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Refusal of visa to anti-Israel activists ‘no surprise’

TALI FEINBERG

After successfully leading the campaign for the official downgrade of the South African embassy in Israel, National Freedom Party (NFP) MP Ahmed Munzoor Shaik Emam still expected to be granted a visa to go to Israel and then Ramallah for a conference framing Israel as an aberration to be obliterated.

In March this year, he led the charge to ensure that the draft resolution to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel was passed by Parliament, part of his continuous condemnation of the Jewish state.

When Emam was denied a visa to enter Israel, he called on the South African government to take action against the Israeli authorities for denying him and Pan Africanist Congress President Mzwanele Nyhontso a diplomatic visa.

The pair had planned to attend a three-day “Nakba” conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The event was scheduled to take place in Ramallah from 28 to 31 July, but has been postponed to November.

National Freedom Party MP Ahmed Munzoor Shaik Emam



Therefore, the two politicians are still fighting the Israeli embassy's decision not to grant them visas. “We cannot allow Israelis a free-for-all when they come here, but this is how they treat us. We have to take a strong stance,” Emam said.

The NFP also released a statement on 27 July condemning Israel's denial of the visa, in which it also urged the South African government to “treat Israel in accordance with their apartheid actions, by placing restrictions on visas and actively downgrading

economic and trade relations.”

MP Michael Bagraim told the *SA Jewish Report* that he wasn't surprised by Israel's decision not to grant Emam a visa. “They have been so vociferous about the destruction of Israel, you cannot blame the Israeli government for this action,” says Bagraim.

“Both of those individuals have been regularly bordering on antisemitism,” he says. “Every country has a right to its own security, and these individuals have done everything in their power to threaten the security of Israel. The Israeli government has done the correct thing. Both of them have made it their life's mission to attack Israel on every platform. No country in the world would welcome them in any form. The vitriol and hatred is spewed out on a daily basis. Our country is falling apart, and they don't seem to care. All they seem to care about is the destruction of Israel and everything it represents.

“I'm not sure Shaik Emam has travelled much lately,” says MP Darren Bergman, calling Emam by his colloquial name. “Many countries require visas, and I can assure you that given our current relationship with many countries, it's hit and miss with South African citizens getting visas with many of them. However, it doesn't sound like he was going for an educational

Continued on page 6>>

Looking isn't seeing



Rabbi Greg Alexander – Temple Israel, Cape Town

What did you see when you opened your eyes this morning? Well, if you were like me, not much as it was that 04:00 to 06:30 loadshedding timeslot, and the house was dark and cold. But that's not really what I'm asking, not the first thing your eyes landed on. What did you see? And what do you see each morning? Moses opens this week's Torah portion with the words, “See, today I set before you blessing and curse,” (Dt. 11:26). That's what he saw, and what he wanted the Jewish people to see.

How can you see that? What does a blessing look like? I'm sure we all know what it feels like, and we can probably describe how an action that brought blessing looks. Giving *tzedakah*, hugging your parents, encouraging a friend to believe in themselves, and the look they gave when your words penetrated to the point that they believed them. We know what that looks like.

And what about curses? What does a curse look like? We know only too well what that feels like and can picture many “cursed” moments in our lives. The pain of a relative or someone we love getting sick, the risk we took that didn't pay off, the disappointment when that thing we desperately wanted or needed to happen didn't come about.

Though I can't tell you what a blessing or curse actually looks like, we don't have to try hard to call up all kinds of images of their consequences. It's enough to know which one we want to fill our lives with.

So, why does Moses use the word “see” instead of “feel” or “understand”? Perhaps he was offering us a spiritual practice, a new way of seeing. That when we

look at the world around us, we don't just see the chores to do, food to eat, or the person that's annoying us right now, but see beyond that the deep consequences of every moment, every word and action, that they can bring about huge blessings or a traumatic curse. If we lived life in that heightened state of consciousness, we would be different people, behave differently.

As the legendary 20th century rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel, put it, “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is

phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”

So tomorrow morning, when you wake up and look around as the day begins – assuming you have your back-up lights charged, but even if they aren't – let's look deeper than what we see, to what lies beneath it, the ultimate consequences of every word we speak or breath we take, the realisation that our lives are important, meaningful, and vital to the present and future of the world. Let's wake with that awareness, or as Rabbi Lawrence Kushner puts it, to live with “eyes remade for wonder”.

