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He is the Director of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, where he also serves as the Joseph Brodsky Collegiate Professor of History and Judaic Studies.

The author of four award-winning books – *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The 1918-1921 Pogroms in Ukraine and the Onset of the Holocaust*; *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*; *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*; and *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine*.

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PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

WHEN THE MISHNAH MET ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Neil Janes (London)
Neil is a dynamic Liberal Jewish Rabbi. He is also the school rabbi at a Jewish primary school and lectures rabbinic students. He is researching for a PhD at King's College London, where he is studying rabbinic literature. Ordained by the Leo Baeck College, he has degrees in Jewish Studies, Psychology and Education.

Sessions include: Rabbi Jeremiah and the Holy Grail

SANCTUARIES AND BATTLEFIELDS

Adam Ferziger (Jerusalem)
Adam is an Orthodox Rabbi and a professor who holds the Rabbi S.R. Hirsch Chair in the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry at Bar-Ilan. He is co-convenor of the annual Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism at Oxford. A past recipient of Bar-Ilan's "Outstanding Lecturer" prize, his research focuses on the history of Jewish responses to modern and contemporary life.

Sessions include: My Best Friend the Rambam: Rabbi Soloveitchik's Imaginary Childhood Superhero

MIDDLE EAST TODAY

DEBUNKING DISINFORMATION



Omer Benjakob (Tel Aviv)
Omer is an investigative journalist working at the intersection of politics and technology. He covers disinformation, cyber and surveillance and has participated in a number of international investigations, among them Project Pegasus and Team Jorge, a secret election-interference-for-hire firm. His writing has been published globally.

Sessions Include: Going Undercover to Uncover the Dark World of Disinformation-as-a-Service

12 LOCAL PRESENTERS YOU MUST NOT MISS

Dennis Davis
Judge and TV Personality
The Crisis of Constitutional Democracy

Eve Fairbanks
Author & Journalist
The Inheritors: An Intimate Portrait of South Africa's Racial Reckoning

Ashley Fischoff
Activist and Researcher
Finding a Hannukia in Azania: Land & Poverty in South Africa

Jessica Jantjies
Copywriter
Finding My Lemba Roots

Wendy Kahn
Community Leader
Anti-Semitism: A Perennial Hatred

Karen Kallmann
Writer & Researcher
Trafficking Jewish Women from Eastern Europe to South Africa at the Turn of the Last Century

Irwin Manoim
Historian of Jewish South Africa
Jews and Booze

Tali Nates
Director, Johannesburg Holocaust Centre
What To Do When There Are No More Holocaust Survivors

Muhamed-Nur Nordien
Political Analyst
The Abraham Accords: New Dawn or Mirage?

Howard Sackstein
Chair of the SA Jewish Report
Stumbling upon Jews in the Backstreets of Morocco

Gus Silber
Wordsmith & Journalist
Unravelling The Jewish Threads In The Life, Music, And Career Of Paul Simon

THE REVELATION AT SINAI: A MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCE

Naomi Ferziger (Jerusalem)
Naomi is an occupational therapist and holds a PhD in Neuroscience. She is a senior lecturer at Ono Academic College. In the course of her 25 years of clinical practice and in her research, she has sought to develop tools for evaluating and treating multiply challenged paediatric populations. Naomi has a passion for Torah study, applying her knowledge in the fields of neuroscience and disabilities to shed unique perspectives on traditional biblical and rabbinic texts.

Sessions Include: Facial Recognition in the Bible – How Important Is It?



DEFENDING ISRAEL

Natasha Hausdorff (London)
British barrister and a frequent speaker on international law and the Arab Israeli conflict, Natasha formerly clerked for the President of Israel's Supreme Court and was a Fellow at Columbia Law School's National Security Law Program. She read law at Oxford University and qualified as a solicitor at Skadden. She serves as legal director of UK Lawyers For Israel Charitable Trust.

Sessions Include: Refuting the Anti-Israel Slander

MAKING SENSE OF ISRAEL'S POLITICAL REALITY

Allison Kaplan Sommer (Ra'anana)
Allison has been a journalist at Haaretz since 2012. She hosts the Haaretz Weekly podcast and is a co-host of The Promised Podcast. Allison is the recipient of a B'nai B'rith World Center Award for Journalism for Excellence in Diaspora Reportage and a Simon Rockower Award for Excellence in Covering Zionism, Aliyah and Israel.

Sessions Include: The War Over Israeli Democracy: A Report from the Battlefield

STANDING UP TO ABUSE

Yael Sherer (Haifa)
An activist, documentarian, journalist, and expert on Health Systems and Policies, Yael is the founder and executive director of the Survivors of Sexual Violence Advocacy Group (SSVAG), a civic organisation of survivors.

Sessions Include: From Personal Trauma to Social Activism and Advocacy

THE SELF CONTRADICTION OF DESIRE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Judith Fogel (Jerusalem)
Judith is an educator and advocate, passionate about Jewish law and dedicated to pursuing and disseminating text-based evidence surrounding a Jewish woman's role in family life and sexuality. Judith has invested nearly two decades in addressing the holistic relationship between Halakha and women's health. She is a certified Yoetzet Halakha who loves teaching Talmud, Mishnah, and Halakha.

Sessions Include: Does Jewish Law have a Position on Sexual Positions?

ISRAEL AND RELIGION: WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

Dov Lipman (Beit Shemesh)
Rabbi and former Member of the Knesset, Dov was the first American born Knesset member in nearly 30 years. With rabbinic ordination from Ner Israel Rabbinical College, he is passionate about the integration of the ultra-Orthodox population into Israeli society. He is also the founder of Yad L'Olim, an NGO assisting new immigrants to Israel, and lobbies the Knesset on behalf of Olim.

Sessions Include: Is the State of Israel the Beginning of the Redemption?



WOMEN IN THE HOLOCAUST

Sarah Levy (Jerusalem)
Sarah has over 30 years of experience in formal and informal education. Since 2018, she has been the Program Coordinator for Echoes & Reflections at Yad Vashem, where she is a licensed guide.

Sessions Include: These Are My Last Words



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We value choice in form, content and style in our programmes. We value the rich diversity among Jews, and so we seek to create cross-communal and inter-generational experiences.
- 3 ENABLING CONNECTIONS**
We aim to create opportunities for communities and individuals to connect.

- 4 PARTICIPATION**
Volunteering one's time is a key feature of almost everything we do. No matter how small the contribution, we encourage participants to take an active part in all aspects of our conferences.
- 5 RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**
Shabbat and kashrut are observed in all public areas. We recognise that in private areas, people will behave as they wish. Should participants wish to hold a prayer group, they may do so providing they supply all resources and are responsible for the session or prayer group in its entirety.

Some key principles

DISCOUNTS: Limmud SA is an inter-generational learning experience. If you would like to attend the Limmud conference for the weekend as a young adult (19-29), or with your family, you could qualify for discounts. Also, if any member of the community is unable to afford Limmud, please contact us in confidence. We will do our best to assist. To apply, please contact Kim at registrationjhb@limmud.org.za

KOSHER FOOD: There is delicious food and snacks, constantly available, thanks to the strictly kosher catering of Catering by Riva in Johannesburg, Norrie Caterers and Café Riteve in Cape Town and the Circle Cafe in Durban.

VOLUNTEERS: Limmud is organised almost entirely by teams of volunteers. We believe there is space for everyone to contribute in their own unique way. We would be delighted if you would volunteer to help make Limmud possible.



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SA olim divided on reform, united on Israel

TALI FEINBERG

South African *olim* are devastated and exhilarated by the passing of the Reasonableness Bill this week, but all feel that much more passionate in the fight for Israel's future.

The *olim* straddle the political spectrum and have protested for and against the judicial overhaul proposed by the current Israeli governing coalition.

"The passing of the bill hasn't broken the spirit of either side," says *oleh* and political researcher Joshua Hyde.

The Reasonableness Bill is the first major legislation in the government's plan to reform the judiciary. It strips Israel's Supreme Court of the power to declare government decisions unreasonable. The judicial overhaul has led to deep divisions in Israeli society, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets. Many South African *olim* have been among those crowds.

One *olah*, Caylee Talpert, says "there's real fear about the legislation. Someone who doesn't live here may not understand the real, palpable fear you hear from friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, around Shabbat tables, and on the streets. It's a fear not only about taking out a key pillar in the separation of powers, but also of how this extremist leadership is driving huge divides.

"The reference to Tisha B'Av has been made by both religious and secular," she says. "It's an ominous time: much of the damage has already been done whether it be to our economy, our plummeting exchange rate and stock exchange, or the huge rifts this has caused."

But *oleh* Barak Salakoff feels that this is a

positive turning point. "What's going on is that the left, which rules the courts at present, controls the country. At present, Israel isn't a democracy, it's a totalitarian state run by the courts under these judges. At last, the judges will be looked at and better judges [are possible] – more to the centre and even some to the right, giving us the real

protesting 29 weeks in a row just about the way judges are appointed. They understand that this is the first step down a radical path."

He says the sectors of society pushing for reform don't want the courts "standing in their way". This includes the legal battles being fought by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Shas leader

Aryeh Deri; haredi military draft evasion, labour nonparticipation, and welfare dependency; and the settlement movement wanting to annex the territories.

However, there's an almost "iron-clad rule" that if drastic change is made to a political system for the benefit of a specific political programme, it almost always backfires, he says. He predicts this might happen in Israel, with the left now galvanising into a powerful force. "The protest movement is saying that this is just the beginning."

Oleh Maurice Hirsch says he is a great proponent of judicial reform. "Regarding the reasonableness clause, decisions aren't being struck down because the decision has no legal basis, it's because two judges decided that it 'doesn't sit well with me, and therefore I'm going to strike it down'," he says. "The most dangerous thing [during this time] has been the calls to refuse to serve in the army, and

statements from former heads of the country and security forces to say, 'We're not going to accept the democratic rule of the elected party. We're going to try and overthrow the government and undermine the entire process,'" Hirsch says. "This is a country that has an army and not an army that has a country. The last elections were very clear."

While *oleh* Paul Mirbach predicted the Reasonableness Bill would pass, "I [still] felt a deep sadness, unbearable loss, and incomprehension at the coalition's callous indifference to the country literally being ripped apart," he said.

He believes the process was conducted in a "brutal manner", with high-handed management of the debate, not allowing the other side to express its reservations, abruptly cutting it off, and threatening to ram it through.

"Laws define a country, like the apartheid laws defined South Africa," says Mirbach. "They are hard to reverse. As such, with the passage of this law, I can no longer call myself an Israeli with pride."

However, *oleh* Isaac Rubin feels that "the judicial system badly needs reform. I welcome the vote, although I don't think it's enough. The political left should be honest that the protests are about losing the election. I feel insulted when they think that their opinion is more important than that of people like me, who voted right-wing. The judiciary should be impartial, which it isn't."

"Many would agree that there's a need for reform," Talpert says, "but this is a revolution, with total disregard for the damage caused along the way. Voices from across the political spectrum – heads of the Shin Bet, Mossad, leadership of the army, hospitals, universities, and rabbis have spoken against the current reform. People who are traditionally very much on the right have come out with sharp criticism – some of the most patriotic and idealistic people who have risked their lives for this country.

"On a rational level, I'm disillusioned," she says. "However, I remain an idealist. The history of Israel is

Continued on page 3>>



Ethan Spilkin returning home after protests in Jerusalem on Sunday

Photo: Revital Chitayat

democracy we lacked for years."

Hyde points out that the protesters aren't just protesting against judicial reform, but its ultimate result. "You don't get hundreds of thousands

judges decided that it 'doesn't sit well with me, and therefore I'm going to strike it down'," he says.

"The most dangerous thing [during this time] has been the calls to refuse to serve in the army, and

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New antisemitism taskforce spans seven nations

Large Jewish organisations in seven countries outside of Israel have formed a task force to collaborate on fighting antisemitism.



The task force, nicknamed "J7" and announced on 25 July, includes representatives from the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Argentina, and Australia, countries which have the largest Jewish populations outside of Israel, excluding Russia, which wasn't included. Israel also won't have an official representative, though many if not all of the participating groups see combating anti-Zionism as part of their mandate.

"Antisemitism is rising around the world, especially in countries where there are large Jewish populations," said Jonathan Greenblatt, the chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, one of the group's members. "Threats to our communities aren't contained by continents and borders."

Odessa's Hillel centre damaged by Russian strike

A Russian missile strike caused "significant damage" to Hillel International's offices in Odessa, Ukraine, on 23 July, the organisation said.

It's the second time a Hillel building in Ukraine has been damaged by Russian fire since the start of the war last year. Its chapter in Kharkiv was destroyed by Russian shelling last year.

The international Jewish-life organisation, which operates on college campuses and supports young adult non-students, said the missile

destroyed the office's door and windows, and that the ceiling collapsed, but no-one was in the building at the time.

"I hope we will be able to restore programmes as soon as possible," said Osik Akselrud, the director of Hillel's Central Asia and southeastern Europe regions. Hillel also shared a brief video appearing to show a construction crane already present on the scene.

Dershwitz first US man to win sabre world championship

Jewish fencer Eli Dershwitz made history on 25 July at the World Fencing Championships in Milan, Italy, where he became the first American man to win an individual title in sabre.

The 27-year-old, two-time Olympian and grandson of Holocaust survivors defeated the number-one-ranked Sandro Bazadze 15-6 in the sabre final.



But Dershwitz's semifinal victory was perhaps even more notable. Facing Áron Szilágyi, a three-time Olympic gold medallist and the reigning world champion, he came back from a 10-4 deficit to advance to the final round.

"I've been working most of my life for this moment, this tournament, and towards Paris 2024," Dershwitz said, according to NBC Sports. "Hoping my third Olympic Games is the one."

