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# ewish Report ■ Volume 27 - Number 26 ■ 20 July 2023 ■ 2 Av 5783

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# Israeli protest leader inspired by SA roots TALI FEINBERG legislation must still go through the Supreme treated that way," he says. "That was present movement. It's worth it for the country you with his family. He met my mother in Cap

mid a countrywide Day of Resistance on the streets of Israel on 18 July, protest organiser and leader Roee Neuman (39) told the SA Jewish Report that he and others are battling for the very soul of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

As an Israeli with deep South African roots, Neuman promises he'll go down fighting for the Israel that his parents chose to settle in, as a beacon of hope and a light unto the

As the Middle Eastern sun beats down on protesters, the temperature of the political situation is heating up by the day, and Neuman is in the thick of it. Thousands rallied across the country and at least 45 people were arrested. Some protesters started a four-day march from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and Neuman is joining them as much as he can.

"It's a week before they vote for the proposed legislation [to curtail judicial review of government decisions], and so we're doing a week of protests," he explains. "If the legislation is passed, no-one knows what will happen, but it will be chaos."

He emphasises that the legislation will "affect every aspect of society". For example, the Israel Medical Association announced a "warning strike" for the morning of Wednesday 19 July, with doctors downing tools except for emergency care. Army reservists warned they will stop volunteering for duty if the coalition unilaterally passes laws to curtail the judiciary.

However, Neuman says that new

Court, and he hopes it will be stopped there. Critics say the legislation to curtail judicial oversight is part of government's attempt

from my mom's side and her history in South Africa, from my father's side as an

immigrant to Israel, and from the family

love," he says. "The sacrifices will be worth it."

For Neuman, it's clear that "Israel as we know it is in danger. The core values of

freedom and equality, given to us in the Declaration of Independence, are in danger when extremist zealots want to hurt the human rights of women, LGBTQI+ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex] people, and every nonreligious minority. That's why we see such a broad coalition coming out against the judicial overhaul that crosses political lines." Neuman was born and raised

in Ness Ziona, a small town south of Tel Aviv. Since 2011, he's been a media consultant, working mainly in the political field and with non-governmental organisations. "My mom, Sandra Neuman, was born and raised in Cape Town. She's the daughter of Philip Zetler, a pharmacist originally from Stellenbosch, and Elfreda Zetler, a nurse and a Holocaust survivor who went to South Africa after the war. My mother is a gastroenterology nurse."

His father, Yoram Neuman, "was born in Moscow and came to Israel as a young child with his family. He met my mother in Cape Town while visiting his aunt who was living there. He's a businessman and president of Hiper Global."

When he was 27, Neuman took a leading role in the group that started the social protest of 2011 - also known as the tent protests. "That was my entry to activism and communication as I was the spokesperson of the protesters."

He was involved in other major protests over the past 12 years in Israel. But he says the current protests are a new phenomenon altogether. "Besides the difference in the length and the number of protesters [this time round], in all past protests we were trying to make Israel better. Here we're fighting for the actual existence of it as a democracy. The stakes are now higher, and that shows in the streets of Israel on a daily

He says the most powerful moment of the recent protests was "the first big demonstration we had. It was in Habima Square, with around 100 000 Israelis in the pouring rain and no-one went home. Everyone stood for more than two hours and there was a feeling of 'we're here, and we're going to do this for as long as we need:" And they have, with protests weekly for more than six months.

For Neuman, the most difficult moment since the protests began was "the minutes after [defence minister] Yoav Gallant was fired [in March 2023]. It was a feeling of a real dictatorship, a Putin-like move. It was scary for everyone in Israel. It was the first time everyone felt like everything was collapsing."

That moment led thousands of Israelis to go out spontaneously onto the streets in a mass uproar. "I don't know a single person who didn't go out to protest [that night]. All

Continued on page 3>>



to shield itself and its decisions from review, enabling it to appoint unqualified or corrupt officials and oust those it deems disloyal. Supporters of the move say it's necessary to correct the overreaching of unelected judges interfering with the decisions of a democratically elected government.

Neuman says that the values he was taught by his parents have informed his activism. "I grew up in a home that taught me to stand up and fight when I see injustice, and that everyone is equal and should be

history as Holocaust survivors. My mother left South Africa in the 1980s and, growing up, she used to say, 'Don't take what you have here for granted.' She hasn't joined protests before, but now she's been on the streets for every single one.

"This is the 196th day that I haven't taken a day off," he admits, while on his way to interviews with Israel's news channels. "And it's not just me. For a lot of people, everything is on hold. Many people have guit their jobs to build organisations and lead the protest

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### Herzog walks a delicate tightrope

**RON KAMPEAS - JTA** 

sraeli parties seeking a compromise should take
United States (US) President Joe Biden's concerns
about the planned overhaul of Israel's courts system
into account, President Isaac Herzog said after meeting
Biden.

Herzog's advice, effectively aimed at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and appearing only in his comments in Hebrew to Israeli media after his White House meeting on Tuesday, was unusual in saying a foreign leader had a role to play in a matter of internal debate.

"It's not like the relationship between the US and countries that are very important to it. This is a relationship with deep family elements, with mutual concern about what happens in the US and, of course, in Israel," Herzog said.

The appeal comes as US-Israel tensions increase, with members of Netanyahu's cabinet openly accusing the Biden administration officials of colluding with the opposition.

Herzog's conversation with Biden "covered regional issues, the Iranian threat, what's happening with Hezbollah in Lebanon, but also what's happening in Israel. And we have to understand and respect this, that when the president of the greatest power on earth asks questions and interests himself, as he did in his conversation with the prime minister yesterday, it's not just for fun, not to gossip, to bother us; it comes from deep concern from many of our friends.

"It's another consideration for us as a people in this moment to come to understandings, to agreements, to dialogue, to drafts [of a legislative deal], because at the end of the day, Israel is very important to the world, it's very important to the region, it's very important to the US, and that must also be a consideration to our brothers and sisters in Israel," Herzog said.

Scheduled to speak to Congress on Wednesday to

mark 75 years of the US-Israel relationship, Herzog is in a delicate position. He has decried Netanyahu's original proposals as having the potential to bring Israel to the brink of civil war, and has offered his services to broker a compromise. Talks are currently at an impasse.

Yet his role is seen as above politics and he's expected to represent all of Israel, including the government of the day. Herzog was previously a leader of the Labor Party and ran against Netanyahu in 2015.

Massive protests against the planned overhaul, which would sap the courts of much of their independence,

In a conversation this week, Biden told Netanyahu that he hoped to see him in the US soon.

In addition to the proposed courts reforms, Biden is also unhappy with the accelerated settlement in the West Bank, because of the extremists that Netanyahu has joined with in his coalition. Israel's government is its most right-wing in history.

The English-language commentary by Biden and Herzog barely addressed tensions between the two countries.

"I was pleased to hear about your conversation



have rocked Israel for months. The protesters see the courts as a bulwark protecting vulnerable populations, including women, Arabs, the non-Orthodox, and the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) community, and say the legislation to blunt their power would jeopardise Israeli democracy.

Biden, unusually, invited Herzog to the White House before inviting Netanyahu, and he has made it clear that his delay in inviting Netanyahu is because he's unhappy with the direction of the current government. with Prime Minister Netanyahu, which focused on our iron-clad military and security cooperation," Herzog said as he and Biden met in the Oval Office. "Because there are some enemies of ours that sometimes mistake the fact that we may have some differences as impacting our unbreakable bond. I truly believe that if they would know how much our cooperation has grown in recent years and achieved new heights, they would not think

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# Criticism: Constructive or counter-productive? Rabbi Yossy Goldman - Life Rabbi Emeritus, Sydenham Shul And consideration. We can't just "fly Torah Thought My late mother, of blessed memory, had a genuine, natural talent. She was able to tell it like it was, and could criticise

hat's the best way to influence people to modify their

The Book of Deuteronomy begins with Moses castigating his people about their past misbehaviour.

He lists the places where the Israelites sinned, without specifying the details. Moses only alludes to their misdeeds, without elaborating on all the gory details, so as not to humiliate them.

Clearly, even if we must criticise someone, we should take care to do it sensitively, in a way that maintains their dignity.

Moses did not say, "You lousy idolators! How could you do such a thing?! You saw G-d at Sinai and now you prance in front of a Golden Calf?!"

No. Not at all. Moses said but two words, and even those two words were ever so subtle.

Di zahav.

It sounds like a place, but Rashi tells us it's actually a subtle reference to the Israelites' sin of the Golden Calf. Di can be understood as dai ("it is enough" – as in Dayeinu), and zahav means gold. Even in his rebuke, Moshe was defending his people. Why did they sin? Because of an over-abundance of gold.

Or, as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks put it, "Moses' criticism of his people was accepted by them because they knew that he was also their greatest defender." Having argued their case before G-d Almighty Himself, Moses had credibility. They knew he loved them, and they trusted him.

He was always extremely careful not to humiliate the people when he rebuked them.  $\label{eq:careful}$ 

It's easy to criticise. Some people seem to do it quite

naturally. But being critical of others requires deep wisdom, sensitivity, respect, and consideration. We can't just "fly off the handle" and let rip. G-d forbid! Embarrassing and putting people to shame publicly is not only a grave offence in its own right, but it will more than likely fail to achieve the desired purpose. On the contrary, after such a royal dressing-down, the offended offender will probably go back to their old ways with a vengeance.

To be effective, criticism must be constructive. If we allow it to become a personal attack or vendetta, it will only fan the fires of dissension.

able to tell it like it was, and could criticise people without causing them to become defensive or angry. How? Because she did it with such genuine sincerity and love. The recipients knew that she was right, and that she meant it for their own good. She always remained the best of friends with the people she had reprimanded. How I wish I had her gift!

How I wish I had her gift!
At the end of the day, did anyone sum it up better than King Solomon in Proverbs?

Do not chastise a fool, lest he hate you.

Chastise a wise man, and he will love you.

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Thirty-seven days before his passing, Moses begins his repetition of the Torah to the children of Israel, reviewing the events that occurred and the laws that were given in the 40-year journey from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land.

Moses rebukes the people for their failings and iniquities, and enjoins them to keep the Torah and observe its commandments in the land, into which they shall cross after his death.

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# One more angel in heaven

Then 13-year-old Joshua Le Roux sang, danced, and shone on stage as one of the brothers in King David Victory Park's (KDVP's) stage production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat in March, no-one was to know that he wouldn't make it to his 14th birthday.

An aggressive tumour would paralyse him and eventually take his life on 9 July.

His devastated parents are joined by "a community in mourning" at his senseless passing, in the words of his school principal, Andrew Baker.

"Joshua has been at KDVP since Grade R. He was a Parker through and through," says his mother, Elizabeth Dunsmuir. "Joshua was having the best year. He loved KDVP High School. He was passionate about singing, drama, ice-skating, baking, and more. He was a brilliant

artist and achieved high academic marks. He was an all-rounder, who questioned everything and believed in people and in magic."

Everything changed when Joshua was unable to walk properly in the week of 10 April 2023.

