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Baseball hero sells “merch” for Israel

Chicago Cubs first baseman Matt Mervis is selling T-shirts and hats emblazoned with his nickname spelled in Hebrew to raise money for the Israel Association of Baseball.

“It’s a great cause to help grow the game in Israel,” Mervis told MLB.com on 8 June, “and try to build some fields over there.”

Mervis, who is Jewish and a hotly anticipated addition to the Cubs this year, played for Team Israel at the World Baseball Classic in March. He’s nicknamed “Mash” because of his home-run hitting power, a moniker that some fans and retailers spell out with asterisks, the way the 1970s Korean War sitcom of the same name was stylised.

That nickname, spelled in Hebrew – asterisks included – along with his last name (in sum, M*A*S*H Mervis) is found on the new merchandise Mervis is selling in tandem with the Israeli baseball association.

Baseball hasn’t been popular in Israel, which has only a few baseball fields. But Team Israel leaders and many on its roster of mostly American Jewish players have in recent years become invested in boosting the sport there. A surprising Cinderella run at the 2017 World Baseball Classic gave the team’s profile a lift, too, helping it attract higher-profile Major League Baseball players, such as Joc Pederson and Dean Kremer.

The team’s recent manager, former Jewish MLB All-Star Ian Kinsler, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last year that he wants to build more “buzz” around baseball in Israel.

Ed Sheeran not as popular as the Talmud

British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran came close to setting the attendance record at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on 11 June, drawing a crowd of 89 106 concertgoers.

The current record-holder? A celebration of Talmud study in 2012 that filled the seats and stands with 93 000 people, most of them Orthodox men.

That gathering, called the Siyum HaShas, marked the completion of the seven-and-a-half year cycle of Daf Yomi, the practice of studying one double-sided page of Babylonian Talmud per day.

The 2012 ceremony re-entered social media discourse this week due to a tweet from PopCrave, an entertainment



news company with 1.4 million followers on Twitter. Its tweet read, “Ed Sheeran breaks the all-time attendance record at MetLife Stadium with a reported crowd of 89 000 people. It is his biggest US show to date.”

The tweet has been viewed nearly six million times, but hours after it went up, a box of text appeared below it fact-checking its claim and citing the Siyum HaShas attendance. The text feature, known as a community note, provides context to tweets that contain inaccurate or misleading information.




The community note tacked onto the PopCrave tweet, written by a contributor identified on the platform with the alias “Futuristic Mountain Seagull”, said, “The all-time attendance record for MetLife Stadium of 93 000 people was set by the 12th Siyum HaShas on 1 August 2012.” It includes a link to the Wikipedia page for MetLife Stadium.

Those who participate in Daf Yomi all study the same page of Talmud every day, and it takes roughly seven-and-a-half years to get through all 2 711 pages of the rabbinic code of law. The most recent Siyum HaShas celebration took place in January 2020, also at MetLife Stadium, and the next one is scheduled for June 2027. Women have been admitted to the event since 1990, and sit in a separate section from the rest of the attendees. The Siyum HaShas is organised by Agudath Israel, an umbrella organisation for haredi Orthodox Jews headquartered in New York City.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Spying versus seeing



Rabbi Danny Sackstein – Sunny Road Kehilla

The spies were sent on a mission to reconnoitre the land. They came back with a negative report for the people. As a result, the spies and all who listened to them had to wander the desert for 40 years. This ill-fated mission lasted 40 days, and accordingly, they were decreed to be in the desert for 40 years – *yom leshanah*, a day for a year. What was the extent of their transgression that resulted in such severe consequences?

Rabbi Asher Weis explains that the transgression of the spies wasn’t what they said but what they saw. Hashem promised the land to our patriarchs and matriarchs. Hashem said it would be good for the Jewish people to enter the land, and that it was possible to overcome the challenges. The spies went against Hashem’s word, and said that it would be impossible for the Jewish people to inhabit the land.

The famous 19th century British philosopher, Herbert Spencer, expanded Charles Darwin’s ideas into the fields of psychology and sociology. He coined the term “survival of the fittest” regarding human beings. These ideas were developed further by Friedrich Nietzsche and his descriptions of the *Übermensch*. The Nazis based their warped racial theories on their interpretations of these writings. These ideas are rooted in the natural world. The lions kill the antelope, the strong dominate the weak. The same applies to humanity. The *Übermensch* can destroy the weaker races.

The great sage, Rabbi Yochanan, teaches (Eiruvim 100b) that if the Torah wasn’t given at Mount Sinai we would learn ethics and morality from nature. We learn modesty from the cat; we learn to be honest and not steal from ants; and we learn fidelity from the dove. Different individuals observe nature and see completely

different things. The philosophers saw brutality and domination, Rabbi Yochanan saw morality and modesty.


What we see reflects what’s in our hearts. We see what we want to see. If there’s darkness in our heart, we’ll see that same darkness around us. If there’s light and positivity in our heart, we’ll see that light and goodness in the world.

This was the transgression of the spies. It wasn’t what they said, but what they saw. Whatever they saw was negative in spite of Hashem’s guarantees. It reflected the negativity in their hearts. The Torah is teaching us to cultivate goodness in our heart.

We do so by connecting to G-d and accessing the goodness in our eternal soul. We can then develop the ability to see good in others and good in the world. This is emphasised by the great Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk in his magnificent prayer, “May Hashem grant us the ability to see good in others and not their weaknesses.”

When we create a society of positivity in which we give others the benefit of the doubt, Hashem responds measure for measure and sees the good in us, evoking the divine attributes of compassion from above. May we merit to see this in our world!

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Moses sends 12 spies to Canaan. They return 40 days later to report on a lush and bountiful land. But 10 of the spies warn that the inhabitants are giants and warriors “more powerful than we”. June 16 marks the commemoration of Youth Day in South Africa. We reflect on the massacre of school children during the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

South African Jewish Report

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Chev calls for foster families for vulnerable minors

NICOLA MILTZ

An advert placed by Arcadia Jewish Children's Home in the newspaper two weeks ago calling for a foster family for four young siblings has highlighted the need for foster parents for a growing number of vulnerable children in the community.

The Arcadia advert called for a foster family to take care of four young siblings, one a baby boy just nine months old, whose biological parents are unable to take care of them at this time.

The decision to advertise for foster parents publicly wasn't taken lightly by the Chevrah Kadisha, which usually deals privately with all matters concerning child welfare and social services and has been doing so behind the scenes for many years.

However, so urgent is the need for a foster family for these four little people, the Chev placed the advert in the hope that it could raise awareness which will enable them being placed in a warm, caring, safe environment as soon as possible. There's also a need for potential, well screened, and readily available foster parents to call upon when the need arises.

"In the past year, more than half the admissions to the Arcadia Child and Youth Care Centre have been new-borns, infants, and toddlers up to the age of seven," said Glynne Zackon, group manager of social services at the Chevrah Kadisha.

"There's an increased need for foster parents as there's an increase in younger children needing care. This could be cyclical and can settle," she said.

Saul Tomson, chief executive of the Chev told the *SA Jewish Report* that there has always been a need for foster parents in the community. "This isn't new. The need changes, it goes through peaks and troughs. Younger children do better with foster families than they do in a children's home. While Arcadia is willing and able to care for them, we sometimes seek the partnership of the community," he said.

"It's ideal to keep siblings together even though this isn't always easy to achieve," he said.

"Foster care offers children a safe and caring home when their biological families cannot take care of them," said social worker Tania Leibovitz, the Chev's group intake consultant.

"The role of the foster carer is to provide a safe, secure environment for the foster child on either a temporary or more permanent basis, and to offer nurturing, kindness, and constructive boundaries to support the child's emotional and mental well-being," she said.

A foster parent must be able to "hold the emotional pain" of the foster child, and respect that they do have biological parents.

"These are special individuals who want to make a difference. They are willing to share and care and bring strangers into their home. It's a true act of *chesed*," Leibovitz said, "They must be open to working with social workers as they become part of the team that provides for the child's overall needs."

A Johannesburg foster father, who wishes to remain anonymous, told the *SA Jewish Report* that he and his wife decided to foster a baby girl whose parents were very compromised many years ago.

"We were already parents with children of our own but felt this was an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. We felt we had the capacity to add another child to our family nest and offer this baby what she



There is an increased need for foster parents in the community

needed," he said.

"We raised her as a child should be raised in a warm environment and today, she's a young, well integrated adult," he said.

Describing the journey with her as "challenging", it was amazing to see how she became enveloped in the family and taught them all tolerance and to be sensitive to different kinds of people, he said.

The couple later fostered another child.

"Fostering requires a willingness to extend yourself. It's a tremendous opportunity to do good, but it's not necessarily an easy ride, it was a roller-coaster ride of note," he said.

Looking back, he said, "the Talmud teaches that whoever saves a single life, it's as though he saved an entire world. Fostering offered us an opportunity to provide these children, who, through no fault of their

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own, faced a reduced chance of living a good life due to their unimaginably difficult family background, with a genuine chance to experience a normal, coping, happy life – quite possibly their only opportunity. This has been rewarding."

One Johannesburg woman, who didn't have her own children, said becoming a foster parent to two siblings previously at Arcadia more than 10 years ago, was the "best thing" that had happened to her.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for them," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

As a regular visitor to Arcadia for many years, she knew the siblings and their heart-breaking story quite well. They had been abandoned, and their parents were drug addicts, unable to care for them.

"I had never considered being a foster parent, but all this changed when the little boy looked at me and asked, 'Why can't you be my mom,'" she said. "It took a lot of thought and discussion, before finally committing, but once I had made up my mind, there was no looking back."

"These kids were third-generation welfare children. The good, the bad, and the ugly came with them. It has been quite a journey, but the good far outweighs the bad. Today, they are functioning, independent young adults who have a bright future ahead of them. I'm grateful to have played a part in their growth and development by offering them an alternative way of seeing the world outside of a child

Desai defiant of censure for anti-Israel activism

>>>Continued from page 1

his loyalty to the rule of law and respect for the judiciary and its structures".

"Regardless of what one might feel about Israel, the fact that Desai has repeatedly doubled down on his position regrettably puts a question mark over the impartiality which was to be exercised by him during his career. This is exactly why stringent ethical constraints are in place for those serving our judiciary," Eloff said.

Some experts in the legal fraternity say that those that celebrated Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng's censure by the JCC for his engagements in a political controversy will now have reaped their just rewards in Desai being censured for his involvement in the BDS movement.

Said someone who wishes to remain anonymous, "It is of course astonishing that after Judge Desai was admonished in Judge Dambuzza's report for engaging in political controversy and being warned not to do so again,

and youth care centre. I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for having them in my life. I never realised how much I would get out of this. It has been a privilege."

The young woman she fostered told the *SA Jewish Report*, "My foster mom changed my life. I don't think my brother and I would be where we are today if it hadn't been for her.

"Though we received the best care, love, and support at Arcadia, we felt we were chosen by someone very special to take care of us and for the first time, we could feel a sense of pride in our story."

The Chev hopes that more people will come forward so there are enough foster carers available at the right time and in the right place to provide safe, loving homes for these children.

Leibovitz and Zackon say foster care is a good option for young children under seven due to their developmental milestones of identity formation, modelling, and care needs. They say it's particularly beneficial because it emulates the functioning of a family, which provides a child with a sense of belonging and attachment.

"Foster care is also a good option when we know there's very little chance of a child returning to their biological parents in the long term so they have the care of more adults in their world and the opportunity to benefit from a family," Zackon said. "The biological family won't be excluded from interactions with their children, yet we look at keeping the foster care home as a safe space."

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SA expat becomes major player in British politics

TALI FEINBERG

The Lubner name is synonymous with upliftment in South Africa, and the family is now pursuing that legacy in the United Kingdom (UK). South African-born Gary Lubner (64) is a serious backer of the Labour Party, hoping to root out antisemitism and make British society more just and equal.

