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Absa Jewish Achiever Awards recognises rising stars

STAFF REPORTER

The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2023, which will be held on 21 October, will include a brand new award – the Rising Star Award – recognising a new generation of leaders.

“We have realised that in order for our community to thrive, we want to recognise, encourage, and bolster a new generation of leaders,” said Absa Jewish Achiever Awards Chairperson Howard Sackstein.

“There are many young people in our community who are making a huge difference in every sphere, including entrepreneurship, fulfilling the needs of our community, and humanitarian work.”

With nominations opening on 15 June, it's time for schools, shuls, individuals, and humanitarian organisations to consider who they will nominate for the first Rising Star Award.

“We want to be able to recognise the roles these 25-year-olds and under are playing as emerging leaders,” said Sackstein. “They are creating a new generation of exceptional leadership for our community. We have seen this in the pages of the *SA Jewish Report*. We see young people importing Prime drinks, involved in software development, and running humanitarian causes.

“They follow a long legacy of remarkable South African Jews who have built South Africa in every area. We want to highlight the exceptional and extraordinary among these young leaders.

He said the award was named the Rising Star Award because these

outstanding young people are at the threshold of their leadership roles.

“They are only starting out in their careers, and still have amazing futures ahead,” Sackstein said. “We want to recognise them now, as they are still 25 or younger, at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards on the night of 21 October 2023.”

The *SA Jewish Report* team wants to “create role models to encourage others to get their hands dirty and tackle the real issues in our country”, Sackstein said.

He said it was vital that young people stand up and show the rest of us leadership. “These are the leaders of the future,” he said. “These are the people who will take South Africa into the future. They will heal our country.”

Those who stand a chance to win the Rising Star Award will need to be doing extraordinary and unique things. They will have to be 25 or under on the day of the award ceremony.

Until 2017, the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards had a category specifically for young entrepreneurs. Sackstein recalls when Nadav Ossendryver won it in 2014, “he came to the ceremony with his maths books because he was writing matric maths the next day”.

Though this new award isn't specific to business, Ossendryver would have qualified as a rising star because with Latest Sightings, he went on to create the largest YouTube channel in Africa, with more than two billion views on YouTube and more than one billion views across all other social media channels.

“Our community cultivates, nurtures, and rewards young leaders in all areas, so we will be doing so too from now on,” he said.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Johnny Clegg and Nadav Ossendryver with the Young Jewish Entrepreneur Award in 2014

An antidote for anxiety

Torah Thought



Rabbi Shmuel Ozhekh – Ohr Somayach Cape Town and co-founder of the Eden Jewish Meditation App

The Asafsuf, a group of complainers that were sick of being manna eating vegans, turned to Moshe and demanded meat. Hashem responded by flying in an overabundance of quail, and eventually killed the Asafsuf for their obsessive desire for meat. The area became known as Kivros Hataiva (the burial spot of desire).

The Shem Mi-Shmuel (1855-1926) asks a fundamental question about this story. He's perplexed why the Asafsuf desired anything other than manna. If we know that manna tasted like anything you wanted it to taste like, why didn't it suffice for meat?

He explains a fundamental idea that relates to anxiety. The name Asafsuf, comes from the words *sof, sof* (in the end). The Asafsuf weren't motivated by their desire for meat, they were worried about the future.

Manna was the food of angels, and to enter into this supernal diet wasn't a simple shift. For years before the exodus, Hashem would secretly rain down manna, causing it to dissolve into rivers, from which animals and plant life would drink and grow. Absorbed into the bodies of the animals and plants, then consumed by people, the Israelites were acclimatising for their eventual pure manna diet in the desert.

On the verge of entering into the land of Israel, the Asafsuf became worried that their diet would soon revert back to a corporeal one. They were concerned that they wouldn't have enough time to acclimatise, and thus requested real meat to ease them into their future diet in Israel.

The Shem Mi-Shmuel explains that their sin was lack of trust in Hashem and over concern about the future.

Yes, they were being pragmatic, although they should have taken a deep breath and realised that Hashem wouldn't just shift their diet drastically. Just like he took care of them on entering the desert, he would take care of them in entering into the land of Israel.

The Balvavi comments on how the main source of anxiety is our imagination, and concern about the future. Instead of being present in what we know, which is the here and now, and practically managing our state of affairs with tranquillity and connection to Hashem, we tend to become overly obsessive about the perceived deleterious outcomes of

the future.

The plague was thus not a punishment, but the outcome of the Asafsuf's affliction with anxiety.

The Torah teaches us that one of the main steps in healing our anxious tendency is to relinquish over thinking about the future and ask ourselves: what do I truly know for certain? The only thing that you know truly for certain is the moment you're in now.

Take a deep breath, release your worries about the future, reconnect with your trust in Hashem, and enter into consciousness of the present moment you have in front of you right now.

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Each of the menorah's seven lamps were filled with pure olive oil and kindled on a daily basis, and would burn through the night. The preparation of the lamps appears to have been even more important than the lighting itself. Any Jew was qualified to light the menorah, but only Aaron and his descendants were allowed to perform the preparation.

Spielberg tells untold story of pilots who saved Israel

TALI FEINBERG

She may be the sister of the world’s most famous filmmaker, but Nancy Spielberg is a force in her own right. And just like her brother, Steven, she’s committed to telling in-depth stories of Jewish life, culture, and history with her own unique style and vision.

This is made clear in her documentary *Above and Beyond*, which captures an unbelievable story lost to history. Perfectly titled, it tells how a ragtag group of volunteer fighter pilots and friends of the Jewish people went above and beyond the call of duty to save the fledgling state of Israel from destruction in 1948.

“How did I find this story? It literally fell into my lap,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*, a day after she generously allowed the newspaper to screen the film in a webinar, to the delight of a worldwide audience. “A stranger sent me an email saying, ‘This should be your next story.’

“It was the obituary of Al Schwimmer, an American World War II flight engineer who told David Ben Gurion, ‘You don’t have a chance if you don’t have an air force. I’m going to help you build one.’ The title of the obituary was ‘father of the Israeli Air Force dies at age 94’.”

“I was stunned that an American would be given credit for the establishment of the Israeli Air Force, which is one of the strongest air forces in the world. And I said, ‘This is an incredible story, this has to be told.’”

She got that email around November 2011, and started filming in 2012, finishing in 2015. She produced the documentary, and Roberta Grossman directed it.

But it wasn’t the best time to be launching a film about the founding of the Jewish state. “Even though world opinion [of Israel] is worse today, it was pretty bad then too,” she reflects. “Not one country in Europe wanted even to hear about Israel. It was a tough time, and it definitely limited distribution.” But she soldiered on, and the film has reached many audiences since.

“After my brother did *Schindler’s List*, I think all of us realised the importance of documenting visual testimonies,” she says. “We are a visual society. Seeing is believing.”

But she quickly realised that capturing the story on screen might slip through her fingers because every day, the very people she needed to speak to were ageing or passing away. “I would set up an interview and then I’d follow up the next week to solidify it, and I would hear that person was sick or had passed away.

“We realised that they were what we call ‘endangered interviews’. We had to run, we couldn’t wait until we had the money. We knew that time was of the essence.”

Some of the pilots had no Jewish identity or were even ashamed of being Jewish. But they felt an unexplained sense of duty to come to the aid of the Jewish people. For many, it changed their relationship with their roots, and was the defining moment of their lives.

The film includes archival footage that takes the viewer into the heart of the action. “Any documentary filmmaker knows that they’re going to have to use archival footage, which costs a fortune,” says Spielberg. “But



Nancy Spielberg and her husband Shimon Katz with the late Israeli President Shimon Peres



Nancy Spielberg and her daughter, Jessica Katz, having a dance break on set

pilots’ families, which was incredible – to see these guys in their youth. They were dashing. Even if I sat across from a 90-year-old face, when I looked into those eyes, I saw that 25-year-old.”

How did she find her subjects? Essentially because these men are really a “band of brothers,” they brought her into their network. The first person she spoke to was the late Israeli President Shimon Peres. “My lawyer in Israel, Yair Green, said, ‘I’m friendly with the president. Do you want to ask him questions?’ So they gave me 25 minutes with the president. He started to tell me stories about his own participation, how he was sent to America to help raise money, to bring back weapons.” He landed up talking to her for almost an hour.

“He mentioned Lou Lenart [who is featured in the film] and [Harold] Smokey Simon – who was South African, and was the most incredible guy. He got married, and three weeks later, the two of them went to Israel and volunteered.”

She says because Smokey ensured all the volunteers remained connected over the decades, “he was my key” in connecting her to the volunteers, especially the ones that he knew would have the best and most accurate stories to tell. In turn, they connected her with their buddies, and so it went.

“There were a couple of situations where two guys hated each other!” she remembers. “And I thought, ‘We’ll never have a premiere with all these guys in the same room because they may be with crutches or walkers and in their nineties, but they’re gonna have a fight!’”

The film has had a hugely positive impact,

Spielberg says. “I get email from people saying, ‘This made me want to be a better Jew’ or ‘This made me proud to be a Jew.’ In this day and age, it’s so important, with people finding it difficult to wear their Judaism proudly and because there’s so much anti-Israel sentiment.”

In addition, “I wanted people who don’t like Israel to think back about what it was like. There was a plan, a two-state solution. The Jews accepted it, and the other side refused. So when everybody talks about Israel being this ‘occupier’, they have to go back to what happened: Israel defending itself and that there was a plan on the table that was refused.”

What surprised her most about making the film was how “in some ways, I found myself identifying with some of the guys who said they didn’t care about Israel [but still volunteered]. I grew up without a Jewish community for the most part, I grew up with people yelling, ‘The Spielbergs are dirty Jews!’ and I didn’t know anything about Israel.