"We picked this up while we were on holiday in Dullstroom," says Dunsmuir. It was to be their last holiday as a family. "On Sunday 16 April, Joshua was diagnosed with a 10.3cm tumour on his spine. By the time he was operated on at Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre - a six-hour surgery - on 19 April, he was paralysed from the neck down. Joshua

was then intubated and heavily sedated. Two weeks later he had a tracheotomy operation. He was on a ventilator the entire time."

They were told his tumour was "low grade", but further testing was done in the United Kingdom (UK). Meanwhile, Joshua was moved to Milpark Hospital for 28 radiation sessions. "By then he was doing really well at regaining some use of his arms and upper body, and the doctor immediately started to try weaning him off the ventilator," says his mother. "On 15 June, the results came back from the UK that Joshua's tumour was a high-grade, rare tumour with no cure.

"On Thursday 22 June, Joshua woke up and was unable to see properly. He had swelling on his brain. They did an MRI scan and two lumbar punctures over the next few days, and told us the tumour had seeded into Joshua's cerebral fluid. He had been fighting so hard and progressing so well, but he passed away on the morning of 9 July. He had spent a gruelling 12 weeks in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU)."

are grieving for "a beautiful, magical soul who made such a difference to everyone he met," she says. "We've been inundated with messages – it must be more than 1500. Josh managed to change people's lives even while he was sick. Rabbi [Yisroel] Uzvolk told us that he was an old soul, whose soul was too big for his body."

Many others saw Joshua's unique and special nature. He attended Habonim Dror, and the youth movement paid tribute to their chaver. "Joshua could light up every room he was in. He was kind, outgoing, and the true definition of a mensch." On reading the tribute, his mother wrote on Facebook. "All he wanted to do was come back to camp this

Joshua would never make it back to the Habonim campsite, but when he started his Grade 8 year, the future looked bright. "Joshua started Grade 8 in January this year in the high school," says Baker. "He was an outgoing,



friendly young man who came with a very close-knit group of friends, but immediately made a whole lot of new friends with students who joined us from other primary schools. He was well-loved by his peers and teachers alike. In that group of brothers [in *Joseph*], there was a tight bond among the boys, and Joshua was integral to that dynamic.'

"Grade 8s coming to King David are given options of electives," says head of arts, culture, and dramatic arts at KDVP, Renos Spanoudes. "In terms of the arts and culture subjects, the electives we offer are drama, music, visual arts, and dance. Why I mention all of them is that if Joshua could have done them all, he would have. He was a natural performer with a particular skill for characterisation, and was someone who could discuss sets, costume and lighting, do accents, play different ages, sing, and dance. He did a drama major, and at the beginning of the year, our set text was the well-known South African play Bar and Ger by Geraldine Aron. He played Barry and he was excellent."

Spanoudes is devastated at Joshua's passing, but takes

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comfort from the lyrics of a song in *Joseph*: "There's one more angel in heaven, there's one more star in the

Orion Ghetz Avinir was Joshua's rosh at machaneh. "I first met Josh at camp last year. He was an extremely big presence. He was funny, respectful, and thoughtful. If any tensions arose among friends, he was always the voice of reason. During activities he was always fully involved, and it revealed his high level of intellect."

His lasting memories are of Joshua enjoying all that machaneh had to offer, in an environment that allowed him to shine. "I was optimistic that we would see him again this year at camp. At machaneh, every person matters. If someone has a great personality with great enthusiasm, that affects the other kids. Josh definitely had that effect on others. We're going to feel this loss tremendously."

Addressing his son, his father, Jerrard Le Roux, says that in the last three months, he was able to "see the boy you were and the man you became. Even in the hardest,

darkest days when the end was near, you still found a reason to smile. As heartbroken as I am, I know that you wouldn't want us to feel sad. All I can do is try see the world through your eyes and feel just a little bit of joy. I know you would want us all to do this."

"For the last three months, Joshua kept fighting and being his charming, sparkling, humorous self," says Dunsmuir. "When he moved to the Milpark ICU, his perseverance gave other adults in ICU the strength to get better, get up, and get moving. He spoke to the nurses in English and Zulu, and his room became their first stop. He was able to have in-depth discussions with specialist doctors and surgeons about topics beyond his years.

"He passed peacefully, with Jerrard and me by his side, holding his hands with all the love we have felt for him since he took his first breath. He was Joshua Dunsmuir Le Roux, a Hufflepuff through and through, and loyal, patient, kind, selfless, humble, forgiving, inclusive, courageous, and brave. His wizard magic lives on in all of us."

### Leader of Israeli protests inspired by SA roots >>Continued from page 1

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over Israel, people who had never protested, did so.'

With 20 500 followers on Twitter and many more on other platforms, Neuman has a large following who see him as a leading voice and activist. His most recent tweet, on 12 July, shows his passion for the cause and love of his homeland. "We're in a real battle for our home. Losing is out of the question. It's not an option and there is no plan B. I love this place too much for me to leave."

To those who disapprove of the current protests, he says, "More than 75% of Israelis support the principle that judicial changes should be made only with a wide consensus. To those who don't support us I say, 'Look at Poland, Hungary, and Turkey. That's where we're heading.

"I believe that we'll be able to stop [the judicial overhaul]," he says. "So far in six months we've had 100% success in stopping legislation."

To those who want to support the protest movement from South Africa, he says, "When any representative of Israel comes to South Africa, protest! There's a huge movement of Israelis and Jews in the diaspora called UnXeptable, which raises worldwide protest. Be informed on what's happening here, and speak out wherever you can."







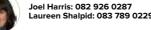
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# Going home - reversing the Zimbabwean narrative

**TALI FEINBERG** 

he story of the Zimbabwean Jewish community in recent decades has largely been one of exodus. However, 35-year-old entrepreneur Yaron Wiesenbacher is reversing that narrative. Last month, he packed up his life in Cape Town, closed his business, boarded a plane with his dog, and headed back to his homeland.

"My life in Cape Town was good, but I think moving back has been on my mind for about five years," says Wiesenbacher. "There's a lot of economic opportunity here. For me personally, I think there's a lot more growth opportunity here in Zim."

His sister has emigrated to London, his brother lives in Johannesburg [while running his businesses in Zimbabwe], and his parents live half the year in London and the other half between Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Bulawayo. "So, most of the time it was

just me left in Cape Town. I kind of thought, well, now it's my time to live where I want to live. I was ready for a new challenge."

Wiesenbacher was born in Bulawayo in 1988. "I went to school at Carmel, which is an amazing Jewish primary school that is still going. It doesn't have many Jews in it, but it's still being run as a Jewish primary school. I finished school there at 12, and then went to Christian Brothers College. We left in 2002 because of the economic situation and moved to Cape Town. I lived there for 21 years, and was in restaurants for the past 10 years. I had a coffee shop in Cape Town called Hard Pressed Café, and then opened

Merle's Schnitz. I am now back in Bulawayo, commuting between Bulawayo, Harare, and Victoria Falls, working for my brother who has a few different restaurants in all those three cities."

Like many Jews, his family's story is one of wandering and finding

"My grandparents on my father's side left Germany in the 1930s. So I have the German surname and the German passport. They settled in Northern Rhodesia, which later became Rhodesia. My mom was born in Bulawayo, my dad was born in Harare. My mother's father was born in South Africa, but my mother's mother was born in Bulawayo. Both sides are quite well known in the Zimbabwe Jewish community." His grandfather, the late Freddy Wiesenbacher, was president of the Harare Hebrew Congregation for many years.

Now, Wiesenbacher is back in his family's heartland and literally in the home he grew up in, which was never sold.

"Emotionally, leaving Cape Town was difficult, but now that I've done it, I'm happy with my decision. Being back here has been amazing. Friends always ask, 'Is there loadshedding in Zim?" I laugh because, like, we invented loadshedding. We really did. It's been going on for 20 years and there's very often no power. But everyone's kitted out with a generator or solar power, or knows what to do when the power is off. Kind of a 'let's get on with it' attitude.

"I feel like in Cape Town, when the power is off, everything stops. Here, when the power is off, you just keep on going.

"I'm a Zimbabwean and for me, this country has the best people in the world. Time moves slower here and there are more hours in the day for me. I really just love being here. The air, the weather, the lifestyle."

The rescue dog Wiesenbacher took with him to Zimbabwe has "adjusted very well, and is living her best life!", and he has adopted another dog.

Being warmly welcomed by people has eased the transition. "Already knowing a lot of people here made a difference, but people do go out of their way to help and make you feel welcome."

Slotting back into the Jewish community that he knew and loved growing up has been comforting. Nothing demonstrated this more than when he sat down to a communal seder with "the last 30 Jews in

"This tiny community that was once so strong, having the ability to tell the story of Pesach together – it feels like one big family. Everyone chipped in and made the meal, and there was one long table. It was very special to be part of it."

There are about 100 Jews left in Zimbabwe, with about 30 in



Bulawayo and 70 in Harare, including some Israelis. "Every now and again, we get a minyan. If someone's got yahrzeit, we message each other and people turn up." They also mark all the chaggim.

Wiesenbacher says many Zimbabweans are returning, especially young people. "There's a lot of opportunity here for work and for things to happen. It also feels like there's more equality between people. It's definitely something I've noticed. For example, there's no one begging at traffic lights." The thing he misses from South Africa is a food delivery service like Uber Eats.

The full Jewish life that the South African community provides is also something he'll miss.

"I want to say thank you as my family and I always felt so welcomed. I feel privileged to have been part of it. I went to Herzlia to finish school, and I felt very lucky to be able to do that. And all the little things, like having CSO's number in my pocket. We shouldn't take for granted what an amazing community we have in South Africa. Even though it's a small community, just know that there's an even smaller community a little bit up north! So, I'm grateful to the South African Jewish community."

Wiesenbacher encourages other young people to move back to or emigrate to Zimbabwe. "I think there are incredible economic opportunities, an amazing climate, amazing people, and it's safer than most countries I've been to. Having lived in South Africa and now having lived here, I feel 10 times safer here. It's not to say I'm completely safe and that nothing bad happens here, but if you can get a job here and you can find your feet, I think it's a great place



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SA JEWISH REPORT 5 20 - 27 July 2023

# Patriotic Alliance defiantly heads to Holy Land

he controversial head honchos of the Patriotic Alliance (PA), Gayton McKenzie and Kenny Kunene, are heading to the Holy Land next

Political pundits have predicted that the governing African National Congress will probably lose its majority in next year's general elections, making a coalition government unavoidable. And the visit to Israel, which has a coalition government, is a sign

> that the PA sees itself as a future coalition kingpin.

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Party president McKenzie, a former convicted bank robber, past mayor of the Central Karoo District Municipality, and motivational speaker, told the SA Jewish Report that the anti-Israel lobby "had already started to talk about us but we don't pay attention to their opinions".

He said that "Everybody has

go, but those who know us will know that's an exercise in futility. We're a sovereign party and we answer only to our members. Our members understand the value of different perspectives."

McKenzie said the PA's geopolitical strategy is a nonaligned South Africa and bona fide peacemaker in the world. "We believe that it hurts the Palestinians just as much by not speaking to Israel."