According to Electoral Commission figures, Gary donated £500 000 (R11.7 million) to the Labour Party in the first quarter of 2023, with significantly more expected over the next 12 to 18 months. This isn't the first time he has donated. Commission figures show he previously gave more than £200 000 (R4.7 million) to the Labour Party. "People with knowledge of his intentions expect his total donations before the election to top £5 million (R116.7 million)," according to the *Financial Times*. The UK is likely to go into elections in the second half of 2024.

"Gary and I are first cousins," says Afrika Tikkun Chief Executive Marc Lubner. "Our fathers, Ronnie and Bertie, were brothers who were very close and

built PG Glass Group." After studying finance at the University of Cape Town, joining accounting firm Arthur Andersen, and clinching a Master of Business Administration from London Business School, Gary joined PG Glass' international parent company, Belron, named after his father and grandmother,



Gary Lubner

Ronnie and Bella. After the European and South African units were split during a reorganisation by institutional shareholders, he became chief executive

in 2000. The company employs about 30 000 people worldwide, and is the world's largest auto glass company.

Having just stepped down from the business earlier this year, Gary is focusing on his passions for philanthropy and sport. He's a trustee of the Nelson Mandela Legacy Trust and regularly participates in sporting events to raise money for charity. After his 40th birthday, he started the Spirit of Belron Challenge – a sporting fundraiser most often involving a triathlon that he and hundreds of colleagues run every year for Afrika Tikkun.

"Gary is a man whose entire life has been driven around human principles of what's right and what's wrong," says Marc. "He was an opponent of apartheid, and continues to act against any injustices he witnesses."

Speaking to South African media in 2013, Gary said, "I'm very fond of South Africa. I miss it enormously. I've got a holiday home there. I've been there every year since I was 11 years old. I visit as often as I can. My kids love it. They were born in England, but they all support the Springboks. I have lots of friends, lots of family there, strong ties. It's an amazing country."

He credits South Africa for "an unbelievable education, an unbelievable start in life, whether it was at school or university. If it wasn't for what we had in

South Africa, none of us would be in the positions we are over here.

"I've always believed really strongly – and it's been a family belief – that you have an obligation to all the communities you work with. It comes from a fundamental belief that businesses don't exist in a vacuum. They exist in a community. We happen to be born into a particular situation. So we always felt that there was an obligation, as individuals and as a business, to give back to communities less well-off than us."

Christopher Stafford, a doctoral researcher at the University of Nottingham focusing on British party politics, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The Conservative Party has always benefitted from being the most funded of the UK political parties, so a big cash donation for Labour will certainly be beneficial to its campaign efforts."

He says Gary's donation could be a defining moment. "Given the recent problems with antisemitism within the Labour Party, Lubner's donation suggests that he has restored confidence in the new leadership's directions and tolerance. That's certainly good for Keir Starmer, especially if it signals a return of confidence within the Jewish community more generally. However, party donors usually aren't that high within the public consciousness, so I'm not sure if it will have much of an impact overall."

King David fuel levy causes rumble

TALI FEINBERG

When King David Schools' parents received a letter from the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) recently telling them that they needed to pay a levy towards the schools' energy costs, many were shocked.

Some were upset they had not been consulted about the levy, to be billed from 1 August, saying that they were already stretched to their limit in terms of school fees and the cost of living. Some pointed out that government schools and other private schools hadn't imposed such a levy.

Others said the school was doing its best, and wouldn't have come to parents unless it had no other choice. Many commended the school for going above and beyond the call of duty, saying that it was the reality of living in South Africa. The levy is R175 for one child per month or R350 per family with two or more children at SABJE schools.

SABJE General Director Rabbi Ricky Seeff said, "In 2021, thanks to generous donor funding, King David was able to install generators on our campuses. This was an amazing advantage for our schools.

"As loadshedding increased in 2022, we realised that the generators were becoming increasingly costly. We budgeted accordingly for 2023 by adding an inflationary increase onto our 2022 costs, intending to cover the running costs in our operating budget. Unfortunately, the costs associated with loadshedding in 2023 have far exceeded our anticipated budget, and have left us facing a shortfall in excess of R2.5 million. The costs aren't limited to diesel consumption. Network-switch failures, security infrastructure, and generator servicing and maintenance have all added to these costs."

Seeff responded to questions about consultation, saying, "As an executive and board, we actively seek out feedback and input from the parent body, formally and informally, through the various structures across the

schools. For obvious reasons, broad consultation would be counter-productive in many operational situations.

"However, the SABJE is well run in every respect, and internally we have layers of governance structures that all financial decisions pass through before being implemented. We were aware that this levy would present some families with a challenge, and we also believed that many would understand it, given the effect of loadshedding. Both perspectives are reflected in the feedback that we've received.

"King David supports hundreds of children annually who receive an excellent education. Our community lies at the heart of everything we do, and the SABJE subsidy programme is unique globally in terms of its coverage and the role it plays. If there are any genuine financial constraints preventing payment of the levy, we will endeavour to help however possible. This doesn't extend to people who are simply ideologically against a levy for unforeseen expenditure of this nature."

The SABJE's average monthly cost of diesel is R243 000, with some months reaching as high as R320 000. "As mentioned, this doesn't take into account any other associated loadshedding costs and failures," he said.

"We made the decision to keep the levy as low as possible, knowing that even at its current level, it won't fully mitigate our expected loss," said Seeff. "That said, everything we do is about striking a balance between sustainability, excellence, and community needs. We're a non-profit organisation with the explicit goal of running at a break-even position. If loadshedding were to come to an abrupt end, we would naturally review the levy. We live in hope."

Community member Brenda Stern-Horwitz said the consternation it had caused "is reflective of deeper issues in our community. People are on their knees financially, many face down on the floor.



The generator at King David Primary School Linksfield

"There seems to be more and more situations arising in our community that are exposing a lack of strategic and joined-up thinking," she said.

Seeff responded to the allegation of a lack of strategic thinking, saying "Anyone who knows the organisation would understand that this couldn't be further from the truth. Living in South Africa comes with challenges, and King David isn't immune to these macro conditions.

"I understand that people are upset, and implementing this levy was done reluctantly only after much consideration, but it wasn't done due to any lack of planning. The planning ensured that the schools had adequate back-up with the roll-out of generators. What wasn't anticipated was the extent of loadshedding. This underestimation of the extent of loadshedding has been a common issue across the community, with many families now replacing their generators with solar solutions. The schools are in no different a position to many of our parents."

One community member suggested a fundraiser rather than a levy. "It's unfortunately a reflection of our environment that we have needed to accept and factor in back-up power as an operating expense for

the foreseeable future," said Seeff. "It's therefore unsustainable and inappropriate to fund these costs on a donation basis. All our students are benefiting from the services we provide. Their learning has been uninterrupted, and it's a real blessing and a privilege."

Another parent said, "I would have felt more comfortable if they had a sustainable solar proposal with fundraising to support it."

"Solar power has been extensively investigated, and was mentioned in our letter to parents," Seeff said. "We have been consulting with independent engineers to advise us on the best and most cost-effective

solutions. People don't appreciate the size of our schools. As it stands now, a solution to fund solar for all our campuses will cost almost R30 million.

"We anticipate that we will begin implementation in 2024, but it will take a few months to roll this out, and we will still need generators for some time. If anything, the installation of solar will result in a duplication of costs for an extended period, and therefore needs careful consideration and timing."

Another parent pointed out that school was closed for three months of the year during holidays, but Seeff said, "Our calculations are done on an average monthly cost over the course of the year, which takes into account the peaks and troughs.

"We understand the financial stress that many members of our community find themselves in," he said. "We also understand why this frequently manifests into some level of resentment and a feeling of not being considered or understood. We are transparent and always willing to engage with parents in mutually respectful dialogue.

"The reality is that King David Schools is a non-profit organisation, the sole purpose of which is to provide children with a world-class general and Jewish education in a Jewish environment and to prepare them for the world in a way that allows them to reach their full potential. The schools are run and staffed by superb teachers and staff who are dedicated to this goal. We consider the schools to be an integral part of our community, and won't compromise on excellence in any sphere.

"This does come at a cost, yet we continually benchmark our fees in line with competitor private schools and manage to do so in spite of our higher costs than comparable private schools, with factors like Jewish ethos, security, and subsidies," said Seeff. "Thankfully, we're also able to do so through the incredible support of the King David Schools' Foundation, which ensures that we offer an excellent product while remaining committed to the community."

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Expats welcome getting South African citizenship back

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) has finally struck down a draconian piece of apartheid-era legislation that resulted in thousands of South Africans – including Jews – abroad unknowingly losing their South African citizenship.

“This loss of citizenship was breaking up families and locking South Africans out of the land of their birth,” says Member of Parliament Adrian Roos, shadow deputy minister of home affairs, who led this fight.

“The response from affected parties was simply overwhelming and the need for this litigation was clear,” he says. “This restoration of South African citizenship will result in countless South Africans returning over time and bringing skills and capital into South Africa to help us rebuild after the 2024 elections. It will also bring hope that South Africans abroad can make a difference, and encourage them to participate in campaigns affecting their rights as South Africans abroad.”

The judgement, made on 13 June, comes after a nine-year campaign by the DA Abroad and a five-year court battle by the Democratic Alliance (DA). “The judgement is a victory for the constitutional right to citizenship,” says Roos. “Interacting with South Africans abroad who had lost their citizenship and knowing the devastating impact, it was an emotional moment thinking of how their lives have now changed.”

Kim Kur, who supports expats daily through her Facebook page Community Circle SA, notes that there are vital reasons to retain South African citizenship which became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all other than South African citizens were restricted in accessing the country. “We never know what will happen in the future.”

Previously, Section 6(1) of the Citizenship Act provided that an adult citizen loses their South African citizenship if they take on the citizenship of another country by a voluntary and formal act other than marriage without first receiving permission from the minister of home affairs to retain their South African citizenship.

“The SCA found that this vests in the minister a vague discretionary power in relation to the retention of the right to citizenship,” says Roos. “This provision is in fact carried over from an apartheid-era Citizenship Act, which was used by the apartheid government to strip exiled freedom fighters and those taking citizenship of bantustans of their South African citizenship without their knowledge. It doesn’t belong in our constitutional democracy.”

In 2021, the Gauteng High Court Pretoria ruled against the DA on the matter, but it took its fight to the SCA. “The journey started nine years ago in the run-up to the 2014 elections, when South Africans abroad who had taken on a second citizenship were finding they couldn’t register to vote as they had apparently lost their South African citizenship,” says Roos.

The home affairs department’s (DHA’s) position was that South African citizens who gave up their citizenship in terms of the section in question did so knowingly and intentionally. But the DA said that this wasn’t always the case, and that many who weren’t aware of the law or, for example, received bad legal advice, didn’t realise they were forfeiting their South African citizenship when they took up a second country’s citizenship. It also said that the current system left the department itself unaware of when a citizen gave up their citizenship.

The DA argued that the department itself accepted that dual citizenship wasn’t problematic, and that the legislation provided for it. It said the default position should reflect this.

Now, the SCA has declared that citizens who lost their citizenship by operation of section 6(1)(a) of the South African Citizenship Act 88 of 1995, “are deemed not to have lost their citizenship”.

Many South Africans abroad expressed joy at the news. One Jewish expat living in the United Kingdom said he never wanted to lose his South African citizenship. However, the British postal system was so efficient, he received his British passport before the

retention of his South African citizenship came through, and by law, it had to be the other way around. “I essentially missed it by about 24 to 48 hours,” he says.

This later had an impact on his son, who wanted to travel through southern Africa to do game ranging and get experience working with animals before studying veterinary medicine. “It would have been a lot easier for him to travel on a South African passport,” the expat says. His son had to leap through so many bureaucratic hoops that the process is yet to be resolved. That’s why this expat prefers not to be named.

Kur says this is another crucial reason to retain South African citizenship. “It’s your rightful heritage, and it’s your children’s right to have it passed down to them. We don’t know what our children will want in the future.” In addition, “Using your right to vote from abroad can make a massive difference.