“But then I went to Israel and I realised we’re all Jews and Israel is my homeland. I felt such a deep connection. I’m an American and I love America, and I’m a Jew and I love Israel.

“The other thing that surprised me, was that we didn’t ask, but each pilot felt the need to tell us two stories. One was about how their moms cried [about them going to volunteer], and you could see it still bothered them. And they all felt the need to tell us about the Altalena [Affair], when there could have been a civil war between Ben Gurion and Menachem Begin.

“South Africans were so much more involved than the Americans in so many ways with their passion, with their experience,” she says. One of these was Eddie Cohen, who is featured in the film, and died on the very first flight that the first four fighter planes took to stop the Egyptians, who were almost in Tel Aviv. “He was 27 years old and 25% of the air force.

“[South Africans]’ passion and commitment ran deeper,” says Spielberg. “I’m not sure why but from what I’ve been told, they had a very Zionist upbringing. So maybe they were just more hardwired for living in Israel, staying in Israel.

“Even today, I see South Africans in Israel that are so passionate, like in Telfed. I think I was afraid of the South African audience saying, ‘Why didn’t you include us?’ I tried to, but I had to limit the story. You can’t have too many characters because you lose your audience.”

To the South African Jewish community, she says, “I’m coming back!” She has visited Johannesburg and Cape Town, and says, “I felt like I fell into a vat of warm chocolate” because the community was so warm and welcoming. “It’s like having family on the other side of the globe, and I love it.”

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Different journey, same finish line for Comrades runners

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Whether it be to break records, honour lost loved ones, raise money for charity, or simply for the love of the race, this year's Comrades Marathon runners are ready to hit the road. As the big day approaches, they share their unique stories.

Though Sunday marks Levi Lipskar's fifth Comrades, his wife is preparing for a gruelling journey of her own – giving birth to the couple's sixth child. Almost 38 weeks along, there's a chance she may go into labour before the race begins. Yet, the hardest thing for her is missing out on the excitement of the ultramarathon, says her husband.

"She's very encouraging of my running, she has more FOMO [fear of missing out] than anything," he says. "She's probably the world's best second at Comrades, so she's upset she can't be there this year." Should the baby arrive before the race, Lipskar won't run. "If it can't happen, then so be it, it's disappointing but not devastating. There are far more important things in life."

Nevertheless, Lipskar, a rabbi and the head of Jewish life at King David Victory Park, has been running for about 13 years and has made some of his closest friends through the pastime. "In my position, it's also a way to express to kids, to families, that you can lead an observant lifestyle and still enjoy the outdoors and stay healthy," he says. "You can do things that are tough and overcome them."

Though he says he's not a super athlete, this motivation together with his strong mind, family, community, and the charities he supports – the Malka Ella Fertility Fund and The Friendship Circle supporting children with special needs – will get him through the race. "Sometimes in a journey when things get tough and you persevere, you see the blessings," he says, speaking of how these causes align with the Comrades.

"It's also about just conversing with people on the road – South Africans from all walks of life. It doesn't matter if you're a chief executive or a street cleaner, at Comrades, you're all trying to accomplish the same thing – the playing field is level. It's very motivating. The most South African I ever feel is at Comrades."

Another Comrades supporter of the Malka Ella Fund is Dr Yossi Unterslak, a reproductive physician who bears witness to the miracles the fund facilitates. Unterslak started running during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown to alleviate stress and anxiety. Slowly, he built up to his first

Comrades, which he ran last year. This year's marathon is the perfect way to honour his late father, he says, dedicated community general practitioner Dr Rodney Unterslak.

"My dream of running the Comrades started with my late dad, who loved the race. We would watch it together when I was a kid," says Unterslak. "This year's Comrades is actually 11 years to the day that my dad passed away, and since my dream began by watching the Comrades with him, I felt it was a fitting tribute to him to run it."

As it's his dad's *yahrzeit* on the day of the marathon, Unterslak will be saying *kaddish* a few times along the road, including at the start and finish of the race. "At the stadium at the end, we'll have a *mincha minyan* and do the last *kaddish* of the day with Jewish people who are planning to finish around the same time as me. There's someone else who's also saying *kaddish* at the end, so hopefully with the others, we'll make a *minyan* together."

The camaraderie of running is a large part of the appeal of the marathon for Ryan Kalk, who will be running the Comrades for the eighth time this year – also in support of Malka Ella. He initially got into running at school when it was a requirement for soccer and cricket, and later recaptured his stride after a breakfast run with his friends. "I don't run because I enjoy running but because I enjoy being around people," he admits. "We spend time chatting, and I'm staying fit and healthy at the same time."

Though Kalk has threatened to quit running the Comrades on multiple occasions, something always draws him back in, whether it be a promise to run with his uncle from Israel or after his passion was reignited by seconding friends who took up the challenge. This year will be particularly special for him because his two oldest children, his sons, will be on the sidelines for the first time.

"We watched the documentary *Down, A Comrades Story* recently because I wanted them to understand what the race is all about," he says. "I'm not just out running and not at home – it's about more than that. Now that they're old enough to be able to manage it and better understand what it's all about, it should be good for them."

For Dr Vic Boston, who will run his 45th consecutive Comrades Marathon this Sunday, quitting has never been an option. Boston, 63, started running the legendary race as a teenager, and hasn't stopped since – aside from the two cancellations over the COVID-19 pandemic. He says his Comrades runs have given him mental strength and stamina. "With Comrades, 70% is in the mind," Boston says.

"It's a great race, it's very healthy, but at the moment, the only thing that's keeping me going is the pressure to break the record," Boston admits. "I've proved it. I've done it. I've got silvers. So now it's just the pressure of those two men ahead of me, who are both in their 70s, going for their 49th and 48th races this year."

"Nothing beats your first Comrades to be honest," he says. "You're going out into the unknown, you're a novice, you just never forget your first one. I was a young boy, but I still remember it. It was uphill and actually very easy." The only one that comes close, says Boston, was his 40th race, when he received an award for the milestone.

In general, running the Comrades is incredibly challenging, he says. "You just *vasbyt*, you don't stop, you've got to finish. Comrades is a fight all the way. It's harder than it looks, especially on a downhill. It's hammering on your body and there is a long recovery time. If you haven't done the homework, don't bother coming to the race."



Thanks to my wife, Ester's, marketing genius, I'm running it under the slogan: 'Living and running for Dr Rod, who lived and ran for everybody else his whole life.'"

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Don't need solar to get your lithium back

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

As we gear up for a cold, dark winter under the looming threat of stage 8 loadshedding, many of our thoughts turn to solar. Yet before cashing in a portion of your home loan or signing a rental agreement, consider whether solar is the right power solution for you.

"The first question I always ask people is what problem are you trying to solve?" says Gidon Kruger, a chartered accountant and the co-founder of Lalela Retail, which imports and distributes back-up power solutions and supplies major retailers including Builders Warehouse and Leroy Merlin. "Are you just trying to stop the inconvenience of loadshedding? Then you don't need solar."

Those investigating solar, he says, are generally either wanting to save on rising Eskom tariffs by generating their own electricity, or have experienced regular prolonged outages due to faulty substations that blow because of loadshedding.

With record increases of 18.65% for standard Eskom customers and 18.49% for municipalities for the 2023/2024 financial year, it's not surprising that people are seeking alternative power sources. Yet, says Kruger, tariffs would need to increase significantly and continuously for solar to offer a true saving. "The truth is that from an economic perspective, solar doesn't necessarily really make sense yet – its financial benefits aren't black and white."

Consider other alternative energy solutions before investing in solar



That's why he suggests investigating other options first, especially if your budget is tight and mitigating the effects of loadshedding is your sole motivation. If staying connected for work is your primary concern, consider a WiFi UPS, which costs R1 400 and provides back-up power for your router.

"That will keep your internet up even through stage 8 loadshedding," says Kruger. For below R2 000, one can also purchase a laptop power bank that can keep the laptop running for an additional two and a half hours if its battery life is limited.

For wider but still affordable back-up coverage, consider an inverter trolley. "These are plug-and-play solutions that you buy off the shelf," Kruger says. "You plug them into the wall like an extension cord and then plug whatever you want into that, be it your television, your computer, your router, or anything with small voltage."

Yet, when purchasing any kind of inverter, be wary of certain battery types. "Lead acid is dead acid and gel is from hell," Kruger cautions. Generally lasting for between 150 to 250 cycles, these batteries were made for inverters designed for old loadshedding schedules that generally spanned only stages 1 to 4. There also used to be power cuts for only about 50 days a year. What we're dealing with now is completely different.

"With today's loadshedding frequency, within three to six months, your battery's going to be completely dead," Kruger warns. That's why when buying any inverter, he advises purchasing a lithium battery. It offers roughly 2 000 cycles, and you'll get 10 times the lifespan out of it, so even though you're paying more upfront, you're saving in the long run.

If you buy an inverter and lithium battery that is wired through your home or into your distribution board (DB board), the capacity and costs will depend on the size of your home and what you're looking to power. For example, in an apartment or townhouse, you're able to keep your TV, your internet, your fridge, and your lights on – as long as they're LED – with a 3KVA (kilovolt ampere) inverter and a 2.5kW (kilowatt-hour) battery that gets wired into your DB board. This costs about R35 000 to R40 000, says Kruger. If you live in a bigger property, you need higher wattage and battery capacity, and the costs therefore increase. For example, a small to medium size house will need a 5KVA inverter and 5kW battery and will cost around R65 000 to R75 000.

"Even if we do reach stage 8, we're looking at four to four and a half hours of outages at a time," he says. "You have at least three and a half hours in between to recharge your batteries before the next loadshedding cycle, and so an inverter and lithium battery is sufficient." Should your needs change or you want solar power but can't quite afford it yet, you've laid the groundwork by installing a lithium battery inverter which is basically solar ready.