Unafraid of a potential backlash by anti-Israel lobbyists, he said he'd tell detractors, "Being friendly to Israel doesn't mean you're an enemy to Palestine, and vice versa."

A PA press statement said that the current government in the Knesset comprises six parties, adding, "Israel is a country struggling with deep and complex social and political issues against the backdrop of a divided history. Whatever one's views may be on the country, valuable lessons can be drawn for South Africa from its experiences."

The PA's confrontational, populist brand of politics makes headlines for a range of controversial views, most notably its stance that it will remove illegal immigrants from South Africa if elected to national government.

McKenzie will travel to Israel with his deputy, Kunene, once dubbed "the sushi king" for his

former convict, businessman, politician, motivational speaker, teacher, and activist.

"Israel has been run under a coalition for decades, and in light of the fact that the PA will be part of a ruling coalition after 2024, we decided to go to Israel to engage with leaders who have experience in managing coalition politics," said McKenzie.

"It's unavoidable that there will be a ruling coalition in South Africa after the national elections of 2024, and it's equally unavoidable that

the PA will be part of the ruling coalition. We take this matter very seriously, and that's why we're going to Israel to prepare for our role in the ruling coalition," he added. "We're looking forward to engaging with world leaders who have different views to our own, and who have experience in governing in a coalition as we'll be called on to do in 2024.

"We believe in the Japanese saying 'one must learn from the mistakes of others'. We're a sovereign party and we'll engage with whoever we believe is necessary to engage with in order



to bring a better government to South Africa."

McKenzie said the PA is also interested in Israeli innovation and technology.

"Only a fool would ignore innovation, but in particular the innovations that Israel has produced would be life-changing to many South Africans. The PA is particularly strong in the coastal cities of South Africa, which experience acute drought problems, and we're

excited to learn more about how Israel overcame this particular challenge."

"I am a very curious person, which is why when I was invited to Orania, I went to see it for myself. There was good there, and there was bad. Israel divides opinions even more, but that doesn't mean one can't learn from the place. We won't be taking anyone's side in or about Israel. We're going there to learn, and I'm always humbled to have the opportunity to learn something new and challenge whatever views I might have."

The visiting politicians are expected to meet Israeli President Isaac Herzog as well as leaders of various political parties both in and outside the governing

"This is an important moment for us as a party as we continue to evolve our vision of a better South Africa that works for all its people."

McKenzie said the party wasn't setting its sights only on Israel, but would be planning visits to other democracies led by coalition governments, including Finland, Germany, and Denmark.

He's also hoping to visit El Salvador. "President Navib Bukele is a living example of how a young man with vision and true determination can free a society from the grip of crime and hopelessness."

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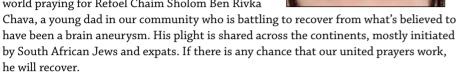
## Jewish Report

### Divided we fall

"United we stand, divided we fall" is a commonly used phrase that goes to the very core of who we are as a Jewish people. This might be an overused and perhaps abused sentiment, but we witness the strength of these words all the time.

It's partially for this reason that we pray together. Praying together strengthens our prayers. As our sages have said, while private prayer may not always be heard, communal prayer is always heard.

I see this as the power of numbers and community. Right now, we have Tehillim groups all over the world praying for Refoel Chaim Sholom Ben Rivka



This is the power of community. This is the power of a united front working as one. People setting aside their differences, ignoring what they perhaps don't agree on, and focusing on what they can do together to help one another and to do good. That is what this is all about.

In the case of this young man - soon to be a father of three - it's easy to do what we can to support him and his family. How can you not want him to recover?

As a community, we're quick to stand up and offer our help and support where needed. It doesn't take more than a social media post to get people behind an uplifting or a help-someone-in-need campaign. It's the most astonishing thing to see how swiftly our community jumps in to help.

That is who we are.

And seeing things with such clarity also helps. When you see what you believe to be right or wrong, it's easy to act accordingly.

However, when we see something as green and others see it as orange, then it's not so easy to get behind the same cause. And here I'm not talking about people's medical or health conditions. I am referring to politics, religion, and all those areas where we may not always agree.

In Israel this week, there have once again been massive protests against judicial overhaul. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets, closing off highways and bringing the country to a standstill.

To be honest, looking at the photographs and videos, it's exciting to see people of all ages and backgrounds on the street, protesting. In all honesty, it looks like fun from here. And they may well be having fun, but they have taken time out of their busy lives to take a stand. And in some cases, they have put themselves in jeopardy, facing the risk of losing their jobs or being arrested.

The protesters are clear that they have only one country and so they have nothing to lose by protesting for change.

And those in power look down their nose at the protesters, calling them rabble-rousers and denigrating their struggle. The authorities have arrested many civilian protesters. However, there has been no looting or people going out to physically harm others.

Do I agree with the protesters or don't I, you may be wondering?

Truth is, my views are irrelevant. What is relevant is that the country is divided. Protesters who are demanding to be heard are being arrested. People are wasting precious work time to protest. And there's an apparent stalemate.

Each side is getting more and more angry with the other. Hatred is building. Now, I know I've said this before, but it bears repeating. Israel is as strong as its last person and it is a powerhouse when it is united. When Israel is under threat from the outside, nothing can dampen the spirit of Israelis. They unite and become a giant of a force.

However, right now they are divided, and that is a major problem.

I got shivers when I first heard senior Israelis in the defence forces saying they would refuse miluim (reserve duty) because they felt this was a way to protest what the government is doing.

That's a terrible idea and can only end badly. I agree people should stand up for what they believe, but standing up in a way that will cut Israel off at the knees is absurd.

The military protects Israel from outside enemies. Harm that and no matter the in-fighting in the country, Israel becomes defenceless.

I do understand that the battles within the country are essential, and Israelis need to fight for what they believe. However, this cannot be at the expense of the country's safety and security. It also cannot be at the expense of democracy.

I'm not an expert on Israeli politics, but I do believe this is going on for way too long. The country needs to find a solution that's acceptable to the majority. I don't know what this is, but it must be found.

It's high time people stop talking over each other and start listening and figuring out a way forward. It's not acceptable for this to continue endlessly. It's taking its toll on the nation's psyche and needs to come to an end.

Israel is a democracy. Israelis need to sit down at a round table and argue it out like all good Jews do. It may take a while, it may take a long while, but they should not get up from the table until they have solutions to the problems.

We cannot continue to allow the country to be gnawed away from within. We must stand strong and be resolute in finding answers to make Israel one again.

While I appreciate protest is healthy, it's high time to end the protest and find solutions to the problems.

In our community in South Africa, we have in the past set an incredible example of working together. Perhaps Israel can take a leaf out of our book now! Am Yisrael Chai!

**Shabbat Shalom!** 

**Peta Krost Editor** 

### Why the need to hand sexual offenders to the police

hat if you or one of your children was a victim of sexual abuse? What if you have spent many, many months living with shame, fear, misplaced guilt, anguish, and confusion? What if, after lots of therapy and self-reflection, you decide to report the crime and, in so doing, accuse another member of the Jewish community? Your decision is based on what you feel to be a moral obligation to protect the community from a sexual

What if once going through the difficult process of reporting, of reliving the events but pushing through, you're accused of being a moser (handing a Jew over to non-Jewish authorities) by members of the very community you seek to protect? What if you're called a liar, accused of being on a witch hunt, declared the destroyer of this person and his family? What if you're constantly told that the alleged offender has done teshuva (repentance) and that he should be given a second chance?

What if you're threatened and intimidated to the extent that you feel your life or your family will be in danger if you don't drop the charges? What if you, the victim, are turned into the aggressor? What if this scenario is commonplace when it comes to reporting abuse in the Jewish community?

In Jewish law, one is forbidden to hand a Jewish offender over to non-Jewish authorities. This is called mesira and, historically, has been viewed as a grave sin. One of the reasons given for this is that, in earlier centuries, the courts were extremely antisemitic, resulting in overly harsh punishments. However, due to the evolution of the justice system in upholding human rights, this is generally no

Rabbi Avrohom Union was brought out from Los Angeles by Koleinu SA in mid-June for a three-day conference on domestic violence and child sexual abuse. Rabbi Union is a dayan (judge) on the Los Angeles Beth Din, holds a Master's degree in psychology, and is a renowned expert in these fields within the international Jewish community. He presented a strong case, based on multiple Torah sources, on the obligation and right that a community has to hand a sexual offender to the secular authorities in order to protect the community.

A sexual offender is considered a rodef, which is explained as someone attacking or attempting to attack an individual in order to kill them. According to Rabbi Union, child sexual abuse is seen in the eyes of the Torah as a life-threatening offence as it can condemn a victim to existential misery for

Often members of the community castigate a victim and accuse them of being overly harsh and of destroying the person and their family. They're interrogated and re-traumatised with the question - but don't you believe in teshuva?

They're made to feel like they're the guilty party for holding a perpetrator accountable. In most cases, the Torah allows the sinner to be given the benefit of the doubt; that is, that they have done teshuva, repented of their sin, and are determined never to repeat the offence. However, when do we know that a sexual offender has actually done teshuva?

The Torah prescribes teshuva to be a very specific and intentional process, demanding all the following steps: acknowledgement and admission of wrongdoing; sincere regret and remorse; a genuine and deeply felt apology to the victim; restitution, for example paying for the therapy of the victim; and a commitment to stopping the behaviour, which will most likely include intensive therapy.

Other actions completing the *teshuva* would be a commitment to remove themselves from an occupation or environment that triggers the behaviour. For example, a paedophile would agree to never work or be around children for the rest of their lifetime. Or a medical doctor who has used his position to sexually assault his patients would deregister and no longer see patients; and a teacher or religious leader should step down from their post.

These behaviours demonstrate that an offender has taken responsibility for the behaviour and has taken the appropriate measures to ensure that there will be no further victims at their hands. If one of these steps is left out, this doesn't constitute teshuva. When community members insist on advocating for the perpetrator and insisting that he or she has done *teshuva*, when they haven't, they're endangering the safety of the community.

So now the question arises as to the case where there are only rumours, but no hard evidence. The Torah understands that there are those cases where an adult or child is terrified of the offender and can't be expected to testify in court. In these cases, we can accept testimony collected other than in a courtroom. The *Shoel umeishiv*, a leading Rabbinic authority in the 1800s, stated that if there's a constant murmur in the community and people are quite sure that this person is a problem, that's sufficient to hand a person over to the

There's a Torah category of meitzer larabim, where a person is considered a hazard to the community. When an

> individual is a source of danger or suffering to the community, it's up to the community leadership to use all means at their disposal to restrain the person. However, if they're unable to get them to stop their offending behaviour, then we're forced to hand them over to the secular authorities

While Koleinu



the rest of their life. Even where there's a strong suspicion of child sexual abuse, the alleged perpetrator is still considered a rodef and, according to the Torah, all means can be used to stop them, even if it means killing them. This indicates how seriously the Torah views the crime of sexual abuse and the damage and destruction it wreaks.