“The South African passport, while not as internationally powerful as others, is useful for access to certain countries,” she says. Finally, “you’re able to travel to South Africa through quicker queues, stay as long as you need to, and easily retire in South Africa. Plus, many tourist destinations discount their prices to citizens. The savings at Kruger [Park] alone make it worth it!”

Immigration lawyer Gary Eisenberg says the judgement still needs to be confirmed by the Constitutional Court, and there’s a possibility that it could be amended or overturned, especially if the DHA appeals it. However, he has faith that it will be confirmed.

One South African *oleh* told the *SA Jewish Report* that “when making aliya under the Law of Return, one doesn’t lose South African citizenship and one doesn’t need to request to retain it. This was confirmed to me in writing by the South African embassy in Israel about a year ago.”

Kur says “obtaining Israeli citizenship by the Law of Return seems to fall into the same loophole as those who apply for citizenship by descent. They never had to apply for retention. The same is true for those applying for Lithuanian citizenship.”

However, one expert speaking on condition of anonymity says that making aliya under the Law of Return and maintaining South African citizenship assumes that the South African government accepts the Law of Return and Israel as the Jewish homeland. That’s why he suggests still applying for retention when making aliya, given that it’s “risky” to rely on South Africa’s perceptions of Israel.

“The DA has been pressurising home affairs to improve its services at South African missions abroad, and this is bearing fruit,” says Roos. “Many South Africans abroad were beginning to abandon their citizenship because of difficulty in renewing their passports. This petition on home affairs services in missions abroad was served in parliament yesterday [13 June], and has already resulted in improvements.

“I would encourage the Jewish community to encourage their South African friends and family abroad to hold on to their South African citizenship with everything they have, participate in the upcoming 2024 elections, and be in a position to return to South Africa after the 2024 elections to help us rebuild our beautiful land,” he says.

“People need to hold their citizenship with pride, vote for change at their embassies abroad, and not let what’s being done to our country define our heritage,” Kur says. “As Jews, our ancestors had everything taken from them against their will. We even have to fight to claim Israel as ours. So, to have our birthright removed unconstitutionally is another blow. Our Jewish community is so dispersed, and our South African citizenship is our bond.”



Shadow Deputy Minister of Home Affairs
Adrian Roos

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Our children are our future

As we commemorate Youth Day and celebrate Father’s Day, it’s heartbreaking to learn that there are children in our community who can’t depend on their parents to protect them from the world. They are unable to lean on those who brought them into this world to nurture them into becoming contributing adults.

When a colleague of mine pointed out an advert in our newspaper two weeks back calling for a foster family to provide a “secure and loving” home for four siblings aged between seven and nine months old, it broke my heart. The advert, placed by the Chevrah Kadisha, said it “was optimal for such young children to be placed within a warm family environment”.

Over the years, I have got to know the Chev and those who work there well enough to know that its caring social workers would never want to draw attention to these children if they didn’t feel they had to. But they would do everything in their power to find a loving family to look after them in their time of need.

So, deciding to put such an advert in the paper was a mayday signal from the Chev, and one not to take lightly.

As a mainstream media journalist of many years, I have heard too many devastating stories about the impact foolish or sick adults have had on their children’s lives. So many of those children turn into beautiful adults, but they often do it against all odds. Some don’t manage so well.

Most of them didn’t have the Chev to come to their rescue. And this is the incredible gift of being a part of this particular community.

I have no idea what happened to the parents of those four children. I have no idea what led those four children to the Chev. But I’m so grateful that they are now in the safest and most caring hands.

My instinct was to see if we – as the *SA Jewish Report* – could help the Chev in its quest for loving, caring foster parents because just maybe we could.

And I have no doubt that the right people from within our community will step forward to help these and other children in need. I also have no doubt that they will shower them with love and compassion for as long as they need it. We are those kinds of people.

As we commemorate the bravery of the youth of 1976, let’s spare a thought for those children we may be able to help today. For some, that may be to foster four siblings. For others, it could be supporting the likes of Amanda Blankfield-Koseff (on this page) in her quest to empower youth through education. It may also be giving a certain amount of money a month to the Chev or another organisation that can help children in need.

We’re fortunate to be a community where we give our children everything we possibly can so they can grow into confident, educated, cultured, spiritually-sound adults. As Jewish parents, we would obviously be proud of them no matter what, but 99.9% of us – don’t hold me to that figure, it’s a guesstimate – will do anything for our children.

However, it happens that there are those adults – yes, even in our community – who stray from the straight and narrow because they are ill or have had a traumatic experience, and they cannot give their children what they need. Often parents or siblings step in or the Chev is brought in to help. The important thing is that those children need to know they are loved and cared for. With that, they can do anything.

In other cases, marriages break up, and so too does the family home. Most former spouses accept that though their relationship may be over, their children still need the love and support of both parents. In these cases, children can more easily weather the divorce storm.

In other cases, there is parental alienation, and one of the parents – most often the father – is no longer involved in the children’s lives. This can be extremely hard for children.

I was so grateful that David Abrahamsohn agreed to write about the importance of dads to sons (see page 7). This is a special kind of bond, one not to be taken lightly.

I believe our children are much smarter than we are and, while so many of us whinge and complain about the situation we’re in, our children absorb what we say and make up their own minds.

When we asked Jewish schools to invite their scholars to write about South Africa’s past and what they looked forward to, I was sure we would read about children wanting to leave South Africa and complaining about the country. However, to the contrary, they all seemed to see a bright future, one in which they participate fully and are responsible for making the country better. As I said, they are wiser than we are. Read a selection of these pieces on page 10.

As always, their contribution is inspiring and a lesson to all of us to make time to listen to them and be guided by them because they will be directing our future and that of our country and community.

And though we can do our best now to guide, nurture, and protect them, as well as give them the love and care they need to develop, we ignore what they say at our peril.

And yes, it’s true, sometimes they show us up to be sexist, too conservative, even potentially racist or any other unsavoury classification we may be horrified to be aligned with, but still, we need to listen to them. Their world is already different to ours, and they are ready for it. While we do our best for them, they are the ones who will guide us forward.



How to put active citizenship in the curriculum



OPINION

AMANDA BLANKFIELD-KOSEFF

We commemorate Youth Day to remember the Soweto youth uprising of 16 June 1976. These brave secondary school students were active citizens protesting against the apartheid government forcing them to learn all their subjects in Afrikaans. They paid the price, and many were tragically killed during this march and others, but they did bring us closer to ending the oppressive apartheid regime.

Here we are, 47 years later, and there are still many challenges in our education system which have ripple effects across many sectors. The use of the mother tongue as a language of educational instruction ends in Grade 4 in 70% of public schools. Now, imagine if all your life you’ve been speaking and learning in Sotho and suddenly, you’re forced to learn how to do maths in English.

There are no easy answers because the working world is mainly English so it would be a disadvantage not to have a good grasp of the language, but how it’s done may be the concern.

There was much horror when the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report came out recently, reporting that 81% of pupils in South Africa in Grade 4 cannot read for meaning. First, we were the only southern African country to agree to participate in this study, which was created by northern countries that are mostly first world. Second, the study doesn’t consider the Grade 4 change in the language of instruction. And lastly, the study doesn’t take into account the many school days that were lost over the two years of lockdown and disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Often, teachers are blamed for poor results. Many don’t understand that in lower-quintile schools, where hunger and overcrowding are common, the challenges are huge. Some teachers feel they are also mothers, law enforcers, nurses, and social workers to their pupils because the

needs of their pupils are such. Teachers often don’t feel supported by the system, and may suffer burnout.

However, what we need to focus on is that formal classroom education is one element of raising children. What’s really important is to develop children holistically. This includes instilling positive values, curiosity, agency, and a sense of empowerment and motivation to become contributing and active citizens.

By having practical experience of embarking on a project where they must solve a problem and prove the impact, these pupils start to realise that they hold the power right now to be agents of change. Money cannot buy the confidence and self-esteem that young people get when they get these skills and feel the motivation to use them for positive change.

We also need to focus on creating not just entrepreneurs but social entrepreneurs who not only create employment, but also solve social, environmental, educational, and economic challenges. We have seen examples of these businesses with the TOMS shoes model, in which a pair of shoes is donated for every pair sold. This type of business model is the way of the future.

The high unemployment issue we face isn’t just from the lack of educational excellence, but from the social ecosystem and lack of soft skills, which are so important for the fourth industrial revolution. Many careers are yet to be created, but having good communication skills, conflict-management tools, emotional intelligence, project-management skills, professionalism, a solution-seeking mindset, perseverance, and resilience is key. Every set of problems has a solution, and this mindset is what’s necessary to make a positive change in our country.

Over the past 14 years, I have had the privilege of working in the education sector nationally. I’m not a teacher, but I’ve met so many dedicated and passionate teachers who go above and beyond to ensure a brighter future for their pupils.

For example, there’s a secondary school educator in a rural KwaZulu-Natal village who often helps pupils after school hours, on weekends, and over holidays to ensure that they grab every opportunity available to them. This teacher is teaching many grades, but still makes time to assist even at the expense of her health.

It has also been amazing to see what a difference it makes to have school leadership that’s forward-focused and open to new programmes to assist pupils instead of focusing solely on completing the curriculum.

A principal of a township school in the Eastern Cape works hand-in-hand with his social worker to assist pupils, and the pass rate at the school skyrocketed with this caring leadership. They are also open to extracurricular programmes that further empower their pupils.

A bottom-up approach – giving young people the agency to express their views and challenges while encouraging them to seek and implement solutions while being mentored by caring teachers or other support staff – can change the whole culture of the school and the community.

We have seen young people who developed a “service mentality” start campaigns to help people while they studied at university. For example, a young lady has started a “period poverty alleviation” campaign at her university.

Instead of waiting for things to change, these young people are taking charge and making things happen.

We have also found that when young people realise that they can make a difference no matter their age, socio-economic background, gender, or location, it brings out the best in them. The focus on helping others gives a strong sense of purpose. In 2019, primary school pupils in KwaNobuhle township in the Eastern Cape decided to help a younger pupil who had no legs below the knees to get prosthetic legs and the confidence to walk in them. The whole school celebrated this victory, and Sisi was given the support she needed.

Our future is brighter when we have young leaders who think of others and want to uplift them, instead of many of our current leaders, who focus on selfish greed.

• Amanda Blankfield-Koseff founded *The Youth Citizens Action Programme (YCAP)* in 2009 and in 2013, moved it to a new youth development non-profit organisation, *Empowervate*. YCAP empowers young people to solve or lessen their social, environmental, educational or economic problems.



Formal classroom education is one element of holistically raising children

A Father’s Day gift for sons

OPINION

DAVID ABRAHAMSOHN



I was surprised to learn that Father’s Day wasn’t celebrated as a holiday until 1972, 58 years after the origin of Mother’s Day. It seems the reason for this was that for much of the 20th century, fathers were just seen as men – men who went out into the world to protect and provide while mothers stayed home to nurture and care.

Traditional stereotypes about fathers and fatherhood are changing. The role of the mother as the primary caregiver and the father as the sole bread winner are becoming less predominant. Fathers are increasingly taking on active roles in their children’s lives. However, serious challenges still exist.

As a therapist, I find it astounding that so many boys and men in 2023 still perceive seeing a therapist as a sign of weakness. Feelings of despair, fear, and helplessness are still suppressed. The biggest challenge for so many men and boys is that they feel that it’s not okay to be vulnerable. There’s no doubt that being vulnerable can be difficult for girls and women as well. However, girls are given permission from infancy to express vulnerability, while boys are often regarded as weak, feminine, or overly sensitive if they do so.

Understandably, cultural issues have played a role. Generations of men have been absent due to the impact of war and work, which have taken a toll. Boys have been taught that to survive, you have to be tough, strong, and competitive.

Over the years, my clients have taught me the enormous cost of suppression of feelings, and the extremely destructive impact it can have on one’s physical and emotional health. It’s vitally important to protect the future emotional health of our boys, the fathers of the future. Acknowledging, owning, accepting, and expressing vulnerability is without doubt the best way to do this.

