Chag Sameach! Our next edition will be out on 20 April.

## ■ Volume 27 - Number 12 ■ 30 March 2023 ■ 8 Nisan 5783 south african • ewish Report The source of quality content, news and insights









## **CHAG SAMEACH**

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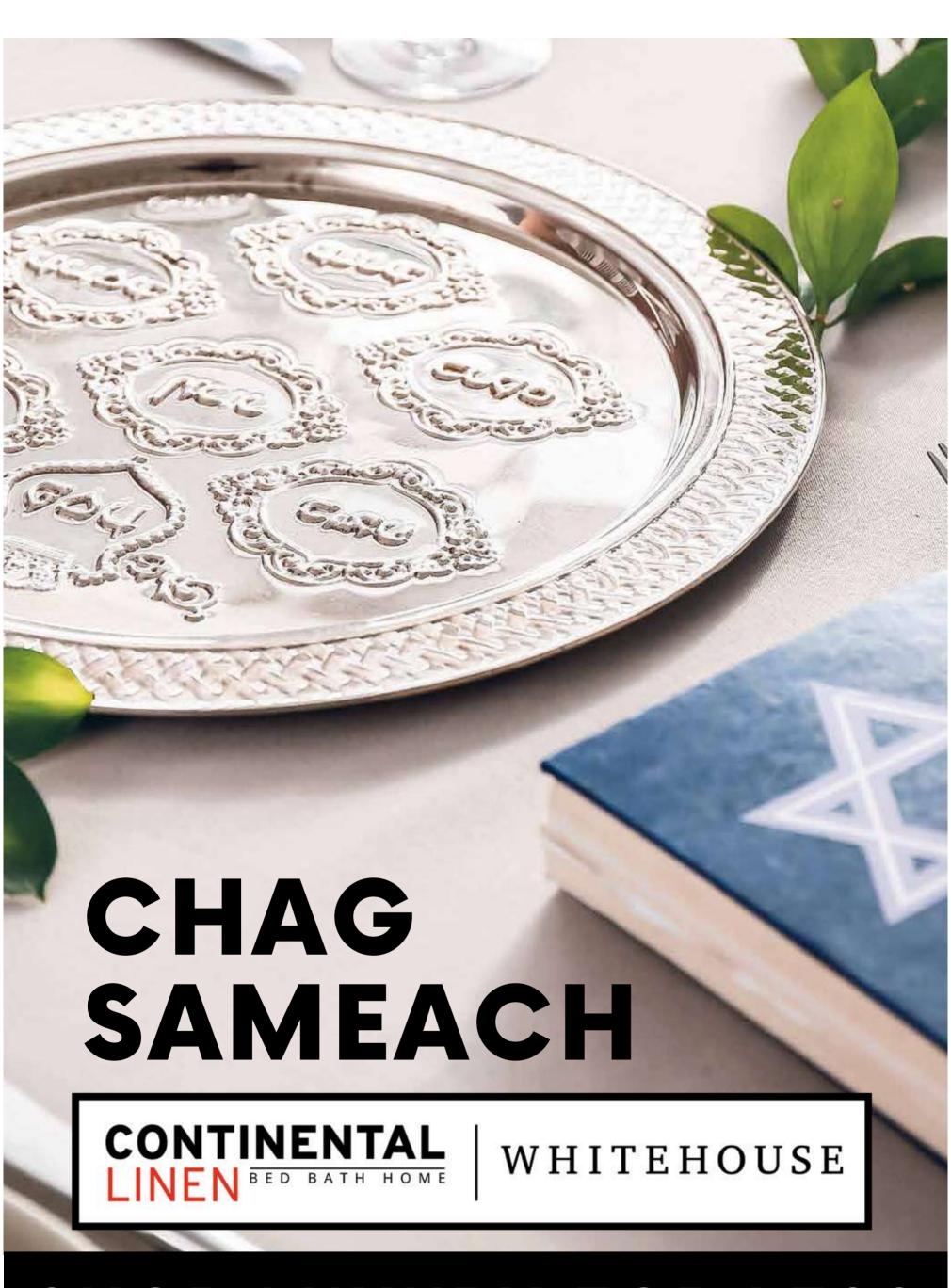




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## Israel's national crisis averted, or just a lull?

**TALI FEINBERG** 

hen the daughter of a South African *oleh*, Galya Sackstein, went to sleep last Sunday night, 26 March, she was worried. "I didn't know if I would wake up to a country in the morning," she

The country she knows and loves was facing the deepest internal crisis it has ever experienced. And she and hundreds of thousands of Israelis feared for what would happen. Dan Diker, the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, says this "earthquake" is "shaking Israel to its core, unprecedented since its establishment".

Overnight, hundreds of thousands of Israelis joined spontaneous mass protests in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu firing Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. This was after Gallant called on government to pause its planned judicial overhaul. Gallant's comments were most likely in response to army reservists warning that they wouldn't serve if the government continued its plan.

The next morning, Sackstein got up and joined a protest. "What's going on here is crazy. I have never seen anything like it. Everything is shutting down," she said in a message to her uncle, Howard Sackstein, in South Africa. Labour unions went on strike on 27 March to protest against the judicial reforms, leading to the closure of the airport, ports, malls, banks, and even Israeli embassies around the world.

That evening, 27 March, Bibi announced that he was temporarily delaying the overhaul of the judicial legislation to allow time for dialogue, but stressed that "either way", reform would be passed. He indicated that this "pause" would last until the beginning of the Knesset's summer session, which starts on 30 April.

The strike ended, and things returned to normal, but many analysts say this is just the beginning of a fight for Israel's future, while Israelis feel that their country could still erupt at any moment.

"The most terrifying thing is that there may be a civil war," says Sackstein. "It feels like Israel is on the edge of a precipice," says Solly Kaplinski, formerly of Cape Town

"Hopefully now there's a little bit of light at the end of this dark and twisted tunnel, but our country and our people here and around the world have suffered enormous damage which I hope won't be irreparable."

Regarding Bibi's step back, legal expert Professor Yuval Shany says, "The temporary freeze of legislation is a significant achievement for the protest movement, which

was able to show the ruling coalition that its power to govern is limited in spite of the parliamentary majority it

"The coalition may use the window of time either to negotiate seriously with the opposition about an agreed upon reform package, or to regroup, hope for protestfatigue, and then charge again."

The chief executive of RealityCheck.com, Professor Daniel Pomerantz, says, "The massive protests have sparked renewed interest in potential compromise. A number of moderate members of the coalition are publicly reconsidering their positions which means that the coalition will have to compromise in order to pass legislation."

Head of legal strategies at Palestinian Media Watch, Maurice Hirsch, is concerned that "the protesters aren't interested in compromise, they're interested only in bringing down the government. We have an elected government, elected on a specific platform of very overdue and needed judicial reform, which is now being blocked by people who want to hang onto their last bastions of control even though these are completely opposed to the general will of the people."

more than the judicial reforms, reflecting a deep-seated fear that religious and hawkish nationalist factions of the coalition will compromise the liberal fabric of society. "This isn't the case, as the checks and balances of

Diker believes that "the demonstrations are about

the political system are built into its structure," he says. "Ironically, there's broad consensus among Israelis that judicial reforms are deeply needed, as there is no democracy in which the Supreme Court has such power. Demonstrators constitute only about 3% of the country."

Professor Glen Segell, research fellow in the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State, says that things may guieten down now, but it's just a reprieve. "Given that we're moving into Pesach, the two memorial days, and Independence Day, I expect nothing to happen in terms of these laws or inter-party consultations. Other crises and

other laws will take over public attention, for example laws about Shabbat and military service. Bibi will unilaterally water down the judicial laws and slip them in at the height of other events."

In addition, "people feel that Gallant has shown leadership guts. He should take it further, and challenge Bibi for Likud leadership", says Segell.

South African Zionist Federation Chairperson Rowan Polovin says, "The proposed judicial reforms have generated significant and heated debates and deepened divisions among Israelis and between the diaspora and Israel. This debate has exposed fault lines within Israeli society that have the potential to undermine the country's social fabric if not addressed in a manner that promotes unity and understanding.

"It's the division itself, not the reasons for division, that needs our undivided attention," he says. "There are competing visions of Israel's future which need to be fused to prevent political schisms in her cultural, business,

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#### Biden hopes Netanyahu 'walks away' from reforms

President Joe Biden said he remains concerned about the turmoil in Israel even ্ট্র after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paused legislation that would enact farreaching reforms to the judiciary. Biden also said he had no plans to meet Netanyahu anytime

"They cannot continue down this road," Biden said on Tuesday, 28 March, when asked by reporters about the health of Israel's democracy. "Hopefully the prime minister will act in a way that he can try to work out some genuine compromise, but that remains to

Biden said he didn't plan to interfere in the fate of the judicial reform, but he had made his opposition clear, and later said that he hoped that Netanyahu "walks away from it". He suggested that his stance dovetailed with that of American Jews.

Biden answered with an emphatic "No" when asked if he was inviting Netanyahu to the White House. "Not in the near term," he said.

Biden's nixing a visit by Netanyahu anytime soon and his scepticism about Netanyahu's good faith in suspending the legislation isn't the lowest point in United States-Israel relations. But it stands out because both men describe each other as friends of many years' standing.

Netanyahu, who according to Israeli media reports is anxious to receive a US invitation, responded to Biden's comments on Twitter by mentioning that relationship. "I have known President Biden for more than 40 years, and I appreciate his longstanding commitment to Israel," he tweeted.

But, Netanyahu added in another tweet, "Israel is a sovereign country which makes its decisions by the will of its people and not based on pressures from abroad, including from the best of friends."

Rollbacks in democratic rights in one of the US's closest allies sounds a jarring dissonance with Biden's foreign policy which stresses democratic values. Israel's courts are also seen as a bulwark against the erosion of rights for vulnerable communities, including



**US President Joe Biden** 

women, Arabs, the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community, and non-Orthodox Jews.

Additionally, top Israeli security officials, including Defence Minister Yoav Gallant have said the deep divisions sowed among Israelis by the legislative push have created vulnerabilities that Israel's enemies are eager to exploit.

#### **Agatha Christie novels scrubbed for offensive references**

HarperCollins has revised multiple novels by famed British mystery writer Agatha Christie to remove references to Jews and other minorities deemed offensive by sensitivity readers.

The edits, which the British Telegraph first reported on 26 March add Christie to a growing list of authors whose work is getting tweaked for contemporary audiences. Roald Dahl, the children's book author whose family recently apologised for his antisemitism, also had versions of his books recently revised to eliminate potentially offensive language.

Christie, whose mid-century detective novels featuring the characters Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple made her one of the best-selling fiction writers of all time, included references to Jews in several of her books that prominent critics found antisemitic. She also included racist language that was more common during her

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We therefore commemorate one of the miracles of the time, on this Shabbat before Pesach.

Shabbat haGadol (the Great Sabbath) always precedes Passover.

Jewish Report

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## **Pretoria University condemns** religious intolerance

**TALI FEINBERG** 

he University of Pretoria (UP or Tuks) this week condemned any form of religious and racist intolerance in the light of the antisemitic stand taken on 15 March by the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) on campus.

"The University of Pretoria condemns any form of discrimination, including racism and religious intolerance, and will take the necessary steps against anyone who is found to be in breach of its anti-discrimination policies," said Tuks spokesperson Rikus Delport. "The university is committed to providing a safe that Jewish students weren't welcome to have any kind of presence on campus, and even staged an illegal "sit-in" protest to emphasise their view.

University authorities have been working in the background to assure SAUJS and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) that the safety and freedom of Jewish students remains a priority. The university re-emphasised its stance to the SA Jewish Report.

When the sit-in was staged in mid-March, the university promised the SAJBD that the students who took part would be disciplined. Now, Delport said, "The matter is with student discipline and with our

> transformation office, which is the champion of our antidiscrimination policy." In terms

of ensuring that it doesn't happen again, "appropriate action will be taken against anyone in breach of our policies", he said. "If any student feels unsafe, they should report it to campus security or work through the available student leadership structures. We believe we have the necessary measures in place to provide a safe space to all our students, regardless of their religious beliefs."

**SAUJS** 

Tuks Chairperson Sasha Said mentioned that since the sit-in, "there has been a significant improvement in the acceptance of Jewish students across campus. SAUJS remains committed to its beliefs and proud of its stand. A market day organised by SAUJS was a huge success, with a continuous flow of people eager to learn, engage, and support not only current Jewish students but future ones.



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"Five more articles have been written in the Tuks newspaper regarding the situation," she said. "However, unlike previous occasions, SAUJS has had the opportunity to respond. It's not ideal, but SAUJS has grown stronger through this interaction. SAUJS has a strong and engaging relationship with the SRC, and we continue to raise funds for students in need."

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn said, "We have been engaging with the University of Pretoria's administration

in South Africa must never condone groups that undermine freedom of association and promote discrimination," he said. "Places of learning must remain safe spaces for all those securing an education in our country.

"We hope that the University of Cape Town [UCT] will follow suit, and immediately launch an investigation against the UCT Palestinian Solidarity Forum for facilitating the distribution of messages from terrorist organisations on its campus last week [20 March], creating a hostile

> atmosphere for Jewish students and the potential for long term violent indoctrination."

Cape SAJBD Executive Director Daniel Bloch said he was due to meet UCT management before Pesach to discuss the issue of speakers from terrorist



Israeli Apartheid Week activists at the University of Pretoria

to ensure that there are consequences for students who violate the basic tenants of non-discrimination and inclusion on a university campus. Attempting to exclude students based on their religion from engaging with the SRC is a dangerous stance anywhere in society, but especially in a university environment. We applaud UP's condemnation of this antisemitism, and welcome its assurance that action will be taken against the students responsible. It's critical that an institution of higher learning upholds these values and principles."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) director of public policy, Benji Shulman, said, "The SAZF welcomes the statement from the University of Pretoria condemning discrimination against Jewish students on campus.

"Institutions offering tertiary education

organisations being allowed to address students on campus.

"Our message to the community is never to allow fear to prevent them from being themselves, taking pride in their beliefs, or standing up for what they believe in," said Said. "SAUJS is committed to being a shining example of this. In spite of difficult moments over the past few months, the support from all community sectors has been overwhelmingly positive.

"As proud Jews and Zionists, SAUJS will stand on its three pillars of Zionism, Judaism, and South Africa," she said. "We'll continue to fight for inclusion and students' rights on campus and to overcome discrimination in any form. The entire SAUJS team stands behind the community, and is always rooting for them. The community should be proud of who we are and what we stand for."





The SAUJS Tuks Market Day on 17 March, where societies recruit new



space where all students, regardless of race,

sexual orientation, and religious belief feel

The university was the site of ugly anti-

Jewish sentiment earlier this year, when

student societies lashed out at the South

African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS)

for daring to form a working relationship

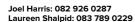
with the Student Representative Council

(SRC). Societies like the PSC made it clear



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## Olim join forces to fight for democracy

lim form a vital part of Israeli society, yet their voices are often overtaken by the loud, proud voices of those born in Israel. But olim are just as proud of their adopted country, and believe that they have a unique and important perspective to add, especially as the political temperature heats up.

This is why a number of South African olim joined their brethren from the United States, the United Kingdom, European countries, Australia, Russia, Ukraine, and South America in forming a new organisation called Olim for Democracy in mid-March

Its first act was to write a letter calling on the Israeli government to halt its planned judicial reforms, and it has now launched a digital campaign and petition urging Likud Minister of the Knesset (MK), Dan Illouz, himself an oleh from Canada and the representative of new immigrants in Likud, to oppose a judicial-reform package "that goes against the Zionist vision of a Jewish and democratic Israel that has inspired tens of thousands to make aliya", according to

Regarding the letter, "We got 1 600 signatures

backgrounds, including Orthodox, secular, Reform, Conservative, and haredi Jews," says Southern African oleh Paul Mirbach, who is on the organisation's steering committee.

Israeli citizens by choice, individuals who made an active choice to leave everything that was familiar to us in our countries of origin and weld our destinies to the destiny of this country. We're all here because of a

dream, a vision, a hope for a better future," they wrote.

The letter addresses a number of MKs, President Isaac Herzog, The Jewish Agency for Israel Chairperson Doron Almog, Jewish Agency for Israel Chief Executive Amira Aharonovitz, and Nefesh B'Nefesh Chief Executive Rabbi Yehoshua Fass

"We're writing this letter with heavy hearts," continued the letter. "The Zionist vision that inspired us - and all the *olim* who came before us - has been hijacked by extremists who threaten the very fabric of this country

"We write to you as olim and olot, devoted Gideon Miller at a protest in Zichron Ya'akov on 28 March **Paul Mirbach** 

as a Jewish and

democratic state.

The judicial overhaul package being advanced by the governing coalition in a blitz threatens to irrevocably damage Israel's delicate system of checks and balances and leave our society vulnerable to a tyranny of the majority.

"Coming from Jewish communities around the world, we know what it's like to feel prejudice and discrimination as a minority group," they said. "As Zionists, we believe that the Jewish people have a right to selfdetermination, a universal right based upon principles of equality and freedom that are integral to all democracies. This legislation undermines the very basis of the justification for the Jewish people's right to selfdetermination.

"Today, the necessity for this safe haven is becoming ever more real. But a non-democratic Israel isn't an option for a haven. And many Jewish individuals are even facing the prospect of no longer being eligible for aliya since members of this coalition have threatened to remove the Law of Return's 'grandchild clause'.

"The legislation being advanced will force Jews facing antisemitism in their countries to choose between living in a society where they suffer hate crimes or moving to a country with restricted freedom and a compromised justice system. It will extinguish the dream of Jews all over the world that they, too, can choose to live as free people in their own land."

As olim and olot from the four corners of the earth, "we urge you to take a stand now and do whatever is in your power to halt this march of madness! The judicial overhaul legislation must be halted, for the sake of Israel, for the sake of all Israel's citizens regardless of religion, ethnicity, or gender, and for the sake of the Jewish people worldwide," concluded the letter.

Gideon Miller, who was one of the ignatories, is originally from Bulawavo and went to the United States before making aliya in 2001. "I signed the letter because I will add my voice to any effort to stop this abomination. I have also signed letters representing Israeli graduates of my graduate school – which is the same one Bibi [Netanyahu] went to - and representing groups of concerned members of the high-tech sector.

"Why should olim speak up? Everyone who cares about Israel should speak up," he says. "That said, there may be a few things particularly relevant to olim: First, aliya is still a core value in Israel and olim are valued as people who came voluntarily. It's one of the core values being betrayed by this deliberate effort to degrade Israel's democracy and rule of law.

"In addition, there's an unwritten contract that the country we're making aliya to is both Jewish and democratic, as spelled out in the Declaration of Independence, which is our only foundational document. Changing either one of those attributes, which is what the government is trying to do, breaks that contract.

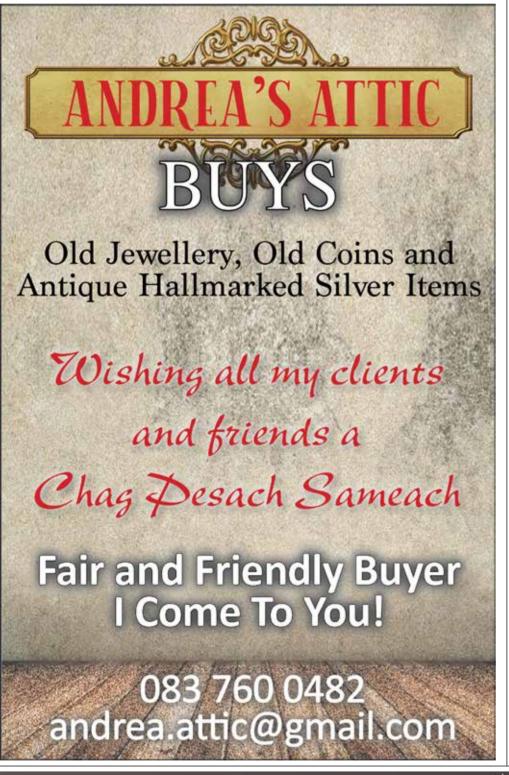
"Israel's democracy isn't only relevant to Israelis but to Jews worldwide," he says. "No Jew who believes in Zionism and a Jewish state wants that state to be an undemocratic embarrassment. And olim represent a unique bridge between Israeli and diaspora Jewish communities."

The organisation plans to host webinars with relevant speakers, and to have shirts made for protests so that they can identify one another. They are in contact with other olim organisations and are trying to create a united voice.

"As opposed to people born in Israel, olim have taken an active choice to uproot themselves and move to another country for an ideological reason," says Mirbach. "That makes our voice unique. We came to Israel with the expectation of it being a democratic and better society than the one we left."

He believes this organisation is needed because "a lot of olim don't have enough Hebrew to understand the political landscape, so we can provide a deeper understanding and the tools to be able to argue on the issue and not feel left out of everything that is happening in the country."

He decided to join the steering committee because "I felt that I wouldn't be lost in a sea of activism, and my contribution could be greater. After living Israel for 41 years, volunteering in the army and a combat unit, fighting in the First Lebanon War, serving in miluim [reserve duty for five extra years after retiring age, these laws that will transform Israel into an illiberal tyranny is like a spit in my face."





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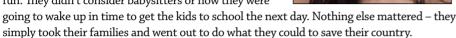
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## For the love of Israel

here in the world do people drop everything they are doing on a school or work night and spontaneously go out in their hundreds of thousands to protest the firing of a minister?

This is what happened on Sunday night, 26 March, in Israel when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fired his fellow-Likudnik, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, for publicly calling on the government not to proceed with the controversial overhaul of the judiciary.

For the protesters, whose numbers were believed to be somewhere around 600 000, this was no evening of fun. They didn't consider babysitters or how they were



For those in South Africa who still believe this is an issue of the political left and right, this was dispelled when Likudniks in their numbers joined all the others in protesting what many believe has the potential to destroy Israel.

This protest – and all those of the past few months – was about Israelis loving their country so much, they refuse to allow politicians to damage its integrity to further their own agenda.

Israelis may have tough exteriors, but they are passionate about their country. They will do what needs to be done to avoid harming their home.

On Monday, the country came to a total standstill. The airport came to a grinding halt. Shopping centres were closed. Schools and business didn't open.

Even President Isaac Herzog publicly called on Netanyahu to stop the legal-reform process, saying, "The eyes of the whole world are on you. For the sake of the unity of Israelis, for the sake of committed responsibility, I call on you to halt the legislative procedure immediately."

A Channel 12 TV opinion poll found that 63% of Israelis – including 58% of Likud voters - were against Netanyahu firing Gallant. Similar numbers supported the halting of the reforms. The poll also found that the Netanyahu coalition would lose if an election were held

I believe another election is what's needed. I know Israelis are sick and tired of elections, having had five between April 2019 and December 2022. However, right now, many would happily go to the polls to change the government they have.

I don't have a crystal ball, nor am I a political expert, but I think Gallant is the first of the Likudniks to break ranks from what has become a far-right government. I believe many more will follow to collapse the government and they will reform as a party without Netanyahu.

Time will tell.

Suffice to say, as much as it has been hard to witness what has been happening in Israel and tough for Israelis to experience, I take my hat off to them for caring enough not to accept what they believe is unacceptable. Kol hakavod!

There was no complaining and whingeing at home while they watch their favourite Netflix series on television on Saturday nights. If they weren't happy with what was happening in government, each one of them took it upon themselves to go out and protest. And they didn't do it one night and then collapse in the knowledge that they had done something. No, when they saw that no change was wrought, they went back out week after week.

They had no problem with bringing the country to a complete standstill to get Netanyahu to back down. And, miraculously, back down he did – albeit tentatively and not permanently.

I have no doubt that should Netanyahu get back on track with his plans, the country will again be brought to a standstill to remind the government whom it serves.

South Africans have a lot to learn from Israelis in what to do to get the government to put its people first. For 15 years, we have watched load shedding become more and more of a problem. We watched as our government corruptly used taxpayers' money to line its pockets, and we complained and whinged.

We, too, should make our voices heard. We also love our country, but I believe we have more fear than determination. We have more differences than similarities, and we don't know how to talk to one another.

So, we watched as the Economic Freedom Fighters took to the streets, and worried. Not that I'm suggesting that we work with Julius Malema and his cronies, who apparently see us only as white monopoly capital. But there is a majority of South Africans who feel the same way we do and want to heal our land. We, too, need to mal our unified voice heard.

#### Myrna Rosen

As we finish our Pesach edition, I want to say farewell to a woman I have never met, but has been a part of my life through her recipes. Myrna Rosen passed away this week. For most of us in the community, her name is synonymous with delicious (mostly Jewish) food and recipes.

My late mother gave me The New Myrna Rosen Cookbook when I moved into my first home on my own. I won't tell you how far back that was, but it was the very first cookbook I owned, and I cherished it. I still have it with an inscription in the front cover from my mom.

My family is known for the delicious cheesecake we bake – we all have the recipe. I only recently discovered after enjoying the kudos I got for baking it for years that it was a Myrna Rosen recipe. So many of her recipes have become staples in our community and have been shared far and wide. They will continue to do so.

Rosen will live forever in the delicious recipes she gave us, many of which we will be using for Pesach this year. We wish her family "a long life"!

#### Enjoy our special bumper Pesach edition, and chag Pesach sameach! **Peta Krost** Editor

Our next edition will be on 20 April 2023.

## Torn apart, but still waving the flag

n Sunday evening, I was having dinner with friends in Tel Aviv during my short business trip to Israel. Obviously we discussed the judicial overhaul because everywhere I went on my visit, the only issue people discussed was the situation, even those who usually couldn't care less about politics.

It's not "another" Israeli dispute, it's a coming tsunami. While eating, a breaking news update informed us about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu firing our defence minister, Yoav Gallant, after he publicly shared his concerns, what he believes to be threats to Israel's national security, and asked that the government slow the legislation process.

For the first time in my life, I felt I had to go, now, outside to shout. I had this bizarre, instantaneous feeling that our country was being torn apart.

Over the past few weeks, we have had tons of wellorganised demonstrations, but my move and that of my friends and fellow Israelis was completely spontaneous and unplanned.

We walked through Tel Aviv streets, and thousands gathered from each corner. Like currents that fed a stream. With a blue and white flag or a sign people had hurriedly improvised. "You took me out of bed!" was the funniest of

But there was authentic anger and fear in the air. That night, we literally cried for our beloved country. I had tears in my eyes, joining a river of people marching with no instructions to the Ayalon Highway. Tens of thousands.

Like me, probably for the first time in their life, they were violating a law, standing there in the middle of a road shouting, "If there's no equality - we will block Ayalon! You messed with the wrong generation!" It rhymes in Hebrew.

Midnight arrived, and on the WhatsApp groups there were reports of protests at dozens and dozens of junctions across the country. There were pictures and updates of all my friends who took to the streets en masse.

In the south, my cousin was arrested by the police for blocking a junction near Sapir College in the Negev. From my hometown of Kfar Saba, I received a photo of friends - for most of them it was their first act against judicial reform, which they supported in principle.

They, too, couldn't go to sleep that night without standing up against the destruction of Israel and creation of a dictatorship. These were historic moments. I wrote a message to my wife and kids in South Africa, "I went out to save our homeland, our future, our democracy," and I really believed I did.

Our strong start-up nation and the good old Israeli kibbutz system, this melting pot, and the great Israel

ZVIKA (BIKO) ARRAN

criminal defendant who simply wants to control the judiciary and legal advisors, as well as satisfy his only potential coalition members, extremists. Bibi, who ideologically used to be the big protector and saviour of the judiciary. Now the opportunist has different calculations and strategies.

But the Israelis who filled the streets didn't do it just because of the legal system or because they were against Bibi. Those in the streets were the high-tech taxpayers, active IDF reservists, doctors, lawyers, women, and LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people. They are "the serving elite" who still represent the majority of the society and feel like they're losing control to others who sincerely threaten the open, democratic, free, pluralistic Israel they know and want.

A few years before it's too late demography-wise, the clash we experience is an uprising of the liberal camp. It's not "left" or "right" anymore on the political spectrum but democrats versus nationalists. That's the reason the polls showed low backing from the public for the reform plan, although this coalition holds a solid majority in parliament.

This week, at the last minute, the legislation was frozen and a civil war postponed. Israeli President Isaac Herzog (holding a symbolic role only in Israel) begged again and again over the past three months to hold talks before steamrolling massive changes to the very foundations of Israel.

Herzog is now hosting the formal negotiations, but only after Israel has already paid an unnecessary price while Bibi insisted that he wouldn't stop. The economy has been hurt. The trust and image in global markets and among our allies and enemies has been severely damaged. And the main cost: internal social rupture.