Torah Thought

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National Women's Day commemorates the 1956 march of approximately 20,000 women to petition against the country's pass laws that required South Africans defined as “black” to carry an internal passport, known as a passbook, that served to maintain population segregation during the apartheid era. In 2006, a re-enactment of the march was staged for its 50th anniversary, with many of the 1956 march veterans.

Malema vows to target Israel, but not Jews

NICOLA MILTZ

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema has vowed to cut all ties with Israel should his party be voted into power after next year’s general election. Insisting that his party’s stance on Israel had nothing to do with the Jewish people because there are many “progressive Jews”, Malema said it would sever all ties with the Jewish state.

Speaking at an EFF press briefing last Wednesday, 2 August, at the closing of the party’s 10-year anniversary celebrations, the controversial politician said, “There won’t be an Israeli embassy under the EFF until human rights are respected in Palestine.” He was responding to questions posed by SalaamMedia when he said, “We’re not downsizing. We’re going to withdraw our embassy from Israel, and we’re going to chase away the Israeli embassy in South Africa. If we can’t do that, then our solidarity with the Palestinians is lip service.”

The firebrand politician said he would ban all cultural, economic, and political exchanges between the two countries, effectively cutting all ties. “We won’t allow any teams, any of our people, to go and participate in sporting activities or festivals or anything of that sort in Israel, that has stolen and continues to kill and oppress the people of Palestine.

“When we say ‘Israel’, we’re referring to the state of Israel, not Jews. There are a lot of progressive Jewish people, so we must never use the EFF stance on Israel to perpetuate hatred for the Jewish community.”

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said, “Malema’s obvious message is that only Jews who share his hostile sentiments towards Israel are worthy of any consideration. It speaks volumes about his unwillingness to engage with views that challenge his own deeply-held prejudices. It’s a pity.”

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town, said, “Only this morning, I read a piece by analyst Ebrahim Harvey that Julius Malema should do some reading on Marxism-Leninism before he calls himself a Marxist-Leninist as he did at the FNB Stadium on his party’s 10th anniversary. He again demonstrates a lack of insight, not to mention knowledge. ‘Apartheid-Israel’ is a shibboleth. It isn’t shared by an overwhelming number of Jews in South Africa, ‘progressive’ or not. Malema should know that Israel occupied the West Bank after a war which wasn’t of its making. Only the simple-minded blame one side in this tragic conflict. Malema wants it both ways. He appears to think that he will gain political points by ostracising Israel. Only Israel. Not Putin’s Russia, which he admires. But to avoid being called out for antisemitism, he talks of many ‘progressive Jews’ whom he values. I’m afraid, most don’t see the world in black and white, as does the EFF leader.”

Sara Gon, the head of strategic engagement at the Institute of Race Relations, said Malema’s comments about the isolation of Israel and the closing down of the Israeli

embassy were standard left-wing, anti-Israel sentiments. “They are based on the usual ignorance of Israel by the left, and taking everything that the Palestinian leadership says or does to be true and real, just because it’s the

progressive Jews are those who hold anti-Zionist/anti-Israel views. “So, what does that mean for Jews who don’t fit that categorisation – who do support Zionism or Israel even though their general political views may not be conservative or even centrist? Does Malema mean not to target Jews, irrespective of their opinions, because there are ‘progressive’ ones?

“His comments were made in answer to a question in a media conference, and his anti-Israel positions have always been clear. He genuinely doesn’t want to be accused of antisemitism – it’s not a good look.” However, she said it was unlikely that individual Jews would face the EFF’s ire, or at least not too much. “Where the interactions are likely to become heated and possibly antisemitic is when the EFF has to deal with Jewish organisations in South Africa. Their pro-Zionist/pro-Israel position will bring out the worst in Malema and the EFF in those circumstances,” Gon said. Malema celebrated his party’s 10th anniversary with a keynote address to tens of thousands of red-clad supporters, once again vowing to unseat the African National Congress in 2024 and making promises that the organisation would provide a better future for South Africans.



