal rights, while a wonderful blessing for Jews, also presents a profound challenge to our Jewish identity. In the melting pot of the United States, Jews have integrated so successfully that they are virtually disappearing. Success and affluence are wonderful gifts of opportunity, but with every other American Jew marrying out we don't seem to be passing the test of faith with flying colours.

So, it appears that when antisemitism bites, we intuitively know how to respond. But when the world is in a kissing mood, we don't quite know how to handle it.

I remember as a young rabbi working at the University of the Witwatersrand in the late 1970s, that the Jewish students were then completely apathetic to Judaism. My colleagues and I were struggling to elicit any meaningful response to our Jewish programmes on campus. During one meeting, we seriously contemplated getting up in the dead of night to spray-paint some swastikas on the Student Union building! Surely, that would get some reaction. Of course, we never did it. But the fact that it even crossed our minds demonstrates how external threats have a way of making Jews bristle with pride and righteous indignation.

May we never again face the test of poverty or persecution. Please G-d, we'll be proud and knowledgeable Jews, successfully meeting the spiritual challenge of the good life.

Israeli UFC fighter hits back at Kanye West's antisemitism



Photo: Amy Kaplan

Natan Levy proudly shows an Israeli flag before his matches

Natan Levy, one of the few Israelis ever to compete in the mixed martial arts Ultimate Fighting Championship, or UFC, isn't pulling any punches in talking about Kanye West's antisemitism.

"Kanye West, if you've

got a problem with me or my people, come see me, bro," Levy said during an interview on Saturday, 3 December, following a victory at UFC Orlando.

"Life is too short to hate, so to all these hateful people, it sucks for you, I pity you," he said, when asked for his reaction to the recent controversies surrounding West and NBA star Kyrie Irving.

Last week, Ye added to his growing list of antisemitic rants by praising Hitler during a three-hour appearance on conspiracy theorist Alex Jones' *InfoWars* show.

Levy, who was born in France and moved to Israel as a young child, has become only the third Israeli to sign on with the UFC, the world's top mixed martial arts league.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

King David alumni take musical 'Mandela' to the global stage

>>Continued from page 1

boy in 1997 and showed his musical ability by composing the music and lyrics of the official school song.

"Although Shaun and Greg live in the US, South Africa is still 'home' to them, and a musical version of the life of Mandela is something they have dreamed about doing for a long time," Wolf said.

Says Hurwitz, "I grew up with Greg and Shaun. Not only are they super talented musically and stars in the performing arts, they are among the most humble people I've ever known. I've loved working with them and am delighted that the show has finally made its debut. Watching it on the stage with a packed audience has been a real moment for us all."

Tradonsky agreed that all who know the Borowskys describe them as humble and modest with big dreams. "It takes a whole lot of grit, stamina, and money to stage a musical production in London, far from the high school musicals of their youth," she said. "It takes years to put on a big production, and they wanted an international audience.

"The protocols involved are mindboggling, and then came the COVID-19 pandemic, and all theatres shut down. But this didn't stop the brothers from pursuing their dream, they just kept going and waited it out," Tradonsky said.

Opening night teemed with South African friends, who flew in from near and far in a display of camaraderie in keeping with the Davidian energy that has spread its wings across the globe.

A former Victory Park head boy, Gideon Valkin, who was at the premier said, "It's not uncommon for proud families and close friends to support the ones they love when they build, create, produce and launch. But only out of the King David community is it possible to witness what we did this week at the Young Vic.

"The Boro brothers are something else," said Ariel Zadikov, who made the journey from South Africa for the show. "Hard work is the catalyst for making dreams come true, and the Borowsky brothers exemplify this. They have worked for 17 years to bring this show to the stage. It's an uplifting and inspiring story that will no doubt attract the masses."

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Jacob's messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob encounters the angel that embodies the spirit of Esau, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip, but defeats the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Israel. Jacob and Esau meet, embrace, and kiss, but part ways. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried near Bethlehem.

South African Jewish Report

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Pandor describes Israel as “Judaizing” the region

TALI FEINBERG

In accepting an award from the so-called “state of Palestine”, South Africa's minister of international relations and cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, paid minimal lip service to South Africa's official support of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but laid the entire blame at Israel's feet. She's now espousing the notion of “Jewish domination” in the region.

“Successive Israeli governments have considered Palestinians a demographic threat and imposed measures to control and decrease their presence and access to land in Israel and the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territory],” said Pandor in her acceptance speech at Freedom Park, Pretoria, on 2 December. “These demographic aims are well illustrated by official plans to ‘Judaize’ areas of Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which continue to put thousands of Palestinians at risk of forcible transfer.

“According to the report of new United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the OPT issued on 7 June, the continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian territory and discrimination against Palestinians are the key root causes of the recurrent tensions, instability, and protraction of conflict in the region,” she said.

“The question of Palestine remains unresolved after 70 years,” she said, referring to the entirety of Israel's existence.

“It's simply shocking that South Africa's top diplomat could spout such utterly ahistorical and amoral nonsense as she did in this abhorrent speech,” commentator Avi Mayer told the *SA Jewish Report*. Mayer has held leadership roles in some of the world's leading Jewish organisations, such as the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel.

“Absent from her remarks was any pretence of balance, [or] any suggestion of Palestinian responsibility for the current state of affairs,” he said. “There was no mention of Palestinian terror, no reference to the vicious antisemitism and incitement to violence that courses through the Palestinian education system, the Palestinian news media, and Palestinian religious institutions.”

Moreover, “the notion that Israel needs to ‘Judaize’ land that constitutes the cradle of Jewish civilization isn't just offensive, but smacks of an attempt to deny the Jewish connection to the land and thus undermine Israel's very right to exist”.

Visiting professor and research fellow in the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State and research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran & Gulf Studies at the University of Haifa, Glen Segall, said, “Such language takes South Africa out of the impartial negotiator position and shows extremist characteristics and behaviour.” Local political analyst Steven Gruzd agrees that the terms used “try to deny the Jewish connection to the land”.

South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin says, “Minister Pandor continues to ride her hobby horse of exclusive obsession over Israel while willfully ignoring terrible atrocities occurring around

the world. She pays lip service to talk about peace and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, but fails to condemn one single rocket attack by Palestinians against Israeli women and children, the recent bus bombing in Jerusalem, or terror attacks against Israeli civilians over the past year.

“Her anti-Israel attitude blinds her to seeing Israelis as legitimate people with legitimate needs and security concerns,” he says. “As a result of Pandor's position, which reflects that of the ruling party and the South African government, our country sadly remains irrelevant in international affairs and isn't taken seriously by the West.”

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner says, “Much of this speech is the usual uncritical rehash of standard anti-Israel propaganda canards. That being said, Pandor at least puts some stress on the need for a negotiated two-state solution to the conflict. This is something the SAJBD has consistently called on our government to help make a reality, and South Africa's own history of conflict resolution through peaceful dialogue means that it's well placed to play such a role. So long as our government refuses to engage with one of the parties to the conflict, however, this obviously cannot happen”.

However, the Institute of Race Relations' Sara Gon says, “For Pandor, Israel only is at fault and the Palestinians are only its victims. Pandor is in the same position of everybody who supports the Palestinians but hates Israel: no mention is made of the Palestinian Authority's role in the ghastly state of the West Bank and Gaza; peace must be attained but no demands are made on anybody or any state other than Israel to make peace. It's Israel and Israel alone which must do the heavy lifting. Thus, nothing will change.

“There's no point in engaging with Pandor on Israel. In reality, she has no intention of playing any part in resolving the conflict.”

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Pandor's theory of Jewish domination in the region echoes Amnesty International's accusations that the state of Israel “considers and treats Palestinians as an inferior, non-Jewish racial group” and “since its establishment in 1948, Israel has pursued an explicit policy of establishing and maintaining a Jewish demographic hegemony and maximising its control over land to benefit Jewish Israelis”. These comments were made in a report in February 2022. They were widely deemed antisemitic.

A joint statement by several Jewish groups in the United States, including the Anti-Defamation League, said Amnesty's document “fuels those antisemites around the world who seek to undermine the only Jewish country on earth, while simultaneously cheapening and downplaying the horrific suffering that was a result of apartheid in South Africa”.

Pandor also said, “The Palestinian struggle evokes memories of our own anti-apartheid struggle against racial segregation and oppression.” In addition, she expressed support for the Amnesty International report.

At the same time, she said, “We'll continue to support the achievement of a two-state solution, with a viable, contiguous Palestinian state existing side-by-side in peace with Israel within the internationally recognised 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with all relevant UN resolutions, and international law. A viable and sustainable peace plan for the Middle East must ensure that Palestine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and economic viability is guaranteed, with sovereign equality between Palestine and Israel.”

Notes Gruzd, “Even when talking about a two-state solution, it's not stated that one of those states should be a Jewish state.”

In only one sentence did Pandor acknowledge that it will take both Israelis and Palestinians to resolve the conflict, saying, “As South Africans, we believe that as intractable as this conflict may seem, peace is possible. If all sides are prepared to find solutions to the thorny final-status issues and engage in honest mediation without outside interference, both Israelis and Palestinians can live in two viable independent states, in security and prosperity. None of us can afford to give up on this end game, as until this is accomplished, the region will be mired in instability and conflict.”

Mayer believes that “peace will come only when both nations' legitimate rights are addressed by reasonable leaders on both sides, supported by fair actors in the international community. Sadly, such absurdly lopsided views as those espoused by Minister Pandor render South Africa irrelevant to any efforts to resolve the conflict”.

Machaneh, here we come!

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EFF calls on UN to “isolate Israel”

TALI FEINBERG

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is demanding the United Nations (UN) “starts isolating Israel” and that the world must “boycott everything that has to do with Israel, starting with severing any form of state-to-state relations with Israel, evicting their ambassador to South Africa and their ambassadors across the world”.

The party’s statement, casting Israel as an “all-powerful”, “bloodthirsty” oppressor, was released to mark the 45th anniversary of the International Day of Solidarity with the People of Palestine on 29 November. It repeatedly called the Jewish state “the so-called state of Israel”.

According to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism, denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination constitutes antisemitism.

“We condemn the bloodthirsty and repressive US backed regime of the so-called state of Israel. We further call on the United Nations to stop paying lip service to the freedom of the people of Palestine, and start isolating Israel,” the statement read.

The EFF claimed that the partitioning of Palestine back in 1947 following the UN adoption of resolution 181 (ii) led to the creation of “the so-called state of Israel”, which sparked “a civil war that led to over 750 000 Palestinians being displaced from their land”.

The EFF called the creation of the state “a series of invasions”, and said Israel was “backed by the most powerful nations on earth”.

“The world watches these atrocities without any indignation because the atrocities are directed at people who are considered not to be worthy of human rights and dignity by those with power in the world,” its statement read. “As Aime Cesaire teaches us on his book *Discourse on Colonialism*, the West is not least bothered by crimes committed against people who are not white, because the very foundations of their society are premised on the exploitation and murder of people who do not look like them.”

It implied that the only reason the world cares about the invasion of Ukraine is “because people of Caucasian lineage are under threat”, and compared the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

“This is revolutionary rhetoric from the EFF, which has historically been firmly in favour of the Palestinian side,” said local political analyst Daniel Silke. “It’s keen to apply racial invective to any of its statements. It’s always useful for it in terms of mobilising its support base. Certainly, casting Israel as a white oppressor ‘racialises’ the response to the Middle East conflict, which is in line with its overall policy pronouncements.”

“Ultimately, this message isn’t so much designed for Middle East consumption, it’s designed for its supporters here in South Africa,” he said. “It’s designed to find scapegoats among the white population. If it can use Israel in this process, then it will. It’s an easy target for the EFF, and it explains the world in ‘black versus white’.

This falls well into its particular worldview, which is racial baiting on the basis of being victims forever. The EFF uses the foreign-policy issue to augment its domestic agenda.”

“The EFF continues to launch attacks on Israel in a futile attempt to appeal to local voters,” says South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin. “In spite of the EFF’s stab at historical revisionism, on 27 November 1947, countries from around the world, including those from African states, voted to recognise the millennia-old Jewish right to statehood and self-determination in their own land.

“Since that date, powerful forces far greater than that of the EFF have sought to reverse that decision. Not only have they failed, but Israel has thrived, and is making peace with its neighbours while contributing to the development of Africa. The EFF’s position on Israel is irrelevant. It’s of no benefit to Israelis, Palestinians, or South Africans, and won’t win it any votes.”

“The EFF’s support for the 45th anniversary of International Day of Solidarity with the People of Palestine is exactly what we would expect from the EFF,” said the Institute of Race Relations’ Sara Gon.

EFF Leader Julius Malema



rhetoric from the EFF which attracts little interest and has no relevance,” said SAJBD National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner.

According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “Much of contemporary anti-Zionism, or the delegitimisation of Israel and its supporters, draws on and perpetuates antisemitic tropes. Anti-Zionism downplays the history of Jewish nationhood and its connection to the land of Israel. More than anything, anti-Zionism and extreme criticism of Israel frequently demonises the state of Israel as uniquely evil among all the nations of the world.

“Denying Israel’s right to protect itself from populations that have actively sought its physical destruction, it magnifies every mistake and wrongful act possibly associated with the country, strips these of all context, and even invents new criminal accusations. Anti-Zionism envisions Zionists as a monolithic evil and as inherently opposed to Palestinians’ human rights and to the values of social justice.”

Anti-Zionists “use age-old anti-Jewish rhetoric in their charges against Zionism and Israel. For example, conspiracies of Jewish/ Zionist power over a country’s policy, and use of classical antisemitic imagery to characterise Israelis”.

In addition, the EFF’s description of Israel as “bloodthirsty” ties into the classic trope of Jews being associated with blood, or the “blood libel”. Some anti-Zionist cartoons and publications have incorporated the blood-libel myth, with imagery of Israeli leaders drinking Palestinians’ blood or eating Palestinian children.

“Anti-Zionism views Jewish power as fundamentally malevolent, and denounces the Jewish aspiration for sovereignty,” notes the ADL. “Often anti-Zionists don’t scrutinise other nations or movements for nationhood to the same degree. Israel is regarded simply as an illegitimate state.”



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Days of miracles and wonder

It's that time of year – a time of miracles! I don't know about you, but there's something magical about December. It's the month when we all down tools and take a break from our normal day-to-day life. Our lives go into peaceful, friendly, relaxed mode. We spend quality time with precious people, and we don't rush those encounters because we have work to do or kids to get to school early the next day.

We see our children – that is if they aren't at machaneh – and we have fun with them. We look people in the eye, reconnect with them on a deeper level, and take time to re-evaluate our lives. We slow down and rejuvenate ourselves.

And that's magical!

In fact, there's nothing more exquisite than taking real time to be with people who matter to us, no matter who they are and why they're in our lives. It's at this time of year that we all land up wondering why we live such fast-paced lives at break-neck speed. Its about now that we contemplate whether it's worth it, while reading another enchanting book to while away the hours on the beach or on a bed with a view. Or even just hanging out at home, loving being in our own space with few if any responsibilities other than to enjoy the moment.

The idea of having a long languid lunch with people I love sounds like bliss, and becomes the norm at this time of year.

And that's magical!

This time of year is also about Chanukah, the festival of miracles. It was at this time of year that the tiny drop of oil that wasn't meant to last more than a day lasted eight days. It was a miracle, one that showed us that the impossible is possible if you will it. It showed us that anything is possible.

We're a people who believe firmly in miracles, and mostly, we attribute them to G-d. We – as in our people – have witnessed many miracles through the ages.

We witnessed the parting of the Red Sea when the Egyptians were chasing us, trying to reclaim us as their slaves. We witnessed the shofar blasts that brought down the walls of Jericho, also back in Moses' time. Remember when Moses' brother, Aaron's staff turned into a serpent? And when, thanks to Esther and Mordechai, we were miraculously saved from uncertain death at the hands of the dreaded Haman?

Miracles are magical, but aren't they sometimes a case of manifesting our hopes and dreams or something happening that was going to happen anyway? Who can tell?

The point is that few things engender faith and hope more than miracles or wonderful things happening that appear unexpected or unlikely.

I love the fact that every time we light the chanukiah or menorah on Chanukah, we remember that miracles do happen. And, as we light those special flames, we teach our children to believe in miracles and magic. We teach them to believe that what's apparently impossible may not be.

I want my children and all the people I know to believe this because it's how we'll ensure our survival and our ability to get past loadshedding, problems with the government, racism, the likes of the antisemitic Kanye West, and those who think like him. It will enable us to see the good in the world – and there's so much of that – rather than all the doom and gloom.

This December, I'm doing something that I dreamed of doing all year, but it wasn't really possible. I accepted that it couldn't be, but knew that if certain circumstances were to arise, it would be possible. I spoke about it, I dreamed it, and then it somehow it all fell into place. So, now I'm able to fulfil what was essentially a dream. Go figure!

Is it a miracle? Did I manifest it? Or was it in the natural order of things and it just happened when I really wanted it to? I can't tell you because I'm certainly no expert.

I can just say that it makes me believe in the impossible, and it makes me feel positive about our lives and the lives of those around us.

On the front page, we bring you the story of the Borowsky brothers who followed their dreams to bring *Mandela the Musical* to the international stage. These King David Victory Park alumni had a big dream that many thought was too big and would never be realised. But they made it happen. *Kol hakavod* to them!

Need I say, if they can do it, why can't you make your dreams come true? What does it take?

Now is the perfect time to ruminate on what it is you want in your life. Now is the time to work out how you can make it possible, how you can take something that you think is hardly doable and make it work.

As we wind down to a peaceful end of 2022, a year that hasn't been easy, I hope for a wonderful miracle in each of our lives. It doesn't have to be a big bang miracle, but something to inspire us and make life more worthwhile.

May we move past the tough years we have had and into a time of gentleness and kindness. May the African National Congress make good decisions about its leadership at its conference. May a true and just leader arise, and take his or her place at the helm of this country. Some of you may be asking: what is she smoking? I don't mind.

