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Government's 'deafening silence' at murder of Jews

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has expressed "hurt and dismay" over the "deafening silence" by the department of international relations and cooperation (DIRCO) in response to the "heinous murder of Jews" following a spate of terror attacks in Israel in recent weeks.

The letter follows DIRCO's speedy condemnation of events that took place days earlier at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, when Israeli police were forced to quell violence caused by Palestinian rioters inside the mosque. According to police, dozens of masked youths barricaded themselves inside the mosque atop the Temple Mount with fireworks, clubs, and rocks following evening prayers, while locking

the doors and placing barricades at the entrances. Police said in a statement that officers tried to convince those inside to leave but were ultimately forced to enter the mosque, where they were attacked with rocks and fireworks. Police added that dozens of suspects were arrested and that "the rioters caused damage to the mosque and desecrated it".

Meanwhile, DIRCO has said nothing in response to the violence and terror that erupted following clashes at the mosque.

missiles from neighbouring countries, car rammings, and shots fired by terrorists at innocent civilians marred yom tov, Shabbat, and other religious holidays.

It continued, "In numerous statements over the past year, DIRCO has stressed the importance of even-handedness in dealing with international conflicts. It makes us question your true agenda, therefore, that when it comes to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, your concern and compassion so blatantly applies to one side only. We have no issue with our government's support for the Palestinians. However, we have no choice but to interpret your selective outrage, where DIRCO cannot bring itself to condemn the murder of these four people as being motivated by an obsessive hostility on your part towards the Jewish state and its people."

"DIRCO and the ANC's [African National Congress's] support for Palestinians and their leadership is an absolute. Their much-touted support for a negotiated, two-state solution is just a weak attempt at virtue signalling, given their clear bias.

forces acting against these young men. DIRCO is unlikely to have waited to ascertain the facts given its bias.

In a statement on 14 April, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) criticised the government's response to the Al-Aqsa Mosque events.

"DIRCO should be ashamed of its statement on 5 April 2023. The Israel Defense Forces has put lives on the line to protect Jewish people, and all other Israelis, over Passover this year.

"While a growing number of violent terror attacks continues to threaten the survival of the Jewish state today, Israel remains a home to a multicultural society where the rights of all religions, minorities, ethnicities, and beliefs are protected and promoted," the SAZE said.

It called on DIRCO to “end its hostility towards Israel by adopting a de-hyphenated approach to the conflict between Palestine and Israel, in a manner that correctly reflects the extreme suffering, loss of life, and violence experienced by Jewish people at the hands of Palestinian extremists and Hamas terrorists this year.”

Pandor and DIRCO hadn't responded to requests for comment by the *SA Jewish Report* at the time of going to press.



See pages 10 and 11



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AUTO AFRICA

The 10 Jews on *Time's* 'most influential' list

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

The journalist arrested in Russia last month and the Biden administration's antisemitism envoy are among the 10 Jewish members of *Time Magazine's* "100 most influential people of 2023".

The magazine's annual list, released on 13 April, includes politician, business titans, artists, and innovators from around the world, from President Joe Biden to a YouTube sensation with 145 million subscribers. Here are the Jews who made the cut.

Sam Altman is the tech entrepreneur who is chief executive and co-founder of the OpenAI artificial intelligence laboratory. In 2016, the entrepreneur Peter Thiel told the *New Yorker* that Altman is "culturally very Jewish – an optimist yet a survivalist".

Judy Blume is the children's author whose books deal frankly with puberty and other challenges of growing up. A film adaptation of her 1970 novel, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, one of the first mainstream treatments of interfaith families, is opening in theatres this month.

Doja Cat is a rapper and performance artist who burst onto the scene in 2020 when she won MTV's Best New Artist award. The daughter of an Ashkenazi Jewish mother and a Black South African father, she's renowned for

blending genres.

Nathan Fielder is a comedian and performance artist whose genre-defying 2022 series, *The Rehearsal* tackled antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and interfaith parenting. It also featured a Portland, Oregon, Hebrew tutor.

Neil Gaiman is a science-fiction writer whose comic book series, *The Sandman*, was recently made into a Netflix series. Raised by a Jewish family that dabbled with Scientology, he was also an early critic of the Tennessee school district that banned the Holocaust memoir, *Maus*, last year.

Evan Gershkovich is a *Wall Street Journal* reporter who was detained in Russian in March on spying charges that the United States Department of State has called part of Russia's "ongoing war against the truth".

Bob Iger is chief executive of Disney after returning to the company last year. "His return as chief executive in 2022 ushered in a new era of transformation and creative excellence" for the entertainment company, General Motors chief executive and Disney board member, Mary Barra, wrote in *Time*.

Deborah Lipstadt was confirmed by the US Senate in March 2022 as the state department's special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism. A well-known academic specialising in the history of antisemitism

and Holocaust denial, she welcomed *Time's* recognition by tweeting, "Receiving this award advances my ongoing fight to stamp out antisemitism and all forms of hate."

Natasha Lyonne is the writer, director, and actress whose popular series on Netflix, *Russian Doll*, used sci-fi conventions to explore identity, trauma, and the intergenerational effects of the Holocaust. In his *Time* essay, actor and director Taika Waititi, who is also Jewish, called Lyonne "the coolest person in the room".

Janet Yellen is the first woman to hold the role of US treasury secretary. Born to Polish Jewish immigrant parents, she has featured in antisemitic conspiracy theories about "globalist" control of financial institutions.

A handful of others on the list have Jewish backgrounds. The actor and businesswoman, Drew Barrymore, recognised by comedian Jimmy Fallon for being "a true role model", is married to a Jewish man, raising a Jewish child, and said she has "embraced Judaism", though she hasn't announced a conversion. Lea Michele, who last year took over the lead role in *Funny Girl* on Broadway, has a Jewish father but doesn't identify as Jewish. And skier Mikaela Shiffrin has a Jewish grandfather but, according to the US Ski and Snowboard Association, isn't "connected to the Jewish community".

Is it night time in Africa?

Torah Thought



Rabbi Oshy Deren – Chabad of the West Coast, Cape Town

Of the many blessings of living in Cape Town, its status as the most beautiful place in the world outside of Israel – my mother-in-law's judgement, verbatim – is definitely high up on the list. Never does that beauty shine like in the middle of a beautiful sunny day as the bright light fills your heart and soul with a sense of warmth, joy, and the blessings of life.

But it gets dark here too in Africa.

Sometimes the darkness is just one of those long Cape Town winter nights, and sometimes it's the realities of life, health, wealth (or lack thereof), peace of mind, anxiety, spiritual, and social connections – where the long night seems to set in, and life in dark Africa seems to stretch without end.

And that's before we even talk about loadshedding. Which brings us back to the first long night of our people in Africa.

This Shabbat, we learn about addressing our darkest corners, and shining them with light. From the beginning of the first parsha, Tazriyah, through the very end of the second parsha, Metzora, all we learn about is purification processes. How to take ourselves from a defiled state of impurity and cleanse body and soul – even the bricks of the house – into a better state.

The very opening verses talk about the purification following childbirth, and in that context, we're given the post Sinai *mitzvah* of circumcision – removing the foreskin and its obstruction of our spiritual growth – during the day.

Yes, the *mitzvah* of Brit Milah, while done at the

earliest possible time of the eighth day of a child's life, needs to wait for the first 12 hours of the eighth day, which begins at sunset, until the morning so that the *bris* takes place during the day. It cannot take place during the night.

Except for the first *bris* that we performed as a nation, which Moses instructed we should do during that long dark night in Africa. The night started with slavery in Africa, and ended with our exodus to Sinai.

Yes, that first *bris* of ours was actually at night. Precisely at night. Because

when we're feeling enslaved to the long-term consequences of past mistakes, we need to forget about the difference between day and night, and take the leap of faith that our covenant with G-d celebrates.

True, we left Egypt thousands of years ago.

But even today, when you feel like you're being pulled back there, don't look at your clock to see if it's day or night. Just make the jump.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom of taking your leap forward.

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Wed 26th April will mark Israel's 75th birthday.
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Gordin’s family mourn the man, the *mensch*, the maverick

NICOLA MILTZ

The wife of award-winning retired journalist, author, and poet, Jeremy Gordin, said he was “the love of her life”, and the family was battling to pick up the pieces after his brutal murder during a house robbery at their Johannesburg home three weeks ago.

“It’s unreal, so hard to believe, so senseless,” said Deborah Gordin.

Gordin, 70, was killed in the family’s Parkview home on the evening of 31 March – the same day the couple celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. They had shared more than 30 years in the tree-lined suburban home, marking every celebration, triumph, and tragedy there.

“It was the only house we’d ever lived in as a family,” said Deborah, adding that it was too painful to go back now following a crime so heinous it had shattered the family’s world.

She and the couple’s two adult children, Jake, 28 and Nina, 24, had been back to the house only once since the incident to collect important documents, and were staying at close friends’ homes away from the crime scene.

Sadly, she said her grandmother’s diamond wedding ring and Jeremy’s silver wedding band were missing, amongst other items.

Deborah and Nina were in Cape Town, and grew concerned when Gordin didn’t respond to messages. A friend gained access to the couple’s house, finding his body and the house ransacked.

She said Jeremy, who was proudly Jewish, was looking forward to eating his favourite annual chicken soup and kneidlach over Pesach, but instead was buried on 5 April *erev* Passover at Westpark Cemetery.

A seventh suspect in the case, Siphamandla Ndlovu, appeared briefly in the Johannesburg Magistrates Court on Monday, 17 April. His case was postponed to 24 April.

A further six suspects, all of whom are believed to be from Zimbabwe, appeared last Friday, 14 April. They are Mhilisi Moyo, Kwanele Kanye, Melvin Ndlovu, Thandazani Mangena, Timothy Thebe, and Richmond Mhlanga. Their case was postponed to 21 April. They have been charged with possession of suspected stolen property and receiving suspected stolen property. Charges of murder and robbery are still being investigated, said police.

At this stage, all seven remain in custody, and the investigation is at a sensitive stage. More arrests are expected as police continue

to hunt down suspects.

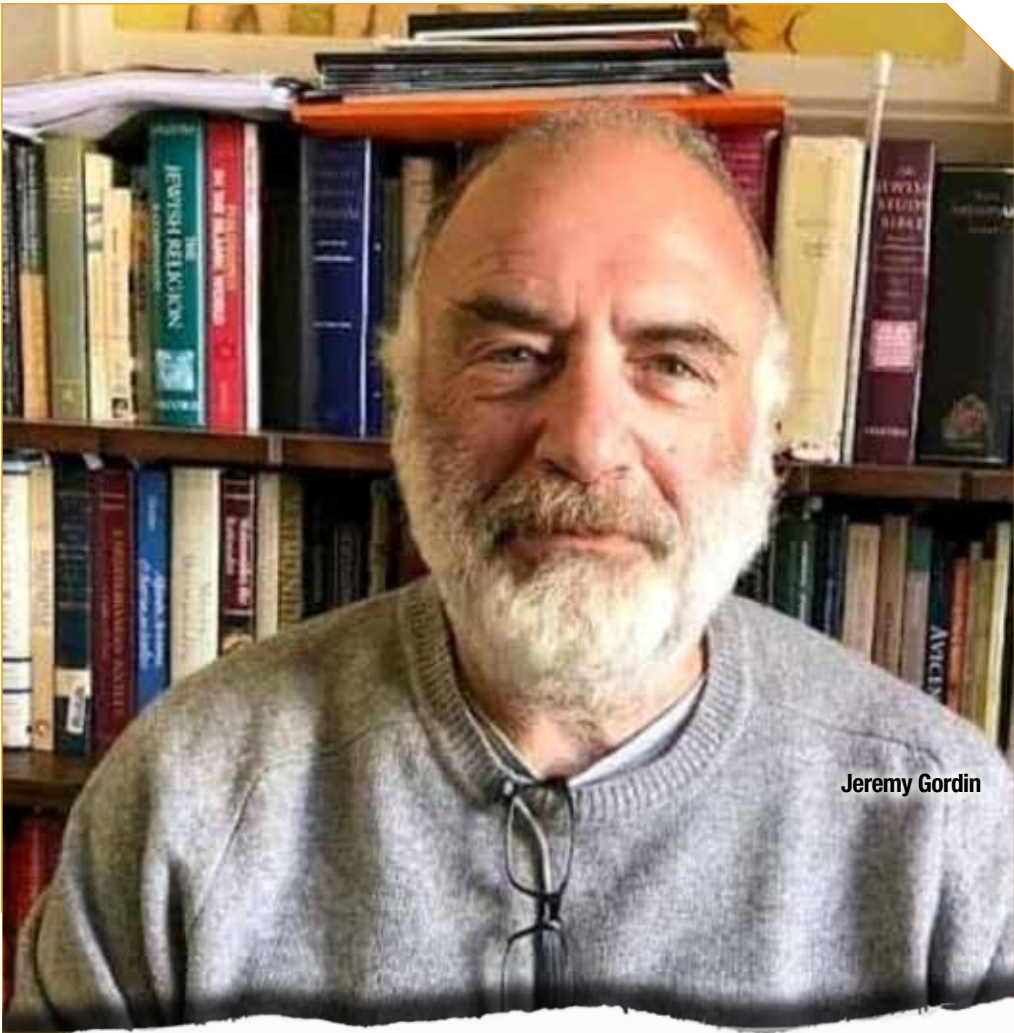
It’s understood that Gordin’s old metallic Mercedes Benz was allegedly sold on, passing through a number of hands before it was located in Auckland Park near the University of Johannesburg, leading police and security companies to track several more suspects.

