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AUTO AFRICA

Wikipedia disciplines editors but avoids underlying dispute

ASAF ELIA-SHALEV – JTA

Wikipedia has banned three editors from working on articles related to Jewish history in Poland during World War II in a bid to resolve editing disputes and safeguard its credibility.

But the online encyclopedia stopped short of taking more aggressive action in response to allegations of widespread Holocaust distortion on the platform.

The decision, handed down on 20 May, concludes more than two months of deliberation by Wikipedia's arbitration committee, which acts as supreme court over the community of volunteers who edit the website.

The arbitration committee opened an investigation in response to an unprecedented academic study concluding that a group of editors had gamed Wikipedia's rules to introduce content that absolves Poland of blame for antisemitism and Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, in line with the ultranationalist view

prevailing in the country.

In keeping with Wikipedia's accountability framework, and to the dismay of the study's authors, the committee didn't take a position on the underlying dispute over Polish antisemitism and complicity with the Nazis. The committee instead concluded that the editors didn't adhere to the community's code of conduct.

The committee's conclusion "entirely missed the mark", said Shira Klein, a history professor at Chapman University whose study, written with University of Ottawa historian Jan Grabowski, triggered the investigation.

Klein said that by avoiding the issue of historical truth and focusing on civility, Wikipedia sent a clear message: "There's no problem with falsifying the past; just be nice about it."

The ruling comes amid a flare-up of attention to Poland's insistence on a narrative of innocence during its occupation by Nazi Germany, thanks to comments made by Israeli pop star Noa Kirel following her third-place finish in the Eurovision song contest.

Kirel told Israeli media that she considered it a "victory" to have been awarded the maximum number of votes by Poland, given that much of her family on her father's side had been murdered in



Continued on page 3>>

What's the big deal about Sinai

Torah Thought

Rebbetzin Temmi Hadar – Pine Street Shul

If you think about it for a second, why was the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai so momentous? It wasn't as if no-one had ever heard of the Torah before. The Torah we received at Sinai had already been in our national possession for many generations. Our forefathers and mothers studied and fulfilled the Torah, observing its every law and ordinance.

This also wasn't the first time G-d had instructed the Jews to observe the *mitzvot*. As a nation, they received 10 *mitzvot* in Marah, just days after they left Egypt.

What makes the Giving of the Torah on Sinai so unique that more than 3 000 years later, we're still celebrating it annually on Shavuot?

During that extraordinary experience on Mount Sinai, it wasn't only that Hashem was gifting us the Torah and all its details, but rather that the giving of the Torah fundamentally shifted the relationship between the spiritual and the physical.

No longer would those two worlds be completely separate and isolated. At Mount Sinai, G-d descended onto the mountain, broke the schism between the spiritual and the physical, between the godly and the mundane, and tasked each of us with bridging the gap between the two.

Our mission in this world, received by every one of our souls at Sinai, is to live a physical life, having ordinary human experiences while infusing every moment with spiritual purpose, intent, and meaning.

It's easy to have a spiritual experience in a spiritual place. That's the role of the angels. But G-d desired something much greater than that. He wanted a home in this physical world – where G-d felt comfortable, created by us flawed, physical humans.

How do we create a spiritual home for G-d in this physical world? Through the Torah. Through our study of its teachings and our performance of the *mitzvos*, we create a sacred space for Hashem.

And it's not just a job for the Torah scholars and the great leaders of each generation.

The Ten Commandments are written in a singular construct, "*Anochi Hashem elokecha*" (I'm Hashem, your G-d) – "you" being singular. Speaking to one person.

Who is G-d speaking to? He's speaking to you. We need to know that G-d is addressing each one of us individually. "I'm Hashem, your G-d" He tells us. I seek a relationship with you personally. Can you create space

for Me in your world, your life, and your home?

Here's the blueprint to build me a home, G-d told us at Mount Sinai. This Torah, these *mitzvos*, this is how you create a space for Me, G-d instructs each one of us.

This is the miracle at Sinai. Before Sinai, one could learn Torah and one could do a *mitzvah*. But one couldn't have an impact on the physical world. A *mitzvah* didn't transform the spiritual matter pulsating through every atom of physicality.

The gift each one of us received at Sinai, and receive each year anew on Shavuot, is the ability to change the world around us, one *mitzvah* at a time.

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Shavuot commemorates G-d giving the Torah at Mount Sinai more than 3 000 years ago. We stay up to study Torah, and hear the Ten Commandments in the morning. Shavuot means "weeks", the counting period from Passover. Shavuot also means "oaths", for on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him. We renew our acceptance of G-d's gift, and G-d "re-gives" the Torah.

Mandla Mandela takes hate global

TALI FEINBERG

In March 2022, Nkosi Zwelivelile “Mandla” Mandela blamed Israel for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, referring to “the apartheid Israel dogs of war” and saying that the “Zionist lobbying machine” has “wormed itself into our structures overtly and covertly”, following which local and international antisemitism experts deemed him antisemitic.

Now, Nelson Mandela’s grandson has spread his hatred worldwide on the “Nakba 75 Tour”, which took place from 15 to 20 May in the United States. At the events, he hoisted a sign saying “75 years of Palestinian resistance to settler-colonial Zionist terror”.

He was hosted by the US Palestinian Community Network (USPCN), National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, and local partners as the tour’s keynote speaker. Many of the host organisations have been linked to terrorist organisations.

“Just like his grandfather, Chief Mandela is unabashed in his support for the Palestinian people, an advocate and fighter for justice for oppressed people across the world, and speaks regularly about Palestinian liberation and resistance to Zionist settler-colonialism at conferences, rallies, and other events across the world,” they said.

However, ACT-IL, an online community combatting antisemitism and standing up for Israel, fought back, especially when it noticed that one of Mandela’s speaking venues was the auditorium of the Santa Ana High School in Orange County, California.

“Mandla Mandela has a history of engaging in antisemitic tropes and militant anti-Israel rhetoric. The event is being organised by terror-linked organisations that promote biased narratives and discrimination against Jews and Israel, such as the Palestinian Youth Movement [PYM] and the USPCN,” ACT-IL said. It called on supporters to write to Santa Ana High School’s senior administration to demand that it cancel the event.

In a letter to the school, youth movement Club Z’s director and founder, Masha Merkulova, said “[The event] promotes hateful, antisemitic rhetoric and indoctrination. Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela has a history of sharing antisemitic tropes and militant anti-Israel rhetoric. I understand that your school is renting space to this group, but I must ask: would Santa Ana High School rent space to neo-Nazis?”

However, the event went ahead, along with Mandela’s appearances in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Cleveland, San Francisco, and Chicago. Advertisements for the events showed the younger Mandela in a keffiyeh, contrasted with images of his grandfather.

The University of Minnesota cancelled Mandela’s speaking engagement on its campus, citing security concerns. It was then moved to another venue in that city. “Threats from white supremacists aren’t a reason to deny Minnesotans the opportunity to hear from Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela,” said Meredith Abby of the Anti-War Committee, one of the hosts.



ANC MP Mandla Mandela

Local Cleveland press reported that “Mandela drew parallels between the successful movement to overturn apartheid in South Africa and the ongoing resistance to Zionist apartheid in occupied Palestine, along with struggles in the US against the oppression of African-American and indigenous people. The crowd applauded Mandela throughout his talk, including when he declared, ‘Today South Africa, tomorrow Palestine!’”

In Milwaukee, more than 250 people attended the event, which included a number of speeches. Ashley Hudson from Madison for Palestine spoke of how “Zionism impacts the government, institutions, and society, and how they have struggled against it in their city,” according to the extreme left *Fightback! News* [FBN].

“Rounding out the event was Zwelivelile himself, who illustrated the similarities and comradery between the South African anti-apartheid movement and the

Palestinian liberation movement,” wrote FBN. “He called for the right to return, echoed support for the Palestinian resistance, and talked about strategies that worked in fighting apartheid South Africa and how these can be incorporated by local activists and community members in combatting police brutality in the US and the illegitimate state of Israel today.”

In an interview with Iranian state-owned news network Press TV during his US tour, Mandela said that during apartheid, the people of South Africa “took inspiration from the heroic resistance of Palestinians in their struggle for liberation”.

He also spoke about “attempts to intensify the infiltration” of pro-Palestinian movements in South Africa, including the African National Congress. “We can no longer tolerate governments that on one hand pledge full support to the Palestinian people and on the other side give free visas to Zionists coming from apartheid Israel to South Africa. Yet our brothers and comrades in Palestine are subjected to visas in South Africa. These are the double standards that we call out our government on,” he said.

“Nkosi Zwelivelile Mandela’s participation in the

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‘Mandela Nakba 75 Tour’ across six cities in the United States is an unfortunate attempt to leverage the globally renowned Mandela name towards mendacious ends,” says South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin.

“It’s regrettable that he allows the Mandela name to be attached to the antisemitic Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement instead of using it to encourage Palestinians to take a path towards peace. His role at these events is as bewildering as its sponsors, which include a vape shop, Jiu Jitsu centre, and antisemitic conspiracy theorist film director Sabry Wazwaz – who has also made calls for an intifada in the past.”

According to Middle East analyst David Lange, “Mandela isn’t the only one associated with this tour associated with highly disturbing views and rhetoric. One of the sponsors, PYM, has an extensive track record in expressing explicit support for terrorists and terror activities against Israel, frequently publishing posts in support of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives, and referring to their casualties as ‘martyrs.’ PYM has also expressed support for the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers, and explicitly denies Israel’s right to exist.

“Then there’s the USPCN, whose founders and members have been linked to US-designated terror

groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). For example, a May 2022 Facebook post describes convicted PFLP terrorist bomber Rasmeah Odeh as one of USPCN’s ‘founding members.’”

The Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression called on people to attend the event in their city, saying “you’ll not find this analysis in coverage from mainstream media, distorted as it is by the capitalist interests that control it”. This is aligned with Mandela’s own antisemitic statements.

Dr Günther Jikeli, the Erna B Rosenfeld associate professor at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University, told the *SA Jewish Report* that Mandela’s antisemitic statements “show strong indications of an irrational and antisemitic mindset that demonises Israel and accuses Israel and the ‘Zionist lobby’ – often a codeword for Jews – of conspiring against Africa, the African people, and the world.

“Mandela uses language such as ‘dogs of war’ and ‘spreading tentacles’ that the Nazis used when they demonised Jews. It’s also concerning because it shows that a leading figure in South Africa has lost any touch with reality, and sees the world as a conspiracy fantasy. And it’s sad that Mandla Mandela uses his prominent name to spread such antisemitic language.”

Wikipedia disciplines editors but avoids underlying dispute

>>Continued from page 2

Auschwitz. Her comments proved explosive in Poland, where officials and media figures argued that Poland wasn’t to blame for what happened to her family, and that Polish people suffered much the same as Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.

Those ideas are baked into Polish law, which since 2018 has criminalised accusing Poland of complicity with the Nazi regime. Klein and Grabowski said they identified a set of Wikipedia editors who are propagating the same ideas on the site.

A majority of the 12 members serving on Wikipedia’s arbitration committee decided against a complete ban against an editor known as Volunteer Marek, who has been accused of skewing the historical record by pushing a Polish ultranationalist agenda, in spite of a finding of repeated conduct violations.

Instead, Volunteer Marek, and another editor facing similar allegations, are no longer allowed to edit articles on Jewish-Polish history during World War II. A third editor, who sought to correct the distortions, was also

barred from the topic area over uncivil conduct. All three can appeal their bans in a year.

In another measure, the decision creates a higher standard for the reintroduction of fringe sources in articles on the topic after they had been removed by anyone, in the hope of addressing the back-and-forth editing battles that can take place.

For Klein, the problem isn’t the committee itself, but rather that Wikipedia doesn’t have what she considers an appropriate mechanism to address propaganda efforts. She said consulting professional historians should be part of the solution.

“There is a systemic problem here that goes way beyond the distortion of Holocaust history,” Klein said. “This is the seventh-most viewed site in the world, yet the safeguards Wikipedia has in place for battling disinformation are scarily ineffective. If it’s true for the history of the Holocaust, it’s probably true for other cases we have yet to discover. With ChatGPT amplifying Wikipedia on an unprecedented scale, this new failure is all the more worrying.”

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Swastika on electricity box jolts Cape community

TALI FEINBERG

A swastika spraypainted onto an electricity box near Stellenbosch was available for all to see, but it was a Cape Town rabbi who stepped up to ensure that the authorities were notified, and the local ward councillor is taking the matter seriously.

But, ironically, amidst the country’s energy crisis, the authorities need Eskom to get the graffiti removed as it’s on the utility’s electricity box.

“I work for Kosher SA, and I had a meeting last week at Firgrove Industrial Park, outside

Stellenbosch,” says Rabbi Levi Silman, rabbinic co-ordinator for kosher factories in the Western Cape. “The swastika was painted on an electricity box just outside the industrial park, on the way in. I noticed it, and it was quite troubling, but I didn’t feel like it was threatening or dangerous. I just took a picture and posted it on Facebook. I thought it was important for it to be exposed and for people to be aware, but I didn’t feel like there was anything I had to be afraid of. It’s probably an isolated incident.”

He also alerted the Cape South African Jewish Board of

Deputies (Cape SAJBD). “Cape SAJBD Programme and Development Manager Joshua Friedman contacted Peter Helfrich, the ward councillor for the Macassar area,” says Cape SAJBD Executive Director Daniel Bloch. “He responded almost immediately, conveying his apologies for the offensive act.

“However, as the swastika was painted on an Eskom electrical box which is Eskom’s property and therefore outside the city’s jurisdiction, the city cannot clean the mess. Mr Helfrich has put us in contact with the relevant Eskom contact, and we will follow up further,” says Bloch.

“Naturally, we would like the swastika to be removed and hopefully, Eskom will do this as soon as possible. We’re also trying to ascertain if there is CCTV footage in the area to identify the perpetrators. This does seem highly unlikely as the incident occurred in a remote area. However, we are awaiting Eskom’s response.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Helfrich says, “Ward 109 in the City of Cape Town is a peace-loving community. We’re a community rich in diversity, and we celebrate this. We can never associate ourselves with anything or anyone that seeks to divide people, nor can we condone discrimination of any kind. I reported this matter to

Eskom, which is the owner of the electricity kiosk, and have asked it to remove the graffiti as soon as humanly possible.”

On the morning of 24 May, he received a response from an Eskom employee, saying, “I have escalated a response to the zone manager as I have not received any from the sector manager. I will advise as soon as I receive a response from them as maintenance of infrastructure is their responsibility.”

“It’s not really what we were hoping for, but I’m happy they have now acknowledged our email and have escalated it,” says Helfrich.

While this doesn’t happen often in the Western Cape, “two years ago, a small swastika was painted on the wall of Muizenberg Synagogue. This was quickly removed”, says Bloch. “Fortunately, we haven’t seen any other incidents related to the painting of swastikas – none that have been reported.”

However, commenting on Silman’s Facebook post, community member Candice Goodson said, “I saw swastikas painted on a lamp post in Woodstock, and removed them myself. Antisemitism isn’t



Swastika in Macassar, Western Cape

welcome.”

“We would like to thank the member of our community who reported this incident to us,” says Bloch. “At the Board, we take these matters of vandalism and antisemitism seriously.”

Any vandalism or antisemitism can be reported to the Cape SAJBD via email sajbd2@ctjc.co.za or on the antisemitism WhatsApp line 079 994 5573.

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Cape Jews threatened as protests escalate

>>Continued from page 1

Bloch said this was the fourth such protest at this site. “For the past two months, the Cape Town Jewish community has been threatened, intimidated, and viciously maligned by anti-Israel organisations like the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, the University of Cape Town Palestinian Solidarity Forum [UCT PSF], and others who claim simply to be ‘anti-Zionist’, not antisemitic.

“The Western Cape Jewish community has rights, just like any other South African citizen, and we don’t need to be the target of a conflict taking place in another country,” said Bloch. “These protesters have chosen the wrong venue to voice their concerns. If they truly believe in the rights of the Palestinian people and that Israel is in the wrong, they should take their complaints to the Israeli embassy in Pretoria. We won’t allow these illegal gatherings to disrupt our way of life any longer.”