• All briefs supplied by JTA

The source of good fortune **Torah Thought**



Rabbi Yossy Goldman – Life Rabbi Emeritus, Sydenham Shul

Times have changed, but what about people? Has human nature evolved over the millennia, or are we basically the same as we always were?

About five weeks before his passing, Moses begins a series of sermons that can be described as his ethical will. He tries to spare his flock the tragedies that may arise from their potential errors of judgement in the years ahead.

He speaks of the good times and the bad, and addresses the people's possible responses to the fortunes and misfortunes they may face.

Moses understood human nature all too well. Forty years of leading his people taught him all anyone could ever hope to know about the human psyche. He realised that in times of wealth and success, his people might well forget the Great Provider of their blessings.

And so, he cautions them to remember who it was that gave them their freedom in the first place: the Almighty, who also fed them manna from heaven and would give them His promised land.

He also understood that it might take a change of fortune for them to remember the source of their blessings.

"When you are distressed, and all these things happen upon you in the end of days, [only] then you will return to the L-rd your G-d and obey Him."

Was he wrong? When do we cry out to G-d? When we are distressed. When we experience *tzoris*. When times are tough. That's when we return to Him and His way of life.

Is it any different today?

When do people run to synagogue, the rabbi, the graves of the righteous, or the Western Wall? In times of trouble. When do we cry out to Him with our deepest,

most genuine sincerity if not when asking Him to save us from our worries and woes?

And that's entirely appropriate. Where else should we turn? To whom should we direct our prayers and our cries for help, if not Him?

But what Moses is teaching us is to remember G-d as the source of our good fortune, too, not only our troubles.

We may be clever, work smart and hard, but success and failure aren't in our own hands. "There's no bread for the wise," said King Solomon. I know plenty of very clever people who never "made it" and some less intellectually endowed who became great successes. Clearly, the heavenly hand is at work.

Moses speaks to us today just as he did to his own generation more than 3 000 years ago. Human nature hasn't changed one bit.

Here in Johannesburg, we're involved in a campaign to complete a new building for the Torah Academy Girls' High School. The project was given a huge lift-off when a prosperous donor was approached by one of my rabbinic colleagues to contribute. During their conversation, the rabbi asked the businessman, "Has G-d not been very good to you?" The man's honest and humble response? A multi-million contribution!

May we all experience only good fortune and never forget where it came from.

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Our parsha includes a repetition of the Ten Commandments, and the verses of the Shema. This declares the fundamentals of the Jewish faith: the unity of G-d ("Hear O Israel: the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one"), the mitzvot to love G-d, to study His Torah, to bind "these words" as tefillin on our arms and heads, and to inscribe them in the mezuzot affixed on the doorposts of our homes.

From parking lot to the law – a car guard's journey

TALI FEINBERG

When Brian Ndlovu turned up for his first day of work at SWVG Attorneys on Monday, 24 July, he could have been any other graduate making his way in the world. But getting to this point was a monumental journey of dedication, dreaming, and the Jewish community's effort to help one person follow his destiny.

Community members helped Ndlovu every step of the way, from funding his studies, to finding him a mentor, to giving him moral support. But it was a chance meeting that ultimately changed his life, taking him off the street and into the boardroom.

"On Wednesday last week [19 July] I saw my mate, Yaron Waks, at the Neighbourhood Square shopping centre and went over to say hi," says attorney David Swartz. "He was chatting to Brian, who told me that he was studying for a BCom Law, had a wife and two kids, and was working as a car guard. I was

so impressed, I asked him to meet me and my partners. We were going to discuss it further, but he blew us away with his grit, determination, and intellect. We offered him a job on the spot, and now he's sitting here at his desk."

To get to that point was a long road for a car guard from Zimbabwe. "I met Brian outside Neighbourhood Square," says musician Jonathan Birin, who first helped Ndlovu step onto his new path. Like many members of the Johannesburg Jewish community, he knew Ndlovu because he was so friendly and "could talk about any topic." Like others, he would buy Ndlovu tea – his favourite hot drink – and chat to him. "He eventually told me that he would like to study, and had even done a Unisa [University of South Africa] application, just to see how the process worked, but didn't have the funds to pay for it. I told him I couldn't promise anything, but I would try to help, and he should send me his Unisa application, which he had done by the time I got home."

Birin got in touch with Glynne Wolman of The Angel Network (TAN). "I told her I had a good feeling about this

guy, and asked if TAN could support him. That's how we got the ball rolling. All kinds of people he had met over the years got involved to help him."

Picking up the story, Wolman says Birin called her in about June 2022, and TAN agreed to fund Ndlovu's studies for a term to see how it went. "His marks were phenomenal, so we carried on. He was conscientious and kept us up to date as he continued to do brilliantly."

The organisation then got lawyer Melanie Levy on board, who mentored Ndlovu throughout his studies, even though she was based in Cape Town. Others donated clothes, money, books, and even a laptop. He passed with flying colours, achieving higher than 80% and even 90% in most of his courses, getting seven distinctions. He graduated with a Higher Certificate in Law from Unisa on 28 March 2023. TAN then agreed to sponsor him to do a BCom Law.

"He's like a celebrity. Everyone is celebrating his success because everyone



Brian Ndlovu and David Swartz

knows him,"

says Wolman. "It shows how it really takes a village to make a difference to one person. Everyone did their bit. It's the perfect example of how we 'give a hand up, not a hand out'. Now, he in turn will become a contributing member of society and hopefully be in a position to do the same someday. It's been beautiful to watch, but it didn't happen in a vacuum. He had to want to do it, and he worked hard in difficult circumstances – from travelling far, to loadshedding, to studying at night. We don't turn people away – Jewish or not. We know there's a need in the community as well. We help where help is needed."

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Birin says Ndlovu has taught him life lessons as he's always sharing quotations and proverbs, such as "education is a train that moves forward and never stops", or "lucky goes to those who are prepared".

Ndlovu clearly lives by these words, and he told Wolman, "Because of you, all my dreams that were shelved are now being realised. My life is forever changed and impacted. I know it will never be the same. You have empowered me to keep on dreaming."

Ndlovu also told Birin about a friend who posted something antisemitic on TikTok. After Ndlovu explained to him that the Jewish community had supported him, the friend took down the post.

"Everyone played their part in getting Brian to where he is today," says Birin. "It shows the Jewish community's ability to network and its will for people to succeed, giving them an opportunity and watching them fly." Sometimes it was just about being there. Having people like Birin and Levy to chat to about his courses and results kept him motivated and made him feel heard. However, Birin says that at the end of the day, it was Ndlovu's will to succeed and not accept the status quo that got him where he is today.

On Facebook, many said they would miss seeing him

in the parking area of Neighbourhood Square but they all celebrated his success.

Speaking to the SA Jewish Report on his first day on the job, Ndlovu said, "It's my first day at a formal job in a long time. The reception I received was warm. The atmosphere is pleasant. I have my own desk. I love it, I love the people. At Neighbourhood Square, I made life-changing connections. This is where I met Jonathan and other good people. I've received a lot of help from the Jewish community. What can I say other than that I'm thankful for their generosity of spirit and the kindness they have shown me."

Swartz says that appointing Ndlovu fitted in with the ethos of the firm, which is based on the principle of "always give back". This has extended to the way Ndlovu's job has been structured – he works half days so that he has time to study and be with his kids. The firm also gave Ndlovu a starting bonus so that he could buy clothes and get himself settled. He'll join the firm's weekly swimming programme for all employees who need lessons. His job will entail research and assisting attorneys, and they expect him to grow in the company.

"Brian is a rockstar," says Swartz. "We know he'll excel."

SA olim divided on reform, united on Israel

>>Continued from page 1

one of miracles, and I must continue to believe in miracles because the future of the Jewish people depends on it."

Then there are those in the middle, who see both sides as making serious mistakes. Oleh Solly Kaplinski says, "There's consensus that judicial reform is necessary, but the roll-out has been disastrous, with extremists on the right and left dictating the agenda. It feels like the country is teetering on the edge. How this plays out now is almost too scary to contemplate, while our enemies gloat in the wings. Who will take on the mantle of authentic leadership and win over a broken people?"

Indeed, those who want to see Israel destroyed are thrilled at the turmoil facing the country. The Media Review Network which describes itself as "a South African group working to expose Zionist apartheid" shared an article on Facebook about the possibility of Israel erupting into civil war and commented, "The Zionist cancer is imploding. This is excellent news for those who wish to see its speedy end and the birth of a liberated Palestine

from the river to the sea."

Locally, the Jewish Democratic Initiative (JDI) says, "The state that is emerging undermines the Declaration of Independence. If our values encompass pluralism, religious freedom, and civil rights, do we continue to succumb to a cognitive dissonance and not apply these principles where Israel is concerned? Our hope for the Jewish people is to move away from the current atmosphere of *sin'at chinam* (baseless hatred) towards *ahavat chinam* (baseless love) for our fellow Jew and human being. JDI calls on our South African Jewish community to make our voice heard in support of peace, [and] equality."

South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin says that ultimately, "Israelis on both sides are proud patriots with legitimate concerns, a deep love for the Jewish state, and a commitment to its future. We hope that our brothers and sisters in Israel will be able to find a consensus that brings stability, heals divisions, and works towards nation-building. Israel will survive the current crisis."

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Death and taxes are certain, divine comfort is real



RABBI LEVI AVTZON

OPINION

Whether it be the collective mourning of our nation on Tisha B'Av (Thursday, 27 July) and/or the pain that many in the South African community are feeling with recent tragedies, specifically the passing of a young father and husband, we're all searching for comfort.

In my own journey with grief, the below letter, more than any other, offered me deep perspective and comfort.

First, some background:

A certain individual invited members of his community to a festive meal in his home on the holiday of Shavuot, when we commemorate the unsurpassable event of G-d giving us the Torah on Mt Sinai, to celebrate the completion of a Torah scroll which was scheduled to be presented to the synagogue in the days following the festival. In the course of the celebration, a young woman suddenly fell ill and died.

The distraught host wrote to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, posing the following three questions:

1. How can it be that a *mitzvah*

such as the writing of a Torah scroll should be the cause of such a tragedy?

2. What should be done with the Sefer Torah?

3. What lesson must he, the host, derive from the fact that something like this occurred in his home?

The Rebbe's response:

1. It's impossible for man, a finite creature, to comprehend all the reasons of the infinite Creator. Indeed, we'd have no way of knowing even some of G-d's reasons were it not for the fact that G-d Himself told us to seek them out in His holy Torah (Torah meaning "instruction").

2. According to the Torah, it cannot be that anything negative should result from any of G-d's *mitzvot* (including your Torah scroll). On the contrary, these protect against evil and prevent it.

3. Every individual has been granted a set number of years of life on earth. It's only in extreme cases that one's deeds can lengthen or shorten it – with some terrible sin, etc,

G-d forbid!

4. Based on 1, 2, and 3 above, one can perhaps venture to say that had the departed one, peace be to her, not been invited to the Sefer Torah celebration, she would have found herself, at the onset of her attack, in completely different surroundings: on the street, or, in any case, in the company of strangers; without the presence of a doctor who is both a friend and a person of faith; without hearing, in her final moments, words of encouragement and seeing the faces of friends. Can one imagine the difference between the two possibilities?

5. According to the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov that every event and its every detail is by divine providence, it's possible that one of the true reasons that Mr Z, the host, was inspired from above to donate the Torah scroll was in order that, ultimately, the ascent of the young woman's soul should be accompanied with an inner tranquillity, occurring in a Jewish home, a home whose symbol and protection is the mezuzah, which opens with the words, "Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one."

(Regarding what to do about the Torah scroll) – It should be brought into the synagogue in conjunction with the *shloshim* (30-day period of mourning) from the young woman's funeral, even if the official presentation will be held on a later date.

(Regarding the lessons derived from this) – Obviously, you and your wife, may you live, have many merits. Without having sought it, you had been granted the opportunity from above for a *mitzvah* of the highest order: first, to ease the final moments of a fellow human being; second, to take care of a *met mitzvah* (a dead body with no-one to care for it) until the ambulance arrived. The extreme merit of the latter can be derived from the fact that Torah

law obligates a *kohen gadol*, on Yom Kippur, to leave the Holy of Holies to take care of a *met mitzvah*!

Such special merit comes with special obligations. In your case, these would include explaining the

3. Yes, we pray for

the best possible scenario based on our perspective of what we think the best is, but we live with faith knowing that G-d

We live with the faith that G-d knows what is ultimately best



above to those who might have questions identical or similar to those posed in your letter until they see the event in its true light: a tremendous instance of divine providence.

What a letter! Each point is mind-bending and transformative. Here are some thoughts.

1. Trying to understand G-d's ways is impossible. A baby cannot understand Einstein, or even their parent for that matter – and we expect to understand G-d's ways? While we mourn and grieve when confronted with loss, we also take deep comfort in knowing that the all-knowing Creator is carrying us.

2. We all have a number of years that we are allocated before we enter this world. G-d rarely changes that allotted time. No-one dies "prematurely", "too soon", or in an "untimely" way. We don't die a minute before our contract is up. Yes, "in extreme cases", we can alter it, but that's the exception not the rule.

It's this idea, which some might find hard to palate, that offered me the deepest comfort when losing my father and in facing pastoral duties in the face of grief. There is a plan, a design, and a designer.

knows what's ultimately best. It's quite a paradox. Whoever said faith was simple or simplistic?

4. What seemed like a tragic event with bad energy and terrible guilt can be transformed into a whole different event if we uplift our perspective. This letter reminds us how a great leader can reframe even the most obviously stark tragedies into a narrative of love and upliftment.

5. Free choice is how we choose to react to the events of our lives. While the number of years might be pre-destined, free-will allows us to fill those days with perspective, emotions, and behaviours that enrich the lives of those around us and bring this world closer to its g-dly ideal.