“It’s cold comfort hearing about the arrests. It doesn’t bring him back,” said Deborah, “It’s all a bit of a blur, but we’re taking things day by day.”

Tributes have continued to pour in for the veteran journalist who touched many lives.

Gordin was born in Pretoria in 1952. His mother was an school English teacher and his father a pharmacist. The family spent eight years in Vietnam when Jeremy was a young boy.

He studied at Hebrew University in



Jeremy Gordin

Jerusalem, and cultivated extensive knowledge about the history of the Jewish people and the Middle East conflict.

“He was Jewish to his core,” said Deborah “and although he wasn’t religious, could converse with rabbis about the Talmud.”

According to all who knew him, he was widely read, called a spade a spade, and didn’t suffer fools gladly. He lived in many countries

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including the United States, and married late, forever referring to Deborah as “his gorgeous wife”.

Gordin started his almost 50-odd-year-long journalism career at the *Rand Daily Mail*. He was the launch editor of *Playboy Magazine*, an editor at *The Star* and *Sunday Independent*, and

era killer Eugene de Kock in the book *A Long Night’s Damage*.

Most recently he wrote for *Politicsweb*.

In a tribute in *Daily Maverick*, John Battersby, the former editor of the *Sunday Independent*, wrote that five months before Gordin’s murder, he wrote “an eerily prophetic letter” to Jake and Nina, urging them to consider leaving South Africa to live elsewhere.

He had a long association with the University of the Witwatersrand Centre for Journalism both as a mentor and a teacher for the centre’s post-graduate programmes, and as head of the Wits Justice Project, which focused on the plight of prisoners who had been unfairly or unjustly imprisoned.

Gordin was one of a handful of journalists to defend the *SA Jewish Report* when it was controversially expelled by the Press Council of South Africa even after it had withdrawn its membership several months prior, over a controversial antisemitic cartoon posted on the Facebook page of the South African Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition. Gordin said the matter had been handled “moronically”.

At a memorial service held a few days after the funeral, Jake read a poem written by his father when his own father had passed away, titled *Kaddish*. Nina, told mourners that her father was “the greatest father”.

“I loved, adored, and respected him. He was the first person I spoke to about anything, because I knew there was nothing he couldn’t help me with. He taught me what’s important in life: not accolades, material positions, or popularity, but how to be a good person, how to stand up for yourself and others, to continue learning and gaining knowledge, and to love.”

Gordin’s sister, Ruth, lamented, “I thought Jeremy would remain in my life forever – serious, interesting, funny, kind, and loving. Someone I knew I could trust. It wasn’t to be.”

Police and security personnel are working hard to bring those responsible for his untimely passing to book.

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Support for terrorism clear in anti-Israel protests

TALI FEINBERG
AND NICOLA MILTZ

Men, women, and children encircle an Israeli flag and set it on fire while shouting “one Zionist, one bullet” and “death to Israel”. Flags of terrorist organisations Hamas and Hezbollah are held aloft. Images of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah are proudly displayed. One sign calls Israel “a virus”, while another compares Israel to the Nazis, complete with a swastika.

This was the scene on the streets of Cape Town in front of parliament. On 14 April, in the presence of police and just steps away from the Cape Town Jewish community's campus, the extreme hatred harboured by the anti-Israel lobby was openly displayed.

Meanwhile in Gauteng, at a protest on the council lawns in Braamfontein also on 14 April, a handful of anti-Israel politicians and zealots called for the name Sandton Drive to be changed to Leila Khaled Drive, after the first female terrorist to hijack a plane.

In the Mother City, 250 to 500 people marched to parliament, where they handed over a memorandum to the department of international relations and cooperation saying that the Jews had “fooled themselves into thinking that they are the chosen people of G-d”, that they are “chosen to oppress other human beings”, and comparing Israel to “Satan”.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign spokesperson Professor Usuf Chikte told the crowd, “We must defend their [the Palestinian's] right to resist with arms if necessary, and this parliament must give them defensive weapons. We want to dismantle every bit of land the Zionists occupy.”

In Joburg, the leader of the Al Jama-ah party, Ganief Hendricks, echoed Chikte, “We want South Africa to send weapons to Palestine. Closing down embassies is a waste of time – we must send weapons. We want to give hope that very soon there will be no Israel.”

Politicians from the diminutive Al Jama-ah and National Freedom Front (NFP) parties spouted hate, while Africa4Palestine's Farid Esack handed the mayor of Johannesburg, Thapelo Amad (a member of the Al Jama-ah party) a memorandum. It had one demand: “That the City of Johannesburg implements the earlier council decision to rename Sandton Drive Leila Khaled Drive.”

In Cape Town, retired Judge Siraj Desai spoke openly in support of the Palestinians, even after Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng was condemned in 2020 for calling for peace in the Middle East, when detractors said that judges must remain neutral.

Desai said that there were “no clashes” in the conflict as “the two sides are not equal”. He called for an “international solution” to allow all Palestinians to return to the land that was now Israel. He ended his speech by calling out, “Free, free Palestine!”

“Desai, who is under investigation for contravening the judicial code, continues to act politically as an open supporter of Hamas,” says South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks. “He has also repeatedly conveyed his support of the Iranian regime.

“Desai offers an extreme example of what happens when the judiciary becomes politicised,” she says. “This, after the Judicial Conduct Committee [JCC] found Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng guilty for

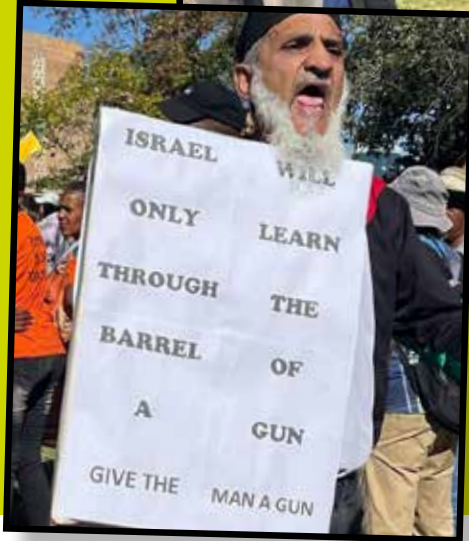
Burning the Israeli flag during the anti-Israel protest in Cape Town



Johannesburg mayor, a member of the Al Jama-ah party, Thapelo Amad, at an anti-Israel protest in Braamfontein



Anti-Israel protest in Johannesburg on 14 April 2023



stating that he supports peace. The SAZF continues to communicate with the JCC about the charges against Desai. He has a record of abusing the power entrusted in him by the judiciary and people of South Africa, and he abuses it once again by affiliating himself with protesters that call for the murder of those who call Israel home.”

The anti-Israel memorandum in Cape Town called on the South African government to apply “maximum diplomatic, political, and economic pressure on Israel”, and to “place an economic and financial embargo on Zionist goods and services” while “all Palestinian financial, trade, and economic interests be maintained, protected, and developed”.

Back in Joburg, NFP MP Ahmed Munzoor Shaik Emam reminded the crowd that he had put forward the motion in parliament calling for the South African embassy in Israel to be downgraded, and thanked MPs for throwing their weight behind this move.

“This is a first step. Sanctions worked for us in

South Africa. The same can be done for Israel,” said Emam. The African National Congress's Dada Morero, who served as mayor of Johannesburg for 25 days, called on people in the Sandton area to support public-participation hearings on the motion to change the street name.

At the closure of proceedings in Cape Town, an organiser called for the burning of the Israeli flag, while protesters called for violence against Zionists. Ninety-two percent of South African Jews agree that Israel is the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people, and 69% self-define as Zionists, according to the 2019/2020 survey conducted by the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town. The protesters burned at least two Israeli flags.

SAJBD National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner, says, “The increasingly inflammatory rhetoric emanating from these protesters is disturbing. Instead of calling for peace and negotiation, the calls are to intensify conflict and escalate violence. These messages of hatred serve no end but to justify what these groupings now openly acknowledge to be their true aim: the eradication of the world's only Jewish state. Such horrendous sentiments achieve nothing beyond fostering divisions, and have no place in a peaceful multicultural democracy.”

“Khaled is a member of the terrorist group Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and is known for trying to hijack an aeroplane, putting countless innocent lives at risk,” says Marks. “It's disturbing that Mayor Amad would entertain the idea of spending South African taxpayers' money on renaming a street after her.

Continued on page 6>>

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Israeli whisky declared Superman of single malts

HANNA RESNICK

Many innovations have originated in Israel, but whisky isn't one that immediately comes to mind in the land of milk and honey. However, when the World Whiskies Awards announced the achievement of the World's Best Single Malt last month, the winner was none other than Israel's aptly named Milk & Honey Distillery (M&H Distillery).

M&H Distillery is Israel's first whisky distillery to date, and was started in 2013. However, it began selling internationally only in 2019.

This particular award went to M&H's Sherry Cask from its Elements series, which is described as having notes of red fruit and dark chocolate, finished with notes of tobacco and oak.

The coveted title was just one of eight awards that M&H Distillery took home from the event on 30 March. It received seven other awards including Craft Producer of the Year and Brand Innovator of the Year (within the Rest of the World category). The company has previously been recognised at the Frankfurt International Trophy 2022 and the 2022 San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

Head Distiller Tomer Goren said in an interview with *Forbes* magazine that what makes their expression unique is that "we make our Elements sherry like old style sherry whisky; it's not a sherry bomb but a balanced whisky".

It all started when a group of young, whisky-loving Israeli entrepreneurs decided that there was no reason not to realise their dream of creating an Israeli single malt. Tech expert Gal Kalkshtein, who had apparently already tried his hand at making his own beer in his home, made it his mission.

"I started to learn about the whisky world and culture. It's amazing and full of tastes. I fell in love, and decided to open a distillery," he told *Whisky Magazine*.

They took over the premises of a bakery in the heart of Tel Aviv, the heart of the culinary and alcohol industry of Israel, and began building in June 2014 and distilling less than a year later.

"Who would've thought of a whisky distillery in Israel? Everybody thought it was crazy, but our founder, Gal Kalkshtein, decided that he could do it even when people told him otherwise," said Dana Baran, the vice-president of marketing at M&H Distillery.

After founding the distillery, Kalkshtein took on board Head Distiller Goren, and sought out Dr James Swan, a world-renowned whisky expert, as consultant. Swan (who passed away in 2017) consulted many distilleries around the world, but his expertise was distilling in hot climates. The distillery has just celebrated its 10th anniversary.

High temperatures aren't known to be ideal for whisky production, Goren told *Whisky Magazine*, but "we use weather to our

advantage". He buys casks from around the world to challenge or stress test his numerous experiments, currently finding second fill to be a good balance in the heat.

Said Baran, "The Israeli climate is, in fact, one of the secrets to our whisky. Because it's very hot and humid, it helps with fast maturation and the extraction of flavours.

"The climate also allows us to experiment," she said, explaining that the speed of maturation allows them to explore innovation within the boundaries of scotch whisky with relatively quick results. "We put a lot of love and dedication into making our whisky, which I think has to do with the Israeli spirit as well."

Goren's dedication to the product has him starting work at 06:00 and working until late. He describes M&H's whisky as "Just what I like, what I think good whisky should be, just drinkable!"

Kalkshtein, however, maintains that if his whisky were a person, it would be Superman because "I want my whisky to be perfect," he told *Whisky Magazine*

The team don't believe in taking no for an answer. "We can do anything, but just don't know how yet," Kalkshtein told the magazine, and this sentiment is evident in what this small start-up has achieved in such a short time. When Goren had the need to monitor the volume of spirit in each cask with ease, Kalkshtein invented a sonar-based device to fit into each cask bung, according to *Whisky Magazine*.

In May 2017, they unveiled Israel's first single malt whisky (after undergoing the standard more than three years of maturation). Their first commercial whisky was released at the end of 2019. Baran said the start of the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after their release meant that a lot of events and tastings were held over Zoom. Nonetheless, they managed to launch to the global market, and are now selling more than 100 000 bottles annually to more than 40 countries worldwide.

The title of Best Single Malt is "a huge recognition of what we do", Baran said. Their dream has always been to stand proudly alongside international brands, which this accolade allows them to do. "What's also amazing is that the Elements Sherry Cask is one of our core-range whiskies. The whiskies that typically win this prize are limited special edition," she said. "Because it's part of our core range, it always needs to be on the shelf, and sales have now increased tremendously."

All the company's whiskies are kosher, and they are the first distillery to produce whisky in kosher sherry casks. Their casks are sourced from a bodega in Spain, and approved by a rabbi.

Their whiskies, including the award-winning Sherry Cask, are distributed in South Africa by Universal Beverages.

