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Hitting a nerve: Jewish woman takes on local antisemite

TALI FEINBERG

Many people have stood up to presidential hopeful Mehmet Vefa Dag's radical homophobia, but few have called out his rabid antisemitism. However, one young Jewish woman felt it was her duty to speak up, especially considering how extreme his hatred is towards Jews and Israel.

However, after Michelle Dickman (31) started responding to Dag's hateful tweets, he immediately went after her, even threatening her safety. He shared images of her Twitter profile and face in several tweets, twisting reality to call her an "Israeli agent", even dehumanising her by describing her as an "it".

Among many predatory and defamatory statements, he said, "This agent is the biggest obstacle in front of our country, it should be caught or deported immediately"; "We will bring you to justice, we will not allow you to interfere in our country's internal matters"; and "If any patriot can give us this Israeli agent's information, we will be heartily happy."



He then tweeted a South African flag and said, "We will cleanse our country from traitors."

His followers joined him, with one called "Hangriest Boer" saying, "The world is waking up to you Jews and your crimes, it won't be long before there are repercussions. You should go back to the demon child-rapist nest called Israel."

Dag was banned from Twitter after users reported him for his hateful rhetoric. However, he soon returned to the platform under a new username, @AFRICANDEMOC, with antisemitic, homophobic, extremist tweets and conspiracy theories. He says he's a "President candidate for 2024 South Africa" and his party is called the Truth and Solidarity Movement.

After the *SA Jewish Report* reported on his antisemitism, he tweeted a link to the article, saying "welcome to our dance with Israeli agents in South Africa".

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Dickman, who works in commercial real estate, says she noticed Dag's homophobic tweets two weeks ago. "Then, he started with the antisemitism. When I saw that he was in Cape Town, and how bad it had become, I couldn't sit by and watch."

Continued on page 3>>

Desirable and detestable disputes Torah Thought



Rabbi Dr David Nossel

One of the most well-known and frightening lessons of the entire Torah comes from the portion of Korach. Korach and his assembly chose to have a dispute with Moses. It was a very ugly episode in our history, and the results, which included a plague, were disastrous. The take-home lesson is very clear: avoid disputes like the plague.

How surprising it is therefore that the Ethics of the Fathers Chapter 4 Mishna 20 seems to teach the exact opposite. Says the Mishna, "Any dispute which is for the sake of heaven will ultimately endure; and [any dispute] which is not for the sake of heaven will not endure. Which dispute is for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai. And not for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Korach and his assembly".

The key to unlocking the message contained in this Mishna is to understand what "for the sake of heaven" means. In order to do that we need to know what the heavens are all about. The heavens represent the ultimate guidelines from above on how to get to the ultimate destination in life down below – the better world we're looking forward to here on earth. That being the case, the more options the guidelines offer, the better. This is because the more possibilities one has, the more likely one will be able to succeed in reaching one's ends. This is what the Mishna means when it says, "any dispute that is for the sake of heaven" – for the sake of providing additional means and options of achieving the ends – "such a dispute will endure". Hillel and Shammai not only held different opinions, they encouraged each other to do so. Each different opinion provides an additional and useful

heavenly possibility of reaching the commonly held earthly destination.

But Korach and his assembly didn't dispute for the sake of heaven, for the sake of getting heavenly guidance about succeeding on earth. They disputed about the heavens. According to them, it was the opposite way round – the heavens were the destination and the earth was the means. Since Abraham, the Jewish people have been dedicated to having heavenly disputes on how to get to a better earth. Korach and his assembly chose to have an earthly dispute on how to get to heaven. Our forefathers were

interested in emulating G-d by using heaven for earth. Korach and his assembly were interested in taking from G-d by using earth to get to heaven. This was an alternative earth shattering worldview that couldn't last. They had lost the plot.

The Torah is full of disputes and debates with myriad differing opinion on almost every subject imaginable. There's only one subject that has no room for debate at all: that heaven, as lofty as it is, is merely a multi-optional resource centre that facilitates us reaching the real plot, to transform heavenly possibilities into earthly blessings.

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Goldstein implores Ramaphosa to lobby for journalist’s release

PETA KROST

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein “implored” President Cyril Ramaphosa before his visit to Russia last weekend to urge Russian President Vladimir Putin to release Jewish American journalist Evan Gershkovich, imprisoned in “inhumane conditions” since 29 March.

This “is a grievous affront to freedom ... that calls out for your intervention”, Goldstein wrote in his personal letter sent to Ramaphosa last Tuesday 13 June.

The chief rabbi took the opportunity of the South African president and other African leaders’ peace-mediation lobby to Russia last weekend to do what he could to help secure Gershkovich’s release.

Wall Street Journal journalist Gershkovich, whose parents fled the Soviet Union in 1979 and were survivors of decades of Soviet oppression of Jews, has been held in detention without trial for more than 70 days, according to Goldstein.

This 32-year-old journalist had been covering Russia, Ukraine, and the former Soviet Union when he was arrested in Russia and accused in trumped-up charges of espionage. He was arrested in Yekaterinburg, while reporting on the war in Ukraine, for allegedly gathering information to pass on to United States intelligence agencies. To date, Russia has yet to present any evidence, and Gershkovich has denied the charges, as has the *Wall Street Journal*, and the US government. He faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty.

A rabbinical leader in the US called on Goldstein recently to lend his voice to the campaign to free Gershkovich, who is living in inhumane conditions in Moscow’s infamous Lefortovo Prison. The chief rabbi, who has always had a good working relationship with Ramaphosa, grabbed the opportunity to take this further.

He felt sure the president – who was a leader in the anti-apartheid struggle – would find it abhorrent that a journalist was being held in detention without trial on spurious allegations. He believed Gerskovich’s situation was so obviously inhumane, much like what so many South African anti-apartheid activists and comrades of the president had endured.

“Mr President, you are in a unique position to intercede on his behalf,” wrote the chief rabbi in this private letter. “Please speak directly to President Putin and urge him to release Gershkovich, whose ongoing incarceration is a violation of human rights, international press freedom, and the rule of law.”

He went on to explain that the journalist was being held “in cruel and inhuman conditions” in the prison where Raul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews during the Holocaust; Natan Sharansky, the Soviet-Israeli human rights activist; Paul Whelan, a US marine in prison since 2018 for espionage; and other victims of Russian political oppression have been or are being held.

The chief rabbi explained in his letter that since his incarceration, Gershkovich “has been held in solitary confinement, enduring unimaginable conditions of deprivation and torture”. He explained that if the journalist ever got to stand trial, there would be “little prospect for a fair hearing or for the accusations to be impartially tested”.

“We know from our own bitter history here in South Africa how the apartheid regime cloaked tyranny and cruelty in the garments of sham legal processes, including detention without trial,” Goldstein wrote.

The chief rabbi joins the US government including President Joe

Biden himself, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and the European Union, in condemning the journalist’s arrest. This is the first time an American journalist has been arrested in Russia since the Cold War.

“Gershkovich had all the permits and permissions required by Russian ministry,” said Goldstein in his letter to the South African president.

“Countless NGOs and human rights organisations have called for Gershkovich’s release. Mr President,” wrote the chief rabbi, “you are in a position of particular influence, given South Africa’s BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa] leadership and your government’s close relation with Russia.

“I appeal to you – in your personal capacity and through all available government diplomatic channels – to intervene to secure his release so he can return home safely to his family in the US.”

When he hadn’t heard anything from Ramaphosa by Monday morning, he resent the letter to him.

The President’s spokesperson, Vincent Magwenya, told the *SA Jewish Report* on Monday that he didn’t know if the president had had time to read the letter sent to him before he left.

“We have been on the road since Wednesday last week, and got back only early this morning. Our focus has been on the peace mission, as you can imagine. So, I can’t give you a comment on the matter.”



Photo: Sefa Karacan Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Evan Gershkovich

The *SA Jewish Report* asked Magwenya to speak to the president within the next two days before getting back with a response. At the time of going to print, we still hadn’t received a response.

Hitting a nerve: Jewish woman takes on local antisemite

>>>Continued from page 2

Every time he tweeted something antisemitic, homophobic, or racist, I would say that he was wrong. There were a lot of those.

“I have the Israeli flag in my Twitter profile, so he obviously saw that and said I should go back to Israel. I explained that I’m not Israeli, I’m South African, and being Jewish doesn’t mean being Israeli.” She pointed out the irony that Dag isn’t a native South African – he’s Turkish – and yet he tries to make South Africans see their fellow citizens as traitors. She also noticed how he egged on other users to share their antisemitism openly.

Though Dag has called on people to target her, Dickman says, “I’m not afraid he’ll hunt me down or even do anything. If anything, it tells me that standing up to him as a Jew has clearly hit a nerve. I’ve had enough of people getting away with spewing so much antisemitic hate and no-one doing anything about it. His responses tell me that I’m doing the right thing.”

Is she scared for her safety? “Not in the least,” she says. “I’m pretty sure he’s one of those people that act all tough behind the keyboard but if you were to face him in person, he may not be so brave.”

Meanwhile, Dag has continued his antisemitic tweets, saying that “[Zionists] are sick people,” accusing Zionists of being paedophiles, and saying “Zionist don’t have a chance to live in Cape Town”. He continuously refers to “Zionist systems” as infiltrating South Africa and the world.

Dickman isn’t sure if she’ll take action against him, but at the same time, “he needs to have consequences. When his account was suspended, I told him it was because of hate speech and the way he was talking about people wasn’t right, and he was so shocked. He said Twitter had double standards. Right now, I don’t think I will do anything legally but if it escalates, then

definitely.”