This obligation to take the strongest steps to protect the innocent and vulnerable overrides the risk of the perpetrator being killed or assaulted in jail. Jewish South Africans are generally reluctant to have a Jewish person sent to jail because they fear for their safety. However, the Torah mandates community members, both leaders and lay people, to take extra steps to protect the community. This protection of the community takes such priority that even when there's no concern of the perpetrator re-offending, they can still be jailed in order to serve as an example to others.

Rabbi Union went on to discuss the matter of teshuva. In our community, when discussions around sexual predators arise, very often the automatic position is to assume that the perpetrator has done teshuva and is no longer a threat.

SA is victim-centric, we feel passionately about the need to protect our community and understand that part of the healing process for a victim is often the need to pursue justice. This involves the necessity of working with the courts and within the justice system.

While this isn't an easy road to take, it's enormously reassuring to know that the Torah advocates for the right of the victim to pursue justice within the secular South African justice system and in so doing, protect the community from further harm.

It's time to move from a position of supporting and enabling perpetrators through false kindness and a faulty understanding of teshuva to upholding and empowering victims in their search for justice and ultimate healing. In so doing, our community becomes much safer for everyone.

 Rozanne Sack is a co-founder of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jewish and wider community.

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### The stories behind 'The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem'

**GILLIAN KLAWANSKY** 

arit Yishai-Levi is giving fresh insight into the fascinating history of Sephardi Jews in Jerusalem during Ottoman and British rule. Yishai-Levi is the author of the best-selling novel on which the hit Netflix series The Beauty Queen of

Sarit Yishai-Levy

Jerusalem is based. This multi-generational family saga – now in its second season on Netflix - is set pre-1948 and highlights

both the history of Israel and Sephardic-Ashkenazi relations. An eighth-generation

Israeli, Yishai-Levi delved into her family's Sephardic roots in writing her first novel, published in 2015. "My ancestors were Ladino speaking," she says, referring to the Judeo-Spanish language spoken by Sephardic Jews. "They

were what we call here in Israel Samech-Tet, Hebrew for Sephardim Tehorim (pure Sephardim). It's a unique community that's not very well known in Israel." While Jews who originate from the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, and the Middle East call themselves Sephardic, the Sephardim Tehorim traced their lineage directly back to Spain.

While her family gave insights into the book's historical backdrop, Yishai-Levi stresses that it's a work of fiction. "It's based on memories, stories, legends, and characters that I heard about in my family, but it's definitely not autobiographical," she says.

Yet she spent hours listening to her father's first-hand accounts of what life was like in Jerusalem under British rule. "My father lived in Jerusalem, and I live in Tel Aviv, and I used to travel once a week to Jerusalem, where we'd sit in a café and he'd walk down memory lane.

"All that I've written about the lives of young people in Jerusalem during the British Mandate is from what my father told me. Which cafés they went to, where they danced, where they flirted, where they made love, and where they'd travel for picnics. It was like I received a present. I was very privileged to sit with my father for extended periods and let him be young again. He even chose the name of the family in my book."

Her father's experiences as a fighter in World War II in the Jewish Brigade in Italy served as inspiration for the character of David, who follows a similar path in the

Sadly, her father passed away shortly before The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem was published.

she wrote the novel at the age of 65. She was the first woman and Israeli to interview former Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat. Her

Yishai-Levi was a renowned journalist in Israel before journalistic background led her to Tel Aviv's Beit Ariela

Yishai-Levi was so intrigued that she decided that her main character, the Sephardi Gabriel Ermoza, would fall in love with an Ashkenazi girl, and not only Ashkenazi, but also very religious. "It's a very dramatic point in the book."

marry Ashkenazim," she continues. "I was amazed, I

didn't know that."

While the explanations she found for the rift differed, the prevailing thought seemed to be that many Sephardim at that time in Jerusalem were well educated and considered themselves to be the elite. Conversely, the Ashkenazim who initially came to Israel under the rule of the Ottoman Empire came from small towns in Eastern Europe, were generally less educated and relatively poor. Yet there is no academic text that clearly proves this historical distinction.

When Yishai-Levi's first novel became a bestseller, television production houses came knocking. While the resulting series is not 100% true to the book, with the second series in fact completely different, she says that the production was rooted in a genuine love of the

"It's a great compliment when your first book

becomes a TV series, it's a great compliment when Netflix spreads it all over the world," she says. "It might not be nice to say, but my bank manager is also very happy about it, so I'm happy."

Now, The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem is set to become a stage production at Beit Lessin in Tel Aviv.

Reflecting on what she wants people to gain from the story, she says the answer is different for non-Jewish and Jewish communities. "When my book was published in Italy, I was interviewed by a well-known

journalist in the country. When she said, 'I didn't know there were Jews in Jerusalem before the Six-Day War', I was shocked. So, from my book, I want everyone to learn that there are many generations of Jewish people in the land of Israel and in Jerusalem."

Her message to the Jewish community is one she says is particularly relevant considering the political turbulence in Israel. "I can't believe I'm saying it in these times, but maybe it's the right time to say it. We are here in Israel; our roots are here. And we're never going to leave it. We'll keep on fighting for Israel, for our values, our beliefs, and our democracy. I hope we'll win eventually and keep our beautiful country and home democratic and peaceful."



Shaar Zion Library. "I'd sit in the press section, because

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I'm a journalist and I knew that I'd find everything I needed in the newspapers."

Scanning old clippings, she found material for everything from furniture the Ermoza family had, to the fashion, theatre shows, music and popular cars of the time, and details on the political environment. It was also there that the seeds for the major conflict in her book were sown. "While I was looking at old newspapers, I found a very interesting article in HaZvi, one of the first Hebrew newspapers published in Israel," Yishai-Levi explains. "There I saw an article condemning the heads of the Sephardic community because they wouldn't let their daughters and sons

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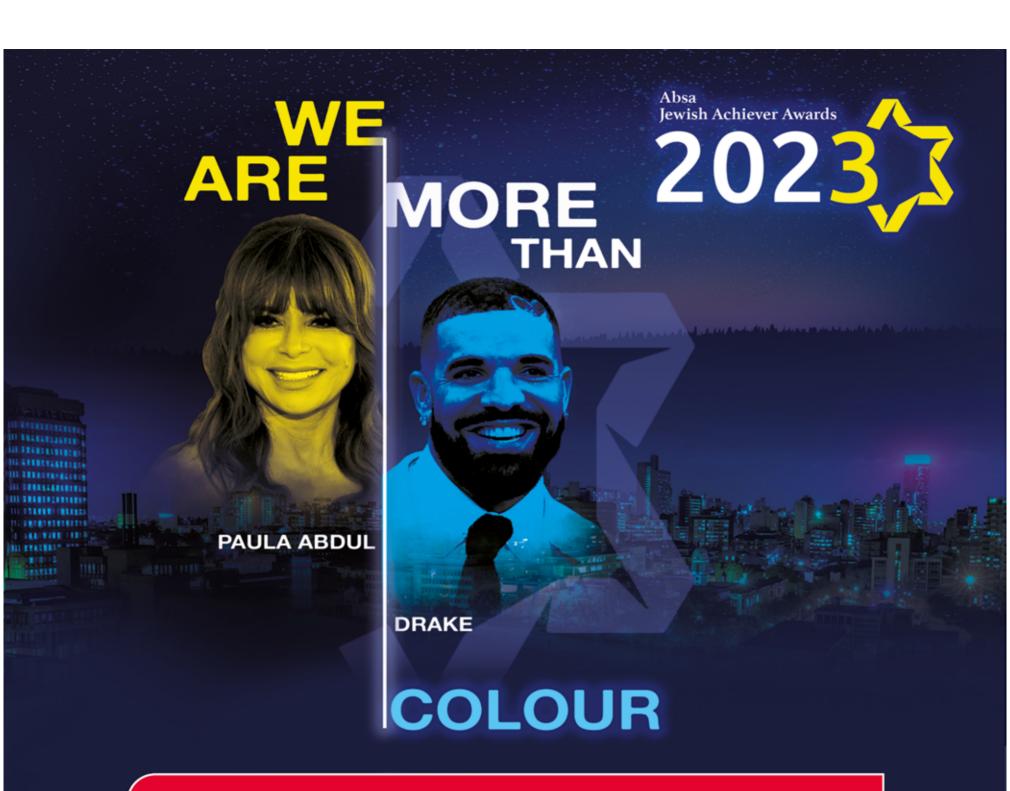
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Jewish Report









# How a shirt helped form a magical Madiba connection

**GILLIAN KLAWANSKY** 

hen designer Desré Buirski heard that Nelson Mandela would be speaking at the Marais Road Shul, just days before his 1994 inauguration, she knew she had to give him one of her hand-designed silk shirts.

By chasing this dream, she not only became Madiba's shirt maker, but also formed an enduring relationship with her hero.

Having emigrated with her family from South Africa to the United States in 1980 at the age of 18, Buirski began her design career in California. While working around the United States (US) and in Indonesia, she heard that Mandela was being released from prison.

"I had this epiphany that I wanted to come back to South Africa." And so, she moved back and opened a store at Cape Town's V&A Waterfront.

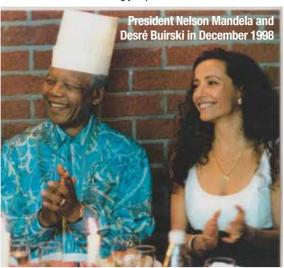
It was by chance that at a Friday-night dinner a few years later, she heard that Madiba would be speaking at Marais Road Shul the following day - the Saturday before his inauguration. "I was

so excited; I couldn't believe it because for more than a year, I had been wanting to meet or even just see him,"

Wanting to give him a gift of appreciation, she dashed home and grabbed a loose black cotton batik-print shirt with brown fish swimming across the chest. One of the last shirts she had made for the shop she formerly ran in California, it was hanging in her cupboard with the swing tag still intact. Wrapping up the shirt, and without time to buy a card, Buirski inserted a small note on the back of a business card, thanking him for everything he had done to save our nation.

At the shul, with the gift under her arm, she heard

Madiba speak. "His speech touched my heart because he said, 'The Jewish people left this country in droves over the past few years because of apartheid. Grandmothers and grandchildren have been separated from each other, as have children and parents. If you've got family overseas, I'm asking you please to tell them to come



back. We're going to have a government of national unity here. Tell them to bring back their skills and what they've learned so that we can help grow this country."

Having left her family back in the US, Buirski was struck by his words. More determined than ever to get her gift to Madiba, Buirski fought her way through the multiracial and united crowd outside and managed to spot his vehicle. She knocked on the window, explained her plan, and was directed to Madiba's bodyguard, who accepted the gift. "I threw myself into his arms and said, 'Please give Nelson Mandela a hug from me, and for all of you who are doing such an amazing job of bringing peace and unity to this country."

Elated, Buirski returned home. Then, on the day of the inauguration, a friend called to tell her to buy Die Burger newspaper. There on page three was a picture of Madiba at the dress rehearsal for the opening of Parliament and he was wearing Buirski's shirt. "I could barely believe it," she says. "You couldn't dream this up."