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Lithuania’s uncomfortable truth

I have never witnessed as many people squirm as I did over the past week in Lithuania. They were reacting to talk of the Holocaust in Lithuania and the local people’s involvement in the brutal murder of what’s believed to be as many as 220 000 Lithuanian Jews, or Litvaks (as we are commonly known).

It was uncomfortable for me, and so obviously for them. However, there was something consoling in knowing that those people who were squirming recognised how horrifying it was to face a Litvak Jew over this part of their country’s history. And they quite apparently recognise what they lost in the decimation of 94% of the Jewish community.

And, while it’s obviously not their fault, because I don’t believe anyone can be held responsible for the sins of their fathers or their countrymen, they clearly do feel a sense of contrition. Many of the people I spoke to do so anyway.

I have no idea what percentage of the Lithuanian population was actually involved or willingly witnessed some of the brutality or murder, and I’m not sure we’ll ever know, but no matter how many, Lithuania needs to ensure that it is seen to be doing all it can to remedy this atrocity that was perpetrated there with the willing hand of many of its people.

I found it fascinating that when the subject of the Jewish genocide came up, most of the people I spoke to brought up their devastating history with Russia and the Soviet Union. Lithuanians, in general, despise Russia, especially the Soviet Union for what it did to their country and their lives. I was told, often, about the losses Lithuanians suffered under the Soviet regime. It has truly scarred and traumatised the country. So, when the orchestrated murder of 220 000 Jews in their country is brought to their attention, this is their form of reference. I guess we all look to some personal experience to try and understand someone else’s pain or experience.

South Africans may look to apartheid and its impact on people, even though nothing happened during apartheid that could come close to the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of thousands of human beings in a country.

Having spent a week in Lithuania, there’s still no way for me to understand how people did what they did to a people – our people.

In South Africa, our understanding of the Holocaust was the murder of six million Jews, most of whom died in concentration camps. In Lithuania, they mostly didn’t get to the concentration camps, they were simply lined up and murdered in or on the outskirts of their villages or towns. And, while the Nazis called for it, mostly Lithuanians did the killing – and then took all that the Jews had, including the clothes they were wearing before they were killed.

Most South African Jews are Litvaks, but still the narrative we hear and know isn’t of the Lithuanian Holocaust. It’s of concentration camps, Poland, and Germany.

While I now understand that what happened to Litvaks was apparently not spoken about in Lithuania until 1991, our grandparents – all of whom left Lithuania before World War II – eventually got to hear what had happened.

Imagine what our families here thought when suddenly they no longer had contact with loved ones they had left back in “*der heim*”. In South Africa, Litvaks established village or town societies and would meet up, mostly I guess to talk about the old days. But once word got out about what had happened, they created memorial or Yizkor books in which they gathered stories of their old life and what happened during the Holocaust. These were pieced together by the few who managed to escape and those few gentiles from villages who shared what they witnessed.

Now that I know, it’s jarring to me that commemorating Yom Hashoah here hardly ever touches on Lithuania, yet it’s the roots for most of us here.

Even in this newspaper, stories from Lithuania have been rare.

It took the likes of Grant Gochin, a South African-born Litvak activist fighting for Jewish justice in Lithuania, to bring it to most of our attention. He won’t accept anything less.

The truth is that until about four years ago, I was oblivious to what happened to my family and most of our families. Now, I can never get it out of my head.

I don’t have a sense that Lithuanians are bad people, but for the most part, this isn’t their fight or their worry, it’s ours. It’s something we need to know about and make sure that the world never forgets what happened.

The Lithuanian government has committed to upgrading the memorial sites at its 200 or so killing fields, and to make it far clearer who died there and what happened. The fact that at many sites, memorials still refer to Soviets rather than Jews having been killed there by Nazis and “their local accomplices”, isn’t acceptable.

It’s incumbent on those of us who are Litvaks to make sure this happens.

It’s also totally unacceptable that any person who is known to have been party to the mass killing of Jews is celebrated as a hero, no matter the role they may have played in other struggles. You cannot be a hero if you have murder on your hands.

I know this isn’t clearcut for all Lithuanian citizens, but I do believe many Lithuanians, especially the government, know what’s right and wrong. They have said that they are working towards ensuring that such people who are celebrated with plaques or statues won’t be for long. We wait not so patiently.

I’m so grateful for being given the opportunity to visit “*der heim*” so I could see for myself what happened, how the few hundred remaining Jews live there, and what’s being done to right wrongs.

Watch this space, there are more stories to come.

On this week of Shoah, I call on everyone never to forget what happened. We need to make sure our children know our history, and that they learn that racial hatred or hating people because they aren’t like you is unacceptable.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Incite, attack, repeat – Hamas’ calculated strategy

OPINION

ADI COHEN-HAZANOV



Conspiracy theories work. Not just as clickbait but as political instruments. And when lies generate violence and reap rewards for their propagators, fanatics like the Hamas terrorist organisation deploy them again and again.

If anyone still wonders what the consequences of using lies to incite terrorism are, they need look no further than the horrific attacks that happened on 7 April 2023. Three London-born Israelis, 48-year-old Lucy Dee and her two daughters, 15-year-old Rina and 20-year-old Maia, were murdered when Palestinian terrorists sprayed the family’s car with bullets.

That evening, a ramming attack at Tel Aviv’s beachfront promenade killed Alessandro Parini, a 35-year-old lawyer from Rome, and injured seven pedestrians, all tourists from Italy and the United Kingdom.

Clearly, incitement by Hamas and other Palestinian sources can have consequences way beyond this tragic loss of innocent lives. Nowhere is the phenomenon more apparent than in Jerusalem, specifically in connection to the Temple Mount. A place holy for Jews and Muslims alike.



Lucy, Rina, and Maia Dee who were all killed as a result of a terror attack on 7 April 2023

For more than a century, baseless allegations about the Temple Mount have been used as a pretext to spark anti-Jewish violence. An example is the recent events that took place during the night before Passover, when Hamas activists and supporters barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque, trying to provoke Israelis to disrupt peaceful prayers.

Armed with fireworks and blunt instruments such as heavy rocks, they forced the police to react to pre-empt attacks on Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall below, and to allow peaceful Muslim worshippers to pray in the mosque.

Using the excuse that Al-Aqsa was in danger, when the only hazard was the one created by Islamic radicals shooting off massive amounts of fireworks inside the mosque itself, Hamas then expanded its offensive to additional fronts.

Thirty-four rockets were then launched from Lebanon, with the support of Iran-backed Hezbollah, toward Israeli communities in the Western Galilee. Then, after Israel’s measured response on Hamas military facilities, rockets from Gaza were fired at Israeli civilians living

near the southern border. The frequency of fatal terrorist attacks then increased.

The invocations of a fictional Jewish menace to Al-Aqsa are a small, albeit very powerful, component of the wider incitement campaign being waged against Israel. As part of it, we have seen another component of Al-Aqsa-related incitement that aims to terminate visits by Jews to their holiest site. These are inevitably portrayed as “storming” and “defiling” the Temple Mount, and Palestinian youth are indoctrinated into believing that it is their religious duty to defend Al-Aqsa against invented Israeli aggressions.

In fact, visits by Jews are conducted in a respectful manner and in accordance with the limitations imposed on all non-Muslims. These limitations stem from a decision Israel made after the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967 to uphold the status quo on the Temple Mount and allow the Islamic Waqf to continue to administer the holy site.

Israel’s respect for Muslim and Christian beliefs is consistent with the Jewish state’s commitment to safeguard the sacred sites of every faith and uphold freedom of worship. These commitments are enshrined, inter alia, in Israel’s declaration of independence. Just this past weekend, thousands of Orthodox Christians participated peacefully in the Holy Fire Ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

An impartial and informed analysis of current and past incidents would undoubtedly establish that the rioting and other violence instigated by Hamas is an inherent part of a carefully calculated strategy. This strategy has largely proven successful, benefiting extremists internally in the Palestinian sphere and internationally in media and political circles.

Last week, a small group of protesters came to the Israeli embassy in Pretoria displaying images of the Iranian tyrant as well as Hezbollah flags, while burning the Israeli flag. Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy in Lebanon, has been described by political analysts around the world as one of the most lethal terrorist organisations in history. It’s sad to see that some organisation in South Africa would want to be associated with such terrorist groups. These events are becoming a normal occurrence in other parts of the country, yet no-one (other than the Jewish community) condemns these antisemitic actions.

This manifestation, albeit small and insignificant, should be a warning about the potential of Iranian propaganda to influence some fringe segments of the Muslim community in this country to adopt extreme opinions.

Israel wants nothing more than for calm to be maintained for the benefit of all those who wish to live and pray in peace. Nevertheless, as long as Israel is unfairly condemned and terrorists rewarded, we’re doomed to see the violence escalate now and recur in the future. Peace cannot be a hostage in the hands of extremists.

• Adi Cohen-Hazanov is deputy Israeli ambassador to South Africa.

Support for terrorism clear in anti-Israel protests

>>Continued from page 4

“The SAZF reminds Amad and his coalition partners that he is the mayor of Johannesburg, not Ramallah, and as such, must use the city’s time and money on rendering quality service delivery to five million residents,” she says. “He should be reaching out to Israel to see how its technology can fix issues such as access to water, electricity, housing, roads, education, and public transport.

“It’s clear that the African National Congress’s politicking in Gauteng has given minority parties the huge responsibility of presiding over powerful political offices that the electorate didn’t choose them for,” notes Marks. “Al Jamah-ah and Amad have used this as an opportunity to amplify views that are in no way aligned with the views of the electorate in Gauteng or the majority in our country. The SAZF will oppose all efforts to

have the street renamed to Leila Khaled Drive.”

Later that evening in Cape Town, at a “Boeka in the Bo-Kaap for Palestine” event, politician Mandla Mandela called for Israeli national airline EL AL to be banned from South African skies. He then stated that “the entire Zionist lobby in South Africa, through their companies such as K-Way [Cape Union Mart], support the Jewish National Fund, and it’s for us to identify those companies and ensure that we boycott those products, as well as ensuring we also look into what relations and trade our government is doing with apartheid Israel.”

This was similar to the sentiment on a sign at an anti-Israel protest held in Durban on Monday, 17 April, which said, “Boycott Cape Union Mart, Clover Dairies, Dis-Chem Pharmacies.”

Breytenbach ‘comes out guns blazing’ in Bester escape enquiry

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish Advocate Glynnis Breytenbach is leading the way in uncovering the large-scale corruption and incompetence that allowed convicted murderer and rapist Thabo Bester to stage an audacious prison escape and to return to society.

His escape will be the stuff of movies, books, podcasts, and series for years to come – how Bester got out of the Mangaung Correctional Centre in May 2022, and then lived under the noses of authorities in South Africa for 11 months until the media finally revealed what had happened in March 2023.

Bester is also a con artist, and is known as “the Facebook rapist” for luring women over the social media platform and then raping them. He was convicted on one count of murder (of girlfriend Nomfundo Tyhulu) and two counts of rape and sentenced in 2012.

And that’s only the beginning of the saga, in which Bester may have spent weekends out of prison with his partner, celebrity doctor Dr Nandipha Magudumana, before burning a body, staging a suicide, and living a new life as a free man – including shopping at Woolworths in Sandton City. When the media finally uncovered the story, the department of correctional services admitted that Bester had faked his own death. Bester and Magudumana went on the run, and were arrested in Tanzania on 7 April 2023. They were deported back to South Africa and remain in police custody.

“It symbolises a state that is rapidly descending into anarchy with no accountability. If the Cabinet members responsible for safety and security can deliberately mislead the country, we’re in serious trouble.”

Breytenbach has been tasked with questioning G4S [the private security company employed by government to run the prison] and Police Minister Bheki Cele, amongst others, and she hasn’t held back. She says that as a member of the Justice and Correctional Services Portfolio Committee and as the Democratic Alliance’s Shadow Minister of Justice, it’s part of her parliamentary work to participate in such enquiries. G4S was subpoenaed by parliament.

Breytenbach is the chairperson of the Federal Legal Commission of the Democratic Alliance. She told the *SA Jewish Report* that G4S and Cele “must be held accountable for allowing and facilitating the escape of Bester, along with the obvious failures on their part, the corruption, the failure to make even a cursory attempt to re-apprehend him and his accomplices”. She also believes they need to be accountable for “their abject failure to warn and protect citizens of South Africa, particularly the surviving victims”.



Photos: Facebook



She called the security company’s 21-page report on the escape “completely exculpatory” and said “G4S takes no responsibility for Bester’s escape”.

During the enquiry, she asked the G4S leadership, “You don’t think it’s part of your responsibility to determine how a murderer and a serial rapist walked out of your prison? That is someone else’s responsibility?”

She asked G4S Africa Regional Commercial Director Cobus Groenewoud why the company insisted that the body found in the cell was Thabo Bester’s body, “even after it was clear to everybody else in South Africa that it wasn’t”. She also wanted to know where the propellant, matches, or lighter used to start the fire in which Bester supposedly died had come from. It later emerged that the charred body in the cell wasn’t his.

“Whose palms were greased?” Breytenbach asked, saying that “an escape of Hollywood proportion” needed numerous people to pull it off as well as a big budget and support from high up in the political hierarchy.