Social media lawyer Sarah Hoffman says Dickman “could potentially have recourse in any one, or all, of the following: laying a criminal charge of incitement of violence; doxing, which is the action or process of searching for and publishing private or identifying information about a particular individual on the internet typically with malicious intent and is now recognised as a crime under the new Cybercrimes Act; or obtaining a protection order against Dag for harassment in terms of the Protection of Harassment Act.”

“We’re lucky because he has such a small following that the real-life impact won’t be as bad as it could be,” says Dickman. “But there are people who support him, and no-one knows what they’re capable of. It definitely has the potential to become a problem.”

She says some others have stood up to his antisemitism, but she hasn’t witnessed them being targeted and called “Israeli agents” like she was. “I don’t know how many people in the Jewish community use Twitter,” she says. “I would love to have more people stand up to him and have people fight back against him on a bigger platform. There are a lot of people that stand up against the other things he says, so I don’t feel alone in standing up to him.”

She feels it should be made more public that “someone who is ‘running for president’ is so blatantly antisemitic, and whatever can be done to stop him should be done. If everyone stands up against him, it will make a difference. We see in the news everyday people being attacked in New York for wearing a kippah, or on a bus in London someone calling someone antisemitic, derogatory names, and there isn’t much we can do about that. But this is in our city and our country. We can put an end to this.”

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Human Rights Commission resolves antisemitic incident

TALI FEINBERG

A Cape Town landlord who told his Jewish tenant that “Hitler should have roasted you mother-f**kers” has apologised to his victim, and agreed to a tour of the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre (CTHGC). His apology follows mediation conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) between the victim, the perpetrator, and the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD).

“More than a year ago, a member of our community was the victim of vile and antisemitic verbal abuse,” says Cape SAJBD Executive Director Daniel Bloch. “The outcome was as we had hoped. The aggressor apologised after understanding why his words were hurtful and offensive to Jewish people. Furthermore, he has agreed to attend a tour of the CTHGC to gain a better understanding of why we can never allow such atrocities to happen again.”

“In spite of this, I will continue to be proud of my Judaism, my identity, my heritage, and my community,” says the victim, age 30, speaking on condition of anonymity. “No amount of insults, no amount of threats, no amount of hate can ever change that. And I hope the same for the greater community, that we can all grow to be exceptionally strong, proud, and may we all flourish despite the growing trend, if I may call it, of antisemitism.”

The incident was filmed on the victim’s cell phone. “It was brought to our attention in 2021,” says Bloch. “We analysed the video recording, which wasn’t clear. Therefore, we were unable to take things forward. In 2022, we engaged with the victim again and were able to listen to a clearer version of the recording. Initially, we contacted the aggressor, seeking to understand the reasons for the comments and ultimately retrieve an apology as this was the request of the victim. Unfortunately, the aggressor wouldn’t speak to us. Our next step was to lodge a complaint with the SAHRC, which we did.”

Initially, they submitted a complaint in the name of the Cape SAJBD. “The SAHRC declined to investigate the matter further, citing the fact that we had already attempted to contact the aggressor without success. The SAHRC offers only mediation, and felt there was nothing more it could do.”

But after several emails to the SAHRC and continuous refusal from it to investigate the matter further, “we requested a meeting with its Western Cape regional manager,” says Bloch. “With the support from our national office, we had a constructive meeting with the SAHRC, presented our case again, and resubmitted a letter of complaint, which resulted in the SAHRC investigating the incident properly.”

The mediation was a short meeting. “The perpetrator acknowledged that he had made offensive statements, and he noted that there was a recording,” says Bloch. “He apologised for offending the victim and couldn’t believe he could have said such hurtful words. He didn’t understand what antisemitism was, and how certain words could be offensive to Jewish people. He has already sent a written apology, and we’re in the process of confirming a date for a tour of the Holocaust & Genocide Centre.”

Bloch feels it’s the best outcome in this particular case. “This seems to be an isolated incident, and we believe the aggressor is ignorant rather than antisemitic. We believe in restorative justice where appropriate, which would include an apology and a tour of the

relevant museum or centre. One of the best ways to overcome hate is to forgive and educate. Sometimes, however, where the situation demands it, we need to take the matter further and use all legal processes at our disposal, such as the Equality Court.”

The victim said the incident “was a dispute between myself and my landlord whereby he illegally deprived me of property that belonged to me and refused to give it back. I got the police involved who escorted me to the property to see that he was still in possession of it. When he realised that I was there with police officers, he began a tirade of abuse and insults, and then started with the antisemitic insults. So I started recording it on my phone. I maintained my

composure, especially because there were police officers there who unfortunately didn’t intervene despite hearing this.”

He eventually left and tried to lay charges of criminal injury “because it did fit the description of such a crime, but the state prosecutor didn’t want to entertain the charges”.

He then approached the Cape SAJBD. “I believe the Board of Deputies acted within its mandate,” says the victim.

“I would have preferred that the matter would have been treated with the contempt that it deserved. When a black person is called the ‘K-word’ by a white person, the white person is treated as a criminal and you will see the criminal justice system act. This should have faced the same kind of wrath because any kind of racism, any kind of hate speech, should be treated equally. In the Constitution, it says we’re all equal before the law. But, unfortunately, in some cases, it seems as if we’re not.

“This is definitely not the fault of the Cape SAJBD. It acted excellently and empathetically, it gave me a lot of its time and resources to try and assist me in getting this matter resolved. I’m happy with the outcome in that the perpetrator has sent a letter of apology and has agreed to a tour of the CTHGC, which I feel is very important, but I feel more could have been done by the justice system.”

To others who may experience antisemitic abuse, he says, “Stand your ground. Don’t be ashamed, and don’t be afraid of displaying that you are a Jew. It’s not a shameful thing. We shouldn’t be afraid to wear a kippah. We shouldn’t be afraid to wear a Magen David. Let people think twice before hurling antisemitic speech. We shouldn’t be the ones backing down, they should be. As the Cape SAJBD says, there’s no place for hate. We shouldn’t give hate the place to manifest.

“So seek every remedy,” he says. “Be it through the police, lawyers, the criminal justice system, or the Board, but don’t give hate place to grow.”

“Every case is different,” Bloch says. “We can take appropriate action based only on the merit of the incident as well as the information available. The Cape SAJBD will continue to protect the civil rights of the Jewish community and fight antisemitism. “There’s no place for hate in our society, and words do matter. If you experience antisemitism or if you know anyone who has experienced antisemitism, please contact us via the WhatsApp hotline on +27 79 994 5573 or email us sajbd2@ctjc.co.za.”



The perpetrator will be going on a tour of the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre

Photo: Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre Facebook page

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Attack on Herzlia ‘a shameful political ploy’

TALI FEINBERG

The African National Congress (ANC) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), apparently desperate to deflect attention from their support of Russia and gain votes, have chosen to target a Jewish school in Cape Town, hoping to sow division and attain popularity.

Wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh, EFF Member of the Provincial Legislature (MPL) Aishah Cassiem called for United Herzlia Schools to be “deregistered, based on the school being pro-Israel” during a debate in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament on 15 June.

This was after ANC provincial education spokesperson Muhammad Khalid Sayed called on Education Member of the Executive Council David Maynier in the Western Cape Legislature to intervene in Herzlia’s Zionist education.

That followed an interview with an Israeli TV news channel in which Herzlia directors said that some Jewish students go to Israel after school.

Maynier said Sayed’s question was asked merely to deflect attention from South Africa’s approach to Russia and Ukraine.

“We need to pause for a moment and be honest about what this is really about. It’s obvious that it’s clearly an attempt to use a school to pivot, deflect, and draw attention away from the monumental international-relations shambles of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” he said. “The fact is, South Africa’s warm embrace of Russia is a clear and present danger. That’s the real issue.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Maynier said, “We confirm that the school won’t be deregistered, and that this was nothing more than a disgraceful attempt to deflect attention away from their support of Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine.”

During the debate, African Christian Democratic Party MPL Ferlon Christians said, “It’s absolutely shameful that a question like this

was posed in this house. This school, Herzlia, is doing exceptionally well, with 100% pass rate and more than 95% of its students obtaining university exemption. The ANC will stoop so low to bring it [the school] to this house. Why?” he asked repeatedly. “Don’t use schoolchildren for your political agenda. You have no right. I had the privilege to visit the school not so long ago, and I’ll go back and learn from them how we improve our education system because they are an example.”

Said Maynier, “The ANC-led national government is arranging to send children from South Africa to Russia in November. The paperwork I have seen makes reference to training, use of surveillance equipment, and protecting information against internal threats. Sending our children to a country engaged in a war and accused of child abduction is surely not something that can be sanctioned. I have informed national government that our department won’t participate in any of these programmes.”

to defame the school further in an interview with *Salaam Media*. Wearing red overalls and a keffiyeh, she touted conspiracy theories of the school being akin to a training ground for militants. She also mentioned community members linked to the school, and implied that their businesses should be boycotted.

She continuously emphasised that the school was “allowed” to be Jewish, but “not allowed” to be Zionist. The presenter enforced these views, asking if there were “other little pockets around the country with the same agenda, grooming children”.

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson says, “The Cape SAJBD is deeply concerned by the EFF’s latest public attack on members of the Herzlia Board, displaying photographs and names on social media. The Cape SAJBD won’t stand by and allow this political grand-standing to continue. It’s a shameful attack on the largest and most prestigious Jewish school in



Photo: Facebook

EFF Member of the Provincial Legislature, Aishah Cassiem

the Western Cape.