Photo: Economic Freedom Fighters Facebook page

EFF leader Julius Malema

Palestinians doing or saying it,” she said. “By emphasising that there are many ‘progressive Jews’, he’s trying to create the impression that it’s not Jews that are being targeted. Given his position, he must mean that

Ghislaine Maxwell taps into resources for incarcerated Jews

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Ghislaine Maxwell, the British socialite who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for her role in Jeffrey Epstein’s sex-abuse ring, is receiving services from a non-profit organisation (NPO) that supports Jewish prisoners.

Maxwell, whose father was Jewish, didn’t publicly identify as Jewish previously and isn’t considered Jewish under traditional Jewish law. The news was first reported by *The Sun*, a British newspaper, which said Maxwell had been “rewarded with better food and more time off work”. United States (US) prisons are obligated to honour inmates’ religious obligations in most cases, meaning that Jews are often given access to kosher food, prayer supplies, and changes in work schedules to account for Shabbat and holidays. The NPO providing services to Maxwell at the Federal Correctional Institute in Florida is called Reaching Out, according to *The Sun*. It’s one of several organisations operated by people affiliated with the Chabad-Lubavitch movement to serve those who are incarcerated. Another is the Aleph Institute. Chabad is one of the most extensive purveyors of

services to Jewish prisoners across the US. “We’re not helping them get out of prison, we’re helping them spiritually, to bring them to a state of mind which had they had exposure to, maybe they wouldn’t have done what they did,” Rabbi Zvi Boyarsky, now an Aleph Institute director, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) in 2009.



Ghislaine Maxwell

While the exact number of prisoners who identify as Jewish is unknown, the number appears to have risen over time. A chaplain working in the New York state prison system told JTA in 2009 that the rise reflected a growing sense that Jewish prisoners had access to more perks. One of those is kosher food. Maxwell’s claim to a Jewish identity runs through her father, a media magnate and possible spy who fled the Nazis as a child and was buried in Jerusalem after dying under mysterious circumstances in 1991. Maxwell reportedly made use of her Jewish ancestry a few years ago, when she was alleged to have taken refuge in Israel while under investigation for her role in Epstein’s sex-abuse scheme. She was arrested in 2020, convicted in 2021, and sentenced last year on five charges related to sex trafficking of minors as part of a scheme with Epstein, who died by suicide in a New York City jail in 2019.

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Cape community steps in as strike deteriorates

TALI FEINBERG

The taxi strike that brought Cape Town to a standstill this week, interrupting the economy, service delivery, healthcare, education, and even the food supply chain, has had an impact on the Cape Town Jewish community, especially its most vulnerable.

The South African National Taxi Council (Santaco) in the Western Cape announced that it was going on strike in the afternoon of 3 August, after negotiations with the government around a new bylaw deadlocked. From one moment to the next, thousands were left stranded, unable to get home. Many stampeded buses and trains, and hundreds of people, including children, walked for tens of kilometres.

The strike left many communal institutions, private businesses, and homes without much-valued staff and service delivery. Within the city, many shelves were bare and services like refuse collection came to a halt.

The local Jewish aged home, Highlands House, had to call on community members to assist with serving meals to residents and even feeding the elderly. So many community members rallied to help from 4 to 6 August, that some had to be turned away. Other community members opened their homes to staff from communal institutions who couldn't get home.

"Highlands House and affiliated welfare organisations have continued our services despite many operational challenges," says Highlands House Executive Director Dr Leon Geffen. "On 4 August, limited staff made it to work safely and all contributed to delivering services to our residents. We persevered through incredibly trying circumstances over the weekend, with less than 40% of our typical staff complement, operationally affecting our cleaning crew, care crew, and kitchen crew most adversely. However, we managed to render all services safely and efficiently."

Thirty volunteers assisted on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. "Some of our staff slept over on the weekend to ensure essential service delivery continued uninterrupted, and we're doing everything we can to ensure their comfort and safety," says Geffen.

One challenge, Geffen says, is to ensure that residents in the Memory Care Unit are assisted during mealtimes and in accessing the bathrooms. "We've been fortunate that we were able to meet every need to date," he says.

Elisa Israel Metz says she volunteered at the home because she finds it meaningful to serve her community. "I was there on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. In the dining room, we were essentially waiters, asking residents what they would like to eat, serving them, chatting to them, and cleaning up afterwards. I was then asked to help feed people, which was humbling. I left exhausted but fulfilled. We're so lucky that we have a community that can pull together. I'm thinking of other elderly people left in the lurch," she says.