I wish only good things for every one of us, and for us as a community, country, and people. I wish 2023 could be a year of beautiful miracles, and that we could extend the celebration of Chanukah all year.



Shabbat Shalom and chag sameach!

Peta Krost
Editor

PS: This is the last edition of the *SA Jewish Report* for 2022. We will resume publishing on 12 January. 2023.

"It's the end of the world as we know it"



OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

Israeli historian Yuval Harari may be one of the greatest thinkers of his generation. While cloistered away in month-long, silent Vipassana meditation retreats, Harari has conjured up some of the most innovative and ground-breaking understandings of human history.

One of his seminal insights is the idea that human society progresses when people collectively agree on common "myths" or "stories". The first great "myth" was the "story" of G-d, the idea that a greater power would punish us in the afterlife if we didn't behave or adhere to a set of rules today. Through this belief in an omnipotent being, judging our actions and wreaking retribution for our misdeeds, humanity allowed itself to be structured and ordered, with the overlord of religion ensuring compliance.

The second great "myth", according to Harari, was the myth of money. Humanity collectively agreed that a coin or piece of paper somehow represented value. No longer was the woman who wanted corn forced to carry her cow to barter for cloth to exchange for wheat. By society agreeing to this "myth" of value, we could trade with each other in an almost frictionless manner.

The third great "myth" arose in the wake of World War II. Society had to define a new world order. Europe had been decimated by two Great Wars in less than 40 years, and the blood and ashes of tens of millions of innocents had fertilised the fields of Europe.

Humanity needed to find a way to live in peace without constant fighting and genocide.

In order to forge peace, we created a new set of "myths", the story of globalisation and human rights.

Countries that traded together were unlikely to fight each other. Nations that shared common values were unlikely to go to war. Democracies were unlikely to attack each other. The United Nations (founded in 1945); the World Bank (1944); the International Monetary Fund (1944); the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (1947); and the Council of Europe – the predecessor of the European Union (1949), were all central to this idea. NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – 1949) would defend democracy, but the economic interdependence of nations would become the key to peace.

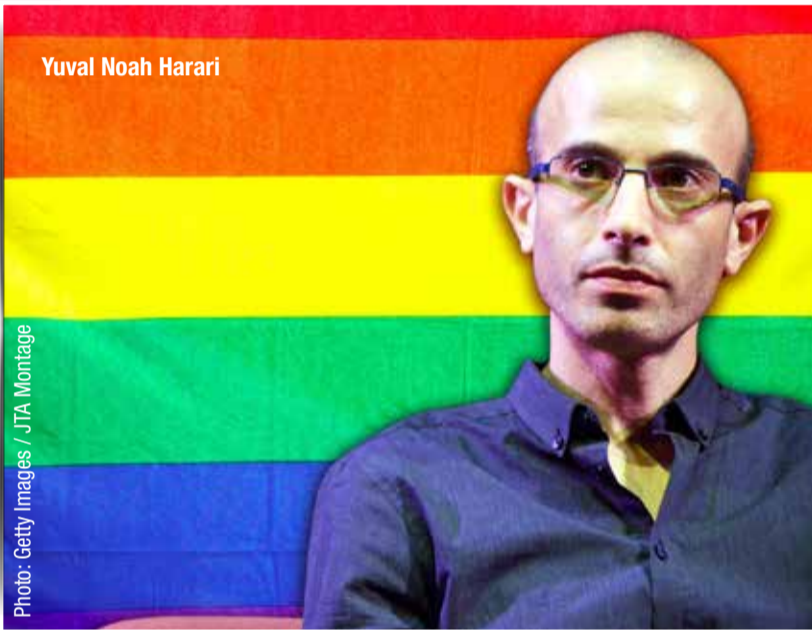
Human rights, democracy, and freedom were central to this idea in the post Holocaust era.

This new respect for human dignity didn't come easy to the colonial masters of Europe. Britain and France longed to retain their colonies. Israel fought its British colonisers to achieve independence in 1948, India and Pakistan in 1947. Between 1945 and 1960, 36 countries achieved independence from their European rulers.

Given the emphasis on human rights, the Cold War between the West and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) became a fight between good and evil, between democracy and tyranny, between human rights and oppression.

As the world decolonised, freedom abounded, China started a liberalisation policy that brought millions of people out of poverty, the Berlin Wall fell, and never before in human history had the world seen so little war.

The era of peace had dawned, war, poverty, and disease were all in remission, the world had never



looked better.

And then something changed!

The values that had underpinned modern Western liberal society suddenly fell from favour. It was an avalanche.

Britain exited the European Union in an illogical and dramatic rejection of globalisation in favour of nationalism. The Americans elected a narcissist, semi-irrational "American-first" president, who saw little value in human rights. Soon ultra-right-wing white supremacists were chanting, "Jews will not replace us" on the streets of Charlottesville and right-wing antisemitism surged throughout the United States. Brazil jerked far to the right with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, and the gentle people of the Philippines selected another right-wing maniac, gun-toting president in Rodrigo Duterte. Hungary moved to the far right, followed by Sweden and Italy.

The world was shifting, the individual was becoming more important than the collective, the values that had guided us since the Great Wars were gone, and no new philosophy or "myth" had taken its place.

In the midst of this collapse in the Western World's belief system, Russian President Vladimir Putin took a gamble, betting that the West in its self-obsession wouldn't care too much about a small expansion of the Russian Empire. The flatlands of Ukraine, the bread-basket of Europe, stood vulnerable, exposed, and indefensible to the might of the Russian army. But Putin miscalculated, and his short war of annexation met the impenetrable force of Ukrainian will. Biden's offer to Volodymyr Zelenskyy of an evacuation was met by scorn and the immortal words, "I need weapons not a flight."

Put Putin's game is far from over. Winter is coming, and the shortage of Russian gas in Europe will test Western mettle. Putin's new bet is to freeze the West into submission, to use the frigid northern winter to loosen the binds between the United States, Europe, and Ukraine. Without ongoing American weaponry, Ukraine will fall. All Putin needs to do is offer the West an alternative to its energy woes. A worried, aging American president, craving re-election, may well grab the bait.

And in the midst of this realignment, the Israeli electorate went to the polls for the fifth time in four years. An election fatigued nation, battered by increased Palestinian violence, rising inflation, and an unaffordable cost of living also lurched to the right. The new cabinet looks more like the neo-fascist Viktor Orbán in Hungary than the liberal democracy proclaimed by Ben Gurion.

The incoming cabinet hosts outright racists with little respect for human rights or dignity. Already a bill has been introduced to place politicians in charge of the appointment of judges, removing the Israeli Bar Association from judicial appointments. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) rights are under attack, and plans are in motion to end the corruption trial that has plagued incoming Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. The new Israeli government is in step with the rise of right-wing forces around the world.

But as South Africans, we live in a country with an independent judiciary, with a Bill of Rights that protects us all, where judicial processes have recommended the impeachment of our president. We're grateful for the values that our struggle for freedom and democracy has bequeathed us, and we cannot hold another set of values when we judge the rest of the world.

As December rolls in and we head for the white powder beaches at the tip of Africa to contemplate the year gone by, we have to wonder, how did they all get it so wrong?

But it certainly is the end of the world as we know it.

- *Howard Sackstein is chairperson of the SA Jewish Report.*

What might be in 2023

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



The year 2023 is fast approaching, and it's time to consider what the new year will bring.

Just a week ago, Cyril Ramaphosa looked a virtual certainty to be re-elected president of the African National Congress (ANC) at its 55th National Conference in December 2022. But as they say, "A week is a long time in politics." He's now facing possible impeachment



over his actions following the theft of huge amounts of foreign currency, and mounting pressure to resign. Which faction of the ANC will prevail at this conference is vital as the country heads for elections in 2024. This may be when the Jacob-Zuma-allied part of the ANC resurges. Expect some shenanigans.

To my surprise, COVID-19 subsided in 2022, and in many ways, the world went back to normal, with travel, working

from the office, and gatherings resuming. A face mask is a rare sight today. It's almost hard to believe all the restrictions imposed on us for two years. I don't feel confident that the world is prepared for the next pandemic.

And what about my predictions last year? I foresaw continued loadshedding and a struggling South African economy – but you didn't have to be a genius to see that! I said, "Politically, the fragile coalitions formed in the

against Taiwan," I said. Again, tragically, one out of two. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, the story has dominated the news, and the war has worsened prospects for the global and South African economy, hiking prices of fertiliser, food, and fuel. The war has also exposed South Africa's closeness to Russia, in spite of claims of non-alignment to the conflict. I cannot see any resolution to this brutal war in the short term. It may well go on for years.

wins, it will break the unwritten rule of combining a Muslim and Christian on the presidential ticket, with two Muslim candidates. In all, 26 African states are to hold elections at local, provincial, or national level in 2023. I hope these polls result in more stability in an increasingly coup-prone continent.

The Jewish state celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2023. Look out for big parties in Israel, South Africa, and across the Jewish world, and introspection about how far Israel has come and its persistent problems. It's also 50 years since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, after which international sympathy started turning away from Israel and towards the Palestinians. Israel's incoming Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, will lead a heavily right-wing government in 2023, even as he still faces corruption charges.

King Charles III will be crowned in May, full of pomp and ceremony like only the British can lay on, 70 years after the late Queen Elizabeth II was crowned.

In terms of milestones, 2023 is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Eskom. I'm trying to make light of it. The iconic Hollywood Sign also turns 100, as does German-Jewish-

born United States statesman and academic, Henry Kissinger (in May). Fifty years ago, in 1973, the first mobile phone call was made, the Watergate scandal broke, and the Sydney Opera House was opened. And 25 years ago, in 1998, the film *Titanic* won 11 Oscars, Google was founded, and the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed by Al-Qaeda, killing 224 people. In 2023, there will be the

Cricket World Cup in India in October and November. Sigh! We're likely to see another spectacular choke by the Proteas. I'd love to eat my words if I'm wrong. There's also the Rugby World Cup in France in September and October. Our beloved Springboks win it every 12 years (1995, 2007, and 2019) but have never been able to defend their title. Their results have been disappointing after lockdown, in spite of good wins over the All Blacks and England. My prediction is an Irish or French champion. Let's hope coach Jacques Nienaber and the mercurial director of SA Rugby, Rassie Erasmus, can spur the Boks to glory in Paris. Cape Town will proudly host the Netball World Cup in July and August. Have a happy new year!

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



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Justice before expedience.
Will SA survive as a
constitutional democracy?

OPINION

IVOR CHIPKIN



I have my grandfather's copy of the Pentateuch and Haftorah, edited by Rabbi JH Hertz, passed down to my father and now to me. My copy is a third edition, published in 1950, though it contains the "additional notes" written in 1936. In these notes, Hertz seeks to draw out and make explicit Jewish principles of law and politics. They were written at a time of great anxiety, a few years before the Shoah.

In a section on "the supremacy of justice in the state", Hertz insists that in the Torah, "biblical regulations concerning justice precede those of the appointment of the king". He places "precede" in italics for emphasis and explains "justice is to be above the monarchy" or the state, an idea without precedent in the ancient world.

In other words, the state may not act against the principles of natural law or justice. It was precisely this principle that was under threat in the 1930s. Worse, this principle was being turned upside down by the Nazis, for whom "justice must be guided solely by state interests".

The "biblical theory of government" as discussed in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, we are told, finds expression in and through a "political constitution" that contains the "spirit and aspirations of the community" and "duties" of the ruler. It's these principles that have framed the modern theory of government, especially since the end of World War II, though earlier in some countries.

It's useful to think about these remarks in relation to our times, for they, too, are a period of great anxiety in which the foundations of modern government are in jeopardy.

In the United States, a then acting president, facing electoral defeat, encouraged an insurrection targeting the seat of democratic government. He later claimed that the election, which he lost, was rigged. Recently, and unbelievably, he has called for the setting aside of the US Constitution.

In Israel, the most right-wing government ever threatens to come to power. In the name of "religious Zionism", it wants to reduce justice to what's in the interests of the state. "Religious Zionism", whose proper name is fascism, is a politics based on weak halachic grounds. We read only recently in shul the parsha "Lech Lecha". There it's written that Canaan belongs to the descendants of the seed of Abraham, including Isaac, but also Ishmael?

Closer to home, we've come through a devastating period of "state capture". As my colleagues and I argued in a 2017 report, *The Betrayal of the Promise*, South Africa underwent a "silent coup" in which political power was displaced away from parliament and from constitutional structures into shadowy networks of politicians and businesses, including former President Jacob Zuma, his family, his political allies, and the notorious Gupta brothers. Many of these claims have been substantiated recently by the findings of the Zondo Commission.

It's worth noting how close we were to a state of emergency. The commission found evidence, for example, that State Security had provided for groups of men to undergo military training in Russia and China and then deployed them as "bodyguards" to Zuma and other politicians. In other words, these politicians had been supplied with their own private militias.

In my contribution to Ferial Haffajee's new book, *The Days of Zondo*, I argued that state capture mustn't be reduced simply to the greed and corruption of select politicians and those in business. Rather, it had a politics, which I discuss in relation to developments in the African National Congress (ANC) from about 2000. In particular, two ideological elements are of special importance.

In the first case, from about 2015/2016 the ANC under Jacob Zuma became increasingly paranoid that the National Democratic Revolution was facing a "counter-revolution".

In second place, the leaders of the ANC didn't regard the organisation simply as another political party amongst others. They believed that it was the authentic representative of the South African nation. Hence, if the ANC was at risk, then the nation was at risk too.

Taken together, these two elements justified a more brazen, increasingly authoritarian and criminal politics in South Africa. It's not necessary to recount the effects of state capture on South African institutions. We live the consequences every day in the form of ongoing electricity blackouts, water shortages, a weak police service, and a perpetually poorly performing economy.

While in large parts of the world, left and right governments, often in the name of popular sovereignty, place justice secondary to the interests of the state, in South Africa there are signs, admittedly tentative ones, of renewed support for constitutionalism.

In the first instance, voters, especially ANC voters, have been demonstrating that the party doesn't have a natural right to their ballots. Secondly, "civil society" voices have recently been given a boost by the Zondo Commission, which argued that the conflation of party and state is unconstitutional. It also has a dire effect on how administrations perform. Finally, and most importantly, key state institutions are beginning to assert their autonomy.

One of the Zondo Commission's most damning findings on parliament was that in spite of there being evidence of executive malfeasance in the public domain since 2011, the institution did not investigate it. It failed, that is, to hold the executive to account.

Ironically enough, the current Phala Phala crisis in South Africa arises precisely because parliament, for the first time, did its job. It investigated a sitting president on the basis of evidence in the public domain.

We wish it had discharged its role earlier, at the time of arms-deal corruption, or Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism, or during the period of state capture. It's ironic, furthermore, that South Africa's most constitutionally minded president is a victim of this new constitutional assertiveness.

Rabbi Hertz might have said that South Africa is beginning once again to put justice above political convenience or expediency.

• Ivor Chipkin is the director of the New South Institute (formerly GAPP). He was one of the lead authors of the "Betrayal of the Promise" report.

Let's bring Chanukah
light to Hisham and Avera

OPINION

BENJI SHULMAN



It has been more than 3 000 days since Avera Mengistu, an Israeli citizen and member of the Ashkelon Ethiopian community, climbed over the border fence in Gaza and was captured by Hamas. His family has had zero contact with him since.

Roughly six months later, the same fate befell a 34-year-old who is part of Israel's Bedouin community, Hisham al-Sayed, who crossed over into the terrorist-controlled enclave.

What was the reason these young men ended up in the Gaza Strip? They have a long history of mental illness, and often wandered hundreds of kilometres from their homes.

On 7 September 2014, Avera was highly agitated after his mental health began to deteriorate in the wake of his brother's tragic death. As a result, he left home and began to wander. Video surveillance showed that he took off and walked approximately 10km along the beachfront between his hometown and the Gaza border, where he was eventually spotted, unusually close to the border fence, by Israeli soldiers. The soldiers tried to get his attention, instead, he was startled and climbed over the border fence and disappeared into Gaza.

Hisham has a similar story as he, too, often went missing without previously informing his family of his whereabouts. In the past, he had entered Jordan, the West Bank, even Gaza, but he was always returned by security personnel who were aware of his mental status and vulnerability. In 2015, however, he was taken hostage by Hamas. Fast forward, and Hamas released a video clip only this year, which appears to show Hisham lying in a bed, looking dazed, and wearing an oxygen mask – the first sighting of him since he disappeared seven years ago.

The holding of Hisham and Avera is a human rights violation on several counts. First, they are civilians who have no part in the war between Israel and Hamas and cannot be held or treated as enemy combatants. Second, the withholding of information about captives, as Hamas has done, amounts to an "enforced disappearance" and is illegal under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been signed by the Palestinians. It also goes against another piece of international law they signed called the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which provides protection for people with psycho-social or mental health disabilities, including freedom from inhuman treatment and equal access to justice. Any detainees

have the right to contact their families, and receive visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross. All of these international rights are violated each moment that Hamas continues to hold Hisham and Avera hostage. Even the likes of Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, a fierce critic of Israel, has said, "Hamas's refusal to confirm its apparent prolonged detention of men with mental health conditions and no connection to the hostilities is cruel and indefensible."

In South Africa, we have a difficult history with the issue of illegal detention. Civilians were regularly abducted, beaten, tortured, and killed by the apartheid government. Yet, South Africa is one of the very few governments in the world that has relations with Hamas even though the rest of the world considers it a terrorist organisation. If the goal of South African foreign policy is dialogue and negotiation as it always claims, the government should use these connections to impress upon Hamas the importance of granting these hostages the basics of their rights under international law, never mind their unconditional release. This is what is being demanded by the families of the captives. Still, Hamas wishes to use these mentally ill civilians as a bargaining chip to try and release convicted members of its terror network from Israeli jails.

Given the global increase in awareness of mental health over the past few years, one would have thought there would be a wider global condemnation of Hamas's actions, nonetheless, the world has remained largely silent. The responsibility for highlighting the plight of Hisham and Avera is in the hands of the Jewish community, its allies, and ordinary citizens all over the world who can and must raise their voices against this injustice.