We’ll continue to support Herzlia and its leadership, and will fight the ANC, EFF, and all other organisations’ reprehensible attempts to deregister the school. This is just the latest unsuccessful attempt by anti-Israel lobbyists to intimidate the Cape Town Jewish community.

“We reassure our Jewish community not to be concerned about the baseless claims against the school,” she said. “Nor should it be concerned by the attempts to



have the school deregistered. The Herzlia tradition of providing world-class education for our children will continue for years to come. We call on our government and religious community leaders to condemn the continuing attacks on the Cape Town Jewish community.”

“Herzlia doesn’t encourage a specific political ideology, and accepts pupils with diverse political views of both South Africa and Israel,” says Herzlia’s director of Jewish identity and community, Geoff Cohen. “Herzlia believes unapologetically that Israel has the right to exist as a Jewish state, and South Africans have a right to have a relationship with the Jewish state. Jews throughout the world have a connection to the holy land, be it religious, cultural, or historic. The school reflects the overtly Zionist nature of South African Jewry and as such, we celebrate our students’ connection with the Jewish homeland.”

Deputy shadow minister for employment and labour, Michael Bagraim, says, “The insidious attack made by both the ANC and the EFF is unfortunately nothing new. These issues raise their ugly heads as politics get hotter in South Africa. We’re facing a watershed election. The EFF and ANC are fighting desperately to create ‘wedge issues’. One of these is the comparison of Zionism to apartheid.

“There’s a belief within the ranks of the ANC and the EFF that the

Democratic Alliance [DA] is vocal in its support of Israel,” he says. “The DA doesn’t see Israel or the issues in the Middle East as being relevant to the South African problems that we are experiencing on a daily basis.

“This negative rhetoric merely drives the growth of antisemitism. We all know that the nature of modern antisemitism isn’t to refer to Jews directly, but to refer to Israel. This crude rehash of millennia of antisemitism is unfortunately raising its head in the political arena in South Africa. It’s antisemitism when they mention local businesses and Jewish personalities, and ask people to boycott them.”

National Chairman of the South African Zionist Federation Rowan Polovin says, “Herzlia is a respected Jewish school in South Africa, recognised as a leader in education in the Western Cape. Its alumni have made enormous and inordinate contributions to all levels of South African society. As a Jewish school with Jewish students and teachers, it’s intrinsically Zionist, with an unbreakable and proud connection to the world’s only Jewish state of Israel.

“It’s a travesty that antisemites are again finding ways to target people of the Jewish faith in South Africa under the thin veil of anti-Zionism, and it’s shameful that they are singling out a Jewish school to promote their hatred,” he says. “Instead of uniting and building bridges across all racial and religious groupings in South African society, these extremists wish to divide. Herzlia, as a Jewish school, promotes religious tolerance, non-racism, understanding, and charity – the very antithesis to what these groupings are about.”

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Mahler in the dark – a ‘Zanderful’ experience



HOWARD SACKSTEIN

Few dare to perform Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 2, the Resurrection. One would almost have to be insane to try. This magnum opus by the Austro Bohemian composer requires an orchestra of almost 120 classical musicians and a mass choir, making performance economically unfeasible. But in 1996, arguably the world’s most famous classical conductor, Benjamin Zander, promised then President Nelson Mandela, that he would bring his Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra to perform Mahler at the Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto. Regina Mundi holds a special place in the anti-apartheid struggle. It was there, in those hallowed halls, that activists would meet and discuss politics while political gatherings around the country were banned. During the 1976 Soweto youth uprising, students fled to the church for sanctuary from the marauding police, whose gunfire had left hundreds of people dead on the dusty streets of South Africa’s biggest township. Police stormed the church looking for student activists, shooting randomly into the sanctuary, scarring the edifice even to this day. A day after the anniversary of the 1976 uprising, on 17 June 2023, Benjamin Zander, dressed in a white bow-tie and tails, ascended the alter to perform one of the most dramatic pieces of music ever composed.



Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 in C minor is the story of death and resurrection. Divided into five movements, it tells the story of death, the memory and longing for a departed, a negotiation between the angels and the deceased, and the ultimate resurrection and afterlife. The music is deep, moving, and dramatic, reaching a crescendo of exhilarations accompanied by the song of a mass choir intoning in German at the ultimate point of re-birth. At one moment, the orchestra plays every key but one. As Zander, a previous winner of the Absa Jewish Achiever Special and Extraordinary Award, worked the orchestra into a dramatic climactic frenzy, the lights suddenly went out in Regina Mundi, a victim of South Africa’s constant loadshedding blackouts. Not missing a beat, Zander continued to conduct the orchestra and choir in almost complete darkness. The audience was in rapture. Nearly 1 000 people in the audience suddenly took out their cell phones and using the flashlights on their mobile devices, they illuminated the cathedral in the glow of their phones. When Zander completed the masterpiece, the audience jumped to their feet screaming, ululating, and applauding.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Audience members climbed onto their seats and pews giving standing ovation after standing ovation to the genius of the performance. An elated Zander thanked the audience, saying that he could never have imagined performing Gustav Mahler’s Resurrection in the dark. The concert will mark one of South Africa’s greatest cultural moments, and will forever imbue the Regina Mundi Catholic Church with another piece of South African history. As the choir bust into African melody, dancing and weaving their way from the stage, we stood there, *motse Shabbat*, a bunch of Jews, an Israeli ambassador, a Jewish conductor, having performed a Jewish composer’s symphony in a Catholic Church in the middle of Soweto on a Saturday night.

• Howard Sackstein is chairperson of the ‘SA Jewish Report’

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Nominations close: 4 August 2023 at 17:00 SAST

Remembering the Rebbe who saved SA Jewry

NICOLA MILTZ

In the early 1980s, the Lubavitch movement in South Africa was given a blessing by Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the Rebbe) to build a new school in Johannesburg. It was bold for the movement considering that things were volatile politically, the community was leaving in droves, and existing Jewish schools were struggling financially.

Communal leadership expressed concern about the timing of such a school when the “community was dwindling”, it said in a letter to the Rebbe.

He responded by saying that an existing situation need not be accepted as irreversible, and called for an all-out effort to reverse the trend. A declining community, he said, need not mean one should curtail the building of further educational facilities that catered to each child’s individual needs.

Today, that school, Torah Academy, is one of the largest Jewish schools in the country, and soon after the correspondence with the Rebbe, the King David Sandton campus was built.

This week marks the 29th anniversary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s passing. He died on 3 Tammuz, observed this year on Thursday, 22 June, a day of introspection by Jews worldwide who continue to read and study his prolific works and feel his holy presence in their lives.

Since his passing, his influence on world Jewry has grown exponentially, including in South Africa. His kind, open face greets you on billboards in cities throughout the world, from Balfour Park and Rosebank to New York City and London, and further afield. His inclusive teaching of love and unity, and a steadfast belief that every person in the world has a vital role to play in G-d’s creation, has touched millions, Jews and non-Jews, from celebrities, politicians, and business leaders to labourers and Torah scholars.

The Rebbe was a global visionary and scholar who had an extraordinarily enduring confidence in the future of South Africa as a place where Jews could flourish and thrive. This belief, say Chabad rabbonim, has been a source of comfort for a community often torn by seemingly insurmountable political and economic upheavals.

“For the longest time, the Rebbe was confident about the future of South Africa as a place where Jews would find security and have a good life and because of this, a large number remained,” said Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, the head of the Lubavitch Foundation.

“Yes, some left, but because of the Rebbe’s blessing and assurances, the ones who stayed were given a tremendous sense of permanence.”

Today, there are 70 *shluchim* (emissaries) throughout South Africa, and about 20 Chabad shuls, with Torah Academy Pre-school being the largest Jewish pre-school in the country, he said.

In a series of illuminating letters to communal leadership at the time, the Rebbe expressed the vital importance of Jewish education and of a diversified system that reflected the pluralistic nature of the community.

“The Rebbe saw that no one size fits all and today, South Africa has tremendous educational facilities catering to the diverse needs of the community,” Lipskar said.

In his letters, the Rebbe said that virtually every Jewish community, including in South Africa, comprised a variety of groups, each with a distinct identity in terms of their traditions and heritage. “All of them existing and flourishing side by side contributed to the advancement of the Jewish community as a whole,” he wrote.

“The Rebbe saw potential growth everywhere, and his vision of Jewish unity, kindness, and love of all humanity was something he taught over and over again, urging all of us to search for this,” Lipskar said.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman fondly recalled awe-inspiring Sundays at 770 Eastern Parkway, Crown Heights, when the Rebbe stood for hours outside his room giving out a dollar to each of the thousands of visitors seeking his blessing and advice.

“The Rebbe made everybody his agents for the *mitzvah* of charity. Every single conceivable type of Jew could be seen in the queue and be given his blessing. Very often non-Jews of all varieties would go as well,” Goldman said. On a recent visit to the Rebbe’s *ohel* (resting place) Goldman saw an African American woman praying there who told him she regularly went there to pray.

“His influence spread far and wide,” he said.

Goldman believes the Rebbe saved South African Jewry at a time when the country was in turmoil in the late

1970s, crippled by uncertainty in the dying days of the repressive apartheid regime.

“In those days, there was virtually no Jewish family that wasn’t grappling with the vexing dilemma of emigration,” said Goldman.

“During this period of uncertainty, the Rebbe sent his rabbinical students to serve this community as his emissaries, giving the country a massive vote of confidence.

“He was completely dismissive of the perceived need to emigrate. There were no grey areas and no vague platitudes. He said clearly that we shouldn’t be afraid and we should carry on with our good work.”