He said the Cape SAJBD wouldn’t attempt to stop any protests as it believed in freedom of speech.

However, it condemned the aggressive and threatening manner in which these protesters availed themselves, and wouldn’t allow the protests to continue in this manner. “We’re exploring all options, including engaging with the authorities as well as possible legal avenues,” Bloch said.

“I heard someone shout about the Holocaust through the microphone, although I didn’t pick up what they said,” said Barnett. “I saw one man wearing a black T-shirt with white writing saying, ‘One oppressor, one bullet’ and instead of the word bullet, there was a picture of a bullet.

“Usually, we try leave the campus before [they arrive], so this was new,” she said. “Although we’ve been there before during ‘peaceful protests’, this seemed more angry and vocal.

“The facilitator for the children visiting us was wearing hijab, so I imagine that she was Muslim, and when we got to the parking lot where they were parked, she was in tears. I don’t know why she was crying, and I didn’t get the chance to ask her. It was

upsetting for everyone.”

Janine Rodgers, who also works at the Gardens Jewish Community Centre, said, “Workers and visitors to the campus are increasingly anxious, with disruptions to our daily work. Protesters often use violent language.

“The protests feel totally unfair and inappropriate. I’m unhappy about many of the policies of the People’s Republic of China, however I would never dream of protesting outside China Town in Cape Town. That would be completely inappropriate and prejudiced. Likewise, if we’re unhappy with the policies of one of the Muslim countries, it would also be completely unacceptable to protest outside a Cape Town mosque or Islamic community centre. However when it comes to Jews in Cape Town, we’re considered legitimate targets.”

“The Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PAGAD, Africa4Palestine, and the UCT PSF have exposed their clear antisemitic agenda by targeting the CTHGC, SAJM, and shul,” said Bloch. “In all their social media posts, they keep referring to organisations that have nothing to do with Israel, yet are Jewish. We find this repugnant, and cannot be interpreted as anything other than hatred of the Jewish community.

“There has been growing acceptance of this rhetoric, and that’s why vigilance and standing up to this hate is essential,” he said. “For now, we can expect to see more flags and chants. However, we cannot and will not accept this ‘new normal’, and will take whatever steps necessary to prevent this from continuing.

“The Cape SAJBD condemns these acts of intimidation, threatening behaviour, and clear antisemitism against the Jewish community. We’ll not stand idly by and allow members of our community to be harassed at our places of work, home, and worship. We’ll continue to fight to protect our civil rights to ensure that we can all practice our religion in a safe environment, free from discrimination, hate, and antisemitism. Jews, like all other citizens, are entitled to the rights enshrined by our Constitution. We call on local Muslim leadership and our government to stop these targeted protests at Jewish facilities.”

Sid Forman
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Farewell, Grand Geek – your legacy lives on

TRIBUTE

PROFESSOR ZEBLON VILAKAZI



I first met Professor Barry Dwolatzky in 2006, at the University of Cape Town, where we engaged around a national software strategy. The next time I met “Prof Barry”, the late emeritus professor in the School of Electrical and Information Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), was in my capacity as incoming deputy vice-chancellor: research, in what was a former night club in Juta Street in Braamfontein, the place’s black and white *nouveau* wallpaper still intact, its crumbling walls in the process of being knocked down, and its dance floor, once frequented by famous football stars during the 2010 Soccer World Cup, hacked to pieces.

The club was surrounded by a sprawl of dilapidated concrete structures posing as buildings – a degraded street of hopelessness. Barry, who passed away on 16 May 2023, stood amidst the rubble together with Dr Solomon Assefa, the then incoming head of IBM Research Africa.

“This is the home of Wits’ new digital innovation precinct,” I recall him saying. “It will be called Tshimologong, the place of new beginnings.” I was taken aback, because I couldn’t immediately envisage what the Grand Geek espoused, even though he described it meticulously and in grand detail. But this was because he was a visionary – he could see things that others couldn’t, he could imagine new worlds where others saw only what was before them, and he could create hope out of despair.

Barry breathed life into Tshimologong – a space for makers, entrepreneurs, innovators, and young people to create something from nothing, to soar to great heights, and to compete with the best in the world. He was an influencer who brought the right people together with the right resources at the right time. He gently coerced Wits’ administration and several public and private-sector entities to invest in his vision, which today forms part of his legacy. He convinced IBM to establish one of its prestigious research labs in the precinct, and brought on board many other partners, large and small.

And this wasn’t the first time he had done so.

An innovator and entrepreneur in the early 2000s, long before these buzzwords became trendy, Barry brought together dozens of software companies, academia, and government in a symbiotic partnership through the Joburg Centre for Software Engineering, which he co-founded and led for two decades. In a competitive environment usually fraught with contention and competition, Barry, in a speech delivered on the top floor of the Joburg Metro Building in the presence of the mayor, convinced captains of industry that there was much that they could achieve together to advance the ICT sector in South Africa while maintaining their respective trade secrets.

Always one to tinker with new technologies, Barry won me over when we delved into quantum computing and technologies. He made research pleasurable and effortless. In recognition of his

contribution to the South African IT industry, he was named the South African IT Personality of the Year in 2013. In 2016, he received an award for Distinguished Service to IT from the Institute of IT Professionals of South Africa as well as the Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Academic Citizenship.

An academic and a mentor at heart, Barry dedicated more than 50 years of his life to Wits. He completed his electrical engineering degree in 1971 followed by his PhD. After graduating, he left South Africa

only the digital realm.” This was his last profound public statement.

“Prof Barry” was well-known and well-loved by his students. In spite of his extensive experience and expertise, he always lent a listening ear and proffered advice humbly and unpretentiously, while making students, staff, and strangers feel special in the process. His confidence in young people is captured in his memoir, *Coded History – My Life of New Beginnings*, launched in November 2022. At the launch, he said, “Young people have the creativity and energy, the drive and the reason to build a new South Africa, a new Africa, and a new world. I believe in the future of our country. This is also the point of a university – to prepare people for the future.”

The book revealed much about his life as an underground software engineer in the struggle against apartheid, “the mission” that brought him back to South Africa from the United Kingdom where he lived in self-exile in the 1980s, and how, on the eve of democracy, he helped to build the country’s ICT industry. Never one to rest, Barry launched a podcast series titled *Optimizing: Leading Africa’s Digital Future* as the COVID-19 pandemic was sweeping the world.

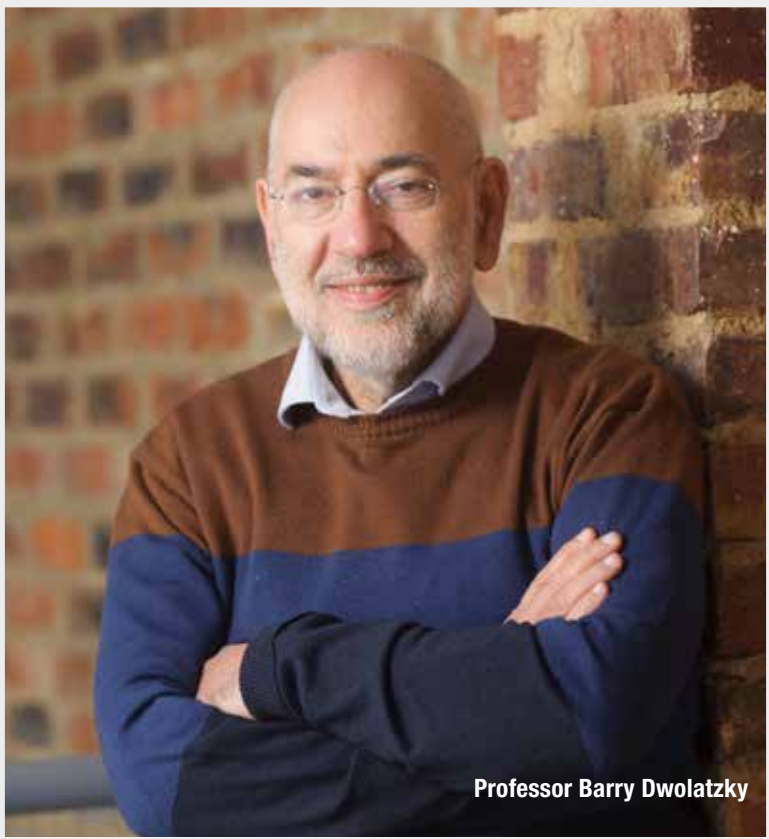
Barry was a survivor. His life was threatened by the coronavirus, which he conquered. His book reveals how he nearly died at the age of 35, how he beat cancer multiple times, how he was almost stabbed to death outside a bank in Braamfontein in the 1990s, and how he, his wife, Rina, and an international visitor were metres away from a South African Broadcasting Corporation van when it exploded outside the Orbit Jazz Club during the #FeesMustFall protests. I believe he survived each time because he believed in new beginnings and realised that there was more for him to accomplish in this world.

I will miss Barry immensely as a dear friend who also mentored me in the field of innovation (an area which was new to me as a physicist). Having said this, following our last interaction in hospital the night before his passing, I’m comforted by the fact that he will rest in eternal piece, knowing that his legacy will live through the thousands of people he has motivated, through the walls of the many spaces that he has transformed, through the many vestiges that he leaves in his wake, through the new beginnings that will flourish through his inspiration, and that his lifelong dream of foregrounding innovation at Wits has been realised through the launch of the Wits Innovation Centre a mere month ago.

The outpouring of sympathy and condolences from around the world is testimony to the impact of Professor Barry Dwolatzky at Wits, in South Africa, and beyond. He is survived by his wonderful wife, Rina King, and his children, Leslie and Jodie, all of whom are part of the Wits family.

May his memory be a blessing to us all.

• *Professor Zebulon Vilakazi, Fellow of the Royal Society, is vice-chancellor and principal of the University of the Witwatersrand.*



Professor Barry Dwolatzky

in 1979, and spent a decade in the United Kingdom as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Manchester’s Institute of Science and Technology, Imperial College London, and the GEC-Marconi Research Centre, where he worked on a number of large software research and development projects. Always curious, Barry later traversed the world in search of new ideas that he would throw into a hadron collider of possibilities, knowing that when they crossed at the right moment, they could help to create new worlds filled with opportunity.

HE COULD IMAGINE NEW WORLDS WHERE OTHERS SAW ONLY WHAT WAS BEFORE THEM, AND HE COULD CREATE HOPE OUT OF DESPAIR.

He returned to Wits as an academic in 1989, and worked his way up the academic ladder to become a full professor in 2000. He continued with his teaching and research activities and spent the past few years conceptualising Wits’ innovation strategy, which he emphasised went beyond the digital sphere.

In April this year, the emeritus professor spoke at the launch of the Wits Innovation Centre, his latest brainchild. In conversation with Dr David Fine, also a Wits alumnus and innovator, Barry said, “The next 100 years will not simply be a continuation of the last 100 years. All organisations and institutions, including universities, will change, and the change will be rapid and profound. The best of these will position themselves to lead this change internally and externally, beyond

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Never waste a good crisis

I’m tired of negativity, not least my own. It gets me and everyone around me nowhere. It helps nobody, and all it does is make a somewhat difficult situation look worse.

It’s cold, that’s true. We’re dealing with loadshedding – another truth. We must also deal with the reality of our generic infrastructure problems and the anti-Israel hatred that’s looking fairly ominous in the Western Cape. These aren’t heartening signs or situations.

However, for the most part, we live a great life on the southern tip of Africa.

I cannot speak for everyone in the community because we all live different lives. So, I’m generalising.

Most of us have comfortable homes and can afford to feed our families. We even go out for dinners when we can. Mostly, we have one or two cars per family, and can get up and go whenever we want or need to. We eat well, and all our creature comforts are met.

With that in mind, we can and do find ways to laugh at ourselves and our situation.

This week, I had a good giggle when I saw that someone had renamed Eskom’s Megawatt Park and the ANC headquarters, Luthuli House, on Google Maps. I’m not sure who did it or how, but the former became “Eskom MegaGravy Train Park” and Luthuli House was renamed “Loothuli House”.

I love that we can find humour in our not-so-uplifting situation, which makes us feel better. Satirical social commentary, I guess, is a coping mechanism. It also brings us together in our frustration turned humour.

Not only do we find humour in situations, we also find solutions. This is part of our nature. Though Israel is the “start-up nation”, we’re the “make-a-plan” nation. Perhaps we do it because we have no choice, but it’s something we can be really proud of.

Not being blind, we realise that the government isn’t doing its job of fixing our roads, so we make a plan to repair them ourselves. Have you noticed that there are fewer potholes lately? Did you really think the government was behind the repairs?

Had you noticed how our parks hadn’t been looked after and had become overgrown? Did you see litter in too many places to mention? You know that corner, where there are always accidents because motorists couldn’t see the road signs because the foliage was overgrown? What of those street signs that were so faded, you couldn’t make out what you as a motorist were meant to do?

CAP Green has been launched to tackle this, and now, these problems are being solved. Have you seen the clean-up crew in those luminous green CAP vans? They’ve made a plan, and it’s inspiring!

Come to think of it, the whole concept of CAP was an answer to a problem. Crime was hurting us, so Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and other leaders came up with a solution. Now, CAP is doing more than just responding to people in trouble in their homes, it’s successfully fighting crime. You see what I mean – a plan was made to solve a problem.

I get that around the world people would and should be on the streets protesting when the government doesn’t give them what they need. Over here, right or wrong, we acknowledge that if we don’t do it, it’s unlikely to happen. So, we make a plan.

Have you noticed just how many members of our community are involved in the solar industry? Again, loadshedding abounds and our electrical infrastructure is shot, and the only way to deal with it is to find our own solutions or live with it. The most obvious, efficient, and environmentally friendly solution is solar energy.

And so, entrepreneurs saw the gap and, while they are making money, they are getting us off the grid, partially, fully, temporarily, or permanently. The point is: it’s a win-win situation that was formed out of a problem not of our making.

As Winston Churchill so eloquently put it: “Never let a good crisis go to waste!” This was said during World War II, when things were desperately bleak. Churchill saw that even in the direst of situations, we could attain insights and find opportunities for growth or development.

Such is life. When the going is fabulous, do we really improve and grow? Do we make a difference then? I don’t think so.

When times are tough, that’s when we dig deep to find our inner strength to grow and innovate. That’s when we can really make a difference.

None of this is possible if we see only negativity in our challenges. We can’t develop or grow while complaining and blaming. I know how easy it is, believe me. As you know, I’m not that evolved person who is above complaining and whingeing.

Suffice to say, I recognise that it gets us nowhere, and the only way to look is up and ahead.

Got a problem? Decide to find the solution. Feel like complaining? Find an alternative because complaining is simply a waste of your time.

Use this crisis to develop yourself, your business, or your community. We have everything we need to make our lives here work. There’s no need to seek greener pastures. Our pastures are pretty green as it is.

The truth is, you can find problems wherever you look. Or you can find beauty, solutions, answers and, ultimately, contentment with your lot.

I’m so tired of looking at what we have here, and seeing doom and gloom. We’re so lucky to have what we do, let’s appreciate it, and make a plan to improve on it.

Shabbat shalom and Shavuot sameach!
Peta Krost
Editor



COVID-19 no longer an emergency, but still dangerous

OPINION

PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB



On 5 May, the director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, formally terminated the Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) for COVID-19.

“It’s therefore with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency,” Ghebreyesus said. On 11 May, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) similarly ended the emergency in the United States.

Undoubtedly these were watershed moments in the history of the worst public health disaster the world has seen in the past 100 years. But does this now mean that the COVID-19 pandemic is over? Has the virus, SARS-CoV-2, disappeared as did its predecessor, SARS-CoV-1, in 2003?

The International Health Regulations (IHR), instituted in June 2007, is the legal instrument of WHO to promote global health security by reducing the risk of international spread of diseases, infectious and non-infectious, (including chemical or radiation threats). These regulations are legally binding on the 194 member countries of WHO.

The IHR committee of experts constantly reviews outbreaks of diseases throughout the world and decides to declare a PHEIC should a serious public health threat arise with a significant risk of international spread and which requires a co-ordinated international response. What the PHEIC achieves is the streamlining of international public health funding and the acceleration of the development of vaccines, therapeutics, and



Older individuals and persons at risk of serious illness should maintain their vaccination status

diagnostics under emergency use authorisation. Various internationally binding regulations are drawn up to minimise cross-border spread of infection, including travel and trade restrictions and vaccination requirements.