It's not too late to redesign Israeli democracy and adjust it and keep it liberal, but include the growing portion of haredi, religious, and Arab populations. But when you want to set new "rules for the game", it can't be through "the winner takes it all". We have to build a new consensus in order to change a system.

The clash started by introducing a "judicial reform", but there's no place for a limited compromise anymore. The only solution is via a larger package deal, maybe finalising the foundations we have of a Constitution. We should look at the idea of judicial reform, balancing relations between the different branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) of government in Israel, and a Bill of Rights. This way, each side will gain something.

We'll find out fast if there's goodwill in the negotiation room. Because if one side insists on taking advantage of its accidental majority in the Knesset in order to force us to

> become Hungary Turkey or South African apartheid regimes, the masses will fight. Literally.

The vast majority of Israelis - many of them voted for this coalition - prefer the free, inclusive, diverse, and prosperous Israel.



Zvika (Biko) Arran protesting in Tel Aviv on 26 March 2023

Defense Forces (IDF) narrative we keep telling ourselves isn't relevant anymore. Internal cohesion in our country is our biggest challenge, not Iran or Hamas.

And you know it already, because during our shlichut to the Jewish community in South Africa, I wrote on the pages of the SA Jewish Report, and repeated it again and again in every conversation I held. No Jewish sovereignty has reached its 80th independence day, and this is purely due to a domestic (internal) collapse.

This crisis emerged recently in Israel through a unique coalition of interests of injustice: haredim – the ultra-Orthodox – who don't want the legal system to intervene with their extra rights and budgets. They feel no obligation to Israeli society, such as the need to join the army or teach their kids maths or English. The second group is made up of some Messianic settlers who want legal approval for Jewish supremacy all over our promised land. The third tiny group, with many "hitchhikers", is a bunch of true ideologues who support the illiberal model of Hungary and Poland.

Ah, and there's another partner to this hostile coup: a

and turn this clash into an opportunity for a "constitutional moment"? Maybe. I still have hope, especially after the massive, creative, amazing civic awakening in the past few weeks. Unfortunately, I doubt if Netanyahu can rise above his "survival mode". Let us pray Bibi won't be a modern arrogant King Rehoboam who split our ancient Kingdom of Solomon into Israel and Judah.

We're heading for our Pesach holiday and the national days of remembrance and independence. From slavery to freedom and the birth of a nation. From Holocaust to revival and shivat Zion (return to Israel).

This is the most sacred times for Israelis, to commemorate our sacrifices and celebrate our miraculous achievements. For the first time ever, Israelis are looking back at those days with suspicion and hostility to each other. But at least they still bring to each rival demonstration the same blue and white flag.

• Zvika (Biko) Arran is a publicist, social entrepreneur, lawyer, and advisor to philanthropists. He currently lives in Johannesburg with his wife and four sons.

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## Israel's days of turmoil

"Unity is more important than any legislation. Such legislation should come to an immediate halt. We must stand as one nation for Israel's 75th year of independence as a Jewish, democratic, free, and liberal state," said Major General (Res) Doron Almog, the chairperson of the Jewish Agency earlier this week. Almog was the latest in a growing chorus of voices in Israel warning about the effects the proposed judicial reforms are having on Israel's society. As Israel approaches 75 years of independence, many are asking what kind of Israel it will be.

Israel is having an unprecedented moment in its history and is poised on a delicate precipice. The chasms which have dogged Israeli society for decades are fast becoming canyons, dragging diaspora communities in as the issue of proposed judicial overhauls looms.

I have covered and explained Israel for two decades and lived here for 12 years, and I have never seen events as extraordinary as we witnessed this past week. Antioverhaul protests over the past 12 weeks have become progressively larger and diverse in participation - a reality many don't want to accept, preferring to see this as a leftversus-right issue.

Accusations of "unwillingness to accept election results" are also pervasive. It negates any agency that Israelis on both sides of the argument should be free to have, and certainly doesn't represent the facts on the

In the wake of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's



firing of Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, which many Israelis viewed as a step too far, hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets in protest. From Eilat in the south to Haifa in the north, Israelis were furious about the firing of Gallant, calling for a halt to the overhaul because it poses a significant threat to national security. The Histadrut, Israel's largest labour union, called for a general strike. "We're all worried about Israel's fate," Histadrut Chairperson Arnon Bar-David said. "Together, we say, 'Enough!'

"We have lost our way - this isn't about left or right," the union head said. "We can no longer polarise the nation. I did everything I could over the past weeks to stop the situation," Bar-David said, pointing out that his efforts had been in vain.

"We're joining hands to shut down the state of Israel,"

he declared. "The malls and the factories will close." The airport shut down, flights were grounded, hospitals, malls, businesses started to close in quick succession like dominoes. Israel had shut down.

A strike of this magnitude coupled with growing protests was unprecedented. It was an extraordinary moment in Israel's history.

Hours after news broke that he would be making an announcement, the prime minister finally addressed the nation. He had reached an agreement with his coalition partners to pause the proposed reforms until the start of the next sitting of the

Knesset in May. He had guaranteed Itamar Ben Gvir control of a new guard under his national security ministry. Is this the wisest choice, given Ben Gvir's history of inflammatory comments and his recent issues with the Israeli Police, whom he criticised for not taking harsh enough action against protesters?

Netanyahu's speech to the Israeli people was a missed opportunity to unify a deeply divided country. It was a chance to leave behind the deeply divisive rhetoric blaming elements of society including the media and referencing anarchists. This is unhelpful, given extremist elements like La Familia, who called on some supporters to take up arms - "tractors, guns, knives" - and attack antigovernment protesters.

To his credit, Netanyahu ended his address by saying that the upcoming national holidays and Passover

would be celebrated in the spirit of togetherness.

As the dust settles and all parties start the difficult task of negotiating a way forward, it's time to count the costs. Israel today is bruised and divided. Netanyahu's task is to find a way to unify his people. It's time to make good on his promise to be "a prime minister for all of Israel's

Polls conducted after the announcement to pause the reforms show a marked decrease in support for the coalition. National Unity leader Benny Gantz has experienced a significant increase in support. Perhaps the clue is the name of his party - National Unity. Gantz, who many had written off as politically naïve and lacking the skills to take on a seasoned politician like Netanyahu, has shown that rare quality needed to lead effectively statesmanship.

In a few weeks' time, Israelis will celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. This is a time to reflect on the miracle of our independence; and it's no coincidence that it follows Yom Hazikaron, when we remember the price we paid to live as a free people in our ancient, historical homeland. Perhaps we need to be reminded of the sacrifices made and the miracle that we have, lest we head down a path we can never return from.

 Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.

## Pretoria's Putin headache

outh Africa faces a political headache in August, when the country will host the summit of the BRICS - the club comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa in Durban. As things stand, if Russian President Vladimir Putin attends, South Africa would be legally obliged to arrest him and hand him over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges that amount to child trafficking from Ukraine. Pretoria has been down this road before. In 2015, it defied the ICC and its own courts by not nabbing Sudan's then president, Omar al-Bashir, on South African soil. So, what might it do this time?

On 17 March, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Putin and Russia's commissioner for children's rights, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, for alleged war crimes in Ukraine since February 2022 involving the illegal deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia. Critics charge that this indictment is an inherently political move that may do more harm than good. It has little chance of being enforced, although it may curtail Putin's travel plans. It's mainly of symbolic value, a rejection of Russian atrocities committed in

The ICC has long been accused of bias (mainly against Africa), blindness to Western crimes, and politicisation. The United Nations Security Council can refer cases to the ICC, even if some of its members - including China, Russia and the United States - aren't themselves ICC state parties. Neither is Ukraine, which makes the current charges a little unusual.

South Africa was one of the original signatories that established the ICC under the Rome Statute in 1998. The court issued arrest warrants in 2009 and 2010 for Al-Bashir for alleged war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur. Judge Richard Goldstone argued in the Daily Maverick that former South African President Jacob Zuma "unlawfully embarrassed" the country by inviting Al-Bashir to attend the African Union Summit in Sandton in 2015. Goldstone said "South Africa was in clear contravention of its international-law obligations" by inviting and then not arresting Al-Bashir, and sneaking him out of the country from a military base in defiance of a court order.

Pretoria faced withering criticism, and the African National Congress (ANC) threatened to withdraw from the ICC. It reversed this decision in 2002. South Africa remains an ICC signatory and is thus bound by its procedures, international law, and South African law.

Goldstone said that "under no circumstances" should South Africa invite Putin to attend the BRICS summit in the first place. If he did come, under international and South African law, Pretoria would be obliged to arrest Putin.

South African minister of international relations and cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, confirmed that Putin had already been invited to the 15th BRICS summit on 24 August. She railed against the double standards of the ICC for not charging Western leaders. The leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters, Julius Malema, said, "If need be, we will go and fetch [Putin] from the airport to his meeting, he will address, finish all his meetings, we will take him back to the airport. We are not going to be told by these hypocrites of the ICC who know the real violators of human rights, who know the murders of this world."

According to reports, the South African government is seeking legal advice and "engaging with stakeholders". As I see it, it has several options. First, it could hold an online summit, obviating the need for any heads of state to travel to the country. This may be seen as Pretoria buckling to Western pressure, and is therefore unlikely. Putin could spare South Africa's blushes by staying away, but that's not his style. He doesn't care about South Africa's dilemma. Second, South Africa could give up the right to hold the summit and shift it to one of the other BRICS (or another state), and make it their problem. It's dubious to think South Africa would easily surrender the prestige of hosting the summit that comes around every five years. Third, it could seek exemption from prosecution from the ICC for sitting heads of state - an argument it advanced in the case of Al-Bashir. Fourth, it could brazenly defy the ICC and South African law and allow Putin to come and go unencumbered. This would fuel criticism of South Africa as a state with scant respect for the rule of law, where a culture of impunity is pervasive. Fifth, it could arrest Putin and hand him over to the ICC - an extremely unlikely outcome. Sixth, South Africa could revive the ANC's bid to withdraw from the ICC, although it would still be obligated to nab Putin as it was still a member when the warrant of arrest was issued.

Civil society groups are expected to mount legal challenges if Putin is invited to South Africa. The issue is sure to detract from South Africa's hosting of the BRICS, and overshadow other issues. Asking for consistency and morality in South Africa's

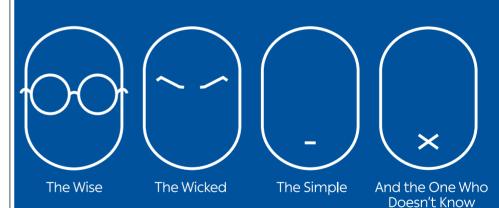
foreign policy seems like a stretch too far. Pretoria seems ready to protect the Russian president, come what may, further damaging its claims to uphold human rights.

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

Mhy is this night different from all the other nights on this night,

we are all reclining, we are all enjoying

the Seder together in the holy land.



## **Happy Passover!**

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How to Ask

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## Brave teenager 'shows up for life' after spinal cord injury

**NICOLA MILTZ** 

ohannesburg teenager Isaac Moritz was on a family holiday in Cape Town in December 2021 when his life changed forever.

He followed his friends into the icy Atlantic Ocean on Clifton 2nd beach to try catch a wave, and slammed headfirst into a sandbank, breaking his neck on impact. A severe spinal cord injury rendered him paralysed from the neck down.

He remembers it like yesterday.

"I never lost consciousness," he told the SA Jewish Report this week.

Earlier that day, he had been at the Waterfront on a sailing boat. "I was having fun and went on a scooter around Sea Point, and then went to meet my brother and friends at the beach," he said.

It was the day before Christmas, sunny and hot, with happy people socialising at a distance in the open air after months of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

All this came to an abrupt halt as scenes of pandemonium ensued in a bid to save the once sporty and active, happy-go-lucky teenager's

"I couldn't move, I thought I was going to die," said Isaac, 16, recalling the tragic, life-altering

"I remember being under water, but I couldn't move. I couldn't feel anything. I saw legs and swimming shorts and tried in my mind to wave and beg for help," he said.

His panic-stricken friends nearby pulled him to shore, realising he was in obvious distress.

"I kept telling them, 'I can't move, I can't feel anything, help me!" he said.

The following catastrophic moments on that beach, surrounded by dozens of faces staring down at him, lying motionless on the sand, are a blur for the Grade 10 pupil at Yeshiva College. He was literally frozen stiff as the water kept running over him while people rallied and called for help.

Isaac's mother, Merissa, was at the apartment preparing for Shabbos when her son, Michi, 18, called. "I felt the blood drain from my body," she

Flooded with painful memories she tearfully describes the scene as "unfathomable", and remembers feeling physically sick to her

A trained occupational therapist, she knew



instinctively that her boy needed all the help he could get. "I called my husband, Gabriel, to organise a tehillim group and immediately start praying for a miracle," she

"Isaac was hypothermic and couldn't move, he desperately needed an emergency silver blanket to warm him," she said.

Firemen carried him up the famous steep steps where they waited with anguish for the ambulance to arrive. So began Isaac's gruelling months-long journey to wellness and slow recovery.

News spread fast, sending shock waves through the community, shattering holiday vibes as people far and wide prayed for him. "The community sprang into action," said Merissa, setting up multiple tehillim groups, arranging challah bakes and charity drives in Isaac's name.

"Doctors didn't know if he would be able to walk again or what the future would look

since the incident which upended his life and that of his parents, three older brothers, and younger

Isaac spent a week in an induced coma.

"I prayed to let me be able to read his lips when he woke up," said Merissa. He spent another three agonising weeks in intensive care, on life support at the Netcare Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital. This was followed by a dramatic medical airlift to Johannesburg's Netcare Milpark Hospital, where he spent a further six weeks on life support battling septicemia and numerous complications. Once stabilised, Isaac was

moved to the hospital's rehabilitation centre for a further two months. He finally reached home in May last year, where a whole new world of convalescence coupled with ongoing intense multiple therapies and state-of-the-art rehabilitation awaited him.

Today, through sheer determination, resilience, and a strong will to improve, as well as the finest medical care, Isaac is able to walk a few steps by himself – something doctors were doubtful he would be able to.

He can walk "quite far" with assistance, and can move his left hand and arm. He has minimal movement in his right arm, but overall body sensation and muscle tone is improving, albeit slowly, said Merissa, who is his devoted primary caregiver and helps him with things like brushing his teeth, bathing, and getting dressed.

He remains focused on his dream to achieve functional independence in the not-too-distant

After an early morning physiotherapy session, Isaac attends school in a wheelchair for a few hours a day, followed by more therapy.

"I can see I have come a long way, which gives me hope," he said.

> Behind his warm smile and soulful expression lies a world of pain but a steely resolve to "push through the hard moments because tomorrow is a new day with new possibilities".

"I know what my life was before, so it's frustrating to be physically challenged. When I'm having a bad day, I shut everyone out and wait for the moment to pass because there's always an end to it, the sun will come out," he said.

"It's not about the big things," said Merissa. "It's about small moments, and there are many of them each day. We don't talk about his prognosis, we focus on the journey and moving forward," she

The family is forever grateful to "phenomenal" doctors and healthcare professionals, who they believe saved his life. "We have been carried by our faith in Hashem and an extraordinary community of close friends, family, and total

strangers who have given us wings throughout this ordeal," said Merissa.

For three months, all meals were provided including school lunches and toys for Netanya, 6

"People still drop by with sushi and donuts, and do random acts of kindness for Isaac's recovery. We are overwhelmed with gratitude," she said.

Isaac's older brother, Adam, 23, said his brother's journey had touched many people.

"He has no idea of the positive impact he has on so many people. He has pushed me to get into shape and my other brother to start running and participate in the Jerusalem marathon. He inspires all of us to push harder and be the best we can," he said.

A year after the incident, Isaac attended Bnei Akiva camp in Mossel Bay for 10 days, encouraged and assisted by his doctor and confidant, Reuven Jacks, who has attended to him throughout, and his older brother, Avadya,

There wasn't a dry eye in the hall when he delivered a moving speech before the crowded campsite, instantly becoming a symbol of hope.

"Isaac shows up for life. It's tough, but he's determined not to let his accident hold him back from experiencing all that life has to offer," said

In spite of his injury and resultant health conditions, he's dedicated to making a difference in the world by showing that there are infinite possibilities regardless of circumstance.





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## Black Jewish Russian gives prejudice a bad rap

**HEATHER DJUNGA** 

"When I was young, my parents told me, 'Noah, you're black – and you're Jewish. It might not always be easy for you or fair, but you must be proud of who you are."

Wearing a kippah on his head and Magen David on a chain around his neck, United States-born Noah Shufutinsky is proud of his identity as a black Russian Jew. His mother is African American, and his father was a refugee from Soviet Russia.

Shufutinsky, a renowned rap artist who goes by the name of Westside Gravy, was in South Africa as part of a Stand With Us delegation to meet the local community. He was also here to collaborate with local rap artist, Tanaka Jura, in writing and recording a new song speaking against the evils of xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism.

During his visit, the two musicians performed together for the first time in a Rosebank nightclub. Shufutinsky uses the medium of rapping to tell his story and make necessary statements. He said rap music provides a platform for discussion of critical issues affecting society today – the topics no-one wants to talk about.

While in South Africa, he visited the Sharpeville memorial site on Human Rights Day on 21 March. The site commemorates the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960. Shufutinsky was accompanied by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, South African Union of Jewish Students, and the South African Zionist Federation.

"Though each story of racism, hatred, and division plays out differently, I can relate to some of the feelings that apartheid might have caused," said Shufutinsky, who laid down a wreath at the memorial.

Shufutinsky told the SA Jewish Report he had experienced antisemitism and racism from an early age.



I learned that the things that make me different aren't to be hidden but to be proud of.

The first time he had to deal with antisemitism, he was at preschool. He said he told his classmates and teacher that he didn't celebrate a certain holiday because he was Jewish. To this one of the children responded, "Then you're not invited to my birthday party." He said he now understands that this was coming from a child who was only about five years old.

In another instance, when he was on a university campus, a car slowed down next to him as he walked. Someone yelled something at him about him being Jewish from the car's window. He responded by walking up to the car window and asking the people in the car what they had just said to him.



Shufutinsky said he had learned to be proud of his identity, and gave credence to his family and upbringing for the unapologetic and proud public display of his unique cultural heritage.

"It hasn't been much of a struggle to [have a strong sense of] identity because of the household I grew up in. Mom and dad went through a lot of things someone like me might have to go through. My dad was a refugee from the Soviet Union who had to come to America when ostracised for being Jewish. Coming to the United States, he had to deal with being a refugee. My mom's parents had to settle in California from Mississippi, which they left because of racism.

"I've learned when confronted by attitudes of antisemitism or racism to realise that many don't come from a place of hate, but ignorance and misinformation. This is why communication is so important. Music can be used to break down these prejudices and misinformation through storytelling. As a people, we need to tell 'the Jewish story' to others."

He said many people relate to his lyrics. "Those who can't are given a window into my reality through my words."

Shufutinsky wrote lyrics and poems from a young age, and they helped him to make sense of his experiences. "The nature of my dad's work meant that we would move every three years," he said. So he gathered stories and sounds, which have all become a part of his music.

He said he started communicating with Jura, who goes by the name of July56, from across the world through Zoom. Realising they had a message to share and much in common, the two rap artists decided to collaborate to create music which speaks about important societal issues.

Recording together in a studio for the first time was an incredible experience for both artists. "We hadn't heard each other's verses, but when we put them together, they just clicked," said Shufutinsky.

Jura said his parents were from Zimbabwe so he could identify with the challenges of xenophobia and could relate to those at the receiving end of antisemitic gestures. He said of their collaboration, "We bring our unique stories and sounds together. I have African sounds and afro-beats. Noah brings the sounds and melodies of his culture into the mix, and raps in Hebrew."

Jura said he had had a Jewish friend as a child who had a recording studio on his property. "It was from him that I learned about the Jewish culture," he said. "As an example, it was a rule that there was no recording on a Saturday – this was Shabbat."

Jura learned about his friend's identity because he didn't try to hide it. Likewise, Shufutinsky said, "I learned that the things that make me different aren't to be hidden but to be proud of. My parents taught me that my grandparents didn't risk everything for me to be ashamed of who I am."



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**10** SA JEWISH REPORT 30 March – 20 April 2023

## Women work wonders - exhibition charts history of UJW

TALI FEINBERG

hey say that behind every great man is a great woman, but over the past 90 years, the Union of Jewish Woman (UJW) has turned this adage on its head, as epitomised by a new exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum titled Women of Action: A History of the Union of Jewish Women,

which opened on Thursday, 23 March 2023.

"The breadth and depth of the work that these committed women did and still do over generations is jaw-dropping," said exhibition researcher and Cape Town UJW Chairperson Karen Kallmann at the opening. "In every town and hamlet that Jews made their homes, these women made a difference. They built Jewish communities from the bottom up, ensuring that the vulnerable were taken care of. And what really distinguished the UJW was the extent of its outreach work in the broader community."

It's a mission that UJW National President Bev Goldman said had been passed down

through the generations. "I stand here tonight representing the many hundreds of extraordinary women, members, and volunteers dating back to Toni Saphra, who emigrated to South Africa from Germany in 1900 and in 1932, founded the first branch of the UJW in Cape Town."

Kallmann said the UJW saw its work as a vital act of citizenship, referred to the words of Sonia Jacobs in 1949, "We say quite plainly that where we make our permanent home and our living, where we bring up and educate our children, where we subscribe to

the laws and obligations of the country and receive the rights and advantages of citizenship, there we have to honour our obligations as citizens, at the same time reserving our Jewish identity, religion, and way of life. Only on that basis are we entitled to demand and receive equal rights, according to law and without discrimination with every other citizen in the territory."

While these women raised children, were dedicated wives, built Jewish homes, and strengthened Jewish communal institutions, they also doggedly worked to bring "relief, succour, assistance, education, empowerment, entertainment, and much more to hundreds of South Africans of all beliefs and races, in both urban and rural areas, wherever the need was greatest",



said Goldman.

This was especially challenging in the apartheid era, but with stubborn strength and guided by Jewish values, they persisted. Working out of the limelight, they found ways of reaching the most vulnerable across colour lines.

At times, their work was shut down by the apartheid authorities. For example, the government refused to grant a multiracial permit for the UJW's annual orphans' concert in 1966. This concert had been held in the Cape Town City Hall since 1944,

when UJW member Miriam Bloomberg, the wife of then mayor Abe Bloomberg, organised the first concert for 1 500 underprivileged and physically challenged children.

In 1965, the concert was allowed to take place only after a last-minute compromise: the audience had to be racially segregated. UJW members weren't allowed to distribute refreshments to children who weren't white – ironically, those who needed sustenance the most. The next year, the government refused outright for the concert to be held.

In spite of this blow, the UJW found other ways to reach the children who needed it. It instituted early childhood education centres and crèches, and an early school leavers club for teens who had to drop out of school. It also helped teachers and parents upgrade their skills

Hospital visits were undertaken by every UJW branch from the 1940s to at least the 1980s, to both Jewish and non-Jewish patients of all races. UJW also took an active role in patient care. For example, in 1978, the UJW offered an eight-week training course for volunteers at Johannesburg Hospital. Branches also set up feeding schemes at hospitals.

The UJW also made sure that the elderly, infirm, and mentally ill within the Jewish community were well looked after, visiting patients at general and psychiatric hospitals.

Supporting people living with disabilities has always been a key part of the UJW's work. In addition, feeding programmes were conducted across the length and breadth of the country.

As the HIV/Aids pandemic swept like wildfire across the country, the UJW was there, caring for AIDS orphans, assisting the health department with ongoing training for doctors and nurses in anti-retroviral rollout, counselling AIDS patients, and educating young people.

Empowering women has always core to the UJW's mission. Training women in life skills, working

with female prisoners, counselling, and training unemployed women were just some of these initiatives. In more recent years, Mama Flo was founded to find sustainable solutions to "period poverty".

The scourge of gender-based violence continues to be tackled head on by the UJW, especially supporting rape victims, including children, as they navigate the court system or endure hours at police stations.

The UJW has always championed women's

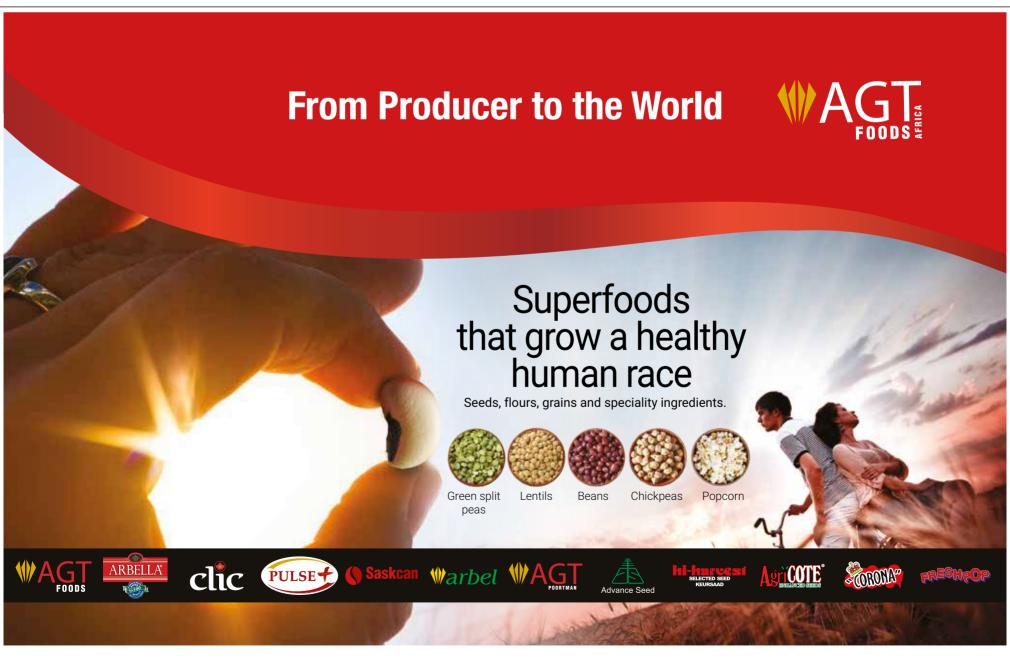
rights, including the right of Jewish women to obtain a Jewish divorce. It also supported refugees, particularly the 1 580 Jewish refugees detained in Mauritius in the 1940s.

A little-known project of the UJW is its support for Jewish conscripts called up to the South African Defence Force. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the UJW provided Pesach and Rosh Hashanah parcels and Shabbat dinners for "the boys on the border".

The UJW supports Israel through various initiatives. Especially in moments of crisis, the UJW has directed donations of clothing and funding to the Jewish state. The organisation worked closely with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, building the first hostel for female students, establishing a laboratory, and setting up a bursary fund for students disabled in the Yom Kippur War. The Hebrew University awarded its prestigious Torch of Learning Award to the UJW in 1975 – the first time the award was given to a South African recipient.

The UJW has long provided adult education for the Jewish community, and is even known for launching the career of the late Barry Ronge. He was so popular as a speaker, that word spread and he was soon headhunted to write a regular column in the *Sunday Times* and to speak in a radio slot.

The vast history and massive impact of the organisation is captured in this inspiring and uplifting exhibition, which is also a "call to action" for Jewish women to continue the trail blazed by previous generations.



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30 March – 20 April 2023 SA JEWISH REPORT 11

## Mzansi Challenge deaf to global condemnation of Israeli exclusion

**NICOLA MILTZ** 

rofessional Israeli rugby player, Ori "Afrika"
Abutbul, who plays for the Tel Aviv Heat (TAH)
rugby team watched the start of the controversial
Mzansi Challenge at the weekend with a "heavy heart".

Like his teammates, the rugby wing was "looking forward" to participating in the rugby tournament, but his hopes were dashed after the South African Rugby Union (SARU) controversially rescinded an earlier invitation to participate, allegedly citing security threats by groups aligned with the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) South Africa.

In spite of a backlash and widespread condemnation locally and abroad for SARU's abrupt, "discriminatory" decision, all efforts to have it reversed appear to have fallen on deaf ears. The competition, which has been beset with a range of problems from the get-go, went ahead at the weekend with the Mexico/United States San Clemente Rhinos taking TAH's place.

The Mzansi Challenge includes teams from Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and six South African provinces. It's the first division of SARU's Currie Cup.

"Obviously I felt disappointed when the competition began. I had a pinch in my heart because I was really looking forward to participating," said Abutbul, who has previously enjoyed playing for a number of local clubs in South Africa.