In an article, Goldman wrote that the Rebbe’s continuous reassurances of



Rabbi Yossy Goldman with the Rebbe

confidence “spread like wildfire” throughout South Africa. He recalled how the Rebbe relayed a message to communal leaders via a consular official at the South African

Bernhard once said, ‘Go home or stay home.’ If you have it in your mind that things will be fine, then they will be. It’s a mindset. The Rebbe understood this.”

Jewish and South African – an enviable identity

OPINION

GABRIELLA FARBER-COHEN



We dream of walking the streets of Europe. We dream of studying at one of the many schools or universities in America. We dream of living in Israel among all the Jewish people, especially when loadshedding hits and the 100th discussion is had about the state of South Africa.

Oh, how much greener the grass must be on the other side!

Last week, I returned from the World Jewish Congress (WJC) conference, with the theme of bridging the gap between diaspora Jews and Israel. I was part of one of WJC’s delegations called NextGen, as a fellow of The Lauder Fellowship. The conference began in Brussels, Belgium, and then moved to Jerusalem, Israel.

We met the European Union Parliament, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Israeli President Isaac Hertzog, and countless other Jewish organisations. But the most incredible part of it was being surrounded by more than 150 Jews representing their communities around the world.

Throughout the trip, there was a recurring thought in my head – first, how proud I was to be part of the global Jewish community and the contribution it makes in the world. Second, the fact that I was beyond grateful that as a Jew, I live in South Africa.

When it comes to being Jewish, if our influence is compared to our numbers, it doesn’t make rational sense. Yes, some might use this influence for antisemitic rhetoric, but I see it as an incredible achievement, and it reminds me of my duty as a Jew to make a difference.

Though I was overwhelmed at being with our global Jewish family and counterparts, being with them made me appreciate not only being Jewish but also South African, and that I had a return flight to Johannesburg.

Often, we need to be taken out of our reality to see it for what it really is. After school, many of my friends emigrated and now post-university, others are considering following the trend, and so the question looms at the back of our minds, “Am I going to stay in South Africa?”

It’s hard to ignore political instability; crime; a terrible exchange rate, which made it hard to give over the credit card in Brussels Airport for a Coke costing R75; and many other problems we know all too well.

Yet, it took leaving South Africa for a few days to realise that there’s no place I would rather call home as a young, religious Jewish woman.

dorm rooms, the University of the Witwatersrand has hardly experienced any antisemitism in the past three years.

Jews in Israel are becoming more and more divided and polarised, or in President Herzog’s words, there are “serious fault lines within our people”. Meanwhile, the Jewish community in South Africa is one of the most united in the world. No matter how different we are religiously, politically, and financially, each person in this community is cared for.

And they aren’t just cared for by organisations, but by individuals themselves coming together to be there for each other, not in spite of our differences but because of them.

While walking the streets of Brussels, we had to take off our lanyards because on them was written “World Jewish Congress”, and men were encouraged to remove their kippot. In South Africa, if a beggar or car guard recognises that you’re Jewish, you’re greeted with “Shalom mama, may G-d bless you.”

Don’t get me wrong, South Africa has its issues and problems, but after seeing what other Jews are facing around the world, I would much rather have a few hours of no electricity and be able to be a proud Jew anywhere and everywhere in this country.



Gabriella Farber-Cohen (front row, second from left) with other delegates at the World Jewish Congress conference

We can see things through whatever lens we choose, something can be a compliment or antisemitic. We can either be angry because of something, or appreciative of it.

At the end of the day, it’s our choice. Every country has its issues, but I choose to have to use a gas stove and some candles as opposed to having to hide the greatest and most important light of my identity – being a Jew. We don’t realise what we have here as a Jewish community. We don’t appreciate the privilege and resources we have as Jews in this country. We aren’t grateful enough for the incredible lives we live here. We wear the wrong glasses, with lenses that are distorting our view.

The grass isn’t greener on the other side, the grass is only greener where you water it. Let’s start using our power as Jewish people and our duty of *tikkun olam* to water the grass of South Africa.

• Gabriella Farber-Cohen is the national political officer of the South African Union of Jewish Students, the provincial spokesperson of the African National Congress Women’s League Gauteng, and is in her final year of LLB at the University of the Witwatersrand.

NHI unhealthy for SA in current form, say experts

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

The National Health Insurance (NHI) Bill passed by the National Assembly last week has caused alarm among healthcare providers, medical aids, and political analysts, who say that in its current format, it could cause a deterioration in standards and prompt a mass exit of skilled professionals.

A Jewish doctor, who works as a specialist in both the government and private healthcare sector, and who chose to remain anonymous, says though there's a lack of clarity on how the NHI will affect doctors especially those in private practice, they have significant concerns.

"You see the mismanagement, corruption, and infrastructure challenges when you work in state. Why break the private system to try and patch the broken state one instead of trying to fix it? That would be much more to the point."

For specialists, government income is often insufficient, the specialist says. "With our current economic situation, I need to supplement this income with private work. Yet that concerns me less than access to quality healthcare in this country. If you break the private system, you create a huge burden on an already broken public system. I don't think it can cope."

Dr Frans Cronje, a renowned political analyst and the director of think tank, the Social Research Foundation, said we underestimate the seriousness of the Bill at our peril. Cronje was talking to Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein in a webinar hosted on 19 June. "If the policy is eventually implemented as currently drafted, it will cause immense damage to South Africa because you cannot sustain a middle class in the absence of world-class healthcare," he said. The middle class will then exit, causing a skills and capital shortage.

Steven Crouse, the chief investment officer and senior wealth navigator at independent financial solutions



company Octagon Financial, also warns of a brain drain, specifically among private doctors. "I have friends who are medical professionals who have emigrated years ago under the threat of NHI," he says.

"Unfortunately, more will likely go that route, but can they live elsewhere like they live here? Probably not. Wherever else they go, they'll be entering a public healthcare system."

Though the NHI itself will reportedly not be modelled on any one country's system, Health Minister Dr Joe Phaahla recently paid a fact-finding visit to the United Kingdom (UK).

Renee Snoyman, who recently returned from four years living in the UK where she was a care worker for the elderly, says that public healthcare systems like that country's National Health Service (NHS) are far from ideal. It takes ages to see a general practitioner, she says, who needs to be consulted before you can get a repeat script for vital medication.

"I once went to the hospital with one of my customers who had Parkinson's and had broken her hip," Snoyman says. "It was full, so we sat in the corridor with hundreds of other people the whole day. They didn't have space, and she needed the operation, so she was on a waiting

list either to be put into the main ward or transferred to another hospital. And this is a first-world country that's had the NHS for many years."

Yet, says Crouse, the NHI isn't financially viable, especially in an economy where growth is already severely constrained. "In the past six budgets that have been passed, there hasn't been a single cent allocated towards NHI," he says. "And there has to be."

"The African National Congress [ANC] is telling people what they want to hear as it approaches the 2024 elections," he says. "This is very much a vote-attracting mechanism. But on the ground, there's been nothing. And that's why I'm not, at this stage, panicking. Couple that with the question of whether the ANC is ever going to be in a position to raise taxes – it can't squeeze juice from a lemon that's been squeezed dry already."

Though Crouse believes there's no need for panic, he says we need to get our minds around some form of redistributive healthcare. "But I don't think it will be the one that says you'll be forced to go here or there, because supply and demand and market forces will take care of that. Those with much bigger and deeper pockets, who fund our government, will ultimately have a say in it, especially if it's going to bankrupt this economy and if it's going to be open to looting, a real risk."

"If the current proposal is implemented, the state will ultimately be the single point that purchases all

healthcare services in the country," says Cronje. The Bill aims eventually to nationalise private medical schemes and incorporate their resources into a single pot of funds from which those healthcare products or services will be made available.

"Regardless of who you are or where you find yourself in the country, you will be able to, in theory, visit any care provider who will provide care services to you for free and then claim back from the state." Yet we are a very long way away from any form of implementation, he said.

The Bill is founded on the idea of a single-payer model, and makes no allowance for private medical aids once fully implemented. In a press release issued in response to the adoption of the Bill, Dr Ryan Noach, the chief executive of Discovery Health, stressed the need for better integration of private healthcare as opposed to its disbandment.

"Discovery Health remains committed to supporting the development of a National Health Insurance system and universal healthcare coverage that improves the equity and access to healthcare for all South Africans," he says. "However, we don't endorse the single-funder model as proposed in the Bill, and believe that sustainability can be achieved only through collaborative work between the private and public sector, built on the strength of the COVID-19 partnerships that served South Africa so well."

"It's particularly concerning that the inputs of the healthcare professionals, who are core and essential to the delivery of care, aren't being given the appropriate weight and attention in the amendments to the Bill," Noach says.

In fact, the South African Medical Association (SAMA), which represents more than 12 000 doctors, has stated its opposition to the current version of the Bill. Detailing its objections, SAMA launched a Change.org petition which in five days, reached 47 000 signatures and counting.

This kind of active opposition is key to preventing the Bill's implementation. "I expect that the body of resistance will continue to build," Cronje said. "In that event, I expect we'll see off this threat over the next three to four years, and replace it with much more constructive body of healthcare policy."