“You have investigated and dismissed three people,” said Breytenbach to Groenewoud. “It’s simply not possible [that only three people helped Bester]. You’re talking to the South African public who have an absolute direct interest in this matter. They have an interest in not having serial rapists and murderers running around the streets. And your job was to make sure that didn’t happen. A job you failed miserably.”

When prison head Joseph Monyante said it wasn’t necessary to do lifestyle audits on prison staff, Breytenbach responded, “You employ people to look after hardened criminals and you don’t think it’s necessary to do lifestyle audits on your staff who have access to money, who are known for bribery and corruption. Are you saying your staff is above that?”

Breytenbach pushed Cele to explain why police didn’t alert the public to Bester’s escape earlier, particularly Bester’s previous victims. “It’s an absolute disgrace that the victims of this man weren’t warned, prepared, and protected,” she told Cele. “You should hang your head in shame, all of you. It’s no way to treat people. If, while you were so busy protecting the secrecy of your investigation, Bester had murdered another woman, if he had raped another woman, what would you have said then?” she asked.

Cele responded, “Well, I am not a speculator [sic]. It has not happened.”

Cele repeatedly argued that police kept quiet because they feared alerting Bester and potentially blowing their investigation.

Breytenbach told the *SA Jewish Report* she

or more months and did nothing at all. They didn’t attempt to re-arrest, they did little or nothing to investigate, and quite clearly hoped that it would never become public knowledge. One must wonder why.”

She said she was incensed about the escape, and felt that every South African should be equally outraged. “They were knowingly exposed to a known and dangerous convicted criminal. They were deliberately misled by members of Cabinet appointed to carry their best interests at heart. It’s indefensible.”

While local media reported that Bester

was most shocked and upset that “the heads of the criminal justice cluster in South Africa had knowledge of this escape for eight

spent weekends away from prison at nearby hotels, including the Jewish-owned Tredenham Boutique Hotel in Bloemfontein, it’s unclear if Bester was actually on the premises with Magudumana. But in Breytenbach’s opinion, “At this point, having seen documentation to this effect, I do think it’s a very distinct probability [that he spent weekends away from prison at hotels].”

Breytenbach said she was unaware of other escapes on this scale. “There are regular escapes, but re-arrests happen very quickly. This matter is different, and involves corruption on a massive scale.”

She thinks Bester’s story represents a lot of South Africa’s current reality. “It symbolises a state that is rapidly descending into anarchy with no accountability. If the Cabinet members responsible for safety and security can deliberately mislead the country, we’re in serious trouble.

“The committee will continue to probe this matter, and will get to the bottom of it, come what may. South Africans must hold their elected representatives to account, and never accept this type of duplicity.”



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OPINION ROWAN POLOVIN



Next week, the world’s only Jewish state celebrates 75 years since her rebirth in 1948. We honour 75 years of Jewish self-determination and freedom in our ancient homeland. This remarkable and improbable, achievement shouldn’t go unnoticed. In spite of 14 wars against Israel, ongoing and daily acts of terror, countries bent on her destruction, international antisemitic boycott movements, delegitimation campaigns, hostile United Nations resolutions, and a growing trend of worldwide antisemitism, Israel continues not only to exist 75 years on, but to thrive.

Only 600 000 Jews, representing 3% of world Jewry at the time, lived in Israel to celebrate her declaration of independence on 14 May 1948 alongside a population of 200 000 Arabs. By the end of 2022, Israel’s population had grown tenfold to more than 9.6 million, including 7.1 million Jews and 2.03 million Arabs. Almost 50% of the world’s

Jordan. In the past few years, peace between Israel and the Arab world isn’t a dream anymore, but a reality. The Abraham Accords, sprung out of aligned interests and common enemies, has effectively ended the Arab-Israeli conflict. A warm peace has been forged between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain in the Middle East, as well as Morocco and Sudan in Africa, with numerous other discussions taking place in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The Arab world’s infamous “Three Nos” in Khartoum of 1967 of “no peace, no negotiation, no recognition” has become the “Three Yes’s” – yes to peace, yes to negotiation, and yes to recognition. The African National Congress government’s “ostrichism” and self-declared hostility against Israel places our country at odds with this new reality.

Israel at 75 continues to be a technological powerhouse out of proportion to its size and challenges, and countries from the United States to India and China seek out its

innovation and technology. It has more start-ups per capita than any nation on earth. The tiny nation in the desert has produced the most efficient desalination programme in the world which has enabled her to overcome crippling water shortages, become an exporter of water, and to provide assistance to other



Photo: Or Kaplan

Israel is an innovation and technology powerhouse

15.2 million Jewish people now live in Israel, and they are happy to be there. Nine-tenths of Israelis from all walks of life are satisfied with their lives, and Israel now ranks number four on the World Happiness Index (South Africa being a very distant 85), and 23 on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index (South Africa is at 44). Unemployment is very low, at 3.5% (compared to South Africa’s unemployment rate of 40.3%). The Jewish state’s gross domestic product \$564.15 billion compared to South Africa’s \$435.5 billion.

Israel is the embodiment of our tenacity as a people. Though she turns 75 years young next week, she also turns thousands of years old and remains the only democratic state and pillar of hope in the vast Middle East. The existence of a Jewish state, desiring to live in peace with its Arab neighbours in the Middle East, has required a long period of integration and normalisation. It took 31 years for Egypt to make peace with Israel, and 46 years for

nations. In Africa, Israeli technology and innovation has resulted in the provision of a stable water supply to more than 3.5 million people across the continent, as well as half a million people in South Africa where our own government has failed to do so.

The South African Jewish community across Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban will come together next week in their thousands to celebrate Israel’s Independence Day, as well as the unbreakable bond between our community and the Jewish state. We invite you to attend the celebrations and step inside events showcasing Israeli culture, food, entertainment, and fun for the whole family.

I’m optimistic about the future of Israel, and look forward to the next 75 years. May Israel make us closer, stronger, and prouder as a people.

- Rowan Polovin is the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation.

UCT pushed for answers after terror talk on campus

TALI FEINBERG

It’s been a month since the University of Cape Town (UCT) allowed members of terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) to address students on campus on 20 March, yet the university still hasn’t taken any action or condemned this promotion of hate.

The event, hosted by the Palestinian Solidarity Forum (PSF) during the hate-fest known as “Israeli Apartheid Week” (IAW) made Jewish students feel “unsafe, threatened, targeted, and ostracised”, in the words of South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) Western Cape Chairperson Erin Dodo.

Both the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) have engaged with the university on the

issue. SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks stated the situation plainly on 5 April, saying that it was “unconscionable that an institution like UCT would remain silent following messages from Islamist extremists. No Jewish student

can feel safe on a campus where fellow students would support and promote such hate speech, discrimination, and racism towards those of the Jewish faith.”

The SAZF has therefore filed a request for the incident to be investigated by the Office for Inclusivity and Change (OIC) at UCT. According to its website, the OIC was established to “build, develop, and foster an environment where everyone feels included and change is respected, encouraged, and celebrated”.

Marks said that the OIC initially communicated that it planned to meet the department of student affairs to discuss the SAZF’s concerns, but was unable to provide any feedback regarding whether the meeting had in fact taken place.

“UCT’s failure to condemn these actions and investigate the PSF for inciting hate speech will result in further action from the SAZF. The continued abuse of Jewish human rights cannot – and must not – be tolerated at UCT or any other institution in South Africa,” Marks said.

“Hamas and PIJ are internationally recognised terror organisations whose foundational charters espouse violence against Jews around the world. Members of the student body and PSF shamelessly hung Hezbollah and Hamas flags with images of military grade rifles on them in the Leslie Commerce Building at UCT.

“This intolerable act threatens the very foundation of South Africa’s Constitution, which enshrines the protection of the human rights of all its citizens. The fact that UCT has failed to condemn the PSF for hosting representatives from Hamas is a grave affront to our democratic norms, when the Hamas Charter clearly calls for the killing of Jews.”

Marks noted that “our universities should be places of rational debate and inclusive engagement, not hostile environments which encourage the dissemination of propaganda from extremist organisations such as Hamas. Places of learning in South Africa must be clear about the dangers of incitement and hosting speakers who would call for the discrimination, annihilation, and destruction of Jewish people as a result of their beliefs.

“Supporters of BDS [the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation] have been convicted by

the South African Human Rights Commission for antisemitism in previous years. This behaviour, without condemnation, can result only in further human rights violations in future. South African citizens should condemn the PSF for encouraging the discriminatory, racist, and extremist political ideologies of Hamas and the oppressive regime of Iran on South African campuses. These groups pose a serious threat to the human rights of women and members of the LGBTQIA+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual] community as well.

“We urge members of the public to join us in condemning this behaviour without reservation. UCT shouldn’t delay in doing the same. The SAZF will consider further legal action should the PSF not be held to account for its actions in this regard.”



Photo: Facebook

Hezbollah flag on show at the University of Cape Town at an event held in March 2023 by the Palestine Solidarity Forum

On 17 April, SAZF National Chairperson Rowan Polovin told the *SA Jewish Report* that “the SAZF has submitted a formal request for investigation into the extremism and spaces of hate that UCT wilfully allowed on its campus by the PSF last month. UCT must take public responsibility for allowing spaces for terrorist organisations that openly call for the destruction of the Jewish state and regularly spew antisemitic venom to address students. We continue to demand that UCT publicly condemn acts of extremism and hate taking place under its watch.”

Meanwhile, Cape SAJBD Executive Director Daniel Bloch said, “We had a constructive meeting with UCT [on 5 April]. It will be conducting its own debrief of IAW with the different student bodies, as well as investigating our concerns raised in both our letter to them and the media statement.”

At the time, Cape SAJBD Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson said, “The SAJBD finds it bewildering that UCT has so palpably failed to stand by its statement of values in which a firm commitment is made to build an equitable social order based on respect for human rights. Students look to UCT to provide platforms for engagement in meaningful, respectful discussions, free of discrimination, persecution, or hate. SAUJS and PSF had agreed to rules of engagement, which UCT neglected to enforce and allowed the PSF to breach.”

Says Bloch, “They have asked for time, and we have agreed that we won’t make any further comments until they have concluded their own internal processes. We did agree to speak again towards the end of April. We are on the same page insofar that universities provide safe spaces for all students.”

Says Dodo, “For now, students don’t feel a threat on campus as IAW has passed, but I do very carefully monitor everything.” She was present at the meeting between the Cape SAJBD and the university.

In response to questions from the *SA Jewish Report*, university spokesperson Elijah Moholola said, “UCT has ongoing engagements with the concerned internal structures as well as the relevant external stakeholders around this matter. UCT wishes to allow space for these conversations to continue and as such the university will not comment further at this stage.”

The *SA Jewish Report* approached the OIC for feedback, but was told to refer to Moholola’s statement.

"The continued abuse of Jewish human rights cannot and must not be tolerated at UCT or any other institution in South Africa."



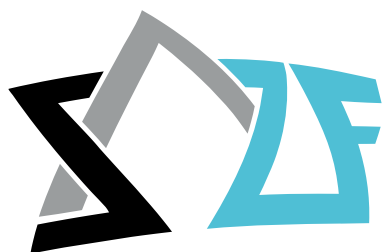
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Winds of change move slowly through Lithuania

PERSONAL STORY

PETA KROST

It's almost impossible to comprehend that of the 220 000 Jews brutally killed and dumped in pits in 200 sites across Lithuania, most were killed within six months in 1941. But, hardest to comprehend is the fact that it represented close to 95% of Lithuanian Jews, killed by Nazi order, but mostly at the hands of Lithuanians.

In most towns and cities, Jews represented half or more of the population. Now, there are only a few hundred Jews living in Lithuania in mostly Vilnius and Kaunas.

Visiting Lithuania last week, I took painful journeys to three of the killing fields to try and comprehend and pay my respects to our people decimated during the Lithuanian Holocaust.

The first site, Ponary, was outside Vilnius, the capital, where 70 000 Jews (mostly from Vilnius) were murdered, mostly in 1941. How could I absorb this number of people, who were lined up in front of the pit and shot, then thrown into a pit with other dead bodies, or thrown into the pit and then shot. And before the next death group, the murderers, who were mostly Lithuanian, would throw chemicals over the bodies so they would disintegrate, and then they would shoot the next lot of Jews. And so it went on...

As we arrived at the large Jewish stone memorial – put up, I understand by Jewish benefactors – I heard what sounded like an eerie wind blowing through the forest around me. Without thinking, I started whispering, *"Yitkadal veyitkadash Shemei Rabba"*. As I kept repeating it, almost to protect myself from this cold chill running through my body, the tears started running down my face.

I sobbed at the horror of this devastation of our people, whose lives were obliterated simply because they were born Jewish. It didn't matter whether they were brilliant mathematicians, had fought for Lithuania, were talented artists or musicians. It didn't matter if they were just a few months old, whether they were children who knew laughter, or men and women just trying to make something of their lives.

They were no longer just a number, they were individual Jewish people who had lives ahead of them and were never going to get a chance to realise their dreams, to enjoy the silly or wonderful things in life, who were never going to do anything again just because of hatred. Each one of them was innocent. Each one was terrified of what they knew was coming and had no way to escape it.