"When you install the solar panels, the portion of what they produce through the sun's photons will get used immediately," says Eitan Glassman, electrical engineer and the founder of niche energy savings solutions company GreenMatters Engineering. "The excess will then be stored in the battery, which can be used for times when the sun isn't shining and at night."

Yet, cautions Kruger, in spite of the fact that night time is when we consume the most power, many solar systems are

set up only as back-up power. "To really save money, you have to set up the inverter to run the battery every single evening regardless of loadshedding," he says. However, one battery will get you through only four and a half hours, after which you'll automatically revert to Eskom power unless you have multiple batteries and panels.

Solar systems vary in cost. "For an entry-level system with a 5KVA inverter, a 5kW battery, and eight 450W (watt) panels, you're looking at about R130 000, fully installed," says Kruger. Yet if you want to go off the grid and not rely on Eskom at all, you'll pay about R500 000. On the plus side, you can claim cash back on your residential solar system. According to National Treasury, individuals will be able to claim a rebate to the value of 25% of the cost of new and unused solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, up to a maximum of R15 000 per individual.

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upfront – whether through savings or by taking the money out of your home loan, an increasingly popular option. It's a nuanced decision that needs to take into account factors like how long you're planning to stay in your home and whether you'll still want solar if and when the Eskom crisis is resolved.

Rental options are affordable, for example ranging from about R1 740 from GoSolr to R1 900 a month from Versofy Solar, which both include ongoing maintenance. Yet, it pays to read the fine print. Some contracts lock you into a three-year commitment which, if broken early, is subject to hefty penalties. Others go month to month but then charge more than R20 000 to decommission the system.

Though reputable companies do due diligence when they use third party installers, it's generally your responsibility to ensure that your workmen are reputable, Glassman cautions. "I've seen people who install gardening or fire systems now selling solar, anyone that has a bakkie and offers some form of house services is now selling solar," he says. Research the company you use, ensure they're health and safety compliant, and ensure they have a good track record by obtaining independent references.

For any solar system, you need a certificate of compliance from a reputable electrician. "Ask for an expert electrician card which means that they have the qualifications to understand electricity and install electricity correctly," Glassman says.

SA throws BRICS at terrorism, but impact doubtful

>>Continued from page 1

"Whether South Africa takes terrorism more seriously is doubtful," says Gon. "I don't think this will particularly shield the Jewish community from attacks, but the undertaking should indicate a preparedness to investigate the threats the community receives. I'm just not sure it will result in the authorities acting more quickly and successfully. That depends on the capacity of crime fighting agencies locally."

Willem Els, senior training co-ordinator at the Institute for Security Studies, notes that "[BRICS] is addressing new and current threats that should be read with the fact that South Africa has been greylisted, and it is being pushed for more and stronger action.

"That's not only for South Africa to get out of the greylisting, but to avoid further financial punishment," he says. "I think it may just be a positive development that will create a safer and more secure environment for South African citizens."

"One would certainly hope in an ideal world that this kind of declaration would make South Africa more even-handed, fair, and more willing to critique all sides in conflicts," says Silke.

"But I think one has to face the reality that the current South African administration is clearly, by virtue of silence, acquiescing to certain of these conflicts while singling out others.

"The proof is in the pudding," Silke says. "We'll have to wait and see whether South Africa adopts a more responsible stance on broad global issues. I'm not hopeful though."

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Presidential initiative to solve our problems

There’s something exciting about being first at anything. When it’s a competition and you have worked hard for it, it’s hugely satisfying. When you’re chosen to go first in giving a presentation or examination, it may be daunting because you don’t have a frame of reference from those who went before you. However, the fact that you’re chosen to go first is generally a compliment. You’ve been selected to set a specific standard, or so I would imagine. Or to be a guinea pig and trusted to test the waters.

I’m talking about the fact that Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who is a real fan of the South African Jewish community and our country as a whole, chose us to be the first to participate in his ambitious leadership plan called “The Voice of The People – the president’s initiative for worldwide Jewish dialogue”. The idea is for us to give the president perspectives and guidance in how to solve problems within the Jewish world, especially between the Jewish state and the diaspora.

As a fan of this Israeli president, I think, in principle, it’s an outstanding idea. The aim of creating a world Jewish advisory council to prevent problems within our world from escalating to dangerous levels is inspired. There’s no doubt there’s a dire need for getting past our problems with each other. And I love the idea of a global Jewish *Beit Midrash*.

I was cautiously optimistic when we ran a story about it in our special Israel-focused Yom Ha’atzmaut edition. I was cautious because, as with so many great plans, they take years to get off the ground... if they ever do. So, when shortly after his announcement, I and many others in the community were invited to participate in the first in a “series of strategic laboratories” around the world in June and July, I was impressed. It was going to happen, and the president wasn’t wasting any time in launching it.

Though we were the first, representing Africa, there are to be other such laboratories in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, the United Kingdom, France, Hungary, Australia, and obviously Israel. There will also be virtual labs in Hebrew and English.

Without doubt, the sooner this is done the better, so we can sift through problems and come up with positive solutions to create a safe space with each other and identify commonalities.

I know there are some who find my blanket desire to find solutions within our communities too idealistic or removed from reality. So be it! However, the truth is that if we don’t sort out our differences and find ways to work together in peace, accepting each other’s perspectives, we make room for our enemies to do so much more harm. United, we cannot be defeated.

I believe the president’s intention is to help us – as in the entire Jewish world – sort out our nonsense and make diaspora Jewry feel a part of Israel. He has my full support in that.

On Monday, we gathered – Jews from Cape Town, Durban, Joburg and Israel – at Beyachad to find a starting point in this process.

It was fabulous to interact with people, some of whom I only knew by name before this, who were just as committed to our community and Jewish world as I am. It was a gift! As Jews do though, there was a lot of chatter. The truth is, you cannot put Jews together without giving them time to have a good old chinwag. It’s who we are.

I loved the fact that there were religious and secular, Orthodox and progressive, young and not so young, left and right-wing supporters of Israel and South Africa present. All these people took time out of their busy lives to be there because they, too, wanted to make this work.

There was truly a mix of communal leaders, all of whom had very strong opinions they wanted to share. And that’s exactly what Herzog wanted us to do.

Did we achieve anything specific? I’m not sure we did. We shared ideas that might need time to brew and deepen substantially.

However, though there were some who didn’t think the day took us anywhere worthwhile, I’m glad this process has begun. It’s going to have teething problems. Every new venture or brainchild does. It has never been done before, and there isn’t a clear or obvious way to make it work.

However, as long as we in the Jewish world remain committed to making it work, it will.

I’m sure that those behind the initiative will take what they learnt from Monday’s gathering and make the next one in the next country better. So, perhaps we were guinea pigs in this regard. But I believe the reason Herzog gave us the role of going first was because he trusts our commitment to each other, to the Jewish world and obviously, to Israel.

He has said numerous times how unique and close-knit our community here is and how in spite of having many differences, we work so well together to achieve a goal.

There are few Jewish communities around the world quite like ours. We’re a true community!

I agree that we were a good starting block. However, the proof is in the proverbial pudding, and we aren’t going to see that for a while. I trust that Herzog will achieve his goal, and I look forward to seeing who will make up the global *Beit Midrash* and what it will achieve. Idealist or not, this is essential, and I want to see it work.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



SA – increasingly the proverbial curate’s egg

OPINION

MIKE ABEL



There’s a story I heard as a child from Bishop Cowdry, my best friend, John’s, dad. My mom, Hermione, met John’s mother, Bettie, at the nursing home, when they were both waiting to have their babies. John and I were born one day apart, and have been brothers for 56 years.

The Cowdrys would come to the Abels for Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, and we’d all go to them for Easter and Christmas. A magnificent tradition that lasted for more than 40 years until our parents passed.

So here’s the story. A curate (the assistant to a senior clergyman) is dining with his boss, the bishop. The bishop says to the curate, “I’m afraid you’ve got a bad egg there.” To which the nervous curate, not wanting to upset the bishop, responds, “Oh no my Lord, it’s excellent in parts.”

And this is where we find ourselves right now in our much loved South Africa. A place with significant issues, but still good in parts. And sometimes that can be hard to see. As that age-old truism goes: “It’s all about perspective.”

There’s little doubt we’re enduring significantly worrying times. As if rolling blackouts of up to half a day aren’t bad enough, some suburbs and cities endure frequent water supply issues and calamitous droughts due to horrendous neglect and poor water-provision planning and management. More than 20 people have died recently from cholera in Hammanskraal. All tragically and maddeningly avoidable.

And then, we’re bombarded with news of the ghoulish spectre of a potential grid collapse and the apocalyptic wasteland of Mad Max proportions that would ensue. Right now, we’re sadly no Xanadu. But where is?

And I’ll be the first to admit that our highly questionable and damaging global perception of cosying up to Russia, true or not, as the Union Buildings restates our neutrality, have me, as my grandparents generation might have observed, having a conniption.

The possible implications and socio-economic fallout from our geopolitical meanderings may have many unintended consequences in a country with zero financial give.

There’s no margin for error with our debt-to-gross-domestic-product ratio, our record unemployment levels, and our climbing interest rates, with additional greylisting status. All rather troubling and little space to tinker with domestic and foreign-investment faith. Our current bond sell-offs tell that story.

So, against this backdrop, which may not be considered entirely ideal for peace of mind, why do I still have faith in South Africa?

The first answer is our people. South Africans, by and large, are incredibly decent, kind, patient, resourceful, resilient, and good. I experience this every single day.