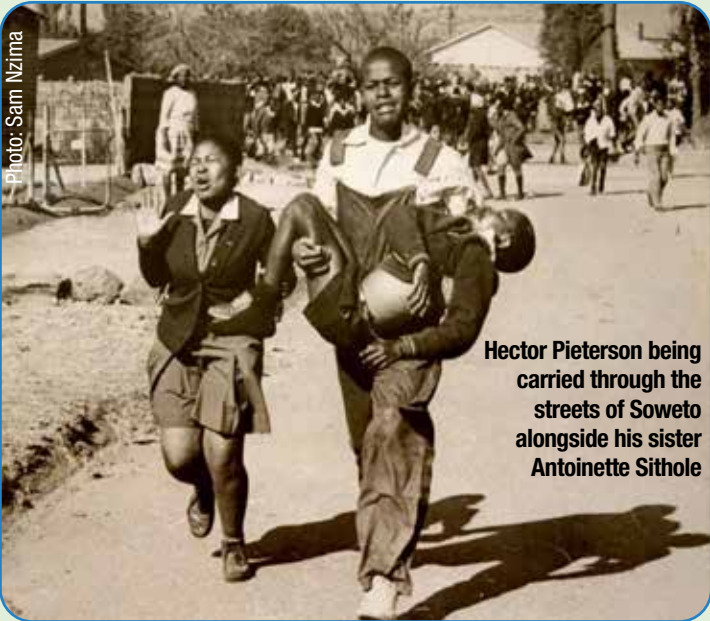
Absa Jewish Achiever Awards – so much more!

STAFF REPORTER

Our theme at this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards ceremony on 21 October 2023 is "We are more than!"

And as South African Jewry, we really are so much more than we believe we are or believe we're capable of being. This is why there are so many incredible Jewish achievers in our community.

"At a time when so many in our community are disheartened and disillusioned, it's important to try and find perspective in our situation," says Howard Sackstein, *SA Jewish Report* and Absa Jewish Achiever Awards chairperson this week.



Hector Pieterse being carried through the streets of Soweto alongside his sister Antoinette Sithole

And so, on Youth Day on 16 June, the *SA Jewish Report* launched our Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2023 campaign with the catchphrase: "We are more than our past." On the *SA Jewish Report* wrap, we ran the iconic image of the 13-year-old Hector Pieterse – who had been shot during the 1976 Soweto uprising – being carried through the streets and his sister, Antoinette Sithole, running alongside. It was this picture that galvanised the world against apartheid. So too did the man in the photograph next to this (on the wrap), the late South African President Nelson Mandela. Says

Sackstein, "These images show that we are more than our past, and we'll be so much better in our future."

"When you look at the chaos in this country of the 1970s and 1980s, you have to admit that today, in spite of our numerous troubles, South Africa is a much better society."

"So, it's clear that as a community, we're so much more than our past, so much more than onlookers or bystanders to history," says Sackstein. "We're more than darkness, and more than colour. In fact, we're the builders, we're the innovators, we're the creatives, and the entrepreneurs who have built South Africa."

It's for this reason that the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards "celebrates the extraordinary and the

disproportionate contribution our community has made to South Africa", Sackstein says.

He points out how much achievement we have to celebrate in this country. "We celebrate the progress we made for and in South Africa after we arrived here mostly as penniless refugees from Eastern Europe. We have since built communities, industries, and philanthropic organisations that have created jobs, filled bellies, and uplifted the people of South Africa," he says.

It has been a progression that will be evident in this year's Absa Jewish Achiever

Awards' theme, and the exciting build-up to the ceremony on 21 October. "Our progress starts with our past and what we have overcome, and ends with a proud statement that 'we are South Africa'. The dusty soil of this nation sticks between our toes and the rhythm of Africa beats in our South African Jewish hearts. This is something worth fighting for."

So, set aside any disillusionment and find those exceptional achievers in our community who should be given deserving *kavod* at this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. Nominate now. Go to bit.ly/jaa23nom

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Lithuanian Jewish revival ‘begins with honesty’ – ambassador

TALI FEINBERG

In his last public engagement in South Africa, Lithuanian Ambassador Dainius Junevičius focused on the devastating and irreversible destruction of Lithuanian Jewry during the Holocaust, especially in what was once the centre of Jewish life, Vilna, or Vilnius in Lithuanian, known as “the Jerusalem of the North.”



He was speaking at the opening of the exhibition *Chayela Rosenthal – Wunderkind of the Vilna Ghetto Theatre* in Cape Town on Sunday, 18 June, almost 80 years to the day since that ghetto was liquidated by the Nazis.

“As prominent Lithuanian Jewish writer Grigory Kanovich, who passed away recently, said, ‘Only penance, the truth, and the courage to admit it have the power to revive and strengthen the relations between the Lithuanian and Jewish nations.’ I fully subscribe to these words,” he said.

Among the Lithuanian Holocaust survivors who came to South Africa was the remarkable Chayela Rosenthal. She went on to have a remarkable international career in Yiddish theatre with many stars of stage and screen. She made her home in Cape Town, where she and her husband, Xavier Piatka, had two daughters, Naava and Zola, who continued their parents’ legacy.

The exhibition explores Chayela’s pre-war life, and her extraordinary tale of survival and resistance through her music and that of her brother, composer Leyb Rosenthal, who was brutally murdered days before liberation.

“We welcome the return of Jewish culture from the past to the present, wherever that may be,” said the ambassador. “I hope this exhibition will be seen by the Lithuanian public one day. It speaks of human strength in the face of death and unspeakable injustice [and] reveals [Chayela’s] ability to remain humane in the most challenging moments.”

The ambassador said that “in contributing to this exhibition, we wanted to remember that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the destruction of the Vilnius Ghetto on 23 September 1943. The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania in 1994, right after Lithuania regained its independence, proclaimed this day the Day of Remembrance for Jewish Victims of Genocide in Lithuania.”

Looking back, he said “I belong to the post-war generation. I was born only 17 years after the beginning of the war in Lithuania. My mother was the same age as Chayela. I grew up in Viliampolė during Soviet times. It is a suburb of Kaunas where a ghetto was established during the Nazi occupation. It’s also close to the Kaunas Ninth Fort, where Jews were killed.

“In Soviet times, there was little talk about the Jewish tragedy, and I was completely unaware of the cruel past of this place. When I came to study in Vilnius in 1976, there was almost no trace of the city’s Jewish history. During the Soviet years, not only was there no talk of the Holocaust, Jews were discriminated against and had very few opportunities to develop their culture.”

However, “the Lithuanian national revival movement *Sąjūdis* and the initial struggle for liberation from Soviet oppression at the end of the 1980s provided conditions for a Jewish national rebirth. In 1989, the Lithuanian Jewish Cultural Society was founded.”

During the following three decades, enormous changes took place in Lithuania, the ambassador said. “Gradually, Jewish culture has become closer and more familiar to us,” he said. “Many publications on the history of the ghetto and memoirs of Jewish survivors have been published in Lithuanian.”

Today, “walking around Vilnius, we see many traces of the Jewish legacy”, Junevičius said. “Signs mark the boundaries of

the Vilnius Ghetto, there’s a monument to the victims of the ghetto, memorial plaques mark the buildings of the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre and the Ghetto Council, and a Ghetto Museum on the premises of the former ghetto library is in the making. At the initiative of our foreign affairs ministry, a memorial plaque has been erected on the site of the YIVO [Institute for Jewish Research] building.”

Junevičius reflected on how the exhibition inspired him to remember Jewish survivors of the Vilna Ghetto that he has met in the past. This includes Fania Brancovskaja, born Jocheles in 1922, who turned 101 in May. “She always speaks in the beautiful Yiddish of Vilnius when invited to speak. She escaped just before the liquidation of the ghetto by going to fight with the partisans. In 2017, Fania, an active promoter of Holocaust remembrance, was awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Lithuanian State Order.

“Another prisoner of the Vilnius Ghetto I met is Samuel Bak, who lives in Boston. An honorary citizen of Vilnius, Bak says, ‘Not a day goes by that I don’t think about my beloved hometown, Vilnius. Independent Lithuania has recognised the importance of my art, which bears

witness to the memory of the Jews who lived in Vilnius and were killed in tragic circumstances.” Junevičius noted that at the age of nine, Bak held his first exhibition in the Vilna Ghetto. Later, he was rescued by the Poles and Lithuanians of Vilnius, who hid him in a Catholic convent until the end of the war.

“Professor Markas Petuchauskas holds a special place in my life,” the ambassador said. “When the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre was founded, Mark was 12 years old. He saw all the plays of the Vilna Ghetto and memorised their directors – the famous artists of Lithuanian Jerusalem. In his own words, ‘The theatre turned me into a human being, a citizen, instilled in me a love for theatre, and gave me a profession for life.’”

Petuchauskas escaped and spent the rest of the war in a village in western Lithuania. He studied law and later became a renowned theatre scholar.

In independent Lithuania, “Markas founded the Jewish Culture Club, and in 1996, he started organising the International Days of Remembrance of the Vilnius Ghetto,” said the ambassador. “It was he who discovered the posters and documents of the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre in Lithuanian archives and, in 1997, wrote a comprehensive history of the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre.

“In the same year, under his leadership, the Lithuanian Jewish Culture Club organised the International Art Days in Memory of the Vilnius Ghetto Theatre, the 55th anniversary

of the theatre. Five years later, in 2002, on his initiative and with funds raised by the club, a commemorative plaque in Lithuanian and Yiddish was unveiled on the former ghetto theatre building.”

In addition, “Twenty years ago, in 2003, Mark organised Naava Piatka’s concert, bringing Chayela’s music back to Vilnius on the same stage where her mother performed.”

“As I conclude my mission, I want to believe that South African Jews know a little better the Lithuania of today – a modern Lithuania, a member of the EU [European Union], NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation], and the IHRA [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance], appreciated by its partners for what it has done in addressing issues of the past and perpetuating Jewish history,” he said.

He noted that, “Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė’s visit to Israel earlier this month, when she met with Israeli leaders and participated in the AJC [American Jewish Committee] Global Forum 2023, demonstrated the excellent relations between our countries.