"For some of us it may have been the pinnacle of our careers because we're from a small rugby nation, and this was a great opportunity. We came close, could even smell it, but then we were pulled out. It's a shame, but it's life. Instead, I tried to watch the matches on the internet in my apartment in Tel Aviv and hope to one day play in South Africa again," he said.

TAH's head coach, Kevin Musikanth, told the SA Jewish Report that he experienced a bittersweet moment when the tournament kicked off without his team's participation.

While flipping through international sports channels,

Musikanth said he took some comfort in seeing several players from his squad playing for numerous other global rugby sides after being snapped up by reputable teams elsewhere when SARU turfed them out.

"I'm proud of what our club has achieved in such a short period of time, which has allowed individual players, mainly our South African players, to be marketable globally," he said.

Two of his top
players, including his
club's captain, played for
Namibia against Border
in the opening match of the
Mzansi Challenge on Saturday,

25 March, while several others are playing for other international teams.

Meanwhile a group of American Jewish organisations have added their voice to the controversy over the exclusion of TAH and its replacement with a club from the US.

The 12 groups – including the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations, and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, as well as others – sent a letter the San Clemente Rhinos and USA Rugby on 24 March protesting the decision of the Rhinos to join the "discriminatory and it hadn't heard from SARU since.

The letter from the US Jewish organisations stated, "The United States is a global leader in sport and the host of the 2031 Rugby World Cup. The participation of the Rhinos in the Mzansi Challenge under these circumstances would undermine the ability of USA Rugby to take its proper role in international sport."

Alyza Lewin, the president of the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, told *The Algemeiner* that last week's letter signed by the 12 Jewish groups is "a remarkable demonstration of unity" by leading organisations that have "swiftly come together to condemn SARU's outrageous discrimination".

"Discrimination has no place anywhere, but particularly not in sport," she said. "At a time of dangerously rising antisemitism, when anti-Jewish bigotry is becoming more and more commonplace and acceptable, it's essential that everyone stand strong in rejecting it."

The Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law, representing TAH, sent a separate letter to the World Rugby Union on 16 March asking the governing body to reverse SARU's actions against TAH and ensure that the team compete in the Mzansi Challenge. Sadly, it wasn't successful.

Others who have asked SARU to reverse its actions against TAH include the South African Zionist Federation, the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), UK Lawyers for Israel, and the Israel-based International Legal Forum. The Israel Rugby Union sent a formal complaint to World Rugby and a New Zealand-based attorney filed a legal complaint with the World Rugby Council about SARU's move. The Israel Rugby Union and TAH have threatened to take legal against SARU. The *SA Jewish Report* and SAFI have formally requested information about SARU's decision in terms of Section 53 of the Promotion of Access to Information Act.

Alexander told the SA Jewish Report that he was unavailable for comment, and that "World Rugby was dealing with the matter".



discrimination against the Tel Aviv side and withdraw from the Mzansi Challenge.
On 3 February, SARU abruptly announced without giving prior notice to TAH, that it was withdrawing its invitation to the Israeli team to compete in the Mzansi Challenge after listening "to the opinions of important stakeholder groups" and opting for the team's exclusion

"to avoid the likelihood of the competition becoming a

source of division", according to SARU President Mark Alexander.

The announcement was made shortly after supporters of the BDS movement against Israel pressured SARU to ban TAH from the Mzansi Challenge, saying the union would "have blood on its hands" if it allowed the "apartheid Israeli team" to compete. The department of sport, arts and culture said on 8 February that it

TAH said SARU didn't consult it prior to its decision,



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## Bullying is systemic and teachers don't get it, teens say

HANNA RESNICK

"At my school, you either fit the mould or you don't. And if you don't fit in, kids will start to exclude you and talk behind your back. It just builds up from there," said a Jewish high school student who agreed to speak out on condition of anonymity.

He was one of a number of Jewish students who came forward to shed light on the issue of bullying that school leadership and parents don't appear to comprehend.

These brave pupils explained that bullying isn't always intentionally targeted at one particular student, but is rather routine behaviour from bullies. "Often kids will see someone 'less popular' and start nudging each other and giggling, just so they have something to talk about," said one of the students. "It's almost like they need to use other people just to make conversation".

Another said, "Our school has a zero-tolerance policy to bullying, but that doesn't really mean they can stop bullying from happening. What happens is if something major has happened relating to bullying, we'll have some sort of talk at school, but most kids don't take these talks to heart."

These scholars explain that they generally don't report bullying to school staff because that "a lot of kids feel that the social workers don't care that much, and sometimes going to them makes the situation worse.

"They don't feel like it's a safe enough environment, and are worried that others may find out they have gone for help."

One of the teens said, "I don't really know if people are comfortable going and telling teachers unless they have a special connection with a certain teacher and they trust enough to know that they won't tell anyone."

Many of the students believe that there isn't enough practical intervention when issues are reported. "They speak to you about your feelings, but they can't fix the problem because they're also thinking about the other child's feelings. But when you're actually being bullied, it often feels like nobody believes you."

Social media allows bullying that begins at school to become inescapable. "It's different from when our parents were younger. Nowadays, it's not like you get picked on at school but you're safe at home. It never goes away. When you're being bullied at school, you can also be bullied at home. It's constant. Our phones follow us everywhere, and so much bullying takes place on social media. There's no safe space for us anymore."

Additionally, bullying isn't typically happening in isolated cases with a handful of students. It seems that some schools have a systemic problem that isn't being solved but is being swept under the rug.

"I don't think there's an easy solution because you can't really change the perspectives and ways of all of these students. But teachers need to be a lot more aware of what's happening so that they can intervene when something's wrong," said a student.

Another believes that it all stems from a culture of entitlement. "There's a lot of entitlement in students and teachers at my school, and there isn't much done about it. Sometimes bullying even takes place in the classroom, and teachers and staff participate in the bullying and take advantage of their power over students." This is particularly prevalent in marginalised groups. "These issues are never really dealt with, just avoided," they said.

They also explained some of the nuances in the kind of bullying that high school students experience. "Back in primary school there was more 'normal' bullying in the sense of, 'You're different so I'm going to tease you'. In high school, it's more like rumours and snide comments and gossip, which is arguably worse," said one of the teens.

Another said, "In the senior grades, students are old enough to have the subtlety and tact not to bully someone outright, or to have plausible deniability when they do." Most of the teens the SA Jewish Report spoke to believe that often "the school is too scared to do anything", and problems begin to snowball from there.

They also feel that teachers should be more responsible for the well-being of students when there's an obvious issue in their classrooms. "If they hear nasty rumours or see a kid that's taking strain, they should do something about it. Don't just bring it up in the staff meeting, ask the kid if they're okay, if something needs to be reported." Teachers should also have sensitivity training to understand the issues that students face today.

One teenage girl decided to take matters into her own

hands and stand up to her bully when she was excluded from her group of friends. She said, "I always knew that my morals and values were different to theirs, but I wasn't really going to do anything about it". She discovered that these "friends" had created a

She discovered that these "friends" had created a separate WhatsApp group that they were communicating on for months, one that excluded her. "It was so much more than a WhatsApp group. They were slowly pushing me away.

"I didn't think too much about it at first," she said, but when she eventually confronted the admin of the group about it, she was permanently kicked out of the friendship group.

"The worst part is that my best friend stood behind her [the admin bully] and said nothing. At that point, I wondered if she was ever actually a true friend." Having confronted the bullies, she was able to regain her power, put this group of so-called friends behind her, and go on to make new friends.

The student approached the social worker, who was understanding, but the student didn't feel that there was anything more that could be done. "In high school, it's different," she said. "It's not like I want the school to call in my parents or anything."

The student went on to find people who were more accepting. "I was lucky to be able to stand up to the person because a lot of people can't. I was blessed to be able to understand that that's not the way I should be treated," she said. "Looking back at that group, everyone is just so fake and toxic. And those who are still being bullied won't speak up or do anything about it. I know that a lot of them wish that they could get out of that situation and that they would be so much happier, but they won't do it. Because in high school, popularity is everything."

Many students who have experienced bullying find that the only way to solve the situation is to move schools. One student who made the brave decision to change schools this year described how bullying made them feel totally isolated in their previous school. "I had been friends with a particular group of people for the whole of primary school. However, in high school, things seemed to shift and I felt like they were purposefully trying to exclude me. Sitting in a different area without telling me, not inviting me to parties, all that kind of thing."

After being excluded for quite some time, the student said that their friends began making more pointed attacks. "At one point, one of them told me that I was 'invisible', right to my face, which is arguably the worst thing you can say to someone who already feels worthless and small." What made things worse for the student was the way the bullying was dealt with. "The social worker advised that being separated from this group, being in a separate venue for assessments and speeches, and spending time alone in her office would help to ease my anxiety. But all that did was push me further away from my entire grade and make me feel like my only option was to leave.

"I remember walking through the school on my last day and feeling like a ghost, as if I was already gone and nobody cared. I just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible." The student has since settled into a new school and found friends who are more welcoming. "I guess I'm kind of thankful to those people for teaching me how friends shouldn't act," the student said.



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**14** SA JEWISH REPORT 30 March - 20 April 2023

## The real-life pitfalls of 'selfie-esteem' people making unkind comments on social

ur carefully curated social media pages complete with idyllic selfies and perfect posts can never portray the reality of the inevitable struggles we all face. With our lives increasingly dominated by social media and the way we and others are portrayed online, experts are raising questions about its impact on our mental health.

With a recent study by the Child Mind Institute revealing that women and teen girls take seven selfies before feeling they have captured one "good enough", it's clear that our preoccupation with how others perceive us breeds unattainable beauty standards, especially in the age of social media. "It speaks so strongly to our society's need for women to impress as perfect," says Pam Tudin. While they may not confront impossible beauty standards, men are aren't immune to social media

Tudin is a clinical psychologist and the co-founder of Klikd, which helps parents, teens, and tweens use social media safely. Through its app, Klikd also assists teens to understand why they are posting selfies, and upskills them to manage the feelings that come with online comparison.

"Most selfies are about putting an image of ourselves in the world that doesn't reflect the full truth," Tudin says, discussing the rising selfie obsession amongst teens and adults. "Filters can be fun, but mostly we use them to hide what we regard as imperfections. Simply put, we use them to make us look better than we

are IRL [in real life]. This is fabulous if you never have to step out of your house to engage the real world but, if by night we're posting perfection and by day we have to show up at school, at work, on blind dates, or for a sweaty hockey practice, life can get

It creates pressure to maintain an online illusion that can never be equalled offline. "This kind of online comparison, over time, makes for anxiety and a fear of engaging in real-world moments," she says. "Simple everyday acts, like meeting someone in person for a freezo become stressful instead of being normal, fun moments."

Though Tudin argues that posting selfies isn't inherently bad, we need to be aware of the possible dangers that come with how we react to the feedback we receive. "When we use a selfie to start chasing the likes to build our

self-esteem, we're heading for psychological trouble," she warns.

Obsessing over how we're perceived online and feeding off such external validation - or lack thereof - can be detrimental to our self-esteem, says clinical psychologist Romi Tollman, reflecting on the dangers of social media as a whole. "In the age of social media, our self-worth has unfortunately become tied in to the direct feedback we get from the content we choose to place online." When we're online, we can better control how we present ourselves and our lives as opposed to being in a reallife, in-person setting.

"To many, honing in on this choice may feel empowering, but to others, it poses a daily struggle to keep up with the perceived demands of what content is and isn't 'worthy'," Tollman says. "Likes, views, and followers are used as a measuring tool that seems to dictate how good or bad we should feel about ourselves, which has an intrinsic impact on self-esteem. Social media continues to create barriers for people to build their self-esteem up from the insideout as opposed to the outside-in, which is fragile and inconsistent."

As a working mom, wife, and someone in the public eye, former Mrs SA contestant, Kerri Marks, has encountered such challenges first-hand. Yet through experience, she's learned to keep things in perspective. She stresses the need to keep checking in with yourself about how people respond to you on social media, and how you respond to them. "It's important to keep in mind that your self-worth isn't measurable online and doesn't exist relative heard or seen," she says. "The opinions of others, whether good or bad, always have an effect on our well-being. You beat yourself up, constantly toying with the possibility that that person has a point."



An important life lesson, Marks says, is not to take such things too personally. Posting insulting comments says much more about the troll than it does about the person they're attacking.

Yet it's not always easy to rationalise things in this way. Though adults struggle who constantly share idyllic images online can also evoke feelings of jealousy and inadequacy. Yet, the illusion doesn't always reflect the reality. As Tudin says, "Fifty selfies in an aquamarine ocean in Vietnam don't reflect the inner struggle someone

In addition,

following people

media isn't just awful to experience, it's

all the time hearing only the negative, internalising every drop of unkindness."

hard to undo. I watch teens in my practice

endless." In fact, says image consultant and hypnotherapist Tanya Sachs, constantly portraying perfection on social media can be damaging

might be having with

depression, anxiety,

break-ups, financial

strain - the list is

in and of itself. "Influencers who have accumulated strong Instagram followings, for example, have often lost their sense of who they really are." Yet, others maintain a clear distinction between their authentic self and the image they portray.

Reminding ourselves of times that we've posted seemingly perfect images while facing inner turmoil can help keep things in perspective and boost awareness of what lies beneath a perfect exterior, Tollman says. "These platforms have been built to provide an escape from reality, whether it's destructive to our psyche or not." That's why it's important to be mindful about curating the content we consume to eliminate toxicity. "While you scroll through and post on social media possibly to escape your reality, remain aware that others are doing the same," she

That's not to say that all pictures and posts are misleading or psychologically damaging. There's nothing wrong with embracing who you are but making the best of what you have, says Sachs, especially when it comes to building a business or personal brand in today's world. "Being able to use social media in a healthy way all comes down to your intentions and knowing who you are."



to others," she says.

"I've dealt with so many trolls and people who merely comment for the sake of being

with this too, such behaviour is particularly damaging to teens, says Tudin. "The roller coaster of emotions that comes with

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## Liberating the human spirit

"Freedom is a fragile thing. It must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people." As Jews, these words of Ronald Reagan, delivered at his inaugural address as governor of California in 1967, resonate deeply. We're a nation born in slavery, liberated by G-d.

And the struggle for freedom isn't over,

and certainly not something we can take for granted, as modern autocratic states like Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran demonstrate. On Pesach, we celebrate the gift of political freedom. And we recognise that more than just a natural right, it's a divine gift, one that we would be lost without.

The founding fathers of the

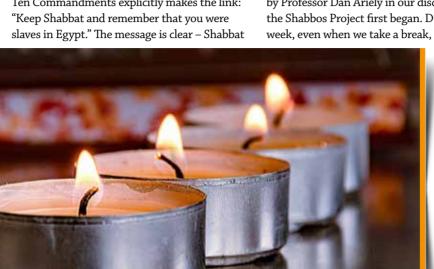
United States understood this. In drafting the US Constitution, the foundation of modern constitutional democracy, as men of faith, they were influenced profoundly by the Exodus, and saw freedom as a right granted by G-d rather than at the behest of any government.

Shabbat is the day of freedom

Political freedom is the cornerstone blessing of post-apartheid South Africa – entrenched by a supreme Constitution, respected by the overwhelming majority of our country's citizens; an unshakeable pillar that has

weathered many political storms over the past three decades.

But freedom is more than something merely enshrined in law. We learn this from the connection between Pesach and Shabbat. The Ten Commandments explicitly makes the link: "Keep Shabbat and remember that you were slaves in Egypt." The message is clear - Shabbat



is a day of freedom. And it teaches us to broaden our understanding of freedom to appreciate that freedom isn't only political – however vital that may be - but personal.

Personal – or emotional – freedom is deeper than not doing work, as we learn from this verse: "Six days you shall labour and accomplish all your work, and the seventh day is Shabbat." Note the implication that you can actually "accomplish all your work" in just six days, which we know is a physical impossibility! The

Midrash explains this verse to mean that when Shabbat arrives, we should feel as if we have finished all our work.

This reveals a profound idea about human psychology, one which was pointed out to me by Professor Dan Ariely in our discussions when the Shabbos Project first began. During the week, even when we take a break, the burden

> of our work still hangs over us. On Shabbat, our mental load is lifted.

There's no pressure to work and do our chores, simply because we aren't allowed to. Only when we put everything aside, at G-d's

instruction, can we actually stop working without any guilt. We feel the calm and peace of mind that comes with knowing we can slow down and relax because our work is done. We're

But Shabbat teaches us that real freedom goes deeper still. There's another kind of burden we carry – our disconnection from meaning. Becoming slaves to ambition, consumerism, and materialism drains our lives of happiness and inner peace. We're so much more than our

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN

jobs and the things we own. Shabbat reminds us that our most important accomplishments cannot be touched, measured, or priced.

Around the Shabbat table we remind ourselves what truly matters - our most precious relationships, our connection to our Creator, our values, our purpose. And that's truly liberating. The most profound human psychological need is to find meaning, and when we lose sight of that, we feel burdened and overwhelmed. The divine soul within each of us drives us to seek meaning and purpose, to live a life that goes beyond mere survival for its own

And so, the path to a more meaningful Pesach experience – to true freedom – runs through Shabbat. When we gather with family and friends at the seder, we thank G-d wholeheartedly for giving us the gift of freedom 3 335 years ago, this year. We tell ourselves and our children that this isn't something to take for granted. As we read the haggadah, we remind ourselves and our children of how G-d liberated us not just physically, but – in taking us directly from Egypt to Sinai – spiritually.

The night is saturated with inspiration and wisdom, with connection to G-d, and to each other. It's a night of resplendent freedom in all its dimensions – political, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. We celebrate and embrace the blessings of freedom given to us by our Creator - overflowing with gratitude for, in the beautifully succinct words of the haggadah, "our redemption and the liberation of our

· Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is the chief rabbi of South Africa.



















## Frogs and darkness the not-so-new normal

OPINION

was about to switch off the radio after the early morning news bulletin when something the presenter said caught my attention. He was about to interview an expert on the energy crisis to explain why there hadn't been load shedding in South Africa for close to 72 hours. Yes, I was hearing correctly: why there hadn't been any outages over the period. I was riveted by the discussion, the various explanations, and the possible conspiracy theories around the availability

 yes availability – of sufficient power for those couple of days.

It was absolutely surreal, borderline Kafkaesque. Is this what we've come to? Is the new normal to sit in the dark? If we get to an intersection and the traffic lights are working, we question why. And if it goes on for too long, we need expert advice on the radio to reassure us and explain!

There's an urban myth about the frog in boiling water. Presumably, if you throw a frog into a pot of scalding water, it will immediately jump out. But if you put the amphibian in a saucepan of tepid water on the stove and heat it gradually by a degree or so a minute, the creature will remain in place, ribbitting the equivalent of "aah" as it enjoys the ever increasing temperatures, until it emits its final croak.

This is apparently untrue. Science tells us that a frog thrown in boiling water would get very badly hurt and possibly die immediately. If the water was heated gradually, the frog would attempt to get out as soon as the temperature was beyond comfort level. Nonetheless, the myth persists. Mainly because it makes for a wonderful metaphor, extensively used by the clergy, economists, and sociologists. Also, I hope, because nobody has tried the experiment at home. Never let the facts get in the way of a wonderful story!

Thus begins the history of the Jewish people as they

first emerged into a nation back in ancient Egypt. At first, conditions were absolutely amazing. The Egyptians treated us with respect, as true VIP guests who had arrived courtesy of the viceroy of the time, Joseph. With time, gradually the situation deteriorated. Feeling threatened by the strangers, the host nation began to show open hostility and xenophobia. By the end of two centuries, we were slaves, fashioning bricks from raw materials to build structures for the Egyptians and

two centuries, we were slaves, fashioning bricks from raw materials to build structures for the Egyptians and

Surreal? Kafkaesque?
Our current exile has lasted

being mercilessly beaten by cruel taskmasters when failing to achieve the expected quota.

When, finally, Moshe arrives with the news of impending redemption, he receives a cool reception. The divine message is clear: "Say, therefore, to the Israelite people, 'I am Hashem. I will free you from the labours of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage." But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they wouldn't listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage." (Exodus 6). Had slavery in Egypt become the new normal?

not a couple of centuries, but a couple of millennia. And the frog in the pot is calling out "aah", enjoying the wonderful bath. There were bad times indeed. Persecutions and pogroms. Forced expulsions and conversions. Mass executions and final solutions. As recently as a couple of generations ago. But in 2023? A significant number of our people have opted to return to our homeland, where our language, faith, and culture prevail. Our communities around the world enjoy political stability and financial prosperity. We assist each other in hard times, and there are plentiful

The Midrash tells us that a fair proportion of the

Israelites in Egypt openly declared their intention to

remain behind when the Exodus occurred. They died

under the cover of the Plague of Darkness (the original

one), and were hastily buried by their brethren before

the Egyptians could witness the indignity (Mekhilta

d'Rabbi Yishmael).

RABBI YOSSI CHAIKIN

chesed (kindness) organisations to support and assist those who need it in every imaginable way. Exile hardly seems the right word to describ

hardly seems the right word to describe our current situation.

In this exile, it's our value system that has become prisoner. Ideas held sacred from time immemorial are being challenged and upended. Nothing is holy any longer, nothing is absolute. Every opinion is valid, and we're all free to define ourselves in any way we choose to identify. Our new "woke" society will cancel anyone who dares to call out that the emperor actually has no clothes. It happened fairly quickly, in our own generation, but slowly enough for the frog to get comfortable in the hot water.

In case we needed to be reminded that we're definitely still in exile, we open our newspapers to read of teams being disinvited from rugby tours and of even more overt hostility towards our brethren in other parts of the world. In our holy land, the one country where it's undoubtedly most difficult to perceive of exile, society is being torn asunder by political differences. Mashiach hasn't quite arrived yet!

Along comes Pesach, and the wonderful seder night. An evening to return to our roots. Not just to tell an ancient story and to reminisce about our redemption long ago, it's a night of discussion about how to integrate those age old and immortal values from 3 300 years ago today, in 2023. It's about refusing the status quo as we reignite our longing for a final redemption.

Jump, frog, jump out, before it's too late! Wishing you *chag Pesach kasher vesameach,* and meaningful, life changing seders.

 Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul, and the chairperson of the South African Rabbinical Association.



# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND THIS HUMAN RIGHTS MONTH AND BEYOND

Chapter 2 of our South African Constitution contains the Bill of Rights, which is the cornerstone of our fledgling democracy. It enshrines the rights of all people living in South Africa and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom among other inalienable rights. However, despite our progressive Constitution and our basic human rights contained therein, much is yet to be done for those rights to be enjoyed and exercised by all citizens.

Our country faces a number of socio-economic challenges, which include high unemployment, poverty, social inequality, and limited access to public services. These difficulties continue to engulf South Africans and have an impact on the quality of life and economy collectively. This is especially true for impoverished and under-resourced communities like Alexandra, Diepsloot, Orange Farm and Mfuleni for example, where most of our work as Afrika Tikkun is carried out. Though many of our beneficiaries lack water and sanitation, proper housing, sufficient food and access to a quality education; in 2022 we were

able to reach 50 373 children and young people in those communities and bridge this gap. In addition, through our 360° Social Support Services, we were also able to serve 1 900 774 meals, empower 305 caregivers and provide support to 235 children with disabilities in homes and our stimulation centres. Notwithstanding the communities and the people that we have been serving for almost three decades, the mammoth task of reaching more people remains.

One of the key features of a developmental state, like ours, is to ensure that all citizens, especially the poor and other vulnerable groups have access to basic services. The Constitution of our country places the responsibility on government to ensure that such services are progressively expanded to all, within the limits of available resources.

Nevertheless, it is in our collective interest to invest in our future and ensure no one is left behind and that we all enjoy the gains of our hard-earned freedom. Join us in our movement towards change and a better life for all.



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## Meeting the Mountain of Darkness

OPINION

"You get two kinds of climbers: those who summit and those who don't." Those words echoed in my head on a vintage bus lurching along the muddy byways of Arusha, Tanzania. A friend had cajoled me into joining the hike we were about to undertake. I agreed, against my better judgement. To train for the trek, I took daily walks through Sandown and read mystical texts about mountains.

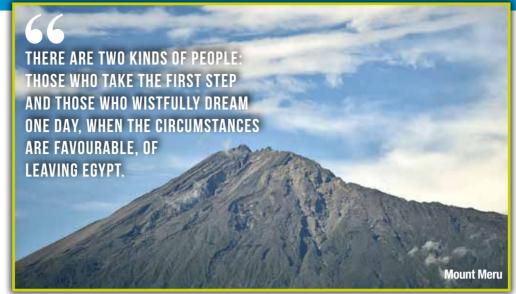
One teaching resonated deeply. You get two kinds of mountains: mountains of light and mountains of darkness. Table Mountain or the Drakensberg – my prior hiking conquests – are mountains of light where you can see the peak from the ground. I was about to face a mountain of darkness, where you cannot see the top until halfway through the hike. Mountains of darkness, the mystics explain, are where real growth happens.

The bus heaved to a stop, and I caught my first glimpse of imposing Mount Meru, Kilimanjaro's younger brother. I gazed upwards, and realised that the top of the mountain was above the clouds – and the clouds were high. At that moment, I started to doubt if I would be the kind of mountain climber who summits

To my surprise and the disbelief of the seasoned climbers from our shul, I stood atop Meru three days later. Every muscle ached, and my chest burned as I struggled to breathe in the thin air. My soul felt alive with the realisation that I had achieved an impossible goal. Nelson Mandela's words, "It's only impossible until it's done," rang true as I stared at the endless crystal blue sky. That hike taught me one of the most important lessons of my life, namely that true growth is to conquer your mountain of darkness, and that's achieved a single step at a time.

Pesach takes me back to the peak of Meru. Much of our group's experience of trudging up the mountain's interminable incline reflects the Pesach story.

Jews don't simply recall the Exodus, we challenge



ourselves to relive it annually at the seder. Pesach is a profound reminder that there are two kinds of Jews – and we want to be the ones who summit.

When you read the Pesach story, you might imagine that every Israelite followed Moses out of slavery. The facts are less encouraging. Only 20% made it out. A full 80% remained behind and perished in Egypt. Shhh! Don't tell anyone. We prefer to keep this uncomfortable information "in the tribe".

Who would have imagined that Moses would get such a poor response to his "Let my people go" pitch? We get that Pharaoh didn't get it, but you'd think the Israelites would have jumped at the chance to follow a leader who turned the Nile to blood and shut off the sun for a week. Moses should have had a cult following.

It's the old 80/20 rule, and it offers a stark insight into Jewish life and personal growth. You get two kinds of Jews: those who leave Egypt and those who don't. Pesach forces us to confront the possibility that we may be the Jew who doesn't make it out, and

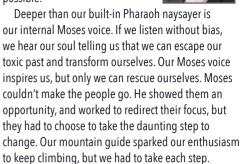
challenges us to become the Jew who does.

Egypt is more than a location; it's a state of being. We live in a personal Egypt where we feel locked into unhealthy mindsets or toxic habits. Every time we try to change or grow, our internal Pharaoh plays a compelling soundtrack of self-doubt. "I'm not strong enough/young enough/disciplined enough/focused enough/driven enough to change." We want to break out and shift gears, but we find it easier to flop back into the well-trodden path of past mistakes.

Two hours away from Meru's summit, our group tried to bribe our guide to take us home and tell everyone we had reached the top. Our guide stunned us with a simple, brutal response, "Don't lose your hope." Right there, on a mountainside, as the sun crept up over Kilimanjaro, our illiterate chaperone was channelling Moses. In Egypt, the thought of escape feels like climbing a mountain of darkness. You don't know where you're headed, nor do you believe you can get there. Then, your guide says, "Don't give up, follow me, one step at a time, and I will take

RABBI ARI SHISHLER

you places you never dreamed possible."



There are two kinds of people: those who take the first step and those who wistfully dream one day, when the circumstances are favourable, of leaving Egypt.

But, there's only one kind of Jew.

Jacob's great-grandchildren in Egypt weren't yet Jewish. They became Jewish only at Sinai, once G-d presented the Torah. The 80% of Israelites who remained in Egypt were biological children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who retained the choice to opt out of their spiritual connection at will.

Most of them chose their uncomfortable comfort zone over the chance to develop spiritually. They never became Jewish.

Every single Jew left Egypt. Had they not left Egypt, they wouldn't have stood at Sinai. Once they reached Sinai, they became Jewish. This is Pesach's lesson. We all leave Egypt eventually. Nobody remains stuck. Even when we're ready to quit on the slope of a mountain of darkness, G-d will send us someone or something to remind us not to lose hope. Pesach reminds us that it's our destiny to escape. Our challenge is to make the inevitable move sooner rather than later.