So how do fathers teach their sons that they can feel, express, and show vulnerability? An important place to start is to make it safe for them to share

their feelings. The best way to do this is for fathers to listen actively to their sons. Instead of listening to solve a problem, this type of active listening requires empathy and non-judgement. Sometimes our anxiety as a parent leads us to being reactive when our children feel upset. We often underestimate the cathartic power of just listening and reflecting thoughts and feelings.

It’s also beneficial to show affection openly towards sons. Hold them, hug them, and kiss them. Fathers who react with warmth and greater sensitivity to a child are significantly more likely to have children with a better emotional balance from infancy to adolescence. These children are linked, in turn, with higher levels of social competence, peer relationships, and resilience.

Modelling emotional vulnerability for sons is also very powerful. When fathers are comfortable with their emotions and express feelings in a proactive way, boys watch and model this healthy emotional habit. Create a culture in your home of not keeping difficult thoughts and feelings to oneself. It’s not enough to encourage our sons to share their inner worlds. The men they look up to and respect need to show them how it’s done while being careful not to burden them with adult problems that could overwhelm them.

Clinical research continues to conclude that loving and engaged fathers are fundamentally important for the health, well-being, and development of their children. That influence begins as soon as a baby is born, and extends into teenage years and adulthood. There’s still much more work to be done around this issue, but already the importance of emotionally sensitive dads is difficult to overstate.

To best protect our children’s mental health, particularly our sons, we want them to understand that being strong isn’t about not being vulnerable. The irony is that it takes those stereotypical “manly” traits of courage, strength, and determination to be vulnerable. On this Father’s Day, let’s thank our dads for everything they do for us, but also challenge them to confront the traditional stereotypes of masculinity so they can nurture their sons into emotionally healthy fathers of the future.

• David Abrahamsohn is a clinical psychologist in private practice.



SA Jewish Report film festival lights up homes

HANNA RESNICK

The SA Jewish Report’s first Online Film Festival has raised almost R150 000 towards supplying hot water bottles and rechargeable lights for those in need. The initiative is called the Share the Light Campaign as “we are re-energising South Africa by sharing our lights during loadshedding, darkness, and cold weather”, said Howard Sackstein, SA Jewish Report chairperson and webinar host.

“When we decided to run an online Jewish film festival where we would be showing remarkable documentaries free of charge to our community, we said we would do this so people can stay home in the middle of what is a cold and dark winter and be under the duvets while they’re watching amazing documentaries from around the world,” said Sackstein. He decided to use the film festival to make a difference to those who didn’t have the privilege of warmth and light during a loadshedding-filled winter.

Through the 154 SA Jewish Report webinars run so far, the SA Jewish Report has been able to raise an astounding amount of money for various charitable organisations, said Sackstein. He decided that the film festival would be no different.

“We thought, how can we use that opportunity to ask our community once again to do good? So what we’ve done and what we’ll continue to do throughout the first Online Film Festival is to ask people to

donate if they’re able to and the donation goes towards buying rechargeable lights that people can use during loadshedding as well as hot water bottles that people can use and boil hot water for before the lights go off.”

Half of the money collected will go towards buying those facilities for the

Women’s Benevolent Society to distribute, 200 have come to The Angel Network, and 100 have been given to Yad Aharon & Michael.”

The lights and hot water bottles are being distributed by The Angel Network to townships around Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, and by Yad Aharon

and the Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society to Jewish individuals and organisations such as Selwyn Segal and Sandringham Gardens.

“The Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society is most grateful for being included in this initiative and for giving us the opportunity to share the light with so many members of our own community in need,” said Fundraising Chairperson Leigh Brouze.

Yad Aharon Chief Executive Lauren Silberman said Yad Aharon was “absolutely thrilled” to receive these items.

“It’s just such an amazing initiative by our community to make sure that people are comfortable in what’s going to be a cold, dark winter,” said Sackstein. “At the moment, people are literally sitting in the dark in freezing weather, and anything that our community can do to alleviate that both within our community and in the broader community, I think is absolutely special. We’re so grateful to all the viewers of the SA Jewish Report webinars who want to be part of this campaign.”



Jewish community, while half will go to townships and squatter communities around the country. “The first week, we raised enough money for more than 500 people to receive rechargeable lights and hot water bottles. So far, we’ve raised enough for 700 people to receive these items,” said Sackstein.

Glynne Wolman, from The Angel Network said, “We’ve already ordered the first 500 of everything. Two hundred water bottles and lights have gone to the Jewish

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Orchards residents celebrate as suburb finally gated

STEVEN GRUZZD

Orchards became the latest Johannesburg suburb to celebrate having several of its public roads enclosed on Tuesday, 13 June. And residents are hoping, as with other closures, that this will bring down crime in their suburb significantly. Though there are a few hundred such enclosures in Johannesburg, this is only the second that really has an impact on the community, the others being in the neighbouring suburbs of Savoy and Waverley. “Most have been successful, and cut contact crime dramatically,” says Sean Jammy, the chief operations officer of Community Active Protection (CAP) Security that administers more than 30 of these enclosures. This suburban closure, designed to enhance security and promote community co-operation, took three years to finalise with city authorities. It wasn’t always a smooth ride, with several objections, municipal mistakes, and major bureaucracy to deal with. Lessons have been learned from the ups and downs of a similar scheme in Savoy and Waverley.



The new road closure at Orchards Road, Orchards

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Orchards resident Feige Swimmer was the applicant to the Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) on behalf of her suburb. Permission to enclose the roads was granted three years ago, she said, but after nine months, this decision was reversed by the municipality for a further nine months due to objections that were raised. The consultant used for the application had made errors, which entailed a new application process. Swimmer refused to take no for answer, and marshalled the local community to support her efforts. “It was a very long road with the JRA and the objectors,” Swimmer told the *SA Jewish Report*. “But I didn’t give up. The cause of community safety mattered to me. Crime has definitely gone down since the enclosure process started. And it has created a nice sense of community and more togetherness among the residents. It’s unfortunate that we have to block ourselves off, but serious crime is a fact of life in Johannesburg.” Swimmer described the plight of an elderly couple in the area who had guns pointed at their heads in a robbery. She said the enclosure “isn’t foolproof, but it does give us a sense of safety. Kids can ride bikes in the roads. We still need to remain vigilant, but we can drop our shoulders a little bit.” Being the applicant was laborious and taxing for Swimmer, a commercial property broker, and dealing with a disorganised – sometimes dysfunctional – city council wasn’t easy. Key personnel were shifted in the council, delaying

the process for months on end. “It was hard to please everybody,” she said, “but once I got the ball rolling, people appreciated the effort and the community came together. I didn’t give up in spite of many sleepless nights. I decided, ‘I want this.’ Not everyone has the patience and time for this, but I felt supported by certain community members to stand and fight for this. I never felt alone.” The community has handed over the running of the enclosure to CAP. Jammy said though some residents hate the enclosures, the vast majority say they “wouldn’t want to live without it”. He stresses that these enclosures are about more than security. “They are about pride in the areas we live in through adopting and maintaining parks, reducing vagrancy, and improving property values.” The journey in Savoy-Waverley had its own roadblocks. The council claimed that they received significant pushback, including from some traders in the area. A few weeks after the roads were enclosed, in December 2022, armed police officers with bolt-cutters forcibly reopened the gates. CAP took the matter to court and won with costs, and the roads were re-enclosed. As a temporary compromise with residents outside of Savoy and Waverley who the council alleges were complaining, CAP agreed to open the gates on High Road and Grenville Road where they meet Corlett Drive and Louis Botha Avenue respectively, to allow traffic access to the M1 freeway. However, CAP is not allowed to erect booms or cameras on these roads as the city is appealing the legality of the enclosure. “This delay has meant that we cannot yet complete the enclosure properly,” Jammy said. “The entrances at High and Grenville roads aren’t monitored. This means that licence plates and drivers’ faces aren’t photographed.” But Jammy is adamant that there has been a significant reduction in serious and violent crime in spite of the hurdles placed by objectors and the council. “Serious violent crime within the Savoy-Waverley enclosure has reduced by 80% compared to the same period last year. We still have things to rectify, including monitoring all entrances and exits with cameras, creating a four-way stop on Stirling Street with the JRA, and other traffic calming measures, which will further improve the area.” Jammy offered three lessons from the Savoy-Waverley process. “First,” he said, “closures are definitely part of the way forward to make people feel safer in our communities. Second, it’s about more than just security, it’s about making our streets and suburbs cleaner and greener, better places to live. The more active the community is, the more successful the endeavour. And third, we must find constructive ways to engage and work with the city council, even if there are obstacles, sharing our vision and planning for realities like traffic congestion and driver safety earlier in the process.” With crime an unfortunate reality in South Africa, communities that can afford it will continue to take their security into their own hands and not rely on the police or the government.

Politician’s Zionist conspiracies – ‘antisemitic and sad’

TALI FEINBERG

An obscure South African politician, who has become known for his homophobia, recently added classic antisemitism to his repertoire with tweets that could easily fit into the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Mehmet Vefa Dag is originally from Turkey and now lives in Cape Town. On Twitter, he has a background image of a South African flag, and says he’s “president of Truth and Solidarity Movement Party and a 2024 general election South African presidential candidate”. On 12 June, he tweeted that “100 000 Jews control the entire SA economy. 100 000 people can’t control the wealth of 60 000 000 South Africans. The system needs to be changed. Enough is enough.” He also wrote, “Zionist Jews are using their banks, corporations, media, and politicians to divide and conquer and destabilise the world and inculcate hatred towards heterosexual white men. It appears something like this happened about 80 years ago.” On 10 June, he tweeted that both Donald Trump and Joe Biden were “controlled by Jewish supremacy”, accompanied by a graphic saying “every single aspect of the Biden administration is Jewish”. On the same day, he tweeted, “Our war is not with gays or lesbians, our war is against the new world order, against Rockefeller, Rothschilds, Soros, their puppet party DA [the Democratic Alliance].” He also calls the DA “the Devil Alliance”. In many tweets, he has referred to “Zionist systems” and conspiracy theories about Jews and Israel. Though he has only 879 followers on Twitter and 679 followers on Instagram, his Truth and Solidarity Movement Facebook group has 3 500 members, while 5 000 people follow his personal Facebook page. His LinkedIn profile says he will “make South Africa great again”, echoing the slogan of the extreme right in the United States. Sometime between 12 and 13 June, Twitter suspended Dag’s Twitter account because it “violate[s] the Twitter rules”. On Facebook, many people said they had reported him to Twitter. However, his profile and pages remain on other social media platforms, and the damage might already be done. Milton Shain, the author of the recently published *Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present* considers Dag’s remarks “unabashedly antisemitic”.



Mehmet Vefa DAG @AFRICANDEMOC

I love Orthodox Jews very much, my problem is, I am against the Zionist system, which tries to ban Christianity and Islam, and which gets in the blood of hundreds of people around the world.