As long as we live in this pre-Moshiach world – may it end soon – we'll encounter pain and tragedy. From the days of Adam and Eve until the time of redemption, death, (and taxes) are certainties of life. I hope this letter can guide our trek through the valleys and shadows.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

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Interfaith leaders pray at Bree Street explosion site



Reeva Forman, interfaith liaison for the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, attended a prayer meeting in the Johannesburg CBD on Monday, 24 July, at the site of last week's Bree Street gas explosion. Hosted by City of Johannesburg Speaker Colleen Makhubele and Bishop Stephen Morea, the leaders made their way from St Mary's Anglican Church to the scene of the explosion, where they prayed for the deceased, injured and traumatised, and the residents of Johannesburg.

Complacency means devastation, warns SA-born climate financier

TALI FEINBERG

It's not every day that an entrepreneur born and raised in South Africa meets a king and a president to launch a bold plan to combat climate change, but then Dr Andrew "Andy" Kuper is no ordinary entrepreneur. Named on the 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours list a year ago, the co-founder and chief executive of LeapFrog Investments met King Charles III and President Joe Biden at Windsor Castle on 11 July, where he announced a \$750 million (R13.4 billion) investment plan to combat climate change.

Australia-based Kuper was one of just 20 global chief executives and chairpersons invited to meet the gathering. "It was a surreal experience meeting King Charles and President Biden together, both of whom were warm and gracious," says Kuper. "They knew about LeapFrog and my work with my co-founder and fellow South African [Leapfrog Chief Operating Officer] Gary Herbert and our diverse partners to build a business dedicated to changing lives at scale in Africa and Asia.

"The king and president chose to focus us on their shared passion for many decades – protecting our environment," says Kuper. "Limiting the earth's warming and avoiding catastrophic climate change is of existential importance to us all. US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry and UK Secretary of State Grant Shapps convened a climate finance mobilisation forum around the meeting. They brought together 20 chief executives and chairpersons who together oversee trillions of dollars, and who have been at the forefront of finding and investing in solutions to climate change. We then reported back to the king and president together, as well as met with each of them individually, to chart a path forward."

Kuper says he has been strongly shaped by his upbringing in South Africa. "I went to Woodmead, the only unsegregated school under apartheid, for a period," he says. "Eventually, I matriculated from King David Schools, where the Wolf brothers emphasised contribution to community. I was there, as a Wits [University of the Witwatersrand] politics student, surrounded by friends of every colour and background on the Union Building lawns in Pretoria, on the day Madiba was inaugurated. As I watched the prisoner become president, I knew my life needed to be devoted to

It's inspiring to see how many Jewish South Africans have had a positive impact on societies across the world.

making large-scale change.

"The companies LeapFrog has backed and built have now reached 450 million people with healthcare, financial services, or climate solutions," he says. "That's more than 5% of the world's population. So we have a distinctive perspective to share on how to raise and invest capital, and how to back businesses that enable people to adopt new tools and technologies that change their lives along with their communities and environment."

At Windsor Castle, LeapFrog announced its plan to invest in companies that provide climate solutions in emerging markets. "We expect to reach and enable 50 million low-income people in Asia and Africa with climate solutions," says Kuper.

The investment will focus on supporting companies in the built environment, energy, transport, and food sectors. "By 2030, overall investments in these sectors could help reduce greenhouse-gas emissions substantially, and could create an estimated 90 million new jobs in developing

countries."

He emphasises the urgency of the situation. "To limit the warming of our planet, we need to take carbon out of people's lifestyles, commerce, and ultimately the atmosphere. If we fail, the result will be fires, floods, droughts, and other natural catastrophes that are more severe and frequent than we have ever experienced."

The discussion focused on developing countries. "Today, they account for 25% of carbon emissions but could account for more than 70% of emissions by 2050," says Kuper. "Hundreds of billions of dollars are being invested to decarbonise wealthy countries, but unless we can encourage similar investment in emerging markets, the world will warm by more than two degrees."

He says that though LeapFrog has worked to empower emerging consumers in Africa and Asia, "seeing the impact of a warming climate on their everyday lives made us realise we needed to do more to combat climate change. It's often those who have contributed the least to climate change who suffer the greatest effects." Kuper shared his plan individually with King Charles and Biden. "Kerry and Shapps also discussed it with the broader group of chairs and chief executives. The plan was universally well-received for both its ambition and practicality. It was encouraging too to be one of several commitments announced on the day.

"We need to be sober though on the challenges here," he says. "These commitments are catalysts – insufficient on their own. But they are powerful as a start and in providing a road map for others."

On that note, "We have a lot of work to do!" he says. "LeapFrog's climate team will continue to build its climate investment strategy. We have already invested in companies such as Sun King, started in Kenya, which has reached tens of millions of people with pay-as-you-go solar home systems, beginning to light up that map of Africa at night. CarDekho, in India, is enabling four million online searches for electric vehicles in India, every quarter. Lessons from investing in these companies will help LeapFrog

and others to broaden our investment universe and help to catalyse more green growth."

His advice to others who want to help with climate change but feel too overwhelmed to start is that "there are simple things that anyone can do to reduce the carbon footprint of their household such as changing how you commute to work or making different choices about food and travel. You can volunteer with non-profit organisations that protect the environment or lobby governments and the private sector to do more. You can build or join a business devoted to having an impact on climate change by



Dr Andy Kuper and United States President Joe Biden

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"I'm optimistic that the world is on a path away from any worst-case scenario, but we mustn't take our foot off the accelerator, or my children and billions of others will live in a world of volatile climate conditions," he says. "My hope is that LeapFrog's example will show that there's a way to combine profit with purpose, to find green solutions that also generate profit for investors, and to mobilise trillions to protect our planet, especially its most vulnerable people."

Finally, he says, "It's sad that so many of us aren't together in South Africa any longer. But it's also inspiring to see how many Jewish South Africans have had a positive impact on societies across the world. We lived through powerful times and transitions together, which had many good and many hard elements, and that shaped us all. Whatever the location or challenges, we shouldn't lose hold of home or hope."

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Israel's leaders – stand up!

On Tuesday this week, at least four Israeli newspapers were distributed with jet-black front pages under their banner heads. The only words on the page were, "Black day for Israeli democracy."

Doctors launched a nationwide 24-hour strike, and the country apparently looked like it was in mourning following the far-right-wing Netanyahu government pushing through the first judicial bill, eliminating the reasonableness clause in law.

What this means is that judges are prevented from stopping government decisions that they deem unreasonable. It means that potentially, any apparently unreasonable law passed by the government of the day cannot be overturned in a court of law.

Whether you support the present Israeli government or not, this revised law applies to any government from here on in. So, you may think this government is reasonable and their decisions acceptable, but what happens when you don't necessarily agree with the government, and you no longer have the wisdom of judges to prevent "unreasonable" laws from being passed. See the problem?

So many Israelis believe that this is just the beginning, and there's far worse to come that will potentially destroy the democracy that means so much to Israel and the Jewish world.

Some Israelis or *olim* have changed their profiles on social media to Israeli flags with the two triangles separated, in a personal protest.

The law was changed in the Knesset on Monday despite months of endless national protests calling on the government to stop it, and a massive march from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem over the weekend.

After the law was changed, chaos erupted on the streets of Israel. Highways were blocked by protesters, who defied the water cannons and mounted police. There were many complaints of police brutality, and the water cannons were apparently filled with foul-smelling dirty water. More than 33 people were arrested.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said in an interview on Britain's Channel 4 on 24 July that Israel was under threat of civil war. Though most people see Olmert's prediction as an exaggeration, Israelis aren't happy.

"It's a sad day," said Yair Lapid, the leader of Israel's opposition. "This isn't a victory for the coalition. This is the destruction of Israeli democracy."

Benny Gantz, the head of the National Unity party, was quoted as saying, "We may have lost a battle, but we will win the war."

Sadly though, as long as there's massive division, nobody is winning any battles. Those who are protesting against what the government is doing are furious. Those who support what the government is doing are angry with the protesters for not accepting what they believe is the right way.

And though there were touching moments where protesters on either side held hands on escalators going in different directions, families in Israel are split over this national crisis.

The country is so divided. And all this is happening on *erev Tisha B'Av*, the saddest day of our year, when we commemorate the destruction of both our temples and various other tragedies that befell our people. This includes the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290, and the banishment of Jews from Spain in 1492. And it's documented that both World War I and World War II began on Tisha B'Av.

I cannot say that it is or isn't a coincidence that it happened this week because I have no doubt that those changing the laws in Israel know exactly when Tisha B'Av is and what it represents to us all.

This week, the leaders of the Jewish Agency, World Zionist Organisation, Jewish Federation of North America, and the world leadership of Keren Hayesod (United Israel Appeal) wrote a letter appealing to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and opposition leader Yair Lapid. These people – effectively the leaders of the Jewish world outside of Israel – called for unity and peaceful coexistence in Israel.

I cannot recall a previous time when external Jewish leaders pleaded with Israeli leaders to get off their high horses fast to solve their crisis.

They appealed to Israeli leaders "on the eve of Tisha B'Av" to find a way to overcome the "great polarisation and discord in Israeli society", saying, "We must make every effort for unity and *shalom bayit* [peace in our home]."

"On the 75th year of our independence, we emphasise the need and commitment of each and every one of us to our shared destiny, for unity which respects diversity, guaranteeing that the state of Israel will remain a Jewish and democratic state."

They went on to insist that Israeli leadership put the well-being of the entire Jewish people first and find a way of "moderating the discourse and verbal radicalisation" to "reach agreement".

Representing world Jewry, they expressed the deep concern of the Jewish people and our aspiration "to strengthen the foundation of our national home".

They urged Israeli leaders to "make use of the tools available to them" to find the "broadest common denominator for the sake of *kiruv levavot* [bringing people together] within *am Yisrael*".

Then, on 25 July, Ronald Lauder, the president of the World Jewish Congress, made an appeal in the *New York Times* and other publications in the United States and Israel. He admitted that generally, the Jews of the diaspora "refrain from meddling in Israeli politics", but said he felt he could no longer do so as "Israel's future hangs in the balance" and the Jewish state faces "imminent existential danger".

The "unprecedented events of 2023 are eroding the social compact and endangering national security", Lauder said, and as a Jewish leader, he could no longer keep quiet.

"As I watch Israel tear itself apart while its enemies grow in strength, I must take a stand and speak up," he said. He quoted Abraham Lincoln, who said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," and went on to say "neither can an Israel divided against itself".

Lauder claims there are only three men who can fix the situation – Netanyahu, Lapid, and Gantz. He insists they have to bring about national unity by sitting down immediately for a frank discussion of the country's alarming predicament.

"They must overcome personal interest and political differences so they can form a strong and stable emergency government," he said, pointing out that they have no choice and must rise to this historic challenge.

I believe this is the only answer.

It's time for Israeli leaders to get a grip and find an urgent path forward. Netanyahu, Lapid, and Gantz must stop these shenanigans, get around a table, and find a sensible, realistic way forward for Israel that brings the internal battle to an end and unites the country.

Discord and division in the country is only destructive. It doesn't serve any side or any leader. It's especially not serving Israel, its people, and the Jewish world. It's only harming us.

When Israeli police are pitted against Israelis over politics, it's problematic. Arresting people for what boils down to a difference of political opinion is also problematic.

Israel's true leaders need to make this work. The solutions won't make everyone happy. They shouldn't. They should make everyone happy enough, and still have to accept a little disappointment.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Trek of tears: Israel's marathon march for democracy

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



"My country tis of thee. Sweet land of liberty. Of thee, I sing." These lyrics from an American song, ironically set to the tune of *G-d Save the King*, embodies the spirit of the more than 72 000 Israelis who marched for four days from Tel Aviv to the capital, Jerusalem, to protest against judicial reform.

Democracy, protection of civil liberties and the values enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence have defined Israel in her 75 years of independence. Many across the country and the world are worried that these values could be significantly eroded should the current draft of the proposed reforms be passed.

Many hope they will be cancelled, and most hope for broad-based consensus through negotiations.

The march started on Wednesday, 19 July, and culminated in a rally outside the Knesset on Saturday night, joined by nationwide rallies in protest of the proposed judicial overhauls.

Before the start of the march, grandfathers, fathers, and sons davened *shacharit* (morning prayers). The image was emotive. Wrapped in their holy cloak of tefillin and tallit, they joined in prayers that have linked generation to generation, sustaining us through exile, persecution, and strife. Perhaps there were additional prayers for the unity of this deeply divided country.

Armed with the blue and white flag of Israel, they started to march. They marched over rough terrain in the scorching sun. A metaphor, perhaps?

peacefully trekking towards the capital.

I followed the marchers along their route all weekend, and I'm sure that like many across our deeply divided country, I wept tears of pride at my fellow citizens, courageous and determined as they walked kilometre after kilometre in the blazing hot sun, never losing sight of why they were doing this.

I wept tears of sorrow for the divisions and chasms that are so deep in Israel's society. Perhaps it does take an event of seismic proportions to expose the fissures and cracks that so desperately need healing.

I wept for those who feel marginalised and just want to be heard in the highest reaches of the country's institutions.

I wept for you and for me, who deeply love this country and just want to see Israel thrive. We face so many external threats by those devoted to our destruction.

For those of us who are journalists, whose job description is to expose the dark areas of our democracy to the sunlight, this has been one of the most difficult events to cover. We're routinely maligned, some even physically manhandled.

I have been called a "seditionist", "inciter of hate", "traitor", and an "anarchist".

Our job is to report what is in the public interest. It may not be what many want to hear, but in a thriving democracy, a free press is vital. We face a mounting threat from extremists in government who want to restrict that right severely.