To help spread information about the incarceration of Hisham and Avera, the South African Zionist Federation will be working with the youth movements, running educational sessions, and handing out blue bracelets saying, "Free Hisham and Avera" at the first *machanot* since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is in concert with groups locally and globally who are working on getting them released.

But let's not leave this fight just up to young people. Chanukah is a time of bringing light into a world of darkness. Very little else could be darker than being held for 3 000 days in Gaza, all alone, without access to family or communication. So this year, while you are lighting your Chanukah candles, celebrating the miracle of impossible victories, take a moment for Hisham and Avera and their families – they are looking for a miracle of their own.

• Benji Shulman is director of public policy for the South African Zionist Federation.



Leah Hepple and Hadas Weiss with their blue bracelets



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Jew hatred exists in the black American community. Deal with it.

OPINION

BEN M FREEMAN

Kanye West is a Jew-hater. Although he's a black man, he openly supports white-supremacy and Nazism. On the one hand, West has suffered consequences because of hate. He has lost endorsement deals and huge companies like Adidas (eventually) stopped working with him. But what's the wider context of his recent tirade about Jews, and how should the Jewish community respond?

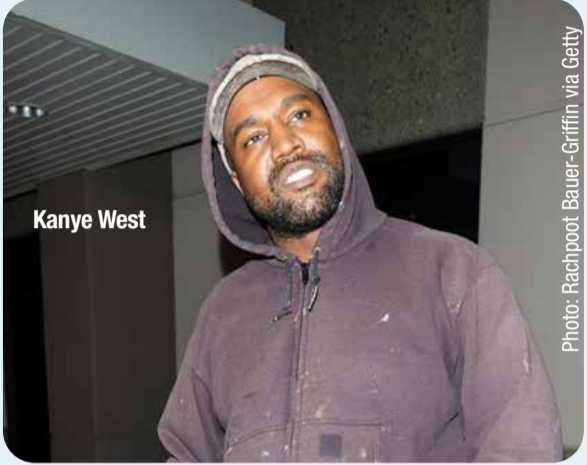
There's a problem with Jew-hate in parts of the black American community. That's not to say that every black American hates Jews, nor is it to erase the many black Jews that exist in the intersection of these identities. However, in spite of historic allyship and closeness between these two communities, we're seeing the rise of an anti-Jewish movement within parts of the black American community.

Spurred on by the Nation of Islam – a black American supremacist organisation – and Louis Farrakhan, who has described Jews as “termites” and has blamed Jews for the slave trade, notions of Jewish power and privilege have been circulated in sections of the black American community. Following criticism of Farrakhan's Jew-hate in 2018, Nuri Muhammad, a disciple of Farrakhan wrote, “These same Jews that are attacking the minister are the blood relatives of the slave-ship owners.”

These modern anti-Jewish black American ideologies didn't emerge specifically in the black American community, they are iterations of anti-Jewish ideas that have been circulating for thousands of years. But like so many other manifestations of Jew-hate, they have been repackaged to suit a specific

narrative. In this context, to help explain the persecution suffered by black Americans.

The idea of the Jewish bogeyman isn't unique. The Jew is the Boggart, the mythical creature from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, by JK Rowling, that takes the



shape of whatever the person looking at it fears most. This is why Jews can represent whatever the person targeting us wants us to. And in black American supremacist ideology, like the Nations of Islam, the Jew is white. In fact, Jews are the apex white predators responsible alone for all the ills of the world. This notion is seen broadly across the left, but it has proven to be particularly seductive in certain black American spaces.

Additionally, the American Black Hebrew Israelite narrative that they are the real Jews is rooted in Christian supersession. This is the notion that Christians replaced Jews as G-d's chosen people. Not every American who identifies as a Black Hebrew Israelite shares these perspectives, but those who do

seem to be growing, both in number and in confidence. On 21 November, hundreds of Americans who identify as Black Hebrew Israelites marched in New York chanting, “We are the real Jews!” Their warped belief is that they are the true descendants of the ancient Israelites, and modern Jews are European colonisers and usurpers. Now, where have we heard that before? This hate isn't simply expressed in rhetoric either. In December 2019, David Nathaniel Anderson (along with another assailant), who adhered to extremist American Black Hebrew ideology, committed a mass shooting at a kosher supermarket in New Jersey.

Discussing this isn't anti-black. Discussing this doesn't mean Jews aren't allied to the black American community. Discussing this doesn't erase the real oppression suffered by black people in America, historically and in a contemporary setting.

Jews have to defend ourselves regardless of where the hate we face emanates. We can have empathy for other minority and marginalised communities, but that certainly doesn't mean we stay silent when faced with hate. Belonging to an oppressed people doesn't inoculate you against hate.

Kanye West may have lost his endorsement deals, but the damage has

been done both in terms of spreading specific manifestations of black American Jew-hate as well as threatening relations between the black and Jewish communities in the United States. West has double the number of followers on Twitter than there are Jews in the world. When someone of his stature uses their enormous platform to demonise the world's most continually persecuted minority group, then we should be worried. He is contributing to the normalisation of Jew-hate. He is giving permission to others who share his feelings to proclaim them proudly. Kyrie Irving shared a link to a film titled *Hebrews to Negroes: Wake Up Black America* which features Holocaust denial and the accusation that Jews financed the slave trade a week after West first threatened to go “Death Con Three on Jews”.

Jews must discuss this. As Jews, we must defend ourselves. Jews must understand the historical and contemporary context of our experience. West isn't on an anti-Jewish hate train because he has mental-health difficulties. That's extraordinarily ableist. West has been on a tirade against Jews because it seems as if he has bought into lies about Jews that have specifically circulated in his community as well as in the wider world. Of course, when we discuss these issues we must be careful not to slide inadvertently into anti-black rhetoric. We must be precise and specific in our language and in our defence. But we must defend ourselves.

The idea that Jews should keep their heads down and just get on with it must be consigned to history. While we may

understand the impetus for that cultural response to Jew-hate, we must recognise that it didn't work. I know there's a fear that we may “prove people right” if we raise our voices to defend ourselves. I know that people were worried that if West was cancelled, then notions of Jewish power would be proven. No. We must defend ourselves. We must expect there to be consequences to such egregious examples of Jew-hate.

Without sounding alarmist, there's a war taking place. In the media, at high schools, at universities, in people's workplaces, on the streets. Jews are being targeted. We must wake up to this fact. We mustn't diminish it. We must understand it, and face it.

West's Jew-hate is bigger than him. It's bigger than American Black Hebrew Israelites or the Nation of Islam. It's rooted in thousands of years of deeply embedded systemic hate that has targeted Jews. There's strength in numbers, both for us and for those who hate us. Tragically, West has offered Jew-haters a huge platform and role model in their war against us. We must fight back in any way we can. And we mustn't underestimate the severity of these battles.

• Ben M Freeman is the founder of the modern Jewish Pride movement, a Jewish leader, a Jewish thinker, and a Jewish educator, and the author of Jewish Pride: Rebuilding a People and Reclaiming our Story: The Pursuit of Jewish Pride. His work focuses on Jewish identity and historical and contemporary Jew-hatred.



Ex-South African awarded for changing Israel's architectural landscape

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African-born Professor Harry Ben Zion Brand was awarded the prestigious Bonei Zion Prize in the field of Culture, Art, and Sport in Israel for his innovation and contribution to changing the Israeli architectural landscape over 50 years.

Industrial architecture, according to Brand, was traditionally considered to be a dirty and neglected field in most Israeli cities, but he has changed this by upgrading the quality of working conditions and creating facilities that are as attractive and comfortable for workers as any other field.

“That was my motivation,” says Brand, who received the award at Nefesh B’Nefesh’s annual Sylvan Adams Bonei Zion Prize ceremony on 28 November. “I would like to think I’ve made some contribution

which might be significant in the field of architecture for industry. Since many of the people working in the industry in Israel are highly qualified technically, the working conditions for them must be as good as they are in any other working sphere – banks, companies, and so on.”

Six months ago, Brand received a phone call from Nefesh B’Nefesh’s public-relations associate, Avichai Ivgui, telling him he was to receive an award at its prize-giving ceremony. He laughed it off, thinking Avichai was a fundraiser, but later recognised how prestigious this award was.

The ceremony was attended by 500 people at the Beit Ha’Am Cultural Center in Jerusalem. It honoured English-speaking *olim* who have made a notable impact on Israeli society.

Brand has dedicated his life to industrial development and planning in Israel

since making aliya from South Africa, via England, in 1962. An alumnus of the University of the Witwatersrand School of Architecture, Brand said he was fortunate to have been brought up and educated in South Africa.

“It was a window of opportunity. My parents came to South Africa from Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. They had a difficult time, in Europe and when they started off in South



Tony Gelbart, Margaret Adams, Professor Harry Ben Zion Brand, and Rabbi Yehoshua Fass

Africa, as did many other immigrants from Eastern Europe. But they gave us the best opportunity possible. We had a wonderful education at school and university, access to sports activities, and Zionist youth

Continued on page 14>>

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Not over till it’s over: more pathogenic COVID-19 variant may arise in future

TALI FEINBERG

A new COVID-19 variant could cause worse illness than the current predominant Omicron strain, especially in immunosuppressed individuals, according to a new study done by Professor Alex Sigal. It was Sigal's Durban laboratory that first isolated the Beta variant of COVID-19, and it was also the first to report the Omicron variant "escaping" previous immunity.

Sigal, who was born in Russia, grew up in Israel and Canada, and eventually settled in South Africa, says he conducted the study because it's "important to know what the possibilities are", and there's a "possibility" that the pandemic isn't over and could become dangerous again.

This could take "a year or more", he says. At the same time, he thinks vaccines "will probably keep protecting against severe disease, and people should be boosted for the foreseeable future". He also predicts that "we should expect pandemics every 10 to 20 years or so, based on recent history".

In the new study, "We looked at what a SARS-CoV-2 virus which has been evolving in one immunosuppressed person is able to do to cells over time," he says. "We found that the virus shows signs of being more pathogenic since it evolves a greater ability to make cells fuse to each other. This is understandable from the virus' perspective as it allows the virus to transmit between cells in a way which is much less exposed to our neutralising antibody immune defence."

The study, released on 24 November, is yet to be peer reviewed and is based solely on laboratory work on samples from one individual. Sigal and other scientists have earlier suggested that variants like Beta and Omicron, both initially identified in southern Africa, may have evolved in immunosuppressed individuals such as those

infected with HIV. The long time it takes for these individuals to shake off the disease allows it to mutate and become better at evading antibodies, they say.

South Africa has a large population of immunosuppressed individuals, and Sigal says it's "likely" that it can be a hotspot for the development of new variants because of this. However, "we cannot be sure if variants come from other places in Africa

It was after completing his studies at the Weizmann Institute that he travelled to eastern Africa by bicycle, where he witnessed the impact of the HIV epidemic.

"Virology led me to a newly established institute in Durban, South Africa, [formerly K-RITH, now the Africa Health Research Institute or AHRI] as I was particularly interested in the interaction of HIV with other infection," he says. "There was evidence that evolution

Infection Biology in Berlin, where his interests included neuro-HIV, HIV evolution, and TB. But after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, his group at AHRI pivoted completely to COVID-19 research, and has led the way in many respects.

They established a longitudinal observational cohort to investigate the effects of HIV co-infection on COVID-19 outcomes, and developed virological and serological techniques for isolating and testing variants.

Now, his core research is on understanding the evolution of COVID-19 and its long-term-persistence in the presence and absence of HIV co-infection. He's particularly interested in variants, long COVID-19, and the effects, antibody neutralisation, and cellular transmission of COVID-19.

"Working on emerging variants is intense," he says. "Months of work are compressed into days. It aged me mentally and physically."

If the pandemic becomes dangerous again, "lockdowns aren't sustainable", Sigal says. "Boosting [with vaccines], masks, and social distancing should work. What people can do now is a theoretical question – people won't keep a social distance and wear masks based on a possibility. If it becomes reality, we should be prepared to do it."

He believes the South African Jewish community "should continue the traditions of striving for and supporting academic excellence and excellence in human endeavour more generally. In my opinion, it's such traditions that define the community here and globally and not the narrower definitions now being championed by the current crop of politicians in Israel."



Dr Alex Sigal (centre) with his team

of other pathogens can occur in immunosuppression because of poorly controlled HIV infection. This was long before COVID-19. For example, XDR TB was first discovered in South Africa but there was no thinking then – and there isn't much now – that antiretroviral therapy should be continually supported by a global effort to prevent this."

He established his laboratory at AHRI in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute for

First CT Jewish cemetery to be protected by national heritage body

TALI FEINBERG

When Jews first arrive in a new place and hope to establish a congregation, the first thing they do is to get land for a cemetery. This was what the fledgling Cape Town Hebrew Congregation did when it purchased two plots of land in Woodstock in the early 1840s, which became the first Jewish cemetery in Cape Town.

Now, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) would like to declare it a heritage site, along with a number of other historical and religious sites in nearby District Six.

"This is a big deal," says Craig Nudelman of Cape Town Jewish Tours and the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). "With so many cemeteries being vandalised, this will ensure that the site is preserved and protected. Restoring cemeteries is expensive, and it's difficult to work with the municipalities. In addition, not a lot of people know about the Albert Road Cemetery, and this will highlight its status as the first Jewish cemetery in Cape Town."

"The cemetery has always been considered a heritage site, governed by Western Cape heritage," says Eric Berger, the executive director of the Jewish community's Cemetery Maintenance Board (CMB). "This is a new organisation that will be a national body. The CMB maintains the cemetery and does repairs. We're not permitted to disturb the graves or ground. We also keep the cemetery locked and secure." He says there are 58 graves there.

Howard Phillips, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, also believes it's a significant move. An expert on Jewish cemeteries in South Africa, he notes that this wasn't the first cemetery to be established in South Africa – that was in Makhandia (formerly Grahamstown).

"The Albert Road Cemetery signifies almost two centuries of Jewish presence in the Mother City," Phillips says. "The property was acquired by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation in 1842. The first burial, of 41-year-old Abraham Horn, one of the congregation's founding members, took place in December 1844. His

son, Charles, was born after his death in 1845."

Charles was possibly the first Jewish child born in Cape Town. "The cemetery was closed in 1887. Its Tahara House, only the foundation of which is now visible, was the first dedicated Jewish building in sub-Saharan Africa until the congregation acquired its first synagogue in 1849."

At the time the land was bought, "it was out in a fairly remote area", says Phillips. Today, the cemetery is hidden behind a wall and locked gate, next to a busy road. Few know about it, even those in the Jewish community.

"All Jews who died in Cape Town were buried in the Albert Road Cemetery until the 1880s, when it was closed. The community then bought a site in Maitland – not the main cemetery there today, but a smaller one."

Says Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape SAJBD, "The Cape SAJBD works tirelessly alongside our partners to preserve our Jewish heritage and ensure that the community remembers and acknowledges



Plaque at the Albert Road Cemetery

the contributions of all those who came before us. We commend SAHRA for not only protecting the site of the first Jewish cemetery in Cape Town, but for preserving other significant religious and educational landmarks associated with District Six."

SAHRA is calling on the public to comment on its intention to declare the first phase of eight sites in and around District Six as national heritage sites. This includes two churches, two mosques, two schools, and the Albert Road Jewish Cemetery.

"The declaration of these sites as heritage sites will ensure their protection. No person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide, or change the planning status of any site declared a national heritage site without a permit from SAHRA, and no person may damage any fence, wall, or gate constructed or sign erected by SAHRA in terms of subsection," says the announcement.



Director

The SA Zionist Federation Cape Council, an umbrella organisation for all Zionist Organisations in the Western Cape Jewish community, provides the bridge between the Jewish community in the Western Cape, South Africa and Israel. It also acts as a point of contact for stakeholders in Israel and SA interested in furthering the Israel – SA relationship.

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The secret to success

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



Over the past few days, as I reflected on the significance of the 15th *yahrtzeit*, marked this week, of my mentor, teacher, and rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein of blessed memory, I realised that he taught me a vital lesson that can guide our community at this juncture.

We live in a world of numbers. We count everything. We assign numbers to virtually every aspect of our lives. But we tend to be consumed by them, to ascribe them too much importance, often at the expense of that other critical element of appraisal – quality. While quantity is a measure of the physical world, quality is a measure of the spiritual world.

Rabbi Goldfein often emphasised the value of quality over quantity. As with all his teachings, he expressed this lesson in the way he lived his life. Though he ran a relatively small yeshiva in Johannesburg, its impact has been enormous, far out of proportion with its size. Indeed, through the quality of this institution – of the Torah that was taught there and students that were produced, who serve in positions throughout our community – the yeshiva helped mould the community as we know it.

There's an important message here for us. As a community, we've always

been small in number by global standards. Even at our peak, we were much smaller in comparison with the two biggest Jewish communities in the world – America and Israel – and even

size. This is true on an individual level, but especially as a collective. We're a community that sets certain standards, and models certain values and behaviours, that make us the envy of communities around the world. Communities far greater in terms of quantity look to us for guidance in terms of quality.

But what's the essence of quality? What gives it power over quantity? The key message of Chanukah is that quality is, at root, a spiritual force, and that the Torah, as G-d's blueprint for creation, is the source of it. The closer we are to our divine source, the more we can develop our quality, and from there, change the world.

Where do we see this lesson in the events of Chanukah? The mighty Greek empire, which had conquered most of the known world at the time, had invaded the land of Israel, and was pursuing a relentless campaign to remove all vestiges of Torah living from the society. The situation seemed hopeless. Many Jews at the time were abandoning their faith due both to the existential threat and enticements of Greek society. It was at this point that a

small group of people banded together – Matityahu and his brothers – to try and do something about the situation. What began simply as an act of defiance became a miraculous military defeat of the mighty Greek army, allowing the Jewish people to reclaim the land and the freedom to practice Judaism. It was the spiritual power – the righteousness and uprightness, the justice of the cause, the purity of vision – of the 10 Maccabean leaders that enabled them to defeat the great army of the Greeks. They were small in physical quantity, but potent in spiritual quality.