Each one of them was one of us. They were Litvak Jews, just like my family and me.

There but for the grace of G-d went my family, and I'm here to tell the tale.

I'm here to tell the tale of all 220 000 Jews who were killed in the most inhumane way. For too long, we didn't know the truth of what happened to them or how they died.

After World War II, Lithuania was taken over by Soviet Russia and during that time, Lithuanians were apparently prevented from discussing what happened to the Jews until Lithuania's independence in 1991.

In fact, on the memorial stones at the burial sites, other than the one put up by a Jewish benefactor, there's no mention of one, let alone 70 000, Jews killed there. They speak about Soviets killed there, not Jews.

They also indicate that when the Nazis realised that the war was coming to an end in 1943, they came back to remove the traces of what they did at Ponary.

These memorial stones state that they (apparently Jewish prisoners) took what remained of the bodies out of the pits and crushed them to a pulp before burning them. Rather than take responsibility for this atrocity, they destroyed evidence of their heinous crimes.

The wind kept blowing, and as the long, tall trees moved in the breeze, it seemed that they were trying to tell me something. In that moment, I wondered if there were any birds or wildlife in this deathly place. And suddenly, I heard birdsong, as if to remind me that in spite of this horrific atrocity, we're alive to tell the story.

Those monsters couldn't destroy all the evidence because I know about it, and everyone who goes there knows about it too. And in spite of whether anyone ever gets punished, it will never be forgotten.

I visited the Ninth Fort, the killing fields outside Kaunas (or Kovno in Yiddish), the second biggest city in Lithuania. This place, also out of town, was once a prison and used for political and other prisoners before it became a killing field mostly for Jews during the Holocaust.

The history of the place was less focused on the Holocaust, but not any less horrific. It was around 28 October 1941 when Jews were squashed into the outside yard of the prison without food or water until it was their time to be marched off to the killing field.

Once again, I could hear that low drone that sounded like wind, but there wasn't a breath of a breeze in the air.

We walked through the jail, in which there are several Holocaust exhibitions, which gave visual evidence to something that, for me, didn't need it. I'm sure that many people arrive here, and the exhibitions give them food for thought and an understanding of the horror.

It's hard not to be horrified on hearing that on the first day of killing Jews from Kovno, they outdid themselves and any other Holocaust killing field at that time by managing to murder 9 200 Jews in one single day on 29 October 1941 at Ninth Fort. What a revolting accomplishment!

And it went on from there.

Walking toward the killing field, I went cold as I heard the guide in the background going on about related information. He described a massive 32m-high concrete commemorative statue in front of us.

I looked ahead to where he said the killing fields were and all I saw was a beautiful, green, well-mown lawn. I kept looking further, hoping to see something that would shock me. But that was it. I was shocked that there were no visible pits or plaques or anything vaguely resembling the horror that lay under the ground. In fact, there were little children riding bicycles on the grass. I guess that was how they wanted to interpret what



The commemorative wall at the Kėdainiai killing field with the names of Jews who were murdered there

had happened, but for me, it felt sanitised.

The sole reference to what happened was a simple plaque saying, "This is the place where Nazis and their assistants killed about 45 000 Jews from Lithuania and other European countries."

I still heard that droning, but if not for that, I could have been having a lovely walk in a park, not visiting the site of at least 30 000 Jews, mostly Litvaks, whose lives were terminated because of being Jewish.

It didn't help that the guide kept referring to "the people" killed by "the Nazis", and rarely referred to the fact that 30 000 of those people were Jews who were mostly killed by Lithuanians civilians, not Nazis.

I left feeling more angry than sad. I left despondent at the fact that, though there appears to be a clear move by the government to acknowledge what was done at the hands of Lithuanians, I wasn't seeing enough of it.

I was dreading my personal journey to Kėdainiai, where members of my own family had been murdered in killing fields.

When we got out the car at the outskirts of Keidan, again I heard that whistling wind, but there wasn't a breath of wind to

be felt. In fact, as I stood in front of a metal memorial wall to the Jewish inhabitants from Keidan who were brutally murdered, I was battling for breath. It felt like someone had vacuumed the air out of me. Then I saw my family's names that had been cut out of the metal. Hirshash Krostas, Nisanas Krostas, Srage Krostas, and Zundelis Krostas.

Zundel wasn't even 10 years old when he was murdered at this site. My guide, Rimantas Zirgulis, the director of the Kedainai Regional Museum, explained that 2 076 Jews had been killed at this site – representing all the local Jews – in one day. Through research, he and his team found more than 1 000 names of Keidadians who were murdered there that day. Their names are on the metal memorial wall. They're still trying to find the others so they can complete the wall.

What was a space where the pit had once been (100m-long, 4m wide, and about 1m deep) was a beautiful green scar of grass situated between two rows of trees with a dignified stone, grave-like memorial at the one end and another creative memorial at the other.

As devastating as being there was, I felt

that nobody was hiding that these were Jewish people who were murdered and there was a real attempt to honour each individual at least with their names.

There's no way to change this history. These people are gone, and Lithuania is missing a vibrant, exciting, phenomenal community of Jews. Their loss is evident to me all around the country.

But the Lithuanians need – as they have done in Keidan – to do everything they can to acknowledge what they did and truly honour those lives they destroyed.

The winds of change are slowly moving through Lithuania. There seems to be genuine commitment at least to acknowledge guilt on the part of Lithuania as to its involvement. I have the commitment of several parliamentarians that this is just the beginning, and that they will acknowledge the truth of what was done and teach the population, starting with children, about what really happened.

However, as we move into Yom Hashoah 2023, almost 82 years since the worst of the Holocaust in Lithuania, I believe this needs some real momentum.

‘Never forget, never ignore,’ delegates tell Pretoria Yom Hashoah

DIANE WOLFSON

"We rose from the ashes of the victims, and we continue," said Israel's deputy ambassador to South Africa, Adi Cohen-Hazanov, quoting late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, at the Yom Hashoah commemoration in Pretoria on Sunday, 16 April. "The heroism of the Ghetto fighters was a cornerstone in the establishment of the state of Israel. We continue from those last moments when the hearts of millions of Jews and many others stopped beating. We are the hope and last dream of the six million who are long gone."

"Today, we're facing constant antisemitic attacks worldwide, and attempts to doubt the legitimacy and sovereignty of the state of Israel, for which we fought for many years and continue to do so," Cohen-Hazanov said. "This determination makes us all more driven to maintain Israel as an independent and strong country, the cradle of the Jewish nation, and a safe home for every Jew in the world."

Cohen-Hazanov was one of the number of diplomats, political leaders, Christian Friends of Israel members, and other

dignitaries who joined the Pretoria Jewish community at the ceremony held at the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation complex and hosted by the Pretoria Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).



Holocaust survivor Irene Fainman addressing attendees at the Pretoria Shul

She described how she participated in the memorial ceremony last year held at the killing site in the forest of Ponar, 10km near Vilnius, Lithuania, where she was posted as an Israeli diplomat. It gave her a small glimpse of the last images of more than 70 000 Jews who were brutally murdered in the pits by the Nazis and local collaborators.

During her term in Vilnius, she said she would walk the streets of what was the Jewish ghetto and today stands empty. Cohen-Hazanov spoke of a similar situation in Kaunas, where almost 40 000 Jews were shot to death, as occurred in Kyiv, Warsaw,

and Saloniki. All are examples of cities with a rich Jewish history and heritage which was painfully lost as a result of the Nazis' commitment to systematic annihilation of the Jewish nation.

Dr Doron Goldstein, the chairperson of the Pretoria Council of SAJBD, said that this year's Yom Hashoah, being the 80th year since the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, is a reminder of fighting for hope against all odds. "We cannot change the past, but by remembering it, we can change the future," he said. "The greatest achievements in prevention lie in education. In South Africa, in a welcome step, Holocaust education is now included in the school curriculum. It's also necessary to teach that persecution and discrimination is a universal problem and

Continued on page 15>>

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Finding old Keidan in Kėdainiai

PERSONAL STORY

I grew up hearing about “*der heim*” from my grandfather, referring to this far off Baltic country called Lithuania. Most South African Jews did, but I never imagined spending time in Kėdainiai (or Keidan, as I grew up calling it), in the town that my grandfather, Jankel Krost, and his family grew up in. I certainly didn’t foresee spending a night on the property where they lived that had been owned by my great-grandfather, Zalman Krost.

Today, it’s a guesthouse, so it was possible. As I lay in a bedroom in the building, I wished the walls could tell me what they recalled from the days my grandfather and his siblings were children here. I wondered what they were like.

I remember them only as elderly folk, but when they lived here, they had their lives ahead of them. They had dreams and adventures to experience.

They had an expectation of adulthood, marriage, and families in this town and country, but it wasn’t to be. Fortunately, they got out of Lithuania before the mass killings of the entire Jewish population of Keidan in 1941, but that didn’t mean life was always easy for them.

They spoke Yiddish to each other, and they lived among Keidianian gentiles. I had so little knowledge about what that was like or how they were treated. I just know that my great-grandfather was a master metal worker who did work for the “who’s-who” of Russian aristocracy while Lithuania was under the Tsar.

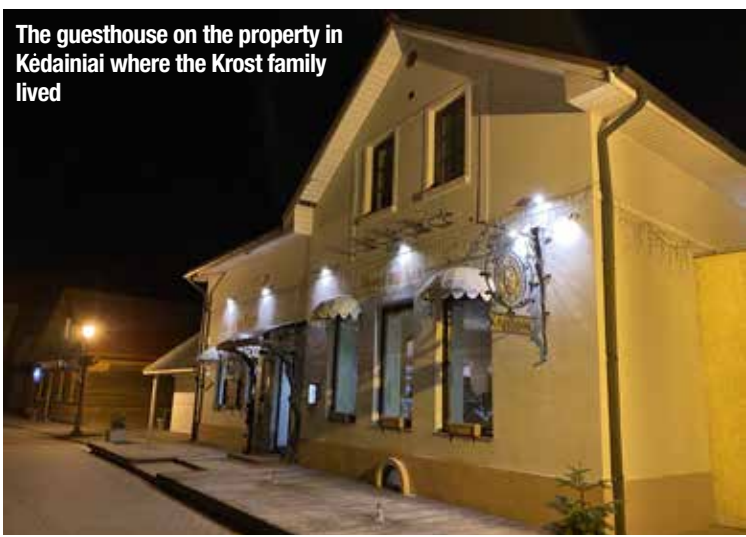
He was also deeply involved in and respected as a leader in the Keidan community, having been the founder of the town’s Linat Hatzedek (an organisation providing lodging for the poor), a member of the Chevrah Kadisha committee, and the president of Keidan’s big synagogue.

I also knew that in 1915, the whole family, along with the other Jews in the country, were forced to go to Russia for a few years, leaving all they owned behind. When they were finally allowed to return, I understand that their homes had been ransacked and belongings stolen. It was then that my family began considering leaving *der heim*.

I had hoped that being in this house, I would, by osmosis, have a sense of their lives and develop a connection to their history. I thought that by walking through the streets, I would feel a closeness to them and their childhood experiences.

However, I soon realised that the soul of a place has nothing to do with its history, but rather the people who inhabit it now.

Though there are indicators everywhere in Keidan of the former presence of Jews – who before 1841 made up almost 60% of the population



– there was no sense their presence now. The Yiddishkeit we bring to a place was totally absent.

There haven’t been Jews in Keidan since the entire population of 2 076 was marched out of the city, their clothes and belongings taken from them, lined up in front of a huge pit, and murdered.

In spite of the fact that more than half the town’s population suddenly disappeared and their belongings and homes were grabbed and enjoyed by whoever got there first, nobody at the time spoke about the bizarre disappearance of the Jewish population.

We’re led to believe that for 50 years, which included the rest of World War II and the years that Lithuania was under Soviet rule as part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, nobody spoke about the Jews.

It was only once Lithuania regained its independence in 1991 that we’re told they began to uncover what had happened and started to discuss this devastating travesty. It has, however, been documented that though there was a Nazi or two who ordered the killings, the people who did most of the shooting, barring Jews from escaping, and preventing witnesses, were Lithuanian activists or soldiers and gentiles from Keidan. Neighbours. Customers. Teachers. Even people the Jewish Keidianians thought were friends.

This repulsive scar remains in Keidan, or at least I felt it, being family of those

whose names were on the list of those murdered. Four of my family members’ names appear on the metal memorial to those murdered at the killing field.

Through my day there, I was guided through the streets to see where Jewish shops and homes had been. I visited

the three synagogues there, including both the summer and winter ones. I was shown the ramshackle house, once owned by Jews, that had a shutter on the roof on an outhouse specifically to use for Sukkot.

I visited Jewish Street, the building that was once a Jewish-owned movie house, and was told which areas were predominantly Jewish. It was clear we had a huge presence.

My guide, Rimantas Zirgulis, the director of the Kėdainiai Regional Museum, was sympathetic and kind, but the horror perpetrated by the people from his home town was clearly not easy for him to speak about. However, he did much to keep alive the memory of the Jews of Keidan. No matter how tough the questions, he answered with respect and care.