Since 2007, six events have been declared PHEIC. The first, in March 2009, followed an outbreak of human cases of a novel strain of H1N1 influenza virus, dubbed “swine flu”, as the pig was the intermediate host of the virus. (Unfortunately the name “swine flu” has often been tagged onto any influenza to raise its importance. Influenza is influenza, and calling it “swine flu” doesn’t enhance its significance.)

Five years later in 2014, polio was designated a PHEIC to promote the global eradication initiative. (Interestingly there were only 68 recorded cases of polio in two countries in the world at the time.) In 2014 and 2018, PHEIC was declared for Ebola outbreaks in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, respectively. These were the two largest outbreaks of this dreaded disease in history.

The South American outbreak of Zika virus, responsible for congenital malformations of the developing foetus, became the fifth PHEIC in 2016. Finally, on 30 January 2020, WHO designated

COVID-19 to be a PHEIC.

The pandemic has clearly been in decline over the past year, with hospital admissions and fatalities dropping markedly. There has been no new variant of concern since the advent of Omicron in November 2021, well over a year ago. Fortunately, while there have been many subvariants of Omicron, these have all proven to be significantly less virulent. The WHO emergency committee thus felt that COVID-19 is now an established endemic human virus, and no longer an unexpected novel virus. The virus is also widespread throughout the world and, of course, there’s now no need for regulations to prevent cross-border spread.

Unfortunately, the termination of the international emergency doesn’t signify that the virus has miraculously disappeared and is no longer a threat. Indeed, in the United States, a few thousand deaths are still being reported weekly to the CDC. (The current toll of COVID-19 in South Africa is difficult to determine because of the marked decline in surveillance.) The virus is still circulating in the global population, usually causing a relatively milder illness with occasional clusters of cases or mini-outbreaks following super-spreading indoor crowding events.

COVID-19 won’t disappear, it’s now an established viral disease of humans. Unlike influenza, which it resembles clinically, COVID-19 hasn’t yet become a seasonal disease, although this may change in the future and winter outbreaks may become a characteristic of COVID-19. Continuing into the future we will likely come to recognise COVID-19 as an ongoing endemic disease with periodic upswings, but these are unlikely to develop into the major waves which we experienced with the previous variants of the virus in the earlier days of the pandemic.

The present-day scenario of COVID-19 could be maintained if the prevailing population immunity remains high and as long as we’re not confronted by a new viral variant of concern. We’re likely to retain existing high levels of population immunity because the ongoing circulation of the virus in the community constantly re-stimulates the immune systems of individuals who are infected, whether or not they have any illness as a result.

What’s uncertain, however, is whether a new variant of concern will arise, which could significantly circumvent population immunity and also cause serious disease. Monitoring programmes throughout the world constantly take samples for genomic surveillance from clinical specimens and from wastewater

to look out for a new variant. When, where, and if a new variant is born, is anybody’s guess. Nevertheless, in anticipation, the future possible new variant has already been given a name, Pi, the next letter in the Greek alphabet.

COVID-19 is today a far less threatening public health problem. Nevertheless, the virus is still lurking in the population and is still infecting individuals and causing illness. COVID-19 still poses a danger to vulnerable individuals, and the recommendations still stand for older individuals and persons at risk of serious illness to maintain their vaccination status. Individuals with severe underlying medical conditions should try to avoid insecure environments such as crowded, poorly-ventilated indoor settings which are likely to be on the rise as our winter weather sets in. If this is unavoidable, there really should be no embarrassment in wearing a mask.

• *Barry Schoub is professor emeritus of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and was the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases. He chaired the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccines. This article is written in his private capacity. He reports no conflicts of interest.*

Bibi’s book — far from the last word

BOOKS

STEVEN GRUZD

Love him or loathe him, most people have a strong opinion about Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister. Back on the Knesset's opposition benches in mid-2021 – after 12 consecutive years in the top job – Netanyahu used the time to write *Bibi: My Story*. Running to 650 pages (and more than 30 hours in the audiobook version), his absorbing blockbuster autobiography was released, in Hebrew and English, just before the November 2022 Israeli elections. In that vote, Netanyahu swept back to power at the head of his right-wing coalition. Although he had already penned his memoirs – longhand – it's quite clear that at 73, “Bibi” believes his story isn’t quite over yet.

Born in Tel Aviv in 1949, he completed high school in various cities in the United States (US), which explains Netanyahu's strong American accent and his excellent English. Netanyahu was the middle child of three boys, flanked by his older brother, Yonatan (“Yoni”), and his younger brother, Iddo. His father, the historian Benzion Netanyahu, who specialised in the Spanish Inquisition, relocated his family to the US as he took up a university teaching post. Benzion was active in the Revisionist Zionist movement, passing his right-of-centre views down to his son. He died at the age of 102 in 2012.

Not many people probably know that

Bibi initially studied architecture – a pursuit he had in common with Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal and Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved hundreds of Jews in wartime Budapest.



Netanyahu worked for Boston Consulting Group, which honed his skills as a strategic thinker, for a couple of years. He also served for five years in *Sayeret Matkal*, an elite Israeli special forces unit. He led daring raids into Israel's neighbouring countries and escaped death more than once (especially as he tells it).

Netanyahu idolised Yoni, who was tragically killed leading the operation to rescue hijacked Jewish hostages in Entebbe, Uganda, in 1976. Yoni's life and death cast a long shadow over his family. In the book, Bibi writes, “Yoni's sacrifice and example helped me overcome inconsolable grief, thrust me into a public battle against terrorism, and led me to become Israel's longest-serving prime minister.”

From 1982 to 1984, Netanyahu's diplomatic career was launched, as he took up the post of deputy chief of mission in Washington, D.C. From 1984 to 1988, he served as a combative Israeli ambassador to the United Nations. In the first Gulf War in 1991, Netanyahu was a familiar face on CNN explaining Israel's positions. He rose up the

ranks of the Likud, leading the party in opposition from 1993 before becoming Israel's youngest prime minister at 46 in 1996.

He lost power in 1999, before returning as Ariel Sharon's foreign minister from 2002 to 2003, and one of the country's most influential finance ministers, from 2003 to 2005. Netanyahu's Thatcherite reforms – including privatisation, cutting welfare, and taking on the unions – are largely credited with turning Israel into the economic and innovation powerhouse it is today.

Netanyahu served his second stint as prime minister from 2009 to 2021. His memoirs show how infuriatingly stubborn he was in advancing what he considered were Israel's best interests. His toughness and intransigence on the Palestinian issue exasperated American presidents from Bill Clinton to Joe Biden, as lasting peace in the Middle East eluded all of them. To be fair, there was no genuine peacemaker on the Palestinian side in these decades.

He has consistently portrayed a nuclear Iran as the biggest existential threat to Israel.

Netanyahu formed his strongest alliance with President Donald Trump. Under Trump's watch, the US embassy finally relocated to Jerusalem; the US recognised Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights; and the historic normalisation agreements with four Muslim-majority countries were forged under the “Abraham Accords” in 2020.

Bibi also saw the opportunity presented by the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic, securing vaccines early and putting forth Israel as the model of a COVID-19-immunised population. He also copped much criticism from the way he handled the pandemic.



Learning together

The magical moment of Havdalah was the focus of Generation Sinai at Jewish schools on Tuesday. Programme director Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein described heart-warming scenes of parents and children bonding over learning and delving into the mitzvah of Havdalah. Over the past 12 years, Generation Sinai has become an integral part of the school calendar and the best-attended parental event.



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Sandton Sinai

King David Primary School Victory Park



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Herzlia Weizmann

Yeshiva College

Torah Academy



Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School

Rimon Play and Nursery School

LITHUANIAN CITIZENSHIP BY DESCENT

Passing on the Gift: Reinstating Lithuanian Citizenship for Future Generations

Reinstating your Lithuanian citizenship has a remarkable advantage for future generations as you can pass on Lithuanian citizenship to your children by birthright, and they can pass it on to theirs and so on, making it a lifelong gift. However, it's important to understand the two main aspects of your children's eligibility for Lithuanian citizenship by descent.

Firstly, consider whether your child was born before or after you were granted Lithuanian citizenship. If your child was born before you received citizenship, they will not automatically become a Lithuanian citizen. To be eligible, they must be no further than third generation to a Lithuanian ancestor and follow the same reinstatement procedure as you did.

On the other hand, if your child was born after you were granted Lithuanian citizenship, they become a Lithuanian citizen by birthright, with no eligibility criteria to meet. All that is required is registering their birth in the Lithuanian civic registry before ordering a passport for them.

Acquiring Lithuanian Citizenship for Spouses: What You Need to Know

If you have already reinstated your Lithuanian citizenship by descent, unfortunately, your spouse cannot automatically become a Lithuanian citizen through marriage. To acquire Lithuanian citizenship, your spouse must either have their own Lithuanian ancestral line or apply for a temporary residence permit by marriage in Lithuania or any other EU country. Each EU state has its own regulations regarding residency, so if you have specific plans to move to the EU, it's crucial to check the particular state's regulations on this matter. A temporary residence permit in Lithuania is renewable every two years and requires registration of marriage, sufficient means of living, and residential premises in Lithuania - either ownership of real estate acquired for investment purposes or a lease of residential premises.

A Lithuanian temporary residence permit enables your non-EU spouse to travel freely within the entire Schengen Area.

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There's no question that Netanyahu put tiny Israel on the map. He strengthened ties with emerging powers such as China and India, and one of his closest and most admired counterparts over the years was Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two met many times, especially after both militaries were involved in Syria after 2015.

He has also bolstered relations with many African countries, starting with a trip to Uganda in 2016 for the fortieth anniversary of Yoni's death. Recognising that Israel has much to offer African states in terms of technology, agriculture, and security, Netanyahu's statesmanship has spearheaded diplomatic and commercial efforts.

An autobiography allows its author

to portray events in a flattering or self-serving way. It amplifies successes and downplays or sidesteps failures. This one is no exception. In his book, Netanyahu comes out swinging against the political left and the Israeli media. He scoffs at every scandal he has been embroiled in. He sees all accusations against him – including the current charges of breach of trust, bribery, and fraud – as baseless, political vendettas impugning his honesty.

Despised or deified, there's no question that Netanyahu has been at the heart of Israel's remarkable story for more than a quarter of a century. He has proven to be a thick-skinned political operator, the ultimate “comeback kid”, with more chapters yet to write.

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Secrets of Shabbat revealed in chief rabbi’s new book

STAFF REPORTER

Few books are lauded by television stars, senior rabbis, an Israeli president, and United States senators, but Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein’s book on Shabbat has elicited applause from all of the above and more.

President Isaac Herzog said of *Shabbat – A Day to Create Yourself*, “It reminds us of the real ways in which Shabbat can elevate our lives and our souls, and shows us why Shabbat is the national treasure of our people.”

Dan Ariely, bestselling author and professor of psychology and behavioural economics at Duke University, said the book demonstrated the wisdom of Shabbat in “the ways it interacts with and reflects the way we live and – most important from the perspective of social science – how it guides us to make changes to improve our daily lives”.

United States Senator Joseph Lieberman, who is a vice-presidential candidate, said the book was: “an inspiring read for scholars and novices alike. Deeply philosophical, but not dense. And full of practical insights that will enrich the Shabbat experience of anyone who reads it.”

Rabbi David Lau, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, said the book “reveals the secrets, the inner dimensions of Shabbat, and brings to light not just their meaning, but their application. I have no doubt this book will strengthen the covenant between the Jewish people and the Creator.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, the Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel, said Goldstein “lays out how to build character and find happiness through keeping Shabbat”. Goldstein “has set out the contents precisely and thoughtfully, golden apples presented in silver showcases”.

The book has also been lauded by other leading rabbis around the world. Rav Hershel Schachter said he was “moved to tears”; Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, found it “overflowing” with ideas; and Rav Osher Weiss said the book “demonstrates the personal heights each and every one of us can reach by keeping Shabbos”.

South Africa’s chief rabbi said he was inspired to write the book because of the manner in which the Shabbos Project – his brainchild – took hold first in South Africa and then around the world.

“The response was overwhelming, and, in truth, deeply surprising,” he recalled. “I was struck by the visceral embrace of Shabbat among Jews of all backgrounds, beliefs, and nationalities. There was a tremendous outpouring of joy and excitement, with so many people touched in deeply personal ways.”

The book is intended as a companion to the Shabbos Project, Goldstein said. “It’s not meant to be something you take off the shelf and read from time to time, it’s a book that sparks action and commitment, that sparks public discussion, that moves people to experience Shabbat for themselves.”

This is why the book is being launched around the world, and why all proceeds are going towards the Shabbos Project. It has been translated into three languages – French, Spanish, and Hebrew – with Shabbat



Book launch event at Kesher Yehudi in Israel

Project volunteer partners in a number of countries driving public engagement and setting up dedicated learning groups focused on the book’s main themes.

The book tells of the weekly event that lies at the heart of a global grassroots movement uniting Jews across every language, culture, and background – Shabbat.

It’s “a call to see Shabbat with fresh eyes, to discover how it can unleash personal and societal renewal, how it offers us a recipe for happiness in an increasingly complex world”, Goldstein said.

“This book shows how Shabbat gives us the tools to create the best version of ourselves and our world, reminding us that our most important accomplishments in life cannot be touched or measured or priced. Building character, shaping perspectives, and offering happiness, Shabbat gives us the divine gift of self-creation.

“As I began writing, I was faced with many questions: what lies at the heart of a global movement of thousands of volunteers and hundreds of thousands of participants of every persuasion? What is the secret power and beauty of this G-d-given gift that has captivated Jews for generations? Why is Shabbat so compelling for us today? The book is an attempt to answer these questions,” he said.

Though the book is written in a simple, lucid style, with short chapters and easy-to-digest ideas, it’s nevertheless a work of deep scholarship, drawing from literally hundreds of Jewish sources, and distilling the ideas and commentaries of Jewish sages spanning 3 000 years.

Said Goldstein, “I was moved to write *Shabbat – A Day To Create Yourself* because I believe passionately, having served as chief rabbi of this magnificent community for almost 18 years, and I see this now more clearly than ever: Shabbos is the divine gift we all need to thrive in today’s frenzied world.

“Writing it has been an eye-opening experience for me and a labour of love. And I want to thank our entire community for that. The way we embraced the Shabbos Project inspired the world, but it also inspired me to write this book, to uncover the secrets of Shabbos and what makes it so compelling and captivating.

“It’s been a real journey of discovery for me, and I hope it will be equally eye-opening for those who read it.”

Quoting from his book, he said, “Shabbat gives us the time and space we need to breathe; to create ourselves; to build our

inner world; strengthen our faith; nurture our family and find meaning and purpose; to create a better quality of life; to curate the kind of life we yearn for.

“Shabbat instils in us the humility, wisdom, trust, optimism, generosity, idealism, gentleness, appreciation, and stillness we need to thrive, psychologically, ethically, spiritually – all the character traits we need to live optimally and joyfully.”

The chief rabbi explains in his book that

Shabbat also addresses “the most serious existential threat to the future of the Jewish people – assimilation rooted in apathy, ignorance, and disengagement”.

In his book, he reflects upon the fact that once a week, we need to pause and focus our creative energy inwards. “Shabbat gives us the time to think and learn. More than that, the day itself enriches our mind. For six days of the

week, we pursue our material needs. But on Shabbat, we dedicate ourselves to thinking and learning Torah, to becoming wiser. The laws of Shabbat clear an entire night and day from all the hassles and responsibilities of daily life, giving us not just the time, but the headspace to learn, to think, to pursue wisdom and knowledge.”

He goes on to say, also quoting from his book, “To live wisely, we need to nurture inner calm. We need to be serene. This

approach is useful in every aspect of life. The laws of Shabbat are designed by G-d to create an atmosphere conducive to a state of being called *menucha* – a feeling of complete calm and serenity.