We South African Jews don’t come from a happy past – any of us. Those who fled Russia, Lithuania, or Poland. Those who escaped Germany. We’ve seen how “civilised” countries are capable of the most extreme barbarism to their citizens. And extreme brutality to other countries far from home via colonialism, with nary a concern for the owners and local inhabitants of those countries.

It’s been said, if the British could have lifted the pyramids, they’d be in a museum in the United Kingdom today. This tongue-in-cheek observation isn’t entirely without foundation.

Would I like to live in a country considered the greatest democracy on earth, but where guns outnumber citizens?

Is South Africa at its lowest ebb right now? Definitely not. We live in a country with huge issues, none of which we can’t fix with the right people, in the right place, making the right decisions, but it’s a free country. It’s not a place where 90% of the population live in abject poverty due to significantly constrained freedoms while 10% enjoy a good life. That’s an aberration. One we knew only too well.

South Africa is sadly nowhere near where it should be almost 30 years post-apartheid. The inequality gap should have closed considerably over these three decades, and when you see what a Singapore, Israel, or United Arab

Emirates have achieved over the same period with very limited resources compared to our abundance of natural assets, it’s a profound tragedy.

It’s the impact of trillions of rands of maladministration and corruption. It’s all mostly fixable, but only if we make the right decisions about leadership and implementation. That’s where it begins and where it ends.

We have world-rivalling companies in tech, banking, telecoms, agriculture, mining, the creative industry, manufacturing, healthcare, green energy, automotive, retail, and more. All exceptional in every way.

Big business and the smaller entrepreneurs that make up our country can, if liberated to do so, transform South Africa. These are the good parts of the curate’s egg. Layer on that our hospitality industry and natural assets. Our extreme beauty, our tourism possibilities, and our affordability, South Africa can and should be booming.

Our government, policies, and decisions just need to be able

to unlock all this potential. And we can play a huge role in directing this. Through guidance, through pressure, through wisdom, and at the ballot box. We have a huge job to do. But it can be done.

Hunter S Thompson wrote something that I love and try to live by, “Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming ‘Wow! What a ride!’”

And this is our South Africa.

Hugely challenging. Far from perfect. Full of ups and downs. But the ride of a lifetime, if you can stay on the horse until it stops bucking. If you can play your role in calming it and taking it into the meadows for a more gentle ride.

In no way do I underplay our significant challenges, but there are equally as many opportunities to drive positive change and live a meaningful and rewarding life.



The very personal question to ask is, “Is it enough?” And there should be absolutely no judgement either way.

But if one is to stay in South Africa, rather than simply complain, ideally you need to get involved, as many do, in making a tangible difference. Not rely solely on others to do all the hard (but sometimes rewarding) work for you.

• Mike Abel is the founding partner and chief executive officer of M&C Saatchi Abel.

Vaping – the Venus flytrap of our youth

OPINION

DR ANTON MEYBERG



It's a drug, it's expensive, and it's highly addictive. Worse, it's turning our children into liars.

The challenge with vaping is that it sounds innocuous. Drug companies have been brilliant at marketing it, and have made the concept seem so appealing. Modern vaping tools look like USB flash drives. They're odourless, and so easy to hide. They put up stalls at shopping centres and staff them with good-looking young people. They are vibey, and have made it look trendy to walk around with an e-cigarette. The colours of the sales stands are bright and eye catching, even "healthy" looking. A modern day Venus flytrap baiting its victim.

A quick look around the world shows that vaping is now the most commonly-used tobacco product among teens in the United States, putting them at risk of smoking and a life-time addiction.



Respiratory issues related to vaping have increased exponentially in 2023

Vaping-related lipoid pneumonia develops due to inhalation of the oily substances found in intense liquid cartridges. Vaping can cause an acute, progressive form of life-threatening respiratory failure leading to intensive-care admission and being placed on life support.

Breathing in the harmful chemicals from vaping products can cause irreversible

lung damage as well as heart disease, and lead to biological changes that are associated with cancer development.

I have done many talks and podcasts on the vaping epidemic. The question I'm often asked is: is vaping worse than smoking cigarettes? The answer is simple. If a pedestrian gets hit by a speeding car or by a motorbike, are they still going to get injured? The answer is obvious. Though vaping is less severe than smoking, it still has detrimental effects on our bodies, our central nervous systems, and the environment.

So why hasn't the government banned vaping in public, just like it has smoking? That will come soon enough.

The environmental impacts of vaping also need to be addressed. Most vaping devices contain metals and plastics that can take many years to decompose. Plastic never fully decomposes, and lands up polluting our food and drinking water.

Another common question is: surely it's better to use vaping to help stop smoking? This, too, is a myth. No official health guidelines include vaping in smoking cessation guidelines. The simple answer is that vaping is bad for you regardless of your age.

We live in a society that's always looking for a new kick or something to help build our self-esteem among our peers. Be sure – vaping isn't it.

Vaping is a dangerous habit. It's an addictive drug and lands up causing many medical and psychological issues. It's critical for parents and educators to be informed and empowered and stop this epidemic before it spirals further out of control.

• Dr Anton Meyberg is a specialist physician and pulmonologist in private practice, which is largely responsible for the Intensive-Care Unit at Linksfeld Clinic in Johannesburg. He is passionate about healthcare and education.



While vaping comes across as cool, the health risks are dire

Australia has recently restricted the use of vaping, making it illegal for those under the age of 18 and, with new legislation, it will be available by prescription only.

In June 2022, the US Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of the JUUL e-cigarette.

In South Africa, the finance minister announced in the 2022 Budget on 23 February 2022 that excise duty on vaping tobacco products would be introduced.

This week, on Tuesday 6 June, New Zealand has now announced a ban on disposable vapes and new vape shops will not be allowed near schools or meeting grounds.

So, what's all the fuss about?

The consequences of vaping are becoming more apparent to me in my practice over time. Whereas last year, I saw a few teens and adolescents with respiratory issues related to vaping, in the past six months, the numbers have spiralled three-fold, with many presenting with asthma, chronic coughs, and chronic respiratory issues. I have dealt with at least 50 patients during this time.

As innocuous as it may seem, vaping devices contain nicotine. Nicotine is a stimulant. This causes an increase in heart rate, headaches, dry mouth, as well as blood pressure. There's a causal link between vaping and asthma, heart attacks, recurrent coughing, increased phlegm, chronic bronchitis, and sinusitis.

More than 7 000 different flavours are added to vaping mixtures including cotton candy, chocolate, strawberry muffin, and many others. These additives are also linked to increased dental cavities as well as halitosis (bad breath).

One of the main reasons why vaping is so bad for teens and adolescents is the fact that the human brain is the last organ in the body to develop fully, a process that takes until their early 20s. Vaping affects the central nervous system causing mood disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, irritability, memory problems, as well as poor impulse control. With a major risk to the youth of dependence and addiction.

Nicotine causes the brain to release a hormone called dopamine, causing feelings of pleasure and happiness, which in turn encourages more nicotine use and leads to addiction, especially in teens who are much more vulnerable due to their ongoing brain development.

Vaping isn't safe. The aerosols that are inhaled in

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Farming community recalls lyrical years in Leslie

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish children who grew up in the tiny farming town of Leslie, Mpumalanga, had an idyllic childhood and enjoyed a thriving communal life. They remember running around on the dusty streets wearing their kippot and never facing a hint of antisemitism, and sitting on “mielie bags” during *cheder* classes, after hiding from their teacher who had to drive two hours from Johannesburg. All of these memories and a deep feeling of nostalgia came to the fore at a community reunion at Frangelicas in Johannesburg on 4 June. Though members of the community are now scattered around South Africa and the globe, they made the effort to come together to remember a golden era.

“Country living instilled a close-knit community which encouraged amazing values of sincerity, responsibility, family, and close friendships, regardless of age difference. The reunion keeps those values alive,” says Leslie Rubin who organised the event with Raymond Kramer. Both grew up on farms in the area.

He estimates that at the community’s height, it had about 35 to 40 families. About 60 people attended the reunion. “The highlight was seeing old friends and reminiscing about the past with the children and grandchildren of foundation members of the Leslie Shul. The warm and welcoming shul was the focal point of Jewish social life for townsfolk and farmers on Leslie’s outskirts.

“As early as 1900, Jews were known to have prospected for gold in the area, and had also embarked on farming to earn a living,” says Rubin. “People farmed mielies, potatoes, beans, grains sorghum, cattle, and sheep.” Some families arrived from Lithuania while others had been in South Africa for generations. His own family came to the area from Bethel.

As the Jewish presence in the area grew, “the Jewish communities of Leslie, Devon, and Kinross were in need of a shul. At first my father, Solly Rubin, had an office in the Main Street,” says Rubin. “*Minyans* were held there.

Dave Katz lobbied for a shul to be built. He donated the land and collected pledges. The shul was consecrated in 1964, and it also had a hall attached.

“The Sefer Torah was entrusted to Jacob Snipelisky, Louis Lunz, Ezra Kagan, and Gustav Buxbaum for safeguarding, and Mr Katz became chairperson. The shul attracted a warm congregation, which enjoyed religious services and communal functions. It was sadly closed in 1992 due to diminishing numbers.” Drought was one of the reasons for farmers leaving the area. Possibly one Jewish person remains in the region today.

But the community has carried its history forward. “The sharing of stories and anecdotes contributed to a memorable and uplifting evening [at the reunion]. It felt like being part of a large happy family. I was privileged to enjoy an amazing childhood of family love, close bonds with sincere friends, and the freedom of living on a large farm. Sometimes we would visit friends and forget to leave for a day or two!”