He took me to the Jewish cemetery, where I found another relative of mine, Yosef Gershon Krost, who had at least been allowed a dignified death and burial.

I later learnt that the Jewish graves had been cleaned and maintained by the Keidan senior high school students as a project to learn about the Jews of their town. The teacher behind this, Laima Ardavičienė, then organised for the students to photograph and read each gravestone to document who and when Jews had died.

She also got them to draw a tree of life

Continued on page 15>>



Ella Blumenthal embodies spirit of survival on Yom Hashoah

STEVEN GRUZD

In a glimpse of the future, the main speaker at Johannesburg’s Yom Hashoah Holocaust commemoration on 18 April wasn’t there in person. Ella Blumenthal – still feisty, forgiving, and funny at age 101 – instead talked to her daughter and granddaughter in a video.

Blumenthal’s daughter, Evelyn Kaplan, delivered a poignant, heartfelt message from the podium. As the number of Shoah survivors around the world dwindles, the succeeding generations will be called on to perpetuate the memories of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945.

Blumenthal was a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – when Jews took on the might of the Nazi army in Poland’s capital exactly 80 years ago, on 19 April 1943. Their fearless heroism against insurmountable odds led Israel in 1959 to choose this day to commemorate the Shoah, following a Knesset resolution in 1951.

Blumenthal also survived the camps of Majdanek, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen. Remembering April 1943, she recalled the shooting and Molotov cocktails being hurled at German soldiers. They were taken by surprise, and the Jews held out for days, before the rebellion was mercilessly crushed and the ghetto set aflame.

“The sight will be forever in my mind,” Blumenthal said in the video, “I can never erase it. The smell of burning feathers from the bedding will forever be in my nostrils.”

She also spoke of being miraculously released from inside a gas chamber with her niece by an SS soldier, who said, “You are not going to be gassed today.”

Blumenthal’s story is beautifully told in the award-winning 2021 documentary *I Am Here*.

She retains the happiness of her pre-war childhood. “I was very naughty. I still am,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

“G-d spared me to be here today,” Blumenthal said. Her positive outlook and optimism shine through her words. “I wake up every day to see the world, the light coming in. I never close my curtains. I want to see the dawn coming in. *Baruch Hashem, ani po* (Thank G-d, I am here). I went through suffering and tragedy, but you have got to carry on. The world is beautiful. Be thankful to have another day.

“I never lost my faith in Hashem, even in the darkest of days,” Blumenthal said. “I survived, I lived, to tell the world about it.”

Her message was, “It’s so wrong that people fight with arms. We shouldn’t blame each other for being different colours or religions. We must sit down and exchange views – we are all one nation, we’re all the same, G-d’s creations.”

No less powerful were the words of Ella’s

daughter as a second-generation survivor. Kaplan said that she knew in her bones from a young age that her family was different. She had no grandparents, uncles, and aunts. She sensed that her mother needed protecting from further harm for the rest of her life. She remembers her mother screaming from nightmares, where her children were being taken away from her. A single framed black-and-white photograph was the only remnant of her mother’s entire family. Of the 25 of them, 23 were killed in the Shoah.

“You don’t understand it, but you accept it,” said Kaplan. “As you get older, you begin to process it all, struggle with it.” She saw that her mother wasn’t defined solely by her past, but was full of “life, verve and vigour.” She was “strong, sassy, feisty and forthright”.

“The Holocaust didn’t end in 1945. Its impact on the younger generation was so profound. It altered your genetic code ... Genocide continues to wreak havoc on future generations,” Kaplan said.

For her, the COVID-19 lockdown was, strangely, a blessing, because her mother moved in with her. She and her family had the precious gift of more quality time with this remarkable, inspiring woman. At 101, Blumenthal has mastered social media, and keeps in touch with her family around the world.

“I learned from her that hatred begets hatred. I was passed on her baton of tolerance and understanding,” Kaplan said, “Losing her parents, her brothers, her aunts, and uncles was unfortunately not extraordinary at that time. But going on to love, to talk, to write ... to have a lust and thirst for life – that was extraordinary.”

The moving ceremony, organised annually by the Gauteng Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, retained many of its traditional elements. This included songs and



Ella Blumenthal’s granddaughter and daughter, Danielle Kaplan Katz and Evelyn Kaplan

prayers, the lighting of six memorial lamps by survivors and their families, and a message delivered by the deputy ambassador of Israel. Kaddish was led by one of the survivors, Reverend Joseph Matzner.

A flock of pigeons circled above the audience as school leaders read out the names of individuals who perished in the Shoah. This was an omen that they will never, ever, be forgotten. We are here.



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Beryl Unterhalter: ‘A strikingly different woman of her generation’

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Described as “one of those selfless souls who were the backbone of our country and Jewish community”, Beryl Unterhalter lived a remarkable life. From her anti-apartheid advocacy to her prolific academic career in sociology to her dedication to her family, Unterhalter also remained an integral part of organisations championing education and literacy well into her 90s.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* following their mother’s passing on 4 April at the age of 95, David and Elaine Unterhalter and Karrie Weinstock paid tribute to a loving mother whom Weinstock described as “a strikingly different woman of her generation”.

What set Unterhalter apart, says Weinstock, was her ability to combine her academic career with a spirit of fun and adventure while parenting three children and keeping her family life together. Building a home that became a centre of people, meals, and joy, Unterhalter

was also a core volunteer in multiple non-profit organisations.

“That ability to hold three portfolios where many women of her generation held only one, spoke to her incredible organisational skills, her huge energy, and her sense of commitment to various communities,” says Weinstock.

In addition to her successful academic career, Unterhalter was an active member of the Liberal Party alongside her husband, Jack, who led the party in the Transvaal. Under Alan Paton, the party fought for a society based on non-racism against the backdrop of apartheid South Africa.

“While its electoral prospects were meagre, it stood for a set of non-racist values that at the time, were very hard to pursue, many of which have now found their way into our Constitution,” says David. The Liberal Party eventually disbanded as it declined to participate in a racially exclusive set of elections.

Those that actively fought against apartheid in the 1960s were thought of “as being essentially either crazy to be trying to oppose this monolith that was in the making, or certainly were castigated as being

some set of species of terrorists and the like”, David says.

“The racism of the white community at that time was pervasive,” says Elaine. “We grew up exposed to it, and my parents were always resolutely against it.” David laughs as he recalls how Albert Luthuli once stayed at their house on the way to accept his Nobel Prize in Oslo. “Years later, my parents hired a white nanny who turned out to be an out-and-out racist, and they always thought it funny that she was sleeping in the same bed that he had been staying in.”



Beryl Unterhalter (front left) with family members

Unterhalter excelled at school and majored in social work at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). She went on to train black social workers, teach at a primary school, and then lecture in social work at Wits. Later deciding to specialise in what was then an emerging field and what eventually became the serious discipline of sociology, Unterhalter pursued an academic career at Wits, pioneering medical sociology as a required subject for future doctors.

“Our mother embarked on an academic career in what was then an entirely male-dominated institution,” David says. “She

went on to get her doctorate in sociology when she was in her early 40s, amidst a handful of women who had doctorates and pursued academic careers.”

Not only did Unterhalter inspire a new generation of female academics in her more than 35 years at Wits, she contributed to her children’s professional success. David, a Gauteng High Court judge, Elaine, an academic in London, and Weinstock, an educator in a Toronto-based girls’ school, all point to their mother’s impact on their careers.

“More than an inspiration, she was an incredible support to us through this talent she had for interest and engagement,” says Elaine. “Even though she was so ill and frail, about three weeks before she died, she was still giving me advice for a journal article I was writing.”

All three of Unterhalter’s children were inspired by her belief in service, which they perpetuate in their own projects. “My mom had a deep love of learning,” says Weinstock. “She was a lover of the arts, literature, philosophy, music, and always wanted to empower those who didn’t have access to the education she had.”

Among Unterhalter’s many projects, she worked in early childhood education in Soweto. “Right up until the time proceeding her illness at 93, she was working in literacy programmes with children from government schools helping them with their reading.”

Unterhalter also ran literacy programmes with young children and adults, collaborating with the late Ann Harris on literacy and computer classes for domestic workers. “My relationship with Beryl was cemented on the premises of Oxford Synagogue, where she established a facility to train domestic workers in the art of cooking, dressmaking, and introduced IT skills training,” recalls Afrika Tikkun Chief Executive Marc Lubner.

“Her highlight was the annual event where her students presented their designed dresses to an audience at a sit-down dinner sponsored by Afrika Tikkun.

“Beryl loved to see these ladies acknowledged for their efforts, knowing she had imparted a part of herself and her belief in the capabilities of others. Given a chance, Beryl believed, anyone could grow and experience the joy of achievement.”

Unterhalter was also integral to volunteer organisation University of the Third Age (U3A), an international organisation that’s greatly developed in Johannesburg. “Here, people who have had academic lives continue to offer a huge range of academic and other kinds of courses to mainly retired ‘students’,” David says.

“Beryl was an outstandingly active, energetic, and enthusiastic member, introducing many important new developments, making friends with so many members, going on outings, sourcing and co-ordinating courses, and motivating so many of the activities,” says U3A Johannesburg Chairperson Marcia Leveson.

Unterhalter, her children say, was a woman of action. “People talk a great deal about the value of giving,” David says, “but there are those who actually do it as opposed to thinking about it. My mother’s great virtue was that she was a doer of boundless energy and effort.”

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Controversy fails to take shine off Shein

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Recently placed under investigation by South Africa's department of trade, industry and competition, Chinese online fashion and beauty phenomenon Shein has been accused of deliberately sending its goods in small packages to reduce import duty costs. In spite of global criticism, the brand remains the world's top fast-fashion brand – but at what cost?

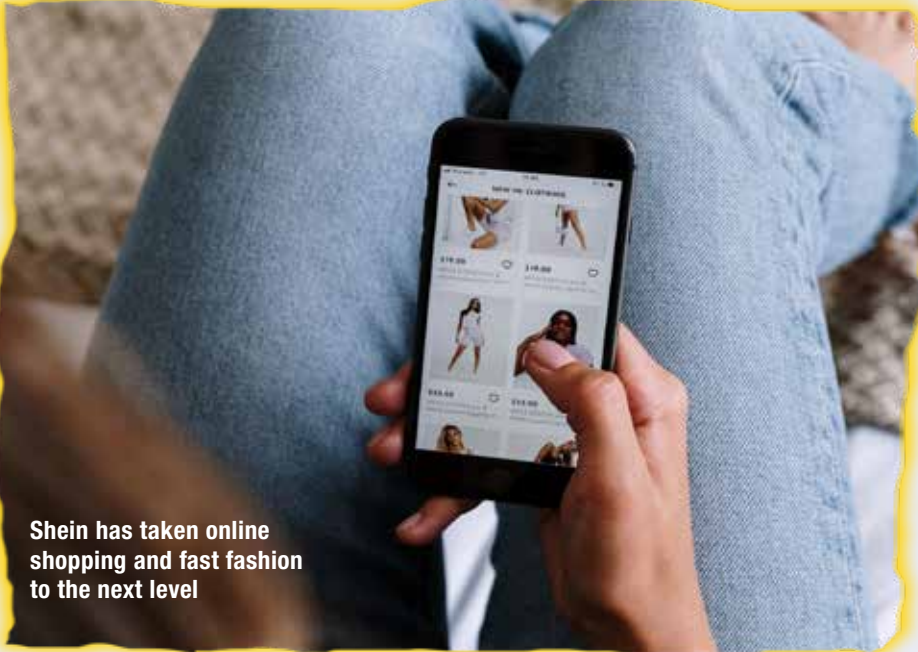
In the age of fast fashion where the latest catwalk trends are rapidly mass produced at low cost, Shein's appeal is undeniable. With a legion of loyal South African shoppers – including large Shein resale groups in our community – it's worth more than \$100 billion (R1.8 trillion). Shein sells a multitude of fashion items at considerably low prices to customers in more than 150 countries, including South Africa. "The majority of South Africans cannot just spend without thinking like before," says Cara-Lee Herr, a former fashion editor at *Fair Lady* and an entrepreneur in the fashion industry.

"They are extremely price sensitive but still want nice, on-trend items, so fast fashion ticks both boxes. The majority aren't going to bother to see where it's made, but rather care about the price. Fast-fashion retailers have the money to put behind their marketing, especially on social media channels which drive consumer behaviour." Fast-fashion items are, however, often discarded as rapidly as they're produced, raising concerns about excess waste.

Demonstrating how Shein has taken fast fashion to another level, fashion retailer Zara produces 20 000 new styles annually in comparison to the 6 000 per day added by Shein.

In an investigation making international headlines, South African unions and clothing groups are arguing that the company is using tax loopholes to offer unrealistically cheap clothing prices. Bringing clothes into the country in small quantities means Shein pays less import taxes, something local clothing retailers cannot escape.

"Local clothing retailers pay 45% import tax on one item," Michael Lawrence, the executive director of the National Clothing Retail Federation (NCRF) of South Africa, which has raised import-tax concerns with authorities, told *City Press*. The NCRF is an umbrella body made up of retailers such as Woolworths and The Foschini Group.