Buirski still gets emotional recounting the story, for two reasons. "The journey that I walked on with Madiba, the same journey that South Africa walked with him on, was an incredible time in history. And when I think of South Africa now, I just wish Mandela was still alive and he was still our president. But it is what it is."

For Buirski, the fish shirt was the beginning of an incredible journey. Soon after the picture was published, Buirski contacted Mandela's then private secretary, Mary Mxadana, and arranged to send through more shirts. A year and a dozen shirts later, Mxadana called her to arrange a breakfast with Mandela. "I literally fell on my back after I put down the phone," laughs Buirski.

At the meeting, she offered Madiba her help in any way possible, and he asked if she'd like to make him silk shirts. And so, during the years that followed, she made him more than 150 one-of-a-kind hand-painted silk shirts. During that time, she was invited to all the presidential

Yet what stands out was a staff Christmas party she attended in 1998, the week before her mother passed away. She was seated next to Mandela himself. "I had my first photograph taken with Madiba. Despite our long relationship, I hadn't had a single photo taken with him before that," Buirski recalls tearfully. "I could go to my mom the next day - she was in the hospice - and take her that photograph."

Another highlight for Buirski is a silk quilt she eventually created out of the offcuts of the shirts she made for Madiba over the years. She was unsure how to use it,

until inspiration struck, and she knew she had to give it to Madiba to auction off for his charities.

While she hadn't seen him for five years at that stage as he'd moved to Johannesburg, Buirski knew she had to find a way to pitch Madiba her idea. Through a mutual friend, Dan Ntsala, she met Madiba in Mozambique to hand over the quilt, which ultimately fetched €360 000 (approximately R8 million) for Mandela's charities at a fundraising auction held in Monaco in 2007.

In Mozambique, she got a moment alone with her

"I was sitting on the arm of Madiba's study chair, a few inches above where he was sitting on the chair," she recalls. "He looked up at me and said, 'I wish I didn't have any regrets. I wish I'd never done anything wrong in my life.' I was speechless. It was like he imparted a bit of his soul into my heart. It shows you how virtuous and gracious that man truly was because he did so much for South Africa and to recognise that there were things that he wished he'd never done. It taught me to always try and be a better person. He made me a better person."

Buirski also experienced a full-circle moment a few weeks after Madiba passed away in December 2013, when she received a call from a rabbi in New York, Avraham Berkowitz. He told Buirski a story of how he, by chance, met Madiba in Monaco and asked him if he wore his shirts to liken himself to Joseph in the Bible. Mandela laughed and said, "No. I wear the shirts because they represent the tribes and many people of South Africa. There's a lady from Cape Town who has made all my shirts for me, and she's helped me carry my message to every corner of the world."

• Now based in the United States, Desré Buirski remains founder and brand ambassador of her Cape Townbased Presidential Shirt brand, which has an ongoing relationship with the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

### Giving at least 67 minutes for Mandela

SAUL KAMIONSKY

■rom building homes to packing food hampers, donating clothes, and teaching children the value of giving, community members and organisations spent 67 minutes or longer helping those less fortunate on Mandela

virtual tuck

Day Thirty-six homes are being built in Orange Farm, a township 45km south of

Johannesburg, as part of the **Hearts Build Homes** initiative by The Angel

Network and Fingertips of Africa.

Glynne Wolman, founder of The Angel Network, told the SA Jewish Report that this is the organisation's biggest initiative ever. and families are expected to move into the homes next week.

The initiative is dedicated to building homes for the many families in townships whose homes Lerner giving out blankets were in Soweto ravaged by floods, fires

and other

disasters.

A centre for Early Childhood

Development and a soup kitchen were also being built in Orange Farm on Mandela Day, thanks to generous donations from corporates. In the weeks to come, six more homes will be built in KwaZulu-Natal.

"All homes will be stocked with essential household contents," Wolman said in her speech at the Wanderers Stadium on Mandela Day. The corporates that contributed financially towards the homes

were there, packing food parcels

> thabiseng Sekhobo, Nikita Apperson, Lele Madisakwane, Nhlumo Ndlovu, everything one needs for a week -

essentials. The sun was shining and the atmosphere festive. Wolman said the commitment shown by The Angel Network's generous

donors has had a profound effect on so many lives. "Today we come together to celebrate the spirit of *ubuntu*, which teaches us that we

are connected,

and we are better together. It's in this spirit that our donors

have joined

hands with us, offering support and resources to provide homes to those in need. By sponsoring these homes, our donors have provided safety and comfort to families, children, and individuals who have

Yehuda Lazarus, the founder of Fingertips of Africa, said, "I'm proud to stand together with The Angel Network in the true power of ubuntu, in the name of Nelson Mandela, to create a brighter future for all."

faced unimaginable challenges."

Just more than six kilometres away, food hampers were being packaged for 730 members of the community at Yad Aharon & Michael in Rouxville, Johannesburg.

Students from Glen Oaks Primary School and King David as well as community members dedicated 67 minutes to packing these hampers. "The

attendance is much better than previous years," said Jody Eberlin, who takes care of all Yad Aharon's volunteer programmes.

and Aden Vowles from Glen Oaks such as fish, dairy products, vegetables, chicken, and meat - and were distributed between 15:00 on Mandela Day and

> King David Linksfield matric pupil Tyler Goldberg came voluntarily to help out at Yad

> > Aharon. "It feels great because I realise how many families I'm helping," he said. "It's sad to see how many people need it, but it's nice to know we're helping them." Glen Oaks

**Primary School** pupils were helping out at Yad Aharon for the first time. "We always do our

67 minutes for Mandela Day and we try to do different things every year," said teacher Peta-Lee Levitan. "It feels wonderful to be here. The kids are loving it and they're doing well, so we're really proud of them."

By helping those less fortunate, the pupils, between the ages of seven and 11, gain a sense of tolerance, said teacher Stacy Schneider. "We have outreach at school, but now it's also about being involved in other communities."

Continued on page 15>>

### The miracle that started with a blessing

tanding to sing *This Little* Light of Mine, children welcomed visitors to the Eco Blessings Preparatory School on the Brakpan Shul premises on Mandela Day (Tuesday, 18 July).

girl called Blessing. School co-founder Yakima Waner - also founder of The Harvest Project,

Among the singers was a

which supports the school explained that Blessing was the inspiration for the initiative.

Her mother, Jesse, who is the sole breadwinner for her children, had left Blessing in someone's care. The little girl had drunk

poison, and the ensuing traumatic episode had made Jessie swear she would do everything to ensure there was a crèche in the area.

She started one in a small home in nearby Plastic City, an informal settlement housing mostly refugees. This was where Waner met her and where the idea for a school on the Brakpan Shul premises was birthed.

The new classroom - sponsored by the South African Jewish

Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and World Jewish Congress – is for Grade 3 pupils, and uses natural lighting and recycled plastic fittings. These features are part of management's goal to teach the children about sustainability. They are also taught to grow their own

It's all about celebrating life

for Waner and her team. "We're giving the children a chance at schooling, and today's launch allows us to dream for the future, as we grow our facilities to accommodate higher grades." Speaking on

behalf of the SAJBD, national chairperson Wendy Kahn said the initiative on the shul property is an honour for the Jewish community as it has become a haven of salvation for many.

"This same building has hosted Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, weddings, other ceremonies, and prayer meetings. Now, its legacy is living on through the light of these children who have just sung This Little Light of Mine."

### Planting in honour of Madiba

"In the spirit of Mandela, we got pupils from King David, Phateng Comprehensive School, an African National Congress ward councillor and the Democratic Alliance mayor, the Gauteng Education Department, and the Pretoria Jewish community to work together for the greening of Mamelodi," said JNF chairperson Michael Kransdorff. Sixty-seven spekbooms were planted in honour of Mandela's legacy. The award-winning centre, which hosted an Israeli water delegation last week, raises environmental awareness and mobilises residents to become environmental champions. It has hosted more than 122 000 schoolchildren and their teachers to learn about water, waste, energy, and biodiversity. More than 28 000 trees have been planted at schools, homes, and other sites, thanks to this environmental centre.



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### Israeli-South African musical connection across the sea

**TALI FEINBERG** 

hen Israeli musician Omer Goshen met Capetonian videographer Bella Russell while travelling in South Africa, the two women

instantly formed a connection. Now, they have collaborated on a music video for Goshen's song What the Sea Gives (The Sea Takes). The result is an evocative, whimsical creation that brings Israeli lyrics and music to the South African landscape. Filmed in the tiny village of Greyton, near Cape Town, the video is also aimed at supporting a family living in poverty.

"We're trying to help Nam-Zenebe [known as Nam] Truter, the girl featured in the video, to fund her school fees," says Goshen. In the video, Nam explores the landscape as if in a fairytale. Goshen never imagined filming a music video in a small South African town, and yet that is where her journey took her, especially after meeting Russell.

"I was born in a city close to Tel Aviv and when I was seven years old my family moved to a kibbutz in the north

**Omer Goshen** 

called Ramat HaShofet. So, I've spent most of my life close to nature. I started making music from a very young age and performing at festivals and venues in Israel. In the army I served as a guitar player in the air force band, and when I finished my army time, I went on a long trip in Africa. I now live in Tel Aviv and work as a musician full-time."

Her 14-month trip in Africa began in Ethiopia, then Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, and South Africa. "I spent months driving on the coastline and fell deeply in love with the views, the people, and the ocean. I felt a strong magic in South Africa."

From her very first day in the country, Goshen encountered the warmth of South Africans and the Jewish community. "On my first night in Cape Town, two Jewish girls named Romy and Maya hosted me. We met for a few minutes, and they just decided to invite me to their place. We're still in touch. I got a lot of help from South Africans when I was travelling, and made a lot of friends."

She and Russell met at a festival on the Garden Route and quickly became friends. After Goshen returned to Israel, she started working on her album. "When I finished this song What the Sea Gives (The Sea Takes) it reminded me of South Africa. I remembered that Bella is a videographer, so I sent her a link to the song asking, 'What do you think about creating a music video for it? You can do whatever you like! Create art." And luckily, she agreed. Without knowing Hebrew, she just made the perfect film for it with her crew of friends, Hough Maritz, Christiaan Jonck, and Nina Kay.

The song was released in mid-July and is now out on all platforms. "The song is a ballad of self-searching, introspection, and endless wandering. The song describes



deep moments of understanding," says Goshen.

Russell is also a traveller. Speaking to the SA Jewish Report from India, she says she grew up in Cape Town and studied English and film, and then did a cinematography course. Her parents live in Nature's Valley and that's where she met Goshen. "From that moment on, we just connected. I thought she was a beautiful soul."

Russell says she's always known Israelis and Jewish people, but Goshen taught her more about Israeli life and culture. Now, Russell says she has met "thousands of Israelis, because I'm travelling in Asia and spent a lot of time in India and Nepal and it's full of Israelis! So, I actually have a lot of Israeli friends now. I'm staying with one at the moment. Sometimes I feel like I'm an Israeli!" she laughs. "I find that Israelis are very similar to South Africans and we get along very easily. Israelis have a lot of joy and lightness."