 Rabbi Ari Shishler is the rabbi at Chabad of Strathavon.



Yom Hashoah 18 April 2023 West Park Cemetery

11:45 - Song by Leigh Nudelman Sussman

A tribute to Ella: a Granddaughter's perspective by Danielle Kaplan

Interlude

12:00 - Traditional ceremony with survivor testimony by Ella Blumenthal.

Commemorating 80 years since the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising





## Up up and away

'm writing this as my plane is rolling down the runway about to soar into the skies and transport me out of my comfort zone. There's music playing in my ears, and I feel a sense of disconnection.

I always marvel, looking out of the plane window, how small and insignificant we really are. Zoomed out, we look like little busy ants, scuttling around, sometimes chasing our own tails, mostly without purpose.

Everyone is rushing somewhere, doing something. We do it all day. Then, we collapse at the end of the day, to simply wake up and press repeat. And then there are times in our lives that we have to change the gears into overdrive ... like now.

Pesach is around the corner, and my mind simply goes into overdrive with all the items I need to prepare. So, out comes the phone, the task manager, the recipe app, the guest list.

And then I stop.

Up here, looking down, can I perhaps entertain the notion that I could do things differently? After all, aren't we supposed to be moving from slavery into freedom, and here I am shackled and enslaved into a frenzied preparation and a hectic yom tov marathon. And that's on top of the pressurised life we're living day to day, carving out a living, raising a family, managing relationships, (and load shedding, water cuts, fibre down) - I guess you get my drift.

So, can I really move from being enslaved to the vicissitudes of life to a state of freedom? Or do I accept the status quo, and just get caught up in the frenzy with every other Joburg Jewish mom about the price of matzah, the lack of mayonnaise, and very real stress of preparing a seder for 35 people.

Up here, on the plane, things are so quiet, serene, relaxed. There are no traffic jams, nowhere to go, nothing to do. The captain manages the navigation, and the crew is looking after all our needs. Sit back, take a deep, long breath, glide through the clouds, and observe the patched earth pass you by.



Shhhhhh . . . . I sense a message that perhaps there's a lesson to be learnt here.

Let's face it, the undeniable truth is that we're all enslaved to the pursuit of success, material wealth, honour, relationships – fill in the blank. Ultimately though, every human being on the planet seeks peace of mind, serenity, fulfilment, love, and purpose.

But we're distracted by our taskmasters constantly, especially one who is unrelenting and unforgiving. And who might that be? Our mind, of course! It's here where we're subjugated constantly to thoughts of fear, anxiety, helplessness, anger, control, low self-esteem, and then it's all translated into the frenetic life we live.

So if one wants to move into a state of freedom, one needs to work at one's core.

Step one: start by letting go of all these destructive thoughts. Let go, and know there's a captain of the world. He's doing all the navigating, and he's also looking after you, sending his "crew" to assist you.

Step two: put yourself into a space of quietness, and

contemplate how G-d has in fact given you so much. Write down a list of things you can be grateful for. Not what you're missing. You actually have whatever you need to live right now, your lack is simply the captain saying you don't need this right now (separate that from what you want).

Step three: seek purpose and direction in your life. In the guiet, ask yourself where you're going.

Did you know that just prior to the redemption in Egypt, we lost 80% of our people in the plaque of darkness! Four-fifths of our nation never made it out of Egypt! Why? The miracles were abounding, great things were happening, and the scent of redemption was in the air. Egypt had almost been brought to her knees, and as they say in South Africa, it was "min dae".

The answer is that for most of our brethren, the only reality they knew was one of slavery and subjugation, and even though they yearned to throw off the shackles of servitude, they were still very much embroiled in their "comfort zone". They simply couldn't let go of

REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILS

their current reality and see a different world, in which we serve a higher being,

not a pharaoh nor ourselves. Or, translated in the language of 2023, could we live in a world that isn't dictated by our bank accounts, our holiday home, or our status. Can we?

Ponder that a while. Up here, it's easy to think and gain some clarity on one's trajectory. It's time to set the compass and change direction this erev

Soon, my plane will be descending to my destination, and I'll join the army of ants again, busy as ever. Except this time, I'll embark knowing that G-d is leading me to where I should be, to accomplish things that need to be done.

While my body will be doing all the work (because, hey, someone has to prepare for Pesach), I'm going to try and keep my mind up there in

a state of peace and tranquillity, knowing that everything has been taken care of.

There's a captain keeping a watchful eye, and I'm going to trust and have faith, knowing that while this world is tempestuous and hard to navigate, I am, in reality, free. Free to serve something greater than me, to be of service to others, and to make this world a better place.

In fact, this Pesach, I'll do it all differently. I'll drink the four wine cups of redemption and throw off my self-limiting thoughts; I'll chew humble pie (matzah); and ask how I can be of service to G-d and others. I'll lean into the true meaning of freedom, and change my reality. Please fasten your seatbelt and prepare the cabin – er myself – for redemption.

Wishing you all a chag kasher vesameach!

• Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah and applies it to contemporary times.



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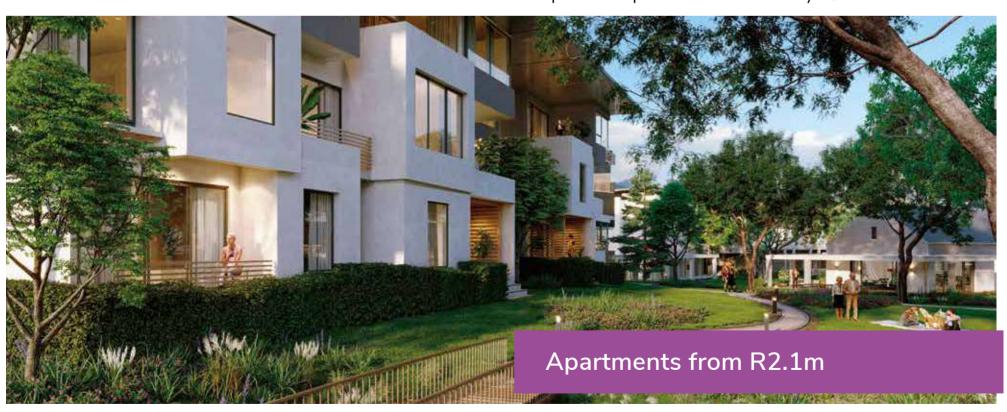




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## Speedy exodus - a uniquely Jewish story

**TALI FEINBERG** 

crucial moment in the Pesach story is when the Israelites are so rushed to leave, their bread doesn't have time to rise. It's emblematic of making decisions on our feet, following our faith, and taking a leap into the unknown. It's a moment that many Jews have experienced in the past and will continue to experience as we find our place in a rapidly changing

When David Akinin was 11 years old, he and his three brothers were briefly kidnapped. "Two men came into our home in Caracas and took us captive. After several hours, we managed to run away." It was a turning point for his family, and soon afterwards, they hurriedly left their home in Venezuela, seeking safety as refugees in the United States. "Our parents left everything behind, packed some bags, and looked for new beginnings, just as their parents did in Morocco and Spain 50 years

At the time, Akinin was one of only a few children to leave from his class of 112 kids at his Jewish school in Venezuela. "We were seen as the crazy ones." Now, 20 years later, about 90% of what was once a thriving Jewish community has left.

Akinin succeeded in America before eventually settling in Namibia, where he thrived. But his home is now South Africa, where he hopes to grow deep roots.

Recently, he, his grandmother, Lucy, her brother, and Akinin's mother and uncle visited the apartment where Lucy grew up in Tetuan, Morocco. "My grandma has been back several times, but some years ago, I knocked on the door of the house where she lived as one of eight siblings and exchanged details with the lady who now stays there. After many years of contact, she hosted us earlier this year." It was a full-circle moment for a family that has often had to flee, but has found new places to call home.



Leaving but keeping our traditions alive is unique to the Jewish people. It's about deciding on a better future for you and your family.

Libah Stein took a chance on a journey and found a sense of solace in the desert. Her life in South Africa had become a struggle

after her mother and grandmother passed away, and she battled to find a job. So when she was given an opportunity to do a Masa teaching programme in the middle of the Negev, she grabbed it.

Her decision was made within a few days, and she told hardly any friends she was

Libah Stein and Anabel Makover in Mitzpe Ramon

Orthodox Jews in suits and flipflops, mixing with windblown hippies – a true mix of people coming together."

The head of her programme, her roommate, and the high school pupils she taught all welcomed her as she slowly discovered who she wanted to be,

> as a human being and a Jew. She immersed herself in this new life, and felt "a connection to my people and my purpose". It was an exercise in discomfort, letting go of luxuries, but also finding everything she really

Mitzpe Ramon in known for its huge crater, the *makhtesh*, and for Stein, this geological formation was an important part of her journey. "People would watch the sunrise or sunset from a wall overlooking the canyon. When I went there, people would say, "Shway shway" (slowly, slowly). It made me realise I could slowly take steps forward."

The silence and majesty of the landscape allowed her to connect with the souls of her mother and grandmother, whose presence felt

closer than

as a Jewish woman. Ultimately that answer came only from my journey, and deciding to return."

Paul Mirbach's idyllic childhood and carefree youth in Bulawayo came to an abrupt end in September 1976. The Zimbabwean (then Rhodesian) government passed a law that all boys aged 16 were required to register for army service.

"The law passed on a Thursday night. The next day, I noticed that almost all my Jewish friends didn't come to school," remembers Mirbach. "That Saturday evening while I was doing my homework, my father asked me how I felt about going to Cape Town to finish school. I thought about it for all of a second,

"The events of the next two days were like a whirlwind. A flurry of phone calls with parents of other children my age was punctuated by hurriedly going to the stores to buy clothes and "getting my papers in order". I remember arriving home after school on Monday with my preliminary O-level results, very proud of my grades, and for the first time in my life, my mother didn't even look at them. She handed me a suitcase. I was still in my school uniform when I boarded the plane."

Mirbach stayed at the Herzlia hostel in Cape Town, where he finished his schooling, became deeply involved in Habonim Dror, and eventually made aliya. He never returned to live in Zimbabwe. But "looking back,

> that period in Cape Town on my own was the seminal period in my

> > personal growth. They were the formative years of my character. I learned to be self-reliant and independent. I learned to think for myself and make responsible decisions.

"I also learned to deal with loneliness. What surprised me was how deeply I felt adrift, without an anchor. The feeling of rootlessness and search for stability seeped deep into my consciousness."

Akinin believes that leaving with just the clothes on your back and hope in your heart doesn't have to be a negative thing. "Leaving but keeping our traditions alive is unique to the Jewish people. It's about deciding on a better future for you and your family. As a Jewish community, we're often first to raise our hands and say that we're going to look for something different, that we won't accept the status quo. We don't leave and say, 'Please help us', we leave and say, 'Let's go rebuild.' It's a form of resilience passed down through the generations and our

going. She packed lightly, got on a plane, and didn't look back. "I never thought of it as an exile or exodus, but looking back, that's what it was," she says. "I took a chance in applying for this programme, and they told me I would be accepted if I took a role in Mitzpe Ramon.

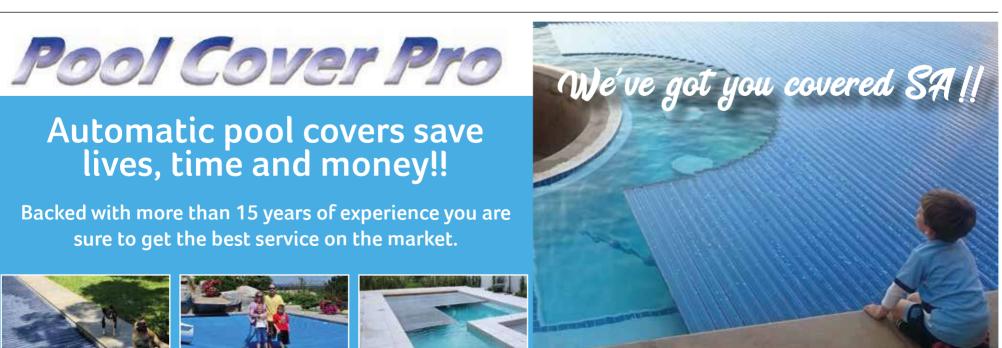
ucy Garzon de Benarroch and her brother Rabbi Baruch Garzon "The desert has a funny way of reflecting on people. Initially, I thought, 'What have I done?' It was so remote - the nearest proper shops were a one-and-a-half-hour bus ride away. Everything was brown. But then you start to see different shades of brown. And you smell the rain. I've never smelled rain like I did in the desert."

Amidst this barren landscape, she was warmly welcomed into a colourful and nurturing community. "There were had back in South Africa. "I had such a fear that if I left South Africa, I would be letting them go. But I found their voices in the desert."

visiting her childhood home in Morocco

Six months after she quietly left Johannesburg, she returned to South Africa with a changed perspective and a new passion for Judaism. "I started to see my purpose

Like the Israelites wandering in the Sinai,



## Mimouna maxes out the blessings

imouna is a Jewish North African, particularly Moroccan, exuberant celebration which begins about two hours after the conclusion of Pesach. It's a feast which is colourful, exotic, and rich in tradition. It's celebrated all over the world wherever there are Moroccan Jews or Jews of Moroccan descent, including the United States, South Africa, and Israel. It's also celebrated by some Ashkenazim who do so primarily out of interest in it as a cultural phenomenon and in Israel, it has spread into mainstream culture from private parties to big communal celebrations.

Its origins are unclear, but it's thought to be a commemoration of the death of Maimonides' father, Rabbi Maimon ben Yosef (the great Jewish philosopher who was an important figure in Moroccan Jewish life and wrote and worked on Jewish-Muslim relations). He's believed to be born or have died on



this day. In fact, it's said that Mimouna has Arabic connections, both in the actual word "Mimouna" and, according to Rabbi Ari Enkin, in the tradition that Muslims would join the celebrations of their Jewish neighbours in Morocco and even supplied the flour used for the specialities of the feast as many Jews had no flour in their homes after Pesach. Mimouna is therefore symbolic of brotherhood and tolerance. In Morocco it also marked the beginning of spring, and thus is also thought to be symbolic of prosperity, fertility, and joy. Others connect it further to the word "emunah" (belief) in the coming of the Messiah.

The atmosphere is festive, and celebrated with family and friends. It's usually an openhouse celebration, filled with colourful foods such as oranges, dates, nuts, raw honey, and mazum which includes six different kinds of jam (that of an etrog, green grape, brinjal, carrots, and others) all of which, according to Gila Elmaleh of Glenhazel, show richness. There are also cookies and petit fours with "coconut, peanuts, and sesame" and brandy and chocolate balls. Other sweetmeats also sometimes served include zaben (white almond nougat), and marozia (fried raisins decorated with nuts) and stuffed dates. According to Elmaleh, there's alcohol and Moroccan music playing softly in the background. "We try to please everyone", she says, so there's also music which the younger generation enjoys. Akiva Glickman of Moshav Aderet in Israel, which is primarily Moroccan, says there are also "fried cakes and desserts". Glickman says the flour used is often from kitnivot flour which the Moroccans use over Pesach. On Elmaleh's Mimouna table,

there were "fish on green leaves and gold rings placed on the table to symbolise wealth and prosperity. There was also mint tea served in a big bronze teapot."

The central food of the Mimouna feast is the moufletta, which is like a thin pancake or crepe (which is nearly see through) made from flour, water, yeast, and oil. It's cooked on a greased pan until golden. It's usually served with honey or jam, and sometimes butter. According to Claudia Rodin's The Book of Jewish Food, the moufletta is accompanied by milk, which symbolises abundance, sweetness, happiness, and Israel, the land of milk and honey. Eating moufletta, she says, "is believed to bring good luck". According to Hodaya Hurwitz (Vaknin) in 2015, the Sephardic community celebrated Mimouna at a resort, and her grandmother and aunt made more than 20kg of Moufletta that

Because so much preparation goes into presenting all this food within two hours of the end of Pesach, each member of the family is given a job to do. Hurwitz says that her task when she was younger was to "set the table and explain to the new guests some of the

> table. I always made sure to invite as many of my South African friends as possible to expose them to what I always felt was one of the most beautiful and powerful nights of the year." Before her grandparents made aliya, their Mimouna celebrations took place in Yeoville, Bellevue, Kew, and Highlands North. Now the celebration has moved to her parent's house in

Elmaleh said when her parents lived in South Africa, her father would sit at the head of the table in the traditional white gown, called the jalabiya, with a purple hat called the tarboosh which is usually a red cap shaped like a flat topped cone with a tassel which hangs from

Glenhazel.

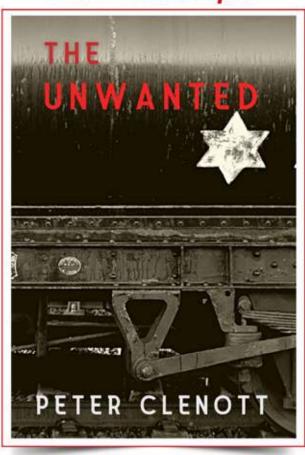
the crown, and mustard or white shoes called babouche, which are flat Moroccan slippers. Her mother wore a traditional kaftan with a gold belt. Guests, according to Glickman, aren't expected to wear traditional dress and usually dress casually (but respectfully).

Hurwitz says her Sephardi grandfather would bless everyone. "It was a traditional blessing called 'Tirbechu ve tisadu' informally translated as 'You should be blessed and successful'. Each person would get their moufletta and a specific brocha for what they needed in their lives 'for example parnosa [financial sustenance], children, marriage', and so forth." Her grandfather would tightly hold the hands of the person he was blessing. This, says Hurwitz, created a mystical and powerful atmosphere. It felt as if "he was adding his own secret blessings for us based on what he thought we needed". One year, the Moroccan ambassador came to their Mimouna celebration from Pretoria to get a blessing.

Elmaleh's mother would also bless everyone with a sprinkle from a big dish of flour placed on the table. Other customary ways for hosts to bless their guests on arrival at their open houses was to offer a date filled with butter or walnuts while giving a blessing.

According to some Israeli tourist sites, Mimouna celebrations get bigger every year. Tourist Israel.com says, "One of the most notable is the Mimouna celebration in Jerusalem's Sacher Park, which attracts about 100 000 people, often including the president and prime minister." According to the Jerusalem Post, Israeli politicians "have seized on the holiday as a can't-miss opportunity" to win the hearts and minds of traditional voters, and it's not uncommon to see them in partly traditional

# The Unwanted: An excerpt



It is September 1939. War has just begun. The Nazis have begun an extermination program – against their own children.

Late summer. The first day of September, to be precise. And, to a young girl about to die, time, running out, matters above everything.

In the past, on a fine day such as this, this girl, now hunched over her notepad in the back seat of a BMW, might have visited a museum in Berlin. She might have crossbred flowers with her grandmother, studied her precious textbooks, or hiked through her native Bavarian forest looking for plant samples. But this first day of September in 1939 is an unusual day. At 04:45 this very morning, the German army under General von Rundstedt and General von Bock have invaded Poland. World War II has begun.

Does she even care, this girl? She's only 14 years old. Mind on lock-down, does she notice the forests passing by on either side of her grandfather's car? The war is distant. Turbulence at home is daily. Does she hear the radio playing, already touting the magnificence of Der Fuhrer's lightning strike? Does she hear her grandfather's satisfied grunt - "Hitler is making Germany unrivalled again" - or catch his eye as he darts a worried look toward the female creature whose blood he denies is akin to his? No. She's too intent on her notepad to notice anything. Writing with a manic intensity that neither of her male attendants understands, she's bent over her paper as if some weight is forcing her down, never taking her eyes off her work, keeping her creations a secret from the world.

"Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie."

She mumbles this rhythmic chant over and over, "Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie", until her grandfather, Friedrich, can no longer tolerate it and turns the knob of the radio to raise the sound, to drown out her existence.

She's crazy, this one, her grandfather is thinking. Not of my blood. I've a clear conscience about this. Not of my blood.

Her name is Hana Ziegler. And though she does have a family, grandparents, and two uncles, Edward and Walter, she's very much alone in the world. Mother deceased, father an unknown, she has borne her existence through her intellect, her curiosity, her studies of a world that her family, apparently, doesn't want her to inhabit much longer.

"Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie."

Her lone suitcase sits at her feet, her few possessions thrown in at the last minute. Papers, schoolbooks, gnawed pencils, an eraser, and a sharpener. The sun had barely risen three hours earlier when she was rousted from her bed by her family's maid. Money isn't the problem for the Zieglers. Hana is.

In Peter Clenott's new mystery thriller, The Unwanted, 14-year-old Hana Ziegler is being driven by her grandfather and her psychiatrist to a euthanasia centre; 16-year-old Silke Hartenstein graces the covers of Nazi propaganda magazines; Avi Kreisler is a Munich police detective condemned to Dachau; David McAuliffe's patrician father wants his son elected the first Catholic president of the United States. In The Unwanted, in the aftermath of war, revenge brings these four people together in ways unimaginable.

WARNING: Do not skip ahead to the last page.

The book can be purchased on Amazon, Barnes & Nobles and Level Best Books



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# Seder may be the same, but you've changed

Humans evolve, grow, have moods, gain

new perspectives, and live through

changing life circumstances.

On a similar note, I often find it interesting when

couples share how their marriage has "gone stale"

as if we're talking about two pieces of bread in the

Humans evolve, grow, have moods, gain new

circumstances. So, if our marriage has gone "stale",

then we must ask ourselves if it isn't ourself, the

individual, who has gone stale and boring. And if

that's the case, we ought to work on growing our

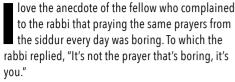
character and perspectives, and suddenly, we'll find

perspectives, and live through changing life

cupboard or two apples in a fridge.

the marriage resurrected and fresh.

RABBI LEVI AVTZ



What he meant to say is that we're constantly evolving and changing as human beings. So, if we show up to the prayer today and see the words in the exact same way we read them yesterday, then it must be us who are boring.

If we were growing and maturing all the time, then we wouldn't find the davening repetitive and boring, as we would approach the words each day from a new perspective and with new experiences.

Think about how many times you can sing your favourite songs over and over and over. Each time you sing the melody, it talks to you differently. Your mood and headspace will affect how the music touches you.

our favourite relatives (and non-favourite relatives) and look at the exact words we have looked at in previous years.

The table will look the same.

The people will look the same (not a day older). Your off-tune uncle will grate your ears all the same

Your cousin will ask, once again, five minutes into the seder, "How long until we finish?"

Once again, those relatives with young kids will disappear for three quarters of the seder because "we were putting the kids to sleep".

Your auntie (and many others) will, once again, have way too much wine to drink, and by the time it comes to the kneidlach, she will be laughing at everything and everyone in top volume.

And the *kvetching* about living in South Africa will be the same (hopefully not!).

What will hopefully not be the same is you. For

these past 12 months
have allowed you
to grow and see
yourself and the
world through fresh
eyes. The words will

resonate and touch you in different ways than in the past because you aren't the same person, and the messages you need to hear are different to what you needed to hear one year ago.

So, show up to the seder the way you show up to the concert of your favourite musician – knowing all the words but looking forward to experiencing the evening and understanding the words in a whole new light.

Don't be boring!

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul

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# The many faces of freedom

riya Parker in *The Art of Gathering* relates how she once visited a teahouse in Japan and participated in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The tea master shared with her an ancient teaching to keep in mind, "ichi-go ichi-e", which translates to "one meeting, one moment in your life that will never happen again". She goes on to call this the Passover principle because early in the seder we ask, "How is this night different from all other nights?" Of course, we want to give a technical answer to the question, but the question serves more to orient us in the evening. Why have

we gathered? In what way will this gathering be different from any other?

We gather to celebrate our freedom, physical and spiritual. We relate what it means to have been a slave, and our deep appreciation for having been redeemed by Hashem, and yet in these broad strokes, we tend to miss the many facets of freedom that appear in the Haggadah. Let me share two of them with you: the

freedom of time and the freedom of expression.

#### The freedom of time

The seder begins with kiddush, which is in essence the sanctification of time. Everything exists within time, but only man understands the qualitative value of time. He or she can reflect on the past, experience the present, and anticipate the future. That said, the slave lacks the time experience, living at the command of his master. Thus, the first commandment to the newly born nation while still in Egypt was, "This month shall be for you the first of all months." (Exodus 12:1).

Consider what commandment you would have chosen to have given to the people first if you had been in G-d's proverbial shoes. This seems to be a strange choice, if not as the Italian commentator, Seforno, explains that as slaves, the Jews had no freedom to determine how they would use time. Now, on the threshold of freedom, they are to receive the gift of time, the ability to choose how to use time, the autonomy to determine and shape the use of their time. The seder places the first stage of freedom and our first challenge before us: how will we choose to use our time? How will we sanctify time? The Jews were required as slaves to work endlessly and gather straw day and night. They were so busy, they had no time to contemplate freedom or consider the gift of time. In our busy lives today, often taken up by a tremendous amount of time wasting as we surf from one news site to the next, mindlessly follow Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok, or addictively play computer games, the seder refocuses us by asking how we will sanctify the gift of time.

#### The freedom of expression

Another manifestation of slavery is the inability to speak freely. To be under the command of Pharaoh meant the suppression of the freedom of speech. In our modern age, we see this in various parts of the world where there's no freedom of the press or limited

access to social media. If we were given the opportunity to name the festival, I doubt that we would have chosen "Pesach", "Passover", or "commemorating the tenth plague". I would think that "Independence Day" or "Freedom Day" would have been more appropriate names for the festival. Yet, the name Pesach according to our tradition also contains a hint to *pe-sach*, (the mouth that speaks). The essence of the *mitzvah* of the seder night is to tell the story, to speak and question, debate, and argue. Our descent to Egypt marked a period of silence and our redemption is to be celebrated through



speech. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (*Redemption*, *Prayer*, *Talmud Torah*) expresses this as follows, "What is redemption? Redemption involves a movement by an individual or a community from the periphery of history to its centre. What is meant by a history-making people or community? A history-making people is one that leads a speaking, story-telling, communing, free existence, while a non-history-making, non-history-involved group leads a non-communing and therefore silent, unfree existence."

In this short paragraph, he captures the journey of the Jewish people as they moved from slavery to becoming an entity. We have seen the same evolution since the establishment of the modern state of Israel. A people shunted from country to country, at the wish and whim of others and with no influence suddenly turned the entire world's attention to a small state that has gained a powerful voice, that influences world policy, and through its ingenuity, responds to the needs of the world in almost every area of endeavour. This is also true on an individual level, whereby Moshe will initially claim that he's not a man of words and that he's unable to express things with charisma before Pharaoh, and yet with the exodus, he'll find his voice.

At the seder, as Jews have done over millennia, we'll celebrate freedom of speech. We'll dedicate our voices to useful speech, uplifting speech, helpful and impactful speech, but not speech that harms, diminishes, labels, or makes anyone feel less of themselves.

We live in a world where freedoms aren't always that obvious and shouldn't be taken for granted. A world where we're often afraid to say things lest we be cancelled or not affirmed. As we sit with a greater sense of purposefulness at the seder, we would do well to contemplate two of our many gifts of freedom, time, and speech.

• Rabbi Craig Kacev is the director of education at the Pincus Fund Israel, and a former director of the South African Board of Jewish Education.

## From bitter to sweet - making the most of maror

**GILLIAN KLAWANSKY** 

traumatic brain injury. The loss of a troubled parent. Battling devastating burns. Whether they've endured near-death experiences or devastating loss, these three people embody the power that comes with approaching the bitterest of experiences with positivity.



An occupational therapist (OT) with the world at her feet, Kerry-Lee Brandt-Salamon (now 38) had been married for just five months when a freak aerial acrobatics accident almost ended her life. Working as a pole acrobat and aerial artist in her spare time, she was rehearsing for a show at Sun City in August 2014 when the unthinkable happened. While performing a trapeze sequence with another acrobat holding her from above, the rigging broke, and Brandt-Salamon plunged 6m headfirst to the ground. Her partner landed on top of her.

Unconscious but breathing, she was rushed to emergency surgery to treat the bleeding on her brain. Ultimately, she spent six months in hospital, in a coma and

undergoing multiple operations including brain surgeries and an arm amputation. "They told me I'd never recover and would be a vegetable," says Brandt-Salamon. "The fact that I've recovered as much as I have and that I'm still recovering has shocked everyone, even my sister, who herself is a

Brandt-Salamon attributes her ongoing recovery to the support of her amazing family and husband. The fact that she was incredibly fit before the accident has also worked in her favour. Having spent the five years following the accident in a wheelchair, she's now walking but has a boot on her foot, which is everted turned out. She also struggles with her short-term memory and has a prosthetic arm. She continues to undergo extensive physio and occupational therapy, and sees a psychiatrist who advocates the power of talking to deal with the emotional toll the accident has taken.