Shein has taken online shopping and fast fashion to the next level

suppliers accused of making employees work up to 18 hours a day. "As a global company, Shein takes visibility across our entire supply chain seriously," Emily Workman, Shein's director of corporate communications, told the *SA Jewish Report*. "We're committed to respecting human rights and adhering to local laws and regulations in each market we operate in. Our suppliers must adhere to a strict code of conduct aligned to the International Labour Organisation's core conventions."

Legions of satisfied shoppers remain undeterred by the controversy. "Do we ever question where exactly the clothes in our local stores come from?" asks Staci Lyons-Jacobson, the admin of a Shein Curve – Shein's plus-sized fashion line – WhatsApp resale group.

For adults, larger-sized items at local clothing retailers tend to be "bobbadiik", she says. However, on Shein Curve one can get exactly the same clothing items as those sold in smaller sizes. Even though Shein's clothing prices have

risen recently, she says, they're still cheaper than most retailers and make-up and accessories remain incredibly reasonable.

Convenience is also a drawcard with items delivered to customers' doors via Shein's courier partners, often taking just 10 days to arrive. Lyons-Jacobson admits that the clothing can sometimes be "hit and miss", which is why she started her WhatsApp group, but she says the quality is generally of a high standard.

Points systems as well as vouchers accumulated by being on the app also allow for considerable discounts on products purchased, she says. She has also calculated what to spend on Shein orders to avoid excessive taxes and duty fees – about R1 200 to R1 400.

But it's not easy to send things back to Shein, says Necia Hirschson, which is why she started her WhatsApp resale group called "Shein shopping oopsies" which has 280 members. "The fact that they're cheap means that it doesn't matter if you or the kids wear the clothes for only one season and then throw them away," she says. This tendency to briefly wear and then discard clothing before making your next purchase, explains why fast fashion is such a lucrative but environmentally concerning business model.

Herr says the duty fees on Chinese imports are generally lower because they mass produce. "The more units they can make, the cheaper the production there. Here, units produced are a lot more expensive as they are made in smaller batches. We're dealing with huge inflation here because of factors like petrol prices and loadshedding increasing manufacturing costs. So, outsourcing from China is looking better in terms of affordability."

Yet, she says, legitimate factories in China are also experiencing higher raw-material costs especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, which casts doubt on Shein's practices. "In my opinion, there has to be bad practice involved in Shein," Herr says. "The factories I use in China who are all above board can never produce for

Continued on page 14>>

Hebrew so much more than ordering coffee

OPINION

MAZAL SACKS



Hebrew is in crisis in many South African Jewish schools. By the time children get to high school, they can't wait to drop a subject that's been breaking their teeth and seems to have little more usefulness than ordering a cup of coffee on Ben Yehuda Street on the odd visit to Israel.

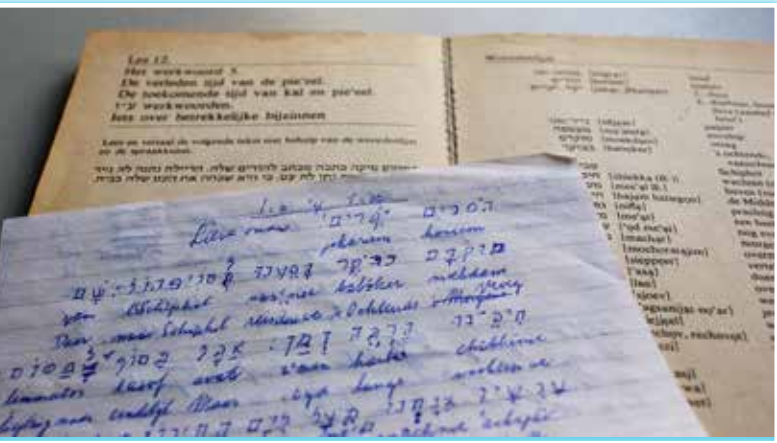
But what if choosing Hebrew was so much more than a grade on a report or a conversation with an Israeli? What if our children could discover the language of their forefathers and their own souls within the structure and form of these ancient letters? What if learning Hebrew unlocked the secrets of creation and our reality?

Hebrew should never be taught as a foreign language to Jewish students. It should be a birth right and a passport to a fully engaged Judaism and a connection to our people and homeland, and therefore, it should never be taught in English. The subject should and can be an adventure in Jewish identity and unity.

How do we conduct a seder or pray from a siddur without knowing what we're saying? Our children learn their *brachot* from an early age, but do they even know the richness of the very first word, "Baruch"? Do we?

In Hebrew, every verb has a root, and that root can open worlds of meaning and exploration. The word for prayer comes from the root, *peleh* (magic or wonder) and with our prayers, we can co-create our lives.

Each word of the Hebrew language is an entire world and tells us something fundamental. For example, the root word for fear is *pahad*, but turn those letters around and you get *dahaf* – push. The message is clear that you cannot wait until you are over your fear to do great things, you have to push yourself, even when you're afraid, and this lessens the fear. Such depth in each word! We all deserve to be in on these deep Kabbalistic secrets, especially our children, whom we have a duty to educate, and pass on the torch that was ignited at Sinai and



Hebrew should never be seen as a foreign language to Jewish students

the awareness with which Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov lived.

Hebrew isn't just a language, it's our entire

culture. Each *Ivrit* lesson is an opportunity to share our rich heritage and history with passion. But it takes passionate teachers who teach with a sense of purpose and a meaningful syllabus that allows each student to travel through our people's story through our sacred texts, our prophets, our tragedies, and triumphs. In high school *Ivrit*, we explore writings from Tanach, the exquisite poetry of King David's *Tehillim*, and the wisdom of Pirkei Avot. We learn about the Holocaust from its witnesses and survivors, and about the wars and heroes of modern Israel.

Being proficient in a second language other than an official South African language opens doors when applying to university, and develops our children's cognitive ability as they master a language in a different script, reading right to left. The curriculum also develops critical thinking skills, as they learn to analyse texts and draw their own conclusions – not simply learn by rote.

Once again, it reiterates the fact that taking Hebrew as a subject isn't just about learning to speak the language, it's about developing crucial skills that will carry our children in the work place.

By the end of matric, our children could have so much more than a symbol on a certificate. They could have an identity – a deep sense of belonging to one of the greatest stories on earth. They could have an instant *kesher* – a connection to any Jew from any country, a common language to build the unity and *ahavat Yisrael* our people so need. And they could have one of the most essential ingredients to play a meaningful role in the future of Israel. A strong, thriving Israel allows us all to walk with our heads held high anywhere in the world. So let's encourage our children to learn Hebrew as a subject so they know what it means when they say the word "Yisrael", so their eyes light up when they visit *Yerushalayim*. And let's invest in teacher training to insure the continuation of *Ivrit* teaching in our schools.

• Mazal Sacks is head of Hebrew for King David Schools. After completing her army service in Israel, she studied Hebrew and Kabbala at Tel Aviv University. She later moved to South Africa, and studied literature, Mishnah and Tanach at the University of the Witwatersrand.

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Changing course – mature students prove the power of perseverance

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Chief executive turned medical student. A budding financial planner. An advertising entrepreneur come published author. Whether they’ve completely altered their career, found a new passion, or built on existing talents, these mature students believe it’s never too late to pursue your passion.

Excelling in the business world where he became chief executive of highly successful distribution company, Daniel Benjamin, now 45, changed everything last year to follow his dream of becoming a doctor. Armed with an undeniable work ethic, Benjamin previously completed a BCom and a Master of Business Administration while working full-time. Yet, he’s always known where his true calling lies.

Growing up in the United States, Benjamin had in fact completed a year of pre-med when life led him to South Africa where he married and become father to five boys. More than 20 years later, having succeeded in the business world and sold off his shares in the company, he knew he had enough time and money to return to his first love.

“Becoming a doctor means more to me than just a drive to help people,” he wrote in a motivation letter applying to the University of the Witwatersrand Graduate Entry Medical Programme, which allows entry of suitably qualified candidates into the third year of the MBBCh degree. “It includes a fascination with human biology, a quest to help diagnose and treat illness and disease, and a wish to work



in a field where I believe that I can best utilise my abilities.”

Having faced rejection after his initial application, Benjamin is now in his fourth year of full-time medical studies at Wits.

Being almost twice the age of his fellow students is something he’s embraced. “I only see benefits in being a more mature student,” he says. “It helps with really wanting to do the degree and with how you approach studying and the various rules that others are so nervous about. You can also help fellow students as you have enough life experience to know what’s important and what’s not.”

A clinical claims consultant at Discovery Health, David Klatzkin decided to pursue a BCom in his 30s. Having done a basic

ambulance-assistant course after matric, he joined Hatzolah and also spent time at a Yeshiva and as a volunteer for Magen David Adom in Israel. Thereafter, he completed intermediate life support training and returned to Hatzolah. He later began his career at Discovery.

“The idea of starting a degree was daunting as I hadn’t completed the first few I’d begun over the years. I had however reached the point where I felt I needed one to further my career,” Klatzkin says.

Newly married and working full-time at Discovery, which helped subsidise his studies, Klatzkin decided to take things slowly when he began his BCom through Wits in 2018. “It took me three years to complete the first year,” he says. “Some people thought I was mad, but I decided to rather take on too little but finish and gain a life skill than take on too much and fail or drop a course.” His strategy paid off, and Klatzkin completed his BCom at the end of 2022, a “surreal” experience.

Yet, it wasn’t all smooth sailing. While finding time to study was always a challenge, becoming a father in 2021 took things to another level. “My lectures were online in the evenings making it difficult, especially when the little guy was screaming his lungs out,” he recalls. “I would feel bad about leaving my wife alone so would go back and forth from the lecture helping with bottles and bath time. I ended up working when he was sleeping.

“Looking at pictures of my wife and son whenever things were tough helped,” he says. “They keep me motivated. This week, I’ll be crossing the Great Hall and getting capped as a BCom graduate.”

In spite of the associated challenges, Klatzkin says he now has the study bug, and is completing a post-graduate diploma in financial planning.

Passionate about the written word, author Lynn Joffe, who remains chief executive

and executive creative director of Creatrix, a multilingual storytelling and branded content agency, is also a dedicated student. Having attained a Bachelor of Arts degree in the early 1980s as she worked her way up “from typist to copywriter and beyond”, Joffe says she’s always wanted to advance her “academic chops”, which is why she decided to pursue a Masters in Creative Writing at Wits in 2015.

“What sparked the decision was a beloved age-mate dying of cancer in 2014,” she says. “I was jolted into the realisation that time was finite, and that if I wanted to write ‘literature’, I needed the structure and discipline of the academy.” She graduated in July 2017 at the age of 58, and then spent two years working with an editor before her debut novel, *The Gospel According to Wanda B. Lazarus* was published.

Writing for commercial projects and creating an imaginary work from the depths of your soul are completely different things, she says. “Since *Wanda* has been published, I have a secret – and not so secret – feeling of accomplishment. I don’t think I would have been able to write this book earlier in my life – it’s a kind of a cosmic *bildungsroman* – and I sense that recognition breeds confidence and success breeds further success. Work is still important, I continue to juggle it, but I imagine that writing fiction will take greater precedence in the future.”

Joffe is taking a sabbatical from a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Pretoria. Not only giving rise to her next literary work, this qualification will allow her to teach, extending her love for education. Joffe says she thinks of her studies as representing the maturity to realise her fullest potential. “This is something I couldn’t do in younger years,” she says, “but which experience has led me to be able to self-actualise, as [American psychologist] Abraham Harold Maslow would say.”

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Controversy fails to take shine off Shein

>>Continued from page 13

so cheap. At Shein, somewhere along the chain, someone is either not being paid enough or working too many hours. I get the concept of Shein – it’s a unique type of retailer – I wouldn’t even compare it to a fast-fashion retailer. I understand that it’s cutting out the middleman, but that still doesn’t explain how it can be this cheap considering global raw-material costs.”

Workman, however, claims that Shein is able to keep prices low through its unique on-demand business model.

“This enables us to reduce the waste and overproduction typically associated with the fashion industry by producing an ultra-small batch of each style on our site, gauging market response, and then communicating this feedback to supplier partners almost immediately,” she says. “We therefore respond with larger production only if it’s warranted, reducing

the unsold inventory percentage to single digits versus an industry average of 30%. This leads to cost savings, which are passed on to our consumers through our affordable pricing.”

Many remain unconvinced. Susan Frankel, the owner of Kerry’s Fashions, a Joburg-based modest clothing store featuring locally manufactured clothing for women and girls, says that small local businesses will never be able to compete with what she terms “sweat shops”.

“The fast-fashion industry has made the already damaging impact of COVID-19 worse for us as people want cheap options no matter the quality and the sweat that goes into making them,” she says. “Consumers aren’t aware that the cost of good quality materials has risen quite substantially, exacerbated by import costs.” Yet building on its long history, loyal customer base, and alteration offerings – ironically often on Shein garments – Kerry’s Fashions is here to stay, she says.

Missing Tupperware tips us over the edge

Some of our biggest marital arguments involved Tupperware. Or rather, my failure to return a container that had been placed in my care. And whereas I never truly understood the magnitude of my offence, I always had a notion that this was about something other than the piece of plastic.