This idea is symbolised by the iconic miracle of Chanukah – the small jar of pure oil the Maccabees found when they recaptured the Temple, which burnt for eight days when it should have burnt for one. This is why we celebrate Chanukah by lighting candles for eight days. It was the oil's spiritual purity that imbued it with the miraculous power to burn for eight days, to transcend its physical limitations.

The prayer we read recounting the great miracles of Chanukah describes how G-d delivered "the many into the hands of the few". As the Torah says, "Not because you are the most numerous of the nations did G-d want you and choose you – for you are the fewest among the nations." Jewish history is the story of the smallness of the Jewish people and our outsize impact on the world. It's the story of quality over quantity. But the secret to our success – just as it was for the Maccabees – is our connection to the

source of our power – the spiritual purity of the Torah. And this is the great lesson of Chanukah for the Jewish people, and especially for diaspora communities like ours, that irrespective of our numbers, if we remain upright and loyal to our divine heritage, then we'll survive and ultimately thrive.

It's instructive that, globally, communities that are becoming detached from their Judaism deteriorate as the new generation disengages and assimilates. On the other hand, communities that are growing in their Torah connection are enjoying not just qualitative growth but quantitative growth – the new generation is marrying Jewish, having children, giving *tzedakah*, getting involved in shuls and Jewish schools.

That's the message we, the South African Jewish community, need to hear this Chanukah. As individuals, as families, and as a community, by growing in our *mitzvahs*, in our Torah learning, in our journey to keeping Shabbos, in our acts of kindness, we can thrive. We can build thriving schools and shuls and community organisations and, most importantly, warm and vibrant Jewish homes.

Together, by dedicating ourselves to growing through Torah and *mitzvahs*, and reinforcing what makes us special – by focusing on our key qualities – we can create a thriving, vibrant community that our children will want to be part of.



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The best always-on solution

OPINION **RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN**

All will agree that the number-one conversation topic at social gatherings through 2022 was which is the best always-on solution. We fiercely debated the advantages of diesel versus petrol generators. Proponents of electric inverters vehemently defended their recent purchases. Then there were those who wanted to be totally off grid and praised the virtues of solar.

But let's start from the beginning. The very beginning, as in Genesis 1. "In the Beginning, G-d created heaven and earth. He said, 'Let there be light, and there was light'... And G-d saw that the light was good." In fact, says the Midrash, He decided that this first creation was too powerful, too intense, and too good, and hid it. He put it away for the righteous to enjoy in the world to come. The Midrash proceeds to disclose the hiding place by telling us that G-d concealed it in the Torah. So obscured it isn't, since if we really want to access it, we know exactly where to go.

A couple of dozen chapters further, in the same book, we read of the candles of our matriarch, Sarah, which miraculously remained lit from Shabbat to Shabbat. When her recently bereft son, Isaac, saw the miracle recurring in the tent of his new wife, Rebecca, he knew that she, too, was worthy of being a mother in Israel. The candles, lit around the world every Friday night, perpetuate this light in Jewish homes long after the physical flame has dimmed.

It was Aaron the high priest's duty and privilege to kindle the menorah in the Holy Tabernacle every night. These perpetual flames represented the light of Torah, which emanated from the sanctuary, illuminating the entire world with its teachings, values, and morals.

Dark times hovered over the Jewish people when the wicked Haman threatened extermination for all. When his evil decree was annulled, the Book of Esther describes the jubilation with the words, "The Jews had light," a verse that now forms part of the weekly havdalah service. At the end of every Shabbat, we gather around a woven, torch-like candle to repeat that same phrase as we usher in the week ahead.

Antiochus tried to extinguish that light with the laws he passed, banning core Torah observance. His plan was to supplant our religious practices with what he deemed a superior culture. Hellenism worshipped the body over the spirit, the material over the physical. The ideology threatened to blow out that light which we had cherished for millennia. A small band of faithful did the unthinkable when they attacked an army far mightier and better equipped than them. Having regained control of the Holy Temple, they were able to rededicate it. Once again, the menorah could be lit, a symbol of the Torah that would outshine Greeks and subsequent enemies of this light.

Only pure oil, uncontaminated by Hellenism, would do for this demonstration of the victory of light over dark. Of that, as we know well, they could find only one small cruse, sufficient for one day. But the light shone on, for a full eight days, a demonstration that purity and holiness remains, always on, whatever the circumstances.

Year after year, we celebrate this festival of light. No stage of darkness can overpower it. For our candles of faith, our candles of hope, are more powerful than any threat we have ever met.

And soon, please G-d, very soon, He will remove the light from its hiding place. Then, the whole world will appreciate the value and values of this true light. Always on.

• *Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul, and the chairperson of the SA Rabbinical Association.*



Children ignite the beauty of Chanukah

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

There's nothing like the dose of excitement that children add to Jewish holidays. This is particularly true of Chanukah, where children often ignite – or reignite – their parents' love of the festival.

In the manic year-end rush and subsequent holiday exodus, celebrating Chanukah often falls by the wayside. Even if we loved the festival of lights as children, those days are often long forgotten until our own children come along.

"When you see the festival through your children's eyes where everything is so exciting and wonderful, you start to appreciate it more," says Melanie Ger, who has a nine-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter. "It brings an energy and a light, literally and figuratively."

Ger believes the traditions around Chanukah are beautiful, but she says it's her children who ensure that she and her husband celebrate.

"We wouldn't do it if it weren't for them. They both come home from school with their menorahs and candles, which makes it easy to fulfil the *mitzvah*. They're responsible for telling us what to do, which is awesome because it empowers them. The kids light their own menorahs and then we light a big family one that came from my great great-grandparents from Lithuania, connecting us to our heritage."

Ger is happy that her children are at Sandton Sinai, where they've learned about the meaning behind the *chaggim*. "Our kids are enthralled by Chanukah, and they share its history with us as well as with their grannies and Zaidas, so it spreads across the generations." It goes even further, she says,

as they share their pictures and Chanukah activities with family around the world, creating connections that were particularly powerful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Chanukah is a joyous holiday that celebrates miracles, so it's the perfect opportunity to reflect and connect with your loved ones," says Kirsten Katzen. Her six-year-old son Jamie has also inspired new Chanukah traditions through what he has learned at school.

"He goes to a Jewish pre-primary school where they strengthen their pupils' Jewish identity by teaching Hebrew, Jewish heritage, *chaggim*, and Torah values," she says. "We bring the traditions that he learns into our home, and they enrich our lives, connecting us to our community and in turn strengthening our Jewish identity."

"Every year, Jamie creates a magical menorah with colours and glitter, and there's real excitement about lighting the candles every night," she says. "The dreidel spinning game is also a highlight." The Katzens add their own rituals to the holiday. "This year, we'll be starting a new tradition of sharing eight reasons why we love each other to learn the value of kindness and spreading love."

In some cases, the parents of children who don't attend Jewish schools make a bigger effort to instil love of the religion, which reignites their connection to its rich traditions. This is the case for Stacey Urdang.

"Our four-year-old son Jayden attends Crawford, where I work as a teacher, and it's important that we expose him to Jewish traditions and make him aware and proud of his Yiddishkeit," Urdang says.

Also parents to 15-month-old Asher, the Urdangs want to establish Jewish identities for their boys. "We know that learning comes from

the home, so we try hard to teach them about their heritage and to expose them to Jewish holidays, also celebrating with extended family. Chanukah is a firm favourite with Jayden."

Urdang says she loved the festival growing up in Cape Town, where she and her family would attend the menorah lighting at Milnerton Shul. "We used to sing and dance as a community every year, and it was always something special," she recalls. Though she and her husband used to celebrate Chanukah when they first married, they later "dropped the ball completely".

"It was only once Jayden was born that we reintroduced candle lighting," she says. "His granny bought him a menorah when he was a toddler, and we have continued with this family tradition for the past three years. Jayden absolutely adores lighting the menorah, playing with the dreidel, and eating doughnuts. We're hopeful that he will ignite a similar love in his baby brother."

Lee Herridge, mother to two daughters aged eight and 10, also feels a need to educate her children about their Jewish heritage, not only because they attend secular schools, but because they are being raised in a mixed-faith family.

Though they celebrate major holidays like Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah has always been usurped by Christmas. "It's hard to say to your kids there's this thing called Chanukah when all they're seeing is Christmas trees and Santa and presents," she says. "It's a marketing juggernaut."

"The other challenge is that every December we've stayed at the coast where my husband's family live. For them, it's Christmas, the tree, and a mountain of presents, so we've never celebrated Chanukah."

Though she embraces Christmas, Herridge is excited that the fact that her family is staying at home in Joburg this year means that they can create their own traditions and celebrate Chanukah too.

"I grew up in Israel on a kibbutz where Chanukah was a big deal," she says. "There were bonfires outside, and we'd do something called *cotevet aish* where you turn hessian sack and wire into letters and shapes creating a word or image that burns when the fires are lit. Years later, when we'd moved to South Africa, I did something similar at Habonim machaneh, where we'd use hessian to create a giant menorah, which was really fun."

Though she can't replicate such large-scale celebrations, Herridge has bought a menorah and candles and plans to make latkes and remind her kids of the story of Chanukah. "They remember it a little as they went to a Jewish nursery school, but it's not something we've ever celebrated at home."

"I'm hoping that by involving them in the candle lighting process, they'll get into it," she says. "Christmas is such an exciting thing for kids to celebrate, so I'm not trying to compete with that. I just want them to feel like there's more to Jewish holidays than Pesach and Rosh Hashanah – other festivals that we can start celebrating too. Chanukah is such a great holiday for kids."

And, evidently, for adults too.



Aaron and Gabi Ger

Perfect food for relaxed Chanukah get togethers

LAUREN BOOLKIN

TikTok Potatoes

It's hard to believe that 2022 has tik-tokked away already, and here I am, writing Chanukah recipes. At least this year, COVID-19 is behind us and we can celebrate with family and friends again. These are the crunchiest potatoes ever, and so simple to make. Their perfection is enhanced by the fact that all the preparation is done the day before.

Ingredients

- 5 largeish potatoes
- ¼ cup olive oil (duck fat if you are making these according to the rules, but olive oil is perfect)
- 1½ tsp salt
- Sunflower oil for frying



Method

Preheat your oven to 125C. Line a 25cmx12cm loaf tin (or a normal-width one) with baking paper. Peel and slice the potatoes using a mandolin, and place them in a bowl of water to stop them going black. When all the potatoes are sliced,

place them in a bowl with the olive oil and salt, and toss well making sure all the slices are coated.

Layer the potatoes in the loaf pan overlapping them as you go. You should get four to five layers. Cover the potatoes with baking paper and bake for three hours.

Remove from the oven. Cool slightly, and then place a second loaf tin on top of the paper (and the potatoes). Weight the loaf tin with cans from your grocery cupboard to compress the potatoes. Refrigerate until the next day.

Remove the tins. Carefully cut into squares, and deep fry until golden and crispy.

Lamb Koftas (Serves 8)

I tried writing another doughnut recipe and then a churros recipe, but the truth is, we all buy them.



Sensibly so. Chanukah, however, is a time for relaxed get togethers. This recipe is perfect for that. PS. the balls are fried in honour of Chanukah.

Ingredients

- 100g bulghur wheat
- 1kg lamb minced

- 2 ½ tbsp dried origanum
- 1 clove of garlic
- Zest of a lemon
- 1 tsp salt
- Olive oil for frying

Method

Cover the bulghur wheat in boiling water, and leave it to stand for 15 minutes. Pour into a fine sieve, and press out the water with the back of a wooden spoon. Add it to the minced lamb and then add all the other ingredients except the oil. Mix gently, being careful not to compress the meat.

Form into golf-sized balls, and place them on a baking sheet lined with wax paper. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes and up to six hours. Fry until cooked through. Serve in a warmed pita bread with Israeli salad and hummus.

Capetonians get in the swim with revamped 36ONE Openwater Series

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Since Capetonians Steve Liptz and Warren Fialkov started working tirelessly to professionalise the 36ONE Openwater Swim Series in Cape Town earlier this year, the number of swimmers at the events has multiplied.

The idea for the series came about two years ago, when Liptz swam in a Cape Town-based swimming event that the Fialkov family, a Jewish family, had been running in the city since 2005.

"I found an amazing legacy which the family had created, but entering the swim was cumbersome, to be honest," Liptz says. "The website hardly worked. It took me an hour every time I wanted to register for the next event. It was a fun swim, but the administration and operational side needed work. I wanted to do something about that."

Liptz and Fialkov went all-out, putting in much more time and effort than they had envisioned to ensure all aspects of the race were top-notch. They have put on four events so far.

"I'm glad we've done it properly," Liptz says. "We've got everything – a brand new website, an excellent event entry system, social media presence, a lot of communication via email, and specific differentiated communication for different segments of interested people. We have professionalised it. All the staff now wear the same kits, so people can recognise who's who. Everything's branded, and we brought in specific sponsors. It's been great fun. It's like having a start-up again, just doing what you want to, and trying to be successful."

Liptz says people are loving the race, according to the race's surveys and those he has spoken with.

36ONE Asset Management, the company Liptz co-founded, runs several events, such as a mountain biking event. It also sponsored a football side called 36ONE Soccer Specialised, and has a mountain biking team, which once boasted the late two-time Absa Cape Epic winner, Burry Stander, and Olympic bronze medallist, Swiss Christoph Sauser.



"All the money and everything we gave to the mountain biking team, none of it went to the cyclists, but to the kids of Kayamandi, a township near

Stellenbosch," Liptz says. "These kids would certainly have landed up on the streets without our support. Some of them ultimately became international cyclists. It changed their lives, and it's still going to this day. We do it as a way of making a difference to South Africa. We've really stood by our belief since the beginning of 36ONE 18 years ago that education through sport will make a difference to South Africa."

Liptz's plans for the series encompasses "creating a lifestyle and a family type atmosphere so that people come together, get to know each other, spend time outdoors getting some vitamin D, and exercising their lungs. Also, all the benefits of cold water. This series has a double benefit – it brings people together with the benefits of cold-water swimming. A lot of people in Cape Town have been doing cold-water immersion, simply putting themselves in cold water for traditionally a 20-minute period to get all the benefits it may bring."

Liptz would love the series to become an

international tourist destination, in which people would add cold-water swimming to their to-do list in the city. "That would be the ultimate objective because then, you're doing good not only for Cape Town, but for the country as a whole."

He describes himself as an average swimmer who upon moving to Cape Town two years ago, thought pursuing the activity would be a great way to spend more time in the sea. "The more I did it, the more I liked it. I continue to like it more and more, so I'm just one of those guys who joins the events and does the swims."

Liptz says the swim series offers "a fun way of exercising because it doesn't feel like you're exercising. You're in a group, socialising, and challenging yourself, your time is recorded, you can set goals for yourself, and you can meet specialists in the field, whether it's from a nutritional or coaching point of view, or any aspect which would help you with the sport. Our sponsors include nutritional experts."

The series has swims for everybody, Liptz says. "We have events on the same day. We have different



Photos: Ron Stanford, Anton Robert, and Louisa Theart

swims and categories starting from beginners all the way to advanced categories in which Olympic champions have swum."

For example, the 36ONE Openwater Race Experience is a 90 or 180-minute swim for beginners. Spectators are encouraged to watch from the shoreline or boats anchored off the course.

Another swim in the series is the 36ONE Off-The-Beaten-Track Swim from the scuba dive site of Cosy Bay to Oudekraal Beach. When the visibility is good, swimmers can easily see the flora and fauna on the seabed and in the kelp forests, and maybe spot a diver too.

"We give prizes at the end, but to make sure it's not just about the winners, we give away random prizes," Liptz says.

The series' upcoming events are the Off-The-Beaten-Track Swim on 17 December, 14 January, and 18 February; the 36ONE New Year's Day Mile and the 36ONE Clifton Mile Swim on 1 January; and the 36ONE Viking Swim Challenge on 18 March.

On top of all these swims, Liptz says, "Being involved in a new event encourages us to find additional ways to give back and support the local community. We think we've found an amazing initiative. We're just finalising a few things before announcing what it is."



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Religious authorities in Israeli government “could deepen social divide”

TALI FEINBERG

The new Israeli government will strengthen the role of religious authorities in daily Israeli life, including over conversion, kashrut, marriage, and divorce, and have an impact on Israel's relationship with diaspora Jewry.

So says Rabbi David Stav, the founder of the Tzohar Rabbinical Organization and a past candidate for chief rabbi of Israel. He is one of the most active figures working to bridge the extreme divide between religious and secular in Israeli society.

“The government is going to be controlled by haredi parties,” says Stav, who was in Cape Town to interact with the Jewish community. “The deepest concern is that we’re going into a new era, where there’ll be no attempt to bridge the gaps between Israelis. It could split the country, leading to a struggle that will be difficult to come out of. It could lead to a situation like we saw almost 3 000 years ago, with the Jewish people splitting into the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. It will be like Israel is two states – the state of Tel Aviv and the state of Jerusalem.”

Stav founded Tzohar together with five other rabbis soon after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. The organisation aims to help shape the Jewish character of Israel through dialogue, and to search for common elements of identity across all sectors of Israeli Jewish society. It’s now made up of more than 800 religious

Zionist Orthodox rabbis.

“It was always important, but after the election, the voice that Tzohar brings is more critical than ever on a social level,” says Stav. “Our concern is about the future of Israeli society, and to soften tensions between groups.”

A few weeks before Israel's recent election, Stav wrote, “With each election cycle, identity politics becomes more and more entrenched, positioning us against each other in deeply painful ways.” He calls it “Judaism and Israelism.”

“In 1948, most would never have believed that these two ideals would come to compete with one another,”



Rabbi David Stav

wrote Stav. “But 75 years later, the reality is that there are even those who believe that one cannot be a truly good Jew if one is a good Israeli, or a truly good Israeli if one is a good Jew.

“Every day, we need to think about what needs to be done to create a national social framework in which every Israeli Jew – indeed every Jew across the diaspora – can take immense pride in the Jewish and Israeli identities and see no contradiction between the two,” he says.