"I've always been a positive, determined person," she says. "I never lost that willpower to keep going because otherwise, I would have given up a long time ago, it's just been so difficult."

Brandt-Salamon has spoken publicly about her accident and is planning to write a book about her experience. "The fact that I've come out of it the way I have after almost dying in hospital five or six times, and the fact that I was able to pull through and just keep going is a powerful story," she says.

Having slowly begun to assist one child with OT challenges, Brandt-Salamon plans to go back to practicing properly one day. She also hopes to start a family soon.

"Kerry is inspirational because of the way

she pushes forward," says her husband, Roi Salamon. "The accident hasn't changed her good nature. From being very quiet before, she's become incredibly outgoing and makes friends with everyone."

For 25-year-old Jayde Ronthal, positivity has also been a driving force in the face of challenges. The daughter of a single mother who suffered from anorexia and a drug



addiction, Ronthal was forced to grow up guickly. "It wasn't easy, I basically assumed the role of a mom to her and my younger brother from a very young age because my mom just wasn't present to be that person."

Recognising her leadership ability, her school appointed her head girl in matric, and Ronthal dedicated her time to the school and various charities. A few years later, tragedy struck when her mother passed away just after Ronthal's 21st birthday.

"I took a long time to grieve, but her loss also taught me resilience and encouraged me to do more," she says. "My mom was such a giving person, and that's something that I took from losing her. It inspired me to give back in the way that she wanted to,

to live a healthy lifestyle, to connect with positive people, and to live a passionate and fulfilling life. I don't want to regret anything."

The director of the Friendship Circle, a non-profit organisation for kids with special needs, Ronthal also cofounded Ayekah during the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides Shabbat meals to 70 families each week. She's also an active Selwyn Segal volunteer, and runs the Emunah Batmitzvah programme. Currently completing her honours degree in psychology, Ronthal plans eventually to open her own clinical psychology practice.

Yechiel Hummel, 23, a travelling mashgiach who shares kashrut tips on Instagram, knew he had to take positive outcomes from a near-death experience in order to move forward. Just eight months ago in Kenya, while working as head mashgiach for Africa Kosher Safaris, Hummel lit a cylinder to heat up food on a chafing dish - a metal cooking pan on a stand with an alcohol burner below it.

"I had never really had fire training, so I put in more of the spirit jelly and the match was still lit," he recalls. "The next thing, I heard a massive noise. People were taking cover from the explosion, and I started to feel hot. I looked down and saw that my legs, stomach, and arms had caught alight. I freaked out." It was the guick thinking of two other leaders on site who told him to roll over that saved his life.

Taken to hospital in Nairobi, Hummel was later transferred to Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg, where he had several surgeries and treatments including three



Jayde Rontha

never look the same, he says he's grateful to be walking, something he wasn't sure he'd ever be able to do. "I'm fully functional again, back to playing sport and touring through my work," he says.

Once Hummel was declared stable, he realised that there were aspects of his personality that needed to change. "There were things that I was saying to friends and family - the ones who have given me the strength to keep going that I never should have," he says. "This was a wake-up call."

Some of the most positive outcomes were daily gratitude journaling and his friendship with Ephraim Stern, one of the men who saved his life. "Before this event, we didn't get along at all and today, we have a special connection which includes learning once a week," says Hummel.

"I'm not perfect, and there's still so much I have to work on, but this event motivated me to start the journey to becoming a new person."

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PESACH 5783/2023

## The meaning of freedom

One of the key themes of Pesach is freedom. The SA Jewish Report asked students at Jewish schools to consider what freedom means to them. This is a selection of their replies.

#### We're slaves. Here's what we can do about it

ELIANA HEPPLE, GRADE 12, CAPE TOWN TORAH HIGH

he Oxford Dictionary defines freedom as "The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants", and the definition of a slave is a person who is forced to work for and obey another, and is considered to be their property or a device, or part of one, directly controlled by another. The question is, do you have freedom?

In contrast to Mitzrayim, yes, we're free, but if we look at the definition above and the celebration of Pesach, we're not free. Pesach celebrates leaving Mitzrayim, and it's a mitzvah to relive that moment, but how do we do that? We must leave our own Mitzrayim, leave what we're slaves to.

We're all devices controlled by another. We're

controlled by technology, the internet, society, and our *yetzer horah* (inclination to do evil). We can't be authentic until we leave this Mitzrayim. But it's difficult to give it all up at once. You can't just put your phone and laptop away forever, but Pesach

is a time for us to temporarily leave our Mitzrayim. Once we "cross the Red Sea", we arrive at a better version of ourselves and are able to serve Hashem with true love and *kavana* (sincerity). We're currently being held back from serving Hashem, we've become too materialistic and have forgotten that we come from Hashem.

Are we physically free? Yes. Are we spiritually free? No. Now's the time to fix that.

## A complex question with no easy answer

YOCHEVED SAKSENBERG, GRADE 12, KING DAVID HIGH SCHOOL VICTORY PARK

round this time every year, my father asks me if I think I'm free, and every year, I somehow manage to answer incorrectly. Eventually, I learned to remember the answer from the year before and parrot it back, but I was still wrong.

Last year, I asked my father why he kept asking me the same question each year if the answer was always changing. How I could possibly get it right, and how did this make any sense? But when he explained, it made perfect sense. Freedom isn't an end point, it's a spectrum, and it's always changing. I need to reflect if I have more or less freedom this year than I did last year, and acknowledge and appreciate that change.

I've never had a problem acknowledging freedom, but I have always had trouble appreciating freedom. I'm approaching a time in my life where there will be a fundamental increase in the amount of freedom I have, and with that comes a frightening amount of responsibility – something I often try to avoid. I only learned to appreciate it when writing the first draft of this very essay.

If I look back to the time when the Jewish people were enslaved in Egypt, their idea of freedom was simply liberation. Since then, however, that simple idea has expanded into so much more. Just take a look at the 1960s, the prime era of the fight for freedom. There were the women's movements,

the civil rights movement, and the peace movements in which each member was fighting for freedom or improvement of freedom. We've come such a long way, and as a result, I have so many more opportunities. Because of these fights, we have freedom of religion, expression, movement, and more! We have freedom to make choices of consequence, which according to the מרמב"ם is the definition of freedom.

You never know how to appreciate something fully until you acknowledge that you no longer or didn't ever have it. So, though it's difficult to relate to the Pesach story, why not try to use it as a springboard, the start of the fight and winning of freedom so that maybe this year, you can fully appreciate freedom and relate to the story a little more, and hopefully, I'll get the answer right.

#### How to escape your inner Pharoah

LEAH SASSOON, GRADE 9, KING DAVID LINKSFIELD

've always wondered why we talk about freedom so much on Pesach. What's the point? We aren't slaves anymore, we're free, no? But are we really free. Yes, we're not slaves to Pharoah in Egypt, however we're slaves to many other things



- technology, toxic people, social media, and so much more. But, why are we slaves to these things, why can't we overcome them? The truth is, we aren't really slaves to all those things, we're slaves to ourselves.

Your own brain is

telling you that you're not good enough without something, or is holding you back. Nobody other than yourself is preventing you from reaching your full potential. The amazing thing about the story of Pesach is that it's still relevant today, thousands of generations later.

We celebrate Pesach and retell the story every year because it shows us that we're still slaves, just like the Jews in Egypt. Our brains are like the pharaohs in our lives, and with Hashem's help, we can overcome them. Freedom means not letting anything – especially yourself – hold you back from doing what you believe you should, and not being ruled over or controlled by anyone.

I hope that this Pesach, everyone will escape their inner Pharoah and finally become free, just like the Jews in Egypt.

#### How can poverty be associated with liberty?

GAVI BEN-DAVID, GRADE 11, YESHIVA COLLEGE



reedom is a
fundamental human
right that many
societies have fought for
throughout history. However,
the question of whether we
have true freedom now is
complex. This is especially
poignant during Passover,
a holiday commemorating

the Jewish people's escape from oppression in the pursuit of liberty.

In today's cancel culture, people are ostracised for expressing what's deemed to be "politically incorrect". To add insult to injury, companies use algorithms known as "filter bubbles" which show users only content that matches their beliefs and preferences. As a result, we hear only the ideologies that Facebook or Twitter want us to hear, reinforcing our biases and impairing our critical thinking. The echo-chamber effect of large media corporations in which they filter out ideas, resembles the techniques used by Joseph Goebbels in Nazi Germany such as burning books that contradicted the Nazi agenda. One can argue that silencing opinions on social media is even more damaging than burning books as they can be seamlessly deleted in a click of a button.

The matzah we eat symbolises our "redemption from slavery to freedom". Matzah is referred to as "poor bread" by our sages. The Maharal, the chief rabbi of Prague in the 15th century, poses the question why poverty should be associated with liberty. These concepts appear to be polar opposites. He answers that a poor person is frequently dependent on others, and is unquestionably not free. One who is poor has little to no material possessions. "Poverty" (as opposed to a poor person) represents lack of connection to anything else other than the thing itself. Redemption occurs when the independent become self-sufficient. Like a slave freed from his master or a baby born from the womb. Lack of autonomy results from submitting to an authority figure. Such was the state of affairs in Egypt. And then G-d redeemed us, and we became sovereign.

The Maharal said that a person immersed in the physical pleasures that his body craves will never be free because he is reliant on desires. How common is this in our day and age? People believe that keeping *mitzvot* is constraining, in truth the real limitation is being imprisoned by longing for destructive wants. While it's true that we have gained the freedom to do as we please, ironically, we're more trapped than

Our sages tell us, "There isn't a free person except for a person that toils in Torah," (Pirkei Avot 6:2). Such an individual on the quest for the real truth will be led to true freedom.

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## Don't take freedom for granted ELIYA OSSIN, GRADE 11,

t the beginning of the Haggadah, our sages command that, "In every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as if he personally left Egypt."

For us Jews who are free, this is a difficult task. How are we expected to experience feelings like we've just come out of slavery?

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There are enormous differences between modern Jews and the Jews of ancient Egypt. As slaves, Jews weren't allowed to practice their culture and traditions, choose their occupation, and live with the freedoms we take for granted as modern Jews.

On the face of it, the differences are so stark, there doesn't seem to be any common ground between us and our ancestors. But there are commonalities. One of these is Israel.

The exodus from Egypt was liberation from oppression

culminating in the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel and the building of the Temple.

Israel also provided a safe haven for Jews who survived the Holocaust and Jewish refugees from countries such as Yemen and Ethiopia, who experienced

their own exodus.

As a modern Orthodox Jew, Israel continues to be a place where I'm able to express my Jewish roots without fear.

Over time, Jews have been deprived of freedom in almost every country in which they have lived. To this day, there are countries where Jews are advised not to visit.

As Ronald Reagan once stated, "Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It's not ours by way of

inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation."

May we all experience true freedom this Pesach. Chag sameach!

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#### The privilege of discovering who we are

SARALE SHISHLER, GRADE 10, TORAH ACADEMY GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL

"Freedom is the choice to live one's life doing what one wants, to live where one wants, eat by own choice, and learn what one's heart desires. This means that freedom can apply to different aspects of life, and freedom isn't an absolute term." – John F Kennedy.

Freedom is being able to live with respect and dignity according to the choices I make. All societies define freedom in different ways. Each culture sees freedom in its own light

The Jewish people weren't freed from Egypt so that we could do whatever we wanted when we wanted to

do it. We were redeemed so that we would live lives of value and meaning, in harmony with our ideal selves. It's up to us to achieve our true identity. In this way, we become truly free and no external force can change it.

Every Pesach, we leave Egypt again; every Pesach, we're given the ability to strengthen our identity. Sometimes we have to take the time to rediscover that inner truth, but it's there, and it's the most important part of us. Carl Jung said, "The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." That's the opportunity of Pesach.



## YOSSI SHAW, GRADE 11, TORAH ACADEMY

he real question is, do we have freedom now?
In the days of Mitzrayim, Jews were overworked and pushed to death without earning a single cent, they were given minimal homes to live in, and to make matters worse, the Egyptians swapped men's and women's work so that they wouldn't even have the freedom to do what came normally to them. This evidently isn't freedom, it's prison.

We're in exile more than ever

In the 21st century, do we have freedom? Jews may work in most places they choose, and earn money for it, men and women do their own respective work, and Jews can choose where they want to live. Is this what we as Jews call freedom? No. As Jews, freedom is on a much

higher level.

These days, we're all chasing after new Netflix shows, the newest clothes, and the newest pop music, but the reality is that none of that matters when we go up to שמים. Chasing after these mundane things isn't freedom, therefore we're truly more in golus (exile) than we thought we



Can we compare ourselves to the Jews in Mitzrayim? Jews in Mitzrayim may have not had the same luxuries we have today in our somewhat freedom, but they knew they were in *golus* while we struggle to comprehend the fact that we are in *golus* more than ever.

## From indignity to pride in three simple steps

RUVI NAPARSTEK, GRADE 11, TORAH ACADEMY

ews in Egypt were enslaved in the most gruesome way – to the extent that they had their new-born boys ripped from their mother's arms to be killed among hundreds of thousands more just because of the Pharaoh's paranoia.

They had all their basic human dignity stolen from them. The Mefarshim explain that after leaving Egypt, the Jews were left with only three things: their names, their clothing, and their language. This was the last brittle line preventing the Jews from disappearing into assimilation in Egypt. Their names represented Jews' ability to be their unique selves, using G-d's gift of identity. Their clothing represented the sliver of freedom that Jews had to dress modestly and properly before G-d, not having to drop to the level of the Egyptians. Their language represented the ultimate freedom of being able to speak their Jewish thoughts

in the holy tongue. Regarding this point Mefarshim explains that if the Jews had not kept these three things, G-d would not have rescued them as there would be no more Jews, only Egyptians. This shows how close

the Jews truly were close to extinction by assimilation.

I believe that we are in the most free era in human history. Never before has there been a time where we Jews, Muslims, Christians and so many other religions and cultures were living peacefully together without anyone having to constantly look over their shoulders. While we have to look into the past to learn from our ancestors' mistakes, we also have to look at their values and morals. We must be grateful that we can still stay true to the values. We must look at our ancestors in Egypt, in awe of the true G-d. Without their faith we would still be in Egypt, not even aware of our rich Jewish ancestry.



JENNA ZETLER, GRADE 12, HERZLIA HIGH SCHOOL

reedom is more than that feeling of relief once
you have completed that long-awaited, dreaded
school task. I believe that with freedom, comes
responsibility. In Judaism, freedom without responsibility
means slavery to one's ignoble impulses.

Responsibility in Hebrew is "acharayut". If we look at this word closely, the first letter is "alef", which refers to "ani", meaning "I". This shows that we have a responsibility to uphold to ourselves. If we add another letter, we get "ach" meaning "brother" in Hebrew. This expresses that we have a responsibility to our family. If we add another letter we get "acher", "other" in Hebrew. This shows we also have a responsibility to others in our community. If we carry on this process, we get "acharey", which translates to "after me" in Hebrew. This shows that when we seek to deliver our responsibilities by fulfilling our duty of tikkun olam, we must be the change we wish to see in the world. "Acharayu" means "after him", referring to Hashem. We must recognise that ultimately, every positive change we bring about is done in His

image for the sake of all those that were created in His image. Finally, by adding the last letter, we get the full word "acharayut", which translates to "responsibility", which ties every concept together.

Only once we comprehend our responsibility towards the greater world, can we be truly free. Jewish

people in ancient Egypt had no freedom of that sort. The Pesach story highlights the giving of the fundamental gift of freedom from Hashem. Hashem also gave us the state of Israel, allowing us to live freely in the Jewish diaspora knowing that we will always have somewhere

Each morning I wake up to endless opportunities made possible by my ancestors and Hashem. They remembered the responsibilities they had to themselves, their family, each other, and to Hashem. This is what drove them to conquer their obstacles.

True freedom is when we can live to our full potential. We shouldn't take it for granted, let's all use it responsibly in pursuit of a better world.



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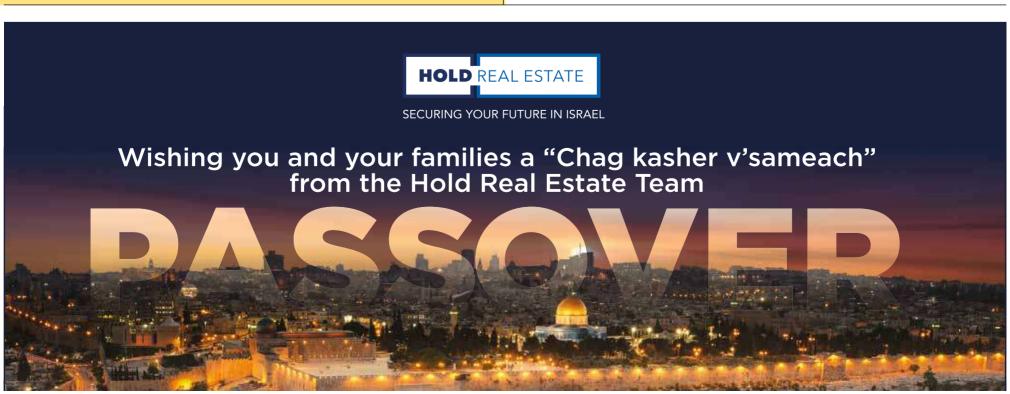






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## Feeling free – no matter what!

still remember a particular radio advert from my youth. It was for Salem menthol cigarettes - a jingle to the words, "You can Salem out of the country, but, you can't take the country out of Salem!"

Some have argued that "You can take the Jews out of Egypt [and slavery], but you can't take the Egypt out of the Jew!"

They maintain that the "slave mentality" became ingrained in our national psyche.

Yet, back in the 16th century, the saintly Maharal of Prague argued differently. Rabbi Judah Lowe was a saint, mystic, halachist, philosopher, and chief rabbi of Prague. There's even a statue of him outside Prague's City Hall to this day.

The Maharal writes that not only did the Jews not inherit a slave mentality from Egypt, but the very opposite. The Exodus forever changed the inner identity of the Jew. The Exodus set us free, not only physically and politically, but spiritually and psychologically. Ever since the Exodus, every Jew is innately free.

The Exodus wasn't just a one-off historical event or a fantastic, dramatic story of our national independence that we retell every year at our Pesach seders (or that inspired Steven Spielberg to produce The Prince of Egypt).

No. The Exodus was a spiritual revolution which changed the mentality, the mindset, the psyche, and the very nature of a Jew forever. We are, by definition, a free people, and nothing and no-one can ever change that

And so, Pesach and the Exodus from Egypt which marked the very birth of our nation wasn't just a political transformation but a spiritual transformation for the Jewish people and for every Jew until the end of time.

In 1927, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, then the acknowledged spiritual leader of Russian Jewry, fought the Communists tooth and nail. They were closing down Yiddishkeit in Russia, and he kept Jewish schools operating underground. With total commitment, he and his chassidim kept minyanim and mikvahs going clandestinely. Many paid with their lives, including my own wife's two grandfathers.

The Rebbe himself was arrested and sentenced to death. But he was resolutely defiant, even in prison. Miraculously, his death sentence was commuted to 10 years



in exile, to Kostrama, a few hundred miles from Moscow.

Leningrad, 1927. The Rebbe is on the train about to go into exile. Many hundreds of chassidim came to the train station to bid him farewell. In the crowd were Soviet police, KGB (state security) agents, and many Jewish informers. Knowing full well that every word he said would be reported to the Communist authorities, he said:

be with us as He was with our ancestors; may He not forsake us nor abandon us. Only our bodies went into exile, but not our souls. We must proclaim openly before all that regarding any matter of our

faith - Torah,

mitzvahs, and

Jewish custom

"May G-d

- it's not subject to the opinion of others, nor can any oppressive force be used against it.

"This is our request to the Holy One: May He not forsake us nor abandon us. G-d should give us true strength to be unintimidated by physical pain, on the contrary, to accept it with joy, so that every punishment we receive for supporting a cheder, for learning Torah, for performance of *mitzvahs*, shall increase our fortitude in the holy work of strengthening Judaism.

"We must remember that imprisonment and hard labour are only temporary things, whereas Torah, mitzvahs, and the Jewish people are eternal."

Powerful stuff! What courage, defiance, and faith!

What was the Rebbe's bottom-line message? Only our bodies went into exile, but not our souls! They may imprison and enslave our bodies, but the soul of a Jew can never go into exile. The soul of a Jew is always free!

And, indeed, he outlasted them. After only 10 days in exile, the Rebbe was released and allowed to leave Russia. He spent time in Riga and in Poland and in 1940, again with miracles, he came to the United States where he re-established

Not only was he echoing the words of the Maharal, he was living them.

Chabad until his passing in 1950.

During World War II, in the midst of the Holocaust, from the death camps, emerged a young man trained as a psychotherapist, who from his own extreme circumstances in the camps was able to identify an intangible spirit that helped many Jews survive their most harrowing ordeals. Dr Viktor Frankl, the author of Man's Search for Meaning, which has sold many millions of copies in many

#### RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN

languages, gave voice to his own experience in the camps and

reported that he had discerned that it was mainly the people who had a sense of meaning and purpose in life who had a better chance of survival at Auschwitz.

And his Holocaust experience taught Frankl a lot about freedom too. In his words,

"Our greatest freedom is the freedom to choose our attitude to any given situation. There are always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision. Would you submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, of your inner freedom, which determined whether you would become a plaything to circumstance, renouncing your freedom and dignity."

According to Frankl, of those who survived, many made that very decision not to renounce their freedom and dignity, no matter what.

So, says the Maharal, every Jew possesses that innate freedom.

On Thursday, 2 April 1970, an Israeli Phantom Jet fighter was shot down over Syria. The pilot, 26-year-old Pini Nahmani, was imprisoned in the Al Mazza jail in Damascus.

He was later exchanged in a prisoner swap with the Syrians. Pini writes about his time in prison. When Pesach was approaching, he and his two fellow Israelis in jail prepared for a seder. They scrubbed the floor; they painted a seder plate on a piece of cardboard. They had two haggadahs and some matza from the chief rabbi of Zurich. Boaz, the youngest, asked the Ma Nishtana (Four Questions). They ate matzah and they sang. They sang all the songs of their youth, all their favourite Pesach songs. They sang so loud, the prison guards warned them to tone it down or they would go into solitary confinement. But they ignored the guards. They felt free, and they kept singing as loud as they could.

Nahmani would later write that in his whole life, his most memorable seder, his most inspirational seder, was the seder he celebrated in a Damascus prison. Ironically, where was he most free? In prison!

It doesn't matter where or in what circumstances we find ourselves, a Jew is innately and eternally free.

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is the life rabbi emeritus at Sydenham Shul, and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

## To Pesach, with love

he Shabbos before Pesach is called "Shabbat Hagadol", and it's upon us once again. As we walk around shopping centres this Pesach season,

we're drawn to all the specially marked shelves which are advertising "kosher for Pesach" everything. People are boasting about their latest purchases and moaning about this year's prices. Shops display the latest products,

and friends talk about Pesach plans. The air around us is abuzz with "Pesach,

Pesach, Pesach".

When we look through the Torah, however, the references to Pesach are mainly through the pascal offering. Throughout the rest of the Torah, Hashem refers to this holiday as Chag Hamatzot (the festival of matzah). The Torah doesn't seem to have picked up the Pesach spirit. What's the reason for this?

To answer this question, let's see when the Torah does talk about Pesach. It's mentioned by Hashem passing over our

houses during the plague of the "killing of the first-born". Hashem purposely spared the Jewish people to become His nation, and killed our oppressor's future haters. The

festival of matzah, on the other hand, refers to the remembrance of how we left Egypt in a great hurry to arrive at Mount Sinai to receive G-d's Torah – even to the point that we didn't give our bread enough time to rise.

This explains the reason for the specific usage of these two different names. The Jewish people remember

Hashem's love, and we're thankful to Him for having spared our lives, therefore, we refer to this

> holiday only as Pesach – Passover. We're eternally grateful that Hashem passed over us. Hashem, however, remembers

> > how devoted we were to Him, how we were so eager to receive His Torah that we didn't even wait for our dough to rise and left with flat bread.

It's for this reason that we read the megillah of Shir Hashirim next Shabbos. A book composed by King Solomon that describes in great detail the love we have for Hashem and the love He has for his people.

So, as we do the last bit of shopping and see Pesach all around us, let's try and remember how much Hashem loves us.

Wishing you all a very good Pesach.

• Rabbi Ryan Goldstein is the rabbi at West Street Shul.





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## Did the Exodus really happen, and does it matter?

STEVEN GRUZD

very year on Pesach, Jewish families around the world faithfully gather to tell the story of the Exodus, when Moses led the Israelite slaves out of Egypt. The haggadah is rich in experiential learning, recounting this foundational legend of Jewish liberation through food, stories, and songs. We recall the Exodus each Shabbat, and every Jew is commanded to see himself or herself as having personally left Egypt. We're commanded to pass the tale on to future generations. But how historically accurate is the Exodus story? Is there corroborating archaeological evidence? And does it really matter?

If one considers the Torah to be the unchanging, unchallengeable word of G-d, there's no debate. The Exodus is a central article of faith, and is taken as being literally true. But if one sees the Tanach as a series of books written by different people over time, does the Exodus stand up to scrutiny?

Sceptics argue that there's no hard evidence that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt in the first place. They point to the fact that the Egyptians – meticulous chroniclers of their leaders' lives – make no reference to the enslavement or the Exodus in writing. They also note that there's nothing to show a dramatic population loss that would have been experienced if large numbers of Israelites suddenly left Egypt, as the Torah claims.

Rabbi Ramon Widmonte, the dean of the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, said, "The question is what type of archaeological evidence is there for anything at all in history, and what would one expect there to be for an event like this?" Officials always seek to promote their own narratives. "Egyptian kings aren't going to record a defeat - they never record defeats. You're never going to get Egyptian records of their big defeat – it doesn't exist. What do you expect to get, and where would you get it from? What type of evidence is likely to have survived from that time period? Who would have recorded it?"

Archaeological evidence is, indeed, rather thin. Supporters of the Exodus story point to the Merneptah Stele, a victory monument built in the 13th century BCE by Pharoah Merneptah. It references "Israel" as a group defeated by the Pharaoh. Archaeological digs at Tell-el-Dabah and Kadesh Barnea reveal evidence of Semitic languages being spoken in Egypt at around the period of the Exodus, but this doesn't mean that substantial numbers quit Egypt at that time. The Ipuwer Papyrus, which describes disaster befalling Egypt around 1 250 BCE, hasn't received scholarly support as reliable evidence of the Exodus.

Rabbi Gabi Bookatz from Waverley Shul said there was no clear collaboration of the Exodus story, "But that's not surprising. History is recorded by the victors, and the Egyptians weren't going to record that. Even in the Six-Day War of 1967, the Egyptians denied the military disaster to their own people. We shouldn't really expect to see much evidence." He noted that Kenneth Kitchen, an esteemed British professor of Egyptology and archaeology, argued that as we move closer in the historical record to contemporary times, the more physical evidence there is for biblical events.

"Every year before Pesach," said Rabbi Greg Alexander of the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation, "someone sends out a photo of an Egyptian chariot wheel found on the floor of the Red Sea, or a thesis about how the ten plagues



were really a result of extreme weather conditions, and I feel like they missed the point. When we read the Exodus, we get to see through the lens of our ancestors 3 500 years ago, how they transitioned from the complex family/tribe of Genesis to the

nation that walked out of Egypt via Sinai to the promised land. It's the greatest story ever told, of the oppressed being freed, the founding of a society based on morality, respect, and justice and it's one that resonates in all cultures today." Alexander said that those publicly questioning the veracity of the Exodus often have a political motive, such as anti-Zionism.

"With the 21st century tools of post-modernism, we know that the text is created by the reader and reflects their interests and prejudices as much as the writer's. Today, we find meaning in the message that has come to us from Sinai via a chain of tradition. This is moving, inspirational Torah teaching, and not a history or archaeology lesson. What

matters isn't whether it's Rameses I or II, but how the study of Torah impacts us," Alexander said.

And that's the important thing to remember as we remember the Exodus.