“This atmosphere wouldn’t have existed had it not been for late President Algirdas Brazauskas’s words of apology during his first visit to Israel in 1995,” said the ambassador. “The Lithuanian president apologised in the Knesset to the Jewish people on behalf of the Lithuanian nation for the actions of his countrymen who had participated in the Holocaust.”

Ninety-year-old clock has Springs in its step

TALI FEINBERG

A clock that has Hebrew letters instead of numbers and which used to hang in the Springs Shul continues to have an impact 90 years after it was first presented to the congregation. Many kilometres away and years later, on the Shabbat of the recent Comrades Marathon, the clock and the runners’ endurance were celebrated at Chabad of Umhlanga.

“The plaque on the clock contains the inscription: ‘Presented to United Hebrew Institutions [UHI] Springs by the President L. Gordon, 11-6-33.’ That’s 11 June 1933, so the clock turned 90 this month,” says Linda Gordon.

“The clock now hangs on a wall in my flat – it’s a prized possession,” she says. “President L. Gordon refers to my paternal grandfather, Louis Gordon, after whom my brother, Louis, was named. My grandfather was president of the UHI of Springs from 1932 to 1939, and during his presidency, he donated the clock to the Springs Shul.

“Volume 6 of the book *Jewish Life in the Country Communities*, which includes Springs, records that the first shul in Springs, the Springs Gates of Hope Synagogue, was consecrated on 3 May 1908,” Gordon says.

To cater for the growing congregation, “In 1933, an extension to the synagogue was built. Although the archive department of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has been unable to locate in the records of the Springs UHI any reference to the clock, I believe that my grandfather, in his capacity as UHI president, must have specifically donated the clock in 1933 in honour of the newly built extension.”

In 1949, in order to accommodate the growing membership, “It was decided to demolish the old shul and construct a new building on the same site”, says Gordon. “In September 1951, the new shul was officially opened. That’s the shul which I and my brothers knew as the Springs Shul. But I never saw the clock hanging in that shul.”

In 1979, her family moved from Springs to Durban. “At that time, the clock was in the workshop of Springs Jewellers, owned by Teddy Levin, whose shop in 3rd Street, Springs, was next door to my dad’s shop, Louis Gordon’s Book & Stationery Shop, which had been started by my grandfather.

“The clock had been with Teddy Levin for decades, which is possibly why I have no recollection of ever having seen it in the Springs Shul,” she says. “When my dad asked Teddy to give him the clock, saying that he would find a watch repairer in Durban, Teddy replied, ‘That clock will never work again!’



“My dad found an elderly watch repairer in Durban who with loving care succeeded in getting the clock to operate. He also found a lady who restored the clock face by re-painting the Hebrew letters.”

And so, the clock ticks today. “It operates with a pendulum, and I wind it with a big key every two days. Initially, I was winding it every five days, but like many 90-year-olds, the clock is slowing down. It loses about five minutes a day, but I just move the hands to correct the time and it’s still going strong!”

In March, Gordon told Rabbi Shlomo Wainer of Chabad Umhlanga that she and her brother would sponsor the Shabbat *brocha* on Saturday, 10 June, in honour of the clock’s 90th birthday. “We subsequently discovered that that Shabbat formed part of the Comrades [Marathon] weekend and historically, Shlomo has always catered for Comrades runners on *erev* Shabbat and Shabbat day. Preference was also given to a visiting runner, Dr Yossi Unterslak, who wished to sponsor that Shabbat *brocha*.”

But, at the *brocha*, “Shlomo allowed me to share with those present the story of the Hebrew clock. There was a special link, which also served as a reminder of *hashgacha pratis* – that the hand of Hashem is always in our daily lives. Unterslak, whom I had never met, sponsored the *brocha* in honour of the *yahrzeit* of his father, Dr Rodney Unterslak. I remember Rodney and his parents, Toby and Dave.

Rodney’s maternal grandmother – Yossi’s great grandmother – was Sophie Roberts, whom I knew very well. She was my grandfather, Louis Gordon’s, sister!”

And so, on Sunday, 11 June, Gordon paid tribute to the clock on reaching its 90th birthday. “I also paid tribute to all the Jewish runners and especially those who had been present at the Shabbat *brocha* in anticipation of them all successfully reaching and crossing the finish line after a gruelling race of nearly 90km.

“I reflected on the challenge of reaching the age of 90, especially in good health, and the parallel challenge of running 90km, both of which test the endurance of body, mind, and soul,” says Gordon.

“I was delighted that the clock had met that challenge, as would all the runners, because even those runners who wouldn’t manage to cross the finish line had met the challenge of reaching the starting line. I also thought of the challenge which my overseas-based brother, Darryl, had just faced and overcome, having successfully undergone double bypass surgery on Friday, 9 June.

“I silently saluted my dad for his perseverance and determination, the result of which the clock also successfully underwent ‘bypass surgery’ in 1979. Although it was just me and the clock alone at home celebrating the birthday – my brother, Louis, was away for the weekend – I knew that all the family no longer with us, especially my grandfather Louis and my dad, Charles, were spiritually with me.”

Shaka remake an epic tale

TALI FEINBERG

The story of Shaka Zulu has been told many times, but never in the way that it will now appear on South African screens. The series *Shaka iLembe* tells the story in a whole new light and on a sweeping scale. South African expat, Daniel Zimble, a writer for the show, played a key part in telling that story.

“This one’s epic. A huge, humbling privilege to write on this show and be part of the talented team bringing Shaka Zulu to life in 2023. On your [South African] screen June 18,” wrote Zimble on his personal Instagram account while sharing the trailer for the 12-part series on the rise of Shaka Zulu.

Shaka iLembe is different, he says, because “unlike the 1980s series which tells the story of Shaka’s reign and demise from the perspective of the Englishmen who come into contact with him, we tell the story from a local perspective. We wanted to frame out the colonial narrative, and tell the story of the birth of the Zulu nation under Shaka from the inside out.

“The spoken language of the series is deep Zulu,” he says. “There’s been incredible attention to detail. Every bit of styling and design has been carefully researched and painstakingly recreated in a bid to tell this story, which begins in advance of the European histories in a way that is, to the best of our collective abilities, authentic. So the series feels like a culturally important moment.”

Set in the 1700s, *Shaka iLembe* tells the story of the making of the iconic African king, with iterations from his early childhood through to adulthood. *Shaka iLembe* means ‘Shaka the Battle Axe’ – a praise name for him. The production has been six years in the making, consulting historians, academics, and family descendants, including the incumbent King Misuzulu ka Zwelithini, Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as well as the late King Goodwill Zwelithini.

Born and raised in Orange Grove, Zimble attended the gamut of Jewish schools in Johannesburg and Cape Town. “I went to Kensington Hebrew Nursery School, then to Menorah Primary, then Yeshiva College, then did a brief stint at King David Linksfield, followed by a few years at Herzlia in Cape Town, before leaving for the United Kingdom in matric to study A-Levels.” He also attended the Habonim Dror youth movement.

“Habonim [Habo] gave me and my friends and



The filming of *Shaka iLembe*

this fun, carefree environment in which to be young, expressive, and creative. Through Habo and Herzlia, I met some of my closest friends and collaborators: Ari Kruger, with whom I wrote three seasons of *Tali’s [Wedding, Baby and Joburg] Diary*, and many other projects both past, present, and future. Also Josh Ginsburg [the director of the A4 Arts Foundation], who was my creative producer on our South African Film and Television Awards [SAFTA]-nominated feature documentary on David Goldblatt.”

But Zimble almost didn’t follow his path as a screenwriter, executive producer, and director. “I studied A-Levels in Bristol and attended Oxford University as an undergraduate studying archaeology and anthropology. I did my masters in international relations, worked at a policy think tank – the Centre for Conflict Resolution in Cape Town.”

He loved his work at the centre. “I got to do interesting research throughout the continent. But this urge to work creatively and make things kept rearing its head. I had continued to make short films and write scripts in my spare time, and felt excited about making more and writing more, so I decided to change course.”

It seems like the right decision, as he is now a multi-SAFTA award-winning TV and filmmaker who has executive produced, developed, written, and directed popular, character-driven, genre-spanning, award-winning comedy and drama work that has reached

millions of viewers worldwide. Now living in the United Kingdom with his partner and two young sons, he still feels strongly connected to his South African roots.

“I’d just finished head writing two seasons of the telenovela *Isithembiso* – more than 400 episodes of TV – when I heard rumours that *Shaka iLembe* was in the works. Like so many South Africans, I had watched and imbibed the iconic 1980s series with Henry Cele. And like so many South Africans, I felt that the story needed retelling.

“So I pestered and pleaded with my then-bosses Angus Gibson and Desiree Markgraaff at The Bomb Shelter to include me in the writing team. Soon after, I stepped off the telenovela and joined the Shaka-writing *ibutho* [regiment] to begin developing the show. It was a rigorous development process – reading written histories, studying oral histories, and weaving in the many tales that culminate in the birth and rise of Shaka Zulu.”

He most enjoyed “the deep research, the team effort,

and the opportunity to engage with historians, praise poets, fellow writers, and creative minds in telling an epic story about such a hugely impactful figure and about the context into which he [Shaka Zulu] was born.”

The most challenging aspect was “getting the story right narratively, but also as the custodians of such a hugely important history to so many South Africans, striking the fine balance between accurate history and dramatic license”.

The series was filmed in South Africa and features much of the country’s wildlife and scenery. Key filming locations included the towns of Eshowe, Nkandla Forest Reserve, Port Edward, the Drakensberg, Mooi River, and Zulu Falls. Other parts of the series were shot on a purpose-built backlot near the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Site, The Cradle of Humankind.