One Jewish pre-primary school reached out to its parents for mattresses and duvets to be dropped at the school so that staff who couldn't get home could sleep at the school. Some parents invited staff to sleep at their homes. "I didn't think twice," says one mother who asked not to be named. "A teacher's assistant and her son slept over. Some staff went to stay at other school families. Most staff aren't coming in. The teachers are under an immense amount of pressure."

Grant Isaacs' sushi restaurant, Salushi, in the Cape's southern suburbs, is one of the many small businesses that have been affected. "It's been devastating," he says. "On Friday [4 August] we were forced to close. I had a fully-booked restaurant. On Saturday [5 August], I managed to get private transport to collect staff at great risk and expense, just to be able to trade. Customers are unsure as to where we stand, so trade is sporadic."

"On Monday, I had probably 20% of my staff at the restaurant. They're all petrified. Even though many have private cars, they're not prepared to take to the

Continued on page 8>>



A 24-hour Woolworths store in Cape Town

Alleged Israeli crime kingpin expected to fight extradition

NICOLA MILTZ

Well-known alleged Israeli crime kingpin Yaniv Ben Simon, arrested in a high-profile international crime swoop in Johannesburg last year together with seven other Israelis, remains in custody awaiting his extradition hearing later this month.

Ben Simon, 47, and the other Israelis were nabbed during a meticulously planned early morning raid on the upmarket Bryanston rented home of Ronan Levy on 17 November 2022.

The pre-dawn raid netted a huge weapons cache, stolen vehicles, drugs, and wads of cash.

The arrests, conducted by a multidisciplinary operation led by Interpol South Africa, organised crime detectives, national crime intelligence, and the Special Task Force, sent shock waves through the country.

Levy, who has an Israeli-sounding name, but reportedly speaks with a South African accent, was recently sentenced to 106 years in prison for his role in the gang's activities. According to reports, he pleaded guilty in the Randburg Magistrates Court to 11 charges relating to breaches of the Firearms Control Act; drug trafficking, as well as the means to produce drugs; the illegal possession of jammers – antenna used to interfere with radio noise or signals; and violation of the Immigration Act.

It's believed that Levy will spend a minimum of 25 years in jail. The Gauteng spokesperson for the National Prosecuting Authority, Phindi Mjonondwane, said Levy had received the sentence after entering a plea bargain with the state.

It was at his home that police and law enforcement officers found, among other things, 3kg of cocaine, ecstasy, a scale, and other equipment for manufacturing drugs.

According to media reports, about R2.6 million (which included \$46 000); a number of firearms; a converted truck with a shooting port, which is believed to function as a sniper van; and several other vehicles, some stolen, were found at the scene.

Police were able to charge Levy, who rented the Bryanston home, because many of the weapons in the house had been adapted for a left-handed shooter,

and he was the only left-handed person among the eight arrested, according to reports.

Six of those arrested alongside Levy and Ben Simon have been sent home after charges against them were withdrawn after no local crimes could be linked directly to them.

They are Lior Yihia, Moshe Hosana, Ofir Gurman, Sharok Medhipour, Amir Sanker, and Irmiya Meshel. They were deported to Tel Aviv on an El Al Flight in July, and may not return to South Africa for five years.

According to *City Press*, they were declared undesirable immigrants in the verdict, and, after the hearing, police escorted them to OR Tambo International Airport.

It's understood that Medhipour, an elderly Israeli, had never met his co-accused before the raid and had been in the country for only a few days before the dramatic arrests. He was due to fly back home the next day.

It's believed he had been in South Africa looking for work opportunities and chose to stay at the Bryanston residence, which was also run as a low-key bed-and-breakfast establishment. It's understood that the home catered for visitors wishing to have kosher food and participate in a *minyan* for morning and evening prayers.

Ben Simon, one of Israel's most wanted criminals due to his alleged involvement in murder and attempted murder, will appear later this month at the Randburg Magistrates Court, where he is expected to oppose his extradition to Israel, said Mjonondwane.

His attorney, Ian Levitt, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week, "My client intends opposing extradition. No further comment."