This is why it was so important that tens of thousands marched to safeguard the very tenets of democracy.

On Sunday, protesters and overhaul supporters started the day with prayers at the Kotel. They then formed a human chain from the Western Wall to the Knesset.

The definitive image for me this week was captured later in the day in the most unlikely place – the Jerusalem train station. Throngs of protesters, either descending the steep escalator to catch the trains to Tel Aviv to join a pro-reform rally or ascending to congregate outside the Knesset building to oppose the overhauls reached out hands across the divide. Never forget we are brothers and I love you, they said.

What Israel desperately

needs now is a leader willing to do the same. A leader ready to sacrifice office if he must, but to do what's best for the country and its people. A leader willing to push with all his might for a negotiated solution. Do we have that leader?

Writing this article has been profoundly emotional for me. No doubt, I'll receive heavy criticism from many who disagree with me. That's okay. That's democracy. I do hope that people read this and internalise the message. We need to start talking to each other. Perhaps it just starts with you and me.

• Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV and is the co-founder of *Lay of the Land* and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.



Photo: Screenshot

Young and old, religious and secular, they marched. A young boy with mobility issues, determined to participate, marched. Families marched. It was peaceful. Minstrels and maestros brought their musical instruments along and kept the mood festive and buoyant. People were on hand, giving out water and snacks.

They marched. They marched for their children, they marched for generations past, and they marched for everyone, including those who disagree with them. They marched for you and for me.

It was a remarkable, seminal moment in Israel's history, and I like to think that even Israelis who support the proposed overhauls were moved by the dedication and images of their fellow citizens

Century-old Benoni Shul shuttered but not forgotten

HANNA RESNICK

Benoni Shul, which served the once thriving local community for 90 years, officially closed its doors for the last time on Sunday, 23 July, with a deconsecration ceremony.

"The Benoni congregation has always stood proudly among the congregations of South Africa as an heir and teacher of the great heritage of Judaism, handed down to us by our ancestors," said Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the national director of the Small Jewish Communities Association.

Rabbi Josh Green, who has been the shul's rabbi for almost 14 years, said, "Closing down a shul isn't

Green said that in 2010, he and his wife approached Silberhaft, who is also the national director of the African Jewish Congress, and offered their services for a shul over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. "We were looking for somewhere exotic," said Green, "and he called me back to tell me he had a wonderful exotic place called Benoni."

"We went there one or two Shabboses before Rosh Hashanah as a kind of trial run, and got on really well with Bernie Goldman, who was president at the time and has since passed away. And we've been there almost every other Shabbos since then," Green said.

"As the *minyan* slowly dwindled, we would go once a month to Benoni for Shabbat. So, before

Shabbos, we'd drive out there with all our food and we'd host a Friday night dinner with all the members of the shul," said Green. "We'd sleep over there and run shul the next morning. We'd have a nice kiddush, followed

of years ago, he was committed to keeping the shul open for as long as possible, but realised that the time had come to make the difficult decision.

They held a *mincha* service on Sunday, followed by kaddish for all the past members of the Benoni Jewish community. Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein spoke, as did Rabbi Silberhaft, Rabbi Green and Yvonne Rimer, the secretary of the United Hebrew Institute and chairperson of the Benoni Chevrah Kadisha.

Silberhaft encouraged those in attendance not to be disheartened by the closing of the shul but to keep the legacy of the community alive through *mitzvot* and by sharing the memories and lessons of the community. He urged them to "continue to live the legacy of the Benoni Jewish community wherever you are. By doing that, its 116 years won't be something of the past but part of your and your family's future."

He also spoke about the importance of maintaining the graves of the Jewish cemetery in Benoni, saying, "Don't abandon your family's graves because you don't want your children to do the same to yours one day."

Yvonne Rimer, who has been a member of the community for 48 years,

recalled that in the 1980s there was a community of more

than 400 families, most of whom sent their children to the Hillel school, then the Jewish school in Benoni. Sadly, she said,

"when the school closed, it was almost the beginning of the end of the community

because a lot of people moved to Johannesburg to put their children

in King David. Some extremely influential and successful Jewish members have come out of Benoni, and they have continued to support us throughout the years."

The ceremony honoured business leaders Larry Nestadt and Stephen Koseff, who grew up as part of the Benoni community and always supported it.

Koseff said he recalled the shul being a vibrant community centre. "My father was a treasurer of the shul," he said. "I remember all the Barmitzvahs and functions there. There was a big field, so while the adults were inside, we would go and play soccer". Koseff said Sunday's ceremony was "very emotional" as the shul contained such important memories for so many.

The shul's Torah was rehomed at Linksfield Shul.



Photo: Stephen Kangjisser



Stephen Koseff laying tefillin with Chaim Schneider

an easy process, but it was done at a good time, when Benoni was still relevant in a lot of people's lives. We didn't wait to drag it out until there was nothing left to celebrate."

Green, who hosted the event with his wife, Hanna, said that there wasn't actually a service in *halacha* to de-consecrate something, "because no matter what happens, the holiness that has permeated the walls and the grounds of that area can never leave it".

He alluded to the destruction of the Temple, which was believed to have occurred in this week of Tisha B'Av, and how, even once the temple was destroyed, holiness remained. "So even though we have to close Benoni Shul physically, the holiness of Benoni and the holiness of the Jewry and all of the *brachot* and the prayers and everything that happened there, you can't de-consecrate that."

"It was emotional, but it wasn't a sad day," said Green. "There was a mutual understanding that the time had come. While the shul might close, it's sort of gone but not forgotten. The memories are still there."

by lunch, and then we would stay until Shabbos ended and drive back home. We've had two kids since then, both of whom have always looked at Benoni as their second home."

Over the years, they have hosted Sukkot braais, Purim and Chanukah parties, Tisha B'Av ceremonies, and more. Green said that a highlight was celebrating milestones like birthdays and Barmitzvahs.

And he was honoured to witness the celebration of many second Barmitzvahs. "Getting to celebrate a second Barmitzvah with them was a huge privilege. I think just making friendships with people that are twice, even three times my age, and being guided by the elders of our community really had an impact on me."

Green said that after Goldman's death a couple

The remarkable journey of Hungary's Jewish community

OPINION

I could start this piece by complaining about the lack of democracy in Hungary, and I will because it definitely affects Hungarian Jews and their daily life. Not necessarily in the way you might think; we do live in a safe country for Jews and antisemitism is on the decline.

But the Jewish community mimics Hungarian society in many ways. It has, after all, been an integral part of it for at least 300 years. For example, there are two big blocs of Hungarian Jews: a united and strong movement that was imported after democratic change, and a fragmented, colourful, traditional community with debates, disputes, and sometimes arguments. Just like the Hungarian political scene.

Bear with me, I'll cheer you up soon. Autocracy, populism, friendship with Russia, and the state's ongoing battle against various minorities are dangerous for the Jewish community because the wind can change very easily.

Hungary's Jewish community, the largest in central Europe, has embarked on a remarkable journey to rebuild its cultural identity. Through the unwavering commitment of Hungarian and international Jewish organisations,

Pesach seder at the Jewish Community Centre of Budapest in Hungary



this community has embraced its heritage, transformed individual lives, and created a more inclusive society.

But what if we zoom out for a second and look at all the wonderful work done by Hungarian and international Jews over the past three decades?

Hungary's Jewish community, numbering between 80 000 and 100 000 people, has a distinct position as a local community rather than as a product of migration. While Budapest's Jewish community managed to survive the horrors of World War II, tragically 600 000 Jews from the Hungarian countryside weren't so fortunate, underlining the dark

chapter that forever remains in the community's collective memory.

Because of the Shoah and the following decades of communism, Jewish Hungarians stopped telling their children the great Passover story of the exodus, the heroic struggle of the Maccabees at Chanukah, and so on and so forth.

In fact, they stopped telling their children that they were Jewish at all. At the time of democratic change in 1989, only 2 000 people identified as Jewish. But within a generation, that number has risen to more than 20 000. This resurgence is the result of a profound process of self-discovery.

The remarkable revival of Hungarian Jewry owes much to the tireless efforts of Hungarian Jewish organisations, which have played a crucial role in fostering an environment in which individuals can reconnect with their roots and embrace their Jewish heritage. These organisations, often backed by the generous support of donors, particularly from the United



GERGŐ BORBÁS

Continued on page 8>>

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Marriage proposals put risk into romance

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

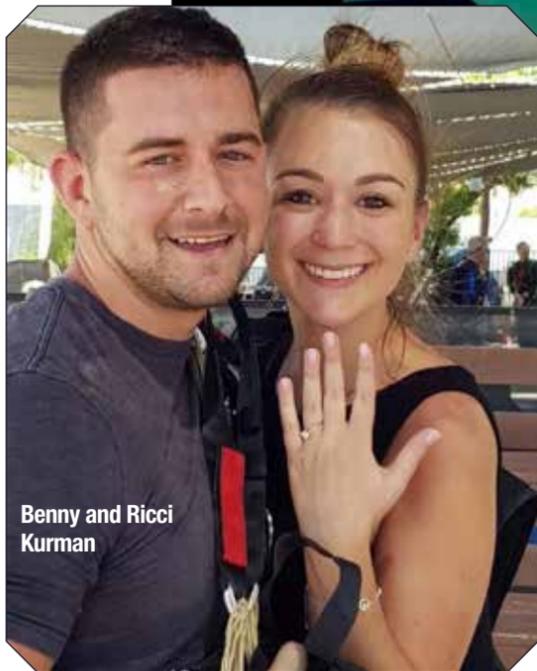
From jumping out of a plane to scuba diving, some marriage proposals literally sweep couples off their feet. As we prepare to mark Tu B'Av (the Jewish equivalent of Valentine's Day), we illuminate some weird and wonderful ways that people have popped the question.

When Ricci Kurman's then-boyfriend, Benny, insisted on taking her skydiving for a second time, she was less than enthused. "Benny was already skydiving as a hobby before we met," Ricci recalls. "I had done a tandem skydive [together with an instructor] in Joburg, and once was enough for me."

Yet when they travelled to America to celebrate her father's 60th birthday with Ricci's family, Benny convinced her to take the plunge once again – with her parents urging her along. "I was in such a mood because I really didn't want to go," Ricci laughs. As they ascended in the airplane, Benny, who is licensed to jump alone, was in front and Ricci and her sister were each strapped to instructors behind him.

"Benny stood up preparing to jump out of the plane, and then he turned around, looked at me, got down on one knee, pulled this ring out, and said, 'Will you marry me?'" Ricci recalls. Shocked, she issued an expletive and asked what was going on. "He just put the ring on my finger, and jumped out of the plane. My sister just started screaming, and I had to jump."

As she fell, Ricci held onto the ring for dear life. "It was so big that it was literally falling off my finger," she says. After Ricci and the ring landed safely, Benny was waiting on the ground, surrounded by her family, and proposed again. This time her response was more eloquent.



Benny and Ricci Kurman



Ilan and Zara Sher

to answer correctly," she recalls. More questions and clues followed throughout the day. "At the end, there was a bouquet of red roses on my desk with a silver paper heart that had the ten questions that had been asked throughout the day." In an attached card from her then-boyfriend, she was instructed to go home and bring the heart along.

"He fetched me, and we drove to Rand Airport, where we went for a flight around

Joburg in a small plane." When they returned, there was a dinner table set with a treasure chest that opened with the code she'd received after solving the day's clues. Inside was that silver heart with the same questions printed on a Perspex heart. Putting the two together, revealed the words, "Will you marry me?"

When Steph Cohen's now-husband, Greg, started a new job, he began a game of subterfuge aimed at facilitating a romantic proposal. "A couple of weeks in, he told me that his company was running a competition for a free weekend away," she recalls. "Six months later, he messaged me to say he had a surprise. I got home from work,

and he said, 'Pack a bag, I won, and we're off to Cape Town tomorrow morning.'"

Greg made sure they weren't able to go into their room all day and took Steph on a Waterfront shopping spree. "After a cheese and wine tasting that evening, we went to the room," she recalls. "I opened the door and saw rose petals everywhere. I thought to myself, 'This is some amazing work trip.'"

"My feet were sore as I was in boots all day, so I began taking them off. As I turned around, hopping on one foot, he was on the ground on one knee. We got married in April the following year."



Steph and Greg Cohen

Last chance to nominate the brave and the best

STAFF WRITER

The countdown has begun to closing nominations for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2023. We have until 17:00 on 4 August to nominate. So, don't miss out! Make sure to nominate now and put forward that unique person or people you believe should be an Absa Jewish Achiever Award winner this year.

So far, we have more than 400 unique nominees, and definitely space for more.

Every year, we bring you inspirational winners. We show you the incredible achievements people within our community have accomplished. We celebrate the extraordinary, the unique, the exceptional, and the brave. We create role models of those who have devoted their lives to serving others, who have started businesses from nothing, and who have built legacies that will outlast their time.

In this community, we have shown that we are more than our past...

We are more than bystanders...

We are more than colour...

We are more than darkness...

So, show us who we are, and who deserves to win in the following categories:

Absa Business Icon Award – for a Jewish person who has achieved iconic status within the business community;

Absa Business Leadership Award – for a Jewish person who

has played a critical leadership role in business;

Absa Professional Excellence Award – for a Jewish person who has achieved national recognition and acclaim in their profession;

Entrepreneur Award – for a Jewish person who has a proven track record in entrepreneurial ventures;

Mann Made Media Community Service Award – for a

Jewish person who has served

the Jewish community with

remarkable distinction;

Europcar Women In Leadership Award – honouring the leadership, success, and overall contributions of distinctive Jewish women in business or in the broader South African community;

Kirsh Family Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of Helen Suzman – for a Jewish person who has contributed in an

extraordinary manner over a long period of time;

Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award in honour of Steven Blend – for a Jewish person who has excelled in any of these spheres;

Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris – for any person who has contributed substantially to the betterment of the lives of the people of South Africa; and

Rising Star Award – for a Jewish person, 25 years old and younger, who has made a massive difference in any sphere, including entrepreneurship and humanitarianism.