A reunion was held 18 years ago, and one planned a few years ago didn’t occur because of the COVID-19 pandemic. “About four weeks ago, Raymond called me and said we should do it as soon as possible, otherwise it wouldn’t happen,” says Rubin. The event even included a rousing rendition of *Avinu Malkein* by community member and singer, Michael Katz.

Aubrey Girnun was originally from Springs, “but I always



The inauguration of the Leslie Shul

had a yen to go farming, so I got a job with Solly Rubin, Leslie’s dad. When Solly died, his sons and I bought a farm. Everyone in the region farmed similar things and built close relationships.” He and the Rubins lived next door to each other, and the families remain close friends to this day. “I miss it very much. It was the greatest place in the world to bring up children. Seeing people at the

reunion that I haven’t seen for donkey’s years was too marvellous.”

At the reunion, his son, Barney Girnun, said, “For us, Johannesburg was New York and Springs was probably Los Angeles.” But he loved his youth in the countryside.

“Those were the greatest years of our lives,” says Kramer. “There were 50km of farms that were completely Jewish. You found Jews in every corner, nook, and cranny. It gave us an amazing grounding.”

His whole family attended the reunion including his three brothers, children, and grandchildren. “It was so meaningful. There were many people who couldn’t be there, but it was still a memorable and historic event, with so much laughter! It was an honour to organise it and see it through. There is so much unity in the ‘farming crowd’, and families were happy to donate towards the event.”

Ultimately, he remembers a childhood of freedom, walking for kilometres in safety, people leaving their windows open and doors unlocked, braais every Sunday, and having friends as neighbours.

“It made a huge impression on our lives. If we can bring our kids up like we were – unspoilt, with more down-to-earth grounding, manners, respect for elders, more sport, being in touch with nature, and being proud of their Jewish heritage, it will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.”

Torah smuggled out of Zimbabwe a ‘once-off event’

TALI FEINBERG

“It was a crazy thing to do,” says Gilad Stern, reflecting on the decision he made three decades ago, to smuggle a Torah out of Zimbabwe. The story, which he says he “hardly thinks about”, recently resurfaced in conversation with friends. Stern reflected on the experience with the *SA Jewish Report*.

The Torah had been used by the community in the town of Gweru (formerly Gwelo), which had since declined. Stern heard of Moshe Moshkowitz, whose Menorah organisation rescues items of Jewish significance from defunct communities and brings them to Israel for safety and use in communities around the country.

“There were no Jewish people left there, but in Israel there was a need for Torah scrolls,” says Stern. There were severe restrictions on the transfer of financial assets out of Zimbabwe, and it was clear that permission to export an item of such monetary value would almost certainly have been denied.

He and Rabbi Eugene Dushinsky of Cape Town told Moshkowitz about the Torah, and so, a daring plan was put into action to get it out of the country. “We decided to use the principle of ‘hiding something in plain sight,’” remembers Stern. “Looking back, I can’t believe we did it. If things had gone wrong...” he shudders to think about the ramifications for his family. And yet, back then, he was fearless and took on the mission without a second thought.

Stern’s wife, Micky, is originally from Zimbabwe, and had left when she was a teenager, so this return holiday was to be a “roots trip” of sorts, says Stern. “We travelled in our car from Cape Town, which was a wonderful way to holiday. Our four children, aged two to seven, were with us. Zimbabwe was in a better state than it is today. We heard about the Torah, and felt like it was worth trying [to get it out].

“Micky said that when she was growing up, the aim was to get money into South Africa. Her father would hide the cash among the oranges in the backseat, and it worked every time. The idea was to make the article look to be of low value and to be the least significant thing: hiding in plain sight.”

They decided to do the same thing with the Torah. “We took off the cover, and hid it among our clothes. Then we put the Torah with the chaos and bedlam of the children’s toys, games, and mess at the back of our station wagon.” The Torah was a medium-sized one, and they unrolled it partially and tried to make it look like a toy. They didn’t tell their kids anything, not wanting their children to blurt out the information.

“We knew it was an appalling way to treat a Torah, but like *pikuach nefesh* [preservation of human life]

on Shabbat, it was for the greater good of Jewish life,” says Stern. They had to travel through a number of checkpoints and then across the border. If they were discovered to be escorting this highly valuable item out of the country, it could have been confiscated, and worse, “I have no doubt we would have been arrested,” says Stern.

“The guards at the border were sadistic and cruel,” he says. On the way into the country, he wrote his place and date of birth in the wrong order and was sent to the back of the queue for another two-hour wait.

But this time, all went smoothly. “It looked completely innocuous,” he says. “As soon as we got across, we felt fantastic – “We did it!” – and then guilty: We immediately put the Torah back into its



The Stern family’s station wagon that transported the Torah

correct state.” In Cape Town, it was handed over to their friend, Roy Sher, who took it to Israel. It was given to Yatir, a settlement in Drom Har Hebron, where it’s still used to this day. Though Stern is generally left-wing in his political views, he has no opinion about the Torah’s final home.

Meanwhile, the place that the Torah came from – Gweru – had an airforce base that was used by the British as a training centre for fighter pilots, according to Stern. It was also the place that Ezer Weizman learned to fly, including crashing his plane once during training. Weizman then went on to become chief of the Israeli Air Force, and later president of Israel.

Reflecting on the experience of smuggling out the Torah, Stern says, “The ends justify the means. We live in a time when many people have high standards of ideological purity. But I think the lesson is that we live in a complex world, and sometimes we have to make decisions for the greater good.”

He’s now double the age he was then, and says, “We were both young and stupid. Me so more than her! I wouldn’t do it again. It felt like a once-off thing. I’m definitely more fear-averse now, but even then, I wouldn’t have repeated it. I have no doubt it was dangerous.”

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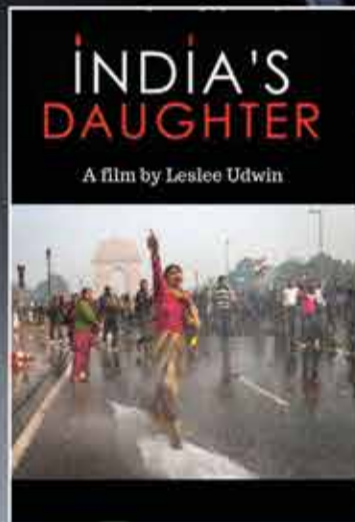
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Digital gallery shows art in fine new ways

HANNA RESNICK

Behind Africa's first physical digital fine art gallery in Johannesburg, called USURPA Gallery, are a few innovative Jewish guys.

And chief executive and former photographer, Steve Tanchel, along with co-founders Adam Trope, software engineer Devon Jacobson, Michael Salomon, multi-disciplinary artist Kay Kay Ribane, and artist and creative director Zele Angelides, are putting African art and narratives on the international platform in a way never done before.

Going into the gallery, the large digital frames that use Samsung Frame QLED technology, allow the artwork to come alive with subtle movement. Though at first appearance it looks like a normal art gallery, the unique artwork on USURPA's walls contain movement and dimension that cannot be painted on canvas.

Looking at these works doesn't feel like looking at a TV screen or a traditional artwork, but rather a totally immersive landscape. Some of the pieces are hand-drawn and then adapted to a digital format, while others are created through a fully digital medium. The pieces are also dynamically coded to create a unique viewing experience for each viewer depending on when they view it. For example, some of the artworks change from day to night, or have certain elements that appear every so often. In one of the pieces, you can sometimes catch a shooting star flying past. Other works include flowing waterfalls or moving faces.

The difference between what you find at USURPA and what you may find elsewhere on the web is that these are unique pieces sold as such to buyers. They can be viewed, purchased, and stored in the form of non-fungible tokens, known as NFTs (unique digital certifiers of ownership stored on a blockchain, used as a form of cryptocurrency). In other words, if you have bought one, it's unique to you and irreplaceable, much like if you owned a Leonardo da Vinci original. If you buy a USURPA NFT, you are the sole owner of fine art, captured on the



blockchain, and secured through individual smart codes.

Tanchel says they are reaching out to a "different market". "It won't be taken into the canon [of artwork] immediately, the same way impressionism, cubism, or even photography were met with scepticism in the fine art world," he says. "We're a future-thought company above everything else."

He understands that people will view this new art form and format with excitement, but some will see it as a bit precarious.

Creating a physical gallery to view works often thought of as online territory, the curators of this gallery say they wanted the art to be viewed in its "natural habitat", in a gallery amongst various other artworks of its kind.

"We needed a physical space where you could actually interact with the artworks," says Ribane, "because it's been so virtual, which creates a bit of a disconnect, especially in a third-world country." He also emphasised the importance of creating a community where art enthusiasts can come together to explore the works.

One of their featured artists is a transgender Jewish

man, Oliver Pohorille (AKA Scum Boy), whose work boldly challenges traditional artistic styles. The description of his work, *Embrace of infancy* reads, "Referencing a poem of the same title, the artist channels the idea of feeling safe as conjured in the 3-D scapes he creates. The elderly figure in the piece is representative of the artist's entanglement with his creation of meta worlds that offer him refuge. Within Oliver's world creation, the white palette is symbolic of an enveloping blanket that perpetually morphs to give the artist embrace, while the

gold is indicative of the resultant ecstasy that emerges from those moments."

The team plans to exhibit a diverse range of art. "There hasn't been enough of a space for women in digital art thus far," they say, and the gallery intends to give a voice to more women, particularly women of colour.

Another goal of USURPA, Tanchel says, is to empower a new generation of artists through tech labs and to teach them how to create within a digital medium. "We're hoping to run a tech lab in every capital in Africa within the next couple of years," he says.

"It's not overnight that anyone can become a digital artist," says Tanchel. "You can't just take a sketchpad and create these kinds of pieces. It's a refined skill, and it shows the importance of storytelling in a new medium, a new way of experiencing dynamic art. This is a new way Africa has been able to tell its own stories, and for us to experience a new narrative, what's happening in the new South Africa.