“This is classic antisemitism: fabrications and conspiracies tied into a neat bundle that betrays a worldview built upon fantasy,” says Shain, an antisemitism expert and the emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town. “Such nonsense ought to have no resonance in our country. Sadly, however, we might increasingly experience this sort of discourse – often dressed up in simple anti-Zionism – as we move towards the 2024 election. Mehmet Vefa Dag seems to be first out of the blocks. No attempt on his part to hide simple Jew-hatred.” According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “The myth of excessive Jewish power relies on historical claims of Jews controlling global affairs. Jews are cast as manipulative and conniving schemers who work in the shadows to advance an evil agenda. Antisemites often position themselves as truth-tellers, whose mission it is to unmask a supposed insidious Jewish plot to take over the world. Antisemites blame social ills on baseless

notions about Jewish power. “Antisemites frequently suspect Jews of holding allegiance only to fellow Jews and to a uniquely Jewish agenda,” the ADL says. “Jews are accordingly seen as untrustworthy neighbours and citizens, as if they are inherently disloyal or have inherently dual loyalties.” When the *SA Jewish Report* asked Dag why he dislikes Jews, he responded nonsensically, “I love Orthodox Jews very much, my problem is, I’m against the Zionist system, which tries to ban Christianity and Islam, and which gets in the blood of hundreds of people around the world.” “I’m against the system that killed hundreds of children Palestinian Muslims and Christians. I’m against the system that hates even a Christian or a Muslim worshipping, even beating them and brutally killing them. I’m against the system that plays with people’s DNA, I’m against the ideology that forbids G-d and imposes irreligion on the system.” If he became president, he says, he would allow Jews to live freely in South Africa. “I will protect them with my whole heart,” he says. “I have been doing business with Jews for the past 22 years.” Previously, Dag’s organisation was called the African Democratic Movement Party South Africa, which he started in 2016. He started his Truth and Solidarity Movement in July 2022. However, the party doesn’t appear to be registered. This month, he has been in the news for demanding that a rainbow-coloured crosswalk – symbolising lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex+ (LGBTQI+) pride – be removed from a street in Cape Town. He called on people to paint over the rainbow colours with black paint. He addressed his demands directly to Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis. Hill-Lewis responded to the tweet, saying, “Genuinely saddened that this hate message gets such traction. A pedestrian crossing isn’t forcing you to do anything, Mehmet. You’re welcome to protest peacefully, but not to spread hate and not to damage public infrastructure.” Dag is also pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. Amongst many pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian posts, he shared a photo of Russian President Vladimir Putin, urging him to visit South Africa and saying that his Truth and Solidarity Movement Party would go to great lengths – even sacrificing their lives – to protect him. He’s also pro-Palestinian, and has called on people to attend anti-Israel protests and boycott Israeli products. He supports corporal punishment at school and the death penalty. Dag’s homophobic and pro-Russian stands were reported by several South African media outlets, but none touched on his antisemitism. South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner says, “We’re seeing a definite trend whereby public figures feel less and less compunction about making openly antisemitic public statements, often in contexts where Jews and even Israel don’t feature at all. “Generally, these represent only radical fringe elements, but even so, it’s quite concerning to note both the openness with which they now peddle their anti-Jewish hate and the overall failure of mainstream society to call it out and denounce it. While the targets may be different – sometimes the LGBTQI+ community, sometimes Jews, sometimes foreigners – the intent is the same, to foster ill-will and create division. While he’s trying to manufacture outrage and sow seeds of hate in South Africa, we know that such messages never resonate with South Africans.”



Mehmet Vefa Dag

A legacy comes of age – remembering Ashley Kaimowitz

TALI FEINBERG

It’s exactly 20 years since Cape Town teenager Ashley Kaimowitz picked up a camera to make a film that would reverberate to this day. At the age of 16, in June 2003, with no experience and during the icy winter holidays, she went to the township of Khayelitsha to make a documentary about child rape.

The film had a major impact. “The greatest adventure that I have ever embarked upon has also turned out to be the greatest accomplishment of my life,” she wrote at the time. “I now know my purpose on earth! The future holds many possibilities, and the road seems endless.”

With the world at her feet, Ashley spent a year in Japan as a Rotary Youth Exchange Student Ambassador and then returned to Cape Town before she planned to head to Australia to study film on a full scholarship. She was supposed to be in Australia at the beginning of 2005, but because of visa issues, she was still in the Mother City in March. It was then, late one night, that a drunk driver “T-boned” her car, killing her instantly. She was 19 years old.

Eighteen years later, friends, family, and even strangers are still grieving her senseless loss. At the same time, others have carried her dream forward. Her legacy continues to make an impact every day.

“She always had a sense of urgency,” says her mother, Megan. “It was like an unconscious knowing that time was too short.” At the time that she made her film, Ashley wrote about why she felt it was such a pressing mission. “The Nonceba Family Counselling Centre was established by local

resident, Nocawe Mankayi, in a desperate attempt to fight rape. In Khayelitsha, one in every three girls is raped by the time they are 21 years old.”

She held a little girl who had been raped, and “it was at that moment that I knew that my purpose on this earth was nothing less than to change it”, she wrote.

When she visited the centre as part of her school’s outreach committee, it operated from a small room. “Dedicated volunteers counsel victims of rape and abuse – mainly children – and provide legal and psychological aid to the victims and their families. They also teach the community about rape and its consequences,” wrote Ashley, who attended United Herzlia Schools.

Seeing how Mankayi was operating out of such dire circumstances, Ashley envisioned raising enough funds to build a new centre that would be a source of refuge, education, and change. But how to do it? “She loved film ever since we showed her *E.T.*,” says her father, Jeffrey. “We showed her and her sister, Kelly, all the classics.” Ever since then, Ashley knew that she wanted to be a filmmaker. “And so, she decided, ‘If I can’t bring Khayelitsha to the world, I’ll bring the world to Khayelitsha’ through film,” Jeffrey says.

Having never filmed before, she somehow convinced donors to fund her and production companies to lend her the best equipment as well as train her and her friends how to use

it. “We got security to go with her, but after the first day, they told us, ‘We need her, she doesn’t need us,’” remembers Megan. “Her sense of community was unbelievable.”

The 24-minute-documentary was completed in August 2002. Ashley titled it *Uthando Labantwana – For the love of our Children*. She was thrilled to raise significant

to her memory and her relentless support of Nocawe’s mission,” says Tara Paterson of XIX Entertainment, one of the many people who has carried Ashley’s dream forward.

“Some days it’s inconceivable that Ashley is no longer alive considering the impact she still has on her friends, family, community, and those at Nonceba,” says close friend, Karla Green Dana. “The older I get, the more I realise just how extraordinary she was and what a remarkable life she lived for such a young person. One day, I’d love to write a children’s book about Ashley and the lessons she taught us.”

When Ashley held that little girl who had been raped, the rapist was the child’s own father. Ashley was devastated, writing, “My father is my hero, my protector, and caregiver.” And her father has taken on his daughter’s mission. He’s the chairperson of The Nonceba Family Counselling Centre Trust.

His pride and passion shine through. “The centre is sadly flourishing. I say that because the volume of rape and abuse is unending. It was even worse during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we managed to keep the place open.” He’s deeply involved in the day-to-day running of the centre.

He believes that he often receives signs from Ashley, “thanking her dad for doing this for her”. Both he and Megan often feel Ashley’s presence. Meanwhile, the drunk driver who killed her got off free, paying only a R300 fine for driving a car that didn’t belong to him.

They know that their daughter would have done great things, and she wasn’t shy about her ambitions. “She bought herself an imitation Oscar statue because she knew

that one day, she wanted to replace it with the real thing,” remembers her father. Megan says Ashley chose Japan for her exchange programme because it was the most challenging place to go.

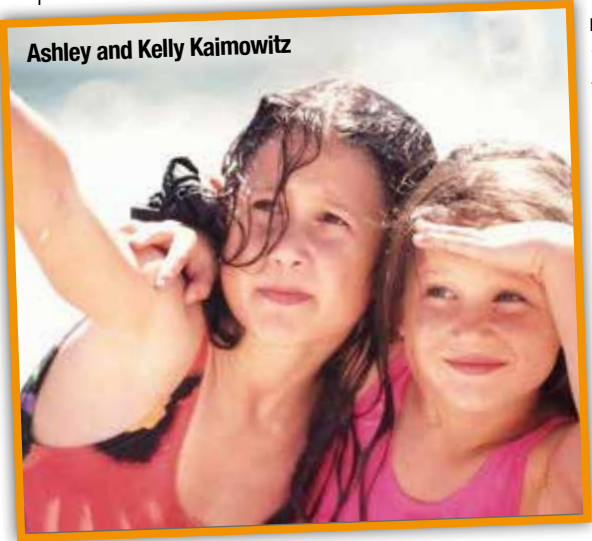
It’s moments like these that show what could have been. “Everybody grieves differently,” says Megan. “It was worse after two years because that’s when reality sets in.”

The little girl that changed Ashley’s life grew up, other children who passed through the centre went on to build careers and families, and Mankayi moved on, followed by excellent centre directors. Next year, Ashley would have been gone for as long as she lived. “Thank G-d we had her for 19 years,” says Megan. “She taught us so much. Time doesn’t heal, but time allows you to find mechanisms to cope. It’s a hole that never fills.”

For those who want to carry Ashley’s mission into the future, the obvious choice is to help maintain the centre. “In addition, get involved in something in her name,” says Jeffrey.

“Through this [project], I have solid proof that you can change the world so long as you have a heart without fear, a mind without walls, and a dream big enough to be shared,” wrote Ashley. These words are etched into her gravestone.

During the earthquake in Turkey in February 2023, a man was photographed holding the hand of his daughter, who had been crushed by the rubble. “I keep that picture on my desk to remind me that others are also in pain,” says Jeffrey. And just like that father, he has never stopped holding his little girl’s hand, carrying her mission forward every step of the way.



Ashley and Kelly Kaimowitz

funds. After her death, more donations streamed in, and in 2008, the doors of the new centre were opened.

The centre is equipped with medical facilities, a counselling clinic, a safe house for children, an abused-women’s shelter, a community hall, training facilities, multiple offices for doctors, lawyers, social workers, and psychologists, an ample playground, and much more. It’s open all day every day, with live-in staff and an entire team trained in crisis response.

“Though Ashley isn’t here to witness the fruits of her labour, the centre is dedicated

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Inspiration from our youth

Youth Day commemorates the day in 1976 when South African youth stood up for their future. The SA Jewish Report asks Jewish youth what this day means to them. Here’s what they said.

Zara Abramsohn, King David High School Victory Park, Grade 11

A total of 63.3% of South Africa’s population is constituted of individuals between the ages of 15 and 34. The majority of South Africa is our youth, and we are already making changes. As a young person myself, I look forward to many adjustments.

Developments in online thrift shopping has taken South African youth by storm. Instagram accounts aimed directly at staying current without hindering our environment with fast fashion, are proliferating. Our youth is looking good, and helping the environment while doing so.



Another aspect of change is in South Africa’s artists and culture. Bouncing back quickly from the COVID-19 pandemic, artisans are back on the prowl. South African youths are finally allowed to re-introduce themselves to the vastness of South Africa’s artistry. Young musicians, such as 20-year-old Will Linley, have the opportunity to express themselves on stage once more. Youth playing for youth.

South Africa might be going through a bit of a rough patch in some areas, but our youth is recovering from the strains of our past, and we’re excelling in whatever we try. South Africa’s youth will soon be able to change the world – even with the lights out.

Donna Levin, King David High School Victory Park, Grade 12

They say that the future lies in the present, with the people that live now. So then, does the past lie with those that lie beneath us? How am I, a mere Grade 12 student, a person who must still ask for permission to use the bathroom, supposed to make a difference in the world?

We see Youth Day as a solemn day, when we honour the youth who died during the apartheid regime. That lies in the past, and it’s a pain that the entire nation will carry. But how, with no clear impending doom but rather a slow-rising water that seems to threaten us, do I look toward the future? Am I expected to carry the weight of the youth who died, or am I expected to rise above it – while the mere weight of exams next week threatens to chain me to the bottom of the sea.

I know better than to ask how I feel about the future. I could ask how I feel about the present. I feel that I will slowly but surely move forward. Perhaps not carrying the full weight of the youth who died, not the grief and turmoil, but rather, I will take their ambition with me and, in the present, I will do the best I can. Every day, in every way, better and better and better.



Rachel Brett, Cape Town Torah High, Grade 11

South Africa has faced many challenges in the past. As a youth living in South Africa, although I sometimes feel a little discouraged, I believe that my country has the possibility of a brighter future. As the youth, we have the responsibility to make a difference, whether it be by speaking out or finding ways that we can help a cause close to our hearts. I would like to see a decrease in the number of people living on the streets. It’s disheartening and heartbreaking, and I wish that one day, these people will have the opportunity for a better life and the ability to pursue their aspirations.