When Goshen asked her to make the music video, "I felt grateful, because I knew that it meant that she trusted me and that she believed in me to create something special", says Russell. "I really love her music and am always inspired by her passion to achieve her dreams. I had two friends who helped me a lot because I'm still learning."

They took a weekend to make the video. Russell is friends with Nam's mother, Roze, and this is how they came to film in Greyton and feature the little girl as the main character. "They're a beautiful family, but they also struggle quite a lot. But it's amazing how much peace, joy, and connection come from their home. I've always been really inspired by them and their natural way of life. So we asked if we could come stay on their little plot of land."

They shot the music video "very freely, while exploring, walking the dogs, playing in the waterfall, getting in the mud, swinging on the swing, and laughing. It was a very natural process. It was amazing to watch it all come together. I wanted the world to see the beauty of this little girl. In South Africa things aren't always easy, and I really wanted her light to shine and for anyone to help her."

Russell would love to visit Israel, especially to attend their version of the Burning Man festival. "I dream of going to Israel. Hopefully one day. I think there's a lot of beauty there that I would love to discover."

Goshen wants to make more albums, "to make every album better than the last one and perform as much as possible. I want to stay excited about everything I do. My worst fear is to get bored. I am definitely coming back to South Africa, no question. As soon as possible!"

A BackaBuddy account was set up by Nam's teacher, Beulah Tertiens-Reeler, to raise funds for her schooling. "Nam is eight years old and lives with her mom and older sister in a small make-shift house in Genadendal, six kilometres outside of Greyton. Last year, Nam's aunt paid her school fees, but this year she can't," she wrote.

"Nam is the sweetest child and so deserving of this education. It's hard to see her family struggling to make ends meet. Most days, they are only able to have one meal. The school fees of R1 800 a month is a lot for them. Nam struggles with some aspects of learning, and extra learning support would also be good. An organisational school account will be set up to hold all the funds, which will be used as needed."

"Every donation helps" says Goshen. "Let's use the power of music to make the world a better place."



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### Jewish food that's neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi

he Jewish people are endlessly diverse, having spread around the globe over thousands of years. Our food is equally varied. Yet surprisingly, many Jews categorise the foods we eat as one of only two things: Ashkenazi or Sephardi. There are many Jewish foods that are neither of those. And even if one recognises a third grouping (largely seen in Israel) - Mizrachi or "Eastern" Jews - many Jewish dishes still don't fit into any of those

Before exploring this in greater detail, an explanation of these categories seems

### **Grouping Jews together**

With a nation that's as ancient and complex as Jews are, there are numerous ways of breaking us down into smaller categories. One common way is by religious stream: Reconstructionist, Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, etc. A different breakdown of Jews is by geographic region of origin. (Of course, the "origin" for all Jews is Israel, so here we mean a stopping point at some period of history.) Three specific areas became larger hubs of Jewish life in antiquity and the Middle Ages. First, Mesopotamia (known as Bavel, Babylonia, in Jewish culture) was the dominant region. As it declined in prominence around the 10th century, two Western European areas took over. Ashkenaz was a medieval term applied to the border territory between northeastern France and western Germany. Sepharad was the name assigned to Spain.

So nowadays, when we call someone Ashkenazi or Sephardi, it means their ancestors once lived in medieval France/ Germany or Spain. Mizrachi means that one's ancestors were more connected to the earlier hub in Bavel than either of those latter two regions. Ashkenazim spread through Central and Eastern Europe, while those in Southern Europe were mostly Sephardic. North African Jewry mixed Mizrachi and Sephardic Jews, while Western European Jews may have been Ashkenazi or Sephardi. And the Middle East largely housed Mizrachi Jews, with some Sephardic Jews who entered the mix.

Numbers, however, have power. In the United States, Ashkenazim are dominant (approximately 95%). So, Sephardi has come to mean "everyone else", even if they're not remotely Sephardic. An Iragi Jew, for example, has zero connection to Spain. So why refer to her as a Spaniard (the literal definition of Sephardi)? Since so few American Jews are not Ashkenazim, the country's Jews ignored those more subtle distinctions. They use "Sephardi" as a synonym for "not Ashkenazi". And because of the size of America's Jewish community, their terminology has impacted the mindset of Jews elsewhere.

### Beyond Ashkenazi and Sephardi (and Mizrachi)

Subsuming Mizrachim under the term Sephardi is not the only inaccuracy in categorising Jewish people (and food). There are tons of Jewish communities around the world who are not only neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi, but not Mizrachi either. A great example is the Italkim, the Jews who lived in Italy before the Sephardim arrived there.

Jews have been living in Italy since at least the first century BCE, long before the rise of any of the three hubs, and don't fit into any of the categories. Similarly, their many unique foods underscore this individuality. We see this best in Roman Jewish cuisine. While cities in Italy's north absorbed large numbers of Spanish Jews,



following the 1492 Expulsion, fewer came to Rome. So that community's foods largely reflect the Italki community's heritage.

Deep-fried artichoke, called carciofi alla giudia - Jewish-style artichoke - is one of their classic dishes. Most likely, Italian Jews didn't eat it 2 000 years ago, since deep frying is a more modern cooking method. But this uniquely Jewish food still can't properly be called Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Mizrachi.

The Italkim aren't the only community that doesn't match one of the big three groups. Similar communities, typically

called Romaniote, existed in Greece and Turkey. In Turkey, Sephardi immigrants overran the local culture, so pre-Sephardic foods have largely been lost. But any special foods that do remain don't belong to the big three categories. Stronger Romaniote communities remain in Greece, but studying their food remains a challenge because of Greek Jewry's massive losses during the Holocaust. (One good source is Nicholas Stavroulakis' excellent The Cookbook of the Jews of Greece.)

What about Yemenite Jews? They are a bit more complicated. They did have

some connection to the Mesopotamian community, but not as strong as others, and not continually throughout their history. So maybe we can call their food quasi-Mizrachi. (In fact, some of their foods are similar to those of Iraqi Jews while others are unique.) Ethiopian Jews and the Bene Israel Jews of northwestern India remained fairly isolated throughout history. Their foods are therefore devoid of the influences of the three main categories.

Georgian Jews and their neighbours the Mountain Jews weren't physically far from Mesopotamia, but were also not in significant contact with that hub. So, they too belong to none of the major categories, as their distinct foods attest.

### So where does that leave us?

In brief, the foods of the Jews from around the world reflect the variety in our nation. Putting people into boxes is inherently inaccurate. (Even the foods of different parts of Ashkenazi society are distinct, as are the foods of Sephardic Jews from different regions, making those two labels oversimplifications to start.) But when we

go so far as to believe that all Jews can be encompassed by two or three categories, we're erasing huge parts of our incredible history as well.

Our diverse foods indicate the diversity of our people. When I tell someone that Georgian Jews aren't Ashkenazi, Sephardi, or Mizrachi, I often get the response, "So what are they?" The answer very simply is: they are Georgian Jews. Let's just refer to all Jews simply as "Jews", or we should get specific about where they all come from even within the big categories. And the same, of course, holds true for the foods that each specific Jewish community

 Joel Haber researches, writes, and lectures about Jewish food history. He's currently writing a book examining the history of Shabbat stews (chulents) from around the world. He will be hosted at Limmud Cape Town (Sunday 20 August); Durban (Monday 21 August); and Johannesburg (Friday 25 to Sunday 27 August).

### Nominate our stars of the stage and field

STAFF REPORTER

s many as 22% of all Nobel prizes have been awarded to Jews. These include prizes for peace, literature, chemistry, medicine, physics, and economics. Of all movie directors who have won

Academy Awards, 38% have been Jews. Thirteen percent of Grammy Lifetime Achievement Awards have gone to Jews.

Jews have created nearly two-thirds of Broadway's longest-running musicals. As many as 10% of the world's master architects have been Jewish.

All this for a people far better known for their business acumen and excellence in medicine, law, and professions other than the arts and sports.

Jews punch way above their weight, both in South Africa and globally. And every year, it's obvious that when Jewish talent does emerge, it makes its mark. At the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, we celebrate this attribute of our community and the stars in our midst.

For most people, if you consider South African music, the name Johnny Clegg and his signature sound comes to mind. Clegg was awarded the SA Jewish Report Arts Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards in 2007. Clegg, who was fondly known as the White Zulu, was proud of his Jewishness.

Consider satire and humour, and the name Pieter-Dirk Uys will inevitably spring to mind. Not your most Jewish-sounding name, but this Absa Jewish Achiever Award 2008 Arts winner is also proudly Jewish.

Think surfing over the decades and Shaun Tomson's name is sure to surface. Tomson was the 2016 winner of the Absa Jewish Achiever Award for Art, Sport, Science, and Culture. No matter how many years have passed since this world champion made his mark, surfing conversations still feature this Jewish mensch.

The same goes for Formula One motor racing and the name Jody Scheckter, who was our 2020 winner of the Art, Sport,

Science, and Culture Award.

Then there's Bryan Schimmel whose name is synonymous with musical direction and arrangement in South Africa. In fact, this Absa **Jewish Achiever Awards** 2017 Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award winner is Ossendryver at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards in 2014 widely regarded as one of the top music directors, arrangers, and orchestrators in South Africa. He's a King David Linksfield alumnus.

Think major music, theatre, and other international stars who've performed in South Africa, and the name Hazel Feldman comes up. This winner of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2018 Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award is the doyenne of the showbiz

industry in South Africa, and the biggest producer of local shows and international

talent. The list of international shows she's produced here

> is long, including Chicago, We Will Rock You, Rent, Dreamgirls, and Jersey Boys. She also brought out and produced Pavarotti, The Rolling Stones, The Three Tenors,

Queen, Frank Sinatra, Elton John, and Rod Stewart,

to name a few. In the run-up to this year's Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, nominate those phenomenal folk who should be winning this year's Art, Sport, Science, and Culture Award. Go to: bit.ly/jaa23nom

### Helen Mirren and Golda Meir are (kind of) related

**PHILISSA CRAMER - JTA** 

elen Mirren will soon become linked with Golda Meir in the minds of many when she plays the late Israeli prime minister in a new film. But the awardwinning actress has another, real-life connection to Meir: the two are related, according to Israeli genealogical researchers.

Mirren was in Jerusalem for the Israeli premiere of "Golda", the dramatic film about Meir's handling of the Yom Kippur War (when Egypt, Syria, and a coalition of their allies invaded Israel and made significant headway before ultimately being rebuffed).

At a press conference before the screening, researchers with MyHeritage presented Mirren with the evidence.

The connection is distant, stretching nine generations back through Mirren's paternal Russian ancestry, and through marriage only. (The genealogy also connects Mirren to Israeli presidents Chaim and Ezer Weizman, and to the British royal family.) Still, Mirren - who isn't Jewish - said the revelation offered an important lesson.

"It's miraculous, isn't it, really? It just goes to show that we are all one family actually," she said. "In times of divisiveness and strife, as I know Israel is in right now, it would be a good thing to remember that fact."

Israel's political turmoil was a central topic of conversation during the press conference. Mirren and her Israeli collaborators - including director Guy Nattiv and co-star Lior Ashkenazi – reflected on the widespread protests against the right-wing government's efforts to sap the power of the Supreme Court.