Nominate now! Go to: bit.ly/jaa23nom



Carol Steinberg, the winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award 2022 being congratulated by Dorianne Weil

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Donna and Dani Kedar



When he proposed to his now wife, Zara, Ilan Sher went in the opposite direction – under the sea. Zara, who has always been mad about water, had to fight to convince Ilan to share her passion for diving, but he was soon hooked. When the time came, Ilan decided that scuba diving in Mauritius would be the perfect setting for his proposal. Yet when they arrived, it was in the midst of a cyclone.

"I went to the diving school to arrange to go scuba diving, and the instructor said he didn't think we could do it as the weather was terrible," Ilan recalls. "I explained that this was my proposal, so

we needed to arrange it even if the diving was rubbish."

Under water and wondering what Ilan had been thinking to have planned a dive in such murky conditions, Zara turned around to see him holding a laminated sign saying, "Will you marry me?" She made the "ok" sign that scuba divers use.

"He had this beaded ring for the underwater proposal, but it snapped as he pulled it out of his pocket – there were beads floating everywhere," Zara laughs. The scuba instructor fashioned a ring from a rubber band that he cut off his suit, and the engagement was official.

When they returned to shore, the hotel staff were waiting with the real ring, and Ilan got down on one knee. Donna Kedar has a long-running love affair with lions. So, when he proposed, her now-

husband, Dani, knew he had to incorporate the creatures into his plan. He arranged a trip to Glen Garriff Conservation, which runs a non-profit sanctuary for lions, and planned a proposal inside its Lion House.

"Lion House is in the middle of a lion enclosure,"

Donna says, "So they were our witnesses. To be proposed to with the lions around us was just magical – they're so majestic." The story goes that Donna, in fact, proposed to Smokey, rated as the handsomest lion in the sanctuary. Upon Smokey's refusal, she was forced to accept Dani's proposal.

Lindi Markowitz Katzoff describes the day her ex-husband proposed as the flight of her life. "Even though the marriage didn't last, the day was spectacular," she says. The epic proposal started in the morning and lasted until late that night.

"When I got to work, there was a question on my desk that I needed

The remarkable journey of Hungary's Jewish community

>>Continued from page 7

States, have been instrumental in igniting the flame of self-rediscovery.

At the forefront of this movement is the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) of Budapest, a secular organisation inspired by Judaism, Jewish values, and Jewish culture. The JCC Budapest serves as a nurturing space where individuals can embark on their personal journeys of discovery. It provides a platform for them to ask questions, participate in their first seder, and engage in enriching family programmes.

By cultivating a positive Jewish identity among the younger generation, the JCC Budapest aims to build a future where being Jewish is a source of pride rather than shame. Our organisation recognises the importance of empowering individuals to contribute to the betterment of their own lives and the wider community. Through the principles of *tikkun olam*, the Jewish concept of repairing the world, the JCC Budapest inspires individuals to make a positive impact.

As we reflect on the past and look to the future,

Hungary's Jewish community stands as a testament to the power of self-discovery, resilience, and collective commitment. This remarkable journey of cultural rediscovery and empowerment inspires communities far beyond Hungary's borders. By recognising and supporting the ongoing efforts of Hungary's Jewish organisations, we're fostering a future where identity is embraced, diversity is celebrated, and the world is repaired, one act of kindness at a time.

• Born and raised in Budapest, actor and producer Gergő Borbás has played an active role in several Hungarian Jewish organisations and is now the creative director of the JCC Budapest. He is also the founder of Personal History Budapest, a theatre production by Holocaust survivors and high school students.

• He will be hosted at Limmud Cape Town (Sunday 20 August); Durban (Monday 21 August); and in Johannesburg (Friday 25 to Sunday 27 August). For information or to register, visit limmud.org.za.

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Art therapy takes the "aargh" out of life

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

As individuals, we have unique ways of dealing with trauma and mental-health challenges, a fact recognised by art, drama, music, and dance therapists, who facilitate healing in a way that resonates best with their patients.

With the dominance of screens and social media, we live in a society where creativity isn't actively encouraged, says art therapist Gabriela Mendelsohn. "Yet, we all have this innate need to create, something we really crave without always realising it. Art therapy gives that space to people to access their imagination."

There's a misconception that imagination is important only for children but it's something that we all need, she says, which is why art therapy is equally beneficial for adults. It delves into the power of imagination, something espoused by Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology.

"His theory is that by using your imagination in therapy to create and personify images and make them talk and move, you can bring about healing, going deeper into the unconscious than just talking," Mendelsohn says.

Before completing her masters in art therapy in London, Mendelsohn trained and worked as a community art counsellor in South Africa. "My first experience doing art with patients was with Holocaust survivors, which really emphasised the power of art therapy," she says. Though conventional therapy was beneficial for some, many survivors found it painful to talk about their trauma.

"Art therapy was a more subtle way of addressing what they went through. It gave them a space to be creative around certain experiences, allowing them to express themselves in a way that they hadn't previously.

Many felt empowered by it."

Now an art therapist in private practice, Mendelsohn says art therapy can either be directive or non-directive. Directive therapy is when the therapist gives the patient a specific activity to do aimed at addressing a specific issue or achieve a certain goal. In non-directive therapy, the patient leads the session, selecting the art materials that speak to them and creating absolutely anything, which they then discuss afterwards.

"We don't interpret the artwork," Mendelsohn says, "rather build a relationship where together, we can reflect on the piece and see what comes up." In and of itself, art is cathartic, she says. It's about expressing yourself in a creative platform, not about making a masterpiece.

Drama therapist Romy Michelson also speaks of the value of using one's imagination to work through psychological issues, which she does "using the practical methodologies of drama for healing".

"The range of people who benefit from drama therapy is huge, from adults who want to delve more deeply into their own emotional well, to kids who have social, emotional, or behavioural difficulties," she says. "It's the whole gamut of need. What's different is the way it's dealt with. Drama therapy doesn't rely only on talking, it's the metaphor and the mechanism of drama that allows the person to feel comfortable before they can go into their emotional world.

"This could be done through puppets, image cards, or different media, projecting what's going on for them onto something other than themselves." While we learn to be less imaginative as we grow older, it's often in that creative space that we feel most comfortable to explore, she says.

"There's a wonderful transfer between the imaginative world and one's own reality," says Michelson. "Each

session is tailor-made to that specific person – they set the tone. It's a delicate balance between being patient-centric and working towards a therapeutic goal."

Music therapist Yael Shapiro (Gavronsky) echoes such thinking. "Though we include talk therapy, our focus is on utilising the power of music to reach people and attain certain clinical goals," she says. "We assess emotional well-being, physical health, social functioning, cognitive skills, and communication through music." The process is unique to each individual, their stage of life, and personality.

Music is intrinsic to human beings, Shapiro says. "Our heartbeats, pulse, steps, and movements have rhythm. There's a universality to music, anyone and everyone can connect irrespective of their language, culture, and religion. It's accessible to everyone, regardless of their abilities and disabilities." In fact, music therapy is a powerful tool for autistic children, stroke patients, even those with dementia.

Whether patients are simply able to tap on a drum or write an entire song, music therapists meet them where they're at. "We use multiple methods and instruments, we do music improvisation, listen to music, or actively use music-making processes," Shapiro says.

"For example, song writing can be used as a tool to express oneself or explore feelings. We might also use the lyrics of a song that the patient connects to in order to talk about the feelings they evoke." It offers a non-threatening way of entering into talk therapy.

Noa Belling, a somatic (body-mind) psychologist specialising in dance/movement therapy, started her career as a professional ballet dancer. "It was my stress-management tool even though I didn't know it at the time," she says. She later applied this experience to her work as a dance and movement therapist, which she describes as "the psychotherapeutic application of dance, movement, or body awareness. This therapy taps into a sometimes traumatic experience that words cannot always adequately describe."

In a session, patients discuss what they want to work through, then dip into the nonverbal dimension. "We look at where you feel the feelings in your body, what parts of yourself you're aware of," Belling says. "For example, 'Is there tightness in your chest? Do you feel a clenching in your jaw? What lies beneath that?'" Therapists then facilitate emotional shifts by helping patients change the way they stand or move. Though some dance therapists are very dance oriented, Belling uses dance in a minimalistic way and works with mind-body awareness.

Patients also express feelings through their bodies, for example by slumping to show their exhaustion, she says. "There are two ways we experience life. We have our felt experience, which is in our body, our emotions, and often linked with our images. We need to be able to bring that into words, to describe what we're experiencing to integrate that most fully into our lives."



The Jewish story behind Oppenheimer

SHIRA LI BARTOV,
ANDREW LAPIN JTA

Friday wasn't just "Barbie" release day – moviegoers also filled theatres across the United States to see Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* biopic.

Many hope it will answer a question that has long divided Americans and the country's understanding of its history: who exactly was J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb?

Oppenheimer's name has become "a metaphor for mass death beneath a mushroom cloud", in the words of Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin, whose 2005 book, *American Prometheus*, was adapted into Nolan's film. But to fully understand the physicist, biographers have looked for clues in his belief system – an ethical code grounded in science and rationality, a fiery sense of justice, and a lifelong ambivalence toward his own Jewish heritage.

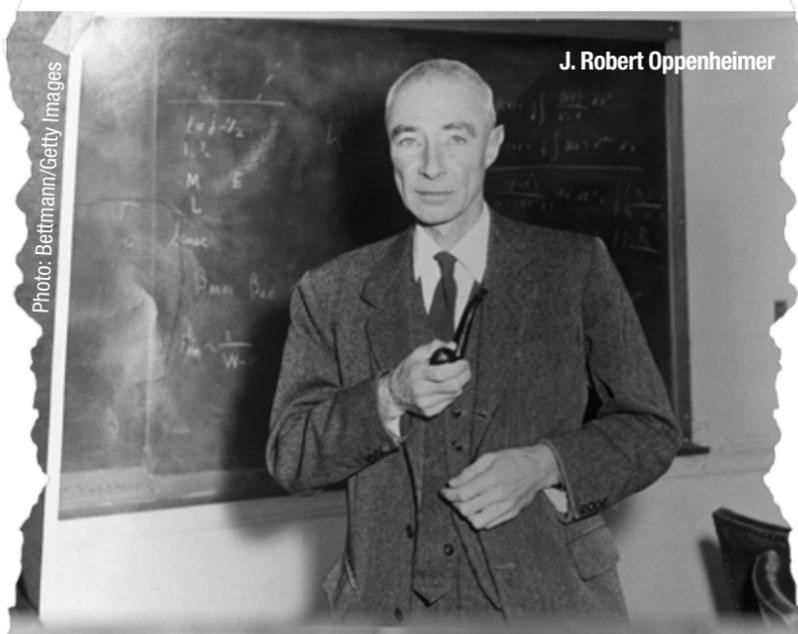
Oppenheimer was born in 1904 to German Jewish parents rapidly rising into Manhattan's upper class. His father, Julius Oppenheimer, came from the German town of Hanau and arrived in New York as a teenager – without money or a word of English – to help relatives run a small textile import business. He worked his way up to full partner, won a reputation as a cultured fabrics trader, and fell in love with Ella Friedman, a painter whose German-Jewish family had settled in Baltimore in the 1840s.

Their secular household embraced American society. The Oppenheimers never went to a synagogue or had a Barmitzvah for their son. Instead, they aligned themselves with the Ethical Culture Society, an offshoot of Reform Judaism that rejected religious creed in favour of secular humanism and rationalism.

Although his parents were first and second-generation German immigrants, Oppenheimer always insisted that he didn't

speak German, according to Ray Monk, the author of *Robert Oppenheimer: A Life Inside the Center*. He also maintained that the "J" in "J. Robert Oppenheimer" stood for nothing at all, even though his birth certificate read "Julius Robert Oppenheimer".

"To the outside world, he was always known as a German Jew, and he always insisted that he was neither German nor Jewish," Monk told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "But it affected his relationship with the world that that is how he was perceived."



Oppenheimer's academic brilliance became a flimsy shield against the antisemitism that orbited his life. He entered Harvard just as the university moved toward a quota system over concerns about the number of Jews being admitted.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1925, he conducted research at the University of Cambridge's Cavendish Laboratory and completed his PhD at Göttingen University – in pre-Nazi Germany – under Max Born, a pioneer of quantum mechanics. Before he got to Cambridge, though, a Harvard professor wrote him a recommendation that captured the

institutionalised prejudice in academia: "Oppenheimer is a Jew, but entirely without the usual qualifications."

Oppenheimer returned from Europe to teach physics at the California Institute of Technology and the University of California at Berkeley. While at Berkeley, he tried to secure a position for his colleague, Robert Serber, and was rebuffed by his department head, Raymond Birge, who said, "One Jew in the department is enough." He didn't push back on the decision, later hiring Serber to

work on the Manhattan Project.

Until the 1930s, Oppenheimer was resolutely indifferent to politics. Though he studied Sanskrit along with science and read classics, novels, and poetry, he took no interest in current affairs. But a profound shift occurred in Oppenheimer during the mid-1930s as he watched family, friends, and great scientific minds crushed under the tides of Nazism in Germany and the economic collapse at home.

"I had a continuing, smouldering fury about the treatment of Jews in Germany," he said in his testimony before the 1954 United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)

hearing, which would end with him losing his security clearance over past associations with communists and support for left-wing causes "I had relatives there, and was later to help in extricating them and bringing them to this country. I saw what the Depression was doing to my students, and through them, I began to understand how deeply political and economic events could affect men's lives."