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## The Passover sweater we should all wear

TANYA SINGER - JTA

very Passover for more than 75 years,
Helena Weinstock Weinrauch, a 98-yearold Holocaust survivor, has worn a
vibrant blue hand-knit sweater to the first seder,
which her neighbour hosts in her Upper West
Side apartment building.

The sweater is a chic 1940s number with fluffy angora sleeves, a sparkling metallic blue bodice and a delicate, scalloped V-neck. But this is no ordinary fashion statement. The sweater was knitted by Helena's friend, Ann Rothman, who stayed alive during the Holocaust by knitting for Nazi wives while a prisoner in the Lodz Ghetto.

Rothman was motivated to survive and, as Weinrauch tells it, "She became known in the ghetto. She was so good at knitting that she knitted coats for the wife of the German people, and it became known that Ann can knit skirts, a blouse – anything you want, she can knit it."

When I first met Weinrauch in person in December 2021, I was struck by her classic, Old Hollywood-like glamour, her storytelling, and her pride in the many sweaters her friend had knitted for her throughout their decades of friendship. Tiny in stature, with a soft voice, Weinrauch's presence filled the room. I hung on her every word.

When she spoke of her brilliant blue Passover sweater – which she treats as a ritual object – she seemed to sparkle like its bright blue bodice. When neighbours or other seder-goers in her building noticed her unusual sweater, she'd say, "It's the Passover sweater," as if everyone has one.

After meeting Weinrauch, I was convinced that she was onto something: everyone should have a Passover sweater – and not just because it is beautiful and festive. For Weinrauch, the sweater holds the power of remembrance,

freedom, and connection. And she's far from the only one to make the connection between crafting, resilience, and religious observance. In her 2020 book, *Painted Pomegranates and Needlepoint Rabbis*, Jodi Eichler-Levine, Berman Professor of Jewish Civilization at Lehigh University, draws upon ethnography to study the power of craft for the Jewish people.

"If we look at Judaism as an ever-evolving process, then Jewish crafts – which are all about process – can help us to see how many vital Jewish practices take place outside of synagogues," she told me. She also reflects on the power of crafted objects, describing them as "talismans of safety and resilience".

Eichler-Levine's book is about how crafters keep Judaism alive. She studied how "everyday acts of creativity are a crucial part of what makes a religious life", and learned that "the act of making is just as important as the object itself, particularly in troubled times."

As Eichler-Levine notes, "Crafting is an act of generative resilience that fosters the survival of both giver and recipient."

These words resonate with me deeply. Knitting became central to my healing after my 13-year-old son underwent brain surgery in January 2017. I left my career behind and assumed the role of full-time mother of a child in constant pain. Over the course of his long recovery, knitting, I realised, was the key to stitching myself and my family back together.

After a long, three-month period of recovery, my son returned to school. Shortly afterwards, I read a story about Weinrauch in *Moment Magazine*. It struck a nerve. It combined my passions for all things Jewish, knitting, and the incredible juxtaposition of the two, igniting within me a drive to know more. I wondered how women knit to stay alive, what other knitted objects I might find. I launched a



**Helena Weinstock Weinrauch** 

project, Knitting Hope, which aims to share the ways knitting or knitted objects helped women to resist, remember those they lost, and find renewal after the horrors of the Holocaust.

I knew, straight away, that Weinrauch's Passover sweater would be an important knitting project to share with the fledgling community of knitters, survivors, and supporters that I was building. Weinrauch's life, after all, is a lesson in resilience: she survived a three-day-long interrogation by the Gestapo, three concentration camps, the Death March from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, and near-death starvation.

Her parents, sister, and 16 other family members didn't.

But Weinrauch didn't just survive the horrors of the Holocaust, she built a life filled with love and beauty. When the war ended, she was nursed back to health in Sweden, which took in thousands of Jewish refugees. "The Swedish people restored my faith in humanity," she said, adding that she'll "never forget their humanity".

In Sweden, she volunteered at a hospital where she "never took a dollar" in order to repay the Swedish people for their efforts. Then, in 1947, Weinrauch connected with one of her only living family members, a step-uncle in the United States. She lived with him for a

short time in New York City, which is where she met and married Joseph Weinrauch, who became a successful travel agent.

When the two sought to start a family, Weinrauch experienced multiple miscarriages which she attributes to all the trauma she endured. When she finally conceived, her doctor ordered her to strict bedrest – and that's when she taught herself how to knit, because she was "going crazy in bed".

Weinrauch gave birth to a daughter, Arlene, in the early 1950s. She died from breast cancer in the 1990s. Weinrauch's husband went into a deep depression and died in 2006 – and she was alone once again.

Not one to wallow, in 2013, when a flier from a local dance studio landed in her mailbox, Weinrauch, then 88, decided to learn ballroom dancing

– which enabled her to feel joy in moving to music. These days, her closets overflow with beautiful, beaded gowns, and every room in her apartment features photos of her beaming at ballroom-dance events. As she quips in the documentary *Fascination: Helena's Story*, "As long as I can walk, I will dance."

In hopes of preserving other aspects of her incredible story – and, of course, that fabulous sweater – I reached out to Chicago-based knitwear designer Alix Kramer and asked her to develop a knitting pattern as a homage to the Passover sweater. She immediately said yes.

"As a Jewish knitwear designer, Jewish advocacy has always been a passion, especially when it comes to carving out space in the vast knitting community for Jewish patterns to thrive," she told me. "I knew immediately that this could be a 'pattern to launch a thousand ships', so to speak. The idea of a blue sweater revolution, with blue sweaters at every seder to symbolise resistance, hope, and community, was what ultimately called me to the project."

The Dayenu pattern, as we've named it, created as a contemporary homage to Weinrauch's original sweater, is now available on the popular knitting site Ravelry and on Payhip.

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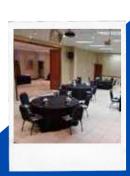


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## Israel's national crisis averted, or just a lull?

>>Continued from page 1

and defence establishments. It's key that Israelis strive to bridge these divides. The nation should engage in honest dialogue, in which all perspectives are heard and respected, in order to heal and find a compromise that will strengthen the country's democratic institutions while addressing the concerns of those who advocate for change."

Historian and former South African, Professor Gideon Shimoni, has a sober view. "The recent demonstrations were truly unprecedented. What was ominously new was the first 'anti-protest' protest launched by Netanyahu [in Jerusalem on 27 March]. The La Familia gang were very prominent and viciously attacked journalists and innocent Arab passers-by as well as anti-government demonstrators."

"I doubt very much whether the negotiations
Netanyahu promised are genuine and can produce
a consensual solution. I also think that in the
foreseeable future, the massive demonstrations
won't cease unless the governmental coalition
implodes."

But for some, this could be a moment of hope. "Time will tell if this was a watershed moment for Israel, but it certainly feels like it could be," says former Israeli politician Dr Einat Wilf. "Numerous issues that have been left to fester for decades, even since Israel's birth, have bubbled to the surface. If managed correctly, this

could be a great opportunity to consolidate Israel's governing ethos and ensure that different groups can maintain a democracy while agreeing to a fundamental vision about Israel's nature."

"This seems like the birth of a new liberal political camp in the country," says Shany. "The atmosphere at the protests is almost revolutionary, and there's hope that after this show of strength, the political elites will have to re-evaluate their tactics and strategies."

Says Pomerantz, "the Israeli people are engaged in a historical and patriotic exercise of freedom and democracy. While some Israelis raise valid complaints that Israel's judicial system needs certain reforms, others raise equally valid arguments that the specific reforms under consideration wouldn't serve Israel properly.

"The result has been thousands of citizens taking to the streets in freedom and in safety. The chants and speeches are pro-Israel, pro-democracy, highly supportive of the police and the military, and narrowly critical only of certain politicians and specific legal proposals

"While we don't yet know what the future holds, one thing is certain, even in this, one of its moments of greatest turmoil, Israel remains a free and peaceful democracy, passionately beloved by its people, and a 'light unto the nations'."

## In Sydney or Joburg – exodus is an internal journey

OPINION

Then CA Jawish Report editor

hen SA Jewish Report editor Peta Krost asked me to write an article for Pesach comparing our leaving South Africa for Australia to the Exodus, it gave me pause for thought. Certainly, South Africa isn't Egypt and Sydney isn't the promised land, regardless of how beautiful Bondi Beach is!

In fact, I miss South Africa terribly. I miss the roots of our community with its history in Lithuanian Jewry, I miss the unique way in which we interact with our difficult apartheid past and our post-apartheid, complicated present. I miss the fynbos and the cosmos, Delta Park, and Emmarentia Dam. I miss my family and friends

Yet, South Africa isn't the promised land either. The truth is, it's rare that Egypt corresponds to an actual physical place. The experiences of being mired in and delivered from Egypt are subtle internal states. There have been some moments in history which probably felt as real as the actual moment of leaving Egypt and crossing the Sea of Reeds. The liberation of survivors from the concentration camps, the aliyot of Soviet Jewry to Israel, and perhaps a person who leaves an abusive

relationship can be actual, physical moves that feel like *yetziat Mitzrayim* (exodus from Egypt).

But in our general lives, the big changes we long for aren't about leaving one place for another but about changing our internal realities so that we aren't held by the narrowness of our attitudes, our limiting ideas, and our moods.

This difference between stark and subtle redemption is captured in the eight-day Pesach journey. When G-d speaks to Moses at the burning bush, G-d promises a stark redemption, utter transformation. "I have come down to rescue them [the Israelites] from the Egyptians

and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." G-d promises something powerfully transformative, being extracted from a devastating reality and taken to an Edenic idyll. Literally, the promise is located in actual places – Egypt is bad while Israel is good.

G-d develops this promise further in Chapter 6, when G-d promises that He/She will free us from Egypt, take us out, deliver us, and redeem us. Freedom, transportation, deliverance, and redemption are the four steps towards this uplift, and they mirror the four cups of wine in our seder. These four steps towards redemption are imbibed



through the wine, literally changing our consciousness making us light headed through the evening, and giving us an as-if experience, that of being delivered from Egypt. On the night of the seder, we re-live and re-imagine a powerful form of redemption, that changes utterly everything.

This kind of miraculous change is uncommon. However this isn't the only type of redemption offered on Pesach. After the heady high of the seder night which culminates in the splitting of the sea, on the Shabbat of Pesach, we have another story of redemption. This time, unlike the transcendent splitting of the sea, we

find ourselves in a natural setting, a garden, as we read Solomon's Song of Songs. Here is a beautiful love story of adoration, admiration, sensuality, and longing. Yet, this love story doesn't have a culmination like the *kriat yam suf* (splitting of the sea). Nor does it have a simple ending or arrival point. In fact, even the end of the love story is left unwritten. We still don't know if the lovers will actually be "together forever" as we read of one lover hoping that the timing will be right for their union: "Hurry my beloved, swift as a gazelle or a young staff, to the hills of spices." (Ch. 8, 14).

In one of Chagall's paintings of Song of Songs, he depicts an ecstatic couple in mid-air, ensconced in love's embrace, riding a unicorn, above an urban landscape. Renowned Jewish educator Erica Brown insightfully points out that Chagall situates his ecstatic lovers flying above the hum drum of daily reality. Chagall's painting captures the elusiveness of ecstatic love. Sometimes we experience the ecstasy of another realm, but most times, we're caught in the mundaneness of life – chores, duties, as well as anxieties, jealousies, and disappointments, to quote Hamlet, "The thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to".

If this "now you see me, now you don't" is true for human love, it was believed by our rabbis also to be true about spiritual love: our relationship with G-d is about looking, finding, losing sight, and trying again.

We read Song of Songs on Pesach because most of the time, change and transformation isn't the in-your-face variety of the Exodus, it's the subtle shifts of the garden dance. Now it's there, now it's gone! If we had to characterise this love song, it would be about living in reality, among our life's challenges, while always longing for something that will transform reality, with occasional hints of being lifted into the sky on a flying Pegasus.

As much as the seder reminds us of the miracle of redemption, the seder also has built into it this paradox of freedom and urbane reality. Many of the symbols of the seder reflect both slavery and freedom. Matzah

is the bread of our affliction, and matzah is also the bread that symbolises our freedom. Charoset

is the mortar that reminds us of how we had to make our own bricks in Egypt but Brown points out that the ingredients of charoset, from apples to cinnamon and wine, are found in Song of Songs. Charoset is a love paste! The very symbols that are used to capture freedom, love and transportation also point us towards slavery and vice versa. This is because most of the time uplift and drudgery, redemption and limitations walk very close to each other. As we read Song of Songs on Pesach, we remember that to be human is to be in the position of seeking and longing. We get a night (two in the diaspora) of being taken out of Egypt but most of the time, we live in the here and now and long for redemption

Every Pesach on *leil seder*, we remember a miraculous kind of deliverance, where the waters split and reality transformed forever. Those moments come now and then in a lifetime. A few days later, we read Song of Songs and remember that it's not all or nothing. There are moments of dappled liberation every day. Sometimes we see it, sometimes we don't. Even when we aren't in the realm of the miraculous, to be human is to be seeking and longing and finding.

To return to that dilemma – Sydney and Johannesburg, Johannesburg and Sydney. Even as I continue to grieve the loss of my homeland, I will look at Song of Songs this year to remind myself that the perfect life isn't to be found in either Sydney or Johannesburg. Rather life is about learning to live in a natural garden, seeking G-d's face, and seeking the face of the other, looking to bring love and find love wherever we are.

Chaq kasher ve'sameach!

 Adina Roth is head of Jewish Life at Emanuel School Sydney, and a third-year rabbinical student at Yeshivat Maharat in New York.



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## Charoset: why cement never tasted this good

hen I was a kid, I loved eating matzah on Pesach, and my all-time, top-two toppings were honey or charoset. Yes, I had a sweet tooth, and yes, I was ridiculously ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and I'm sure this sugar injection didn't help me sit through a seder. But it did make me look forward to that matzah. In my humble, child-Greg opinion, there just wasn't enough charoset made every year. It was delicious at the seders, but then you had a whole week still to go and the charoset

Now, decades later, and teaching about Pesach every year, charoset is a bit of a dilemma. If you look at any Pesach 101 guide, it tells you that charoset is there to symbolise the mortar that the Israelite slaves used to build the pyramids. But if that's so, why is it so yummy? Let's explore.

It's interesting to note that when we get to the part of the haggadah when we introduce the symbolic foods on the seder plate, we don't speak about charoset (or the roasted egg for that matter, but we don't really have space to deal with that one right now). Rabban Gamliel - don't look for him at shul, he lived 2 000 years ago - said that we're required to speak about three items, starting with Pesach. Yes, I know the whole week is called Pesach, but actually it's because that's the name of the Passover sacrifice offered in the Temple era that recalls the daubing of the blood on the doorposts to avoid the Angel of Death. This is usually marked on the seder plate by a shankbone of a lamb (but veggie families often

use a mushroom, beetroot, or burnt twig). Oh, and someone will surely ask every year what the word "shankbone" means. It's the tibia, if you didn't know, but let's move on.

Next is matzah - bread of affliction. Well, that one we all know - they were in a hurry and their dough didn't have time to rise. And finally, maror, symbolising the bitterness of

> slavery. How I understand the maror! It burns like crazy, and anyone who, like us, is hardcore about it and uses

raw chunks of horseradish at the seder, will know that it even makes you cry. Think wasabi times 10! But no mention of charoset at this point, and we have to wait until the famous Hillel sandwich before charoset makes

its appearance. And then

it's weirdly not even eaten properly because you dip the maror in the charoset and then shake it off. Shake it off! What?! You don't even get to eat it now? Little Greg is shocked, he's dying to eat a whole bowl full. But Rabbi Greg gets it, because maror makes you cry but charoset, well it's dessert right there at the start of the meal, it's comfort food. How is that reminding us of the cement

Eating charoset at the

Let's go ask Maimonides for help. The great legal and philosophical genius of the 12th century explains charoset thus: "We take dates, dried figs, or raisins and the like, and crush them and add vinegar to them, and mix them with spices, as clay is mixed with straw." (Hilchot Chameitz uMatzah 7:11) Thanks Rambam for the recipe, it still sounds a lot more like a sweet treat than a marker of poverty and enslavement, and although you say "clay and straw", I still feel like I'm eating dessert, not cement.

One of the amazing teachers that I met when I was on sabbatical in New York in 2019 was Rabbi Jill Hammer, who explains the dualnature of charoset with two midrashim in The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for all Seasons.

The first explains how when the Egyptian soldiers came to kill Hebrew boys, the mothers would go and give birth out in the orchards, under the apple trees. (Sh'mot Rabbah 1:12) The second explains how when the Israelites were walking through the parted seas, the kids got hungry and started to cry. You can imagine the scene: wonder and amazement at the fish swimming in the walls of water and then, uh oh, hungry kids. No manna yet. What to do? Imagine the aisle of torture at Woolworths when you're queuing up with your toddler to pay, and they see the chocolates and sweets to their left and right. What does a good parent do? You don't want to fill your growing child with rubbish, but they are melting down in the middle of Woolies and there are still six customers in front of you in the line who are all turning their heads to see what you're going

"The daughters of Israel passed through

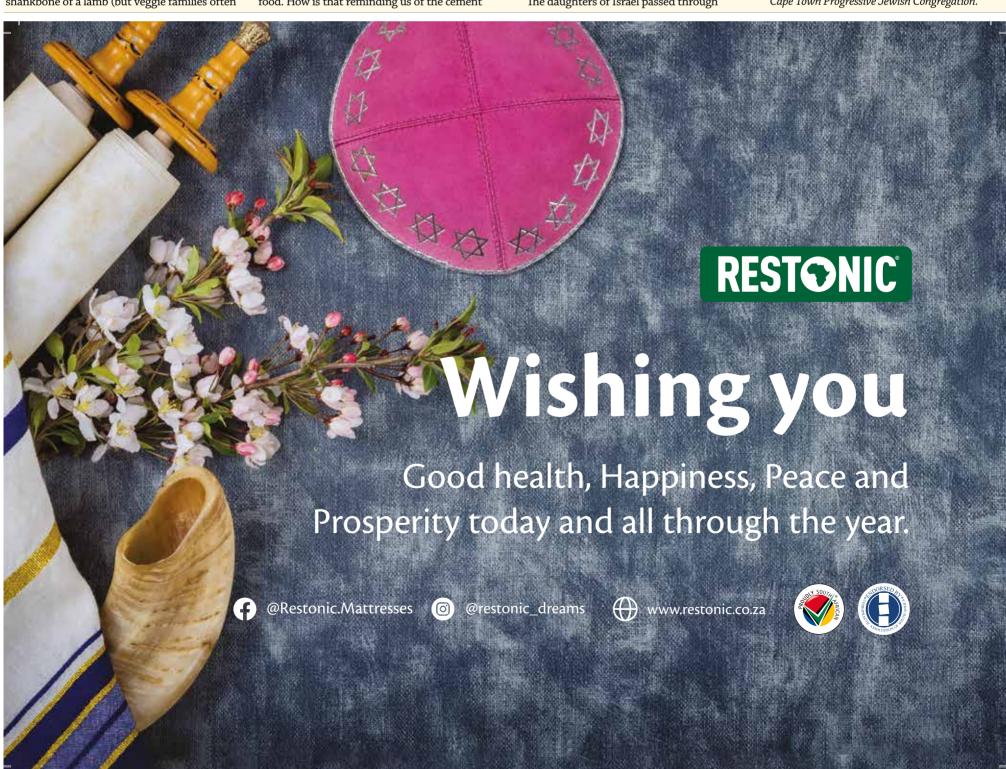
the sea holding their children with their hands, and when the children cried, they would stretch out their hands and pluck an apple or pomegranate from the sea." (Sh'mot Rabbah 21:10). Our Israelite ancestor mothers got to pick out fruit from the wondrous Woolies to placate their hungry little ones and so we, re-enacting our long walk to freedom, grate apples into the charoset.

It's confusing, but let's see what we have now. Because Pharaoh wanted to kill the male babies, our heroic mothers went out to the apple trees and gave birth there to hide them. And then as they walked free, they fed them with apples (or pomegranates – new charoset recipe this year?) to keep them from crying. These two midrashim might suggest that charoset has just as much to do with birth, survival, and freedom as it has to do with slavery and labour.

Perhaps this year at our seder tables, we can explain to our little Gregs that charoset is on the table to remind us of the cement that our ancestors had to pack onto the bricks doing the slave work building the cities of Pithom and Ramses. We should also explain that slavery is an evil that persists today, and that we who know what it was like to be slaves in Egypt must work every day to end it. And in the same breath, we should explain that our heroic mothers defied the tyrant Pharaoh to let their children live and as they finally walked out to freedom, they sustained them with miraculous sweet treats just like we enjoy on seder night. Enjoy your festival of freedom!

Chag sameach!

• Rabbi Greg is part of the rabbinic team at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation.



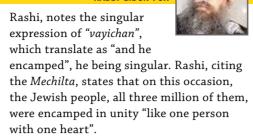
## One people, one destiny

t was the lead-up to the 2010 Soccer World Cup, and I received an email from a university professor in the United States. He was bringing a group of students to South Africa on a learning trip, which was timed to coincide with the World Cup.

As he had a couple of Jewish students, he would like to be able to offer them a Shabbat meal, and he asked if I could assist. There was, however, a "catch". He couldn't split the group, and we would have to host the entire group, not just the Jewish students. Naturally, neither request was any issue at all, and I told him that our family would be honoured to host them.

It was a wonderful and uplifting Shabbat meal. (I hope they felt the same.) A few weeks later, I received an email from one of the students, thanking us for our hospitality. He then he went on to describe the sheer amazement of his non-Jewish friends. Here was a group of total strangers, from different countries, clearly different religious practices, yet we opened our home to these Jewish students and their non-

Jewish friends.



Paying tribute to this monumental occasion, the unity of the Jewish people, we say in the haggadah that had Hashem brought us to that moment of unity and had nothing subsequent occurred, it would have been dayenu (sufficient).

The theme of unity is a central one throughout the haggadah. We commence the proceedings by inviting anyone who has no place to go for the seder to join us at our table. How can we celebrate freedom and liberation while knowing that there are people with nowhere to go? So, we start by making what is in many ways a symbolic declaration, inviting anyone to join us.

This opening salvo of unity is found later on when we read about the ubiquitous four sons, one of the other central parts of the haggadah. As we know, it speaks of the entire spectrum of sons sitting around the seder table, from the wise son to the son who is so far off the religious "beaten

> track" that even the author of the haggadah calls him a rasha (wicked son). Quite a title!

There's a word which appears before describing each of the sons. The word is "echad" (one). One is wise, one is wicked, and so on. Grammatically, the term is redundant, its omission would in no way compromise the prose or our understanding of the content. I would like to suggest that in putting in the word "echad", the author of the haggadah is once

again reflecting the importance of "echad", of unity, on the night of Pesach. Indeed, there are four sons differing in the extreme from one another. Yet, in spite of those differences, they are all sitting together, in harmony, around the same table, celebrating the same festival of Pesach. Once again, it's a vivid reflection of the critical unity at the heart of Pesach, at the heart of the exodus, and indeed at the heart of the Torah and Jewish identity.

We're living in "interesting" times with great challenges. At home, in Israel, the discord and rift is certainly worse than I can ever recall. Different views, different perspectives, different politics, are all creating a schism in society, the likes of which hasn't been seen before. Though in the past, threats from the outside have forced peace on the inside, on this occasion even with external threats, our people seem divided like never before.

Come Pesach, the seder, and the haggadah, and we're reminded of the importance of unity. Not a unity that's predicated on shared perspectives, not a unity predicated on shared views, or shared politics, not even a unity predicated on shared religious practice.

Rather, a unity predicated on a shared history, a shared destiny, and a shared future, in spite of our differences. The seder night calls on Jews the world over to remember that in spite of all our differences, we're one people, and Pesach is the time to remember and celebrate that unique reality.

· Rabbi Gidon Fox is the rabbi of the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation and a dayan on the Johannesburg Beth Din.



amazed at how

being Jewish simply opens doors. It was nice to hear, but in truth, that's what it means to be Jewish - we're one people, one family, brothers and sisters all.

It's one of the highlights of the seder besides the meal that is. The song, Dayenu, gets all participants involved, young or old. It's a song which goes step by step through the various miracles Hashem performed, from the plagues to bringing us to the holy land. At the end of each event, we say "dayenu" (it would have been sufficient).

There seems to be one stanza which is difficult to comprehend - if G-d would have brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, dayenu, that would have been sufficient. Ignoring the fact that the giving of the Torah was the most seminal event in the history of civilisation as we know it; ignoring the centrality of the Torah to the very definition of us as a people; and even ignoring the fact that the purpose of the exodus was to receive the Torah, what would have been the point of being brought to an arid and desolate desert? In what way would the exodus from Egypt culminating in being in the Sinai desert have been dayenu (sufficient)? It seems it would have been pointless, let alone not sufficient.

We're all aware that the moments prior to the actual receiving of the Torah were in and of themselves historic in nature. "Vayichan sham Yisrael" (and Yisrael encamped there), at the foot of Mount Sinai. The pre-eminent commentator,



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## **Delicious after-seder Pesach dishes**

Pesach is much more than two seders, and the week is long unless you have delicious, easy-to-make recipes. Food fundis Lauren Boolkin and Romi Rabinowitz and have a few offerings to feed the family over the Pesach week.

#### **LAUREN BOOLKIN**

#### Crunchy green salad with roasted baby potatoes and macon bits

The macon and potatoes can be prepared a few hours ahead and reheated, covered in a 180 degree oven. Bought balsamic dressing works well too.

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 pkt Crunchita lettuce
- 1 pkt rocket
- 1 pkt tender stem broccoli
- 1 pkt asparagus
- 1 kg baby potatoes
- (I like the red ones)
- 250g beef macon
- Olive oil Onion bits (Freshfellas)
- 1 bunch spring onion
- Edible flowers

## (optional)

#### Method

Preheat your oven to 200 degrees centigrade, Cut the macon into strips. Toss with the olive oil, and roast on a baking sheet lined with baking paper for about 20

minutes or until crisp.

Boil the potatoes until they are all dente. Place on a baking sheet lined with baking paper. Press down on them with a fork until they squash slightly. Drizzle with olive oil and grind on a little salt. Roast in the 200 degree oven until they are crispy.

Place all the green vegetables on top of the lettuce and rocket. Top with the potatoes, macon, and onion bits. Garnish with chopped spring onion and edible

#### Salad dressing

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 3 Tbsp mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp water
- 1 clove garlic crushed
- 1 tsp Pesach mustard
- 1 tsp brown sugar

Whisk all the ingredients together until the sugar is dissolved. Brown sugar works better if you can find a kosher-for-Pesach variety.

#### • ¾ cup olive oil

- ¾ cup balsamic vinegar
- <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- Black pepper
- 10ml soya sauce (optional)

#### **Middle Eastern Scotch Fillet**

The Chimichurri sauce can be kept in the fridge throughout Pesach and is in fact nicer made the day before as the flavours infuse. It's gorgeous on a piece of grilled fish or even as a chicken-salad dressing during Chol Hamoed. I serve it in a separate bowl, allowing me to use the left-over steak in a salad the next day. Store the Chimichurri in a sterilised jar. The meat can be served at room temperature if there are load shedding constraints.

#### Ingredients for the steak

- 1 2kg Scotch fillet or side bolo (If using side bolo, ask the butcher to remove the middle sinew)
- 1 cup sunflower oil
- ½ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup of soya sauce (optional)
- 1 clove garlic crushed
- 1 tsp salt (if you are leaving out the soya, otherwise ½ tsp salt)

#### Method

Marinate the fillet for one to two days in the above marinade. Preheat your oven to 200 degrees centigrade, and cook the meat for 45 minutes a side uncovered. A meat thermometer is useful as cooking times vary according to the thickness of the meat. Once cooked, cover the meat for at least 10 minutes before slicing.

#### **Chimichurri sauce**

- ¼ cup of watercress
- ¼ cup of parsley



- ½ cup of coriander
- ¼ cup of fresh oregano
- 1 small red onion
- 1 clove garlic
- ½ lemon roughly chopped and deseeded
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1 chilli deseeded (or seeded if you prefer)
- 200ml olive oil (or half olive, half grapeseed)
- 1 ½ Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 ½ Tbsp white wine vinegar

If you have a food processor, you can process all ingredients, otherwise chop by hand and blend. Taste for seasoning.

#### **Out of Egypt lamb**

By the time you reach the main course, your guests are probably rather full. The fact that the lamb is cut into small portions allows for a taste of the meat without that overfed feeling. The addition of sweet potato makes the food preparation easier as all you really need is a fresh green salad.