With the help of leaders that care about the people and want to serve them with integrity, we can help our country for the better. It’s up to the youth to be those leaders who are motivated by caring, not self-interest. You don’t need to be a politician or leader with great power to create change and make an impact. I

look forward to seeing my country flourish with the help of youth as leaders in their communities.

Gadiel Janet, Yeshiva College, Grade 12

Every year, a sense of dread fills me as I see the ominous day etched into the calendar – June 16, Youth Day.

It may seem odd for this day off school to induce fear in a student. Surely, it should be the opposite! However, I fear for myself, my accomplishments, and my value as a human being. How do I compare to the tremendous feat achieved by the courageous students that took part in the Soweto uprising? How can I, a sheltered Jewish boy, even contemplate comparing myself to those who inspired the end of apartheid? Therefore, I fear.

However, I’m thinking too big.



Neither I nor the youth of 1976 tried to change the world. All they wanted to do was make a change. They believed they deserved a fair education, and they fought to change things. I now see that the youth of today doesn’t need to aim for worldwide change. We can change ourselves, then our families and schools, and from there, the sky’s the limit.

This Youth Day, I seek to be the change I wish to see. I seek to improve myself so that others may follow. By constantly striving for improvement, I believe that South African youth can build a future we look forward to.

Jayda Sack, Yeshiva College, Grade 12

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” These famed words of renowned English poet John Keats have never resonated more for South African youth. Our country, our home, is full of beauty and life. We are the future of this country that has a rich history of both struggle and triumph. Many of our young identities are shaped by our country’s complex past. Most relevant would be the apartheid legacy, which left no South African untouched. Forty-seven years ago, on 16 June 1976, the suppressed power of the South African youth erupted.



Those who were disempowered as a result of the Bantu Education System took to the streets of Soweto and demanded their rights to education. It’s humbling to think that if young people who had been granted so little could make such a grand difference in their society, how much more we as privileged young people can create change.

For many, present-day South Africa is a story of doom and gloom. As a matric student, I’ve been advised many times to “get out of this place”, and have been told ad nauseam that “there’s no future in South Africa”.

However, if the youth of 1976 accepted their circumstances with obedience, where would we be today? We are the future, it’s our responsibility to stop the cry of our beloved country. South Africa, our rainbow nation, has so much to offer. Its culture, nature, and spirit shall persevere, and I look forward to seeing South Africa flourish once again. For after all, “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”

Yudi Shishler, Torah Academy, Grade 7

South Africa has had a rough past. The past few weeks in particular have been really tough. Stage 6 loadshedding kept us in the dark for hours at a time. Our economy is also under pressure, as the rand dropped to almost R20 to the United States dollar. That’s besides the potholes, crime, and a government that seems to have forgotten about its people.

People often think that if something has been bad in the past, it will continue to go in the same direction. On the contrary, I think loadshedding might force South Africa to become a world leader in alternative energy. We’re blessed that in our country we have abundant sunshine, so we really have a lot of potential to develop solar energy.

South Africa’s greatest treasure isn’t gold or platinum, but its people. Wherever you go, people smile and greet you and are happy. A country that has friendly and happy people always has a bright future. I feel confident when I think about the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s blessing: “South Africa is good, and it will be better.”



Feigie Shaman, Cape Town Torah High, Grade 11

South Africa is an amazing place for youth today. The after-effects of apartheid have had a large influence on our behaviour. For instance, we are much less discriminatory than previous generations, and are more accepting of all different cultures, races, ideologies, and how our world can be improved. There’s so much potential in our generation and amazing leaders on the rise who have incredible ideas about how to change our country and world for the better, such as creating sustainable energy sources, innovative business ideas, and their immense talent adds to our South African art and culture industry.



While many aren’t optimistic because of loadshedding and corruption, we need to look further than that to the beauty and potential our country holds. The question is not what’s wrong with our country, but what we can do to make a change. I’ve already had an amazing youth so far, and I can see the memories and opportunities getting so much better!

Dovid Medalie, Torah Academy, Grade 9

South Africa has had a difficult past marked by corruption and segregation. However, young people are determined to cancel out the past and create a brighter future in which everyone has an equal chance, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race.

Our youth looks forward to all people having an equal chance at getting an education. It also looks forward to educational facilities providing adequate resources with which to educate us.

We also look forward to a change in parliament. Since apartheid ended, the African National Congress has been in charge. It’s time for a change. Hopefully, a more forward-thinking party will get elected in the 2024 national elections. Then, maybe, it can solve our biggest issues such as unemployment, a national shortage of coal to produce electricity, and crime. These are a massive stain on our country’s reputation.

Equality and fairness is another thing the youth looks forward to in the future. We want to live in a society in which everyone has equal rights. In doing so, we would create a stronger economy in which everyone receives a sufficient salary that will boost our gross domestic product.

The youth of South Africa remains hopeful and committed to building a better future for ourselves and our country. In order for us to achieve this goal, we have to continue to work hard and never give up, even when the situation looks dire.



Jarred Zolty, Cape Town Torah High, Grade 11

There’s plenty of hope for the future of South African youth. Many of us have big plans for our own future, but who can say that there’s no future for us here? It’s up to us to build the future of the country. The youth of our nation has been subject to many struggles but overall, the education system has never been more accessible. More and more students are getting a good education, and that in itself will help build the South Africa we dream of living in.

No-one chooses the situation they are born into, but every one of us has the power to create the change we want to see. I have faith that as South Africans, we have



the grit and dedication to rebuild South Africa with a vision for our future. The youth will soon become the leaders of tomorrow, and by building the economy, by creating start-ups, assisting our communities, and continuing to show pride in being South African, we can become the leaders of tomorrow, the business owners of tomorrow, the sportsmen of tomorrow, and most importantly, the community builders of tomorrow.

Hands-on dads make parenting doable

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

One are the days where the man is the sole breadwinner and disciplinarian and the children are entirely the women's domain. In a society largely characterised by dual-income households and less prescriptive gender roles, sharing parenting responsibilities is more the norm than the exception – and it's a setup that many fathers are embracing.

From rabbis holding their babies in shul, to dads cheering on the soccer sidelines, to fathers schlepping their kids to playdates and parties, there are a myriad ways fathers are becoming more active in their children's lives – and the benefits are palpable.

Lance Paiken, a father of three children under the age of four, says that being an active parent is non-negotiable. "I want my kids to look to me for support, love, and guidance and I want to be involved in every aspect of their lives," he says. "I want to have that deep connection with them as they are an extension of me. I make sure they have everything they need, not just financially but emotionally as well."

"I see how much more involved dads are today with myself and my circle of friends," he says. "When we're together, the mothers and fathers take turns running after the kids, changing their nappies, feeding them, and taking them to the bathroom."

Increasingly active fatherhood is a worldwide trend, says educational psychologist Dr Martin Strous. "This shift is attributable to several factors including changing gender roles and a move towards shared parenting. Society is in some respects moving towards more equitable gender roles, leading to greater recognition of the key role fathers play in child development."

With research highlighting the benefits of more involved fathers for themselves, their partners, and their children, it's clear that this evolution is a positive one. "We now understand the significance of fathers' presence and engagement in their children's lives from a young age," says Strous.

"Moreover, there's growing emphasis on achieving a better work-life balance, with fathers wanting to experience the joys of parenting and contributing to their children's well-being. Numerous studies show that children with involved fathers tend to achieve better educational outcomes, have higher self-esteem, and experience enhanced mental health."

No matter how demanding their jobs are, by taking an active interest in their kids, dads play an integral role. "Being present, connected, and supportive, even in the smallest moments, can deepen relationships profoundly," says Strous. "Starting this early in a child's formative years can provide the emotional scaffolding for deep, lasting relationships and harmonious living. It sets a tone that may reverberate through all stages of a family's journey."

For Jarred Gronemann, being active in all three of his children's lives may have been a result of circumstances, but he wouldn't have it any other way. Growing up with a hard-working father, Gronemann loved the fact that his dad still came to sports matches and regularly played with him. "That was something I felt was important to do, and I consciously aimed to be involved in my kids' lives as much as possible," he says.

It started with Jamie, his son from his first marriage, something that in fact attracted his second wife, Tracey Brandt, a General Practitioner with a demanding schedule in both casualty and private practice. "One of the first things that I liked about Jarred was that he was already a very active dad," says Brandt. "I knew that one day if we got married and had kids, he'd be a good father."

Gronemann was thrust into active baby duty when Brandt returned to part-time work six weeks after their first son was born, sometimes at 02:00 or 03:00. "He did the nappies, the bottles, everything," she says. "He had no choice, but he did it happily, he never complained or was bitter that he had to be hands-on. Even on nights when I was home, we would try and share the load as our kids were born 19 months apart."

"That bond from when a child is little is hard to replicate when they're older," says Gronemann. Today, his kids are 16, seven, and five and he's as involved as ever, juggling his full-time job at Maccabi with lifts, sports matches, dance concerts, and birthday parties. Through his example, he's demonstrating the value of being an active dad.

"My son told me recently that he wants to work for Maccabi because that way he can spend more time with his children one day," says Brandt. "In some sense, we're teaching them that there are no gender roles anymore, it's fluid. They can choose to be more hands-on if they want to and create a better balance."

Moms who know they have equal parenting partners often thrive at home and at work. "When sharing parenting responsibilities, fathers alleviate the stress placed on mothers, creating space for them to engage in self-care, pursue personal interests, or focus on their careers," says Strous. "This enhances the well-being of mothers, and strengthens the partnership between parents, leading to a healthier, happier relationship within the family unit."

Lorri Strauss, a freelance singer, actress, and producer, who has two sons aged nine and 12, says her husband's support has enabled her to build her career. "The reason we have such a good marriage has a lot to do with the fact that my husband and I are a team," she says. "Having a husband who is a hands-on father has allowed me to pursue fulfilling work opportunities and have a work/home life balance. My husband is also a great role model to my boys. I think by witnessing the way their dad moves through the world at home, work, or socially teaches the boys valuable lessons which they will hopefully emulate."

Kerri Marks, a mom of three daughters agrees. "When parents work together to raise their children, they can strengthen their bond and develop a deeper appreciation for each other's strengths and contributions," she says.

Her husband, Terence, has been all in from the moment their children were born, Marks says. "He helped carry the load emotionally and mentally for me as a new mom, and for our girls nothing was or is ever too much to ask of him. It comes very naturally to him to be proactive and involved in the girls' lives."

For Kara Lichtenstein, being a mom to two-year-old twin boys is all consuming, so having a supportive husband who consistently tells her she's doing a good job has been invaluable. "When the boys came home from the hospital, he would wake up with me to do the feeds and nappies. Now, he does almost all of the cooking as I'm busy bathing the boys before supper time. He's a fun dad who plays with them, but he's also there to discipline them if they get out of hand. He makes parenting "doable", especially with two at the same time. I couldn't do it without him."



Jarred Gronemann and his family



Jason Strauss and his family



Lance Paiken and his family



Terence Marks and his family

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Trauma, victims, and perpetrators – the psychology of abuse

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

For victims of abuse, the resulting trauma can have long-lasting repercussions. We may seek to understand and rehabilitate perpetrators, but our primary responsibility is to help the victims heal and to prevent future abuse, says Rabbi Avrohom Union, an international expert on child sexual and domestic abuse.

“We don’t understand the vulnerability of trauma,” said Union, addressing rabbis and rebbetzins at Koleinu SA’s Conference on Domestic Violence and Child Sexual Abuse this week. Union is the rabbinic administrator of the Rabbinical Council of California, who also holds a master’s degree in psychology.

“Trauma results in a fundamental reorganisation in the way the mind manages perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think,” he said, quoting Dr Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist specialising in post-traumatic stress disorder.

Common effects of trauma include depression; anxiety; panic attacks; a sense of shame and worthlessness; and feeling emotionally overwhelmed, Union said. Victims may also exhibit self-destructive behaviours; flashbacks; as well as a loss of a sense of who they are.