“The week is full of uncertainty,” Goldstein said. “We struggle along, dealing with various pressures and difficulties. But one thing is certain: when the sun sets on Friday afternoon, Shabbat comes in. No matter what else is going on in our lives, Shabbat always arrives. It’s an authentically optimistic cycle to live in because it always culminates in the light, joy, and inspiration of Shabbat. No matter what happens during the week, the love, joy, faith, and peace of Shabbat is no more than six days away.”

Finally, Shabbat shows us that we can restrain ourselves and, in so doing, elevate ourselves above all things we often think we cannot do without.

• *Shabbat – A Day to Create Yourself is available in hardcover from Takealot, and in eBook and audiobook formats from Amazon. All book proceeds will be donated to the Shabbat Project.*

Early STEM seeds key to future growth

OPINION

SHEVA MESSIAS



Not even futurists are able to predict the future of work accurately. Much of what universities are teaching will be redundant by the time today’s babies get there. Schools therefore have a responsibility to develop enquiring minds.

They need to teach creativity, collaboration, innovation, problem-solving, and critical thinking from a young age. These 21st century skills will be essential for our children as they embark into uncharted territory.

One of the ways that schools should be doing this is through integrating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths) into the classroom, even from a very young age.

This philosophy blends these subjects, teaching them in relationship to each other and making them interconnected. The result? An exciting way of teaching that thrills youngsters and develops the neural pathways necessary for future success.

We need to sow STEM seeds in our children from an early age. The good news is that it doesn’t require many resources.

Well-funded schools can make fantastic use of a variety of materials and technology, but even the poorest of schools can and must bring in some form of STEM, using whatever is at hand – bottle tops or toilet rolls, for example – to enhance learning.

Even if only one teacher at the school has an iPad, this can be used to bring in the technology element. The important thing is that the subjects are integrated.

So, what would a STEM project look like in playschool?

Instead of simply telling children the story of Queen Esther at Purim, teachers could turn this into a fun-filled learning experience. Children need to mix colours to paint their palaces (S); are shown videos of different palaces all over the world (T); must then build their own palaces using boxes (E); and calculate what size to make the people to fit inside, and how many arms, legs, and eyes to make (M).



Or, during story time, teachers could transform the telling of the classic Aesop’s Fable, *The Tortoise and The Hare*, into a STEM experience. The teacher reads the fable, and then shows the children a video of the story performed entirely in song (T). She then shows them a presentation about different types of tracks on which races can be run (T). The children get into groups of three (M), find their materials, and build tracks (E). They must measure and cut pieces of ribbon to mark the start and finish (M); and finally, code their Bee Bots (small programmable robots) to race along their tracks (T).

STEM subjects, except for engineering, are all traditionally taught at school, but in silos. When put together, magic happens. Children feel a huge sense of achievement and really enjoy the experience. With STEM, children can:

- See the biscuit men they made during baking class come alive and dance across the screen, using technology;
- Learn about extreme weather and then construct buildings using a variety of toys and materials to withstand hurricanes. The strength of the buildings can then be tested using a hairdryer, and;

- Design waterproof umbrellas which are tested with a hosepipe, and which they must then rank graphically, according to useability. They are encouraged to

extend themselves – and they tend to become totally immersed.

The possibilities are endless with STEM. It’s all about how we teach our children. Most private schools are fortunate to be well-resourced. In government schools, it’s not always that easy. One glimmer of light is that the Early Childhood Development (ECD) portfolio has been moved from the department of social development to the department of education. This means that hopefully, proper curricula will be developed and there will be more checks and balances. So, steps have been taken to improve ECD, and this can only be good news. Sowing STEM seeds requires passion and creativity, and lack of resources shouldn’t be an issue.

• *Sheva Messias is the head of King David Pre-Primary School Linksfield.*



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Yom Yerushalayim and beyond: the legacy of Eli Kay

TALI FEINBERG

After Eli Kay was brutally murdered at the hands of a terrorist in the Old City of Jerusalem in November 2021, his brother, Kasriel, made stickers with the message, "Love without condition ... in memory of Eli Kay". Recently, someone sent Eli and Kasriel's father, Avi Kay, a picture of one of the stickers on a mountaintop in Peru. "That's how far Eli has reached," says Avi, who was recently in South Africa at the invitation of Mizrahi South Africa and Sydenham Shul. His son's death was a brutal blow to his family and the South African Jewish community, where the family lived before making aliya. But not for a second since the tragedy has Avi, his wife, Devorah, and their children stopped being hopeful that Eli's life could continue to spur positive change in the world.

Jerusalem was the place where Eli was coming into his own as a Kotel guide, a passionate young man, and an Israeli. Yet it was also there, on those ancient streets, that his blood was spilled and he lost his life. So as a Jew, an Israeli, and a father, the city holds a special place in Avi's heart.

He was in South Africa to talk about Yom Yerushalayim, the diversity of the city, and the importance of its unity. "Ultimately, Eli loved Yerushalayim. He respected everyone there, and he was respected in return. He was unyielding in that it was the capital of Israel. He told stories of the many people he interacted with there, and how friendly everyone was. But at the same time, he said he was always cautious and never turned his

back. And that was where he was killed."

And the City of Jerusalem did everything its power to make Eli's *yahrzeit* as meaningful as possible, erecting a plaque in his memory near the place he died. Guests included the mayor of Jerusalem and the chief rabbi of the Kotel. They also dedicated a motorbike ambulance in Eli's name. For those who want to visit the place where Eli lost his life, Avi says it is called Chain Gate Street or Rehov Sharsheret. However on Google Maps, only the Arabic name is written.

Another very special moment during the *yahrzeit* was that Avi's father, Cliff Kay, was able to fulfil his lifelong dream of planting an olive tree in Jerusalem. He wasn't well, but made the trip to Jerusalem from South Africa, and the city pulled out all the stops to allow him to fulfil his wish. The tree was planted near Jaffa Gate, with all the family in attendance. Just two months later, Cliff passed away in South Africa. The tree is a place that keeps his memory alive.

Avi returned to South Africa when his father passed away in January, and then again in May. "It's always amazing to be back. It's so familiar and comfortable. There may be loadshedding and potholes, but there's so much warmth in this community. And there's something special about being back in Africa."

He says his family is doing well. "We're connecting with other families who have loved ones who were victims of terror.

We had a seder with a number of these families, which was incredibly special. We also had a Shabbaton. It's been life-changing. I've also taken it upon myself to visit every family who has lost loved ones to terror. I remember the support we got, and people feel like they can relate to us."

base, brought to life by Avi and others.

In the afternoon the Kays were visited by a delegation from the state and by *shlichim* who had been working in Melbourne and brought notes that children had written to Eli. "It was an uplifting and meaningful day," says Avi.

Kingdom, and her family made aliya about 10 years ago. The families are close friends. The chuppah will take place in Nes Tziyona.

Meanwhile, the Unity Sefer Torah in Eli's name is almost complete. "I took a portion to South Africa to allow people to buy letters, and it was incredibly successful, so much so that I left that part to be completed and it will be brought back when family come for the wedding." They were hoping the Torah would be complete in time for Shavuot and Eli's birthday, but if not, it will be ready soon afterwards.

Avi is now looking at projects in agriculture, another area Eli was passionate about. "Eli is keeping us busy!" he quips. "Last week, I was at the airport and saw a friend who told me he was visiting the place where Eli died and happened to meet the person who was injured when Eli was killed. Eli's spirit is with us all the time."

"South Africa gave Eli his moral compass, and taught him to be a passionate Jew and Zionist," he says, pointing out that he believes that Eli would have looked past the current political turmoil in Israel, and would have emphasised that we need to get on with what's important.

Avi feels the same. "My overwhelming message is that clearly, Israel is going through challenging times, but it's been like that since the very beginning. Our responsibility is to not lose focus, and continue to build a country that belongs to Jews all over the world. We're privileged to live in an era of a free and democratic Israel."



Photo: Trevor Sachs Photography

Avi Kay speaking at Sydenham Shul

Yom Hazikaron was a meaningful day for the family. Devorah spoke at a Mizrahi event, and then they went to Jerusalem where the mayor asked Avi to say Kaddish. They then went to Eli's grave during the siren period. "There were so many people at his grave: Eli's army and kibbutz friends, playing guitar and singing Eli's favourite songs. There were even strangers I have never met. Eli's unit was there, and then they and their families spent Yom Ha'atzmaut at Beit Eli in Kfar Chabad," a home for soldiers to stay while they are off

"We could celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut because we had marked Yom Hazikaron with such meaning. One just leads into the other. We spent Independence Day with friends."

The family knows how important it is to celebrate every *simcha*, and are gearing up to for their son and brother, Chanan's, wedding on 5 June. The couple waited until after Eli's *yahrzeit* to get engaged, which was also the day before Cliff passed away. The bride, Eliyana Rubin, originally from Manchester in the United

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Climbing to Everest Base Camp – a spiritual journey

OPINION

RABBI DOVID KATZ

In our community, we love going on trips. They bring excitement, they give something to look forward to, but most importantly, they boost comradeship. However, the trips I find most beneficial are our treks. Over the years, we have been blessed to trek in Africa, China, Peru, India, and Nepal. Climbing a mountain is often considered a physical and mental challenge, but it can also serve as a profound spiritual journey.



On a trek, we can maximise the benefits that a communal trip brings. Sharing the challenge brings us closer, and the long walks allow for real heart-to-heart conversation. Above all, climbing mountains seems to bring our spiritual side to the forefront. Come to think of it, it's not surprising. Jewish patriarchs and leaders have all had spiritual treks up mountains. Avraham Avinu and his son, Yitzchak, climbed Mount Moriah; Moshe Rabbeinu went up Mount Sinai and Mount Nebo; Eliyahu performed amazing miracles on Mount Carmel; and so on. I will share some thoughts and anecdotes from our most recent trek to Everest Base Camp, a once-in-a-lifetime adventure filled with breathtaking landscapes, physical challenges, and spiritual moments. By divine providence, it took place just two weeks before Shavuot. Moshe received the Torah on a mountain, so preparing for Shavuot by climbing a mountain feels really special. It requires patience, persistence, and resilience, mirroring the qualities needed to be a recipient of the Torah – remaining steadfast and committed to a personal and spiritual development. We were fortunate to have Rabbi Chezky Lifshitz, of Chabad of Kathmandu, as a guiding force, providing logistical support that made the entire trip more manageable and memorable.

Strength of the sherpas
During our trek, we encountered the remarkable sherpas, who tirelessly carried heavy loads such as iron rods and fridges, weighing up to 90kg to 100kg, supported by straps attached to their heads. In spite of the challenging nature of their work, these individuals radiated happiness and contentment. What a message in service of Hashem this was for us! If these sherpas can have such *kabalas ol* (acceptance the yoke of heaven) with physical things, how much more so we can have it with spiritual things, which will strengthen our connection to Hashem.

Yak's role
We encountered numerous yaks, which play a vital role in the local ecosystem. These gentle creatures produce waste, which is then repurposed and sold as fuel. Witnessing this resourcefulness and sustainable approach to living in a remote environment was fascinating. It taught us how Hashem created this world in the most amazing way, and nothing should be taken for granted or wasted.

Spiritual encounters in the wilderness
While trekking higher into the mountains, we experienced profound spiritual moments. We had the privilege of praying Shacharit outside, accompanied by a Sefer Torah. The breathtaking scenery added a touch of awe and splendour.

Capturing the essence of this extraordinary moment, one of our group members shared a picture on social media, and within minutes, it went viral, resonating with people around the world.

Jewish teachings in the mountains
The journey also allowed for unique reflections on Jewish teachings. For instance, as we encountered cows adorned with bells, we recalled studying Gemara, tractate Shabbat, which we have a weekly class on, that discusses cows carrying bells on Shabbat. The convergence of our learning and the real-life scene before us served as a powerful reminder of the relevance of the Gemara's wisdom in our modern lives. Another encounter brought to mind the relevance of Maimonides' teachings in the modern era. We observed scenarios where two groups of animals – donkeys carrying heavy loads on a narrow path crossed paths with yaks carrying other heavy loads heading in the opposite direction – and the question was who would get right of way. This was fascinating to watch, as Rambam's teachings came alive.

Importance of pace and self-control
One of the key lessons we learned was the significance of maintaining a slow pace and practicing self-control. The high altitude demanded that we adapt our walking speed to accommodate decreased oxygen levels. Even if we felt physically capable of walking faster, it was crucial to exercise self-discipline and proceed slowly.

Embracing unpredictability
One of the most striking aspects of our experience was the realisation that nothing goes precisely to plan. We learned to take each day as it came and adapt to unforeseen circumstances. For instance, if someone in our group fell ill, immediate arrangements were made, whether it was a horse to transport them or providing oxygen for another member who required assistance. Additionally, we had instances where expected food didn't arrive, necessitating resourcefulness and improvisation. This constant need for adaptability taught us the value of flexibility and resilience in the face of challenges. It also taught us the need to have *emunah* (faith) and *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem, who is making sure everything works out well. I often get asked what the highlight of the trek was. It's hard to point to just one, but if I had to, the following would be it. One night, due to the high altitude, I wasn't able to sleep well. It was just after midnight, I had barely slept for three hours, and my body refused to go back to sleep. I knew that going outside for some fresh air would be good for me, but it was so cold outside, I was procrastinating. Eventually, I forced myself out of my warm bed, and went outside. Once outside, I casually looked up to the sky. The sky was crystal clear, and I saw the star formations in the most magnificent way. I later heard that it was one of the rare days when the entire milky way was observable. I thank Hashem for not being able to sleep which led to this great opportunity. Our Everest Base Camp journey was a transformative experience that combined breathtaking natural beauty with spiritual and communal connections. As we descended from Everest Base Camp, we carried with us not only memories of the stunning landscapes but also valuable life lessons that would forever have an impact on our perspectives and approach to challenges. Wishing you a happy Shavuot!

• Rabbi Dovid Katz is the Rabbi of West Hampstead Chabad in London, England.



Happy anniversary to our desert wedding

OPINION

RABBI YOSSI CHAIKIN

This was a wedding which would go down in history. The décor was divine. The lighting and sound was simply out of this world, with special effects never experienced before. The marriage vows were meaningful and original. Surprising, however, was the choice of venue... Over the years, I have officiated at marriages in exotic places, from the vineyards of the Western Cape to mountaintops in Limpopo. Couples invest considerable energy in choosing an original and memorable location to tie the knot, a place that will make their special event stand out and which they will reminisce about for decades to come.

The venue of the marriage between Hashem and the Jewish nation, which we commemorate on Shavuot, took place on Mount Sinai, situated in the barren and arid Sinai Desert. It was the Almighty Himself who took charge of the décor, cladding the mountain

with greenery and flowers (which is why we decorate our shuls with plants for this festival). He also personally took care of the unique light-and-sound show – the mountain was on fire and billowed smoke, accompanied by the sound of a shofar and G-d's powerful voice reverberating. We pledged our loyalty to Him with the famous phrase “*Na'aseh venishma*” (We will do and we will listen). The choice of venue, however, is surprising. Right in the middle of nowhere, in an inhospitable and uninhabited wilderness. Should the most powerful divine revelation of all time not have emanated from the spot of the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem? Or at the very least somewhere in Israel. Why a desert? Definitely not a place that we can visit to recollect. In fact, we don't even know the exact spot of the Giving of the Torah. Why the desert?

The answer is that had the Torah been given in Israel, all wouldn't feel equal connection to it. The tribe in whose portion the event had taken place would feel greater entitlement. By giving us this gift outside of the Holy Land, in an ownerless, deserted place, Hashem was making it clear that the Torah is actually for all, whether we live in Israel or in the diaspora. It doesn't belong to anyone in particular and can become the possession of

anyone who wishes it to. The Midrash adds another insight into the significance of the choice of venue. “Anyone who doesn't make themselves ownerless like the wilderness cannot acquire wisdom and the Torah.” Any form of learning requires humility. It's a recognition that we don't know everything and that the teacher can impart new insights and understanding. This is a prerequisite to our minds being open to accept teaching – setting aside all previous notions and approaches and integrating new knowledge. Torah is G-d's infinite wisdom. This can be internalised only through total



and complete humility – ownerless like the wilderness – without any ego and preconceived notions. This is why we include the phrase, “May my soul be like dust to all; open my heart to Your Torah” thrice daily in the concluding passage of the Amidah prayer. The Sinai Desert ended up being more than just the venue for the one-time event of the Gift of the Torah. It was the place where, during the 40 years' wandering, the Jewish nation learned to know Gd, up close and personal. Human survival there is possible only through ongoing miraculous divine intervention – protection from the elements via “clouds of glory”; sustenance through the daily manna from heaven; the most important commodity in a desert – water – from the well of Miriam. During this period, the nascent nation grew in faith and appreciation of the power and greatness of Hashem. On Friday, 26 May, we celebrate our wedding anniversary, renewing our marriage vows for the 3 335th time. We recall the spectacular ceremony, the amazing décor, and the unforgettable light-and-sound show. We also remember a most unique and appropriate venue.