In addition to rescuing family members, while teaching at Berkeley, he earmarked 3% of his salary to help Jewish scientists escape Nazi Germany. By World War II, his drive to defeat Germany would propel him to direct the Manhattan Project – the top-secret development of an American atomic bomb – at the Los Alamos Laboratory in New Mexico.

He was an unlikely candidate for the post. The Federal Bureau of Investigation had already marked him as politically suspect for communist sympathies. He was a theoretical scientist, not an applied scientist with experience in leading a laboratory. He wasn't yet 40 years old. But Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Groves chose Oppenheimer as the Manhattan Project's director in 1942 partly because he showed a burning sense of imperative.

"Oppenheimer said to Groves, 'Look, the Nazis will have their own bomb project and it will be led by Heisenberg, who's one of the leading nuclear physicists in the world. We need to move, and we need to move quickly,'" said Monk.

Other prominent Jewish scientists felt compelled to join. Six of the project's eight leaders were Jewish, along with a significant number of Jewish technicians, scientists, and soldiers up and down the ranks, some of them refugees from Europe.

Although two atomic bombs ultimately dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, not Germany – Germany had already surrendered by then – Oppenheimer was hailed as a hero for his role in ending World War II.

But only nine years later, he was humiliated before the AEC and stripped of his security clearance. Lewis Strauss, the chairperson of the AEC, became suspicious of Oppenheimer for opposing the development of a hydrogen bomb. Oppenheimer pressed for international control of nuclear weapons, believing the purpose of the atomic weapon was to end all war.

Strauss also developed a personal hatred for Oppenheimer, who could be arrogant and supercilious. They came from very different Jewish backgrounds: Strauss was a committed Reform Jew with modest origins who worked as a traveling shoe salesman instead of going to college. He identified closely with his faith, and served as the president of New York's Temple Emanu-El from 1938 to 1948.

In the film, Strauss is portrayed as having secretly orchestrated Oppenheimer's downfall at the hands of the AEC in part by collaborating with Hungarian-Jewish physicist Edward Teller, who agreed with Strauss on the necessity of the hydrogen bomb.

Bird writes an account of Oppenheimer running into Albert Einstein, one of the most famous Jewish figures of the 20th century, shortly before the 1954 hearing. The two were friends and colleagues at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study.

According to Bird, Einstein urged his friend not to go before the AEC. He said Oppenheimer had already done his duty for America, and if the country repaid him with a witch hunt, he "should turn his back on her".

Oppenheimer's secretary, Verna Hobson, who witnessed the conversation, said he couldn't be dissuaded. "He loved America," she said, "and this love was as deep as his love of science."

Einstein responded by calling Oppenheimer a "nar" or "fool" in Yiddish.

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Herzlia alumnus to head SA women's football

TALI FEINBERG

Herzlia alumna and Cape Town resident Romaney Pinnock has always been passionate about "creating spaces for girls and women in the world of football", and now she can do it at national level with her appointment as the South African Football Association (SAFA) head of women's football.

"Sometimes you do get what you wish for. Football changed my life. I cannot wait to help it change the lives of so many more girls and women in South Africa," she wrote on LinkedIn after the appointment was announced on 20 July.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, she says she hasn't been shy about wanting to reach this point. "Five years ago, I started talking about the fact that I wanted to be the head of women's football for SAFA. I kept seeing more and more that needed improving – from grassroots to professional level – and I wanted to be a part of making women's football great in South Africa. So, I was in quite a state of shock on receiving the news. It's a daunting role, there's so much to do, but I cannot believe I'm the person who now gets to drive it. What a blessing!

"I'm excited to have a lasting impact at both grassroots and professional level," she says. "This country has so much talent. I'm blessed with the task of putting structures in place to find, nurture, and support that talent, while creating a more professional offering for players who are good enough to represent their regions, provinces, and country.

"You cannot talk about women's football in South Africa without talking about gender issues, safety, and access," she says. "This job isn't just about having the right coaches in the right places, it's also about driving a culture shift towards protecting girls and creating sporting communities where they are welcomed, cared for, and can grow into the best and strongest versions of themselves."

Pinnock is so passionate about the sport, she started a women's football club, Badgers Football Academy, in 2017. "It has been a consistent side project for me over the years and has grown incredibly. We focus on growing the number of girls and women playing football, driven by the values of kindness, inclusivity, and respect.

"We are fully female-owned and managed, striving to operate as the most professional football club in an

Badgers now has four competing teams: under-16, Senior 1st, Senior 2nd, a team within the provincial league, and a large number of social players. "We strive to create pathways for girls and women, on and off the field."

Pinnock was born in Grahamstown and has lived in Cape Town since 1994. "I attended Herzlia since Grade 4 and went on to study at the University of Cape Town where I did a BSc majoring in biochemistry and genetics, followed by a Medical Honours in cancer genetics. I then completed an MSc in Ecotoxicology [environmental pollution management] at the University of Siena in Italy. In 2011, I started working as a management consultant in a small local firm. As much as I have been able to, I have worked in the education, government, and non-profit sectors, helping clients with strategic planning, organisational structuring, programme design, and general operational improvements."

She has held the roles of chief operations officer of The Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation; programme manager for the Western Cape Education Department; and has been a freelance strategy consultant, recently for UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations), the University of Cape Town, and the University of Zululand.

"In 2022, I completed the FIFA Master in Management, Law and Humanities of Sport, and as of this month, I work for SAFA – finally combining my management consulting life with my football life," she says.

The job will entail "examining the county's football from community to professional level, and creating strategies and structures that lift the overall level of women's football, while empowering girls and women on and off the field," Pinnock says. "It's also about fundraising, sponsorship, and the commercialisation of the women's game. Across the world, brands are recognising the benefits of investing in women's football – now to light that fire here in South Africa and get the backing from donors and investors who want to see growth in the sector!"

She knows there will be challenges. "Football in South Africa is a political and male-dominated sector. I hope I get the necessary support and backing from all necessary stakeholders to have a lasting impact on girls and women across the country."

She points out that "team sports have the power to change lives".

"South Africa is a deeply patriarchal country, and one of the most unsafe in the world for girls to grow up in. In a society of this nature, finding a place of solace, support, and growth, all rolled up into healthy sporting activities and friend-making, can be life-changing. The more professionally managed sporting or cultural communities girls can attend, the more overall empowerment and growth we will see in young women and in society as a whole."

With her credentials and drive, she could go anywhere in the world, but she says, "Cape Town is the most exceptional city. It's home, and if the lights could just stay on, it will always be home."

Her time at United Herzlia Schools had an impact on where she is today. "I had some incredible teachers at Herzlia. Fatima Savel, Grace Elliot, and Ron Jones were directly responsible for my educational trajectory beyond school into the sciences. They were three of the most incredible

educators I have ever encountered, and taught me the importance of great mentors.

"Ted Faulkner, Leonie Oram, Mark Helfrich, Gail Simon, Hilary Waters – all taught me to question, to learn, to be constantly curious, all while maintaining a strong moral compass. Their subject matter was taught in a way that reminded me to find the good in the world, and to keep working towards impact creation."

Nik Rabinowitz gets *Rambunctious*

Stand-up comedian **Nik Rabinowitz** is at it again, this time with *Rambunctious* in Sandton, and he's hoping ISIS won't notice this time. The *SA Jewish Report* chatted to him before the show.

How would you describe *Rambunctious*?

A stand-up comedy show starring male comedian slash Maccabi gold-medal award winning leg-spinner slash goat aficionado, Nik Rabinowitz.

What made you choose that name?

After my experience last year with ISIS, I was tempted to call this show "Terror Virgin", but then an elderly woman saw our daughter running around after shul and said, "She's such a tomboy," and I said, "We don't say that anymore, she's rambunctious." And then I thought, "That's a good name for a show!"



Nik Rabinowitz

It hasn't been long since *Unmuted* was on stage. What inspired you to return so soon with something new?

That's the nature of showbusiness, I'm afraid. As is said in Genesis 1:3 (director's cut): "After you do one show, you must make another show. And so on, and so forth, and lo, let there be sound, as well as light."

Your shows are personal. What's it like speaking (or laughing) about your own experiences publicly?

I prefer to talk about other people's experiences publicly, but they aren't as fond of that. I learned this recently when I had to attend couples therapy with my mother, but you'll hear all about that in the show.

The last show you did at the Theatre on the Square experienced an ISIS terror threat. How did you deal with that at the time? What impact has it had on you in the long term?

Come to this show to find out. I discuss it in great detail – unless ISIS is reading this, in which case, I don't mention it at all.

In the promo to your show, it speaks about the chaos around your son's Barmitzvah. What happened?

I wrote that press release before the Barmitzvah, which actually went very smoothly, for which I'd like to thank Rabbi Feldman, Raphi Ress, and the lady that catered the salmon – not that I got to eat any, but that's Jewish functions for you.

You've been touring the world with the King David Foundation. What are the moments you'll never forget?

It's been fantastic. Highlights include the organisers telling me that one of the New York alumni had a heated driveway but that if I mentioned it publicly, he might spend his money repairing the driveway instead of on a new Muay Thai gym for the Grade 1 Victory Parkers. For more information on the King David Tour, you can come watch *Rambunctious* in Sandton, or

book for Tel Aviv, London, or Sydney.

What are your fondest and worst recollections of King David?

I didn't attend King David until quite recently, when I attended a Pesach seder at Victory Park, led by myself, in front of a panel of stern rabbis, and then to recover, I had sushi from the tuckshop, which really is as good as they say. Afterwards, I sat on a lion statue while a 12-year-old Jewish businessman tried to sell me an NFT.

What impact does being Jewish have on your work?

Aside from suffering from epigenetically inherited self-doubt and pogrom-related anxiety, there are other fears one has to deal with, like the threat of terrorist attacks, and/or religious organisations losing five donors at their annual fundraising dinner because of my interpretation of that week's parshah. On the plus side, the Capital Hotel Empire has been incredibly generous, for which I'm most grateful. #SwingsAndRoundabouts

What does it mean to you and your life?

You'd think being descended from 12 generations of rabbonim would mean I wouldn't have a problem telling Rabbi Kievmann I can't come for dinner on Friday because I'm working, but I still do.

When you're not on stage making people laugh, what do you enjoy doing?

Being from Cape Town, I enjoy mountain walks, octopus courting, and surfing Muizenberg with comedians who are much worse at surfing than me. Occasionally, I also enjoy waking up early to drive our child through rush-hour traffic to the opposite side of Cape Town, right behind the Herzlia school bus, because she won't get on the bus. I like to take the exact same route as the bus in order to remind myself that as a people, we haven't yet suffered enough.

What is Nik Rabinowitz like offstage? Are you always making people laugh, are you serious, or what?

Offstage, I'm a meek, mild-mannered Herbalife salesman, and I truly come alive only once I walk under those bright lights and grab a microphone. If you see me on the street, I'll be shy and unassuming, unlike my bold, rambunctious stage persona. Think of me as a puppet, and the audience as the hand that is all the way up me, moving my mouth.

What's Friday night (when you aren't performing) like in the Rabinowitz household?

During term-time, we kick off with my eldest visiting *juffrou* Nerwich for Friday afternoon Afrikaans cheder, then we drive (don't tell the rabbi) to Gardens for the service, then back home to light candles (if it's loadshedding). Then it's *brochas* and Bud Rosenthorns – which refers to the week's roses (highlights), thorns (challenges) and buds (things to look forward to) – and not the fictional 1950s Jewish baseball-hall-of-famer Bud Rosenthorn, who doesn't exist. After main course, Ben sometimes tickles the ivories, and then if he's around, Debbie's Uncle Morty will admonish him for playing music on Shabbat, before checking his WhatsApps.

What's next for you?

Another week of shows in Joburg, then home to work on a movie with my table-tennis partner, then the King David Tuckshop Tour resumes with Tel Aviv and London in September, and Australia in October, and then it's not clear what happens after that because a psychic recently told me that I'm *clairaudient*, which means I can't see the future, but sometimes I can hear it, but in this case from November on, it sounds a bit muffled.



Photo: Teri Robberts

Romaney Pinnock

amateur ecosystem. Most of our staff are volunteers, and we offer incredible coaching, professional refereeing, and door-to-door transport after dark, all while nurturing the empowerment, growth, and education of our members, young and old. We offer several school scholarships, and ensure that our members feel safe and supported when they are at the club."

KDL matrices live Sevens dream in Switzerland

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Four South African King David High School Linksfield (KDHL) matric students lived their dream as they represented Israel at the Rugby Europe Under-18 Sevens Championship in Switzerland on 15 and 16 July.

Captain Dean Surmany, Daniel Froehlich, Aaron Moritz, and Ethan Edinburg played in all of Israel's five matches in the National Sports Center, Macolin, at the championship, which is the highest level of European Sevens rugby for under 18s.

The four KDHL students arrived in Israel a week before the competition to train at the Wingate Institute, meaning that the entire Israel squad trained together for just a week. "The training was different to all the other teams I've played for," Surmany says, with Edinburg noting that they trained twice a day, "two to three hours in the morning and two to three hours in the evening".

"Then we left for Switzerland to play in the championship," Surmany says. "We weren't really sure what to expect. Sevens is a very different game compared to the usual 15s rugby we're used to, so we knew it was going to be a challenge playing against the top teams in Europe."

He says his side "got a shock" in their first game of the championship. In their first match as a whole team, they lost 53-0 to Portugal.

That afternoon, Spain gave Israel a 56-0 spanking before the Holy Land ended the day with a promising 24-14 defeat against Ukraine.

"It was tough mentally on the team that our first two games were against two of the top teams in Europe," Surmany says. "The Ukraine match was a much easier game, but still difficult. We did substantially better, and lost by our narrowest margin."

Israel finished bottom of Pool C and would again play against Ukraine, but this time in the ranking semi-finals the following day.