"I am not Israeli. I've watched it from afar these past weeks," said Mirren. At the Berlin premiere of "Golda" in February,



Mirren said that she thought Meir would be "utterly horrified" by the current government's efforts.

"I'm personally moved and excited when I see those huge demonstrations," she added. "I think maybe it's a pivotal moment in Israeli history."

Nattiv said he had been attending the demonstrations with his father "to stop this crazy thing from happening" and that he had encountered a veteran of the Yom Kippur War who compared the current moment to the existential threat that Israel faced - and overcame - then.

"In a way, we're fighting to shape the future of our country,"

The film portrays Meir being caught flat-footed by aggression from neighbouring Arab countries, then overseeing a military response that transformed from fumbling to triumphant, and eventually led to Israeli-Egyptian peace in 1979, years after Meir left office. It shows her struggling deeply with the deaths of Israeli soldiers who might have lived had she heeded warnings of war. In 1974, Meir resigned amid divisions within her party over where to assign blame.

"She understood that as the leader of the country she had to take responsibility, and she did - unlike many other leaders who, when things go pear-shaped, start pointing fingers at other people," Mirren said. "I think that must have been incredibly painful."

Mirren's connection to Israel dates back to 1967, when she travelled with a Jewish boyfriend to work for a month on a kibbutz in the north. "I'm amazed every time I come," she said.

Her casting drew criticism for the decision to have a non-Jewish actress play one of history's most prominent Jewish women. About the debate over whether roles should be filled by actors whose identities overlap with the characters', Mirren said, "I adhere to both camps." She noted that she collaborated closely with the British theatre director Peter Cook, who pioneered colour-blind acting in the 1970s and died last year at 97.

Nattiv said one of his Israeli colleagues had initially suggested Mirren because of her resemblance to his own grandmother. He said, "I saw the Jewish soul in Helen immediately. We feel like it was the right move."

Mirren said her motivations for taking the role were simple.

"I'm a horribly greedy actress. All I want to do is play great women, And Golda was one of the greatest," said Mirren, who won an Oscar for portraying Queen Elizabeth II and has also played Queen Elizabeth I, among other historical figures.

Before Golda hits screens worldwide next month, Mirren has another major role – as the narrator in *Barbie*. She said both movies offered portrayals of strong women, and suggested a possible addition to the mounting list of promotional tie-ins for the hotly anticipated live-action film about the iconic doll.

"I think we need a Golda Meir Barbie, don't you think?"

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# Dancing through the Maccabi Games

SAUL KAMIONSKY

or the first time, South Africa is sending a dance ■ team to the JCC (Jewish Community Center) Maccabi Games in Fort Lauderdale, United States, in August. Team South Africa's dancers are doing all they can to ensure they're one step ahead of their opponents.

The five dancers, who will perform 16 dances at the Games, are Yeshiva College's Livya Firer, Redhill's Naomi Benjamin, and King David Linksfield's Addy Joffe, Jordan Brill, and Leah Kerr-Phillips.

Legend and Seal, says, "The team has worked hard to put together a gorgeous Israel dancing group. On top of that, I've worked hard for many weeks rehearsing my two solos and choreographing and rehearsing my two duos."

This will be Rosenberg's first Maccabiah, but she's been to international competitions and taken dancers abroad to congresses and workshops.

She says she's heard that the standard of the dancing will be "very high" at the Games. In fact, she has it on good authority that the standard will be the highest of all the

sports at the tournament.







Addy Joffe, Jordan Brill, Leah Kerr-Phillips, Livya Firer, and Naomi Benjamin

They will join more than 1 500 Jewish teenagers from across the globe competing in the tournament.

Team SA's dance manager Megan Rosenberg says those who auditioned performed dances of their choice at her studio in Johannesburg in March. Independent judges ensured impartiality.

"These judges judge competitions and know the international standard," Rosenberg says. "They chose six dancers on the merit of their performance. One dancer couldn't come, so we're going with a small team of five. They're going to perform the dances they auditioned with as well as other dances they've used in other competitions in South Africa ... We brought in choreographer Talia Kodesh to choreograph an Israeli dance, which has a little bit of African fusion, and is looking good. It's the only dance the dancers are doing together. The rest are duets

Brill, whose biggest dancing achievement was performing in two corporate productions featuring John

"The dancers apparently go all out, so it should be very interesting to see. I'll be watching the entire competition, so we know what we're in for in future as well. Please G-d, we'll go every year after this."

Benjamin says, "The atmosphere between us dancers is friendly and exciting heading up to Games. Some of us know each other from our dance studios, others from school."

Rosenberg says the team will practise daily from 23 July, except for one weekend when they're competing elsewhere in South Africa.

"They've already practised quite a bit together in my studio. I know they've also been practising at the King David Sandton school hall. My job at the Games is to see that the dances are set on stage. I choose choreographers here for the group work, but I work with them overseas. I'm there to look after them. I'm there as a teacher, doing what a teacher would do in a South African competition."

Kerr-Phillips and Firer say Rosenberg has been an

outstanding manager.

"Megan has gone out of her way to prepare us, to make sure we are ready to participate, to instil confidence in us, and to go for gold," Firer says.

Kerr-Phillips says, "She's organised incredible costumes and has made sure everyone is comfortable and happy with the costume design."

Rosenberg says she can't predict how the team will fare as she has "never seen what goes on there before, but our dancers are very good".

Brill is hoping to do "very well as we have worked hard and have pushed ourselves".

Firer says, "If I put in the required hard work – the practise, practise, practise instruction - and if I keep pushing myself, I hope to do very well. I keep reminding myself to keep my head held high and to 'go big'."

Firer is a former junior and senior Springbok rhythmic gymnast. She dances and trains at Jenny Rahme's Dance Academy and with one of Rahme's top teachers at Co-Exist Dance Academy. "At the Discorama Dance competition in

May, I took home first place, with gold in both the group and formation sections. Being selected for, and achieving, two golds in this popular competition was very validating for me."

The Games will be the first time Kerr-Phillips and Benjamin compete internationally, and they say being selected for the showpiece ranks as their biggest achievement in dancing so far.

Aside from competing, the Maccabi athletes will take part in community service, attend the opening and closing ceremonies, and enjoy bowling and other social

Team SA will spend a day touring Fort Lauderdale with the Maccabi Great Britain delegation, and the girls will be staying with host families who are planning Shabbat experiences and other activities for them.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to go to Fort Lauderdale," Joffe says. "I hope to meet Jewish teens from all over the world and forge long lasting

### SA's Sundelson at home at St Andrews

SAUL KAMIONSKY

outh African golfer Judd Sundelson is continuing his family's rich golfing history. He's the third-best university golfer in the United Kingdom this year, and placed seventh out of 72 golfers in the 73rd Boyd Quaich Memorial Tournament in Scotland in June.

"I was leading the Order of Merit for a long time and then I hurt my wrist, so I didn't play in the last event, which made me go from first to third," Sundelson, 21, says of his university ranking.

Sundelson, who has two Maccabi Games winners' medals to his name, matriculated at King David Victory Park in 2020, and is now on a scholarship at the University of Nottingham in England. His score of 279 after four rounds at the Boyd Quaich was only nine shots off the winner, England's Ben Willis of Edge Golf College.

This annual international student event hosted by the University of St Andrews at St Andrews, the Home of Golf, brought together golfers from 15 countries and 45 institutions.

"It was a great experience," Sundelson says. "It was nice to represent the University of Nottingham. All the universities send their best players to compete."

Sundelson says a few South Africans took part, including golfers from the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. "It was great to meet golfers from America, Ireland, Scotland, England, and Portugal. I wouldn't say it was my best week on the golf course, but I still played well."

Sundelson went into the event expecting to win. "I was probably the highest-ranked player in the field, but was battling a wrist injury that flared up on the second day because we had played 36 holes. In the last round I started bogeying and triple bogeying, which affected

Nevertheless, he ended on a positive note by shooting eight under par in the last 13 holes to finish the fourth round on 68, having been four over after the first two

Sundelson's dad, Barry, and uncle Dean also have winner's medals for golf at the Maccabi Games. "My dad played professionally and is this year's Houghton Club Champs winner. My grandfather Neville was a great amateur golfer. My uncle Dean played for Gauteng and won many Cub Champs." The three all inspired Sundelson to take up golf.

"I would go with my dad on the weekends to play nine holes and then, from around the age of 11 to 17, I would go to the World of Golf every week to have lessons with my grandfather, who was a coach there.

"I was in Israel when my uncle won the golf category at the Maccabi Games. I was seven years old at the time. I remember the excitement of him winning and I set a big goal to achieve the same feat. Eight years later, I won the junior golf category at the Maccabi Games in Israel, as a 15-year-old in 2017."

Sundelson previously won this category at the Maccabi Games in South Africa when he was 13. He has won other tournaments in South Africa and Scotland.

He continued playing golf for Gauteng, progressing from junior to senior level. After matriculating, he was



Barry and Judd Sundelson at the 2021 Club

hoping to get a scholarship. "I received golf scholarships from the United States and England. I decided to come to England as my friends were going to Nottingham."

The University of Nottingham awarded him a gold scholarship, its highest level of scholarship, which he received mainly for his golfing ability. His academic results counted a small portion towards it. "About only four students at the university are on gold scholarships," he says.

"I also get sponsorships from the Royal and Ancient [Golf Club of St Andrews] each year to play tournaments. Every golfer's dream is to visit the Home of Golf. Even though I was there for the seventh time, it was still a surreal feeling."

Sundelson has a plus-five handicap, which he says has taken a lot of hard work and dedication to attain. "The whole of high school I just played golf," he says, "but King David always supported me. When I missed class for golf tournaments, the teachers would help me, and the principal was very accommodating with it."

Now he juggles university with practising five days a week and golf gym training twice a week.

"I love being by myself on the golf course with my thoughts and without distractions from the outside world. I love playing golf, the adrenaline and excitement, and trying to get better every day."

He says adjusting to life in England has been hard. "The weather's colder. It's not as easy to play golf, so if you want to play, you really have to want to. I've done a lot of missioning up and down on trains to get to golf tournaments. It isn't easy, but it's definitely worth it."

Sundelson hopes to have a successful career in golf or business.

"I'm incredibly proud of Judd," his dad says. "I love watching how he approaches the game and how differently to me he plays. He plays golf his way. He has wonderful vision and ability. He has taken the best from all of us [me, Neville, and Dean], and he's worked hard to do his best. My father, Neville, has helped Judd so much with his game."

Interestingly, at the 2021 Club Champs, Sundelson came first, his dad placed second, and his dad's brother (uncle Dean) rounded off the top three.

"Golf has been a blessing for our family as it's enabled us to spend meaningful time together," Barry says. "Golf has allowed us to travel to fantastic places and meet incredible people. There's lots of healthy competition and banter in our immediate and extended family, not only with my brothers but with my father-in-law too."