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



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Kindness: starts with G-d, and ends with us

OPINION

RABBI JONATHAN FOX



I recently received the following message:
“Dear Rabbi Fox, I perform free community concerts for the elderly. I do this to bring hope and joy to people through the musical talent that G-d gave me. Please may I share my talents with the residents at Sandringham Gardens. Regards, Max.”
Within days, Max was spreading his kindness to the residents of Sandringham Gardens.
Each of our festivals has a human theme. The theme of Pesach is freedom; the theme of Sukkot is joy; and the theme of Shavuot is kindness.
On Shavuot, we celebrate the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah, which was a divine kindness, as G-d shared His treasure with the Jewish people.
Rav Simlai points out that the Torah itself begins and ends with an act of kindness. It begins with G-d clothing the naked, “G-d made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them;” and it ends with G-d caring for the departed, “And He buried Moses in the valley.”
Repeatedly, the Torah calls upon us to emulate G-d by performing acts of kindness to uplift the lives of others and in His wisdom, He has created people in such a way that every person is in need of kindness.
The Sages teach us that kindness is more encompassing than charity as kindness can be performed



Max and Rabbi Jonathan Fox

for the wealthy and even for the departed. Furthermore, kindness can be accomplished through one's body or through one's money, whereas charity can be performed only with money.
There are so many ways to be kind that each of us can find a way to express our unique brand of kindness in a meaningful way.
Some people have the material resources to give financially, while others possess talents that they can share – like Max who graciously shares his musical talents to bring joy to people. Still others have an enormous capacity for compassion, and can provide comfort. Some are wise and can offer guidance; others are patient and can offer company and solace, an antidote to loneliness. Everybody has something special to give.
One of the reasons we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot is because Ruth sacrifices a life of luxury to support her elderly mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth didn't have any money, yet she performed an incredible kindness through her physical and emotional support for Naomi.
As group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha, I often deal with sad and challenging situations, but I also regularly get to see people at their kindest. And although the types of kindness vary greatly, they all touch lives in a special way.
Our social workers give emotional support; doctors and nurses provide medical help; beauticians bring joy by making people look good; and the chefs in the kitchen delight the taste buds. The list goes on. Through the Chev's volunteer programme, I see hundreds of people sharing their love and abilities with our residents and needy community members. And, of course, our donors enable the largest miracle in Africa, the jewel of our community, the Chev!
Our community is blessed to have a number of organisations involved in providing kindness – each unique and caring in its own way.
There's a beautiful Gemara that illustrates the importance of kindness and the fact that it comes in various forms. Rabbi Beroka was in the marketplace, and he asked Elijah the prophet, “Is there any person here who merits the world to come?” First, Elijah said, “No”, but then two brothers came to the marketplace. Elijah said to Rabbi Beroka, “These two have a share in the world to come.” Rabbi Beroka went over to the men, and asked them, “What's your occupation?” They answered, “We're jesters – we cheer up those who are sad.”

We may not all be able to give everything to everyone, but we can all give something to someone.
I was recently inspired to write the following poem to thank the community for enabling the Chev to perform so much kindness on its behalf:
“The Chev is a giant hand that is wide open if you should call and a loving hand that lifts you up if you should fall. The Chev is a giant hand that gives to those who lack And a loving hand that gently pats you on the back. The Chev is a giant hand that supports you when you are old and a loving hand that warms you if you are cold. The Chev is a giant hand that stretches far and wide And a loving hand to rejoice with a groom and bride. The Chev is a giant hand that guides you back if you go astray and a loving hand that holds your hand into a brighter day. The Chev is a giant hand that waves goodbye when it can let go and a loving hand that embraces you if you feel low. The Chev is a giant hand that is there for every Jew and a loving hand that will always be there, thanks to people like you.”
Chag sameach! May we all receive and internalise the Torah with joy and kindness this Shavuot.

• Rabbi Jonathan Fox is the Chevrah Kadisha group rabbi.

Giving is receiving a most rewarding gift

OPINION

GLYNNE WOLMAN



Shavuot, the day we were given the gift of the Torah, the day we Jews learnt how powerful giving really was, became personal on 12 November 2015. It was the day my world changed and The Angel Network was born.
At the time, there was no way of knowing the impact that starting a non-profit organisation would have on so many people in our country. Though our aim from the start has been to help where help is needed by giving a hand up as opposed to a handout, in 2015, words like COVID-19, vaccinations, Zoom, and a total collapse of the grid weren't even on our radar.
The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, and while we continued to give, it became all about handouts to prevent millions from dying of starvation. For many of us, COVID-19 and the joke that is Eskom has been inconvenient and uncomfortable to say the least. However, for the majority of South Africans, it has spelled disaster in the form of unemployment and abject poverty. Never before has giving been more imperative.
At the end of 2015, I became disillusioned with our country, and realised I could leave South Africa, stay and complain, or find a way to make a difference. The words of Mahatma Gandhi resonated at the time: “Be the change you want to see in the world.” They were what propelled me forward, as did Gandhi's saying, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”
I have since realised that over the past seven and a half years, I received more in giving than in receiving. Giving not only helps others, it inspires those around you

to do the same. It teaches us responsibility, and cultivates a sense of self-worth.

Making a difference is far easier than one thinks. It's not all about making a financial difference, it's about giving of one's time, attention, being a listening ear, or a shoulder to lean on.

Over the years, we have met the most incredible human beings who have practically nothing but give with their whole heart, which is truly humbling.

We have learnt about generosity of spirit from community leaders who spend their time improving the lives of others for no other reason but because it's the right thing to do.

These remarkable people, who are our heroes, contribute to making the world a better place by improving the lives of others.

We have been astounded at how aware our youth are about giving back. There's no doubt that this awareness is instilled in them from an early age by outstanding role models. Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah children have organised winter collections, distributed home baked goodies, driven collections for school shoes, and run

soup kitchens.

Teenagers have made soup packs, volunteered at telethons, and packed hundreds of Christmas/back-to-school backpacks. Age is just a number when it comes to giving, and it has been heartwarming to watch kids as young as 10 wanting to be the change we want to see in the world.

Research has shown that giving leads to greater happiness for the giver. We all have the ability to “be the change”.

No matter how much or how little you can give, giving always has the power to touch a life and affect positive change. Through giving, you add to others' lives and in so doing, add to your own. There's no doubt that through the cycle of giving, the world becomes a more humane place.

Giving should never be seen as a chore or an obligation, but rather something that's done voluntarily with a full heart. Giving fosters co-operation between people, and is part of *tikkun olam* (healing the world).

There's no greater joy than seeing the pride in a mother's eyes as she watches her child graduating, knowing that this child will change the trajectory of their family for generations to come.

Helping others changes their life trajectory in

tiny or massive ways. I cannot explain the joy I feel in ensuring that hundreds of thousands of people receive a hot, nutritious meal monthly; in establishing a sewing academy and a bakery and providing dozens of women with a livelihood; and developing a vegetable garden.

We've been most fortunate to connect with kind hearted, supportive, and generous people who give willingly and with no thought of return. Giving evokes a sense of gratitude, and can be both contagious and addictive.

Shavuot is a time for happiness, family, food, and giving, and in the true spirit of Shavuot and *ubuntu*, you too can enjoy the gift of giving. It doesn't take much, other than approaching those needing our help from a non-judgemental perspective by accepting people exactly where they are in life and offering them the hand up they so desperately need.

As our late, great statesman Nelson Mandela once said, “There can be no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to help others without expecting anything in return.”

If you would like to give to The Angel Network, visit www.fundnation.org/theangelnetwork. Every R10 donated provides five meals at one of our soup kitchens. Using the Fundnation platform doubles all donations.

• Glynne Wolman is the founder of The Angel Network.



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Shavuot treats, ahoy!

Shavuot meals are all about the milchik. Foodie experts **Romi Rabinowitz** and **Lauren Boolkin** suggest these delicious options for the chag (or anytime, really).

ROMI RABINOWITZ

Greek tzatziki salad

This salad is a great accompaniment to any milk meal. It goes wonderfully with fish, but is filling enough to be a meal all on its own.

Ingredients


- 1 tin of chickpeas drained and rinsed
- 6 small Mediterranean cucumbers or two English cucumbers peeled and cubed
- 3 large yellow peppers cubed
- 2 small boxes of vine ripened tomatoes or cherry tomatoes grilled in the oven on 180 degrees centigrade, with a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of castor sugar, for about 10 to 15 minutes
- 2 red onions chopped
- 1 cup Kalamata olives, pips taken out and halved
- 1 cup of organic spelt fusilli pasta or any pasta you prefer, boiled
- Feta cheese to taste
- Chopped dill

Method

- Prepare your salad ingredients, and place in rows on your platter, crumble over feta cheese and chopped dill if you wish.

Dressing


- ⅔ cup double thick yogurt or Greek yogurt
- 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 Tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp lemon zest
- 1 to 2 small cloves of garlic
- A handful of dill
- 2 to 3 grinds of sea salt and black pepper
- Blend together
- Drizzle over salad before serving
- ** All ingredients



are available at Woolworths. I used Koo chickpeas.

Cheesecake

No Shavuot is complete without cheesecake. This cheesecake has certainly served me well over the years whether at birthday parties, afternoon teas, and of course, Shavuot meals, with lots of happy customers asking for second helpings or even takeaways! Whiskey, being the secret ingredient, as well as the sour cream topping, really takes this cheesecake to the next level.



Base

- 1 packet of Nuttikrust biscuits (or any biscuit of your choice such Tennis or Marie biscuits)
- 125g butter melted

Melt the butter and add to the biscuits. Crush them

Filling

- 4 x 250g smooth cream cheese (I use the Woolworths cream cheese, the full fat with the blue lid)
- 1 x cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp whiskey (or brandy)
- 2 heaped Tbsp flour
- 1 x 250ml thick cream (Woolworths)

Preheat oven to 170 degrees centigrade. Mix the cream cheese, flour, sugar, and cream in your Kenwood Chef or with an electric hand beater at a very slow speed. Add one egg at a time and beat slowly. Add lemon juice, whiskey, and vanilla. Mix together making sure not to over mix. Pour into dish and bake for 30 minutes. Switch off oven for five minutes (with the door closed). Then, open the door slightly, and leave in the oven for a further 30 minutes (oven must still be turned off). Remove from the oven and cool.

Sour cream topping


- 1 x 250ml sour cream

- 3 x Tbsp castor sugar
- 1 drop vanilla essence

Mix all the ingredients together, pour over the cheese cake, and allow to set. Enjoy, and chag sameach!

Liya’s favourite tomato soup

This is my daughter, Liya’s, favourite soup. I make it during the year but add cream for a wonderful Shavuot treat.



Ingredients

- 4 Tbsp tomato puree
- 14 tomatoes
- 6 Tbsp butter
- 1½ Tbsp flour
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 2 Tbsp boiling water
- 2 cups hot milk
- 1½ tsp salt
- Dash of pepper
- 1 onion sliced
- 2 carrots sliced
- 1 x 250ml cream

Method

Boil the tomatoes, remove skin, chop, and set aside. In a separate pot, slice carrots and onions, and sauté in two Tbsp butter.

When wilted, add 2 Tbsp boiling water. Add the chopped tomatoes to the carrot mixture, and season with salt, pepper, and sugar. Boil for 15 minutes. When the vegies are soft, puree them. In a small pot melt 4 Tbsp butter, add flour, and stir well. Slowly add the hot milk still stirring, then add the 4 Tbsp of tomato puree. Add the above to the soup, boil for a few minutes, and then add the cream.

LAUREN BOOLKIN

Banoffee pudding

Shavuot is the perfect time to make this pudding as you can be assured that your guests will gobble every last crumb. Leftovers are a serious hazard to late-night snackers. If you use the Woolworths salted caramel, don’t forget to leave out the salt in the recipe.

Ingredients

- 30g butter (2 Tbsp)
- 1½ bananas, the riper the better
- 2¼ cups of milk
- 210g of tinned caramel or Woolworths salted caramel spread
- ½ tsp kosher salt if you are using plain caramel
- ¼ cup of flour
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 4 egg yolks and 1 egg
- 2 tsp vanilla essence
- 1½ cups thick cream
- ½ cup of sour cream
- 1 pkt Nuttikrust Biscuits
- 4 Tbsp caramel


Method

Slice the bananas and cook in the butter until they begin to caramelise. Add the salt, caramel, and milk. Using a hand blender or food processor, blend until smooth. In another bowl, whisk the eggs, sugar, and flour. Add the milk and gradually whisk until smooth. Put into

the pot with the banana mixture and cook on medium heat until it thickens. Remove from the heat, and add the vanilla essence. Place in the fridge for at least four hours.

Assembly


Whip the cream and sour cream until thick. Layer the pudding in a glass bowl. First, the custard, then a few Nuttikrusts and a few dollops of caramel, and finally the cream. Repeat



three or four times, ending with the cream. You can swirl a small amount of the caramel into the cream to garnish the top. Refrigerate for a few hours or overnight before serving.

Crunchie cheesecake

The cake can be made in advance and frozen without the topping. I seem to be on a major Woolworths punt, but it has brought out the most delicious chocolate-enrobed crunchies, and so I felt compelled to use them in my cheesecake. They don’t yet have a stamp, but I’ve triple-checked with the powers that be, and they are indeed kosher. Cheesecake must be made with room temperature ingredients for the best results.



Ingredients

Base

- 2 cups crushed digestive biscuits
- 115g butter melted
- 2 Tbsp cocoa
- 2 Tbsp sugar

Filling

- 1kg cream cheese (careful not smooth cottage)
- 1½ cups of castor sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup cream
- 2 tsp vanilla essence
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 100g chocolate honeycomb crushed

Topping

- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ tsp vanilla essence
- 2 Tbsp of castor sugar
- 100g of chocolate crunchie for garnishing

Method

Preheat your oven to 180 degrees centigrade and line a 26cm springform tin with baking paper. Combine the ingredients for the base, and press them into the tin. Bake for 10 minutes, and allow to cool. Turn the oven down to 150 degrees. Beat the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Add the eggs one at a time. Beat in the cream, vanilla, and lemon juice. Fold in the crunchies. Pour onto the base. Cover with tin foil shiny side up, and bake for 90 minutes to two hours until set. Switch off the oven, and leave the cake in the oven to cool. Refrigerate. Mix all the topping ingredients together, and spread over the cake. Crush the Crunchie chocolates and use them to decorate the cake.

Counting the days, and making each day count

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



You know the drill: you bump into your friend at the mall, "How's your day going?" "Eh, not so good. Could be better." (*Tilt your head, and offer a pitying look: "Shame, sorry ... Um. Did you see those lines in the hypermarket?"*) "It's good, BH (Baruch Hashem). My husband is an angel!" (*"Oh, lovely", you respond. "Mine is still alive."*) "It's fine. Whatever. Blah. Can we talk about potholes, I want to feel miserable!" (*Ya, and loadshedding is just OMG! I just can't believe what's happening! Now, let's bring that misery into our homes because we all need more of it!*) "It's great!" (*Are you ok? What intoxicant are you consuming?*)

And yet, have you ever challenged yourself with this simple question: "What's a good day?"

A day that you worked hard, smart, or both?

A day that you spent with your family and it didn't devolve into a world war?

A day that you exercised, meditated, prayed, studied, bonded, ate well, and made wise decisions?

All the above?

As always, in regard to questions of how to live better, we need to search for wisdom (knowledge and wisdom aren't the same – a topic for another time). Where better to find that wisdom than in The Manual for Good Living authored by the creator of life itself – G-d.