"These are stories that are dying to be told, a vision that's dying to be told," he said. "It's really all about African optimism and showing off the amazing visual artists that are out there at the moment."

So much more of the artists' narrative can be explored in this format, Tanchel says, because you can have an image on your wall that has tiny movement or the appearance of a creature once a week or even a year. "The possibilities are endless."

Anatevka brings religious women centre stage

HANNA RESNICK

Anatevka, the latest production by the Joburg Jewish Women's Theatre, is an adaptation of the story of *Tevye's Daughters* by Sholem Aleichem which explores life in the shtetl and creates an opportunity for religious women and girls to perform.

The Joburg Jewish Women's Theatre, founded by Linda Zulberg, "provides a platform for observant Jewish women and girls to showcase their performing talents in a halachically acceptable environment". Performances are to strictly all-women audiences, with all-women casts.

"The Jewish Women's Theatre gives ladies and girls from all over Johannesburg the chance to know each other and work together. It's really a unity project, in which people from different levels of observance in the Jewish community work together and bridge the gaps between them to create a fabulous environment in which we can grow artistically, emotionally, psychologically, and indeed spiritually," said Zulberg.

Zulberg adapted the story of *Tevye's Daughters* with music from *Fiddler on the Roof*. "It's been a fantastic exploration, not only of the book itself and the story of Tevye the Dairyman, but an opportunity for the people in the play to dive into themselves, into our history, and to understand what life in the shtetl was all about. And to discover how we relate to so many of the issues that the characters face," she said.

As the audience walked in to see the show, they were greeted by the residents of Anatevka in full costume and character. We then entered the village of Anatevka, with predominantly wooden sets and props to create the atmosphere of an antiquated village.

From the opening number, *Tradition*, the shtetl came to life with vibrant choreography. Choreographer, Marise Mishan, whose background includes *So You Think You Can Dance South Africa*, *Cats*, and *Phantom of the Opera*, said that working on this production had been "incredibly rewarding" as it gave an opportunity to young women and girls who "don't get the opportunity otherwise to let these latent talents shine".

Though it's an amazing outlet for self-expression and creativity, choreographing this kind of production comes with a few challenges, Mishan said. "One of the challenges of having

women play the role of men is finding ways to create masculine movements that can be performed effectively by female bodies in a way that's believable and achievable," she said. "Another challenge is that if two characters are playing those of the opposite sex, they aren't allowed to touch. A lot of the scenes are highly emotive, and obviously, as a choreographer, I wanted to include that physical touch, but it wasn't allowed. Finding new ways to use body language to show connection and emotion was challenging, but it was a good challenge because it forced me to think outside the box."

Being a community production, the cast is comprised of a range of ages and skill levels. Mishan said she was pleasantly surprised by the focus and commitment of younger members of the cast (about 10 to 12 years old), including during rehearsals that ran until late at night.

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES OF HAVING WOMEN PLAY THE ROLE OF MEN IS FINDING WAYS TO CREATE MASCULINE MOVEMENTS THAT CAN BE PERFORMED EFFECTIVELY BY FEMALE BODIES IN A WAY THAT'S BELIEVABLE AND ACHIEVABLE

"With regard to skill level, I think at the end of the day, I had to keep in mind that this is a community production, and I was doing it for a community as opposed to myself. Obviously, as a choreographer, I want to create beautiful art and I want to push myself creatively and make it artistic, beautiful, and different," she said. "But, being an amateur production, I couldn't necessarily do that." She said the most important thing was to empower dancers with the experience of performing and being able to learn new styles.

Alongside Mishan and Zulberg, the team included producer Racheili Stromberg and musical directors Tal Jankelowitz and Sarah Chana Katzman.

While there were standout performances, such as Shani Sommer, who embodied the character of Tevye in voice and mannerism, the beauty of the performance ultimately lay in the strong sense of community evident in the cast. It was clear through ensemble performances such as *To Life* that every performer had tremendous joy and pride in the production they had created.

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ChatGPT creator praises Israel’s AI possibilities

NICOLA MILTZ

The co-founder of OpenAI, the company that created ChatGPT, told Israeli President Isaac Herzog this week that he was “impressed” with the talent pool in Israel. He also said he believed Israel would play a “huge role” in the artificial intelligence (AI) revolution reshaping the world.

Sam Altman, the chief executive of the Microsoft-backed company, visited Israel with co-founder, Russian-Israeli Ilya Sutskever, as part of their worldwide tour to meet AI users, developers, and policymakers. Altman, who is Jewish, met Herzog, high-tech leaders, and students.

Speaking at an event held at Tel Aviv University, he reportedly said, “There are two things I have observed that are particular about Israel: the first is talent density, and the second is the relentlessness, drive, and ambition of Israeli entrepreneurs. Those two things together are optimal in leading to incredible prosperity both in terms of AI research and AI applications.” Altman and Sutskever are the innovative creators behind ChatGPT, the viral chatbot released late last year that mimics human writing and which is taking the world by storm.

ChatGPT is a tool based on a so-called large-language model trained with text data to answer questions, or prompts, as a human would.

The pair discussed the threats and challenges that AI and superintelligence

will bring in the future, and emphasised the need to take the existential threats of AI seriously by creating a frontier regulatory body – similar to nuclear-power control bodies – to limit it and use it responsibly.

Herzog met the tech entrepreneur at the president’s residence in Jerusalem. He agreed with Altman that AI was “like developing nuclear weapons” and said an international convention was needed.

“We must make sure that this development is used for the well-being of humanity,” Herzog said. “You can see the advantages and disadvantages, and you are the first to mention it openly and boldly.”

The Israeli president concluded with the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), saying, “Let’s do *tikkun olam* together.”

In a world gripped with the rapid development and use of AI, legislators are contemplating regulation of the technology, and how to deal with safety issues and other potential dangers.

Local AI expert, Professor Benjamin Rosman, said, “There’s hardly any regulation in place anywhere in the world at this point, which is worrying, given what’s at stake. A few countries have started trying to do so, but it’s a

particularly complicated issue that can probably work only with global buy-in.”

He said Israel hadn’t featured much in the global discussion. “The conversation has been largely led by the major United States tech companies, with strong voices in the United States and Canada playing an important role. The most notable hearings have been in the United States and the European Union at this point.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 5 June announced plans for a national AI policy in both civilian and security spheres. Netanyahu said he spoke on Sunday night with Tesla’s Elon Musk about the need for governments to understand both the opportunities and the dangers of AI, and about Israel turning into a “significant global player in the field”.

“We’re at the dawn of a new era for humanity, an era of artificial intelligence,” Netanyahu said. “Things are changing at a dizzying pace, and Israel must formulate a national policy on this issue.”

Netanyahu said that during a phone conversation with Altman, the tech entrepreneur also expressed confidence that Israel could become a “main global player in the field”. During the conversation, the two discussed “opportunities and challenges facing the world and Israel in connection to AI”.

Last week, Altman met with several world leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, to discuss necessary regulation in the field of AI. The meetings followed Altman’s testimony before a United States Senate Committee about its potential.



Israeli President Isaac Herzog meets with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman

US government prioritises Israel-Saudi ties

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

The Biden administration is fully invested in Israel-Saudi normalisation, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the pro-Israel lobbying group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), on 5 June. He also said he didn’t expect a breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian peace anytime soon.

“The United States has a real national security interest in promoting normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia,” Blinken said on Monday to applause at a policy summit of AIPAC.

He said it was critical not to escalate the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but also made it clear that the Biden administration wouldn’t push for the revival of peace talks in the near term. “It’s no secret that today, the prospects for a two-state solution can feel remote,” he said. “But we’re committed to working with partners and with the parties to at least maintain a horizon of hope.”

The emphasis on regional normalisation over pushing Israel into reengagement with the Palestinians will be welcomed in Jerusalem, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is leading the most right-wing government in Israeli history and has intensified Israeli claims to disputed territory.

Abraham Accords through diplomacy and co-operative projects.

Blinken emphasised continuing Biden administration unhappiness with some Israeli practices that have intensified under the new Israeli government, including the demolition of Palestinian homes and settlement expansion.

He also emphatically condemned the Palestinian Authority’s policies of subsidising the families of terrorists who were imprisoned or killed in the course of their action.

“We have to continue to reject unequivocally actions taken by any party that undermine the process toward a two-state solution; processes that use a solution that includes acts of terrorism; payments to terrorists in prison; and violence against civilians,” he said. Israeli and pro-Israel officials have long complained that pressure on Israel not to escalate isn’t matched with similar pressure on the Palestinians.

Blinken also alluded to Biden administration concerns about plans by Netanyahu’s government – suspended for the time being – to radically overhaul the courts system.

“We’ll continue to work with the Israeli government to advance our shared values and will continue to express our support for core democratic principles, including the separation

of powers, checks, and balances and the equal administration of justice for all citizens of Israel,” he said.

Opponents of the proposed changes, who have been staging massive weekly protests in Israel and smaller demonstrations around the world, say the overhaul would sap the courts of their independence, and remove a bulwark that protects democracy and vulnerable populations, including women, Arabs, the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community and non-Orthodox Jews. The courts overhaul is one reason Biden has yet to invite Netanyahu to the White House.

AIPAC’s agenda also includes bills that would further isolate Iran, which Israel regards as its most dangerous enemy. At the outside of his term, Biden sought to revive the deal with Iran that exchanged its agreement to roll back its nuclear development in exchange for sanctions relief; Trump had pulled out of the deal.