To others wanting to go into writing for TV, Zimble’s advice is to “love stories, and be excited by the idea of making

them up. And you need the empathy to intuit what drives, hurts, and heals people you meet in life, and the characters you end up writing. You also need to love writing itself, as painful as it may sometimes be. David Mamet attributes this great quote to Hemingway: ‘There’s nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.’”

As for being in the age of artificial intelligence, “before December 2022, I thought I had the safest career in the world”, says Zimble. “With the arrival of large language models a few months ago, I’ve had to rethink that. It’s one reason I’ve started growing vegetables – there’ll be something to do and something to eat when the machines take over.”

• *Shaka iLembe* is aired on *Mzansi Magic*.



Senzo Radebe

Maimane pays tribute to anti-apartheid hero Edelstein

HANNA RESNICK

Friday, 16 June, marked 47 years since the Soweto uprising, and 47 years since the tragic death of Dr Melville Edelstein, a Jewish sociologist who was killed in Soweto during the upheaval.

Edelstein’s family were joined by Mmusi Maimane and some of his followers in paying tribute to their dad at his memorial in Soweto.

Janet Goldblatt, one of Edelstein’s daughters, said the memorial, built in 2016, meant a lot to her and her family as it recognised the work her father had done. “When I went to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission years ago, I was asked, ‘What would you like as a family?’ So I told the story of my father, and said that I would like for him to be honoured.

“My father went into Soweto every day in spite of huge risks. It wasn’t about wanting to be seen, he wasn’t a political man. He had one agenda, which was to ensure that all children were able to go to school and get an education, and that they were seen and loved, just as any white person was.”

She said she was grateful for Maimane’s willingness to learn about her father and his story. “[Dr Edelstein] was regrettably in the wrong place at the wrong time, the angry mob didn’t understand who they were attacking, and South Africa was deprived of one of its great heroes, an ordinary man who just did good in the world,” said

Maimane. “His memorial stands a block away from the Morris Isaacson High School, the place where the uprising of 1976 began. It was here that young South Africans refused to be taught in Afrikaans and demanded a better future and education for themselves. Of course, Isaacson himself, who endowed the school, was another Jewish South African who provided bursaries and education to black youth at a time when such activities were not popular. As head of the Jewish orphanage, Arcadia, Isaacson understood the importance of



Maria du Toit, Janet Goldblatt, Mmusi Maimane, and Shana Rosenthal

education and the need for children to have a safe environment.

“It has been moving for me to meet the Edelstein daughters and hear their pain,” he said. “Their family epitomises the values of the South African Jewish community, which has done so much for South Africa in human rights, job creation, and poverty alleviation. We cannot forget that apartheid had many victims of all races and all faiths. Dr Edelstein is only one example.”

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Jews in the Blues hits SA airwaves

TALI FEINBERG

Jews may not be the first association people have with the Blues, but “there are many Jewish practitioners of the Blues, mostly in the area of Blues-based rock, from Bob Dylan to Leonard Cohen”, says local Blues enthusiast Ron Keschner.

“Many of them added hugely to the great sounds of the 1960s through to the 1990s,” says Keschner, who hosts his own show on local station Radio Bop. He plans to bring this Jewish connection front and centre with his “Jews in the Blues” theme on Sunday, 25 June.

Keschner lives in Sandton and has worked in financial publishing and Information Technology. “My brother, Alan, and I grew up in Sea Point, Cape Town, the son of refugee parents who had both left Germany to escape the war – my father from Hamburg and my mother from Berlin. My family is spread between Montevideo, Uruguay, where my mother grew up, New York, and Israel. I attended Herzlia – an amazing school that created amazing people. My mother, Sonja, now resides at Highlands House in Cape Town.”

So how did a nice Jewish boy come to be interested in the Blues? “When I was eight years old, our amazing helper, Minnie, had just brought Alan and me home from the beach on a cooking-hot summer’s day. Shortly afterwards, my father arrived home from the office – he had a jewellery store in the city centre – with a record by the Rolling Stones called *12 x 5* under his arm.

“In his thick German accent, he said to me, “My boy, zis is new smuzijc und it’s called rock und roll.” In fact, it was mainly Blues, and when my father put the needle on the song called *Under the Boardwalk*, this little Jewish

kid from Main Road Sea Point was hooked. And the reason I love it is simple – it’s pure, honest music, the music of the descendants of the African slaves brought to the United States in the 19th century. Many people ask me the difference between Blues and Jazz. I tell them this: Jazz has 3 000 chords and three people in the audience. Blues, on the other hand, has three chords and 3 000 people in the audience!

“Radio Bop is a legendary radio station where many of South Africa’s radio greats like the late Bob Mabena and Felicia Mabuza-Suttle cut their ‘radio teeth’ and honed their skills back in the old Bophuthatswana days,” Keschner says.

“Over the sands of time, the famous brand was bought over by Bop broadcasting legends Hector Motivator and George Munetsi, and revived in much the same form as its original. Interestingly, though Blues was created by black musicians in the early to middle parts of the last century and was the forerunner of what Radio Bop’s current audience demographic listens to like jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, and hip hop, it’s not generally listened to by them. I was brought on to educate about what is, in effect, 100% their music – primarily brought across to the United States by African slaves – and try and make them love and appreciate it is much as I do.”

As for what listeners can expect from his Jews in the Blues show, “It will be something slightly different. While I normally use life experiences sent in by listeners to craft my playlist, for this show, I will be mainly speaking about the musicians and their Jewishness. I will be straying very far from the ‘usual Jewish suspects’, and bringing the listeners some obscure Jewish Blues artists.

“This ranges from a Blues song about rabbis – I seriously recommend every *rov* in the country



as Montevideo, Tel Aviv, New York, and many other countries and cities around the globe. This is the beauty of streaming radio. What really established the show with its Jewish listenership was the Herzlia High matric class of 1975 reunion that I did with listeners scattered around the world – the school then sent it far and wide to thousands of Herzlia alumni and all of a sudden, we a great footing in the community.”

Where to from here? “Radio Bop

listens in, it’s an absolute scream and could easily be sung in shuls and at shiurs – as well as Blues with Hashem as the main subject. It will be a sensory as well as educational experience.”

He will also be featuring King David Schools alumnus Dan Patlansky, whom he thinks is “easily South Africa’s top Blues export. There are a lot of people in the know in the United States, the home of the Blues, that believe he’s currently the finest Blues guitar player around today. He has a string of international accolades: fourth best Blues guitarist in the world; best Blues album of the year – I mean the guy has already released 10 international albums and opened to 64 000 people, for Bruce Springsteen no less!

“I will feature him alongside some Jewish ‘surprises’ like Jim Croce and David Lee Roth from Van Halen, and the best guitar player in the world who hid his Judaism but secretly wanted to play only with other Jews. It’s going to be an extravaganza of Jewish musical brilliance, a combination of artists never been heard before in one singular show.”

Keschner says his radio audience “is a beautiful mix of Radio Bop’s traditional and hugely loyal black African audience, as well as all the *mlungus* [whites] this kind of music brings into the site. Because many Jewish people from Joburg and Cape Town know me, we have a fantastic Jewish listenership not just in South Africa, but in cities as far flung

Mk 2 is still a fledgling station, and we have massive plans to make it the pre-eminent streaming radio show on the continent,” says Keschner. “I’m hugely honoured to be given a slot on a radio station with Radio Bop’s legendary status, not to mention being the only *mlungu* in the house playing very different ‘specialty’ sounds for the listener base – hence my stage name, The Rockin Mlungu. We also have the hugely popular regular contributor to the show, Charissa Bloomberg, Cape Town’s internationally recognised Jewish celebrity psychologist talking to us every second week on important topics that help improve our lives.”

To people who have never listened to the Blues, he says, “The Blues is real. The Blues is honest. the Blues is the forerunner of everything we listen to today. Speak to all the legendary stars of today and yesteryear like Keith Richards, the late, great Jeff Beck who I will be featuring, or Bob Dylan, and they will tell you the Blues is the source of it all.

“I look forward to having you join us on the show. I give the number out, and if you care to send in a WhatsApp during the show, I will happily give you a shoutout. We’re going to be opening the show with a sensational song about a rabbi, and closing it with some equally dazzling Jewish gospel Blues. You don’t want to miss it.” <https://radio.savemultimediasolutions.com:1065/stream>

Settlers riot in West Bank following terror attack

BEN SALES – JTA

Israeli settlers torched cars and crops in the West Bank following a Palestinian terror attack, the latest conflagration in what has been a violent year in the territory.

The riot, in which dozens of Palestinians were wounded, followed a shooting earlier on Tuesday, 20 June, by Palestinian gunmen in the Israeli settlement of Eli that killed four people, including two teenagers. That shooting came one day after an Israeli military raid in the Palestinian West Bank city of Jenin that killed six Palestinians, including one teen, and wounded more than 90. Palestinian militants wounded eight Israeli soldiers in the fighting on Monday.

The riot on Tuesday night was a reprise of a similar incident in February, when Israeli settlers rioted in the Palestinian village of Huwara following a terror attack there that killed two Israeli brothers. Following that incident, settler leaders including Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right finance minister, publicly suggested wiping out the village, though Smotrich later said he had been misunderstood.

The Israel Defense Forces feared retaliatory violence on Tuesday night, and warned settlers not to “take the law into their own hands”, according to the Israeli

publication *Ynet*. But that admonition appeared not to deter the rioters. As in February, according to reports in Israeli media, they torched at least one store as well as cars and agricultural fields, and threw rocks at Palestinians. The activity took place in multiple villages near Nablus, including Huwara, according to local media reports. Three Israelis were arrested for arson, and an Israeli soldier was seen firing in the air in an attempt to quell the riots.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 100 West Bank Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military raids and more than 20 Israelis have been killed in Palestinian terror attacks.