One of the mitzvahs in the Torah is the commandment to count 49 days, starting from the second day of Pesach up to the day before Shavuot. We stand at the end of the Omer period.

Why do we count the days? To make sure that our days count. Each day has a different purpose and calling; and is therefore counted in its unique way.

Simply: The 45th day is a different day to the 44th and the 46th.

I write this piece on Sunday, the 45th day of the Omer. Yesterday was Shabbos. Shabbos has a very different energy to Sunday. For Shabbos, I was off my phone, with my family and community, and grabbing a bit of (what I'd like to believe) was a well-earned *schlof*.



Today is Sunday. Back to the screen and work (writing this piece), but not the same intensity of work as tomorrow, Monday. (Although, as a rabbi, Sundays are often the most hectic day of the week, running between an unveiling, funeral [heaven forbid], wedding, and a Barmitzvah ... and explaining to the mom of the bride why you're leaving after seven hours of the wedding [on the way to the Barmi and the morning at the cemetery], and she gives you the *faribeled* look, "So soon?")

Only now do I appreciate the wisdom of my father who used to say, "Thank G-d for all the invitations I don't receive."

Each day has a different calling. It's our responsibility to listen and live by its expectations.

King Solomon writes it best in Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3:

"Everything has an appointed season, and there is a time for every matter under the heaven.

A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted.

A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break and a time to build.

A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing.

A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away.

A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace."

The wisest of all men – King Solomon – teaches us that we need the *seichel* (wisdom) to know what each moment is calling to us.

In modern vernacular, we might put it this way:

There is a time to be with family and a time to be on the phone; a time for physicality and a time for spirituality.

A time for closeness and a time for distance; a time for work and a time for play.

A time to kvetch (not too often) and a time for hope; a time to question oneself and a time for certainty.

A time to emigrate and a time to stay put (I stay put); a time to be strong and a time to be weak.

A time to question and a time to just believe; a time to grow and a time to integrate.

A time to feel elevated and a time to feel uninspired (and still do what needs to be done).

A time to be inflexible and a time to be flexible.

Life is full of different emotions, experiences, and ideas, and there's a time for everything. Wisdom is to intuit what the calling of the hour is – what G-d wants from me now.

Some people are great at picking up G-d's messages about work, but their antenna is dead to picking up messages about family. We call that workaholism.

Some people are great at hearing the message about earning a living, but they are closing their hearts to the incessant messages about having a life.

Making each day count is about hearing the message from heaven that calls us each day to live the calling of the day. The Zohar teaches *"עבִיד עֲבִידֵיהָ כֹּל יוֹמָא וְיוֹמָא"* (every day has its unique purpose and way of serving G-d). Sunday isn't Monday, which isn't Tuesday, and so forth.

And one more thing, before we sign off to do the next things on today's agenda (lunch):

I once heard from someone (I wish I could remember whom) that a good day is a day that you enriched the life of another. If someone's day is brighter because of you today, then you lived a good day.

I humbly agree. There are some things that belong in our lives every day (food, sleep, wisdom, faith, love etc.). Upgrading the life of another person by acts and words of love and care is a daily mandate; no matter what season of life it is. I think King Solomon would agree.

Wishing you and yours a beautiful Chag Shavuot. May we receive the Torah with joy and internalise its messages. May we be in tune with the calling of each day, and play our part in actualising G-d's plan for us and the universe.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi of the Linksfield Shul. He dedicates this piece to his son, Aaron, in honour of his Barmitzvah on Shavuot.

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Time to take women’s Torah study seriously

OPINION

JESSICA GOLDBLATT



If you could go back in time to anywhere in history and just observe, where would you go? I’ve thought unusually long and hard about this question. A Shakespeare play at the Globe in London in the 1500s (preferably *The Merchant of Venice*), or the Martin Luther King Junior-led March on Washington in 1963 are typically my top contenders. But, if the opportunity really arose, I know what I would do: I would go back to the Hebrew year 2448 (1312 BCE), to the 6th (or 5th – because there’s an argument in the Gemara about the actual date of the event) of Sivan. I would go back to Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah).

Out of all the weird, wacky, and puzzling biblical scenes, Matan Torah has always bothered me the most. What does it mean when the Midrash (Biblical Exegesis) says that Israel saw the thunder and heard the lightening? What did Matan Torah look like: what does it mean, really mean, to “see” G-d? And, if I went back in time, I would finally understand this verse, and Rashi’s explanation of it. In the chapter before the Ten Commandments are spelled out, the Torah explains that, *Umosheh alah el-ha’elohim vayyikra elav adonai min-hahar lemor koh tomar leveit ya’akov vetaggeid livnei yisra’el.* (And Moses went up to G-d. Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel...”)

The verse is tautological. “Say to the house of Jacob” is surely no different from “declare to the children of Israel”. The Torah, famously, doesn’t waste words. Rashi, the great medieval commentator explains the difference: “House of Jacob” is the women, whereas “children of Israel” are the men. “Say” is a verb connoting speaking soft, gentle words, whereas “declare” suggests harshness. According to Rashi, Moses is receiving two instructions here: first, explain to the women – gently, sweetly, and kindly, and then, give the tough, “real”, version to the “tough” men. I’m surely not the only one who has felt deeply

uncomfortable with Rashi’s explanation. It comes across as enforcing rigid, problematic, and stereotypical notions about men and women’s intellectual abilities and educational standards. These ideas are disappointingly common in rabbinic literature. The Gemara, famously, brings the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that “anyone who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he is teaching her *tiflut* [commonly translated as promiscuity].” Rabbi Eliezer links two clichés: women aren’t smart, and women are promiscuous. Torah, Rabbi Eliezer argues, which normally increases wisdom, will only make women – flawed, promiscuity-prone vessels – lewder.

As the centuries progress, the attitude in rabbinic circles towards women and Torah study begins to shift – slowly. Rabbinic writing from the 12th and 13th centuries gives women permission to study “relevant topics” i.e. Torah topics that are necessary for their daily Jewish observance (see, for example, the Sefer Chassidim). Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, writing in the 1800s, expands this, explaining that even seemingly irrelevant, “theoretical” Torah sections should be learned by women, because ultimately it increases fear of G-d, and motivates women to keep following Jewish law. What’s starkly absent for centuries, however, is the recognition that women should be allowed to learn Torah because women, like men, are capable, intelligent, thinking beings. The attitude towards women’s study in the Jewish world, of course, mirrored that of the secular world. Medieval times offered nunneries as the only place for women to receive an education. (Here’s another link between a women’s chastity and her intelligence. Perhaps medieval authorities thought along the same

lines as Rabbi Eliezer: the only safe space for semi-educated women were nunneries, somewhere where their education-induced lewdness could be kept in check. Later, upper-class women were educated by private tutors.) Bias against women’s intelligence abounded, even as women achieved success: famous female authors from this time – the Brontë sisters, Louisa May Alcott, George Eliot – all published under male names, using the cover of maleness to write about “unladylike topics”, and to be taken seriously doing so. Rashi’s explanation seems to entrench what women have been trying to overcome for centuries:

Torah: different groups of people have different needs, and properly equal education needs to attend to those specific needs. I’m in the middle of a wonderful book, *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez. The basic argument of the book is that the world is designed for men: everything from the size of cellphones, to safety mechanisms in cars, are based on data that is male-specific. Women are invisible: we’re not factored into the basic design structures of our day-to-day world. The Torah, however, in 1312 wasn’t doing that. The Torah was advocating that we give each group that which is appropriate, that which is best suited for it. Torah teaching that is appropriate for women has, thankfully, changed from the days of Rashi and the Gur Aryeh. Nonetheless, with Shavuot rolling around, it would do us well to consider the question: what should Shavuot look like for a group of women in 5783? What is today’s equivalent of “say” to the “house of Jacob”? To be sure, you would need to ask women. It may look something like organising specific talks for women about topics women are interested in. It may look like organising security to watch women and girls walk home during the course of the long Tikkun Leil night. It may look like having child-care options for some of the evening programming, or repeating specific programmes the next day so mothers aren’t disadvantaged and excluded. It looks like designing programming – for this day in particular, but really for all of Torah education – with the understanding that women and girls are serious, smart, tough, and deserve to learn.

• Jessica Goldblatt is an English literature Masters student with a passion for Jewish education and social justice.



Rebbetzin Estee Stern teaching Bat Mitzvah girls at Sydenham Shul

the dichotomy of frivolous, gentle, and unintelligent women, versus serious, smart, tough men. I want to try proposing a different reading of Rashi, loosely based on the Gur Aryeh, a super-commentator. The Gur Aryeh explains that G-d’s commandment was gendered because men and women need to be taught differently, each according to a way that’s fitting. The Gur Aryeh reasons that women are easily manipulated (see Eve, he says), and easily frightened, so it’s best to be gentle. Leaving aside the Gur Aryeh’s explanation, I want to expand upon his premise. There is something radical here – in the Rashi, and in the

The emotional cost of aliya

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

With the myriad of practicalities that need to be addressed in the process of making aliya, many often neglect the psychological impact of such a life-changing move. Yet, says counselling psychologist Dr Sarah Berman, dealing with both the practical and emotional impact of moving to Israel is vital to making sure that you thrive in your new reality. “How we’re feeling emotionally is going to influence our ability to engage with the practical aspects of aliya, and all the practical steps have an impact on our ability to process what’s going on emotionally,” says Berman.

during each step not just about the practicalities but also about how to process everything because there was just so much happening,” she says. Before uprooting ourselves and our families, we need to think about what it really means to emigrate – and what goes through our minds when we do so. We must approach making aliya in a conscious and intentional way, says Berman. Though some of us may view change with excitement, others may find it terrifying or feel differently about the move at different periods. “Aliya or emigration is different to any other major life event because when we experience other stressful events in our lives, it’s usually only one thing that’s changing. If

Berman says. “Even something as simple as buying milk can be a minefield when you’re in an unfamiliar country that speaks a different language. Give yourself time for the unfamiliar to become familiar.” Culture shock is a common challenge for new *olim*. “Things you take for granted, the jokes we tell, and slang we use as South Africans, may be misunderstood in a different context,” says Berman. “This can feel a bit jarring, as that’s when you really realise that you’re not in the place that’s always been your home.” Where we live before emigrating influences our identity. “When making aliya, you need to think about the identity shifts that take place because when you land in Israel, it’s about thinking not only about how you saw yourself in South Africa, but how are you going to be in Israel,” says Berman. “While you’re still the same person, your sense of identity may shift a little.” How Israeli you want to become is a personal choice and one you need to make room for. This will also have an impact on which community you choose to go into – whether it be a predominantly South African neighbourhood, or a place Israeli citizens call home. You need to consider what will make the move as smooth as possible and give you the outcome you seek. “Ask what support you needed to navigate change in the past,” Berman advises, “and what structures you might need to put in place now that you’re making aliya.” When faced with a big life change, it

can be easy to fall back on certain defence or coping mechanisms. While these may help us navigate the adjustment, we need to be careful of relying on them too much and ignoring feelings that must be addressed, she says. Often when we emigrate, we tend to think in extremes, making the country we’re leaving all bad and the place that we’re going to all good. Yet, the reality is more nuanced than that. “We need to work to view both places in terms of their good and bad aspects,” Berman says. “This will help us have more realistic expectations when we get to Israel and properly say goodbye to what we loved about South Africa.” The emotions you confront are also particular to the life stage you’re in and whether you’re moving alone and with family. Whatever your situation, make space for your feelings and those of others and realise that in a family setting, you may be at different places. Berman suggests making a list of the reasons for your move, including both push and pull factors. That way, you’ll have something in black and white that you can turn to when navigating choppy waters. She also advises doing as much research as possible before making the move, and



Dr Hymie Ehrlich made aliya in 2021 at age 91

organising practical elements like where you’ll stay when you arrive, and where your kids will go to school. “Make it visual for kids, so they know where they’re going, get people to take photos of shops, parks, even their school, so it starts to become tangible, especially for kids who struggle with abstract concepts.” Make sure you give your kids as much time as possible before the move to handle the range of feelings that come up as the move approaches, she says. Also plan how you’ll all say goodbye to the people and places that you love in South Africa. “Aliya challenges our sense of stability and predictability, and our core feelings about separation and making our way in the world,” Berman says. “That’s why we need to confront our feelings and find the tools to help make the move as successful as possible, whether it be through connecting with people in the same boat, checking in with trusted friends, or even consulting a therapist.” As long as you prioritise self-care and embrace your new reality, Israel will soon feel like home.



Telfed members welcoming olim from South Africa in February 2023

Berman, who herself made aliya from South Africa with her husband and small children two years ago, discussed the psychology of aliya in a webinar hosted by The Israel Centre this week. “Each phase of aliya had its own process of adjustment, and I had so many questions

new place.” Everything from your job to your house to your community is new and different, and this can result in sensory overload. “So many different areas of your life are changing at the same time, which can make it hard to process and catch your breath,”

we’re struggling with our job, for example, other areas are generally holding steady, whereas with aliya, you’re lifting yourself up, sending yourself across the world, and plonking yourself down in a completely



Dr Sarah Berman

Voice of Vilna brought to life in new exhibition

TALI FEINBERG

Chayela Rosenthal started out as an actress and singing star in the Vilna Ghetto Theatre in Lithuania, and after enduring unfathomable tragedy, she rebuilt her life in South Africa, becoming a Broadway star.

Her unique story spanning Lithuania, Cape Town, across generations, and against all odds is to be explored in a travelling exhibition to be housed at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC) in June 2023.

It will explore Vilna-born Rosenthal's pre-war life, and her extraordinary tale of survival and resistance through her music, and that of her brother, poet and composer Leyb Rosenthal, who was brutally murdered; her post-war career and enormous contribution to Yiddish theatre; and how her family kept her legacy alive after her untimely death at the age of 54.

"I'm so excited that the life story of my brave and talented mother, Chayela Rosenthal, is being remembered," says her daughter, Zola Schuman. "New generations will come to know her story, and that of her gifted brother, Leyb, and learn more about the Vilna Ghetto and the resilience of the Jewish people who created art, music, and theatre in the midst of unspeakable suffering."

It will tell the story of Rosenthal, who survived the Vilna Ghetto, Kaiserwald concentration camp, Stutthof concentration camp, and a death march. She endured tragedy but rebuilt her life on the southern tip of Africa with her husband, fellow survivor Xavier Piatka, and their two daughters, going

on to have a remarkable career on Broadway and around the world.

The exhibition was conceptualised and developed by the CTHGC and the launch will coincide with the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto by the Nazis in 1943.

Schuman says her awareness that her parents were Holocaust survivors probably "began in the womb".

"I knew from a very young age that my family was 'different'. The shadow of the Holocaust seemed like the fifth member of our family, with my mother's long silences and my father's sudden emotional outbursts.

"I had no grandparents and only one aunt, and a photograph of a young man under my mom's dressing table glass that we couldn't ask her about. It was her beloved brother who was killed by the Nazis two days before liberation. My father always spoke openly about the Holocaust, but my mother never did. It was too painful for her."

She says the most traumatic things her mother faced were "hunger, starvation, painful beatings, humiliation, horrific cruelty, imprisonment, uncertainty, the daily expectation of possible imminent death, and witnessing the cold-blooded murder of so many. A day or two after the Germans invaded her hometown, her father was forced out of their house and was never seen again.

"Every day from 24 June 1939 until May 1945 held trauma, though after she was liberated, trauma still prevailed: typhoid fever, starting a new life of unknowns, and carrying with her the loss of her mother, father, and brother, always."

She says her mother dealt with this



Chayela Rosenthal

in three ways, often contradictory, with "silence, song, and comedy. In public, she was determined to be happy. She decided to 'seize the day', and spread joy. She had a fabulous sense of humour, and with her comedy and songs, she was able to bring smiles to others. She did this in the ghetto and the camps too."

Her father was a journalist, and growing up in such a cultural household was "normal" for Shuman and her sister, Naava. "It was all I knew from a young age. We were always taken to theatre and cinema. We went to all mom's shows and enjoyed or endured daily rehearsals in our home. As young kids, my sister and I were already on stage performing!