More recently, United States officials have said Iranian actions, including advanced nuclear activity and its backing for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine, have put a freeze on those plans. Blinken said diplomacy remains the preferred way to keep Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, but he said pressure was the preferred method for now. Deterrence, he said to applause, “includes strengthening Israel’s military capabilities”.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

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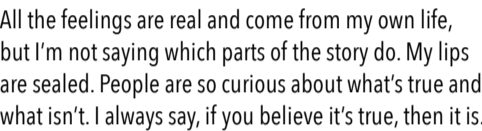
Actor, director, and playwright **Megan Choritz** has just launched her first novel. The *SA Jewish Report* catches up with her.

That's an interesting question. I'm creative. I write, act, and direct plays, and I improvise. I guess you could say I make things up. I also teach, sometimes, reluctantly, and I'm a vegan. That's one way of describing myself. I'm also a 58-year-old rebel, with a big mouth, big opinions, and big energy.

Lost Property tells the story of Laine, who suddenly finds her marriage over after discovering something hideous about her husband, Mark. In therapy with Graham (not his real name), she goes back to her childhood, remembering growing up in Joburg under the influence of her complicated parents, Merle and Larry, and her nanny, Dora. This is against the backdrop of the craziness of apartheid. Laine needs to come to terms with her past in order to heal, but it's the appearance of a small, fierce child, Tina, who unexpectedly brings an unusual kind of hope.

I couldn't help it. The story started growing, then developing, then pouring out of me. It's as if I was the vessel for it to be made. The other – more practical – side of it was that I joined an online writing group called deadlinesforwriters.com during lockdown, and progressed from writing short stories to deciding to write a whole novel. It was a fantastic, empowering, and eye-opening process.

I don't know. I know that sounds crazy, but I started somewhere, and it just manifested. There were times where I had no idea where I was going until I had written the section. There were times when I sat down with an idea, and something else totally unexpected happened. And then there were times where I was amazed that I had even come up with what I had put down.



I have written a lot, mostly stuff that's in one of a million files on my computer. But I have written lots of plays, lots of industrial and corporate theatre, hundreds of short stories and poems, thousands of theatre and movie reviews, a published children's book called *The Big Bird Battle*, an as-yet-unproduced screenplay, and I'm currently doing a rewrite of another novel.

The sitting, agonising, thinking, procrastinating, doubting, and then celebrating, editing, and deleting are all the same, but plays are quicker to write. Also, a play usually has a central theme or message, and a novel is quite messy and untameable. It's hard to get your characters to behave. And time is an impossible thing to keep track of.

I did research when I came up against a situation that needed backing up. But mostly the story is so much of what I know to be true – opinion and lived experience. I tried to write something every day, and produced roughly 1 300 words a week, with the help and support of the writers' group. We read each other's work, and I gave and was given feedback, which was brilliantly helpful. By the end of the year, I had a novel. I was lucky in that just more than halfway in, I gave what I had to my best friend, Melinda Ferguson, who just so happens to be a publisher, hoping to get her feedback. She loved it. She doesn't usually publish fiction, but she said she wanted to publish this. So that was a clear goal to work towards. And an amazing gift. It's pretty hard to get a novel published.

I don't think there's a singular message, but I hope the book has a moment of messy redemption. Things never turn out perfectly, humans hurt one

Ooh, the list is long and varied. I love fiction. Kazuo Ishiguro is my favourite. And Martin Amis. And Stephen King. And Margaret Atwood, and Lauren Beukes. And Colin Cotterill and Yewande Omotoso and Ben Elton and Carl Hiaasen and Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. And Melinda Ferguson. There are so many more, but that's who I'm thinking about now.

I wrote. And went to therapy, first online, and then in real life, and then I wrote some more. This novel is a product of that. Getting back into theatre was very emotional. It was a resurrection. But my feelings about theatre have shifted since I wrote this novel. It's still my lover, but I'm not desperate for it like I was before. It feels much healthier this way. It's ironic.

I'm rewriting a different novel, one that almost got published, but then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and it was turned down during that time of uncertainty and fear. It's quite strange going back to it because it's a pre-pandemic story, and during the worst of the pandemic, it made no sense at all. I couldn't imagine the world ever going back to a "normalness". And yet, here we are. As if it hadn't really happened except for the scars. Suddenly, the story is viable again.

STAFF REPORTER

The Challenge Debate is an initiative by the FW de Klerk Foundation to promote critical thinking, cross-cultural dialogue, and constitutional literacy in South Africa.

The team, made up of Levi Lipschitz, Dylan Steiner, and Kate Lange, dissected the topic against tough opposition from Randfontein. KDVP's values of respect, integrity, and tolerance, were there in abundance, and the debate featured exceptional debating from both teams.

The FW de Klerk Foundation works with young people from diverse backgrounds to promote intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and cross-cultural dialogue. It believes that informed conversation among the youth is the foundation of a cohesive society. The foundation also has a mandate to foster a greater constitutional literacy in young people, in the belief that the South African Constitution is the foundation of our democracy.

The Challenge Debate is intended to further these aims across communities. KDVP was honoured to host the inaugural debate, reflecting its reputation as one of the premier debating schools in Gauteng and the foundation's belief that KDVP's debaters had the calibre to contribute to its success.

Although a small school, KDVP punches way above its numbers when it comes to debating, and the request came at an auspicious moment: in May, the KDVP senior and junior teams took part in the final debate of the Athenium Debating League, of which the school is a founder member. Both teams fought tenaciously through 11 previous rounds to reach the finals. Although the seniors lost to Jeppe Boys and the juniors to Roedean in the finals, KDVP placed first in individual speaker points and rankings and teams from many schools three or four times its size didn't progress beyond the break rounds in this competition.



The inaugural Challenge Debate was attended by officials from the FW de Klerk Foundation, as well as several representatives of the National Foundation's Dialogue Initiative (NFDI), a nongovernment organisation that works closely with the foundation to promote dialogue among the youth. KDVP debating hopes to strengthen ties with both the foundation and the NFDI.

The debate was adjudicated by three elite judges: Bella Mkhabela and Christopher Hojem, two of South Africa's most highly respected debating adjudicators, national selectors, and speakers. The third adjudicator, Jaki Seroke, was involved in the liberation struggle and was imprisoned on Robben Island for six months. He commented on the role of democracy in South Africa.

Participants said that it was pleasing to win the debate, but the symbolism of the evening was of far greater importance.



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PETA KROST

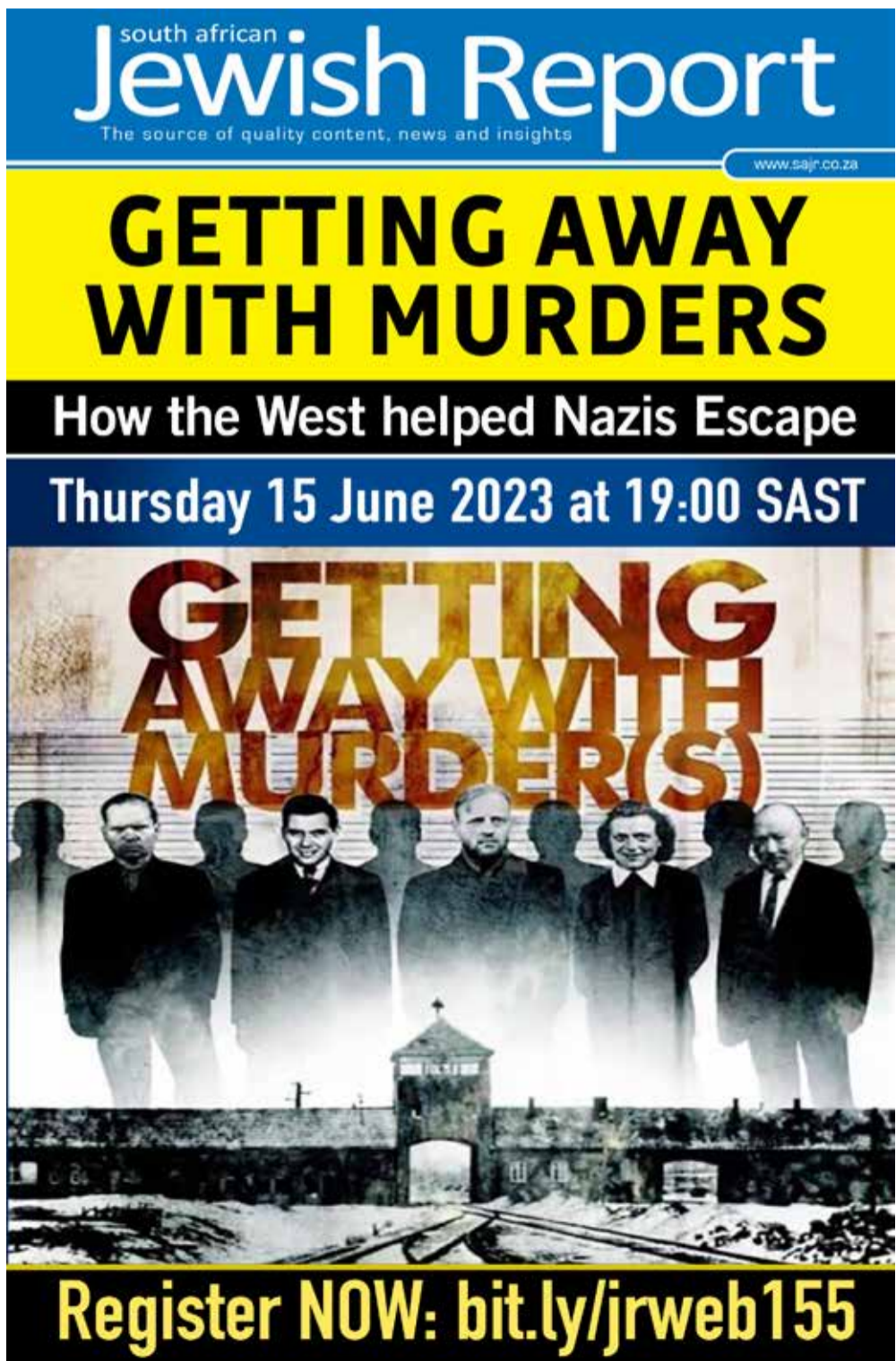
He progressed from competing to coaching others and now coaches his son, Justin, and four other powerlifters. "The sport has grown here, and when we go to the junior champs in August, we'll be taking

Powerlifting has become more and more popular in the Jewish community, although it isn't the sport most would associate with Jewish people, Furman says. There are even a number of Yeshiva College

"The possibility of a sub-nine-hour-Ironman time was always on my mind, and fuelled my desire to do another Ironman," he says. "The lead-up to an Ironman is physically and mentally demanding. Waking up at 04:30 to run, swim, and bike is draining; and then

He believes it benefits teenagers by enhancing self-discipline and any other sport they do. "My daughter is a swimmer and I have her doing certain movements that help her with that. We don't let kids up to 13 lift massive weights, but we give them strength techniques that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives."