Fires burning in the West Bank during an Israeli settler riot on Tuesday 20 June 2023

Violent incidents targeting Palestinians have risen sharply in recent years, according to Israeli government data. After the February riot, which a top military commander joined others in calling a “pogrom”, some settler leaders remained silent or explicitly said they were unapologetic.

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Joburg – where you go outside to warm up

Winter in Johannesburg has made me realise that the difference between a breeze and a draft is about 30 years. Whereas I could never understand my grandmother's and then my parents' obsession with leaky windows, I now find myself hunting down a draft as though my life depended on it. Which it might.

I have no idea when it happened. One day, I was rolling my eyes and getting my parents an extra jacket to drape over their frigid shoulders, and the next, I find myself threatening to fire anyone who leaves the kitchen door open. I have, in the past few weeks, issued more written and final warnings than I care to mention. Most have been to my wife, who is three crucial years younger than I am. I know with confidence that as sure as the earth continues to rotate around the sun, in no time at all, she'll be joining me in my pursuit of permeable and ill-disciplined doors.

Something I greatly look forward to. South Africa is a country blessed with a magnificent climate. So much so that in our darkest hours, when searching for something to keep us positive, it's the weather we turn to. On many an occasion when things are particularly bleak, I switch my weather app to Melbourne or London just to prove that there's at least one thing that the African National Congress hasn't yet destroyed.

But that doesn't mean that winters aren't cold. Winter might be short. It might on the most part gift us with magnificent and sunny days, but when the Highveld wind blows on an icy winter morning, it's a bold-face lie to suggest that it's mild year-round. Worse than that, our houses aren't geared for those

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



days. Windows aren't double glazed, they often don't seal, and front doors don't have an additional "snow door" that protects homes in other countries. Heating is minimal and fragmented, and very few homes have a centralised system. The result often is that it's colder inside than out.

We spent some time living in New York, where we endured one of its coldest winters on record. We were snowed in for days, schools were closed, with the news reporting several fatalities that occurred when drivers were caught on the roads. I recall so clearly parking my car at the edge of the driveway so that we didn't need to clear the whole area before leaving. And finding a frozen fruit juice in the car in the morning, the temperature having dropped so dramatically overnight.

And yet, never do I feel so cold as I do in winter in Johannesburg in my home when someone leaves the window in the study open.

There are cold people and there are warm people. There are those who wear their K-Ways inside the house, and those who insist that it's a beautiful day when it's not. I have always identified with the latter group. Until I reached my fifties. And whereas I'll fight to my death not to wear a coat indoors, lately I do find myself a little more sympathetic to those who have always been colder than I have.

Pretoria UJW puts caring on the map

Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Pretoria leaders Ciska Lewis and Tracy Myer on 14 June presented the Jaffa Jewish Aged Home nursing team with state-of-the-art medical equipment including a nappy macerator, urine analyser, and two patient monitors.



Ciska Lewis, Tracy Myer, Alison van Graan, and Lebo Motsepe

In addition, about 20 families receive parcels at non-profit organisations and the Eco Youth Centre providing

accommodation for orphans. This is the second year that the UJW has been involved with Hermanstad Laërskool, supporting about 30 families each week and also providing a warm breakfast for the children each day, most of whom arrive at school without having eaten this important meal. Plans are in place to provide stationery for next year, as well as a Christmas hamper in December.

Apart from its support for feeding schemes, the UJW also assists the Pretoria Chevrah Kadisha with a monthly donation.

If this wasn't enough for this small Jewish community, Chairperson Lewis says the UJW assists in the provision of care packs for Mali Martin, a shelter and home for abused women and families as well as a safe space for the victims of human trafficking. An additional recipient of the organisation's work is the Magalies Special School for the mentally and physically handicapped, where the UJW provides regular food parcels for needy families.

Sewing graduates walk red carpet

Graduates of the Union of Jewish Women's (UJW's) Sewing Empowerment School walked the red carpet on 15 June wearing their hand-made evening garments and showcasing the items made during their four-month course.

Most students at the sewing school, established by the UJW in 2010, arrive at the course not knowing how to thread a needle. By the end of the intensive course, they are well equipped to start working for themselves.

The school was established by the UJW to help alleviate South Africa's most pressing problems – skills development and poverty. Since then, more than 100 students have graduated.

The project aims to provide practical basic sewing skills for unemployed men and women; teach students the basic principles of sewing including design and manufacturing; and equip students with the ability to

earn an income from work generated from selling items. Unemployed men and women are carefully screened and selected to undergo the four months of full-time training within a structured curriculum.



The Union of Jewish Women Sewing Empowerment School graduates

One of the graduates quoted the famous proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

doing charity work. The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) has been around for more than 90 years, and in Gqeberha, it has a committee of only four people.

However, our Jewish community gets a lot of merit for the work that the UJW does in the broader community as well as our own.

Please don't forget the smaller communities.

– Elaine Racussen, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

Letters

GREAT HISTORY LESSON, BUT DON'T FORGET SMALLER COMMUNITIES

Once again, thanks for the most wonderful webinar on Sunday 11 June (804 The South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Independence). The history of the Jewish people is important, and South Africans have a reputation for their love of Israel. It certainly behoves us to teach our children to be proud Zionists and stand up for Israel.

But, as a matter of interest, only Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban were mentioned as

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Local antisemitism, global response

There have been a string of verbal attacks and demonstrations harassing, threatening, and villifying Cape Town Jewish institutions and leaders this year. Certain opposition political parties in the province have since decided to get in on the act, the latest such stunt being a demand made by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in the Cape Provincial Legislature for Herzlia schools to be "deregistered". Aside from being defamatory and clearly discriminatory, such calls effectively seek to deprive Jewish South Africans of their constitutional right to freedom of expression and association and, as expected, the EFF motion was firmly rejected in the legislature.

It's not pleasant to see our democratic institutions being misused to smear and incite hostility towards our community, but it's important to keep things in perspective. What we're seeing playing out in South Africa is to a large extent a mirror of what's happening internationally, where vituperative rhetorical onslaught against the mainstream Jewish community by individuals or political factions with an obsessive anti-Israel bent are a regular occurrence. It underscores the continued importance of communication and co-operation between global Jewish leadership so as to better understand this common threat and determine how best to respond to it.

Last week, South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Vice-President Mary Kluk and National Director Wendy Kahn were in London, where they met the leadership and professional staff of the British Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council, and the Community Security Trust. They also met at the House of Lords with Kahn's former counterpart at the British Board of Deputies, Baroness Gillian Merron. These were useful working meetings where ideas and information were shared, strategies discussed, and notes compared on the respective situations in the two countries.

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



The SAJBD at 120 - history, heritage, and memory

As previously discussed in this column, the Board hasn't just been a key role player in South African Jewish history over the past 120 years (and counting), but also the primary custodian of that legacy. In a recent visit to the SAJBD archives, I was able to get a hands-on sense of just how much of our community's story, from the earliest years until our own day, has been faithfully preserved, organised, and made available to the public.

Perhaps the most frequently consulted part of the archives is a comprehensive newspaper cuttings collection. This includes files on Jewish individuals, organisations, and activities going back to the end of the 19th century. For a number of years, efforts have been underway to digitalise these as well as such unique and irreplaceable important parts of the collection as minute books, original manuscripts, documents, pamphlets, correspondence, and photographs. There are further bound volumes of leading journals collected over many years, and a large collection of significant books on South African Jewish themes, world Jewry, Israel, antisemitism and the Holocaust, and biographies. All this has and continues to provide an unrivalled resource for academics, genealogists, authors, and journalists, many of them from abroad. The archives have also safeguarded for posterity documentation relating to Jewish organisations that have since closed and that would otherwise have been irrevocably lost.

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

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Pirkei Avos Expo inspires Jewish students

Raphaella Lalou and Talia Confait

A photograph of a young girl, Kayla Michal, and a man, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, holding a large heart-shaped cake. The cake is decorated with a colorful pattern and has a sign on it that says "LOVE". The girl is wearing a pink jacket and the man is wearing a dark suit and glasses. They are standing in front of a white banner with a blue logo and the word "LOVE" visible.

took to heart. The projects were on display, with the winning project decided by a judging panel.

Devorah Leah Wineberg, the director of Tzivos Hashem, was inspired by the number of schools and students from a diverse spread of the community that got involved in this initiative.

Yeshiva pupils tell story of Rashi

A group of children are gathered around a fenced enclosure, looking at a rabbit. One child in a red hoodie is in the foreground, looking towards the enclosure. Another child in a brown shirt is also looking in the same direction. In the background, a child in a pink shirt is visible near the enclosure. The enclosure is made of wire mesh and has a wooden frame. There are some plants and a small yellow object on the ground near the enclosure.

**Mina Lopato pupils
with one of the bunnies**

Yeshiva College Grade 4 students did research projects that brought to life the story of Rashi, a brilliant rabbi who lived 900 years ago and wrote invaluable commentary on Tanach and Talmud. The projects, which took three weeks to produce for kodesh class, resulted in parents and pupils alike learning so much about this great medieval biblical commentator.

Sienna Epstein

Julia Donaldson Day a hit at Sydenham Preschool

On "Julia Donaldson Day" at Sydenham Hebrew Preschool on 14 June, the children dressed up as a character from their favourite book and spent the morning outside in an Exclusive Books-style setup. They paged through a variety of Julia Donaldson books while sipping on a warm drink with friends.

Isaac Friedman

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