“It was perhaps not intentional, but last week, tens of thousands of Israelis demonstrated their commitment to that task when they gathered in Yom Kippur services arranged by Tzohar throughout the country,” Stav said. “Every type of Jew was represented there. Sephardim stood along Ashkenazim and the secular alongside the religious. No delineations were made whether the person was voting right or left, Yesh Atid or Likud. Everyone was accepted and embraced. It was a moment of true Israeli and Jewish unity.

“I know that this is a model that can thrive and needs to be replicated in all walks of life. Because if we fail to rediscover that sense of national unity, then the many challenges we face – political, cultural, economic, and social – will become increasingly insurmountable.”

In all its work, the organisation aims to help Jewish Israelis connect to their Judaism in a non-coercive and non-judgemental way. For example, it introduces rabbis to engaged couples who have never had a rabbi, creating an important and personalised connection before the chuppah. This is important because otherwise, couples are assigned a rabbi who doesn't know them and they may not identify with. “For example, if they've been to the army, we'll match them with a rabbi who has been to the army and they are able to connect more easily.” It has led to thousands of couples coming to Tzohar every year.

It also trains brides and grooms in the laws of *niddah*, has introduced a prenuptial agreement meant to help divorcing wives get a gett, and opened a private kosher authority. It has helped more than 125 000 *olim* and their families to prove their Jewishness and therefore preserve their Jewish identity. The organisation recently started offering ethical and halachic counselling, and lectures on end-of-life questions.

Stav says the divisions in Israeli society deepened after Rabin's assassination, and the need for an organisation like Tzohar became clear. In addition, Tzohar made the radical move of separating religion from politics.

In Israel, there's “a lot of pain” behind secular Jews turning away from religion, he says, for example, observant Jews are seen as benefitting from not having to go to the army or work, while they have to carry those responsibilities. This means that secular Israelis often turn their back on their Judaism completely.

The increased religious authority of the government is dangerous for Israeli society, Stav says, because the secular half of the country “carries the economy on their

shoulders” and it may choose to leave if it feels its voices aren't heard and the authorities are controlling their lives.

The new government will also have practical implications for conversions being recognised by the state of Israel. “The authority of conversions will fall under the haredi parties, which means almost no conversions will happen in Israel.” This will leave thousands of babies born in Israel and *olim* in limbo, and it will have an impact on Israel's relationship with the diaspora. Stav is also concerned about the state having a monopoly on kashrut.

But most of all, he's concerned that the situation will lead to Israeli Jews “distancing themselves from their Judaism even further”. He predicts that the secular and religious will become even more entrenched in their positions. He also believes more Israelis will assimilate, meeting a non-Jewish partner on their travels after the army and seeing no reason not to marry them.

The relationship between Israel and the diaspora isn't “in the best shape”, Stav says, but the new government could “deepen the gap” even further. He therefore calls on diaspora communities to continue to “be connected to Israel” and raise their voices if they are concerned. He knows the South African Jewish community has a deep connection to Israel, and he's impressed with the warmth, commitment, Zionism, and Yiddishkeit found on this southern tip of Africa.

“Our challenge is to explain to the new generation why Judaism is so important and valuable,” Stav says. This is especially important for secular Jews, who he believes will turn away even further if they feel they are being coerced. Rather, an inclusive approach is needed.

Ex-South African awarded for changing Israel’s architectural landscape

>>>Continued from page 9

movements. South Africa, since we left in the 1960s, has changed a lot. The time we had there was wonderful.”

Brand's contribution and innovation altered the Israeli architectural landscape, increasing accessibility, environmental protection, and worker productivity.

He has played a significant role in the planning and building of some of Israel's most important developments and infrastructure, including the Tefen Industrial Park, Osem Headquarters and Logistic Center, Caesarea Business Park, Jerusalem Technology Park, Beck Science Center in Jerusalem, Nazareth Incubator Park, and many more.

When Brand was sent to the United States in the early 1980s, he conducted a survey of industrial parks and saw how beautiful industry could be. “That was an inspiration, and I tried to emulate it in some of the projects I was given to do in Israel,” he says.

His greatest career achievement was having the opportunity to design industrial facilities, starting with the industrial park in Tefen, northern Israel. “I went on to do a lot of other industrial parks up and down the country as well as industrial campus projects and some industrial buildings, all of which have been of a high-quality kind of architecture for industry. I've also had the privilege of working for ex-South African investors in Israel, among them Mendel Kaplan and Graham Beck, so my connection with South Africa has been through the professional channel as well.”

After founding the Israel Planners Association more than 45 years ago, he served as its first chairperson, pioneered the accreditation of architectural schools on behalf of the Council for Higher Education, and served as a professor at the Technion Architecture School, where his granddaughter, Kylie, is currently a student. He has also chaired and served on various committees in the industry, and his architectural and industrial work is displayed in various exhibits around the world.

Brand and his wife, Eva, also an ex-South African, have four children and

10 grandchildren. They visit the country every two to three years, and keep in touch with people there. “I still have family in South Africa,” Brand says. “I have a sister who lives in Johannesburg, and some of her children are still there. Some months ago, my wife and I, and all our children and grandchildren went on a roots tour to South Africa. We visited Johannesburg and Germiston, where I was born and educated, and also Cape Town, where my wife has family.”

Being Jewish is what brought Brand to Israel, he says. “I was involved in the Betar Jewish youth movement in South Africa before coming here to Israel. Although I'm not a practising Jew, I believe in the Jewish renaissance, the re-establishment of the Jewish homeland, and the rebuilding of Israel. It's a wonderful opportunity to combine my Zionist aspirations and professional endeavours in one field of activity.”

Brand and his wife have lived just east of Tel Aviv for almost 60 years. “We haven't moved, but we extended our house. We have one daughter who lives in California, but our other kids live in Israel. We see them every Friday night at our place, or at one of their homes. We're a cohesive family, and everybody gets on well.”

Brand is now retired. “My daughter, Elia, is running the office. She has moved away from industrial development to concentrating on housing for the aged, frail-care centres, and so on. She has become quite a national expert in the field. I look over her shoulder not trying to interfere too much.”

When Brand looks back on the important infrastructure he helped to plan and build, he's proud of quite a few of them. “The one in Tefen was a ground breaking kind of project. It was unique in its time. That led to the Jerusalem Technology Park, which was more of an urban development. The project I did for Graham Beck in Jerusalem, the Beck Science Centre, is a good building, but no one particular child is preferred over the other. I've enjoyed doing them all. It has been a privilege.”



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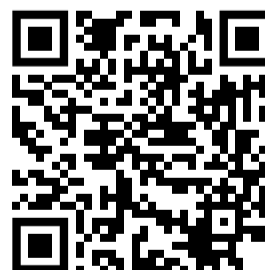
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The trials of being a virgin machaneh mom

PERSONAL STORY

PETA KROST



When I signed my children up for camp this year, I was excited for them. But I had no idea what was in store for me as a virgin machaneh mom.

Call it an initiation, baptism of fire, or even hazing, it was one of the toughest challenges I took on this year. I was spurred on by the fact that I knew my kids were going to have a phenomenal experience, but there were numerous times that I almost fell off the preparation wagon out of exhaustion.

All my Jewish mommy sentiments were challenged because the idea of my children being the only ones not having something made me tick all those damn boxes. This included going on a hunt for kosher biltong and two-minute noodles – lots and lots of them – to put in the trommels, among other tasty morsels. G-d forbid my kids went hungry or, worse, had to be the only ones who couldn't offer others. I know, I know, it's a Jewish thing.

Don't think for a minute I wasn't fully aware that this is a Jewish camp and, as such, no-one would go hungry. There would always be enough food to feed double the amount of children.

Let's go back to the moment I went



Top: Sienna Ho and Daniella Bentley
Bottom: Sara Rachbuch and Romi Zidel

Photos: Ilan Ossendwyer

I understood I needed to send lots of bags – for toiletries, the beach, packing your stuff in before the end of camp when your trommels are on the truck home. There needs to be a bag for every occasion, and I don't mean handbags as in what women carry around.

Then, if you have a look on the camp packing list, you're told to bring a top and undies for every day on camp. Now, bear in mind, camp is three weeks long. My children would

have to have something to wear while the other clothes were in the washing. In other words, we either did a huge shop or they learnt what it is to hand wash their socks, jocks, and t-shirts. While I must admit, I did stock up on



Elizabeth and Joshua le Roux

snacks – should I be admitting this?

Back to my sister who saved my buns because she had two seasoned trommels I could use. But, while standing there, she told me about a few things I would need to put in the trunk for my kids.

First off, I needed to get double-sided tape and reinforced duct tape. This was for putting up shelves, sticking battery operated lights, mirrors, and a pack of tissues onto the trommel. The trommel was to be their cupboard for three weeks. So, of course, they would need lights, shelves etcetera. I mean, how could they live out of a suitcase?

Then, there's always a real chance that the trommel gets wet, and what happens to all the clothes then? Simple, you buy zipped plastic bags of all sizes and proportions that will fit in the crevices and shelves of the trommel so that your clean and dirty clothes, as well as your wet, dry, smart, messing around etcetera clothes have their own bag in the trommel.



Shira Ephron

some new gear (thanks to Black Friday), I made it clear that they were going to be doing washing and gave them a handwashing lesson that I hope will stand them in good stead. I also sent rope for a washing line and pegs, which were on the packing list.

Then, I can't forget that we had to get stretchers and mattresses to go with the groundsheets, blankets and sleeping bags, in a huge separate bag (that fortunately



Joshua and Jean-Pierre Confait

into shock.

It was the moment my sister – who kindly lent me two trommels – started telling me what packing entailed. Bear in mind, I went to numerous *machanot* in what my kids tell me was "the olden days". We would pack a suitcase of clothes, some soap for washing, a sleeping bag and a ground sheet, and got dropped off at Park Station. We and our bags then travelled by train to Hermanus, Mossel Bay, or wherever camp was. We and our bags were put in tents that became our homes for three weeks. No mess, no fuss. I do recall once or twice getting peckish between meals at camp when we would go raid the *mitbach* for



Romi Zidel

we could buy from the youth movement). Ever priced a camping stretcher and mattress? Just saying...

Now, we're a camping family and my kids have had their fair share of holidaying in the rough, so I wasn't sure they needed the stretcher and the mattress, but no way I was sending them without that. My poor deprived darlings!

I could go on and on because packing those trommels took up every waking moment, that is, when I wasn't working on this newspaper, but I'll spare you all.

Suffice to say, we got those trommels off with as little pain as possible, and we'll be a little more prepared for next year's machaneh.

• Peta Krost is the editor of the SA Jewish Report.

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Road to nowhere? Just the way I like it.

PERSONAL STORY

Most families fly to the Cape. But our family has always hit the road. What was originally motivated by budget has become a joy, so much so that some years, I enjoy the car trip “down” more than the destination. They say that you shouldn’t get anywhere too fast, or you’ll leave your ethereal body behind. It explains why we feel so empty for a day when we arrive anywhere by air. But “slow travelling”, like “slow cooking” is something of a “practice”, like yoga. Whether it be the grand grassy plains of the Free State, the *Jack the Giant Slayer*-like peaks of the Sneeuberg, or the craggy infiniteness of the Cape interior, the journey is a meditation, taking me slowly away from my daily drudgery. Of course, packing the car isn’t sweetness and light. First, everyone’s luggage has to be squeezed into the back, then what seems like a month’s worth of fruit and avocados in those uneconomical-sized fruit boxes (my husband is a health nut), then some unfortunate loaves of bread which are sure to be squished, and a knife or two, which is sure to be lost. In the back seat go my by-now large teenagers with numerous electrical appendages attached and their heavy blankets and cushions, and in the front, under my feet is everything else that we couldn’t fit



Prince Alfred’s Pass in the Western Cape

into the back. Right at the back go two mountain bikes roped precariously onto a bike carrier designed for one sleek road bike at least 10 years ago. Needless to say, my husband can’t see very well out the back window, and depends on his side mirrors and sidekick – me. We’ve had a lot of adventures this way. One trip, to Sutherland, took us over gravel road through the moonscape of the Great Karoo for an entire day, while our small boys sat in the back with just one bottle of water between them. We had no idea that there wouldn’t be a single other car for the whole journey through the heat and the dust. When we arrived, we discovered there was a far shorter and easier route to this small town

from Cape Town. It seems some things have been kept secret from us Gautengers, no surprise! Ditto Nieu-Bethesda, which has two roads leading to it from the N9, one a long gravel road of endless switchbacks, the other a sweet, short tar road winding between koppies. No need to ask which one we took. On one trip, which passed through Meiringspoort, I booked a poetic Victorian house in the middle of nowhere for an overnight stay, with wrap-around balcony and an infinite view. The owners of the house, in the tiny town of De Rust, took one look at our trailer, and said, “We may have to accompany you to the property.” An ominous sentence. The road went uphill at a 30-degree angle, dotted with large

boulders. Eventually, not being able to go any further, we had to do a three-point turn with our trailer on a slope, which required much reversing and grinding of gears. The noise brought out the locals from distant farmhouses in the valley. Needless to say, we discovered what De Rust had to offer that night. Then, there was the romantic stone farmhouse I booked that was owned by the padstal between Aberdeen and Willowmore. Even the names of these Karoo towns will inspire trepidation in any seasoned South African traveller because of the utter nothingness that surrounds them, so much so that people have been known to see apparitions crossing the road at dusk. The farmhouse, it turned out, was a two-hour drive into the farm

from the padstal – nothing for the owners, it seems, who are used to living in infinity. Romantic and authentic, but spooky as hell. Of course, this kind of trip isn’t complete without a stop at a padstal – or a Steers service station – though these two destinations are completely different. Padstals are poetic, and sell things we aspire to enjoy on our mythical holiday, service stations are gritty with toilets and hunger. Usually, the further we get away from Joburg, the more service stations turn into padstals. However, there is one stop close to Bloemfontein, which combines both –Tom’s Place – a forested refuge on a lake, with “slap” chips and petrol attached. Nothing short of a miracle! Taking three days to do what most do in a day requires a certain level of humility. You have to stop at the Spar in some tiny town to shop for dinner and interact with the locals, who inevitably are winding down for a boozy weekend; you get dirty; and something happens to your car; and on day three, you arrive sticky with sticks in your hair, wowing at the cleanliness and sheer austerity of your coastal destination. But at least your ethereal body is intact.

• Julie Leibowitz is the sub-editor of the SA Jewish Report.



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The art of sportsmanship – Jewish artist honoured by heroes

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When Melissa Ackerman merged her passions for painting and sport, she never dreamed that the famous subjects of her portraits – Springbok Captain Siya Kolisi and Liverpool Football Club manager Jürgen Klopp – would sign them. Not only did she meet Kolisi, he transported her painting of Klopp to the manager himself.

“It’s been a dream come true,” says Ackerman. “To have two of the world’s most influential sports personalities take note of my work and take the time to sign portraits that this young, Jewish, South African girl painted of them, is mind blowing.”

Growing up in a family with two older brothers and a father who are all sports mad meant that Ackerman’s path was set. “I always say that I was born supporting Liverpool,” she laughs. “It was a no-brainer. My father and my oldest brother are Liverpool fanatics. Rugby was huge in our house as well. I’ve watched the Springboks my whole life.”

Her creative flair, she says, comes from her mom’s side of the family. “My grandfather was an architect, and my mom is an interior designer. Their creativity flowed through into my artistic side, so it’s a great mix.”

Working as a brand manager for payment-solution company, Payflex, by day, Ackerman hones her passion for art by night. Having taken art for matric, she took a break from the hobby before joining an evening art class at the Janet Pollack Art Studio six years ago. Here, she took her flair for sketching into oil painting, the medium she uses for her preferred form of expression – portraits.

Though Ackerman has sold quite a few of her pieces at the studio’s art exhibitions and

through word of mouth, nothing has prepared her for the doors her work has opened. “I’m not somebody who pushes my art all the time,” she says.

“All my work is in black and white. It’s always my preferred colour scheme, so that’s what I used when I painted a large portrait of Siya in his rugby jersey. I decided that I wanted to do a painting of Siya because I loved his story and how he’s such a big part of South African sporting history.” South Africa’s first black rugby captain, Kolisi has had a stellar career.

Ackerman was moved by Kolisi’s journey, from his early hardships growing up in Zwide township in the Eastern Cape to becoming captain of a World Cup winning Springbok team. “Where he came from to where he is now, and the effect he has on the community is inspirational,” she says. “He’s a role model to the youth. To see somebody accomplish that and still be so humble and generous, it’s good to know that people like that still exist. He’s the nicest person, a real gentleman.”

Connecting with her Springbok hero was never part of Ackerman’s plan, but their eventual meeting was set in motion when Kolisi saw her portrait. “My brother posted the painting on a Liverpool supporters’ WhatsApp group, where Siya is also a member. Everyone on the group was saying how incredible the painting was, and they told Siya he had to sign it. He was keen.”

Ackerman subsequently did a portrait of Klopp that was posted on the group as well,



which is when Kolisi reached out to her. “He said how much he loved the pieces, and we arranged to meet and he signed his portrait.”

Also a massive Liverpool fan, Kolisi is friendly with Klopp, with whom he coincidentally shares a birthday. And so, the rugby star took Ackerman’s Klopp painting to the United Kingdom (UK) with him, where the football manager signed it. This

is something that remains a far-off dream for most British artists, never mind an unknown South African one.

“As a Springbok and Liverpool supporter, I did the portraits because I thought it would be cool and now have two signed paintings from two legends hanging in my home,” says Ackerman. “It’s amazing!”

Klopp and Kolisi aren’t the only celebrities Ackerman has reached through her art. She once did a painting of American rock group ZZ Top, and through a family friend, it came to the attention of the band’s vocalist-guitarist, Billy Gibbons, who sent his compliments. She even connected with Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones through a portrait she painted of him. “My cousin, who lives in the UK, came back to me, and said, ‘You won’t believe it, but I’m best friends with his daughter and she sent it on to him, and he was impressed.’ It’s been insane.”