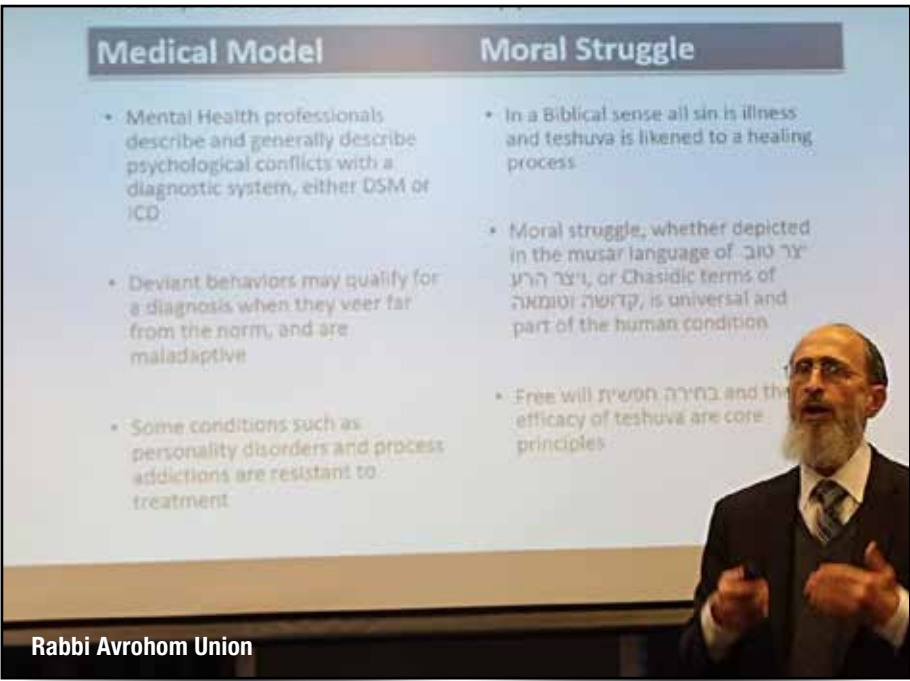
Victims of trauma may also experience lasting physical symptoms including chronic pain and headaches. Statistics even reveal a higher rate of cancer among abuse survivors and other diseases that don’t appear to have an emotional component. “Understand that it’s a two-way street – changes going on in our mind affect our bodies and vice versa,” said Union.



The after effects of a traumatic event can be long-lasting

When someone is abused, the limbic system in the brain, where we process nonverbal, emotional, and relational experience as well as our feelings and traumatic memories, is activated by the fear we feel. In such situations, we respond in one of three ways – fight, flight, or freeze.

“When the victim is being victimised, the sense of fear and danger shuts down the thinking part of our brains – the frontal lobe,” said Union. “They’re not going to fight if they feel they can’t fight. And they’re going to run only if they believe they’re able to run and if they are in fact able



to. What commonly happens is that they freeze.”

The impact of this extends far beyond the event itself. “All that remains within our bodies,” he said. “You may think that it’s over. Therapists will explain to you that it’s not over because the body keeps that feeling. Once those systems have been activated, it’s very difficult to get them out.”

Yet not every trauma victim is going to experience such extreme, long-lasting effects. “A lot has to do with who

we are as individuals, our family history, our personal history, and our genetic makeup.” But it’s important to understand the potential for such an enduring impact, something that can last for years regardless of how severe the abuse is perceived to be.

Union points out that perpetrators can be well-educated, highly respected individuals, or trusted figures including rabbis or therapists. “When it happens with a rabbi or trusted figure, it’s typically more damaging because you’re not only perpetrating the abuse, you’ve broken their connection with their faith.”

They can be friends of the family or family members themselves. “Statistics show that most abuse of minors takes place by people they know,” Union said. Perpetrators can be victims themselves. “That’s one of the tragedies of abuse – a large majority of these people aren’t monsters. There are some, but most have their own problems and issues. It doesn’t justify anything, but it helps us to understand abuse better and try to break the cycle.”

Paedophiles are generally the “monsters” we refer to,

Union said. They fall into two categories: preferential – those who seek children as their sole source of sexual gratification, and situational – when the offender isn’t specifically interested in children but will abuse whoever is available.

Most sexual offenders think about their crimes ahead of time. It’s rarely an impulsive act. “Offenders most often know their victims, and use these relationships to set up situations in which a chosen victim can be sexually assaulted.” What’s more, they generally manipulate these relationships over time to commit sexual offences in a process known as grooming, which often leaves the victim mistakenly feeling responsible for what has happened. Perpetrators also often threaten, pressurise, or use guilt to keep their victims from telling anyone.

Perpetrators tend to justify their behaviour to themselves either through denial – refusing to admit they’ve done anything wrong; rationalisation by blaming the victim or circumstances; and minimising the event, denying the seriousness of the act or harm to the victim.

“Abuse isn’t a mental illness,” Union stressed, “nor is it caused by a mental illness. Many individuals who live with mental health issues don’t abuse.” However, he said, we do commonly see mental illness in perpetrators, particularly personality disorders.

Union highlighted rabbinical approaches to the perpetrators of abuse. Rabbis generally think in terms of a moral struggle whereas mental health professionals speak

Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.

in terms of diagnosis and treatment. In the moral-struggle model, sin is an illness, and the process of *teshuvah* is likened to the healing process. This involves an admission of guilt, apologising to the victim, offering compensation, and taking active steps to change the behaviour.

Regardless of this process, our first responsibility is to the victim, Union said. Our mandate is to protect. We may feel sympathy for repentant perpetrators, but we cannot give them the opportunity to further victimise people by putting them in positions of power.

Many victims live with survivor’s guilt, however Union stressed that not everything that happens to us is deserved. “Halachically, a child cannot deserve abuse,” he said. By simply imparting this belief, rabbinic intervention in such cases can make a massive difference in healing. As such, he stressed the need for a partnership between the rabbinical and therapeutic world.

We can’t change the past but we can enable the person to move forward, Union said. “Healing doesn’t mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.”

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Surviving and thriving – a play on female resilience

Young Johannesburg theatrical talent **Serena Steinhauer** wrote and will perform in *THE UNDONE – Resilience is a Choice* later this month. The SA Jewish Report caught up with her.

You've achieved a lot in short time. What have you have done since matric?

I flung myself into the entertainment industry. In my gap year, I refined my craft further before beginning my undergraduate degree in music. I sang at live gigs, and was fortunate to work on Carly Graeme's one woman show, *All You Ask of Me*, at Theatre on the Square in 2019. That's when my path led me to Berklee.

Although I couldn't be on campus, I enjoyed completing my degree remotely through its online platform, Berklee Online. The courses at Berklee exceeded every one of my expectations, developing me not only as a skilled musician but a professional ready for the industry at large. There were nights that I had lectures at 01:00, and there were days when I didn't leave my room. Three years of this hard work ultimately paid off when I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Music Studies summa cum laude this May.

What inspired you to write THE UNDONE?

My college admissions essay titled "A Survivor's Story". In it, I discussed three stories of survival: my grandmother, Ruth, during the Holocaust; the women of colour that survived the apartheid regime; and lastly, a deeply personal survival of my own. When looking at these three instances from a bird's eye view, I realised there was a common denominator. Often, unconventional stories of survival go unheard. These stories are also often unfinished – those who have faced calamity sometimes don't see the end of their own story. Therefore, their lives were undone. I wanted to give them a name and a voice.

Tell us about your own experience of survival.

It changed my life. It changed how I saw myself, how I behaved, how I look at the world. It was a time when I felt completely violated, especially as a woman. After this, theatre was a catharsis.

Explain the title of the show.

THE UNDONE – Resilience is a Choice is a double entendre. The first meaning is that something is

unfinished, as if the stories told in the show have yet to find their ending. The second, is as if a stitch has been released from the seam, therefore coming undone. Books and stories are a prominent motif in the show, and that's where the double entendre comes into play. However, the tagline is the crux. The women portrayed in the show never allow themselves just to be victims and never allow grave circumstances to define their lives. They decide to overcome. They decide to be resilient.



Photo: Jap Ely

Serena Steinhauer

Why do you believe resilience is a choice?

Those who choose to be resilient are making an active choice not to be bitter about adversity. Resilience is solution-based thinking. How can

we take ourselves out of calamity and into the success of overcoming it? As Jews, we're hard wired to do that. We have faced genocide, expulsion, and antisemitism across centuries, and yet we find resilience in community, in faith, and in ourselves. A line from the show reads, "It's in the blood, you know?" Resilience courses through our veins.

What has it been like working with Bryan Schimmel and Alan Swerdlow on THE UNDONE?

It's extremely inspiring and deeply humbling to work with two of the most renowned members of the South African theatre industry. I've been consistently amazed at Alan's extensive knowledge of our history and the masterful way he can take text off the page and mount it to the stage through his directorial vision. Additionally, Bryan's musical genius and unique composition style

has been on full display through his original material for the show. Working with Bryan and Alan has also been a testament to our shared community.

Tell us about the three different women in your show.

We follow three women across three different timelines, each with a unique story, voice, and demeanour, yet all share a similar quality: a spirit of resilience. We first see Bina, a Spanish converso just after the Middle Ages. Next we hear from Naomi, a ditsy yet self-aware modern-day Israeli woman looking for love. Lastly, we examine the story of Rachel Beer née Sassoon, who was the first female editor of both *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*, and who uncovered the truth behind The Dreyfus affair. Then there's a fourth character – myself and my journey to piece together my own identity with help from the story of my ancestors. As you can see, there are many flavours and textures to each character.

Who inspired those roles? Can you describe those women?

History inspired each of these women. Both Bina and Naomi are completely fictional. Yet both of them existed in history and still exist today. When writing the show, I gave their story a platform and gave them a name, yet stories like theirs are certainly rooted in truth. Rachel, however, was a real person. Through studying her story, Alan and I pieced together the parts of her and created a living character.

Why do you believe Jewish women have a "profound strength and resilience"?

To be a Jewish woman in itself is the greatest privilege. I think of ancestors like Miriam and Esther, women who were fearless enough to change the course of history. They were brave enough to take risks for the purpose of the greater good. I think of Anne Frank, a teenage girl without whom we wouldn't have one of the most prolific accounts of the Holocaust. Jewish women have come face to face with adversity for thousands of years, and have chosen to overcome it. Looking at it from a biblical perspective,

the position of women in our Torah is framed with a sacredness – that we carry the blood of our faith through the generations. The combination of these aspects astound me. I feel powerful as a Jewish woman. I feel close to Hashem every day. I, through the great women who came before me including my grandmother, Ruth, a Holocaust survivor, find the resilience to claim the life I want to live.

What does being a Jewish woman mean to you?

It means being confident, intelligent, and empathetic. I look at the Jewish women that surround me, and I see generosity of spirit, kindness, and unwavering commitment to themselves and their families. Jewish women make a difference small and large, and that's what I resonate with most. I'm honoured to be part of female Jewry in Johannesburg, with organisations such as The Union of Jewish Women, the Women's International Zionist Organisation, and the female leadership in our youth movements who exemplify the brilliance of the Jewish woman.

Is it important for you to tell inherently Jewish stories? if so, why?

Absolutely. I must make mention that protest theatre is a crucial piece of the theatrical fabric of South Africa. I cannot tell apartheid stories as it would be appropriating the struggle of another. But I do have the license to tell Jewish stories as they belong to me and my community. Stories of struggle, of tragedy, of joy, and success. To give my stories and the story of my people a voice is one of the greatest gifts I have as a Jewish woman in theatre.

What's next for Serena Steinhauer?

After completing the run of *THE UNDONE*, I'm thrilled to be relocating to New York City to pursue my Master of Fine Arts in Acting at Pace University's Actors Studio Drama School. Moving to New York and studying my craft further is my dream come true.

- *"THE UNDONE – Resilience is a Choice"* will be at Theatre on the Square in Sandton from 27 June to 8 July. For tickets, go to Computicket or call 011 883 8606.