#### Ingredients (serves six)

- 3 lamb shanks cut into three
- 1 tbsp cinnamon
- 1 tbsp ground coriander (use fresh if you need to)
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp turmeric
- 1 clove of garlic • 2 tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ¼ cup oil
- 2 onions cut into wedges
- 3 sweet potatoes cubed (skin on is fine)
- ½ cup of tomato paste
- 1 tbsp lemon zest
- 4 cups of chicken stock
- ¼ cup of honey

#### Method

Toss the lamb in some sunflower oil and roast uncovered at 220 degrees centigrade for 30 minutes to seal the meat. Combine all the ingredients, and pour over the lamb. Roast covered at 160 degrees for three hours, basting every 30 minutes. Garnish with chopped parsley and coriander. You could also add some chopped dates for garnish if you wish. This dish can be made the day before and reheated.



## Wholesome soup, with a side of kugel

#### **ROMI RABINOWITZ**

#### Wholesome vegetable soup This soup is wonderful for the seder - in fact, it's wonderful all year round. It's delicious and a

cinch to make, with easily sourced vegetables.

## **Ingredients**

- 4 cloves of garlic chopped
- 2 onions chopped • 2 onions cut in half
- 1 butternut cut into small cubes
- 6 baby marrows sliced
- 6 carrots sliced • 1 whole bulb of celery, stalks and leaves chopped.

more water if necessary.

#### • 4 tsp vegetable stock

Method

Heat a little oil in a large pot and fry the garlic and the two chopped onions until golden. Add the remainder of the chopped vegetables, and fry together for a few minutes. Fill the pot with water to cover the vegetables, and add four teaspoons of vegetable stock. Allow the soup to simmer for at least three to four hours for the soup to meld together and a rich, aromatic flavour to form. Add



#### Golden potato kugel

This potato kugel is a must at any Pesach seder, and is my absolute favourite. By frying the onions until golden and then adding them to the potato mixture, this dish is a winner every time!

#### Ingredients

- 10 potatoes grated
- 2 onions
- 2 Tbsp oil
- 3 eggs
- ¾ cup of cake meal/matza meal
- ½ tsp salt
- Pinch of pepper
- 4 Tbsp schmaltz

#### Method

Slice onions into rings and fry in a little oil until golden. Set aside.

Melt schmaltz in a pot.

Into a large bowl add grated potatoes, egg, cake/matzah meal, salt and pepper, and melted schmaltz. Pour half the mixture into your baking dish, top with the fried onions, and then add the

rest of the potato mixture. Bake your kugel at 180 degrees centigrade for about 45 minutes or until golden and

cooked through.

## High price of freedom

#### **HOWARD FELDMAN**

t turns out there hadn't been fraud committed on the credit card. It hadn't been stolen, and we hadn't been hacked. In spite of my misgivings, it transpired that there was no need to contact Investec which would have, no doubt, received several panicked calls ahead of mine fearful of the same thing. It was simply that my wife had gone shopping for a few food items for Pesach. And by a "few" I mean two half-filled bags that were in no danger of bursting open.

Sad little bags really, if one considers the contents. Bags that held not a single dietrelated cold drink.

I find it hard to believe that Egypt, back in the day, could have been this expensive, even if we were to adjust for inflation.

Although it, too, had no access to Coke or Sprite Zero.

It isn't only a South African thing. If my social media feeds are any indication, Pesach seems to have become aggressive (price wise) no matter where one lives. I have seen Americans complaining that it's impossible to manage the cost, and that there's fear that the pressure placed on families will drive people towards non-observance.

Whereas I have no real understanding how someone who adheres to Jewish law would reach that conclusion based on price, the underlying sentiment is worth noting. The cost of keeping Pesach is placing tremendous strain on many in the community.

There has in recent years been several initiatives designed to assist in this regard. The Union of Orthodox Synagogues' "green list" is case in point. It provides a list of items that could be purchased for use over Passover even without specific Pesach authorisation. Although fairly limited, it does at least provide options.

In a recent discussion with head of community liaison at Pick n Pay Norwood (a less enviable position than Andre De Ruyter at Eskom), he applauded the green list. He mentioned, further, that they had taken the decision to not import some kosher-for-Pesach products because of the cost and knowing that their customers would be unable or unwilling to pay for those items. Rather, they focused on

#### >>Continued from page 2

time, including the "N-word" and the term "oriental" to describe characters with Asian heritage.

According to the Telegraph report, descriptions of characters as Jewish, black, or "gypsy" have been scrubbed from multiple books. In one example, Poirot's description of a character as "a Jew, of course" in The Mysterious Affair at Styles, has been deleted.

#### **Greece arrests terror suspects in Athens**

Greek authorities arrested two men on 28 March who were planning mass terrorist attacks on Jewish sites in Athens, including a Chabad outpost and a Jewish restaurant, according to reports.

The Mossad, Israel's spy agency which contributed to the investigation, told Associated Press that the men, who are Pakistani nationals, are also part of an Iranian terror network. A third man is wanted for questioning. The group reportedly entered Greece from Turkey illegally four months ago.

The arrests offer the latest indication that Iranian operatives are active across Europe.

In Greece, home to between 2 000 and 3 000 Jews, the attacks were believed to be imminent, officials said, noting that the suspects "had received final instructions". Police searched for the suspects in Athens, southern Greece, and the island of Zakynthos.



importing a selection of goods that together with the green list would enable people to cater as best as they could for the festival.

Last year, we had the privilege of spending Pesach in Israel. We spent the first few days at a "kitniyot-free" hotel, which needless to say, was superb. But on leaving the hotel for the last few days, we found that it was a real challenge to find items without kitniyot. A number of people we chatted to had given up trying to adhere to this custom simply because it was too difficult. Which, for the first time, I understood, given how difficult it was.

It was at those times that I didn't long for the flesh pots of Egypt, but rather the convenience of the many kosher stores in Johannesburg that cater to those requirements.

Pesach is expensive. It's not for sissies. But it's only eight days. And there are options to make it easier. Further, with or without Coke Zero, it beats the hell out of being a slave.



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Applications Close: Friday, 7 April 2023

**36** SA JEWISH REPORT 30 March - 20 April 2023

## Pyramids to parliament - Ruth Wasserman Lande tells all

In our Pesach webinar this week (Thursday, 30 March), Howard Sackstein interviews Ruth Wasserman Lande, a South African-born Israeli politician who was posted to Egypt as a diplomat. We bring you the story.

For many years, we knew you as the only South African in the Knesset. Tell us what you're doing now.

I left the Knesset about three months ago, after the elections, hoping that I would come back. I'm still very involved in Israeli politics. Three weeks ago, I spoke to 25 000 demonstrators.

It has been a bit crazy in our little country of late concerning judicial-reform. I have set up a little consultancy, and have been commentating on TV (i24 News and Channel 13) and I write an opinion piece for the Jerusalem Post every two weeks. I have also been

elected chairperson of the Women's Impact Forum in the World Jewish Congress, which I think is a great shlichut (task), and I intend to put in a huge effort.

You grew up in Cape Town, but in a previous life, you had a very interesting diplomatic post. Given that we are on the eve of Pesach, I want to ask about your appointment as the deputy ambassador to Cairo.

I was deputy ambassador for three years. I was an unmarried, Jewish Israeli at the time who spoke Arabic and Russian. I was more or less the epitome of evil in the minds



of the Egyptians. It was a surreal experience, very eye opening, and I learnt a huge amount.

## What was it like being posted

For an Israeli to live in an Arab country (pre-Abraham Accords), when Jordan and Egypt were

the only countries to have Israeli diplomats with a real embassy, it wasn't easy.

Even though there has been 40-odd years of peace with Egypt, the relationship was anything but warm. Normalisation of diplomatic ties was distant. It was a tough post in comparison to posts in Europe. Anything and everything you do isn't a given, such as meetings with the ministry of foreign affairs, which though a regular occurrence for most countries, isn't the case with Egypt.

The Jewish community in Cairo, which was once large and active, has been almost non-existent since 1956 when Jews left for Israel and Europe after Colonel Nassar took over in 1952. There are still many old Jewish documents and Torahs in Egypt stored in the old synagogue in Cairo, which is more like a monument now.

There are a handful of Jews left in Cairo. Did you have any contact with the Jewish community while you were

There were 12 Jews in Egypt while I was there. One man in Alexandria, one man in Cairo, and the rest were women. Most of them are married

to Egyptian Muslim men and as per the custom, their children are considered Muslim. We went to visit the synagogue and were in touch with the head of the Jewish community.

There were always

more Israeli diplomats than local Jews. The synagogue in Cairo, which just turned 100, has been well maintained and the synagogue in Alexandria has just been reopened. The Egyptians are well aware of the Jewish heritage in Egypt.

What was it like living in Cairo? The Pyramids of Giza are close to the city. It must be like living in the middle of 4 000 to 5 000 years of history.

I had to pinch myself sometimes to really believe I was there. Living in Cairo as an Israeli Jew is a whole different experience when you're used to living in a "Western" country. There's huge pollution, and the city looks half brown most of the time, but night, when you see the lights and the Nile River from a rooftop restaurant, the city is magnificent. It's hard to breathe, there's 30% less oxygen in the air due to pollution,

and the cars hoot all the time. It's surreal, and goes on day and night.

The call for prayer emanates from different loudspeakers across the city. They try to synchronise them so that you hear only five calls at a time, but this doesn't work well and you hear a constant call for prayer. In the first few months of living there, I would wake up at 03:00 every morning. It was interesting and challenging.

#### Cairo is chaos, especially with the traffic and dirt. It feels like it never recovered from the 10

creates an atmosphere of everything being in between the lines. When you speak to people, it's not direct like in Israel or other Western countries, you speak indirectly using nuances and euphuisms (saying but not saying). I went to Eilat, which is a three-hour drive by car, to get a reality check and recalibrate my senses.

After the Abraham Accords, the

## plagues. Chaos is the name of the game. It

Relations between Israel and the Arab world changed with the **Abraham Accords. How would** you describe the relationship today between Israel and Egypt? Has there been an improvement? Yes, absolutely. The relations have always been warm to a degree. After the peace agreement in 1979, there was never full normalisation of diplomatic ties. People-to-people relations were never fully fledged.



Passover themes tie our struggle to that of Ukrainian Jews



#### SHULY RUBIN SCHWARTZ - JTA

ust more than 100 years ago, in April 1922, my great-grandparents emigrated to the United States with their four children, fearing for their lives in Kremenets, a Russian city in present-day western Ukraine.

My great-grandfather, Aaron Shimon Shpall, an educator and journalist, recorded his thoughts about leaving "the city that we were born in and that we spent years of our lives in", acknowledging how hard it would be "to separate from our native land, our birthplace, and our father's house".

But he was clear that the Russia he knew had "embittered our lives and saddened our souls. If not for the three million of our brothers who live there, it could be overturned along with Sodom and Gomorrah, and the world would have lost nothing".

Finally, after months of gruelling uncertainty, including one arrest and another pending, my greatgrandfather was reunited with his family in Colorado before he and his family ultimately settled in New Orleans, where he served as teacher and then as assistant principal of the communal Hebrew school.

The anguish of my family's departure and, I can only imagine, the feelings of refugees all over the world in every era, is captured in my great-grandfather's diary: "Nobody desired to go, but everybody had to go. We all run, or, to speak more correctly, we flee. And when somebody flees, there's no question, 'Where to?' Where your feet carry you! Where you have the possibility!"

The Passover seder – the Jewish ritual observed more than any other - serves as a symbolic re-enactment of the journey of the Israelites from slavery to freedom. The haggadah commands us to experience this journey annually as a way of developing historical empathy for all who are oppressed, enslaved, and displaced, and who hope for liberation. As Jews, we have ritualised the recounting of our people's enslavement and deliverance in part to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility toward those suffering in our own day.

This year, as we approach Passover, our focus includes Ukrainians fighting valiantly to defend themselves against Russian invasion. Outraged by the violence,

heartbroken by the loss of life, and appalled by the destruction, we feel an obligation to help the Ukrainian people by offering monetary support and help with resettlement.

We're especially attuned to helping the tens of thousands of Jews among them. The bonds of history that tie our struggles to those of Ukrainian Jews and their proud Jewish president today are deep and, in many cases, including mine, quite personal.

American Jewry has flourished thanks to ancestors like mine who realised their determination to seek freedom and escape oppression. Thanks to their courage and resolve, we're privileged to recount the exodus from Egypt each year as citizens of a democratic state and to develop the empathy needed at moments like this to help others who fear for their lives.

For some, historical empathy for the plight of the Ukrainian people might be complicated by ancestors who suffered from brutal antisemitism at the hands of Ukrainian neighbours or whose ancestors' murder at the hand of the Nazis was abetted by local Ukrainians.

How can we square these complicated emotions? In part, because we also know that countless other Ukrainians fought in the Russian army to defeat the Nazis, and that Ukraine has changed greatly over time. The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, on the site of the largest massacre of Ukrainian Jews by the Nazis, is in the process of opening, and today, Ukraine is led by a Jewish president.

Most important, we quell our doubts because the haggadah reminds us not to take our freedom for granted, pointing us instead to activate our sense of moral responsibility to help others who are fighting to secure their own.

Our haggadah prods us to recall our history so that it will conjure up our best selves, so that we'll do what we can to ensure that the future brings freedom, safety, and security to all.

It's a sentiment I believe my great-grandfather would have shared.

• Shuly Rubin Schwartz is chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

onus was no longer on Egypt's shoulders, being the biggest Arab country, to make peace with Israel. Jordan made peace in 1994. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco making peace with Israel lifted the taboo on Israel in the region and strengthened Israel's relationship with Egypt.

The geo-strategic relationship with Egypt has never been stronger - there's an understanding over the threat of Iran. The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is more tactical than strategic.

Egypt is a Sunni Muslim country and Iran is a Shia country, with a huge history of tension. There has been great progress in the Egyptian curriculum, with no anti-Israel rhetoric in schoolbooks and in the media. Two years ago, a Holocaust memorial conference was held by the United States embassy in Cairo for the first time, which is a positive step.





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## Miracles bring mother back from the brink

#### **TALI FEINBERG**

"If it wasn't for the community and Hashem, I wouldn't have made it," says Johannesburg mother Shira Gutnick (née Zagnoev), who almost died on the operating table before the age of 30. Prior to that, she discovered she had cancer when she was 37 weeks pregnant, gave birth, and endured "red devil" chemotherapy. Doctors had to resuscitate her during the operation, following which she was put on life support.

Today, she's celebrating being alive and healthy, and is grateful for so many miracles. She recently hosted a seudat hodaya (meal of thanks) to celebrate her survival, and thanked every person who helped her along

In June 2022, Gutnick had the pictureperfect life. She and Sroli had been married for seven years and were blessed with three-year-old daughter, Leah. Gutnick was pregnant with their second child, a son, and had a routine appointment with radiologist Dr Russell Seider. Exhausted, she almost cancelled, but something compelled her to go.

It was at that appointment that Seider told her not to panic, but he had picked up "abnormal tissue" that needed a biopsy. Two days later, he gently broke the news she had a malignant growth in her breast. While Gutnick reeled, Dr Seider supported her - the first of many moments when she would experience "excellence in science and excellence in compassion".

Gutnick was sent to see surgeon Dr Sarah Nietz that very afternoon, who told her that the tumour was "aggressive and fast growing", but caught early. She then met her oncologist, Professor Bernardo Rapoport. Walking into an oncology waiting room at nine months pregnant, "I could see the shock and confusion on everyone's faces."

From the moment she met Rapoport, "I knew that I was in safe hands. He was G-dsent, and G-d-guided." He told her that she was to have her baby via caesarean section in three days, and begin chemotherapy right after her baby's bris.

Gutnick gave birth to Dovid Shalom on 21 June 2022. "As I looked for someone to put up balloons for the bris, I was trying to book my CT scan to ascertain whether the cancer had spread. But I was able to totally separate myself at the bris, which felt like a real celebration."

Afterwards, the contrast of emotions was vast. She called Dr Seider, who said: "You're going to look back at this as a difficult time that you overcame." These words comforted Gutnick in her darkest moments. "We never know how our words might light a path for others," she says.

Three days after the bris, Gutnick headed to the Rosebank Oncology Centre. She and Rapoport made a pact that he would one day attend her son's Barmitzvah. Gutnick had to have the chemo commonly known as the "red devil".

A brutal chemo schedule followed, with a relentless impact on Gutnick's well-being. Family, friends, and the community rallied to care for both mother and children, and Gutnick's husband ably navigated this new world of a wife with cancer, a newborn, and

A clot had formed as a result of Gutnick's chemo port, and she was referred to Dr Ishmael Cassimjee "who was to become my vascular surgeon and my friend". He did a procedure to dissolve the clot. Afterwards, he asked professor of haematology, Dr Barry Jacobson, to visit Gutnick. "Dr Jacobson insisted that I have my mastectomy surgery at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre, because of the clot complication. Without his insistence, I wouldn't be here."

The surgery was scheduled for 12 January 2023. Dr Nietz and plastic surgeon Dr Dimitri Liakos were to perform it. But within seconds of the anaesthetic entering her body, they realised something was horribly wrong. The left ventricle of her heart failed because of a condition called takotsubo cardiomyopathy, also known as "broken heart syndrome".

"Dr Nietz described it as the 'perfect storm'. The combination of the chemo, which is damaging to the heart, the clot, and the multiple anaesthetics, plus all the stress possibly caused it," says Gutnick.

"The doctors called for help. Miraculously, lead intensive-care (ICU) specialist Dr Liam Brannigan happened to be adjacent to the operating theatre. Had he been anywhere else in the hospital, it would have been too late. He knew this was an extremely rare condition, directing the appropriate resuscitation."

Gutnick was put on life support. She has no memory of being between life and death. She had to be transferred to Milpark Hospital by specialised ICU ambulance. An ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) machine, which takes over the heart and lungs and is available at few hospitals, was



on standby. Had Milpark been more than five minutes away, it would have been too

At Milpark, she was immediately assessed by cardiothoracic surgeons Dr Martin Sussman and Dr Lebo Mokotjo, and cardiologist Dr Ahmed Vachiat. "Dr Vachiat later told me that he didn't even have time to change into scrubs, and how

move from one hospital theatre to another."

Meanwhile, her mother alerted their tehillim group, asking them to "storm the heavens". It was suggested to add a new name to Gutnick's first name, done in Judaism when someone faces a life-ordeath situation. "Before making a decision to add a name, my parents asked Sussman whether my condition warranted it. He said, 'Milpark sees very sick people, but your

daughter is the sickest patient right now."

Within a short time, 10 men arrived, and she was given the name Sarah. "While this was happening, the power of global Jewry kicked in. Thank you to this community for imploring for my health."

More miracles followed. Overnight, ECMO compromised the flow of blood to Gutnick's left leg. The doctors tried to move the catheter, but were unable to do so. "Just before Shabbos, my mom sent a message to please pray for the health of my leg. By the next morning, there was no longer any obstruction. There was no medical explanation. It was the power of prayer."

She remained in critical condition, but the mastectomy was performed. It was successful, and doctors were able to ascertain that Gutnick was in remission. Eight days after her heart stopped, Gutnick woke up. "Dr Vachiat said, 'I have no way of describing what has happened to you other than this is a miracle. Your community did something right with their prayers."

Two days later, she was cleared to go home. "I came home fully recovered. I needed to rest but nothing more than that, thank G-d!" Wherever she went, the community greeted her with joy. "Everyone was so invested. It felt like one big family."

At times during her cancer journey, Gutnick wanted to be "out of her body". "Now, every morning, I say the Shema with joy. I'm miraculously in my body. Ultimately, my story is about the power of prayer, the power of Hashem, and the good that's inherent in all of us."

## Sexual violence – the dark underbelly of liberation

#### **HANNA RESNICK**

or some survivors, liberation from the concentration I camps by Soviet forces may have been a reprieve from the dehumanising treatment that they faced during the Holocaust. For others, particularly Jewish women, liberation led to them being further violated, albeit by a different assailant.

Earlier this year, The Ghetto Fighters' House launched a four-part webinar, "Violated! Sexual Abuse During and After the Holocaust", which explored the history and implications

of sexual violence under the Nazi regime. The fourth and final instalment, which took place on Sunday 26 March, discussed the "Victimisation of Jewish Women by their Soviet Liberators," revising the post-liberation narrative to include those who were most vulnerable.

"Dominant historical narratives of liberation share strong common themes of triumph, heroism, and gratitude," said Dr Daina Eglitis, a professor of sociology who gathered testimony from many women survivors. "The celebrated story of liberation, however, is

incomplete. Missing from most accounts are the voices of Jewish women survivors whose victimisation didn't end with the arrival of their liberators." As one survivor, Isabelle K, said in her testimony, "We were liberated, but this was a

Eglitis' research focused specifically on the sexual assault and exploitation of girls and women trying to find shelter and freedom after being liberated from concentration camps and death marches in the east by Soviet troops. Her work highlights the lack of women's voices, and recognises the fact that those same men who saved them from the hands of the Nazis also posed a significant threat.

"Women's experiences are detectable in primary sources, including published and unpublished memoirs and survivor testimonies. They are, however, largely excluded from mainstream accounts of liberation."

She believes that this is because "women's stories have been marginalised by cultural norms that attach shame to the victims of sexual violence rather than the perpetrators. This is done by writers and researchers who are uncomfortable with the vulnerabilities of women, and by the perceived need for nationalism, with stories that don't interfere in the smooth telling of a heroic and

triumphant past."

Uncertainty about what lay ahead made it difficult for the women of the camps to celebrate their newfound freedom. Rebecca R, a survivor from Struthof, recalled the night that she and the other prisoners awoke to find that the Nazi guards were gone. "The Russians are here. We didn't know to be happy or unhappy," she said.

Another survivor, Helga H, wrote, "We were so weak, we couldn't even cry anymore, but liberation ultimately was no pleasure either. Then, we had to sleep out in the fields because they [Soviet soldiers] raped every woman they got shouted at the soldiers, and they ran away."

Eva W, liberated from a death march originating in Stutthof, claimed that Soviet soldiers "wanted to rape all the women. They haven't seen a woman in years." To evade the desires of these men, women were advised to disguise themselves as old women or young boys.

The third explanation that Eglitis noticed was that "survival was often perceived by Soviet liberators as evidence of complicity". The idea that the Nazis were ruthless fascists led the Russians to believe that Jews had no chance of escaping the camps alive. "They were suspicious of Jews who had survived, and dubious that Jews had survived at all," she said. Many believed or

> suggested that Jewish women had survived only because they had sexual relations with Nazi officers. Klara K remembered a Russian officer saying, "You could live with the Germans, but you don't want to live with us!"

"A few nights [the Soviet soldiers] used to come in and want to rape the girls. They had the attitude, 'You slept with the Germans, you don't want to sleep with us'. They couldn't understand anything," said another survivor. This suspicion continued as Jewish women were subjected to the Soviet "filtration" camps, where Russian officers continued to take advantage of

Eglitis concluded that though it was difficult to draw precise details from testimonies written after the fact, there was an evident pattern of abuse and

violence throughout women's stories that proves that the phenomenon of sexual violence was a significant issue. She said it was impossible to quantify the extent of the issue considering how much of the evidence had been hidden.

The information may have been concealed for the safety of the victims, but it was probably also undisclosed due to the social stigma around stories of "bodily humiliation, attempted degradation, and sexual violence".

In a culture that imposes shame upon victims rather than perpetrators, women are often uncomfortable telling their stories and others are often uncomfortable hearing them.

"Women's voices matter in the telling of the past," said Eglitis. "They provide a more nuanced perspective on this period, inviting a critical and reflective approach to the mythologised images of the liberating Soviet army [which] continues to influence Russian discourse and justify Russian state violence today."

"Liberation is a far more complex story than most historical accounts reveal," she said. "Liberators have been venerated as heroes, but many were also, tragically, rapists who terrorised girls and women who had already survived the savagery of Nazi captivity."



"Russians arrived.

Liberation! But long, long is the night of liberation," said Magda S in her unpublished memoir.

Eglitis said that, in reading countless testimonies and primary sources, she had uncovered three supposed explanations for the continual assault. The first was that "some Soviet soldiers sought to exact payment for liberation". This can be seen in testimonies such as that of Miriam I, who recounted her experience of being on a train to Czechoslovakia after having lost her mother and surviving multiple concentration camps. Weak and tired, she tried to resist the assault of a Russian officer. His response was, "I freed you and you are mine. I can do anything I want with you. I gave you life." Miriam immediately fled the train.

The second explanation was the "socialisation of women into a male standpoint" that the sexual abuse of these women was said to fulfil the "lynched sexual needs of soldiers who had spent years at the front without access to

The testimony of survivor Sofiya A read, "They needed women. They grasped one, and dragged her to the corridor. Luckily the captain came in. He turned out to be a Jew. He

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## Death doula assists at the end of life

**MOIRA SCHNEIDER** 

doula may sound morbidly depressing.

But to someone like Rafaela Joffe
Peerutin, who has chosen this as her career, it's not all doom and gloom.

Peerutin believes her life experience led her to this unusual career. She was a speech therapist in the National Health Service in the United Kingdom, working with the ill and disabled for 30 years, while looking after her daughter, Alexandra, who had a rare Jewish genetic degenerative neurological condition.

"There was always going to be a moment when she would pass," Peerutin says of Alexandra, "and she needed full-time physical care. I was her main carer although I was working full time.

"As she got older, she literally couldn't stand, she couldn't sit, she was on oxygen. She would have seizures where she would stop breathing, and we would have to do mouth-to-mouth [resuscitation]." Alexandra passed away at the age of 24.

"At that time, I thought, there's so much medical support, but there's very little real emotional support, not only for me, but even for her as a young woman and as a child. There was never a conversation with any of us, such as, 'Do you know this is a life-limiting condition?'

"Of course I knew, but it wasn't a topic that was ever discussed. It was very lonely."

When Peerutin came back to South Africa after Alexandra's death, she started volunteering at St Luke's Hospice doing grief counselling for the bereaved and spiritual care for the dying. She underwent "loads" of palliative care and bereavement care training there

She also completed a "deeply intensive" grief counselling course in the United States. "It was cathartic for dealing with my own grief, but also gave me further skills," she says.

About four years ago, Peerutin heard about death doula services, a relatively new field in this country. It's much more well-known abroad, where death doulas are seen as a key component of a multi-disciplinary palliative care team.

Death and dying is being spoken about more openly rather than being the taboo subject it once was, she says. In the health profession, it's becoming more mainstream to think of it as part of the services that need to be provided.

COVID-19 also played its part as it raised awareness of "people dying alone in hospitals without loved ones holding their hands.

"People want to think about preparing a little bit more.
There are so many books and so much thinking about it now.
People have become more receptive to it.

"The medical profession works so hard to keep people alive, but when there's nothing more that it can do, it sends you away, and that's actually when the person needs support. You can still live some form of a life, albeit different, to prepare you to come to terms with the situation and to be at peace with yourself emotionally, socially, psychosocially, and spiritually."

Though the work she does is nondenominational, Peerutin would like to be involved with rabbis in this regard. She isn't religious, but strongly identifies as a Jew.

"My grandfather was taken to the camps, which makes me feel very Jewish," she says. Her mother, Helene Joffe, was a hidden child during the Holocaust, and she and her siblings consciously protected her by "not going there".

"In a way, there's always been grief and trauma in my life, and the body keeps score," she says, referring to cell memory. "For me, it's healing to help and serve others."

Peerutin is involved from point of referral, all the way through to keeping

an end-of-life vigil, if that's what individuals feel comfortable with. Post death, she supports the family. It's a whole package, including washing the bodies. I see a Joffe Peerutin that as sacred, because when you're

working with someone who is on that journey, it's such a privilege and so humbling.

Her service also extends to the unconscious, either through talking, reading, playing music, or employing "gentle touch".

"I will sit and hold their hand, and be part of that journey all the way through," she says.

"A 65-year-old medical professional met me when her cancer had metastasized," she recalls of a "friend", as she calls her patients. "She was still working and functioning highly.

"Initially, it was just getting to know her and chatting about what this journey may look like for her. As the visits progressed, she became more receptive to talking about the more emotional, psychological, and spiritual questions, and her anxiety, conflicts, and unresolved issues.

"We did sessions with her adult son. We made sure that they were sharing everything they wanted to share, whether it was getting the house sorted, the car, the logistics, the paperwork, the advanced care, or the living will.

"I met her and her sisters as well, doing a lot of resolution work around conflicts, and coming to a place of peace in the relationships.