Yet, the signed Kolisi and Klopp portraits are her proudest art moments to date. “It’s a huge deal, that these people have recognised my art. It’s the biggest compliment I think anyone could ever have.”

As a thank you for what he’s done for her, Ackerman is painting a commissioned piece for Kolisi. “I send him regular progress updates of the painting. It’s been very exciting,” she says. “To have the honour of doing a painting for him and having him put it in his own space is pretty incredible.”

Living the right way up in an upside down world

South African-born **Rabbi Ralph Genende** recently launched his book, *Living in an Upside Down World*, which is a combination of columns he has written. We speak to him.

Why did you choose this name for the book?

The COVID-19 pandemic really turned our lives upside down. The title of the book comes from the Talmud (Pesachim 50a). It tells the story of Joseph, the son of Rabbi Joshua bin Levi, who became deathly ill and was thought to have died. After he suddenly regained consciousness, his father asked him, “What did you see?” Joseph said, “I saw a world turned upside down. What’s above was below, what’s below was above.” His father said to him, “My son, you have seen a clear world, you have seen the world as it is.” And of course, if anything, the world feels even more upside down now.

Tell us about your life before you left South Africa?

I was born in Zimbabwe, but grew up in Johannesburg. I went to school at Yeshiva College under the inspiring Rabbi Tanzer, attended Bnei Akiva, and got my *semicha* from the revered Rabbi Goldfein and the Johannesburg Beth Din under the outstanding Rabbi Kurtstag. They were all formative influences in my becoming a rabbi. But the truth is, it was my enlistment as a chaplain in the South African Defence Force which motivated me to study full-time to become a rabbi. It was a great way of crystallising the leadership skills I had gained through Bnei Akiva and as youth director at Cyrildene Shul.

How did being a rabbi in South Africa influence the choices you made?

Being in South Africa during apartheid was formative in my passion for social justice and equality. My wife, Caron, a South African who saw the moral complexities more acutely than I did, and I left South Africa with our firstborn son because of the intolerable injustice of apartheid South Africa. But South Africa awakened my social conscience, and I got involved with the formative Jews for Social Justice and began speaking out against apartheid, albeit in a modest way, for example at a protest at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Going to John Vorster Square to visit Maxine Hart, who had been imprisoned for her association with the African National Congress made a deep and lasting impression on me as well. This was following the Soweto riots, which assaulted my soul, and I still have some poems I wrote in the angst of those times.

Tell us about leaving South Africa and settling in New Zealand.

When we moved to New Zealand, it was a powerful breath of fresh air. New Zealand has always been a progressive and liberal society, and it was like discovering a new and beautiful planet. It was here that I realised that the

police could be a positive and friendly force for good and not just enforcers of an unjust system.

Part of your ideas on social justice include making space for women. What does this mean to you, and how have you realised it?

I’ve been fortunate to be married to a strong minded and independent woman. She was never a typical rebbetzin, but an individual with her own mind and career. She’s like her stepmother, Eva Bedell, also a powerful proponent for the rights of women.

Being exposed to modern Orthodox rabbis like Rabbi Riskin of Israel and my own reading of tradition and literature led me to the obvious conclusion that orthodoxy needed to be more inclusive of the spiritual space we all share.

I’ve championed women’s inclusion in orthodoxy throughout my life, calling for more Orthodox women to be presidents of Orthodox shuls, to carry the Torah with the same pride as men, to read from the Torah in a halachically-acceptable way, and to ensure that women are represented on Orthodox panels and platforms.

Not everyone appreciates your openminded or progressive sentiments. What impact has this had on you?

I’ve always believed that the role of the rabbi isn’t only to comfort the afflicted, but also to inflict the comfortable.

When you challenge the comfortable, complacent, or those with legitimately different views, you have to be ready to pay the price. While I don’t seek conflict, I do encourage vigorous and respectful debate. I believe that this is what Judaism has always encouraged. You just have to read a page of the Talmud to know what I’m talking about.

I won’t deny that some of the attacks on me have been hurtful, but I’ve developed a thick skin and the ability to discern between those who just seek to undermine or reject and those who are willing to grapple with different and unsettling ideas. I try to understand the other side and respect their views, and I expect the same kind of behaviour from them.

Tell us about your belief on the LGBTQ+ community, and its acceptance in our community.

One of the fundamental challenges facing Judaism today is that of inclusion

of members of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community.

It’s a fearsome challenge, and there’s no place in any Orthodox synagogue for engaging in homosexual slurs, countenancing members who publicly express hateful, homophobic opinions, and not finding empathy in one’s heart. This isn’t the way of the children of Abraham, the inheritance of his legacy of kindness and compassion. This isn’t the way of a Torah community that lives by halacha, namely, “One shall not say to a person words that hurt or cause harm.” (Sefer Hachinuch 338).

I know this doesn’t reflect the position of the haredi world, nor even of many of the modern Orthodox establishments. I believe we should err on the side of compassion and like Aaron Keller from Yeshiva University would argue, in a clash between humanity and halacha, opt for humanity, put your energy into and have enough faith in halacha that the problem can and will be solved.

What are your views on conversion?

We’re facing a tsunami of intermarriage, and instead of having an aversion to conversion, we should seek the ways of Hillel and many *poskim* (Jewish legal scholars) to encourage conversion.

How do you respond to increasing attacks on Israel and Jews?

By increasing my love and appreciation of the countless supporters we have. By working with people of goodwill to find an antidote to this vicious virus. By spending my energy educating and encouraging those who are rational pro-vaxxers.

How would you expect people with different opinions to react to your views?

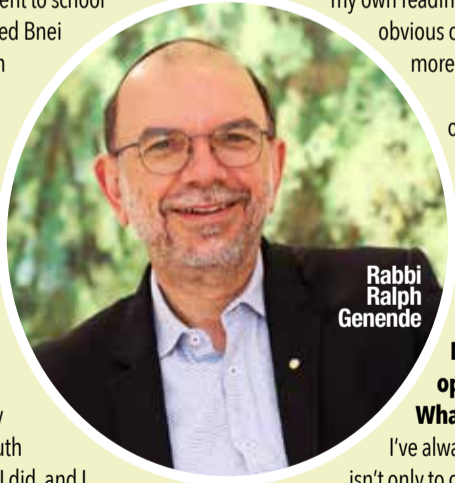
I believe in diversity, I believe in challenging the status quo, I believe in the dignity of our differences, I believe in respectful dialogue. I don’t expect you to agree with everything I say, but I do expect you to be respectful and a mensch in your dealings with people different from you.

Who is this book aimed at, and what do you want them to get from it?

It’s as my publisher, puts it, a collection for anyone – believer or atheist – in need of meaning in our complex turbulent times. I certainly don’t pretend to have all or even many of the answers to the complexity of living now.

It’s about my personal journey but also our collective journey, and I hope that readers will discover some ideas that speak to them, perhaps give them a fresh perspective, and some thoughts that will challenge them.

• To order or enquire about the book, please email: lisa@kesher.net.au

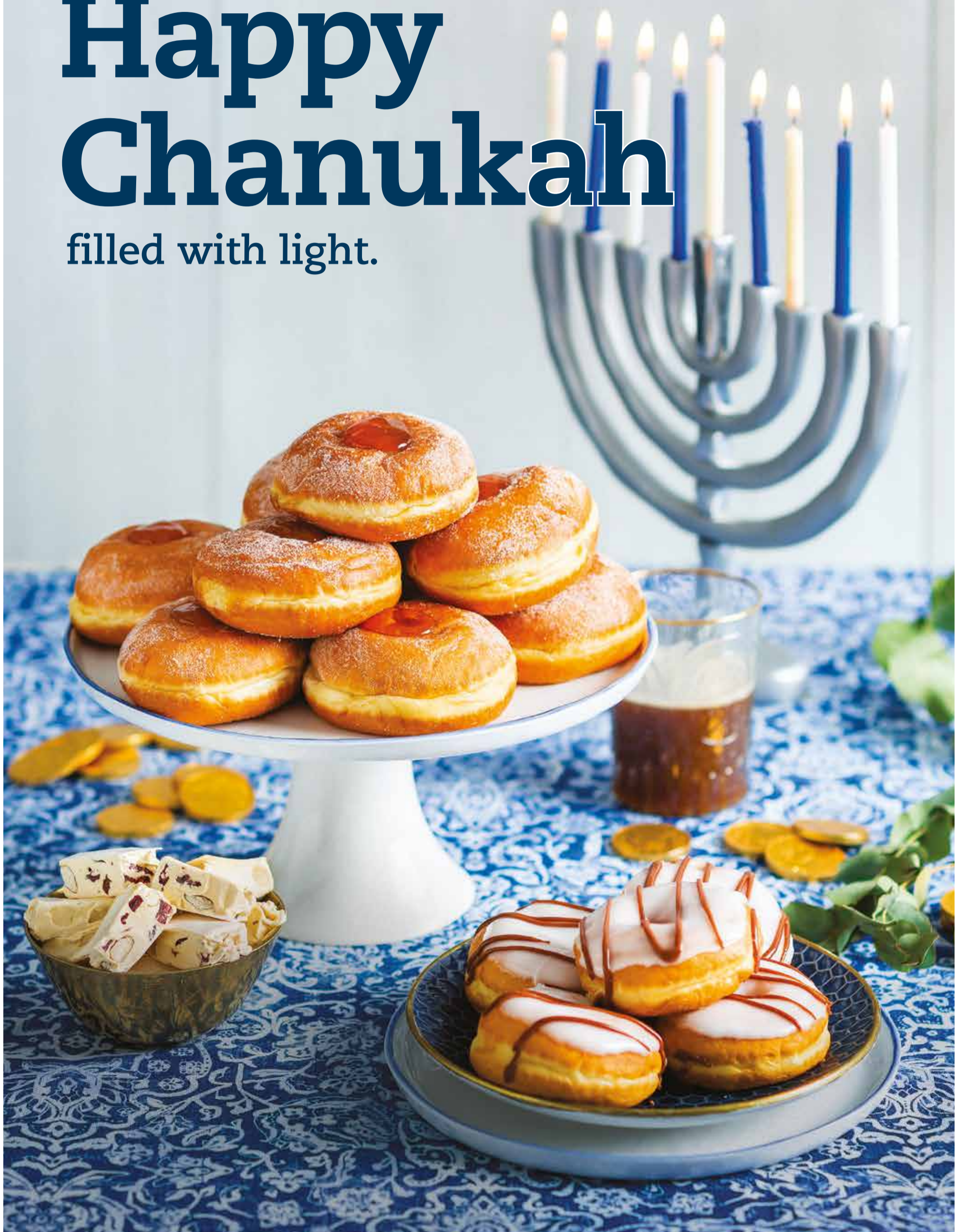


We wish our
Jewish customers a

Pick n Play

Happy Chanukah

filled with light.



So, what’s worth watching?

SHOWTIME

GUS SILBER



Looking for a good movie or series to while away the hours this holiday season? Here are 10 of the best.

Slow Horses (Apple TV+)

Gary Oldman is brilliant as the slovenly, surly, booze-swigging misanthrope at the helm of a crew of MI5 malcontents and rejects, in this series based on the *Slough House* novels by Mick Herron.

It’s a spy thriller with a difference, whip-smart, darkly cynical, and savagely funny, as the troubled underdogs strive to prove that they’ve still got what it takes to crack a case and save the day for England.

The White Lotus (Showmax)

With more money than morals, and more designer baggage than common sense, a group of the idle wealthy are thrown together in an exotic resort location: an Hawaiian island in the first season, and a Sicilian palace in the second.

There’s murder afoot, but the whodunnit takes second place to the alliances and dalliances of the holidaymakers, who are mercilessly exposed and lampooned by a uniformly excellent ensemble cast. Definitely for adults only!



Wednesday (Netflix)

As the gleefully malevolent, ever-unsmiling ghoulish child of the title, Jenna Ortega delivers a deliciously Gothic performance

in this Tim Burton spinoff of the classic *Addams Family* sitcom.

It’s beautifully shot and scored, and *Wednesday*’s stark-raven-crazy high school dance sequence is an unforgettable highlight. It’s sheer Edgar Allan Poe-try.

The Bear (Disney+)

Set in a rundown sandwich joint in Chicago, this sweaty and intense series plunges you right into the heat of the kitchen, as an award-winning young chef struggles to start afresh amidst financial troubles and the memory of family trauma.

It’s comic and gruelling in turn, but what really lingers is the human drama that simmers, boils, and bursts into flame behind the scenes of an everyday city eatery.

The English (Amazon Prime)

Bustling into the Wild West in layers of taffeta, complete with bonnet, lace gloves, and cameo brooch, Emily Blunt is as out of place as a pale rose in the desert at the outset of this culture-clash revisionist Western.

But when she teams up with a Pawnee scout, to avenge the murder of her son, she becomes a different character altogether, headstrong, relentless, and at home on the merciless plains.

The unfolding relationship between a stranger from distant climes and a man of the earth seeking to claim his birthright, propels a stunningly photographed series that takes the Western tradition into a whole new realm.



Fire of Love (Disney+)

Drawn together by a mutual passion to explore the fury of volcanic eruption, Katia and Maurice Krafft were a pair of fearless French scientists who lived, loved, and

ultimately died for their ground breaking work.

This mesmerising documentary, lyrically narrated, captures the story of their romance, their partnership, and their fiery, all-consuming obsession.

Tehran (Apple TV+)

One of the most gripping Israeli series of recent years, *Tehran* takes us right into the heart of a Mossad agent’s undercover mission to disable a nuclear reactor in the Iranian capital.

The action is nerve-wracking, and it never feels anything less than authentic, as Tamar Rabinyan, a genius-level hacker with Iranian ancestry, works her way into the underground of the city’s intelligence network.

More than a fast-paced spy thriller, *Tehran* is also a poignant exploration of cultural ties and the conflict of roots in the Middle East.

Hacks (Showmax)

A stand-up comedy diva, long past her prime, is assigned a young, down-on-her-luck writer to help sharpen her material and get her once-thriving Las Vegas career back on track.

Thus is the scene set for a caustic chemical reaction between seemingly incompatible generations, worldviews, and personalities, in this raucous and hilarious series that brings out the very best in its stars: Jean Smart as Deborah Vance, and newcomer Hannah Einbinder as her long-suffering nemesis, Ava Daniels.

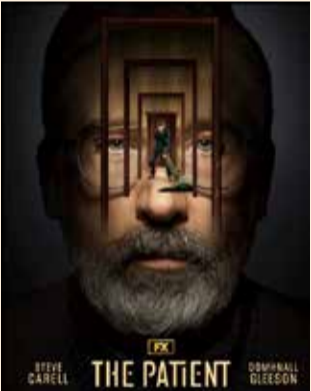
Aside from its abundant joys as an *Odd Couple*-style relationship comedy, *Hacks* also has plenty of heart, and is rich with insights into the culture war between boomers and millennials.

The Patient (Disney+)

Steve Carell, who has come a long way since his breakthrough as Michael Scott in the United States version of *The Office*, excels as a psychotherapist with a very troubled client in this claustrophobic psychodrama set in a suburban basement.

The client is a ruthless serial murderer who desperately wants to stop killing, but can’t, which is why he kidnaps his therapist, chains him to a bed, and demands treatment that will put an end to his urges.

While the action is largely confined to this single location, the series delves into deeper layers of ethical and moral turmoil, as the therapist grapples, in flashbacks, with his own complex Jewish family dynamic.



Pepsi, Where’s My Jet? (Netflix)

In the mid-1990s, as part of its epic battle to win the Cola Wars, Pepsi came up with a loyalty campaign that gave purchasers the chance to earn t-shirts, sunglasses, jackets, and other cool merchandise.

When a TV campaign jokingly showed a clip of a Harrier jet landing on a lucky winner’s lawn, one customer took them seriously, and acquired enough points to claim the item of military hardware, then worth \$32-million (R554.5 million).

This entertaining documentary series tells the story of his battle to beat the system and get his jet.

It’s a revelatory tale of what happens when unbridled *chutzpah* meets the machinations of corporate legal might and marketing gone hopelessly wrong.

• *Gus Silber is an award-winning journalist, editor, speechwriter, and author.*

Big books and thumping good reads for silly season

BOOKS

BATYA BRICKER



There’s a playful version of a cheeky quip that says, “I like big books, and I cannot lie.”

In the book world, November/December is “book silly season” big time, with more titles being published than at any other time in the year. That means we’re spoilt for choice just in time for our summer holidays – whether it’s the beach, the bush, or the cosy couch at home.



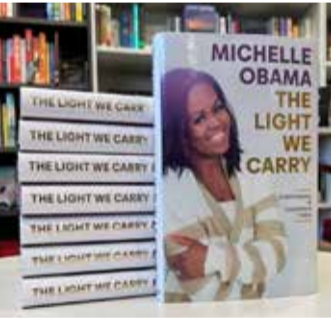
Often, it’s a big name – a celebrity – that makes a book the perfect getaway. We love to live vicariously through a perfect someone who seems to lead a perfect life, or to believe in

the fairytale princess who captures the prince, in spite of difficulties. But for all the dazzle, there’s often a dark side. Peep behind the glitter curtain, and just like you and me, no matter how famous or how rich, talented, or beautiful, there’s personal work to be done and real demons to be slain. That’s why we’ve seen, in an echo to the celebrity culture, a slew of publishing around the real life of celebrities – warts and all. Being authentic is very much in vogue.

Some real-life celebrity baring all this December: Matthew Perry’s *Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing*, is the heartfelt, hilarious, and tell-all biography of Matthew Perry – the real man behind the character Chandler Bing on the TV sitcom *Friends*. The appeal of *Friends* crosses so many barriers – it tickles that retro funny bone for teens and young adults, but my 80-year-old father still laughs uproariously watching the reruns. Matthew’s real-life journey has been littered with decidedly unfunny experiences, from abuse to drug addiction, and this searingly honest book took great courage to write.