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### Nothing beats the bush

ou know what was great? That for one week no-one was confused about their identity. We were not asked to respect an impala who had always identified as a rhino, or a slightly camp elephant who had always been drawn to zebras. For one week we were reminded that safe spaces are an illusion and that a trigger warning is what happens just before a predator breaks through the bush in search of your jugular.

In the Kruger National Park, it's all about the present and the immediate. Noone gets cancelled for something they said on Twitter in 2015, but rather because they were the slowest in the herd and, as a result, became someone's lunch.

Feelings don't count that much. Where else could you sit in a car and chew on kudu biltong while admiring the horns on one of their cousins in front of the car? Where else would a day spotting herds assist in building an appetite for a meat

Maybe the draw is the fact that the Kruger is one of the few places where time seems to stand still. Where in most areas there's still no internet, and where the rules are unambiguous and clear. It is in many ways, a time capsule. It's the ultimate Throwback Thursday, and reminds us of some long-forgotten basics. It undoubtedly is that need for simplicity that attracts many South Africans as well as tourists from around the world.

It's one of the places where drivers welcome someone stopping in the middle of the road, because it might mean that they have sighted something interesting. And where twitchers, or "birders", are accepted

**INNER VOICE** Howard Feldman

as real people. And not banished to the fringes of society like in the real world.

And it's why each year in July, even though I don't really care much for animals or conservation, we pack up and head to the area. It's why, although I would lose no sleep at all if I never saw a Pel's fishing owl in the wild again, we freeze too much meat, take too little charcoal, limited vegetables, and no fruit to speak of, and drive to the game reserve.

We are never alone. Along with the portion of the community who haven't chosen to holiday in Umhlanga, we immerse ourselves in Kruger culture as though our survival depends on it. For a short period, we wake up before dawn to wait at the gate before it opens. We might have no idea why we need to be through the entrance while it's still too dark to see a living thing, but we know that it's important. If it wasn't, why is everyone else doing it?

It's a question of preference. Beach or bush? Sea or shrub? E.coli or malaria? Those travelling locally in South Africa can be divided into these two main groups. And where I have no doubt that mating rituals, primal behaviour, and survival of the fittest apply just as much at the Sands as it does at Skukuza, at least in Mpumalanga a predator is always a predator, and a leopard cannot elect to change its spots.

----- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

### Giving time to help on Mandela Day

s Nelson Mandela often emphasised, both before and after becoming president, the attainment of political freedom in South Africa would have little meaning if it didn't go hand in hand with addressing the devastating economic legacy of colonialism and apartheid. He devoted much time and effort to going into the field to identify the needs of disadvantaged communities, and fundraising on their behalf. In honour of his life, his birthday came to be designated as Mandela Day. Now, every 18 July, South Africans across the board are encouraged to devote at least 67 minutes to helping the less fortunate in their society.

As reported on in last week's issue, Jewish communal organisations countrywide involved themselves in a range of outreach projects, and the regional branches of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) were, likewise, active.

In Gauteng, members of our staff and Gauteng council attended the official opening of an eco communal centre and classroom at the Harvest Centre of Education and Equality in Brakpan. The facility was established by the SAJBD in partnership with the World Jewish Congress (WJC), and will be used as a multi-purpose space for extramural activities, community gatherings, and learning. The Harvest Centre was established on the premises of the old Brakpan Shul during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily to assist the children of impoverished foreign nationals and refugees from a nearby informal settlement known as Plastic City. From modest beginnings, it has developed into an officially recognised preparatory school for children ranging from toddlers to Grade 3 pupils. The SAJBD has been one of the organisation's staunchest supporters, working with its founders, Jesse Nkosi

ABOVE BOARD Karen Milner

and Yakima Waner. We were delighted this year to have the WJC come on board, and we thank them for their generous support.

In Cape Town, the SAJBD, together with the Joint Jewish Distribution Committee, United Jewish Campaign, and others, supported the Mensch Network's "cook-a-thon". Meals for some 4 000 people were prepared for distribution by The Angel Network, via its feeding programme, to 13 kitchens across the Cape Peninsula.

For their part, the Council for KwaZulu-Natal Jewry partnered with the Union of Jewish Women in hosting a sandwich drive at the historic premises of the Durban Jewish community, the Durban Jewish Club. Several corporates and 18 communal organisations and charities came together for the occasion.

In Pretoria, residents of Jaffa Retirement Home made toys and classroom necessities for Sunnyside Primary School.

Speaking at the event in Brakpan, SAJBD national director Wendy Kahn stressed how much the work of the Harvest Project has meant for the local migrant community, and praised all those involved for having "created hope where once there was only desperation". For the SAJBD, our involvement with this and other praiseworthy initiatives in Gauteng and further afield enables us to make a meaningful, positive impact on the ground, thereby realising Mandela's principles and, as Jewish South Africans, helping to further his legacy.

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

### **Sunday 23 July**

 Chevrah Kadisha Bereavement hosts its Growth from Grief support group. Time: 10:00. Venue: The David Lopatie Centre, Sandringham Gardens. Contact: 011 532 9653



### **Monday 24 July**

• ORT SA hosts a talk by Gary Levy titled "Is Your Website Working for Your Business?" Time: 08:30. Cost: R200 (R100 members). Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

### **Tuesday 25 July**

• ORT SA hosts an online talk by Aki Kalliatakis on Business Essentials 101: From Idea to Success. Time 09:30. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

### **Sunday 30 July**

 Marcelle Pincus performs What if Nobody Comes at Elphin Lodge. Time: 14:30.

Cost: R50. Venue: Elphin Lodge Hall. Contact: 082 873 4289 or 083 226 1687

• The Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre screens the documentary Leah, Teddy and the Mandolin. Time: 18:00. Contact: 021 462 5553 or admin@holocaust.org.za

### **Monday 31 July**

• The Union of Jewish Women hosts a house and garden talk by Linda Galvad. Time: 10:00. Cost: R50. Venue: 77 Sandler Road, Percelia Estate. Contact: 011 648 1053

### **Sunday 6 August**

• ORT SA in partnership with Sasfin Wealth calls on corporates and individuals to enter the Padel Cup fundraiser. Time: 08:00 to 18:00. Venue: Killarney Country Club. Cost: R5 000 per corporate team or R2 500 per individual. Contact: thamia@ortsa.org.za

### Giving at least 67 minutes for Mandela

### >>Continued from page 10

Community member Joyce Levin comes to Yad Aharon with her grandchildren every Mandela Day. "It's important for children to know that there are people who have much less than you. I'm blown away by what gets done here," she said, pointing to the many loaves of bread. "Every year there's more

Meanwhile Minnie Bersohn Pre-Primary School schoolchildren, parents, and staff pulled together to create an incredible campaign to celebrate Mandela Day. Before school broke up for the holidays, children, together with their parents, had the opportunity to "buy" items from a virtual tuck shop. The parents would buy the sweets or goodies that the children chose for themselves, but these would go to children less privileged. More than R7 000 was raised by the Minnie Bersohn community this way, and the money was used to make hampers for the 91 children at Boitshepo Crèche in Cosmo City.

"It's never too early to begin teaching children the importance of giving to those less fortunate," says Mandi Defries, principal of Minnie Bersohn.

"Mandela Day is the perfect opportunity for our children to learn the mitzvah of tzedaka, and show them the importance of community. We also loved the fact that this campaign was a real case of educating through a fun and innovative way."

A group of enthusiastic Minnie Bersohn teachers spent Mandela Day at Boitshepo Crèche, which the school has chosen to partner with in order to ensure its growth and sustainability.

The Union of Jewish Women usually packs 100 bags for Mandela Day, but this year it collected enough items from the community to pack 20 more. "Our collection was amazing. This was a really great one," says Bev Cohen, a member on the union's executive committee.

Cohen says the bags were distributed to the Edenvale Clinic Hospital and two clinics in Alexandra, Johannesburg, on Mandela Day. "Each bag contains a babygrow, a vest, a beanie, socks, a blanket, 12 nappies, a fluffy toy, a packet of sanitary towels, a packet of biscuits, a bottle of water, wet wipes, aqueous cream, a bottle of perfume, sanitiser, and



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

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### Why bother with Mandela Day?

nstead of thinking
about doing something
[on Mandela Day], do
something.

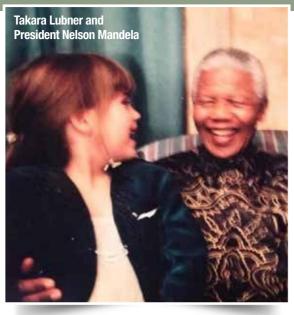
Nelson Mandela was, to many, the "man" we wanted to be, and still want to be. To Barack Obama, he was more than just a man, he was a symbol worldwide of the struggle for justice, equality, and dignity. His sacrifice was so great that it called on people everywhere to do what they could on behalf of human progress, according to Obama.

My personal experiences with this remarkable man were enacted sitting in his living room, talking, dreaming, and planning what the world might be like for children, all children, who might

build the Rainbow Nation Madiba

envisaged.

My sense of Madiba's vision came from how he had spoken of a future for us all, which needed to be built



today, step by step, brick by brick, with every South African playing their part.

Madiba had respect for every South African, irrespective of status, premised on the belief that each of us had to play our role, no matter how material. But play in the game of reconstruction we must.

In one of our sessions, with my 10-year-old daughter, Takara, present, he called for Zelda [la Grange, his assistant] to bring a pen and notebook and instructed Takara to take minutes of our meeting. He did not want anyone to sit idle while there was work to be done.

It was while sitting there with Madiba in his home 21 years ago that we started the Smile Foundation, which provides surgical and psychosocial support to children with facial deformities. We also

addressed aspects relating to skills training of surgeons, nurses, and even parents caring for their children with these challenges.

So why should we all do something for Mandela Day now? Because if he could care for us all, if he could sacrifice as much as he did for a nation he believed in, why should we not also? It's about having a purpose and a belief in oneself. Hope is an expectation and a desire for something to happen, and Mandela Day is an opportunity to engage in creating an outcome for others, for oneself.

There is a gift in being able to give to others. Mandela Day enables us to gift others by being involved, by building trust with millions locally and around the globe who hope for a better world.

Madiba cared. He cared for every child, not looking at the publicity that our foundation raised, but rather at the outcomes of the surgeries we orchestrated, and years after, how the children progressed. He wanted insight into who had contributed to those outcomes and would invariably bring Zelda in to draft a note of thanks to those who gave of their expertise and time.

Madiba wasn't impressed by money alone, he wanted personal

involvement. He
wanted the hospital
staff to be present so he could thank
them personally on his visits. He
wrote a note to Takara motivating

and instructing her to be one of

South Africa's future leaders.

Mandela Day is a day that I believe is motivation for each of us to make the chance, to be the change we want to see. Mandela Day should not be just one day of service to others, but also a reminder, a solid nudge to remember that we can bring about a better future.

As Obama so eloquently put it, "I am reminded that underneath the history that has been made, there is a human being who chose hope over fear, progress over the prisons of the past."

 Marc Lubner is Group CEO of Afrika Tikkun, a non-profit organisation focusing on youth development from cradle to career. He is also the founder and executive chairman of the Smile Foundation.



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