"As the illness progressed and she became bedridden, discussion moved to who she wanted around her at the time of passing, as well as what she wanted for her funeral." Peerutin started using essence oils to calm her anxiety, worked with the family, and gave her meditation tapes to listen to.

"I was present with her when she died, and stayed with the family for a while," she says.

As for the essential qualities for doing this work, Peerutin lists "an open heart and vulnerability. You can't be arrogant, you just have to be present, and not want to impose anything onto someone else. And obviously, compassion. Listening is important, not necessarily talking; being able to be still in a space that's difficult. Being able to see someone ill and suffering, being able to face death."

Peerutin finds joy in her work. "Creating a relationship is incredible, and when you know that the person is comfortable and sharing, that's quite joyous. You'll laugh at things together – it's not all doom and gloom!"



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## KDVP's Joseph a spectacular display of talent

DEVIEW

oseph and the Amazing Technicolour Colour Dreamcoat is a cult-classic musical theatre piece that has had audiences singing along to the book of Genesis since the late 1960s. This week, King David High School Victory Park revisited the Andrew Lloyd Webber staple for its 2023 major production. It performed six shows from 26 to 29 March, selling out all performances, and receiving an abundance of praise.

Joseph was last performed by KDVP High School in 1992, and was revived this year by director and head of arts and culture and dramatic arts, Renos Spanoudes. A highlight of this show was that every student

who auditioned was included in the performance. School spirit radiated from every corner of the stage, and each student was given their chance to shine. The cast was comprised of an impressive 75 students, whose ensemble numbers were choreographed by Dillone Prince, with vocal coaching by Debra

Fleminger Mizrachi.
The performance of the titular character,
Joseph, by Ayal Krawitz (double-cast with
Christian Lees for alternate performances),
felt sincere and heartfelt, reflecting the earnest
nature of the character in relation to constant
antagonism from his 11 brothers. His performance
of songs such as Any Dream Will Do and Close Every Door
To Me showcased his singing talent, while his scene with Potiphar's
wife, played by the charismatic Tali Bloch (alternate Liana Wes), or his
interactions with his brothers, showed a more humorous side to the

The narrator was led by Mira Lipman, whose strong soprano fit perfectly with the character. However, instead of sticking to a single narrator, the character was assigned to a small ensemble of female vocalists, including solos from Emma Sweiden and Gabi Bild, that made it come to life.

One of the elements that makes this musical feel timeless is its amalgamation of songs in a variety of pastiches of genres that never truly allow the audience to attach the story to a singular era. Michael Flaum's performance in the 1920s Charleston-esque song *Potiphar* created a decadent jazz number, while Sam Bonner's (alternate Greg Landau) performance as the Elvis-coded, rock 'n roll king, Pharaoh, served as an upbeat, invigorating blast from the past. The over-the-top, caricaturesque costumes and performances were perfectly executed.

The tone then shifts with the down-trodden family Joseph has left behind, with the French-style ballad *Those Canaan Days*. The ensemble of the brothers was led by Jethro Crawford as Jacob, whose



powerful vocals (and impressive breath control) maintained the sorrowful tone of the song, while interspersing it with moments of comedy and exaggerated French accents.

The production boasted a few unique elements that added a fresh twist to the well-known libretto. In one of them, the story was made more interactive as the baker, played by Shane Yutar,

broke the fourth wall before, during, and after the play. After the butler (Giorgio Klein, alternate Jaedone Zaken), received the more favourable dream, it seems the baker attempted to escape and found his new calling telling dad-jokes to the audience, sporting placards that prompted it to laugh, cheer, cry, or groan. This interesting postmodern idea could probably have even been explored further.

The set was modernised through the use of banners decorated with graffiti, as well as slight variations in traditional costumes. This, too, could probably have been experimented with in other areas of the show to make a more prominent statement.

The student Salt and Pepper teams did an incredible job with the lighting and the variety of moving elements. The set also featured a plethora of levels and scaffolding, which added dimension to the performance. The large cast made use of the entire space in various creative ways, such as moving through the aisles and the stairs coming off the stage. The performance also featured a live band which further immersed the audience in the entirely sung-through musical.

KDVP's performance of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Colour Dreamcoat* was a lovely exhibit of the talent its students have to offer, as well as an engaging watch for all.

# Funny, sad, and biting – why Yiddish isn't going anywhere

**SHELLEY GLASER** 

t has a bitter wit with an instinctual way of letting off steam and the most colourful curses, but many claimed that it wouldn't survive.

However, Yiddish, for all its quirkiness, is unlikely to go anywhere and though experts learn it, there are groups springing up around the world to speak it, laugh in it, and keep it alive

Dr Stanley Katzeff is a part of such a group in South Africa, with up to 40 people from Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town – and internationally from Israel, Belgium, England, and Lithuania – that meets every two weeks over this idiosyncratic language.

"It's a language we don't want to forget," he said. "We lost two-thirds of our Jewish population during the Holocaust, and learning Yiddish makes sure we don't forget them."

Mary Kropman, who also attends the meetings, says it's a "connection to my late parents, and brings back childhood memories". She offers examples of Yiddish wisdom, "No answer is also an answer", and "A half-truth is a whole lie." And one of its many insights, "Man plans and G-d laughs".

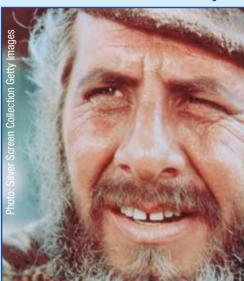
They explain their attraction to this language, including the fact that it has a spice and spirit that's often lost in translation. It's tough to convey its poignancy, sadness, heartbreak, wisdom, and humour in translation.

It is, according to a European Parliament Think Tank, considered to be a part of European folk culture, and contributed to the work of great writers and musicians.

Like the Jews of the early twentieth century, Yiddish can be described as stateless. It neared extinction when it lost most of its speakers to the Holocaust and, according to the Think Tank, also suffered under successive waves of Jewish migration, persecution, pogroms, Stalinism, war, Nazism, and all forms of antisemitism.

According to Michael Wex, New York Times bestselling author of Born to Kvetch, Yiddish language and Culture in All its Moods, Yiddish is the language of a powerless people, and was in many ways a way to "blow off steam". It was the Jewish verbal home, and "long served as a place [...] they could go to".

Wex says Yiddish, more than most languages, embodies a sceptical state of mind, a discouraging posture, and a suspicious attitude to the then ever hostile world. He calls it a language of exile, that likes to argue with everybody and everything. One of the examples he gives is what he calls a colourful curse, "You should swell up and suffer from varicose veins." Another from author John Kunza, "May you be so rich your widow's husband has to never work a day." Yiddish humour isn't gentle or polite.



and cutting at times, others have a less sardonic view of it. Dr Veronica Belling, who studied Yiddish for three years on the Weinreich Program in New York, has translated several Yiddish books and is an honorary research associate at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies & Research at the University of Cape Town. She describes Yiddish as a language of humour. She also says it contains "the spirit and character of Jewish people", and that it gets straight to the point and says things as they are. An example of this, she says is the idiom, "Even if you hit your head against a wall, it's not going to help."

The humour and succinct nature of Yiddish Belling refers to can be glimpsed in Dr Marnie Winston-Macauley's telling of the following joke, "The Italian says, 'I'm tired and thirsty. I must have wine.' The Scotsman says, 'I'm tired and thirsty. I must have a Scotch.' The Russian says, 'I'm tired and thirsty. I must have vodka.' The Jew says, 'I'm tired and thirsty. I must have diabetes.'"

The rich cultural world of Yiddish is embodied by the figure of Sholem Aleichem, and later within a Samuel Beckett play. Sholem Aleichem was a Yiddish author and playwright. His works give a wonderful insight into shtetl life, and showcase Yiddish as the language of the Jewish people. The play *Fiddler on the Roof* is based on the collected stories he wrote titled *Tevye's Daughters*.

The iconic and much celebrated play, *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Beckett was translated and performed in Yiddish. According to Ted Merwin in his article written about it for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, the reason Yiddish went so well with Beckett's play was because "it's such an expressive language, inundated with mirth and woe". Yiddish was said to add new depths to an already intensely profound work.

Many of those who join Yiddish groups like the Zoom group in South Africa became interested in the language as a way of keeping family memories and traditions alive.

Belling heard Yiddish in her youth, listening to her mother and six sisters and two brothers talking to each other. Kropman's mother wrote letters to her only in Yiddish when she was at boarding school, and Katzeff would hear it from his *bobba* and *zaida*.

Yiddish enjoyed a revival in the 1980s and early 2000s together with Klezmer music. The groups enable those with a history of Yiddish in their families to enjoy it together, keeping their memories alive and learning more about the rich history we come from and its poignant and expressive language. Members say it's a fine example of the importance of family in the closer and wider sense.

• If you're interested in attending Zoom lessons, contact the Cape Jewish Seniors Association. The current bi-weekly Yiddish Zoom presentations were initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in February 2021 when in-person meetings were no longer possible. Presentations are given by highly qualified teachers including Belling and Rochelle Wainer from the Yiddish Folkshul in Johannesburg. There's also a beginner's group run by Sybil Castle.

## Spira rocks Chicago at Redhill

ollowing the huge success of Redhill School's theatrical
 production of Cabaret last year, some tried to dissuade the school's executive head from putting on another

musical this year, feeling that it could never live up to the accomplishment of *Cabaret*.

But by interval on opening night of *Chicago* last Thursday, those same folk were humbly eating their words.

Joseph Gerassi, the director, did it again. *Chicago* was a smooth-running, slick, and extremely professional production – from the acting and singing through to the dancing, which was choregraphed by Michaela Browde (a teacher at the school).

They brought to life the glamour, corruption, and criminal underworld of Chicago in the 1920s. The production, while mostly true to the original in the songs and script, brought an innovative and modernising touch by introducing the element of social media and its power to the script.

Though the lead actresses, Nyasha Manda and Enhle Gasa, were outstanding, the male lead, Matthew Spira, was astonishing in his performance of Billy Flynn, the smarmy, debonair, narcissistic lawyer who handles all the high-profile cases of the women in Cook County Jail who murdered their partners.

Spira's personality is, by all accounts, the polar opposite of Flynn's. He's a sweet, helpful, and friendly young guy who would never harm anyone or take advantage of them. However, as Flynn, he was so believable as the conceited womaniser who plays the system to his own advantage for his personal fame and fortune, not even vaguely caring about his clients' well-being.

Spira, who has no formal training in acting, wore his role as comfortably as the extraordinarily loud suit that made his character stand out. He looked like he had been living this role every night for years. This Grade 11 pupil's impeccable Chicago drawl and his delightful easy-to-listen-to singing voice and exceptional acting had the audience captivated.

The two female leads, who were just as superb, clearly had a magical rapport with Spira.

Spira wasn't the only Jewish actor in Chicago, but on opening night, he was the only Jewish person in a major role.

Sienna Ho, a Grade 10 pupil, played the role of one of the two

female leads, Velma Kelly, on alternative nights. Kelly is one of the two murderesses who become overnight media successes because of Flynn's way with the media. On opening night, she was Mona, one of the merry murderesses, as was Sophia Rovetti, who played the role of Annie. Both are clearly accomplished dancers, actresses, and singers. As Velma, Ho's beautiful, smooth alto voice really shone in numbers such as *All That Jazz* and *I Know a Girl*. Even as one of the youngest principal actors, Ho was able to embody the sophistication and complexity of the iconic character. Her dynamic performance captivated the audience throughout the show, and garnered the perfect balance of sympathy and suspicion.



Matthew Spira and Jonah Sherman in rehearsals for *Chicago* 

part of the ensemble on opening night, played the role of Amos Hart, the cuckolded and down-trodden husband of Roxie Hart, a woman who murdered her lover and was one of the two female leads. Backer's earnest performance compelled compassion and pity in the audience toward the self-proclaimed "Mister Cellophane".

Chad Backer, also

Jonah Sherman, who plays Billy Flynn

on the nights when Spira isn't, also received acclaim for his charisma and superb comic timing. When he isn't playing Flynn, he too is in the ensemble.

Spira wasn't the only one in his family in the show, however. His younger brother, Gabriel, who is in Grade 9, played trumpet in the orchestra and was one of the only pupils in the musicians' pit on opening night.

## The Sephardi story behind Beauty Queen of Jerusalem

SHAKED KARABELNICOFF

he Beauty Queen of Jerusalem follows four generations of Spanish Sephardi Jews, as their stories unfold against the backdrop of turbulent times in Jerusalem's history.

The Netflix series takes viewers through the years 1917 to 1949, which comprised the end of the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate, and Israel's War of Independence.

Here's a guide to all the context and history behind the show.

Who are Sephardic Jews?

Beauty Queen of Jerusalem chronicles the lives of the Sephardic Ermoza family. Sephardim are Jews that come from the

and publicly become Christian. Some were determined to practice their Judaism in secret – they were called "marranos". (Today, that's generally considered a derogatory term.) The phrase "crypto-Jews" has become more acceptable.

In Hebrew, both groups are called anusim, which means "people who are forced to abandon their Judaism". And in English they are known as conversos literally, "people who converted."

Nobody knows exactly how many Jews fled. Some historians think it was tens of Cast of Beauty Queen of Jerusalem thousands, though others think it could have been as many as one million.

Those that did flee went to Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. This was likely

> where the Ermoza family would fall.

Sephardic Jews have a unique culture, traditions, and customs. Jews in the Iberian Peninsula spoke Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish language that blends medieval Spanish with Hebrew, Arabic, Portuguese, and other influences.

Ladino is spoken by only a few hundred thousand people today, and the language is especially rare in TV and movies. You can hear smatterings of

In the series, we also see tensions that exist between Ashkenazi (Eastern European) and Sephardic Jews. We won't get into the roots of that cultural conflict,

the centuries-old language throughout

Beauty Queen of Jerusalem.



which exists to a much smaller extent in the present-day Jewish community.

What was life like for Jews under the Ottoman Empire?

Beauty Queen of Jerusalem first takes place against the backdrop of Jerusalem at the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Fleeing the massacres and forced conversions of Christian Europe in the Middle Ages, tens of thousands of Jews found a new safe haven in the Ottoman Empire, joining other Jewish people who had been living there for centuries.

For the next few hundred years, the Muslim-run empire became home for Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews alike. Though relegated to second-class citizens called "dhimmis", Jews brought with them useful skills in medicine, finance, and trade, and flourished.

Over time, the Ottoman Empire began to crumble. Again, the Jews faced antisemitism and suffered from poverty and violence. By the end of the 19th century, when Beauty Queen of Jerusalem takes place, it was clear that the safe haven of the Ottoman Empire was no longer

#### Life during British Mandate

Modern-day Israel was colonised by the British, in what was called the British Mandate of Palestine, from 1923 to

Life under the British Mandate wasn't simple for Jews. In fact, Israeli historian Hillel Cohen makes a strong argument that this time (the year 1929, specifically) was the genesis of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was the year that

long-bubbling Arab resentment and fear of displacement burst into open, bloody revolt. It was the moment where both Jews and Arabs began to violently distrust the other, each building a narrative in which they and they alone are the victim.

During this time, in the early 1920s, Jewish socialist Zionists established the Haganah, an underground militia to protect Jewish neighbourhoods from spreading violence. Fighters were instructed to defend only Jewish communities and not incite violence against the Arabs or the British.

But some commanders protested this policy of restraint. These disagreements caused other militia groups to form, and eventually resulted in intimidation, violence, and even assassinations and bombings.

In Beauty Queen of Jerusalem, we see these tensions take shape as the characters live through this difficult and complex part of history.

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Aloni and Yuval Scharf in the Beauty Queen of Jerusalem

Until the late 15th century, Jews in Spain had established themselves within secular society. Many Jews were renowned poets, scholars, and physicians. In 1492, the Spanish government enacted

the "Alhambra Decree", which forced Jews either to convert to Catholicism or leave the country for good. Jews had only two options: get baptised or escape.

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1923 to 1964 = R10 1931 = R500 Up to R3 000 1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000



3D 1923 to 1964 = R5 1931 = R10 000 Up to R50 000

**42** SA JEWISH REPORT 30 March – 20 April 2023

#### ------ A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## **UP affirms Jewish students' rights**

wo weeks ago, I reported on how factions of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) group at the University of Pretoria (UP) were protesting against "the presence of Zionism on university campuses" and how they were pressuring the student representative council to break off relations with the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS), the representative voice of Jewish students. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies has worked closely with SAUJS UP in confronting and exposing this unprecedented attack on Jewish rights and freedoms, which if allowed to succeed, would have opened the way for practically any Jewish organisation not just at UP but on all university campuses to be legitimately boycotted under the guise of opposition to Zionism. UP is also becoming an important campus for our community. A growing number of Jewish students are opting to study there, and it's vital to ensure that they can identify with and express their support for Israel or any other issue without being discriminated against and treated like pariahs.

Throughout this period, the Board has engaged directly with the UP administration concerning this vicious and discriminatory BDS campaign. In response, UP issued a statement this week condemning "all forms of discrimination, including racism and religious intolerance", and undertaking "to take necessary steps" against those found to be in breach of those policies. We welcome this reaffirmation by UP of these fundamental democratic, non-racist values, and continue to engage with it in steps taken to call to account those responsible for this clearly antisemitic initiative.

#### Yom Hashoah and the legacy of resistance

This being the last issue of the paper before the yom tov break, I would like to report briefly on the

**ABOVE BOARD**Karen Milner

upcoming Yom Hashoah ceremony on 18 April. The commemoration this year is taking place on the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, that desperate, doomed yet vital heroic act of defiance which has become a symbol of Jewish tenacity and the will to resist. For the Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town ceremonies, we're privileged to have keynote speaker Ella Blumenthal. One of only a few Holocaust survivors who remain among us today to share their stories, Blumenthal has not only been an inspirational figure in our community in all she has done to testify and educate about the Shoah, but was witness to the harrowing yet inspiring events that took place in the Warsaw Ghetto in the last weeks of April 1943. I urge you all to join us for this important and deeply meaningful event on the Jewish communal calendar.

In conclusion, a word on the upcoming yamim tovim (Jewish festivals). Throughout the ages, Pesach has fostered a heightened sense of unity and chaverschaft amongst the Jewish people while further inspiring Jews everywhere to connect with, learn about, and celebrate their unique heritage. As we prepare to celebrate this age-old festival of Jewish freedom and national rebirth, let's also remember how we are one people with a shared history and how, regardless of belief, background, or religious practice, we'll always respect, care about, and support one another. In that spirit, I wish everyone a chaq Pesach kasher v'sameach.

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

 ${\it This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies}$ 





## Chag Pesach Sameach



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#### Torah Academy Shabbaton creates memories

orah Academy held its annual Shabbaton last weekend. Boys High made its way to Hoffenheim Lodge, while the Girls High ventured to Wag n Bietjie. The Shabbaton is an annual highlight for the school, promoting unity and team building, building experiences and creating memories for a lifetime.



#### Crawford Sandton hosts Pesach seder

rawford Primary School children prepared and led a Pesach seder at the school with their parents on 16 March. By participating in the preparation of the seder, which celebrates the redemption of the Jews from slavery, the children learned about the history and traditions associated with Pesach and developed a deeper appreciation of their cultural heritage, leading to a sense of pride in their identity. In addition, participating in a seder at school with their parents was an ideal opportunity for children to work collaboratively with their families and friends. Parents beamed with pride at their children's involvement, and said they looked forward to continuing the tradition for years to come.



Myron, Beverly, and Dror Krost

#### King David seder gets Nik Rabinowitz treatment

omedian Nik Rabinowitz
entertained students and staff at
King David High School Victory
Park's first Pesach seder on 23 March with



a "speed seder", which had students and staff laughing while still engaged with the important messages of the seder. With his quick wit and humour, Rabinowitz managed to make the sometimes lengthy and complex seder fun and accessible for all. The event included tradition and delicious food, and Rabbi Ricky Seeff delivered a moving Pesach message, reminding everyone of the significance of the holiday and its importance in Jewish culture.

Hannah Ben-Moshe, Nik Rabinowitz, and Gad Matisonn

## JWBS books fly off shelves for needy



atrons were spoilt for choice at the Jewish Women's Benevolent Society book sale at the Genesis Centre on Sunday, 26 March, with a huge selection of novels, non-fiction, Judaica, and children's books on sale. Proceeds from the sale will be used to purchase underwear, sleepwear, and slippers for the most vulnerable in our community in need of these essential items.

The Jewish Women's Benevolent Society book sale at Genesis Centre

#### Yad Aharon tells 'Whole Story' to donors

ad Aharon & Michael is this year celebrating a 30-year milestone as a leading, independent Jewish food fund which provides the less fortunate in our community with assistance throughout the year.

The organisation, which now assists 730 families with all their nutritional needs, has its roots in a

small Yeoville apartment three decades ago, when it helped a handful of families with Shabbos meals.

Yad Aharon's recent event, "The Whole Story" on 22 March, highlighted the fact



The Yad Aharon & Michael team

that Yad's story is made up of many parts, and captured the hearts of more than 400 donors, culminating in a commitment to *tzedakah* and partnerships by community members.

# CHAG SAMEACH TO all our Jewish customers.





**44** SA JEWISH REPORT 30 March – 20 April 2023

## Fear-based marketing works a treat

fear-based marketing for generations. They have learned the art of making us picture what will happen if in cold weather we don't wear a jersey (pneumonia and death), what the consequences of staying in wet swimming shorts are (kidney infection and death), and even going for a dip in the pool shortly after eating lunch (cramps and INNER VOICE Howard Feldman and Feldman and Edna. Expression is a comparing to the consequences of staying in wet swimming shorts are (kidney infection and death), and even going for a dip in the pool shortly after eating lunch (cramps and INNER VOICE Howard Feldman and Fel

ewish mothers have used

They understood what marketers have been experimenting with for years, which is that there's huge persuasive value in talking to our fears instead of our dreams and aspirations. "If you don't study, you'll fail and never get married. Of course, you know who wants to marry a bum? No-one. That's who."

But fear-based marketing does work. It's how the Economic Freedom Fighters managed to get us to stay away during the national shutdown, and how threatened criminal sanction encourages people to pay their traffic fines.

The story of Listerine is a great example. Listerine marketed bad breath. And painfully illustrated the consequences of what it could mean if we were to ignore the dangers of letting halitosis go

The product was originally invented as both a surgical antiseptic and a "fix-all" remedy for an array of ailments ranging from athlete's foot to gonorrhoea. Before embarking on this campaign, the makers of Listerine tried to focus on dentists and on the value of reducing germs, with little to moderate success. Whereas it might have made intellectual sense to use Listerine, the emotional motivation was lacking and it was having an impact

And so, they shifted focus. They did the Jewish-mom thing and instead of talking up the value of a germ free mouth, they cultivated our fears and watered our insecurity.

One of their most iconic advertising

campaigns featured a fictional character named Edna. Edna, by all accounts, had everything going for her. Aside from the fact that she had paid little attention to their warning.

As a result, Edna was sad, unmarried and, as you might have guessed, was plagued by halitosis. One of the adverts depicted her sitting by herself, lonely, while another woman (with fresh smelling breath) danced with the man of her dreams. (Because, you know, who wants to marry a girl with bad breath? No-one. That's who.)

The message was obvious. Ignore Listerine at your peril.

Marketing works on an emotional level. Positive emotional messages motivate us as well. We don't buy a watch, we buy how that time piece makes us feel. We buy products that make us feel like good parents, responsible citizens, and those that make us think that we'll be beautiful and that we'll belong.

But it's the negative or fear-based marketing that sometimes works best. Which is why it's more dangerous.

We live in a hyperbolic society. Everyone who disagrees is a "Nazi". Everything we don't like is "apartheid", and people who have different opinions are fascists, "lefties", or a threat to democracy.

As a result, many situations are made out to be catastrophes, and nearly all imply dire warning of the end of the world. We see it in South Africa. We have seen it in the United States, and we see it in Israel.

Fear-based marketing has value in its persuasive power. But perhaps, at least for a little while, we should ease off on the Jewish-mother drama and recognise that we probably won't die from pneumonia if we're a little chilly.

#### Letters

#### SLIER OFF THE MARK IN WRITING OUR OBITUARY

Respectfully, Paula Slier's geo-political crystal-ball gazing ("Saudi Arabia flexes Middle East might with Iran deal", 23 March 2023) is off the mark. It proposes a scenario where our so-called ally (the United States) dupes us into attacking our enemies (Iran), and then everyone together with their new friends (Saudi Arabia) gangs up and annihilates us once and for all

The article was written between the festivals of Purim (when the Jews were meant to be totally wiped out and were miraculously saved), and Pesach (when the Jews were enslaved and miraculously redeemed). As the haggadah says in Vehi Sheamda, "In each and every generation, they rise up against us to destroy us. And the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hands." The Soviets, the Nazis, the Cossacks, the Crusaders, the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians

(to name just a few) all tried to destroy us. As "mighty" as their civilizations were, we have survived while they are the remnants of history. There can be no doubt that this outcome will be the same.

When we practice our faith and identify as Jews, however we do so, we aren't just participating in quaint rituals and telling our kids fairy tales. At a very fundamental level, Jews have always been described as "believers, the children of believers". Our form of pragmatism is that we believe in miracles. It's not for us to write our own obituaries, we have plenty of others who are only too pleased to do that for us and wish us away. Yet, here we still are, stronger than ever, in spite of all logic to the contrary. The mission of every Jew is to have faith and tracht gut vet zein gut (think good, and it will all be good). Chag Pesach sameach! – Mordechai Zlotnick, Johannesburg

#### SLIER'S ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE EAST READS LIKE BAD SPY NOVEL

The opinion piece from Paula Slier, "Saudi Arabia flexes Middle East might with Iran deal" (*SA Jewish Report*, 23 March 2023, refers.

Far from providing serious analysis, Slier has concocted a fact free, D-grade version of a conspiracy based spy novel, filled with malevolent fantasy and baseless conjecture. To highlight just a few of many issues, Slier, without a shred of evidence, writes off the whole of Europe as "a continent falling apart", and states that Iran will soon benefit from Saudi arms and benevolence, blithely ignoring the ancient sectarian animosity between these two countries and clear evidence that their relationship remains a cold one at best and that Saudi, far from being a major arms supplier, is reliant on Western armaments!

She also alludes to China and the Middle East as sharing "a basic culture and worldview", yet fails to provide any detail in this regard. Instead, she's happy to buttress her view that the United States was "surprised" at the Saudi/ Iran deal by referring to Nostradamus!

Her piece repeatedly goes out of its way to demonise the US as a global villain by presenting insidious conspiracy

theories and half-truths as to its motives as "fact", culminating in the outrageous, evidence-bereft assertion that the US could use a false-flag operation to incite Israel, its vital ally in the Middle East, to start a conflict against Iran! Her argument also fails to recognise the fact that the US has, since 2019, been a net exporter of oil and is not dependent on Saudi oil for its economic growth. Her article also wrongly states that Henry Kissinger signed the petrodollar arrangement in the 1930s, whereas it was actually finalised in 1974!

She also claims to be "in the know" through "military minds" she engages with that Israel would then fare badly in battle against the mighty Iranian army. This sounds like a quote one could expect to come directly from Iranian Press TV as opposed to a serious analyst of Middle East politics! In conclusion, Slier owes it to a reader to provide at least some basis for her outlandish prognostications, failing which we can only conclude that she is motivated by a deep animus towards the US and a corresponding fawning admiration for its superpower rivals.

- Outraged, Johannesburg

#### Sunday 2 April

 Second Innings hosts a talk by Fiona Capstick on Christopher Columbus and his Jewish connections. Time: 10:00.
 Cost: R40 (R20 members). Venue: Golden Acres. Contact: 082 561 3228 or greciagabriel1@gmail.com

#### Wednesday 5 April

Linksfield Shul hosts a Pesach seder.
 Time: 19:00. Cost: Adults R500, children
 R280 (under fives R100). Contact:
 admin@linksshul.co.za

#### Sunday 9 April

 Jewish National Fund South Africa hosts a Pesach picnic. Time: 11:00. Venue: The Wilds. Cost: Adults R50, children above 12 R30. Contact: 011 645 2579 or b.schneider@jnfsa.co.za

#### Sunday 16 April

 The Umhlanga Jewish Centre hosts its Masada Run/Walkathon. Venue: Golden Mile Beach promenade.
 Time: 07:00. Contact: 031 566 3227 or chaverim@umhlangajewishcentre.co.za  New Beginnings hosts a talk by Fiona Ramsay on My fascinating career and experiences. Time: 10:00.
 Venue: UJW House, 77 Sandler Road, Percelia. Cost: R50.
 Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za





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