The media has been barred from all court



Yaniv Ben Simon and co-accused arrested in Bryanston in November 2022

proceedings since the high-profile arrests as part of strict security measures due to sensitive information and security around the case.

Ben Simon, who has been on Interpol's red list since 2005, has reportedly been living in South Africa since 2007. According to media reports, he's wanted by Israel on a number of charges and on suspicion of being a close associate of jailed Israeli crime boss Yitzhak Abergil, the leader of the so-called Abergil organisation, a crime syndicate.

Abergil, who is linked to an investigation known as Case 512, is serving three

life sentences and an additional 30 years in an Israeli jail for the murder of three uninvolved bystanders in a 2003 bombing that was an attempted hit on rivals, part of his role as head of an organised crime group involved in drug trafficking, extortion, and other criminal activities.

Ben Simon was allegedly involved in the attempted hit on rivals of the Abergil syndicate in two separate incidents in 2003 and 2004. The Abergil syndicate has long been considered a central player in Israel's criminal underworld, according to the *Times of Israel*.

The exact crimes he is alleged to have committed are unreported. Extradition papers outlining the nature of the offences haven't been made public.

According to reports though, Ben Simon isn't your typical mobster. One insider said he didn't lead a flashy lifestyle or wear fancy clothes, opting to operate quietly under the radar "in plain sight". Because of this, security insiders say, he was able to remain undetected and evade arrest for so many years.

Mjonondwane said the case against the group of suspects was held in-camera without media or members of the public allowed in. Ben Simon is due to appear in court on 24 August.

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Truth stranger than fiction

Truth is inevitably stranger than fiction, and sometimes it’s so bizarre that it’s almost too difficult to believe.

This week, when we were looking for stories, knowing we had to get them in a day early – on Tuesday – because of the Women’s Day public holiday, we looked at both the taxi strike in the Western Cape and incidents of terrorism in Israel.

When we look at crisis situations, we always look at the impact on the Jewish community in South Africa or, in Israel or other overseas countries, the impact on the expat community there.

Never in our wildest imagination did we consider that we would find Israelis visiting South Africa falling victim to the violence of the taxi strike. Not one Israeli family, but two! Meanwhile, as far as we know, few if any other white people – never mind Jewish – were caught or attacked in the violence of the strike.

How does that happen? Some people could possibly jump to a conclusion that it was an attack because they were Israeli, and that it was somehow politically motivated, but they would be wrong. There was absolutely no way of knowing that these families were Israeli, or even that they were foreigners. It was simply bad luck and, of course, due to the unacceptable level of violence of the Cape Town strike.

These families were tourists and simply enjoying their time in our beautiful country. What madness that they would be caught in the crossfire of the chaos! In another uncanny unrelated coincidence, last weekend in Israel, there was an attack involving five masked men hurling stones at a family driving their vehicle near the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The couple and their three children were hurt by shards of glass following the stoning.

This almost imitated the attacks on the Israeli families in the Cape, where projectiles were thrown at their moving vehicles. Stoning cars does occur as a form or terrorism in Israel, but it’s rarely in the middle of a city. Again, can you find a connection? I don’t believe there is, but it’s so odd that it’s so similar, don’t you think?

I know Israelis and many in the diaspora have been shocked at the protests and sometimes overzealousness of policemen in Israel. However, in Israel, we have not seen civilians harmed in the course of protests, especially not due to the kind of violence we’re seeing in Cape Town.

The Israeli protesters and those opposing them are generally non-violent, and violence is not the way of negotiations in the ongoing political crisis in the Jewish state. So, while Israelis on both sides may be angry and frustrated, they don’t fear for their lives. And Israelis, though they have pushed the boundaries in terms of temporarily bringing the country to a standstill, they haven’t attempted to bring the economy to a standstill.

However, in Cape Town, shops were unable to operate because their workers couldn’t get to work. Many schools were closed for the same reason, and small businesses battled to keep going. In fact, service delivery, healthcare, and even food supply, was negatively impacted by the strike.

And people who would otherwise take public transport to work or school were afraid of what might happen to them if they are out on the street, so they stayed home to protect themselves and their families. Those who would ordinarily be taxi passengers are the ones who have mostly been victimised by violence, thuggery, and intimidation.