A 26-12 win for Ukraine meant that Israel played against Turkey in the final for 11th place. "Turkey was also a very good team," Surmany says. "We were starting to get our groove as a team, and we played a lot better. We lost by two points [19-21]."

"Representing Israel at the championship was an incredible experience," Edinburg says. "From the moment I stepped onto the field wearing the Israeli colours, the sense of pride was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. Representing our homeland playing a sport I love, surrounded by teammates who shared the same dedication, created an unbreakable bond that



Dean Surmany with ball in hand

extended beyond the lines of the rugby field.

"Before Kevin Musikanth, a director of rugby in Israel, went to Israel about five years ago, he was head of rugby at King David Linksfield. He coached me, and knows a little bit about me," Surmany says, describing the KDHL boys' route to playing for Israel.

Musikanth contacted Surmany, saying, "We need some players for the championship."

"How are South Africans eligible?" Surmany asked.

"In the under-18 category," Musikanth said, "you don't need to be a citizen of the country. Plus, because it's Israel, you're Jewish, and you're proud of what Israel stands for, you're allowed to play for Israel's under 18s."

With Surmany on board, Musikanth asked KDHL's rugby coach to pick three other players who would be good at Sevens rugby.

"Once we landed in Israel, we were welcomed by the players in the Israeli team," Moritz says. "The only difficulty at first was that the coach stated that we would communicate only in English, which made it challenging for the Israelis as English isn't their first language. But as we started to get to know them and spend more time with them, we were able to teach them South African phrases. From this journey, I created a brotherly connection I'll never forget."

Says Froehlich, "It was an unbelievable experience meeting players from all over the world." Unlike the KDHL players, their opponents were "full international players who were accustomed to the Sevens game. It was a huge learning curve. We got better as the tournament progressed."

During the championship, Froehlich mainly played at centre, Edinburg as a hooker and prop, Moritz on the wing and at centre, and Surmany at flyhalf and scrumhalf.

"Going to Israel, I never expected to be the captain of the team," the latter says. "Arriving as an outsider from Israel, I didn't know who we were playing with. A lot of the Israelis weren't fluent in English and didn't understand everything I said as captain. I had a conversation with the coach and he told me that the team needed a person like me to lead and encourage them."

"I tried to translate what I could to Hebrew because I do Hebrew as a matric subject. I spoke Hebrew when I could, and asked one of the guys who could speak English and Hebrew to translate. The majority of the players in the team were from Israel. There were two guys



from the Netherlands who were eligible to play."

Surmany and Froehlich both say the experience is one they will never forget.

"It has taught me about commitment, sacrifice, and camaraderie," Froehlich says. "If I could continue to be involved in a programme such as this, I wouldn't think twice."

"The biggest lesson I learned is the incredible power of sport to break down barriers and unite people from diverse backgrounds," Edinburg says. "It was eye-opening to witness how sport can transcend differences in culture, language, and belief, bringing individuals together with a shared passion. It showed me that sport is a language understood by all regardless of where you're from. On the field, you all speak the same language with the same goal."

"The lessons I learned were teamwork and collaboration," Moritz says. "Sevens rugby is a fast-paced, high-intensity game that requires seamless teamwork and collaboration. Throughout the championship, I've learned the value of working together with teammates, understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses, and supporting one another on and off the field. You realise that individual brilliance is essential, but it's collective effort that leads to success."

New novel brings Lazar focus to Linden

REVIEW

JULIE LEIBOWITZ



"It all started with a word," Karen Lazar says of her latest book, *Wis for Witness*. But this book is more than a game of Cluedle or Wordle, though it does have a mystery at its core.

Situated mainly in the Joburg suburb of Linden, it functions on many levels – it jumps spatially from garden to rafter and Jacaranda and back again – and it narrates in many voices, mostly not human but no less observant for being feathered, made of wire, wood, or plastic.

Though the story is mostly set in Linden, it also travels back into history, to 1981, and the famous novel by Nadine Gordimer, *July's People*. Gordimer, also Jewish, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, and Lazar, an accomplished academic as well as a writer, based her doctoral research on Gordimer's work.

Wis for Witness, Lazar's third book and her first novel, is intertextual and multilayered, but just in case you're thinking it's too academic to read, don't worry! It's warm, funny, and accessible – and it must be the first novel set in Linden.

The name "Linden" refers to the Linden tree, which is known for its beauty, strength, and longevity, and Lazar admits to a certain puzzlement at moving to the suburb, known for its gardens and good schools, but also for being a bastion of Afrikaner conservatism and many versions of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk.

Linden has started diversifying, but not enough, according to Lazar, who points out that its schools are still mostly white. It's not about racial tallying, she stresses, but the quality of inclusion, and Linden, like any suburb in South Africa, is a microcosm of a macrocosm which hasn't fulfilled its promises.

So, Lazar is on a mission, like the cyber stalker in the book, to pierce the purple blossoms, chocolate Labradors, and green bubble of this suburb, to wake it out of its self-congratulatory post-apartheid slumber.

"My mandate is not only to reveal Joburg as an un-lit hell born of failed liberation promises and truncated enactment," she writes. "Of course, the city is that, too, especially the inner city and urban peripheries, but most of this tale ... is based on a self-congratulatory, previously all-white burb. The point of my beak wants to poke through its blithe topsoil to the dystopia beneath."

It's a gentle critique, and if you live anywhere near Linden, you'll recognise the faux culinary sophistication; the rigid educators; the ample-bodied *nouveau riche*;

the hip students; the hard-working professionals with their offices in the garden; even the sometimes passive-aggressive homeless, who remind us that we're actually living in Joburg.

The book's chapters are titled according to its many non-human narrators – dominated by the ubiquitous hadeda – who sounds like that "yenta of a meddling auntie". Rocky, the "chocolate labbie", is as warm and fluffy as the pony-tailed vet he frequents. But it's Wire, the electric fence, who reminds us of South Africa's edgy underbed. "My foe is human," he says. "Probably a young man who hasn't eaten in two days and risks

electrocution to break the law he hates even more than your walls, your huge cars, and never-ending supply of food deliveries."

"In narrating through the eyes of a hadeda, a Labrador, a door, a fence, even a restaurant menu, I aim to encourage the reader to see things from a new perspective, to look and listen properly, and to overcome passivity," Lazar says. Even the pervasive suburban WhatsApp group becomes a metaphor for seeing.

It's not just seeing that gets turned on its head in this complex tale about a complex city. The book is peppered

with poetry which plays on words like "Omelette (Homelette)"; "sturdy; turdy"; "Ditty of Gold"; "seller, bolder, golder".

Clearly words are as important to Lazar as the city she lives in. Like the proverbial "Karen" – slang for a middle-class white woman who gets things done – Lazar brings a laser – no pun intended – focus to the beautiful contradictions of living in what Antonio Gramsci described as the "interregnum", in which "the old is dying, and the new cannot be born".

• Julie Leibowitz is the sub-editor of the SA Jewish Report.

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Teeger leading light of U19 Bangladesh tour

SAUL KAMIONSKY

David Teeger had never played international cricket before embarking with the South African under-19 cricket team on their 50-over series in Bangladesh last month, but it turned out to be an outstanding tour for him.

The tour marked this King Edward VII matric student's second time playing overseas and his first ever matches for the under-19 side. Yet not only did he captain the team in three of the five matches, he was also the top run scorer in the series. All through the tour, from 3 to 18 July, he kept kashrut and observed Shabbos.

He notched up scores of 37, 75, 30, 0, and 63 to finish with 205 runs, 49 ahead of the second-highest run scorer, Bangladesh's Adil Bin Siddik.

"David had a really good tour with the bat," said his teammate, Kwena Maphaka, 17. "He played with a maturity and calmness that many professionals would admire. He was a major asset to the team with his captaincy and bat in hand."

Teeger follows in the footsteps of several famous Proteas players such as AB de Villiers, Mark Boucher, Makhaya Ntini, and Kagiso Rabada to have played for the under-19 side.

He has also walked in the same shoes of cricketers who have captained the under-19 team such as Hashim Amla, Dean Elgar, Quinton de Kock, and Aiden Markram, who all went on to captain the Proteas in at least one format.

Even more remarkably, he has now joined a select group of cricketers to have captained their national team on debut. One such cricketer, Tony Lewis, captained England on his Test debut.

Although Bangladesh won the series 3-2, Teeger says the experience was full of "great learnings" and served as good preparation for the 2024 under-19 Cricket World Cup in Sri Lanka. "We got good exposure to the subcontinent's conditions – the heat, the humidity. The ball turned more and bounced lower. Hopefully, this

could benefit us in the World Cup."

He puts his good form in the series down to training and "piecing together your game plan".

Knowing the spin-friendly pitches found in the subcontinent, Teeger did a lot of spin-specific work with the national team coaches and his private coach leading up to the tour.

"On some pitches, you have to take away certain shots, but it's always about backing your ability," he says. "I tried to use the learnings from coaches who've coached Bangladesh and toured there. Obviously, a little luck here and there helps, but I'm happy to be the leading run scorer."

The captaincy was split between Juan James and Teeger, who led the team in the first, second, and fourth games.

When the players were informed of the split captaincy at a team meeting on their first night in Bangladesh, Teeger felt excited and proud knowing "it's an honour to lead your country". He wasn't too surprised about it because he and James had always captained the opposing teams in inter-squad matches in the trial camps for selection for the tour.

Teeger went on the Bangladesh tour with his dad, former Transvaal wicketkeeper James Teeger, and two suitcases, one for clothes and one for kosher food. They kept Shabbat in the hotel. "Me and my dad had a little laugh about it. We were probably the only two Jewish people in Bangladesh," Teeger says. "I was quite lucky that we played on the Friday and that Saturday was mostly a rest day, so I didn't miss out on too much other than an outing."

They tried to keep their Jewish identity "on the downlow" to ensure the safety of the team. "Levels of terrorism aren't high in Bangladesh," he says, "but it's a 92% Muslim country. My team was aware of my situation, and respected it. We did have police escorts wherever we went, so we never felt unsafe. It was never really a matter of my faith impeding the team security."

In March this year, Teeger made headlines for walking to cricket matches on Saturdays, which he has done for the past five years.

Teeger, King Edward VII's head of school this year, says being in matric has made things "tough", but he feels fortunate that his high school career has prepared him to balance his time effectively. "Being at King Edward VII, there's sport and academics almost at all times. I train a certain number of times a week, and

love."

Teeger was selected for the Proteas under-19 side last year in the local Cricket South Africa Division 2 T20 Knockout Competition, but he served as 12th man for those matches. "We won the tournament, so it was great to be part of that environment. To now play my first game for the country in the Bangladesh series was a huge honour. The feeling inside, you can't even describe. There's so much excitement and obviously

nerves. Getting the first run is always big."

He says his duties as captain on the tour were the same as those in professional cricket. "It was different to schoolboy captaincy. There were ICC [International Cricket Council] regulations that you had to know, and the umpires were in your face a little bit with the rules, encouraging you to speed up the over rate. You feel more pressure, but try to embrace it as much as you can and enjoy it. Ultimately, it's similar stuff – trying to set batsmen up, bowling to a plan, and so on. Juan and I helped each other out on the field.

"The team vibe was incredible. We enjoyed each other's company. When you tour Bangladesh, you need that because you're not going outside the hotel much. We went touring once or twice. We used the tour as a chance to get to know each other better as cricketers and then as people. Cricket builds friendships and I'm very close to a lot of the guys in the team."

One would think Teeger is a shoo-in for the under-19 Proteas going forward, but the coaches didn't give too much of their plans away. "Hopefully my performances in Bangladesh put me in good stead for selection for upcoming matches and tours. There should be that T20 knockout competition again this year and another tour before the World Cup."

He's realistic enough to admit "form comes and goes, so it's just about working hard and sticking to your processes. Hopefully, the rest will take care of itself."

He's considering studying at a university next year and playing for its cricket team. He also hopes to receive a professional contract soon.

David Teeger being interviewed before a match against Bangladesh



then fill in my academics around that. You enjoy cricket when you're playing because you almost use it as a release from that stress."

Teeger plays for his school's first team and for Old Edwardians Cricket Club in Johannesburg. He has also recently played for the Central Gauteng Lions provincial side and the Central Gladiators during Cubs Week. In July last year, he was man of the match in South Africa's junior cricket team's winning final at the 2022 Maccabi Games.

He says the standard of the Bangladesh team was higher than the opposition he faced at the games. "It's all part of the experience. That's why we play the game. You want to travel the world and play the sport you

SAZF and Israeli embassy donate reading device to Wits

For a student who experiences vision loss or any other reading impairment, having access to a device that makes reading easier is a massive gift. So, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), together with the Israeli Embassy in South Africa's donation of an OrCam device to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Disability Rights Unit on 25 July was just that, a massive gift.

Through its accurate OCR (optical character recognition) technology, OrCam is an all-in-one solution that empowers students facing reading challenges. Its ability to capture and read aloud printed or digital text from any surface is particularly useful for students, who can control and use the device at their own pace.

It also functions as a magnifier for pictures, handwriting, maths formulas, and text. The device will allow visually impaired students or with reading disabilities to read printed or digital text instantly from any surface.

"We're excited to be joined by the vice-chancellor's office, the embassy of Israel, representatives from the university, Intamed [representing OrCam in South Africa], as well as members of the South African Union of Jewish Students, and the Student Representative Council today," said Benji Shulman, the director of public policy at the SAZF. "We hope this device will help to make learning more inclusive and accessible at Wits."



Bafana Modise from the South African Friends of Israel tries out the OrCam device



Andrew Sam, adaptive technologist at the unit, said the OrCam had been needed for years. "Not only does this donation enrich the life of one student, it sends a powerful message of support and the importance of inclusivity to our entire Wits community."