Last year, Michelle Obama was the lady who saved Xmas with her book, *Becoming*. Her new one, *The Light We Carry*, was such a tonic – a down-to-earth, vulnerable exploration of how this former First Lady, but more importantly, authentic human being, manages the constant anxiety we all feel as the world often feels like it spins out of control. She talks about self-worth and self-knowledge, and the power we have in becoming bolder and brighter. Reading this felt like I was sitting and chatting to a close friend, and in addition to some sensitive observation and profound insights, Michelle shares her secret stress-busting weapon – knitting!

Other celebrity names that may appeal to you or someone you know:



Patrice Motsepe’s biography is a long-awaited deep dive into the life of this glamorous African icon, but also a peek into the machinations of big-league soccer and his extensive philanthropy.

Whitey Basson’s biography is going to be a winner. The book reads like Whitey himself – down-to-earth and unpretentious, brainy, but mischievous. It’s the massive success story about the titan of South African retail. I loved the anecdote from his childhood where he recounts how he painted his old toys and sold them for pocket money – retail blood pumping through his veins from the get go!

Faf du Plessis’s *Through Fire* is an introspective and no-holds barred memoir from the mind and heart of one of South Africa’s charismatic national captains.

Terry Pratchett’s biography is a portrait of the beloved man, the beloved myth, the beloved legend. It’s his life story from early childhood to extraordinary literary career, and his wilful battle with Alzheimer’s. The subtitle is “A Life in Footnotes”, tipping the hat to Pratchett’s unforgettable writing style. This is a larger-than-life tribute to a larger-than-life man.

Big names in publishing – the luminaries in books –

are big for different reasons. Some for prowess with the pen, some for multiple awards on the shelf, and some because their writing delivers without fail on the promise of a thumping good read.

Some of the big hitters include:

- My favourite fiction title of the season, Kate Atkinson’s *Shrines of Gaiety*, is all jazz and speakeasies, gangster New York, and glitz and glamour. Nellie Coker is like a female Al Capone, and I simply loved the big family dynamics of her “gangsta” family.
- Barbara Kingsolver’s *Demon Copperhead* – reminiscent in so many ways of Charles Dicken’s David Copperfield, but now speaking to and for a whole new generation of lost boys.
- You will know John Irving, one of the world’s greatest novelists, from *The World According to Garp*. Irving’s *The Last Chairlift* is the book I’m saving for the holidays – more than 600 pages – gasp! This is one to settle down with every evening with a glass of wine.
- For his most gripping legal thriller yet, John Grisham returns to Mississippi in *The Boys from Biloxi*, a saga with a rich history, ever richer characters, and a twist you won’t see coming.
- Locally, Rudie van Rensburg and Etienne van Heerden, and of course Dudu Basani Dube’s *The Hlomu* series has had readers hooked and devoted for eight years. This is *The Hlomu The End*, the sixth and final instalment, which ends one story, but begins another.
- Stephen King’s new book, *Fairy Tale*, has been called the “best King book in over a decade” and has already been snapped up for film. The promise – *Fairy Tale* is only the title not the ending.
- Wilbur Smith’s *Titans of War*, Patty Cornwell’s *Livid*, Colleen Hoover’s *It Starts with Us*, Lee Child’s new Jack Reacher *No Plan B* – all big names that will deliver.

These are some of December’s big names and big writers. Now for some really “big books”. You won’t find a category heading like this at Exclusive Books (although maybe we should, because you know which ones I mean).

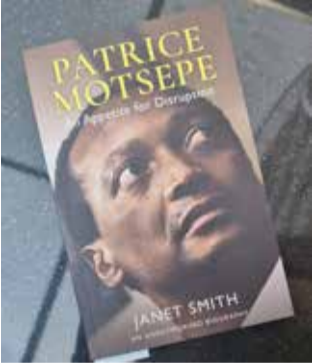
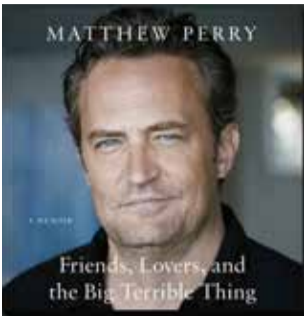
When I say big, I’m talking about the “thumper”, a brick of a book not just in heft but in content, sweeping in scope, sumptuous, and ultimately satisfying. These titles may not be suitable to lug onto the beach, but are all an ultimate and often timeless gift for absolutely anyone – including yourself.

In *Make the Most of your Time on Earth*, there are literally 1 000 ideas for your next adventure in real life or in the armchair. Who hasn’t been bitten by the post-pandemic wanderlust? This book will have you planning, dreaming, and drooling.

And lastly, Bill Bryson has just published the illustrated version of his international bestseller *The Body*. We spend our whole lives in it, but most of us know little about its wondrous workings. There really is no story more amazing than the story of us, and with classic, wry Bryson style, this book is a “directory of wonders”.

Wherever your downtime takes you – physically, emotionally, or spiritually – I wish you safe travels and very happy reading!

• *Word-lover, avid reader, spiritual-seeker, Torah teacher, publisher-author, crazy crafter, mom of three – Batya Bricker also happens to be GM Books and Brand for Exclusive Books.*



Turning dump site into heart of creativity for Soweto youth

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The gift of enabling children from Soweto to create crafts at a former dump site in Freedom Park is not lost on Moshe Singer, a multidisciplinary artist who was involved in the initiative. Though surrounded by shacks, this area, called the Creative Arts Space, has become a place where children from the area can learn art, sewing, music, dance, and engineering.

The children's work was displayed on Sunday, 4 December, during a Hakhel Creative Gatherings Arts Showcase in Freedom Park.

Freedom Park resident Thato Moloi, the founder of the Creative Arts Space, and his partner, started cleaning a dump site in the area to create a space for children to feel safe and "at home", says Singer, the co-founder of Creative Gatherings. "Being an artist, and fashion designer, Thato recognised an opportunity to make it a space for kids to learn art and create fashion."

Moloi is friends with artists and musicians who have come to the area to support the children and conduct workshops on Sundays, says Singer's fellow Johannesburg-based Creative Gatherings co-founder, Yael Shapiro, a music therapist. Founded about six years ago, Creative Gatherings brings artists from different areas together for collaborations.

Shapiro and Singer got involved in the project when one of their friends from Creative Gatherings introduced them to the space at Freedom Park.

"The ethos of their project really spoke to what we were doing, so Moshe, myself, and a few other Creative Gatherings participants have gone there to work with the children," Shapiro says. "Being part of a group called Hakhel: The Jewish Intentional Communities Incubator, and Shalom Corps, we brought along a group of volunteers from overseas."

Volunteers from Mexico, France, Austria, and the United States all arrived in Freedom Park.

"We asked Thato and his partner what support they needed to make it sustainable," Shapiro says. "We're not bringing our Western ideas to fix what's going on here. We actually have a lot to learn as outsiders, also as Jews, from this community, and how we can collaborate, learn from each other, and work together to support this project."

Having international volunteers was important, as it allowed them to see the beauty and problems of Freedom Park, says Leigh Nudelman Sussman, a multidisciplinary artist and the founder of 9th Street, a South African art group. "Only through the eyes of somebody else sometimes can you really truly reflect and do *tikkun olam*. It's like being a parent – often your children reflect back to you some of your inadequacies."

Singer and Shapiro took the volunteers, not all of whom are Jewish, to help out at Sandringham Gardens during the past week. "We also went to the Holocaust Museum to share our history," Singer says. "Then, we took the international participants to the Apartheid Museum. This was about meshing our understanding of each other's backgrounds, contributing towards creating artwork that mashed up these different cultures."

"We had an incredible moment, for example, when the African participants performed the salsa, and the international participants learned African drumming. In the end, it was a constant exchange of art and styles, but rooted in cultural understanding. It was about an exploration of the self and celebration of the other. It made everyone feel welcome and connected, because Creative Gatherings' ethos is about connecting arts and culture through *ubuntu* and *tikkun olam*."

One of the international participants, a visual artist, created African-style costumes out of newspapers, before putting on a fashion show.

The showcase focused on the children's creations, Shapiro says. "From a music therapy perspective, when you have an opportunity to perform or showcase your

artwork, you have an opportunity to try on a different part of your identity. So, for some of these children, where a lot of their identity may be coming from a trauma or quite traumatic home, it's an opportunity to see themselves in a different way and explore different cultures. They wrote a Zulu song about being proud of their neighbourhood and community, and it gave them an opportunity for reflection on that as well."

Says Sussman, "The arts can turn Maslow's hierarchy of needs on its head. Just because you don't have your basic needs sorted out, it doesn't mean you don't deserve the dignity, joy, and equality the arts bring."

Singer says he hopes "international communities will model what we have accomplished. My hope is



Drumming at Creative Arts Space

eventually to do a project like this in Israel. Conflict resolution can be done in a tender and sensitive way through the arts, and by mixing cultures to create something new and dynamic with a shared vision."

Singer says they hope to create a documentary of the Freedom Park project.

"I've learned so much during this experience such as working with limited resources," Shapiro says. "The space is very much about using what we have and recycling materials like old tyres."

"The idea is to create future leaders with art, science, technology, and culture," Moloi says. "Our purpose is to combine different cultures worldwide to share the idea of teaching kids our talents and skills, converting the huge dump site to a beautiful tourism attraction and an inspiration around the hood and to the world. The plan is to make sure that free art education is shared with kids and elders."

• For anyone wanting to get involved or contribute, please email sa.creativegatherings@gmail.com

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Boxing prodigy puts on gloves with legendary trainer

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Eighteen-year-old full-time boxer Joshua Feldman has proven to award-winning boxing trainer Colin Nathan that Jews aren’t “too soft” to succeed in boxing.

“This is a rarity in South African boxing history,” says Nathan, who is managing and training Feldman. “The last top South African fighter who was Orthodox Jewish was Morris Weinstein [in the early 2000s].”

Nathan, who led Hekkie Budler and Sivenathi Nontshinga to improbable victories with his masterful corner work this year, says, “Training Joshua is special. I’ve always wanted to have a Jewish boxer. A Jewish manager/trainer and a fighter – it doesn’t get better than this.”

After matriculating from Herzlia in 2021, Feldman moved to Johannesburg to train at Nathan’s Hot Box Gym in Savoy Estate.

Nathan first found out about Feldman last year. “My son told me, ‘Dad, there’s a Jewish kid in my school who is two years older than me. He is a very good boxer,’” Nathan recalls. “My son sent me some fight footage, and I thought Joshua was pretty talented, but I didn’t give it much thought. The next thing he was at the South African Championships. I saw pictures on Facebook of him, and I wondered if this was the kid my son was talking about. I got a message from my son saying, ‘The guy I was telling you about is fighting in the championships.’”

Feldman ended up winning the silver medal at the championships.

“To get to the SA Championships, I started with three white-collar boxing fights, which are basically fights hosted by a boxing gym with no winner or loser,” he says. “I gained some experience in those three. Then I had about six or seven amateur fights, and won all of them. I had to go into dodgy areas in Cape Town, but I won all of them pretty easily.”

He subsequently won gold at the Western Cape Championships (with two wins in as many fights) in May 2021. “After that, I didn’t fight until the SA Championships in October last year. I just trained in that time.”

At the SA Championships, he convincingly won his semi-final against an Eastern Cape fighter. The final was the next day, “so I was very tired for that fight. I came up short, and lost by a split decision. I think I won it. That fighter was from Johannesburg. He was a year older than me.”

Feldman ranks the silver medal as his biggest boxing achievement because he “fought people from other provinces with different styles. I didn’t know the competition I was coming up against. It was my first major tournament, and the people in that tournament had far more experience than me. They all had more than 40 fights.”

Feldman then got in touch with Nathan on Instagram.

“A week later, I got a call from



Joshua’s dad saying, ‘My son has a massive dream and passion to turn professional in boxing, and you’re the guy recommended,’” Nathan says.

Feldman got a warm reception from the other boxers at Hot Box Gym. “He’s the baby of the team,” Nathan says. “A lot of our boxers have pulled me aside saying they like the look of him because of his work ethic and discipline. Josh comes in, greets people, and just gets to work. He wants to make this a career, and I think he is going to be very successful at it.”

Feldman, who dreams about becoming a

world champion, says determination, self-belief, and consistency are the most important traits needed to succeed in boxing.

Feldman’s grandfather was a sports promoter who mainly promoted golf, even managing Ernie Els, but he brought the big bout between American Davey Moore and South African Charlie Weir to South Africa in the early 1980s.

Feldman started boxing at the age of 12. “I was playing soccer and I had a problem with my knee. My dad told me I should go to boxing because I wouldn’t have to run to train. I didn’t take much notice of boxing for about two

years, but since the age of 14, I’ve been really passionate about it.”

Feldman says he’s a proud Jew and boxer who has only had about 10 amateur fights, but is planning to get his professional boxing license next year.

He trains under Nathan six days a week at Hot Box Gym. “Colin has corrected small details and little mistakes like technique. He’s helping me with those types of things.”

Nathan likes what he sees in Feldman, saying, “It’s crazy to think he’s only 18. There are some ‘X’ factors to this kid beside the fact that he’s Jewish. He has very good technique and an extremely strong work ethic. He has a lot of natural flow and ability. He sets his feet well, has good balance, a very good base and foundation, and good timing.”

Nathan believes Feldman has the potential to go far in boxing, but says, “How far he goes will be up to him. We’ll just guide him correctly. I can’t make predictions on fighters’ careers, but I can predict that he has a really good future.”

Feldman watches modern-day fights, with unified welterweight world champion Errol Spence Jr being a favourite of his, but loves studying old-school fighters like James Toney, Sugar Ray Leonard, Muhammad Ali, and Joe Frazier. “I feel the skill level and work rate was a bit better back then,” he says.

Who’s who at the zoo? What to do this holiday.

Johannesburg

Visit the Joburg Zoo (day or night)

During the day, go see the more than 320 different animal species that the world-famous Joburg Zoo has to offer. At night, head over to the Festival of Lights, where you can see illuminated life-size animals, see nocturnal animals in action, and enjoy live entertainment, food, and the craft night market. Contact: jhbcityparksandzoo.com or joburg.co.za/event

Go ice-skating

It might be summer outside, but the ice rink at Festival Mall in Kempton Park is frozen solid. Contact: 011 394 6702 or visit theicerink.co.za

Artjamming

Release your inner Picasso, and create a truly memorable piece of art. Great family fun to be had in the heart of Melrose Arch Shopping Centre. Contact: 011 684 1608 or visit artjamming.co.za

Rosebank Rooftop Market

From food, art, crafts, and antiques to live music, entertainment, and activities for children, there’s something for everyone at The Rosebank Rooftop Market. Open on Sundays. Contact: 072 243 8582 or visit rosebanksundaymarket.co.za

Acrobranch Huddle Park

If you’re a fan of Tarzan, you’ll love this outdoor tree-hopping and zip lining adventure. Nestled in the trees at Huddle Park in Linksfield, there’s plenty of fun to be had by the whole family. Contact: 086 999 0369 or acrobranch.co.za

The Upside Down House

Get your camera ready and drive through to Broederstroom by Hartbeespoort Dam and experience something truly unique, a house that was built upside down. Contact: 063 100 9858 or visit upside-downhouse.co.za

Chanukah Candle Lighting

Chabad House will light Chanukah candles at the Giant Menorah in Sandton City (outside the Rivonia Road entrance) each night of Chanukah from Sunday, 18 December, to Sunday, 25 December. Time: 18:30 (Friday, 23 December, at 17:30, and Saturday, 24 December, at 20:00). Contact: 079 434 1293 or rak@chabad.org.za

Cape Town

Tobogganing in Durbanville

Cool Runnings Toboggan Park in Durbanville has the first downhill tobogganing track in Africa. Enjoy some outdoor fun at this family park where you can bobsled down their 1.25km steel-pipe track. Contact: 021 949 4439 or visit coolrunnings.capetown

Create Your Own Crockery

With studios in Bree Street in Cape Town’s CBD and Hout Bay, The Clay Café is a great place to get your creative juices flowing. Contact: 076 810 5120/062 455 6578 or visit claycafe.co.za

Cycle along the Sea Point promenade

Rent a bicycle, and go on an adventure along the Sea Point promenade. Up Cycles also have bikes for children and child friendly seats and carriages so



that the whole family can come along. Contact: 074 100 9161 or visit upcycles.co.za

The Two Oceans Aquarium

Get up close and personal with best under-water wildlife. Great educational indoor fun will be had by the whole family. Contact: 021 418 3823 or visit aquarium.co.za

Have a picnic

Pack your cooler bag, and head out to some of the best parks and beaches that South Africa has to offer. If it’s grass you prefer, make sure to visit the Company’s Garden in the city centre, where the squirrels will greet you on arrival, or visit the Green Point Urban Park and make sure to take your bicycles along.

If the beach is more your vibe, head down to Camps Bay or Clifton or take a drive through to Muizenberg, where the water is slightly warmer. The penguins at Boulders Beach will also greet you on arrival.

Go on a bus tour

The Red City Sightseeing Bus will show you the best that Cape Town has to offer. There are three different routes to choose from, with convenient hop-on, hop-off access. Fun, educational, and a great way to explore Cape Town. Contact: 021 511 6000 or visit citysightseeing.co.za/en/cape-town

I Am Here film release

The award-winning documentary *I Am Here*, featuring Ella Blumenthal, will be shown at the Labia Cinema from Friday, 23 December. Time: 18:00. Bookings: <https://bit.ly/3u6V0hA>

KwaZulu-Natal

Big Rush Big Swing at the Moses Mabhida Stadium

If you’re an adrenaline junkie and are brave enough to free fall 80m into the stadium bowl, then this is for you. Get a bird’s eye view of the world-renowned Moses Mabhida Stadium, and see Durban like you’ve never seen it before. Contact: 031 322 9955 or visit mmstadium.com

Visit Mini Town

See Durban’s iconic landmarks in miniature form, and explore the city in a unique way. Contact: 031 337 7892 or visit minitowndbn.co.za

The Durban Botanical Gardens

Visit Africa’s oldest surviving botanical gardens, and see some of the rarest plants in the world. Contact: 031 322 4021 or visit durbanbotanicgardens.org.za

Catch the Umgeni Steam Train

Depart from the Inchanga Railway Station and take a train ride through the rolling hills of KwaZulu-Natal along one of the oldest operating tunnels in South Africa. Contact: 082 353 6003 or visit umgenisteamrailway.com/

Visit the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre

An educational and meaningful experience that highlights some of the darkest events in human history. There’s also a kosher restaurant on site. Contact: 031 368 6833 or visit dbnholocaust.co.za

Visit Umhlanga Pier

You haven’t officially been to Umhlanga if you haven’t taken a picture on this iconic pier and uploaded it to Instagram. Make sure to visit, and take in the breathtaking views of Umhlanga.