And if you’re wondering what this is all about, amazingly, the South African National Taxi Council (Santaco) has been demanding that the government effectively break the law to make the taxi drivers’ lives easier. It called on the government to stop impounding taxis with cracked mirrors or what it deemed to be minor misdemeanours. Perhaps they are overzealous down in the Western Cape, but I have seen taxis on the road here in Gauteng that shouldn’t be anywhere except in a scrapyard, and they continue to operate at full capacity. To be honest, I find it hard to believe that traffic police would impound a taxi for a cracked mirror, even if this is according to the law. I’m not sure that they would risk their lives for that.

Now, I understand that it’s expensive to maintain vehicles, but when you’re carrying passengers and you’re on the road, surely it’s not too much to ask to ensure that your vehicle is properly roadworthy?

Then, they demanded to be able to drive on the other side of the yellow line clearly demarcated to prevent people driving there for safety reasons. What’s complicated about this law? It’s about safety on the road, both for those in the taxi, drivers included, and everyone else using the road.

How can you negotiate laws like this? Do you think Santaco is doing this now because we’re coming up to elections and perhaps it believes it might get away with it because parties want votes?

Then, Santaco came to the negotiating table with people bearing AK47s. This is taking the idiom “bring a knife to a gunfight” to a whole different level. Honestly, how is the government meant to negotiate with assault rifles. This is totally ridiculous!

Meanwhile, Cape Town came to a virtual standstill. The Western Cape High Court granted a court interdict on Monday night that prevented roads from being blocked, and Santaco said the strike would be over by Women’s Day. However, by Wednesday 16:00, this hadn’t happened.

The most unpleasant part of this is that it’s the honest, reliable working-class person who just wants to be able to get on with their working week who has been punished. It’s those same people who fork out their hard-earned money to keep the taxi industry going just so they can get to work and back.

Would that those negotiating on both sides actually consider them in all of this.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Tree of Life murderer’s death sentence revives debate

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Last week, Robert Bowers (50) received a death sentence for murdering 11 people with an automatic rifle in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the United States (US) on a Shabbat morning in October 2018. Bowers injured six others, including worshippers and police officers responding to the attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the deadliest antisemitic incident in American history. His victims included several people aged over 80. This vicious hate crime and harsh sentence has rekindled debate about the efficacy and morality of the death penalty.

South Africa, in spite of its extraordinarily high levels of violent crime, abolished capital punishment in 1995 as inconsistent with the country’s Constitution. This was the first ever judgement delivered by the new Constitutional Court. The apartheid government hanged 134 people in Pretoria Central Prison between 1960 and 1989, and the court was making a strong statement that this practice must end. Many in the country – including some political parties – have called for the reinstatement of the death penalty as a deterrent and punishment for especially heinous crimes, including murder, rape, and child abuse, thus far unsuccessfully. It remains an emotional and highly charged issue.

The Tree of Life Synagogue days after Robert Bowers murdered 11 people



In Bowers’ case, the jury had to be unanimous to impose a capital-punishment sentence, and it was. Jurors rejected mitigating factors put forward by the defence that Bowers shouldn’t be put to death due to mental conditions, including being delusional, schizophrenic, and epileptic. Bowers had offered to plead guilty in exchange for a life sentence without parole, but this wasn’t accepted by the federal government’s prosecution team.

In the US, the death penalty is a political issue. Bowers’ is the second federal death-penalty case to be concluded in the Biden Administration, after 13 death row prisoners were executed in 2020 and 2021 under the Trump Administration, following a long moratorium. In his 2020 run for presidency, Joe Biden expressed opposition to the death penalty, but has taken no steps to abolish it as president in a country where state governments wield considerable power and autonomy on this

matter. Leading Republican opponents like Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis are sure to criticise Biden as being soft on crime (and inconsistent) in the 2024 election campaign.

In Israel, only one person has been put to death by the courts: Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann was kidnapped from Argentina by the Mossad in 1960 and tried in Israel for his crimes during the Holocaust. He was a major figure to carry out the Third Reich’s “final solution to the Jewish question” – the murder of millions of Jews. After his trial in a three-judge court and a series of appeals, he was eventually hanged on 31 May 1962. Eichmann was cremated, and his ashes scattered at sea.