Carol Crossley, registrar at Wits, said Wits had one of the largest numbers of disabled students in the country. "For our disabled students, this provides so many opportunities."

Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky said Israel had a strong connection with Wits because the mother of President Isaac Herzog, the late Ora Herzog, had studied mathematics at the university. "We're so happy this device will help students, and we look forward to strengthening our relationship with Wits," he said.

NIK RABIN OWITZ



RAM BUNCI TIOUS!

THEATRE ON THE SQUARE



COMPUTICKET

25 JULY-05 AUGUST

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Representing our community

The purpose of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is to act as “the representative voice of the South Africa Jewish community” but what does that mean in practice? Essentially, it’s to be the interface between South African Jewry and the wider society, particularly at government level. Combating antisemitism has been the Board’s primary focus over the past 120 years. However, it’s interesting to note that the immediate reason for the establishment of the Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal in April 1903 was to work with the authorities in resolving legal and bureaucratic difficulties that many would-be Jewish immigrants were experiencing.

From those early years, the work of the SAJBD would expand to encompass a range of activities, not just in the civil-rights sphere, but in the cultural, communal governance, and social welfare fields as well. Throughout the decades, the Board, working through official channels as the recognised spokesperson for South African Jewry, would nevertheless continue in certain circumstances to help facilitate the entry of Jews into the country. This we continue to do to this day. Most recently, we were involved in a difficult case of a rabbi and his family who, through no fault of their own, were unable to return to South Africa because of visa issues concerning one of the young children. Aside from the distress experienced by the family itself, this meant that a community was left without its rabbi. By engaging with the home affairs department, we were thankfully able to resolve the matter. It again underlined the importance of what we do in terms of building sound working relationships with the government and the administration, a vital part of which involves maintaining proper channels of communication. Resolving such difficulties also requires much tenacity and determination, and we are indeed fortunate that our national director, Wendy Kahn, as her amazing track record shows, has such an abundance of these qualities.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



Explosion in the CBD

In the aftermath of the shocking gas explosion in central Johannesburg, we have joined our fellow citizens in helping to alleviate the impact of the disaster. Aside from the tragic death of one bystander and dozens of injuries to others, many people in the area have suffered severe losses to their property and livelihoods. On Monday, Reeva Forman again represented our community at an interfaith prayer gathering, and as always, did so with the utmost dignity and compassion. At the time of writing, we are providing food and water and other humanitarian aid to those worst affected. It shows, among other things, that representing the Jewish community, especially in times of crisis, also involves leading the community in contributing to the welfare of the greater society of which it is part.

Events in Israel

As Jews around the world prepare for the fast day of Tisha B’Av, we are reminded of the horrific consequences of Jewish disunity. It’s with this in mind that I have watched events in Israel unfold over the past few days with such a sense of foreboding. I echo the statement made by President Isaac Herzog earlier this week that “the citizens of Israel are thirsty for hope and expect responsibility and leadership. I call on the elected officials to act with courage, and to reach out in order to reach understanding.” Coming from the Zionistic South African Jewish community, with our deep love and connection with Israel, I hope and trust that Israel will stay true to its democratic core and search in earnest for a consensus resolution to this internal disunity.

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

JWBS puts clothes on our backs

The Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society’s (JWBS’s) new clothing depot, situated at the David Lopatie Centre on the Chevrah Kadisha campus, is an inviting space to find the clothing you need.

The depot is fully stocked and efficiently run by a team of dedicated volunteers and a full-time assistant. Its mission is to clothe people from head to toe with gently worn garments and new underwear, sleepwear, and socks. The store services the residents of Sandringham Gardens, The Lodge and Square, the Selwyn Segal, and members of the broader Jewish community.

The JWBS recently held its book sale in which a wide variety of genres are sold for R30 a book. We distributed 300 rechargeable lights and



The Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society clothing depot at the David Lopatie Centre

water bottles; knitted squares to create beautiful blankets for distribution; and assisted single moms and their children with medical expenses.

The JWBS is also sponsoring the tertiary education of five students. Its women’s appeal is raising funds for this purpose, and it hopes to sponsor more students.

UJW’s Mandela Day a countrywide celebration

Passionate members and volunteers of the Union of Jewish Women South Africa from branches in Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal provided tens of thousands of delicious sandwiches to various charities on Mandela Day, 18 July,

working with similar nongovernment organisations to ensure that as many people as possible received their share.

Hundreds of beautiful baby bags filled with every necessity for a newborn, including nappies, bum creams, babygros, blankets, and gorgeous fluffy toys, as well as sanitary wear, lotions, and creams for the mums, were delivered to new mothers at government hospitals and clinics in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Gqeberha.

Hot meals were distributed at various homeless shelters, many of whose residents had not had a full meal for ages. Much needed and appreciated playground equipment was donated to excited children at an informal settlement; indigent pupils attending a disadvantaged primary school received bulk packages of non-perishable foodstuffs for their families; children at a different school received brand-new school shoes; and the grateful and excited beneficiaries were able to celebrate the day in the spirit of our late, great Madiba.



Grateful for the Union of Jewish Women’s bags of goodies

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Time to let Tisha B'Av go

sometimes think we're happy only when we have reason to be miserable. And that we get way too much pleasure from the tragedy of it all. Which is why there's something ironic about the nine days. Along with the deep question: are we observing the laws of the period if we are happiest when we sink into the swamp of sadness?

For some, the Jewish law of not greeting another on Tisha B'Av is a bit of a relief, something they have worked on year-round. And when we lived in New York and caffeine suppositories were available, I recall many fasters who had a distinct spring in their step.

It didn't start with us. My late grandmother was blessed with the gift of misery. "Tania!" someone would say on seeing her, "You look wonderful!" "Really?" was her standard response. "You should only know how I feel." The implication being that she might look as healthy as a horse but internally, she was a short breath away from heartbreak.

A family *simcha* would end with our faces being washed because of the evil eye that no doubt someone wanted to visit upon us because that night, we were too happy. And when anything went slightly awry, she would lament, "Man plans and G-d laughs," as though she wasn't in the least surprised that whatever it was had

turned out the way it did. Because in her world, there seemed to be the view that G-d might take perverse pleasure in making bad things happen to good people. Even if it meant conjuring up a quick thunderstorm just when she wanted to go for a walk.

"It's tough to be a Jew," was another favourite. And for her generation, it was. Pogroms and the Holocaust, antisemitism, and the challenges of feeding a family while trying to be an observant Jew, meant that it was more than just tough. It was life threatening, and it was stressful beyond anything our generation could imagine.

Suffering in 2023 means something very different. Personal challenges around health and wealth aside, we're blessed to live in a generation that has hardly ever had it so easy. Jewish observance might take commitment, but it's rarely about feeding one's family. There might be antisemitism, but we have a voice, we have a state, and we have an infrastructure that will lend whatever support is needed.

For our grandparents' generation "tough" didn't do it justice. For our generation, it's an exaggeration.

My worry is that we seem to default to misery. When researching my book, *Smile Dammit*, I used social media to gauge our reaction to happy versus sad stories. What I found was that whereas

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



we speak about the good stuff for about 24 hours, we tend to spend a week engaging in miserable news. This seems to indicate that the sad stuff is much more enticing, and gives us some kind of perverse reward. Which is why I'm concerned about our drive towards things that are negative.

The approach to recent events in Israel is no different. And whereas I don't profess to understand the complexity of coalitions and judicial reform, I do know that it's not "the end of democracy" and the end of the state. To me, the protests look like darn good fun and a lot more like Yom Ha'atzmaut at King David Linksfield than the unravelling of society. Yet the language around it is so hyperbolic that it makes civil war not only seem a remote possibility, but an inevitability.

We need to recognise that what we have is worthy of celebration. Not lamentation.

Words matter. Attitude matters. Together, they have the power to create reality. The nine days of mourning end with Tisha B'Av. It's time to let them go and focus on the gifts of our generation, where it's indeed a blessing to be a Jew.

Sunday 6 August

- New Beginnings hosts a talk by Judith Ancer on *The Tiger and The Abyss: A Life Worth Living*. Time: 10:00. Venue: The Royal View, 2 Edward Street, Sandringham. Cost: R50. Contact: lynarch@worldonline.co.za
- Seconds Innings hosts a marvellous morning of music with pianist Avi Kanar. Time: 10:00. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres. Cost: R40 (R20 members). Contact: 082 561 3228

Monday 7 August

- The Union of Jewish Women Cape Town hosts the book launch of *Women of Action - a history of the Union of Jewish Women* by Karen Kallmann. Time: 17:30. Venue: South African Jewish Museum. Contact: 021 434 9555 or projects@ujwcape.co.za

Wednesday 9 August

- The Union of Jewish Women hosts five inspirational speakers including Thando Madonsela, Rachel Ancer, Hayley Brainin, Nikki Munitz, and Tammy Jutan at its Women's Day *Women of Courage* breakfast. Time: 10:00. Cost: R290. Venue: Linksfield Shul Hall. Contact: 011 648 1053



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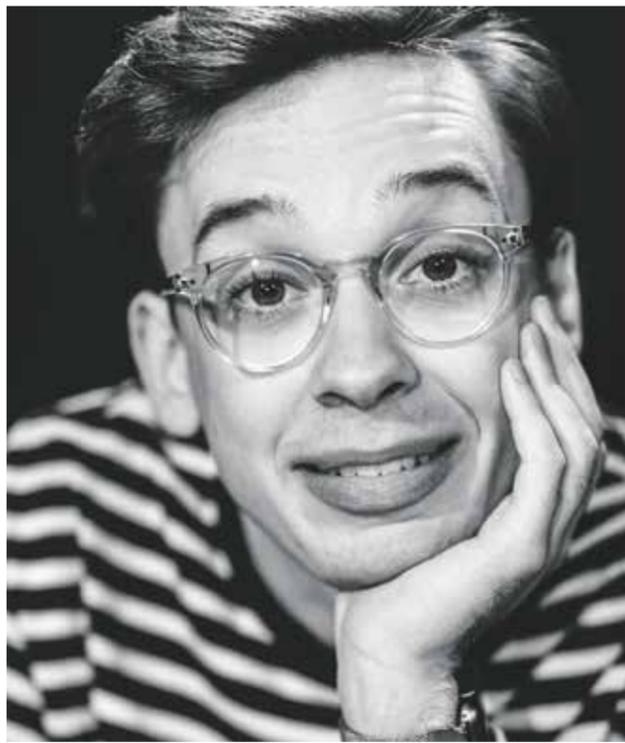
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YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW



THE BARD OF BUDAPEST Gergő Borbás (Budapest)

Gergő is an actor, producer and creative director of the Jewish Community Centre, Budapest. He is also the founder of Personal History Budapest, a theatre production by Holocaust survivors and high school students.

Sessions Include: The Current Situation of Hungarian Jewry



STEWING IT UP Joel Haber (Jerusalem)

Jerusalem-based Joel, a researcher, writer and guide on Jewish food history, is currently writing a book examining the history of Shabbat stews (cholent) from around the world. A beloved Limmud presenter, Joel will make his African debut at Limmud South Africa this year.

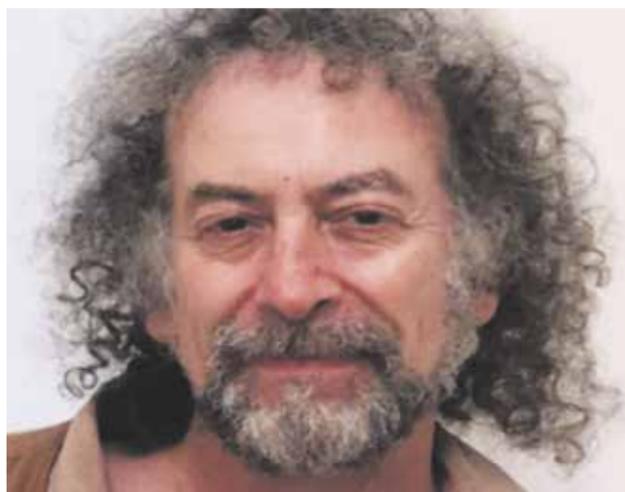
Sessions Include: A Land of Milk and Mufletta: At the Crossroads of Israel's Cuisine and Culture



CONTEMPORARY JEWISH CULTURE Andrea Ausztrics (Budapest)

Andrea is a creative producer and curator with a background in Cultural Anthropology and Film Studies. She has a passion for documentary films and animation, with a special interest in cultural heritage.

Sessions Include: The Dead Poet: Seven Tales of Radnóti Miklós



DRUMMING & DISCOVERY David Fenster (Beit Shemesh)

David is a professional drummer who discovers hidden treasures. He specialises in creating instruments out of discarded objects. He is also a storyteller and salvage artist who, through the discarded items he discovers in second-hand shops and at sidewalk sales, reveals the personal dramas waiting to be told.

Sessions Include: Drumming Workshop



HISTORY AND FOLK MUSIC Tamir Hod (Kibbutz Snir)

Tamir is a historian at Tel Hai College. His expertise is in the History of Israeli Society and the Holocaust. He wrote *Did We Remember to Forget?*, a study into the Demjanjuk affair of the 1980s and 1990s. He is also a folk musician.

Sessions Include: Israeli Police Unit for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes



PODCASTING IN HEBREW Michal Zoran (Tel Aviv)

Michal embodies secular Tel Aviv culture and writes for the satirical Israeli TV show "The Jews are Coming". She also writes stand up and comedy for several female comedians in Israel, and hosts, alongside her partner Omer Benjakob, the weekly podcast "That's My Opinion Anyway" about culture and politics. Her first novel is set to be published this year.

Sessions Include: Tell me a Joke in Hebrew – Israeli Humour in Comedy and Stand Up

WHERE, WHAT, WHEN AND WHO TO CONTACT

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