His advice to others wanting to follow in his footsteps is, "Be consistent in your training year after year. There are no short cuts. Stay focused, learn from your mistakes, and keep challenging yourself. The road to success is never linear. The true challenge is how to overcome challenges and disappointments. Never give up!"



Solar makes spouses happy

“I swear, it’s like I have my wife back,” said a friend. We were talking about his recent solar installation and the way it had changed his life for the better. It had only been about 16 hours, but in that short time, he was starting to remember why he had married his spouse in the first place. “I didn’t realise how miserable loadshedding was making her,” he said, “until we went solar.”

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It needs to be noted that in terms of solar panels, the law of diminishing marginal utilities applies. What this means simply is that if eight panels bring a certain amount of happiness to a household, then it doesn’t follow that 16 panels will bring double the happiness. It’s like eating pizza. Eating one slice after a pizza absence is very satisfying. Two slices will also bring joy. But the third and fourth slice will do little to add to the joy. In fact, it might even start to have the opposite effect.

That said, it should come as no surprise that solar panels bring joy to the household. It was my inverter installation guy who pointed that out to me. He shared Jewish wisdom with me, and explained that one of the reasons we light Shabbat candles to bring in the day is because it brings light into the home. Unlike the festival of Chanukah, where we don’t receive benefit from the lighting of candles, on Shabbat, we’re not only allowed to light them, we’re even expected

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman



to light them in a place where we’ll bask in the rays of the candles. Shabbat candles and the illumination they bring are meant to bring *shalom bayit*, which literally means peace to the home.

Loosely translated, this means that couples fight less when there’s light.

South Africans understand this. Darkness isn’t just irritating because we trip over the darn dogs and stand on unseen Lego pieces, but because it’s downright depressing. Try as we might to be positive and upbeat and have a good and healthy perspective, it takes effort. And when loadshedding and darkness assails us night after night, the lack of light takes a toll on us.

Which is why finding a solution to the problem is an imperative. We can – and probably should – continue to rage against Eskom and the African National Congress who have put us in this position in the first place. But at the same time, we need to find ways to mitigate the misery and bring light into our homes. And whereas there’s little value in going the most extensive and expensive route, given the law of diminishing marginal utilities, there’s immense value in bringing light – and peace – into the home.

With the bonus being that you might even be able to heat at least one, but maybe two slices of pizza.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Antisemitism no Waters under the bridge

When I was growing up, I felt like I was living in a post-antisemitism world. In the wake of the Holocaust, people understood the horrific consequences of race-based hatred, and in mainstream discourse, targeting Jews became unacceptable. Regrettably, that can no longer be said to be the case. Today, we’re witnessing an increased tendency for Jews to be spoken about and treated in a way that would have elicited genuine outrage only a few years back.

When it comes to recognising the evils of prejudice and the necessity of opposing it, ours is a hyper-aware age. This is true when people are victimised on account of immutable characteristics like race or gender, and it likewise applies to those mistreated on account of their religious or cultural identity. One would think that Jews, as a historically persecuted group that still experiences serious prejudice, would feel safer in such an environment but on the ground, that’s not what’s happening. Instead, as British writer and comedian David Baddiel has argued in his influential 2021 book, *Jews Don’t Count*, there appears to exist a hierarchy of racisms from which antisemitism is excluded. The result is that outside of the Jewish community itself, there’s a distinct lack of urgency even to acknowledge that global antisemitism has already reached worryingly high levels and continues to rise, let alone resolving to do something about it.

For me, the reaction to the recent concert in Germany by Roger Waters of Pink Floyd fame

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



was especially illustrative of this concerning trend. An obsessive anti-Israel activist who quite openly calls for the Jewish state to be abolished, Waters was initially able to cloak his deep-seated antisemitic views under the guise of pro-Palestinian activism, but that mask has long since slipped. His recent performances have featured a giant inflatable pig branded with a Star of David, a performer wearing a Nazi-style uniform while goose-stepping on stage, and Waters himself pointing a mock machine gun at the audience. In spite of this, the reaction of the media was largely to ignore or downplay Waters’ obvious antisemitism by uncritically rehashing his routine claim to have been simply expressing his “opposition to fascism”. His offensive appropriation of Anne Frank’s name in his concerts is ignored, in spite of the immense hurt that it causes.

That antisemitism is on the rise on both extreme ends of the political spectrum is concerning enough. However, the lack of outrage on the part of those ostensibly committed to opposing such evils is perhaps even more disquieting. Sensitising the wider public to the resurgence of this dangerous form of prejudice is one of the major challenges that Jewish communities around the world – our own included – are continually wrestling with.

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

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Sandton Sinai excels at Creative Arts Festival

Sandton Sinai pupils were this year given the opportunity to participate in the Creative Arts Festival, which offers a taste of what it feels like to immerse oneself in the dramatic arts. The brainchild of Michelle Omsky and Marcelle Pincus, familiar names in drama and school circles, the festival offers experienced and novice pupils the opportunity to perform using different mediums to develop skills like facial expression, stage setting, and intonation.

This year, Sandton Sinai entered own choice poetry; monologues; duologues; dramatised poetry; and unprepared reading. The pupils embraced the learning experience and made the school proud with their well-polished performances, the end result of weeks of hard work.



Sandton Sinai pupils at the Creative Arts Festival

Diller Teen Fellows tackle period poverty

Diller Teen Fellows this year focused on the issue of "period poverty" in underprivileged communities. The Grade 11s on the programme collaborated with non-governmental organisations Fingertips of Africa and Qrate to package and distribute "dignity packs" to hundreds of girls, which consisted of reusable feminine hygiene products, school supplies, and a small treat.

On 28 May, coinciding with World Menstrual Health Day, the fellows assembled the packs, which would later be distributed to the girls. By providing sustainable sanitary products, they aim to remove a barrier to the girl's accessing education.

Diller Teen Fellows is a global leadership programme designed for Grade 11s within the Jewish community. In their year on the programme, the fellows embark on a transformative journey, exploring three themes: Jewish identity, leadership, and

tikkun olam (healing the world). Engaging in a range of activities such as leadership workshops, Shabbatonim, charity initiatives, and an international conference in Israel, the fellows develop essential skills and form connections with fellow Diller communities worldwide.

The outreach initiative showcased their leadership abilities, including public speaking, research, innovation, and teamwork.

Following the packing session, the teens had the privilege of engaging with author and gender activist Candice Chirwa, who spoke about the significance of educating and empowering girls and women about menstruation. Participants were encouraged to challenge social stigmas associated with menstruation, while further developing their leadership skills. Through their efforts, they realised the power they possess to effect positive change in the world and their community.



Diller Teen Fellows assembling dignity packs

Yeshiva Primary excels at chess

Chess at Yeshiva College Primary School continues to reach new heights. The Junior A team won the Go For Chess League Junior Division on 30 May. The Senior A team picked up a gold medal, with the senior B and C teams both taking home silver medals.



Junior A team winners - Levi Feldman, Shlomo Block, Asher Kalmek, and Amira Nathan

Blessings for bnei Yisrael

Akiva Carr, a father at Hirsch Lyons Nursery School and a *kohein*, came to school on 2 June to do *birkas kohanim* with the children in honour of last week's parsha, Parshas Naso, in which the kohanim bless *bnei Yisrael*.



Akiva Carr doing birkas kohanim with the children

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 <p>27⁹⁹ POTATO BAG 2KG</p>	 <p>13⁹⁹ CARROTS 1KG</p>	 <p>20⁹⁹ RHODES BUTTER BEANS IN CURRY SAUCE 410G</p>	 <p>20⁹⁹ CHIP N DIP PERI-PERI 250G</p>	 <p>11⁹⁹ NIKNAKS MAIZE SNACK 135G EACH</p>
 <p>25⁹⁹ MC CAIN STEW MIX 600G</p>	 <p>20⁹⁹ KOO WHOLE KERNEL CORN, SWEETCORN WITH CHAKALAKA 410G EACH</p>	 <p>27⁹⁹ ORLEY WHIP CREAM FRESH DESSERT TOPPING 250ML</p>	 <p>15⁹⁹ SAUCEALICIOUS TOMATO SAUCE 500ML</p>	 <p>38⁹⁹ SENSODYNE MULTI CARE T/PASTE FRESH MINT 75ML</p>
			 <p>21⁹⁹ SUNLIGHT SOAP LAUNDRY ASSTD 400G EACH</p>	 <p>21⁹⁹ OMO BLEACH FRESH 750ML</p>



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