What does halacha (Jewish law) say about the death penalty? The Torah and Talmud decree capital punishment for what they consider severe sins and transgressions – by stoning, burning, decapitation, or strangulation. But according to the Talmud, the authority to apply the death sentence ended when the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, and the Jewish judicial body of the Sanhedrin ceased to exist. In the 12th century, Rabbi Moses Maimonides (the Rambam) stated, “It’s better and more satisfactory to acquit a thousand guilty persons than to put a single innocent one to death.” In halacha, the death penalty has existed

more as a principle than a practice, and in modern times, rabbinic authorities have left capital-punishment issues to the civil courts. In the US, all major Jewish denominations have opposed executions, although individual rabbis have sometimes supported them.

It’s far from clear whether the death penalty in fact does act as a deterrent to crime. Many would prefer perpetrators to suffer and rot in jail for the rest of

their lives rather than being executed. With long appeal processes, many inmates spend years on death row in practice anyway. Studies have also shown racial bias in death sentences, and many instances of people executed later being shown to be innocent, when it’s too late. Others argue that society replicates the barbarism of criminals when putting them to death, with governments and their executioners playing G-d.

Across the world, 55 countries maintain and implement the death penalty, the majority in east and northeast Africa and across Asia. Another 23 retain the death penalty on the statute books but haven’t executed anyone in the past decade. This debate will no doubt continue.

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.

Refusal of visa to anti-Israel activists ‘no surprise’

>>Continued from page 2

trip. It sounds like he was going on a conference to bash a country that he now expects a service from. Unfortunately, this is the calibre of some of our MPs in Parliament.”

Local political analyst Steven Gruzd says, “It’s Israel’s right, like any sovereign state, to allow or deny entry to anyone. Israel probably didn’t want certified anti-Zionists going to an inflammatory meeting and to give them a platform. South Africa can raise objections, but countries control who enters and who doesn’t. I doubt it would have much effect on Israel. At the end of the day, the Palestinians don’t yet have a sovereign state that would make these decisions, which is why Israel has a veto here.”

“No country is obliged to let a person into their

country, whether a visa is required or not,” says Sara Gon, the head of strategic engagement at the Institute of Race Relations. “Presumably Israel regarded them as hostile. They would be unwise to ask too much of our government as its own policy is that every country has the sovereign right to decide who may or may not enter its territory.

“The antisemitism reflected in the [NFP] media statement should create no surprise as to why Israel refused them. Whether it was the right or wrong thing to do may be the subject of debate, but whether Israel was entitled to do so is up to the assessment of the Israeli authorities.”

The SA Jewish Report reached out to the Israeli embassy in South Africa, but it chose not to comment.

Israel at crossroads conjures ghosts of SA

OPINION

BEN CASPIT



D was 13 years old, a Barmitzvah boy, when his family had to leave South Africa, and they immigrated to Israel. Now, those voices and sights are coming back to him.

“Although we lived in Cape Town, seemingly far from the riots in Soweto, it spread throughout the country,” he says. “My father worked in the city, there was a fear of leaving the house, of going to work. There was a feeling of a siege, of the collapse of our whole world.”

The Jews of South Africa were seen as part of white rule. When the apartheid regime began to collapse, they were caught on the wrong side of history.

South Africa, a kind of paradise for white citizens including Jews, began to collapse around them. When this happens to the Jews, a persecuted people who fled from exile to exile for thousands of years, it stirs up old demons.

The possibility of rapid degeneration into chaos and anarchy shook the country’s Jews. The fear that at any moment the black majority might lose their fear, stop obeying, and take over the government and the whites by force, grew stronger. D’s family didn’t hesitate too much. One day, they made aliya.

Today, 44 years later, those days of horror creep back into D’s soul. He’s already a veteran Israeli, 57 years old, with a family of his own. The nightmares that afflict him now are different from those that afflict millions of liberal citizens in Israel today. The fact that he had already gone through this experience once, in his previous homeland, gives D a premium package of nightmares.

And one more thing: D was, until recently, the head of a division in the Mossad for special duties (the equivalent to a general in the Israel Defense Forces). His wasn’t “another” branch, but the department of “Caesarea”, the combat branch of the Mossad. His whole mature life, D fought in the dark for the fortification and defence of Israel.