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Refuelling Comrades' souls – 25 years on

ILAN AND CORINNE OSSENDRYWER

For 25 years, Rabbi Shlomo Wainer has braced the icy pre-dawn chill on Comrades Marathon day to enable Jewish runners to lay tefillin en route. Last weekend, Chabad of Umhlanga's rabbi once again uplifted an extremely gruelling down run for so many with this unique initiative.

Those who have competed before look forward to that brief Hillcrest tefillin stop 60km into the marathon. This pitstop is unique, and as far as Wainer knows, it's the only one in the world because Comrades is the only race that starts before sunrise and ends late in the afternoon. In other words, the only time to lay tefillin is en route because it isn't possible before dawn.

At the Chabad pitstop, male runners get more than just a tefillin opportunity, they have a chance to give tzedakah and get a motivational and strength-inducing

hug from the rabbi before they continue on their way to complete the last 30km of the gruelling run before the dreaded cut-off time.

This year, more than 40 runners stopped off briefly for their soul food. There were also three who at different times needed a *minyan* to say kaddish. Wainer made a plan, and an emotional never-to-be-forgotten kaddish was recited before the runner moved on.

For many Jewish runners, the weekend starts with a vibrant Shabbat at Umhlanga Chabad led by Wainer and Rebbetzin Devorah Wainer at the shul. There's a charged energy in the shul filled with excited runners and their families.

When Comrades runner and chazzan Ezra Sher sang a prayer to the tune of *Chariots of Fire*, it enhanced the mood. As did the wisdom shared by guest speaker Tilda Tearle, a veteran of 30 Comrades. Her advice was to

Continued on page 15>>

When an earthquake is light relief

I'm not sure what it says about my social life, but last week's earthquake was the most fun we've had on a Saturday night in years. Maybe even in decades.

It was exciting, it got our heart rates up, and had just the right element of danger. Unlike Netflix on a Saturday night, it was something that we did together as a couple. And it was very, very social. More than that, it gave us something to talk about for the days that followed as we relived, reminisced, and shared the experience with anyone who would listen. In addition to this, there was a great sense of relief when it was over.

Much like Saturday nights used to be. When we were younger.

It was also a welcome break from loadshedding, water-related discussions, potholes, and from the devaluation of the rand thanks to the government's Russia policy. All of which was frustratingly preventable, predictable, and given the current lack of leadership, probable.

In contrast to the earthquake, which couldn't have been planned for, couldn't have been prevented, and where there was no-one to blame. Leaving aside the mining theory for now.

The great Boksburg slash Alberton earthquake wasn't the only show in town. Comrades runners and supporters who were already in Umhlanga, with a hint of Pietermaritzburg, were busy with their own earth-shattering event that like the earthquake, was social, dangerous (no-one should be running that distance), and something that would be spoken about for days. Much like the earthquake, it too was a relief when it was over. As frightening as the 4.5 magnitude

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



earthquake was when it hit at 02:38, for the most part it was treated with humour and levity. Aside from the neighbourhood hadedas, who were unimpressed with being woken an hour or two early, most people, once they realised that their homes weren't being broken into, that their husbands weren't having seizures, that the Russians hadn't arrived, and that there was no bulldozer in the garden, seem to take the Boksburg (Alberton) event in their stride. Pausing only to confirm on Twitter that everyone had experienced the same thing. Which they had.

What's clear is that South Africans are desperate for a break from the depressing and repetitive reality that they are forced to deal with day in and day out. A reality that has an impact on them in almost every facet of their lives.

So desperate is this need, that they are prepared to punish their bodies and their families by choosing to run close to 90km. So desperate are they, that they are happy to be woken up at 02:38 on a Sunday morning by the aggressive shaking of their beds. Because while they train and run, and while their legs burn and their thighs chafe and their nipples bleed, it's impossible to consider what the African National Congress is doing to the country.

And because we would rather put our future into the hands of an act of G-d, like an earthquake in Boksburg slash Alberton, than we would in our current government. Which is way more frightening than Saturday night arrangements.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Battling the bilge

The past week has provided yet more evidence of how overtly antisemitic modes of thought and the heavily conspiratorial worldview that invariably goes with it has come to permeate the outlook of certain extreme political and civic movements in our country. Even when ostensibly concerning issues of a general nature – be they illegal immigration, gang violence, drug trafficking, upholding traditional family norms and values, or water management – it's becoming routine for Jews to be gratuitously dragged in and maligned. This is a defining characteristic of *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*-type thinking, the circuitous logic which as a matter of course lays the ultimate blame for society's ills, regardless of what they might be, at the door of "global Jewry".

Thus we saw the Al Jama-ah Party include a wholly irrelevant side-swipe against "Zionists" in its statement opposing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) participation in discussions around the revised government white paper on family life. Other anti-LGBTQI+ voices were even more explicit. In a flurry of bigoted and offensive tweets, one Mehmet Vefa Dag, the self-styled founder and president of a new political movement called the Truth and Solidarity Movement Party, asserted that "Zionist Jews" were "using their banks, corporations, media, and politicians to divide, conquer, and destabilise the world and inculcate hatred towards heterosexual white men". Prior to this, the PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs) movement in Cape Town combined the usual diatribes against Israel with attributing responsibility for bringing drugs to Cape Town's streets and creating havoc in the communities in which it operates to "the vices of the Zionist world order, one being gangsterism and drugs".

Thankfully, we have also witnessed, at least on mainstream online forums, a fair amount of angry push-back from the public at large. It would seem that the average fair-minded, thinking South African has little difficulty in recognising such rhetoric for the unhinged

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



and hate-driven bilge that it is. That this is so is certainly in large part attributable to the kind of democratic, non-racial values that South Africans as a whole committed themselves to adhering to and upholding just less than 30 years ago, values which continue, however imperfectly, to underpin and inform our culture to this day.

To ensure that these values remain respected and adequately protected, it goes without saying that ongoing education along with due sensitivity training is vital, whether in schools, homes, workplaces, or indeed in the wider intellectual-cultural sphere. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies' own core work therefore includes helping to lead and be the public face of the Jewish community in fostering such a society. As often featured in this column over the years, they include such initiatives as our regular #MakeUsCount election year campaigns; participation in commemorative events on public holidays; and in more recent times, in humanitarian relief efforts outside our community. The Board has also brought out a number of noteworthy books and scholarly articles on Jewish participation in the struggle for democracy in South Africa, with many of those who feature in them having since been recognised and honoured for their contribution at our biennial and sometimes regional conferences. Through this, we have hopefully helped to instil a sense of pride in this and upcoming generations in how much our small community was ultimately able to be part of bringing about the advent of democracy, and to inspire others from our ranks to further this legacy.

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

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



Malcolm Freedman



Steven Joffe



Brian Rodkin's father Stan lays tefillin for the first time in 75 years



Gideon Levinsohn saying kaddish for his late father, Judge Phillip Levinsohn



Chazzan Ezra Sher



Gary Lefevre



Greg Edelstein

>>>Continued from page 14

avoid sitting at all during the race, "because you won't be able to get up", she said to much laughter.

On Shabbat morning, first-time runners were honoured with an aliya to the Torah.

Though most of the Jewish runners were from South Africa, some travelled from Israel, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Gadi Levin, a 50-year-old grandfather originally from Cape Town, travelled from Tel Mond, Israel, to run his first Comrades.

Brian Rodkin came from Canada, with his family kitted out in supportive posters, to run his ninth race. Rabbi Wainer even persuaded Rodkin's dad, Sam, to put on tefillin – something he hadn't done in 75 years.

Avigdor Book arrived from Israel to run his seventh Comrades. Several Jewish runners, like Steven

Isaacson and Dan Chaitowitz, were running their tenth Comrades, a feat that would earn them the prestigious green number.

When Wainer started the initiative a quarter of a century ago, his idea was to start a tradition of supporting Jewish runners. Two runners stopped to say hello, and one asked if the rabbi would help him lay tefillin as he wasn't able to perform this *mitzvah* before the race.

The following year, Wainer came equipped with more tefillin, and so the tradition began. Wainer understands that if people are in a hurry and don't lay tefillin – his hugs and a *brocha* will suffice, or even just a wave of acknowledgement that he and his team are at the roadside, supporting all the Jewish runners.

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Yeshiva raises funds with FUNraiser

The Yeshiva College Parent-Teacher Association hosted a *FUNraiser* for the pre-primary school on 8 June. Children whizzed around the brand new Three Roses Tea Garden bike track at Sandringham Gardens, while the parents mingled and schmoozed over donuts and coffee.



Nicky and Ben Fichardt

Celebrating those who make a difference



Franscica Ncube

Torah Academy Nursery School on 8 June dedicated the morning to showing *hakaras hatov* (recognising the good) to the school's assistants. The kids made cards, and celebrated the helpers with a party filled with treats and hugs.

KDL pupils help build school library

King David High School Linksfield Grade 10 pupils' concern about poor literacy levels in South Africa led them to help build up the library of Orange Grove Primary School.

The project was inspired by the school's #ChesedIsAlwaysAWinWin programme, part of its Jewish Studies curriculum for Grade 10s.

In the programme, pupils are tasked with researching and participating in a *chesed* project in order to understand the running of *chesed* operations as well as appreciating what it means to give of themselves.

Erin Dworkin, Mika Sacharowitz, and Liora Shapiro were motivated by poor literacy levels, with reports that 81% of South African Grade 4 pupils are unable to read for meaning.

They approached Marion Bloch and Gillian Jankelowitz, who have established a library for the pupils of Orange Grove Primary School

solely with the help of volunteers and through book donations. On 5 June, they paid a visit to the school, and



Mika Sacharowitz, Liora Shapiro, and Erin Dworkin with Orange Grove Primary pupils

donated books, games, and stationery that they had collected from fellow pupils, and presented a library lesson to a class of 43 Grade 2 children.

The excitement of the children as they listened to stories, completed worksheets, and coloured in pictures in the books which the girls had prepared for them was a rewarding experience. They then sang, danced, and played games, all with the aim of demonstrating the amazing world of words and the vistas that await a literate child.

The girls were humbled by their visit, and felt privileged to have been able to participate in this project.

Crawford pupil gets prestigious white blazer

Dina Tchelet of Crawford Sandton recently received senior full colours for academics, sport (tennis), and service, and was awarded a white honours blazer at a school assembly.

A white honours blazer is one of the highest awards a student can receive at Crawford. It celebrates students who have achieved senior full colours across any three of the four disciplines.



Dina Tchelet

Sunday 18 June

- Tzivos Hashem South Africa hosts *The Grand Pirkei Avos Expo*. Time: 10:00. Venue: Sandringham Bowling Club. Contact: tzivoshashemsa.co.za

Wednesday 21 June

- Second Innings hosts the screening of *A Queen is Crowned* – the original full coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Time: 09:30. Venue: The Military Museum in Saxonwold. Cost: R130. Contact: Grecia 082 561 3228
- The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre hosts the screening of *The World is Ours*. Time: 18:00. Contact: 021 462 5553 or admin@holocaust.org.za

Sunday 25 June

- The Johannesburg Heritage Foundation hosts *The Great Achievers – Westpark Jewish Cemetery tour*. Time: 14:00. Contact: www.joburgheritage.org.za or https://qkt.io/iLeoZy
- Second Innings hosts a show by an African jazz and soul band. Time: 10:00. Venue: Sandringham Gardens. Cost: R60 (R40 for members). Contact: Grecia 082 561 3228



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SHNEIDERS DARK CHOC ALMOND, DARK CHOC HAZELNUT & MILK CHOC HAZELNUT 180G EACH



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MAXI BEEF BURGERS P/100G



13⁹⁹

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28⁹⁹

LION FIRELIGHTERS 12'S



31⁹⁹

THREE STAR MATCHES 32H FIRESTRIKER EACH

24⁹⁹

NIVEA MEN ROLL ON ASSTD 50ML EACH



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MAXI BEEF BOEREWORS P/100G



31⁹⁹

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21⁹⁹

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