"At home, someone was always either singing out loud, playing the piano or records, when the news wasn't blaring from

my dad's radios. Our home was always filled with actors and artists from all around the world, and many gay people, black people ... even when that was illegal."

But tragedy continued to dog the family, as both Shuman's mother and sister died young of cancer. They both could have achieved so much had their lives not been cut short, she says. "They were both so full of life and endless energy and driven to do it all and do it well. My mom and sister were unstoppable.

"It's my honour and privilege to share their life's work with the world." Her father has also since passed away. "I continue to do multimedia presentations that tell their stories; I perform songs my mama sang; give talks about my sister Naava's book; and have created a website, www.chayela.com, about my family. I created YouTube channels to share their music and other performances. All this is my legacy of love – telling their stories and singing their songs, though singing in Yiddish has been a challenge, but I'm working on it!"

The exhibition will include incredible artefacts, including "my mother's favourite glorious sequined dress and top she wore on stage; the floral dress she wore in her first South African Yiddish play; the original book in which she wrote songs from the Vilna Ghetto; her original comedy sketches and jokes; her LP records; original show programmes; newspaper articles; music manuscripts; and more."

She thinks readers will find the exhibition meaningful because it's uplifting in spite of it being a Holocaust story, and "the majority of South African Jews are of Litvak descent, so it will be an interesting personal journey too.

Younger visitors will be exposed to more of their grand and great-grandparents' life and culture.

"Older visitors may remember my mother. Although she was an international star, she chose to make South Africa her home, and performed all around the country, bringing joy and the *mameloshen* – Yiddish."

She believes the exhibition will appeal to all generations, "as it moves from the darkest chapter in our history through to the current day – telling a young girl's journey from the ghetto to Europe, onto the stages of Broadway, and into sunny South Africa".

She hopes the exhibition will "invoke a deeper awareness of Jewish life and culture before the Holocaust, a new appreciation of the courage of our people, and of what was saved and brought from history to the present. I hope it will remind every visitor to fight against injustice and hatred and each visitor follows my mom's advice to celebrate each day and remember my Uncle Leyb's words '*Mir leybn eybik, mir zaynen doh*' (We will live forever... we're still here!)"

Finally, she wants to thank "all those whose families welcomed my parents into this wonderful community, those who went to my mom's shows, and all who will now honour her memory and those of all our ancestors by visiting the exhibition."

- The exhibition, "Chayela Rosenthal: Wunderkind of the Vilna Ghetto Theatre" will run from 18 June to 4 August 2023 in Cape Town, and will be accompanied by an ancillary programme of performances, film screenings, lectures, and educational programmes. It will travel to Johannesburg and Durban later this year.

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Endangered seal Yulia loves and leaves Israelis

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

For much of the past week, Israel’s latest unlikely celebrity lounged on Jaffa beach, drawing throngs of onlookers, constant media attention, and round-the-clock protection from the government as she sunbathed and slept the day away.

Then early on the afternoon of Tuesday, 23 May, the unwitting star named Yulia – a rare 6-foot (1.8m) species of seal weighing hundreds of pounds who has travelled the eastern Mediterranean – waded into the water and swam away. She left no sign of whether she would ever return.

Her departure has left some local residents bereft and others hopeful that she may find a safer home than a bare beach with little shelter, other animals, and litter. News of her departure spread quickly through the area’s social media and WhatsApp groups, one of which had even changed its name from “Friends of Jaffa” to “Friends of Yulia”.

“Of course, I know she’s not smiling, but her lips are formed in a way that makes her look like she is. She’s so utterly calm – even while a million people are watching her,” said Aya Zaken, a resident of the ancient city adjacent to Tel Aviv, who added that she was “deeply sad” that Yulia had returned to sea.

Seeing the mammal for the first time was a “much more moving” experience than she had expected, Zaken said, partly because of the seal’s size but also because of the effect she had on onlookers.

“When faced with her, I felt an overwhelming sense of calm, like a deep meditation,” Zaken said. “The feeling that this is so much bigger than me or my troubles.”

Yulia, who was given her name by a local boy who first discovered her, arrived on Jaffa’s beach on Friday. She had since been the subject of 24-hour surveillance both by the press and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, which had sent volunteers to keep watch and ensure that the crowds of people who have gathered since her arrival didn’t disturb her.

Yulia is a Mediterranean monk seal, one of roughly 600 to 700 left in the world, according to the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, though other estimates put the number even lower. The species is classified as endangered.

Yulia was listless and shaking when she first arrived on Israeli shores, and experts were worried that she was ill. But when Turkish researchers at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN, received images of Yulia, they recognised her as a monk seal they had already seen, named Tugra, who is known to have a penchant for both swimming great lengths and napping for extraordinarily long stretches of time. She is more than 20 years old, and has a reputation for travelling, having been spotted as far off as Greece and Turkey.

“On the one hand, I’m on such a high, I haven’t slept in days,” said Mia Elasar, who has been researching monk seals for 30 years. “As a child, I heard that there were once far more seals here; and now, to see one in real life, it’s a legend that has come alive.”

Elasar is the founder of the Delphis Association, an Israeli non-profit organisation for marine mammals that has partnered with the IUCN on a joint project for the protection of monk seals. She said Yulia’s (or Tugra’s) globetrotting isn’t the only reason for her extreme fatigue. When she arrived in Jaffa, she was spotted with large bite marks in two areas of her body. According to Elasar’s Turkish colleagues, those marks weren’t present at her last sighting in 2019, off the coast of Lebanon. She was also shedding her fur, a process that requires a lot of

energy.

“I worry for her here,” Elasar said. “It makes more sense for her to go back.”

Some Jaffa residents agreed that the beach – with its crowds, dogs, and considerable volume of garbage – wasn’t the best place for their beloved guest. Elasar added that Israel lacks the resources to give Yulia the protection she needs. To provide a more permanent home for her and her fellow seals, she said, authorities would need to build caves along the shoreline where the marine animals could rest.

“I think it is for the best,” said Dan, a resident of Jaffa

“I very much want her to come back,” said Arnon Pinchuk, 14, who came with some of his classmates to see Yulia on Wednesday morning, only to learn that she had left.

Pinchuk was one of only 18 students from the Kehila Democratic School in Jaffa to take the trip. Asked why the rest of his 103-student class didn’t come along for the adventure, Pinchuk answered, “Because they’re losers who prefer being on their phones.”

Jaffa has a diverse population of Jews, Christians, and Muslims and, for many of the residents, Yulia’s arrival was a unifying event. That was especially the case amid recent events in the country, which range from civil strife over a proposed overhaul of Israel’s judiciary to the recent five-day conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza. Yulia got to Jaffa near the end of that round of fighting.

“She came at a time when people need quiet, solidarity, unity, and happiness,” Zaken said. “I hope she gathers her strength and comes back and tells us all how awesome we are.”

Along with locals, Yulia attracted a gaggle of photographers who have spent hours training their lenses on her. Yehiel Lamesh, an amateur photographer, travelled from the southern port city of Ashdod to visit Yulia, and said, “I would go around the world to see such a creature, so



Yulia (also known as Tugra)

Photo: Yehiel Lamesh

who declined to give his last name. “It was probably a matter of time until someone would potentially harm her or ‘adopt’ her to live in a bath or aquarium, or even try to eat her.”

In the end, Yulia apparently felt the same way. After 48 hours of sleeping following her arrival, she finally went back to sea. Over the ensuing two days, she was in and out of the water, until, on Tuesday, she left for the longest stretch yet. She was spotted swimming opposite the nearby Jaffa port on Wednesday morning, which gives optimists reason to believe that she will return.


of course I would come here.”


To Ziv Binunski, a cameraman for Israel’s Channel 12 News, Yulia’s sojourn was a welcome respite from his other assignments, which include capturing rocket fire over the Gaza border, as well as the anti-government protests roiling the country.

On Wednesday morning, he stood on the beach, hoping to catch her return.

“It’s such a different experience, being connected to the sea and to nature,” he said, “and to be dependent on the whims of animals and not humans”.


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Ditch ‘the talk’ and discuss sex from day one

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Long considered an awkward but necessary discussion that parents stumble through with their kids, discussions about sex shouldn’t happen in isolation, say experts.

By teaching our kids about their bodies throughout their lives, explanation about the intricacies of intimacy becomes more natural, not jarring and cringeworthy, they say.

imparted over many years.”

Falkson lays out such an approach in her guide, which empowers parents to create open, holy, and healthy conversations around sexuality. “We encourage that, from a young age, children are taught in developmentally appropriate stages,” she explains. “As they get older, we add more and more information so that they have the full picture by the time they can understand, instead of one big talk that scares

but it’s important that we give them a different age-appropriate viewpoint shaped by our family values.”

O’Reilly agrees. “If we can be our children’s compass so that they can navigate the sometimes confusing and overwhelming world that they encounter online, we can ensure their emotional and physical safety as much as possible,” she says.

When broaching the subject with older children, meet them where they’re at, says Falkson. “Ask what

they know, correct the things that aren’t appropriate or real, and add information without overwhelming them,” she suggests. “As time passes, continue the conversation naturally using everyday experiences.”

Often our children may initiate the conversation, especially when they’re young and curious. “Generally, children will ask a question when they are ready for the answer, and won’t stop asking

element too, as this is when you should be talking about sex as a way to show love, not just a way to make babies,” Abelheim says. “Knowing how much detail to provide will also depend on the child and how much you as the parent know they can handle.”

If you’re concerned about your child taking it upon themselves to educate their peers about the facts of life, be proactive. Explain that though they’re old enough or ready to have this talk, others may not be. “Explain that what we’re

discussing with them is so special, and every parent wants to have the opportunity and privilege of explaining it to their own children.”

We need to break the taboo around talking to our kids about sex, Falkson says. We must address our own beliefs and possible hang-ups about discussing the topic to empower our children and break damaging patterns. “It all starts with how we speak to our children and build them up in this area.”



Open conversations with children about sex promotes a healthy understanding

“If we want to raise children who are empowered through their sexuality and enable them to go on to build deep bonds through their adult lives, we need to start discussing sex with them from birth,” says sex and intimacy coach Galya Falkson, who recently released a guidebook titled *The Complete Parent’s Guide for Children of All Ages: Developing a Healthy Relationship with Sex*.

“Don’t let outdated stigma and fear about discussing sexuality with your children hold you back from creating strong connections and building empowered individuals,” she says.

Her contention echoes contemporary thinking. “Having one big talk when you haven’t covered the basics will be difficult and overwhelming,” educational psychologist Claudia Abelheim says. “If you create an environment at home in which things like body parts and their functions, how our bodies change, the difference between boys’ and girls’ bodies, and what’s private and so on are discussed freely from an early age, it will happen in a very natural way.”

“The ‘sex talk’ is an outdated construct,” says clinical psychologist Yael O’Reilly. “We rather think about sexuality as being a developmental process, one that has a stacked approach. Having micro conversations over the years about body safety – mine versus yours – which evolves into what’s safe and unsafe behaviour, will pave the way for us to answer the ‘bigger’ questions around sex, puberty, and sexuality as we have created a foundation of trust, knowledge, and information. As there isn’t one big conversation, small bits of information can be

and possibly confuses them more.” As kids go through the stages of development, a lack of understanding about what their bodily changes mean and how to manage them can be detrimental. Open conversations to promote a healthy understanding are key.

Yet, if you haven’t provided an incremental grounding and feel it’s time to broach the subject, just how should you do it? “I always suggest asking older kids what they already know since they have been exposed to friends, television, and the internet by then, so they most likely have an idea about sex, but it may not be a healthy or good one at all,” says Falkson.



Galya Falkson

In today’s world with the prevalence of social media and other online platforms, our children are exposed to much more, much earlier, increasing the importance of the role parents play in sex education.

“We cannot control what our kids are hearing and seeing online or what their friends tell them,” says Abelheim. “Yet, when kids hear about sex from their parents, they come to know that their parents are reliable sources of information and that they don’t need to look anywhere else. We can’t stop the negative messages that they may receive from society,

until they’re satisfied,” says O’Reilly. “So, when your child has a question, do your best to answer it and wait to see if there’s a follow-up question. Because this is a sensitive and often uncomfortable topic, we tend to either shy away from answering truthfully or launch into explanations that the child isn’t necessarily asking for or ready for. A child who asks where babies come from isn’t necessarily asking about sex, so we can answer in very fact-based, biological terms.”

Nevertheless, discussing sex with our kids can be a minefield. “It’s alright to acknowledge any awkwardness with our kids and tell them that we’ll navigate it together, because sometimes the important things in life are uncomfortable to do, and that’s ok,” she says. “Sometimes using tangible aids can assist in decreasing awkwardness, such as a developmentally appropriate book or video.”

If they’re not asking about sex as they grow older, especially as they approach the age of eight, parents need to take the lead. O’Reilly suggests starting small and building from there. “Kids between the ages of five and eight should know how babies are made – in an age-appropriate way,” says Abelheim. “You can start giving more detailed explanations from the age of about nine. If your child asks you questions you must always answer in a truthful, but again, age-appropriate way.”

“From about 12 you should be talking about the emotional

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Joburg creatives bring their youth to the big screen

TALI FEINBERG

Brett Morris may be one of the country's leading creative minds, having worked with brands from Coca Cola to Nando's, but it's been his lifelong dream to make a movie. "Just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, a friend challenged us to make it happen,



Brett Morris and Hylton Tannenbaum

and he offered to kick off the funding," says Morris, whose coming-of-age film *Just Now Jeffrey*, written and directed with equally successful creative leader Hylton Tannenbaum, is in its final stages of production. "That was the beginning of a three-year journey to write the script, raise the money, and finally get it done," says Morris. "We have also

always wanted to give a voice to a generation that grew up in South Africa towards the end of apartheid. We found that South Africans were generally painted with the same brush, and we wanted to show all of the complexity and nuances across the political spectrum during that time: from right to left and everything in between."

agency and some international ones too. He has won awards at Cannes, Clios, and The Loeries.

Morris says the movie is "an edgier version of *The Goldbergs* meets *Superbad* meets *American Pie*, but set against a never-before seen on film, 1980s Jewish, Joburg canvas. It's a coming-of-age comedy, which is a universal theme, with the unique backdrop that was South Africa in the late 1980s. While South Africa battles through civil unrest and the final days of apartheid, Jeffrey Greenbaum battles through his raging hormones and the final days of high school. Filled with lovable and familiar characters in hilarious situations, it gives a voice to those of us brought up in a crazy era, in a strange country surrounded by surreal circumstances.

"South Africa in the late 1980s was one of the most unique places in the world in one the most extraordinary times in history," he says. "The Berlin Wall came down, Communism fell, and apartheid was about to end. This is the backdrop for a truly original coming-of-age story. So while the theme is universal, and we can make comparisons to other movies in the genre, it's a backdrop

that's never been seen before on screen. The kind of film we aspire to make is of the same narrative style as the films of directors we admire, like the Coen brothers and Quentin Tarantino.

"Obviously, we draw on life experiences, as any good story should, but this isn't a biopic by any means, it's a work of fiction," says Morris. "It's really about creating a compelling film that draws on the many different types of characters and fictional stories we have thought of over the years.

"The point of a film is to entertain an audience and reward it for watching it. We set out to make the kind of movie that we would want to watch. We're currently in our last week of shooting, and then

we begin post-production, which will take at least three months. We hope to be ready to release the film by the end of the year, and are currently in negotiations with various distributors, sales agents, and streaming platforms.

"It's been a helluva process!" he admits. "Every stage of making a film has its own challenges and opportunities. They happen every day, whether big or small but, as with any creative project, the important thing is to keep focused on the end goal and keep pushing forward. It's been incredible for us to see the words of the script come to life through the wonderful actors we have on board, and finally seeing the story unfold piece by piece."

The large cast includes familiar

names like Rob van Vuuren, Shelley Meskin, and Nik Rabinowitz, with Julian Robinson in the lead as Jeffrey. "The cast and crew have been incredible, and it's amazing to see the depth of talent that we have in South Africa," says Morris. "From up-and-coming talent, to seasoned professionals, they have all been excited to be part of this project and make it something special, which is great for us to see."

Their ultimate goal with the project is to "make a great film that entertains a local and global audience and delivers returns for our investors. We hope that you enjoy the film, and please support us by following us on www.instagram.com/justnowjeffrey for inside info and updates."