Born risk taker takes a chance on an autobiography

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Peter Lindenberg, former South African barefoot water skier, powerboat driver, and car racer, describes himself as a "born risk taker". "I was abnormal," he says. "I would literally put my life on the line if there was a lap to go in a race."

Coming second was never an option for Lindenberg in his more than four-decade-long racing career.

Whether he was breaking records, earning Springbok colours, winning world championships in barefoot water-skiing, or triumphing in powerboat or car racing, he would go *Flat Out and Fearless*, the title of his new book.

It documents the life of the Johannesburg-born Lindenberg, who received national colours on 39 occasions and has been named in the South African Hall of Fame. "My life has been about bouncing back from crashes, dramas, and other obstacles," he said at the launch of his book at Exclusive Books in Rosebank Mall on 23 November.

Lindenberg hopes that the book will encourage people to bounce back, an ability he believes is important, especially in the post-COVID-19-pandemic era. "Many people have problems," he said. "The harder you hit the deck, the higher you can bounce back."

Lindenberg wrote the book to share his story with others. "I wrote it in the most honest way I could, not incriminating people who maybe should have been incriminated," he quipped.

He said the book should have been released long before this, but a few

stumbling blocks intervened.

He found some parts difficult to write because he wanted to be honest. "I did some things wrong, and I've admitted to them. While writing the book, I often cried.

"The real takeaway for the reader is that in 99% of situations, an opportunity exists for an alternative way forward. Most importantly, don't bother with stuff you can't control. Get on with what you can influence.

"While we were putting the book together, I was fortunate that I had my last [car racing] championship," Lindenberg said. "It was really exciting racing, and I won. I was 66 years old."

He previously missed two events when he couldn't travel because of COVID-19



restrictions, and then he contracted the virus. "I was literally knocking on the door. When I started to feel a bit better, I was still lying in hospital, and I thought, 'You know what, they still haven't published the book. I'm going to write another chapter because I managed to survive COVID-19 as well.'"

The cover of the book is like a montage.



The picture on the top left shows Lindenberg in a boat before the days of Formula One races. "That was one hell of a boat. It almost killed me. It could run at 220km an hour."

The photo next to it portrays Lindenberg triumphing at the British Grand Prix in Nottingham, England, in 1989. Another image depicts Lindenberg in one of his three favourite race cars – a particular Mustang from 1999. "That car was written out of the rules after one year, and the book tells how I got it." A further snapshot shows Lindenberg

in a wheelchair at Johannesburg International Airport after suffering a brain haemorrhage while on a flight.

Lindenberg was born in Johannesburg in 1955, and said he was fortunate to have a family who stood by him when he made mistakes. "Everybody thinks team sports are rugby, soccer, cricket, etc. Meanwhile, what I did was a team sport. It's just that I was the guy at the top of the team. You had to surround yourself with the right

people and, importantly, you had to trust them because if one of those guys made a mistake or didn't do their job properly, you would die. It's as simple as that."

Lindenberg thanks all his competitors in the preface to the book. "Without competitors, I wouldn't have won. Having them is what pushes you to win."

Lindenberg said his dad was the driving force behind his water-skiing performance, but he had no history of being involved in any kind of water sport. "When it came to racing, I created the opportunities myself, but I needed other people to believe in and back me. That's one of the most important things if you do what I do."

Someone phoned Lindenberg one night and said, "I've bought you a Formula One boat."

"I've never sat in a Formula One boat. I've never really watched a full Formula One race," Lindenberg responded.

Nevertheless, the person believed in Lindenberg's ability, and gave him his first Formula One boat. "A lot of my driving ability must have somehow been in-born because I won my first boat race, and I won my first ever Formula One race," Lindenberg said.

Lindenberg also used to steal his mom's car and drive sideways on the sand road near their house. "I think that helped as well," he laughed.

The book describes the distractions Lindenberg often faced, pulling him away from his goal, but he managed to keep his eye on the ball.

On the day of his British Grand Prix win in 1989, the wind howled, and the race was delayed. Lindenberg walked past a place where bets were being taken, and saw he was the fourth favourite, at 7/1 to win the race. "Sh-t, I'm a good bet here," he said to himself. "I'm going to win this race."

He scurried back to his wife, Debbie, and said, "How much money do we have?" She counted it, and said they had £7 000.

When Lindenberg asked her to bet all their money on him winning the race, she said, "You're crazy, we still have another week and a half before we go home."

Debbie, nonetheless, was able to bet only the amount of money the bookmakers were prepared to accept, which was £3 000.

Lindenberg ended up winning the race and receiving his biggest payday. "If Debbie was cross in the beginning, she wasn't so cross afterwards," he said to laughter from the audience.

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Words fail me describing this year

The image of the Durban mayor taking a swim in the ocean to prove that it's safe to do so was a particularly horrible one. Although a potentially novel idea, the action revealed more than he might have intended. Simply by needing to slip down to his lycra, he exposed just how little credibility he or his office has.

Why? Because if his credibility was high, simply telling us that E. coli was at a safe level would have been enough for us to go swimming, and he wouldn't have needed to engage in eye catching antics for us to consider believing him.

Worse than that, many followed him closely to see if he exhibited any symptoms a few days after his dip in the Indian Ocean.

This is my last column in the *SA Jewish Report* for 2022. That makes it a good time to be a little self-indulgent and look back at the times we shared. This column is a personal one, which means that you came with me to places like the Kruger Park, you suffered through the indignity of Skukuza accommodation that had no turn-down service, you blundered through the Jewish festivals with me as we lurched from one arrangement to another, often incorrectly arriving at the wrong house, and you concluded our school career with us.

You enjoyed the experience that involved my son's marriage to someone from Yemen, but were very annoyed that I found my trip to Israel in April to be difficult. You were angered by the fact that I voiced an opinion that might not be yours, and that didn't paint Israel in the light you hoped it would, and some of you did what you could to convince me that I was unqualified to have a view.

But an integral part of having credibility as a columnist is having the courage to sometimes

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



address the things that don't sit well with readers. It means being able to write about experiences and concerns that are uncomfortable, and that I know will likely infuriate people.

The reaction to my shared experience is mostly positive and engaging. It's sometimes a little aggressive, sometimes really amusing, and occasionally, it's hurtful.

Those are the times when columnists rely on the strength and support of a strong editor. An editor like Peta Krost, who provides guidance and support and more importantly, perspective. The *SA Jewish Report* and its writers are immensely fortunate to have Krost in their corner.

The year 2022 has been an incredible one. It started with Omicron and ended with E. coli. It began with Putin invading Ukraine and ended with a near-defeat of Cyril Ramaphosa. It was a year darkened by loadshedding and brightened by community. The year 2022 was fortified by the resilience of South Africans, and held together by bonds of humour, shared experience, and faith.

We have learned that we have no idea what the next year will bring. What we do know is that so long as we retain our positive outlook, as long as we're prepared to laugh at our misfortune, are supported, and support those around us, and as long as we retain our credibility, the chances are good that 2023 will be amazing.

I wish you all a safe and blessed holiday, and look forward to many more words, together, in 2023.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

A busy year of breakthroughs

As 2022 draws to a close, the Jewish community can look back on a year that for all its challenges, has been replete with activity and achievement. It has been heartening to have witnessed the extraordinary revival of Jewish communal life in every sphere following nearly two years of enforced separation and disruptions. The community's vigorous post-COVID-19 recovery testifies both to its vibrancy and fundamental resilience, and should give us all hope for the future, whatever it might bring.

This year has certainly been an exceptionally busy one for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). In this column, I have reported back on the wide range of activities we have been involved in, and while not all can be listed in this brief end-of-year overview, it's certainly worth looking back on some of the highlights.

The year got off to the best possible start when the Constitutional Court upheld previous findings of hate speech by the South African Human Rights Commission and Equality Court against former Congress of South African Trade Unions International Relations Secretary Bongani Masuku. Among other important outcomes of this landmark case, the right of our community to identify with and express support for Israel without

being subjected to antisemitic abuse was confirmed.

Together with the address by Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, United States special envoy for monitoring and combating antisemitism, the video presentation on the Masuku case and panel discussion with the lawyers involved were the highpoints of November's SAJBD Gauteng Council conference.

As the representative voice of South African Jewry, the SAJBD devotes much effort to leading the community in being an active, identifying part of South Africa's democratic and human rights culture. In April, an exciting initiative in this regard came to fruition with the launch of *Mensch in the Trenches*, a book produced by the SAJBD to commemorate unsung Jewish heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle. I had the opportunity of sharing a platform with the author, Jonathan Ancer, at the two Johannesburg launches as well as the subsequent launch in Israel. One of the launches was held at our Freedom Seder, which proved again to be an effective and inspiring vehicle for sharing what our Jewish heritage has to teach about the universal values of freedom and human rights.

On the global front, the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions enabled us to reconnect with our overseas colleagues. Among the memorable events my



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

Board colleagues and I participated in were the inaugural conference of the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, where I presented a paper on the Masuku case and its implications for international Jewry, and the recent historic meeting of the World Jewish Congress that was hosted by the Vatican.

Alongside these public events, the Board continued to carry out its normal everyday functions on behalf of the community. This included dealing with cases of antisemitism; engaging with the media to ensure that the community's voice was heard on issues that concern it; addressing problems of university exams set on Shabbat or *yom tov* (nearly 100 such cases were resolved this year); and dealing with public enquiries relating to South African Jewry and its history.

At the close of yet another highly eventful year for South Africa and the world, we can now look forward to a well-deserved break. Accordingly, I wish you all a safe and happy holiday, and look forward to reconnecting with everyone in the New Year.

• 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

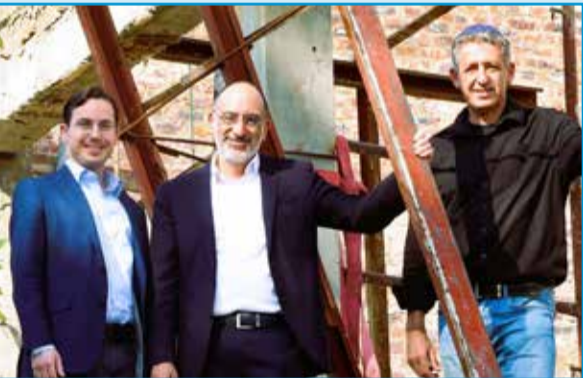
KDVP Pre-Primary plays tribute to a remarkable teacher



King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park paying tribute to Sharon Levin-Kur (holding gift)

King David Pre-Primary School Victory Park paid tribute to Sharon Levin-Kur on 5 December, a teacher at the playschool for 37 years. Fondly known as Sha-Sha, Levin-Kur devoted herself to creating a remarkable playschool at King David Victory Park, and her spirited personality, uniqueness, and love for each child she taught had an impact on thousands of lives.

Waverley Shul gets facelift for the future



Greg Roomer, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, and Stuart Bernstein

Waverley Shul is renewing its campus into an asset, which will serve the community better in the future. The project will transform outdated, underutilised office space into an accessible, inviting, modern, digitally-equipped multipurpose venue along with new bathrooms and workspaces. The upgrades will serve the shul, parents at the nursery school, and the broader community. The beit midrash is also receiving a facelift, and will return to daily use when work is complete. Concrete has been poured, key structural aspects are complete, a groundwater challenge has

finally been solved, and the renewal process is gaining momentum. The shul's revamp is in keeping with Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein's message of building for the future in uncertain times. "In spite of concern about emigration and the state of affairs in South Africa, we believe that the Jewish community will nevertheless remain viable and that our centrally positioned campus should play an important role in the community in future," says committee member and project co-ordinator Stuart Bernstein. Completion is expected during the first quarter of 2023.

WIZO Cape Town holds fast to its mission

The Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) Cape Town's annual Rebecca Sieff event on 27 November had two incredible guest speakers: Adi Cohen-Hazanov, the deputy chief of mission of the Israeli embassy in South Africa, and Kelly Melnik, WIZO member and survivor of the Apropo Café terror attack in Tel Aviv.



Hila Zetler, Shelley Trope-Friedman, and Sheila Wagenheim

WIZO Cape Town members Sheila Wagenheim and Esther Potash received a 50-year service award for 50 years of commitment and dedication to Bnoth Zion WIZO.

This year, WIZO executive, branch chairpersons, and nominated branch members also received acknowledgment certificates for going over and above the call of duty to sustain their branches during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

Bnoth Zion WIZO Cape Town is now in its 121st year, and after all these years, its mission remains the same – to improve lives in Israel and South Africa.

UJW celebrates kids of Alexandra Aftercare project

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg held a Christmas party on 2 December for the children at its Alexandra Aftercare project. The children, ranging in ages from five to 18, performed traditional dancing, a play, and a poem to entertain the elders of the Lutheran Church, executive members, and staff of the UJW, and parents and siblings.

The children generally come to the Alex feeding scheme, eat their lunch, and stay for the afternoon in a safe environment where they do their homework, read, and do arts and crafts. Regular attendees received certificates for attendance and/or for volunteering and/or for doing their homework. The UJW thanks its sponsors, corporate and private, for their generous donations of toys, gifts, cupcakes, and food.

Isobel Kohll celebrates a life well lived

Elphin Lodge resident and former speech and drama teacher, Isobel Kohll, celebrated her 100th birthday last month. Born in Boksburg North on 13 November 1922 to a Lithuanian father and a British mother, Kohll (nee Cort) was the middle child of five children. She married her now late husband, Raymond, in 1947 and has two sons, Malcolm and Jeffrey.

Kohll enjoyed stints living in Zimbabwe and Hillbrow, before settling in at Elphin Lodge more than 20 years ago.

A painting enthusiast and a Scrabble fundi, Kohll's love for the arts, drama, piano, and dance have never waned. "The most important things in life are tolerance, understanding, sympathy, and developing an interest in people," she says.



Isobel Kohll

CSO runs self-defence worship in Alex

The Community Security Organisation (CSO) Johannesburg participated in a women and children's empowerment event recently in honour of the 16 Days of Activism.

At the event, organised by the Sandringham Police Station and Sandringham Community Policing Forum, CSO staff and volunteers ran a self-defence workshop, part of its body and mind programme, for 60 women and children at the Organic Market in Alexandra. The team said it was humbling and a privilege to give back to other communities less fortunate than our own.



CSO staff and volunteers running a self-defence workshop in Alexandra

JWBS end-of-year book sale a title event

Many people turned out to buy books at the Jewish Women's Benevolent Society's last book sale for 2022 at the Genesis Centre in Fairmount on 4 December. There was an enormous collection on hand thanks to the community. The store was manned by volunteers, and the excitement of buyers was palpable.

Herzlia Weizmann welcomes Grades 6 and 7 boys to minyan

Herzlia Weizmann held a Minyan Monday on Monday, 28 November. With a number of Grade 6 boys having celebrated their Barmitzvahs during the course of the year and many others preparing for theirs, the majority of the *minyan* was made up of Grade 6 pupils. Parents joined in, and Rabbi Sam Thurgood *leined* during the morning *tefillot* service. Grade 6 boys and their dads were called up for the different *aliyot*, and were also the *chazanim* for the service. It was a special and inspiring morning, and the school is looking forward to hosting similar mornings next year.



Rabbi Sam Thurgood *leining* at the Herzlia Weizmann *minyan*

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Meat Blintzes tray of 6

71⁹⁹

97⁹⁹

EFFRAT GRAPE
JUICE ROSE
1L

129⁹⁹

I&J DEEP WATER
HAKE FILLETS
800G

59⁹⁹

FRY'S
SPECIAL
VEGAN
SAUSAGES
500G



25⁹⁹

MC CAINS MIXED
VEGETABLES
600G

24⁹⁹

GOLD SEAL
PREMIUM
10MM
& 12MM
FRIES
1KG EACH



13⁹⁹

MAXI BEEF SAUSAGE
P/100G



15⁹⁹

MIAMI TOMATO
& GREEN PEPPER
410G

21⁹⁹

TASTIC RICE
NATURES BROWN
1KG



19⁹⁹

CAPE POINT
PILCHARDS
IN TOMATO
SAUCE
400G



14⁹⁹

EARTHWISE
TOMATO
& PEPPER
400G



3⁹⁹

THE
KITCHEN
SOUP
PACKET
THICK
VEG
50G



134⁹⁹

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MONDAY 19 DEC - 6:30 PM
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WEDNESDAY 21 DEC - 6:30 PM
THURSDAY 22 DEC - 6:30 PM
FRIDAY 23 DEC - NO LIGHTING
SATURDAY 24 DEC - 8:30 PM
SUNDAY 25 DEC - 6:30 PM

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Centre, Big Screen
Kick Off 5 PM



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Entertainment, Food
and More ... From 4 PM...
Candle Lighting 6:30 PM



66⁹⁹

MONTAGU
PITTED
PRUNES
250G



5⁹⁹

DAIRYMAID ZOOTY
POP ORANGE
ICE-CREAM



23⁹⁹

ALL GOLD
SUPERFINE
APRICOT JAM
450G



62⁹⁹

MONTAGU
YELLOW CLING
PEACH
250G



28⁹⁹

POTATO
BAG
2KG



37⁹⁹

SNOWFLAKE
CAKE FLOUR
2.5KG



32⁹⁹

ORLI
CHANUKAH
CANDLES
45'S



11⁹⁹

LIFEBUOY TOTAL BATH SOAP
175G



20⁹⁹

COLGATE
REGULAR
TOOTHPASTE
100ML



87⁹⁹

HEAD & SHOULDERS
SHAMPOO ASSTD
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AND HAPPY
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