There's a very real possibility that the next generation will be forced to live in a world devoid of Tupperware. That our children and their children won't know the joy of the closing sound of a perfectly matching lid, as well as the frustration of a missing one. Our grandchildren won't know what it means to be trusted with their container, and the horror of losing it.

Much like the White Rhino, but arguably more concerning, is that Tupperware is on the verge of extinction.

This should be a big story, but one could easily have missed it. Especially if we consider other events that have dominated the news. In that context, it could be contended that the Tupperware demise is of no consequence.

I would argue that the very opposite is true. The death of Tupperware might well signal the death of old-world family values.

Consider the history of the brand. Tupperware was born into a post-world war world. The company is named after Earl Tupper, a chemist in the 1940s who created lightweight, non-breakable plastic containers inspired by the seal-tight design of paint cans. The purpose was to help families save money on costly food waste.

They never sold well in stores because consumers were unsure how to use them. That conundrum led to the idea of demonstrating the product, which then evolved into the famous Tupperware house parties.

The practice dove-tailed brilliantly with the rise of

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



suburbia: women had bigger homes, bigger kitchens, more money to spend, more children to feed, and more responsibilities to keep house.

For the generations that followed, Tupperware became a measure of love and responsibility. More favourite and trusted children were rewarded with the honour of taking Tupperware to school, while those lower in the pecking order were given then "cheaper" alternatives. Mothers in many cases, given the choice, would rather that the container returned home, and not the kid. And many a domestic squabble would begin with husbands not bringing one home from the office (been there, done that).

Unlike the rhino, or abalone for that matter, Tupperware is a symbol of the home. It metaphorically "contains" and preserves food, which is the embodiment of nurture and sustenance. It allowed children to carry a slice of home with them and husbands (or wives) to be reminded why they were working. This possibly being the reason why moms across cultural lines turn into monsters if that piece of plastic is deemed to have been treated with disrespect.

There are many reasons that the company might fail. The inability to adapt and appeal to a new generation, the sales process, as well as the product pricing might all be factors.

One thing is certain, whereas I might be saddened by the extinction of any species, I will miss the missing Tupperware lids, the responsibility it entails, and even the arguments that my carelessness might have caused. There's no doubt in my mind that the void created by a post Tupperware world will have a much more significant impact on us than any missing abalone ashtray ever could.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Trauma and triumph

This week, Yom Hashoah ceremonies were held under the auspices of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in all the major centres. I thank Mary Kluk for once again so ably and sensitively heading up the national planning committee, which worked with survivors and other stakeholders to ensure that these events were as inclusive as possible. The ceremonies were well attended in spite of them taking place on a weekday.

In common with most Jewish communities around the world, the practice in South Africa is to hold Yom Hashoah on 27 Nisan, the date decided upon by the Israeli Knesset in 1951. This date in the Hebrew calendar was chosen because it marks the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when Jews awaiting deportation and death rose up in a last act of resistance against their prospective killers and managed to hold out for three weeks despite the hopeless odds against them. Yom Hashoah this year fell on the 80th anniversary of that landmark event, which not only inspired Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe to fight back against their would-be murderers, but inspired subsequent generations of Jews the world over to fight back against antisemitism wherever it arises.

Ella Blumenthal, our keynote speaker via a video message for the Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban ceremonies, is one of the few remaining survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. We were privileged not only to hear her first-hand testimony of those harrowing times, but the words of her daughter, Evelyn Katz, who spoke about the enduring impact of her mother's experience on her life and that of her descendants. In a powerful and deeply moving address, Katz

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



shared some of the poignant details of her life with a Holocaust survivor, in which the trauma of the past is never far from the surface regardless of the passage of time. Even those few survivors who were liberated never completely left the death camps but have forever borne the scars of what they endured and witnessed. This makes the commitment of people like Blumenthal to testify and educate about their experiences in spite of advancing age and the personal pain it must cause them all the more admirable and indeed, inspiring, for those later generations who are now stepping in to ensure that the duty of remembering and bearing witness to what happened continues.

World Jewry is today confronting an escalating rise in antisemitism globally. This is, of course, a matter for much concern, but we should also remember that unlike the Jews of Europe 80 years ago, we have many effective (and non-violent) avenues – legal, political, institutional etc – through which we can fight back. The core mandate of the SAJBD (which this month celebrated 120 years of serving our community) is to combat this evil wherever it manifests, working with our international colleagues whenever necessary and ensuring that "Never Again" isn't just a slogan but a lived reality for ourselves and future generations of Jews, no matter where they may be.

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

'Never forget, never ignore,' delegates tell Pretoria Yom Hashoah

>>Continued from page 10

not restricted to one racial, ethnic, national, or religious group."

Sam Eichhorn, the vice-chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students at Pretoria University (Tuks), said that after his visit to Yad Vashem in 2020, he found it inconceivable to think that a pile of old, dusty shoes could have such a profound effect on someone.

The display of old shoes showed Eichhorn that the Holocaust wasn't words on a page or footage in a documentary. "It was about people. It was about friends and families and neighbours. It was about doctors and dancers and actors and teachers. It was about children with dreams and parents willing to do everything in their power to see those dreams come to fruition. Those shoes belonged to people. People like you and like me. Yad Vashem taught me that this is what mustn't be forgotten. That this, speaking as a representative of the Jewish youth, is what will soon become our responsibility to carry. To pass on. To ensure that every generation will know," he said.

"Building and preserving our communities is the greatest challenge our youth will face as we begin to fill more positions of leadership and attempt to fill the large shoes of our predecessors," Eichhorn said, imploring the younger generation to come forward and form the backbone of our greatest tool, our community.

The deputy head of mission of the Austrian Embassy, Oliver Grunbacher, said Austria took full responsibility for the crimes many Austrians committed or collaborated in during the Holocaust. That's why it changed its citizen law in 2019, making it possible for the descendants of those who had to flee from Austria during the Nazi regime to claim Austrian citizenship. Grunbacher emphasised the importance of staying vigilant at all times, and never giving way to antisemitism, as well as speaking up and protesting whenever the Holocaust is questioned.

Going into great detail at times, Holocaust survivor Irene Fainman was blunt in telling of her time in the Ravensbrück Women's Camp, but concluded that she refuses to live with hate which, like a cancer, can consume one, although she would never forgive or forget.

Finding old Keidan in Kėdainiai

>>Continued from page 11

on the back of her classroom which had the names of all the Jewish families who had once lived in Keidan. She did this to enhance their education of the Holocaust and help them internalise what had been a thriving Jewish life. She wanted to keep alive the memory of a community that was forever gone from the town.

I was looking forward to meeting the owner of the property that had once belonged to my great-grandfather. I wanted to find out as much as I could about its history.

The owner, who told me that he was born in 1991 and had bought the property just 13 years before, knew little about its history.

However, sitting opposite me, knowing my history, he told me how he felt about the Jewish community. They were anti-progress, he said, citing an example of Lithuanians needing to build a road and the Jews making a big noise about stopping it "because they needed to check whether there were bones there". The bones he was talking about were those left in mass graves from the 220 0000 Jews murdered in 200 sites

around the country.

He went on to tell me that if they didn't like what was happening in Lithuania, they could leave. He said Jews needed to let go of the past, and move on. He told me his mother had also lost people during Soviet times, but she had moved on. "The Jews also need to move on. They can't expect people to make special allowances for them because they lost people. They need to stop feeling sorry for themselves and move on."

I guessed he was referring to the 220 0000 Jews who were "lost" when they were rounded up and brutally tortured and murdered. Amazingly, this young man appeared not to realise that what he was saying was offensive to me.

Shocked, I wondered if his attitude was unusual in Lithuania.

I'm so grateful that my family's soul is no longer in that building because I would hate for it to have to share space with people like that.

As much as I'm grateful to have gone back to my roots in Keidan, I won't be returning in a hurry, thanks to one young man.

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Durban’s first Jewish marathon sprints off starting blocks

LAUREN SHAPIRO

Rabbi Pinchas Zekry, himself an ardent runner, has long been promoting among his congregants the Maimonides notion of “a healthy soul in a healthy body”. On the strength of this wisdom, he has now initiated the first Jewish “marathon” in Durban.

The beachfront promenade on Durban’s famous Golden Mile was alive with activity on Sunday, 16 April, when the Jewish community and friends gathered for the inaugural Masada Run/Walkathon, which doubled as a fundraiser for Masada Workshop, Durban’s Jewish sheltered employment programme. There were varying options, including a 10km run, 5km run, 5km walk, and 3km walk.

The event attracted more than 200 people – not to mention the many canine companions who tagged along. Among the crowd were representatives from various organisations, including Akiva College, Eden College, the Union of Jewish Women, the Community Security Organisation, PKF Chartered Accountants, and NSG Attorneys.

Said multi-medal-winning Durban running legend Adam Lipschitz (29), who won gold for South Africa at the last Maccabi Games, and



Photo: Tlantie Grote

Participants at the inaugural Masada Run Walkathon who participated in the event, “It was great for the community to get involved in a sport that everybody can do. I haven’t seen the Jewish community together like this for a while, besides on the high holidays.”

The event was organised by the newly launched Chaverim Community Hub, a project of the Umhlanga Jewish Centre. “We’re a place where every individual can connect to their Jewish identity in whichever way they choose and at all stages of life,” said Chairperson Alana Baranov.

Sunday’s event did indeed attract the full spectrum of the community. Arthur Zimmerman, a veteran runner with more than 100 marathons under his belt including 20 Comrades Marathons, was the oldest participant, running the 10km leg in an hour

and 18 minutes at the age of 81. Ashira Friedman, aged three, toddled the 3km leg in 47 minutes, making her the youngest person to take part in the event.

After the walkathon, the crowd gathered at the Durban Jewish Centre for brunch and a medal ceremony. Winners in the 10km run included Dylan Williams and Adam Lipschitz (20-39 age category), Rowan Budlender (40-49 age category), and Zekry and Michael Joffe (50+ category).

The event is slated to become an annual fixture on the Jewish calendar, with next year’s walkathon open to participants from around the country.

Chabad of Sandton reads names of Shoah victims

Chabad of Sandton members Esther Hecht and Karen Kadish take part in a continuous reading ceremony at the shul on Yom Hashoah to remember the souls who perished in the Holocaust. Congregants lit candles in remembrance, gave charity, and read names from a list supplied by Yad Vashem of those who died.



Esther Hecht and Karen Kadish

Sunday 23 April

- Second Innings hosts a talk by Phillip Wood on *Travel Opportunities for Mature Adults*. Time: 10:00. Cost: R40 (R20 members). Venue: Golden Acres. Contact: 082 561 3228 or greciagabriel1@gmail.com
- Chabad South Africa hosts *Unity in the Stadium – Siyum HaRambam*. Time: 16:00. Venue: Wanderers Cricket Stadium. Contact: 011 440 6600

Monday 24 April

- The South African Zionist Federation hosts the annual observance of Yom Hazikaron. Time: 18:30. Venue: Yeshiva College. Contact: 011 645 2601 or www.sazf.org
- Chevrah Kadisha Social Services hosts a talk on *Addiction*

is a Family Disease. Time: 19:00. Cost: R50. Venue: The David Lopatie Centre. Contact: talyab@jhbchev.co.za

Tuesday 25 April

- The South African Zionist Federation hosts Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrations. Time: 16:00. Venue: Yeshiva College. Contact: 011 645 2601 or www.sazf.org

Wednesday 26 April

- The SA Jewish Report hosts a webinar on *How to Save South Africa*. Time: 20:00. Register: bit.ly/jrlive150 or editorial@sajewishreport.co.za



MANY MORE SPECIALS IN-STORE

KosherWorld

TRULY KOSHER

134⁹⁹

BARKAN KINOR KIDDUSH 750ML

211⁹⁹

NOAH JOSHUA PETIT SIRAH SEMI DRY 750ML

116⁹⁹

PERL ANIMA 750ML

275⁹⁹

GAMLA SYRAH 750ML

262⁹⁹

DELAVI SALMON SMOKED TROUT 500G

187⁹⁹

FARBRENGEN PURPLE GRAPE JUICE 1.89L

21⁹⁹

ATLANTIS FISH CAKES 300G

38⁹⁹

ANAT PITA BREAD WHITE 6'S

53⁹⁹

ANAT WRAPS 6'S

20¹⁰

MAXI BEEF SCHWARMA P/100G

49⁹⁹

THE OLD STONE MILL SCHWARMA SPICE 125G

27⁹⁹

MONTAGU LIFESTYLE ASSTD MIX 100G EACH

28⁹⁹

FRESHMARK TOMATOES 1KG

13⁹⁹

FRESHMARK CUCUMBER ENGLISH WRAP

48⁹⁹

EDEN CUCUMBERS IN BRINE 670G

43⁹⁹

SALAD FARM ASSTD 250G EACH

37⁹⁹

NIVEA MEN DEO ASSTD 150ML EACH

Water for Wound and Sinus Irrigation

21⁹⁹

DISTILLED WATER (1 LITRE)

24⁹⁹

STERILE SALINE SOLUTION (1 LITRE)

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