Educator reveals drama of English – and life

TALI FEINBERG

When Marcelle Pincus (née Rubin) was growing up, her parents' great hope for her was that she would leave school after Grade 7, and work at a till at OK Bazaars, giving her a "career for life". But Pincus, one of six children, always wanted more. So, she made a plan to have a much bigger "career for life" that would have an impact on the lives of thousands of others.

Not only that, but this dynamic 84-year-old educator, speech and drama teacher, adjudicator, textbook author, and now playwright has created a play about her life, which will be performed at Theatre on the Square and Crawford International Sandton for a night in June and August.

She will also do charity performances at Sandringham Gardens and Elphin Lodge Retirement Village, which is where she lives. Pincus says at Elphin Lodge she has a "new lease on life", which was one of the reasons she decided to bring her life story to the stage.

The play is titled *What if Nobody Comes?* in reference to her reaction to a colleague suggesting that she perform the play. As a speech and drama teacher, it had been a personal project, but he recommended that she take it to the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. "But what if nobody comes?" she asked. "Well, there's your title!" he replied. People did come, and the play has been performed numerous times since.

This newly reworked version will include 12 child actors, and performances by Jonathan Birin, Ros Basserabie, and Tulla Eckhart. The dancing is choreographed by Dani Davis.

Pincus's family came to Johannesburg from Lithuania, "so in our home, I only heard Yiddish. The result was that I wasn't very good at English," she says. "This hindered me as far as school was concerned. As far as home was concerned, we had a beautiful home. My parents eloped – yes, eloped – and were very happy. They had six children. I loved my childhood days. I was very creative. We weren't rich, but we were happy."

One defining moment in her life was when a teacher accused her of stealing a book, saying she was "evil, wicked, and a liar". That moment "wrecked her", but it also showed her how a teacher's words could have a deep impact on a child, in turn ensuring that she became a better educator.

She didn't love school, and battled with English, but it was meeting elocution teacher Norah Taylor that made her decide that she too wanted to become a teacher. "I wasn't going to go to OK Bazaars," she quips. She went on to train as a speech and drama teacher. She worked in numerous institutions over the past 60 years, having an impact on "disadvantaged children who came to school

with no shoes" and generations of Jewish children. She's still teaching today. Her workshops have been presented in Welkom, Maputo, Manchester, New Zealand, and throughout South Africa.

Writing the bestselling *English Handbook and Study Guide* textbook with Beryl Lutrin was also life-changing, allowing her to no longer worry about her finances for the first time in her life. Most importantly, it allowed her to make a positive impact on people's lives just as she always dreamed of doing. A comprehensive English reference book, it covers language, comprehension, writing, literature, visual literacy, oral communication, spelling, and vocabulary, from senior primary to matric and tertiary level. It's a teacher's handbook, a student's textbook, and a home reference book.

All her work is connected, she says, as she "teaches English through drama, and drama through English", so her passion shines through, even in a textbook.

What she loves about teaching is the children



Tulla Eckhart and Marcelle Pincus

themselves. She says they tell her she's "strict, but very fair", and that she respects every child she teaches. She has loved seeing the children she has educated go on to do great things, and she has always tried to help children see the positive, even in difficult times. She believes that speech and drama allows every child to believe in themselves and gain confidence, a crucial factor. Now, at the age of 84, interacting with children is the highlight of her day.

She has been through challenges, from losing her beloved husband, Danny, in 2016, to witnessing her daughter undergo a 10-hour operation to remove a liver tumour, which was discovered to be benign. "That was a miracle, inspiring me to give whatever I could." She gives in all kinds of ways, from helping Jewish life thrive at Elphin Lodge, to performing her play to bring joy where it's needed.

"I want my message to be that people should never give up – you can have an impact on your own path and what will become of you," she says.

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Nonagenarian slays competition in African bridge tournament

STAFF REPORTER

Johannesburg nonagenarian Joy Rothenberg is competing this week in an all-African bridge tournament, having recently received her South African colours to represent her country. On 22 May, she played against Egypt and Tunisia in the All Africa Zonals tournament and won both matches.

“It’s mind-blowing to be able to get my colours and represent my country now,” said Rothenberg, 93, this week shortly before the competition began. “I never thought I would get this far.”

She said her bridge partner had asked her to take part in a team of six in a national competition. “I was hesitant a first, but very excited. We won, and now we’re playing for South Africa.”

To date, Rothenberg has only ever played at some Johannesburg bridge congresses,

smaller competitions, and in an inter-club tournament. In the latter, she said, “ we walked away with the cup”.

Rothenberg plays socially about five times a week. “I’m part of The Links Bridge Club, but I play mostly online as it is much more convenient.”

Rothenberg was born in Johannesburg in 1930 to a British mother. “We lived in London for two years, but moved back to South Africa and settled in Benoni.” She met her husband when they were both 18, got married at 22, and had three children. She now has grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

In her mid-30s, Rothenberg started playing bridge and discovered she not only had a natural ability, she was also really good at teaching the game. “A friend asked me to teach her to play, and shortly thereafter, I was inundated with people asking me to teach them to play.”

So, she became a bridge teacher and taught for 30 years. During that time, she wrote a book that helped people learn to play. “I contacted the *Sandton Chronicle* at the time, and they agreed to interview me about the book,” she said. “A few days later, Exclusive Books asked if it could see the book. That led to a first order of 10 books and three months later, I had a number-one best seller. We started selling the book in Cape Town and Durban, and copies were sent to the United States and Australia.”

She then started a bridge club in Rivonia with a friend of hers, which they ran for six years.

She says bridge “is fascinating no matter how old you are”. What’s more, as she discovered, “if you’re a good player, you’ll be inundated with invitations to play. The game is so good for the mind and keeping you socially active.”



Joy Rothenberg

A made-to-milchik disaster

Shavuot is proof that G-d doesn't really like Ashkenazi Jews. Either that or He has a great sense of humour. Because any festival that involves feeding dairy products to an interbred, largely lactose-intolerant group, who on a good day suffer from intermittent irritable bowel syndrome when bouts of any form of anxiety overwhelms them, can't be for real.

And yet we take it on like our faith depends on it. Like unless we consume a half a dozen cheese blintzes by 22:00 on the first night of the festival, questions about our lineage will be asked and fingers will be pointed.

Tell me what you want about our Eastern European past, I still don't believe anyone in Lithuania served quiche. Or that they simply had to follow a three-course cream-infested meal with Cookies & Cream Haagen Dazs ice cream and Bar One sauce. I don't believe that there was a need to display, and then taste, three types of cheesecake each with different toppings, excluding the Peppermint Crisp pudding that isn't a cheesecake but that couldn't be left out.

And I'm reasonably certain that the Latvian Jews of Riga had hardly a spare moment between pogroms to debate where to best buy the choice mascarpone cheese for the ultimate tiramisu.

There are many ways that my childhood was a blessed one. But one of the unspoken reasons was that my mother was an appalling "milk" cook. She could destroy a non-meat meal like the best of her generation. So much so that if there was worldwide competition in the category of the worst "non-chicken or meat soup" she would win gold. Each time.

What that meant was that we were largely spared the horror of modern-day Shavuot cheese-and-cream festive meals. That was aside from one meal

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



at my grandmother's house, where on leaving everyone lied about the magnificence of a dairy meal. And proclaimed too often to be believed that it was wonderful to leave a meal without that "heavy" feeling of a meat meal. Even as a child I could hear the insincerity over the sound of my already grumbling and lactose-intolerant tummy.

As a young adult, I recall one Shavuot evening walking from Glenhazel to Observatory to see my parents. There were several of us who chose to make the trek, which we thought would be a blast. And a blast it was. For different reasons. Although the distance wouldn't have been an issue under normal circumstances, it turned out that one of the walkers was even more "intolerant" than me. And had eaten way too much of something pasta. With cream.

Suffice to say that I will never be able to look at Sylvia Pass quite the same way again.

Each year, I make the same resolution. Come the days before Shavuot, I sit myself down, look myself in the eye, and assure myself that this year will be different. I won't "have" to try all the cheesecakes, even if one has a caramel topping. I will find meaning in the festival even if I eat no tiramisu, and I will remind myself that quiches are very 1970s.

This year, I will be respectful to my Ashkenazi body. Unless there is some form of Belgian Chocolate cake with whipped cream. Then, all bets are off the table.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Cape Jew-baiting a step too far

Over the past two months, the Cape Town Jewish community has been targeted by a series of threatening, inflammatory, and not infrequently overtly antisemitic demonstrations, both in its communal heartland and outside one of its largest Jewish schools. These "protests", as has become all too apparent, are simply platforms through which a relatively small group of extremists are allowed to engage in unbridled displays of hatred and naked aggression towards the Cape Town Jewish community under the guise of standing up for human rights. We're continually in contact with and, as needed, are supporting our Cape counterparts in responding to the vitriolic attacks to which they have consistently been subjected to.

The right to freedom of expression allows for protesters to express whatever views they like about the policies and actions of a particular country. However, a line is crossed when slogans like "One oppressor one bullet!", "Death to Zionists!" and "What a pity Hitler never finished the job" are shouted at community members attending communal events or outside their

places of work. Likewise, social media references to "Jewish supremacist monsters" is out-and-out Jew-baiting, however much it is dressed up as a moral crusade.

The Cape Board decided last week that enough was enough, and went public with its concerns. In a strongly worded statement, it called on local religious leaders and the government to put a stop to these targeted protests at Jewish facilities (which include the historic Gardens Synagogue – the "Mother congregation" of South African Jewry – as well as the South African Jewish Museum, Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, and Gardens Jewish Community Centre). The fact that those responsible continually refer in their social media posts to organisations that have nothing to do with Israel, yet are Jewish, cannot be interpreted as anything other than hatred of the Jewish community. The Board will "not stand by idly and allow members of our community to be harassed at our places of work, home, and worship" the statement declared. The Cape statement has since been picked up by a number of news outlets, with Executive Director Daniel Bloch also

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



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

being interviewed by SABC News. I commend Daniel on the dignified, restrained but forthright manner in which he presented our community's case.

Though the Board's focus has necessarily been on confronting the growing prevalence of inflammatory demonstrations against our community as a whole, we continue also to follow through on individual instances of antisemitic abuse that have come to our notice. Last week, a long-running case concerning antisemitic verbal abuse against a Cape Town community member was satisfactorily resolved through a successful mediation process hosted by the South African Human Rights Commission. Another, more recent, hate speech matter, in this instance involving hate mail on the part of a religious leader, is also being followed up, and we're confident of a similarly satisfactory outcome.

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

Letters

ISRAEL THRIVING DEMOCRACY, NOT ORWELLIAN DYSTOPIA

How appalling that you saw fit to publish the article by Dr Martin Sherman on mob rule in Israel, (Orwellian dystopia descends on the Jewish state, *SA Jewish Report*, 18 May 2023). Though it's admirable to publish diverse views, his article has done a disservice to the right-wing and even those who are pro judicial reform. There are a plethora of good articles promoting the reform, and this isn't one of them. I would refer the readers to the latest edition of the *Jerusalem Report*, which contains a respectful debate between me and the Kohelet Forum on the merits and demerits of the judicial reform.

The *SA Jewish Report* has published what is little better than gutter journalism.

Sherman has shown disrespect for ordinary citizens of Israel protesting on the streets. The remarks are scandalous, twisted, and irrational. Protesters are presented as a mob with sinister, conspiratorial aspirations. It's an inconvenient

truth that the elite of Israeli civil society has strongly protested against the judicial reforms. These include Nobel laureates, top economists, the Bank of Israel, retired military and security commanders, lawyers, tech entrepreneurs, trade unions, businessmen, and academics. Sheba Medical Center, the largest in the Middle East and rated as a top-10 global hospital by *Newsweek*, agreed to participate in a national strike against the reforms, but at the eleventh hour, the strike was averted.

Israel is the antithesis of an Orwellian dystopia. It's a free, robust, thriving country. Orwell's classic book, *1984*, was about a highly centralised, totalitarian government which suppressed free thought and individual liberty – the exact consequences which protesters against the reform wish to avoid. Classic constitutional democratic discourse isn't double talk.

The controversy over reform is about

constitutional government, separation of powers, checks and balances, and protection of fundamental rights. It's the clarion call of outdated legal positivism and those pursuing parliamentary sovereignty to oversimplify and denigrate the role of the judiciary.

Over at least the past 300 years, the progress and liberty of leading Western countries shows that those who follow the recipe he despises have been the most successful. Certainly a strong judiciary is a vital ingredient. We need only look at the excesses of apartheid South Africa as an exemplar of a supreme parliament he desires with no checks and balances.

Reason, fortunately, will prevail but no thanks to the *SA Jewish Report*. – **Lawrence Nowosenetz, Tel Aviv, Israel**

The SA Jewish Report does its best to give as many perspectives as possible. – Editor

Chad Saldsman

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Cape community unites with charity five-a-side



Mordechai's Miracles from the Gardens Shul won the inter-shul five-a-side soccer competition

The Rabbinical Association of the Western Cape (RAWC) partnered with the South African Jewish Museum for an inter-shul five-a-side soccer competition on 21 May, benefiting Parkfields Primary School in Hanover Park, Cape Town. Appropriately for Shavuot, the new rabbinical association's motto, "One Community – One Heart" was on full display by the shul and teams. Proceeds went towards a printer, shoes, and stationery for the school's foundation phase. Said Rabbi Osher Feldman, the chairperson of RAWC, "The Mordechai's Miracles [Gardens Shul] team may have won the hard-fought trophy, but in truth, the ultimate winner is the Cape Town Jewish community."

UJW emphasises support for Israel at 91st AGM

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg's 91st annual general meeting (AGM) on 18 May featured Bafana Modise from the South African Friends of Israel. Modise, guest speaker at the AGM, visits Israel regularly, and recognises its right to exist as a national homeland for the Jewish people. He informs communities around the country about Israel's positives, particularly its contribution to high-tech, medicine, and agriculture, and challenges the notion of Israel as an apartheid state.



Bafana Modise

Yeshiva pupils trained in self-defence

Yeshiva College Grades 4, 5, and 6 have been trained in self-defence over the past few weeks in a course run by the Community Security Organisation. Grade 4s and 5s had two sessions introducing them to self-defence, while Grade 6s had six-hour sessions. The two-week course included awareness of surroundings; learning how to strike; and how to get away from danger. The additional four weeks for Grade 6s included managing chokes, escaping dangerous situations; and most importantly, leadership principles. Thanks to Liron Sanders and Greg Surmany for organising the sessions.



Batsheva Israel and Liron Sanders

Full STEAM ahead for Torah Academy Israel Week

Torah Academy Nursery School celebrated Israel Week on 19 May, culminating in a school wide Shabbos party and gathering for Yom Yerushalayim. The children visited the four holy cities, delving into their significance, unique sites, and attractions while using STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and maths) activities to expand their experiences. They visited the Kotel, drew cards for our *chayalim* thanking them for their protection, made hummus and Israeli salad from scratch at the *shuk*, and had fun at the beach in Tiberius, with sensory and water play.

ORT announces Roland Sassoon as new president

ORT SA has announced the appointment of Roland Sassoon as its new president. Sassoon is a banking and finance veteran, and is former chief executive of Sasfin Bank. He is also an entrepreneur who has been involved in financing small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for more than 50 years. He's known for strategic thinking, an innovative approach to doing business, and a commitment to staff development. As president of ORT SA, an education and training organisation affiliated to World ORT, Sassoon will provide strategic leadership and oversight of the organisation's activities and programmes. "For more than 50 years, I have been closely involved in financing SMEs, and I

look forward to applying this experience to ORT SA in assisting entrepreneurs to establish their businesses," he says. "SMEs in South Africa are facing huge challenges with inflation, power failures, probable recession, high interest rates, unemployment, poor skills, and so on," Sassoon says. "For most, unfortunately, the goal is survival rather than thriving in these tough times, although of course there are always opportunities especially in new technologies such as online business and, of course, artificial intelligence. ORT assists SMEs in various ways such as strategising, marketing, and financing. As non-executive president, I hope to provide some guidance in fulfilling its purpose."



Roland Sassoon

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