He didn’t waste time in white-collar positions, of which there are quite a few in the Mossad. He worked only in the field, in hair-raising operations and personal combat, deep in hostile territories. Always in the most dangerous position, at the tip of the bayonet that Israel built to guarantee that “never again” would Jews have to face a Holocaust.

And in all these years, he wasn’t afraid, but he is today. It’s not a physical fear. It’s the ancient, primal fear which repeats itself with chilling frequency, especially among Jews – the fear of becoming a refugee, of losing the

homeland again. Fear for the fate of his country and his children.

There are many differences between what happened in South Africa and what’s happening in Israel today. There’s no apartheid in Israel, but there was in South Africa. Israel isn’t isolated and marginalised in the world, South Africa was. Still, the similarities are chilling.

“The fear of the Jews at the time,” says D, “didn’t materialise immediately. The regime fell, and democracy was established. But the deterioration began and didn’t stop. The state crumbled because of corruption, mismanagement, the appointment of cronies, and affirmative action. Those who didn’t leave themselves, sent their children out of the country and remained alone. Most of the Jews didn’t immigrate to Israel but preferred Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. Our family preferred Israel.

I FEAR THAT THE FATE OF THE LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC ISRAELIS IN ISRAEL WILL BE SIMILAR TO THE FATE OF THE WHITES IN SOUTH AFRICA

“I feel exactly what my parents felt then. I ask myself if this place promises a good future for my children. I don’t worry about myself. These processes mature slowly. I assume that in the next 10, 20 years it will still be possible to manage here, for those who have the means, assuming that they keep their opinions to themselves and don’t speak out against the government. But one day, my children will wake up and find out that they are in South Africa. And I fear that it may be too late.”

Isn’t he exaggerating? “We’ll know in the future,” D says, “but the feeling is one of tragedy. When I was 13, we had to leave a homeland that I loved very much. We had an excellent life there. Everything you dream of and more. But there was no personal security and no security in the future. That’s exactly what’s happening here now. It’s such a sad déjà vu. Even then [my parents] were debating whether to take money out of the country or not, whether to apply for foreign citizenship or not, whether to prepare a refuge or not. It’s terrible.”

When you look at D, it’s hard to guess that this is the person who headed the legendary operational body of the best intelligence organisation in the world.

“There aren’t many you can point to and say

outright that they hold Israel’s security on their backs,” says Tamir Pardo, the former head of the Mossad, who appointed D. “D is one of those few. This man fought in the organisation for decades. As someone who accompanied him for many years in a variety of roles, I can testify that very few of the people I have met in my life were braver, more reliable, more honest, more moral, or more than D.”

“My parents sacrificed their quality of life for the sake of their children’s future. Now my mother is heartbroken,” D says. “The future she wanted to give her children is crumbling before her eyes. Everything has to begin from the beginning, for the sake of the grandchildren.

“My parents had the option of immigrating to the United Kingdom, the United States, anywhere. My father had a green card. They believed in Israel, and were Zionists.”

Asked whether he thinks Israel could become a failed state, he says, “Obviously. We can already see the beginning of it. As democracy weakens, so will the economy, the good forces will leave, the cost of money will rise, investments will disappear, corruption will continue to spread and poison every good part, the economy will shrink, and all the achievements of past decades will be erased. Look at the doctors leaving. The disappearance of high-tech investments. We’re already there. This government has declared war on the public service, on public servants, on civil society, on the gatekeepers.”

This man faced countless extreme situations during his life. He brought the Iranian nuclear archive to Israel, he managed the Mossad’s operations around the world for years, he shouldn’t panic easily.

“I’m a realist,” he says. “I see the South African process here – irreversible damage to the education system, academia, health. I see productive society kneeling under the burden of the non-productive sectors, which it finances through transfer payments. I fear that the fate of the liberal-democratic Israelis in Israel will be similar to the fate of the whites in South Africa. In this respect, our situation is just as bad. The coup d’état is on steroids. The rate of deterioration and the spread of decay is accelerating. And in addition to all this, there are external enemies and threats, which make everything more toxic and dangerous.”

Asked to say something optimistic, he points to his patriotism. “Israel is at a fateful crossroads. It has to choose between continuing the path as a Jewish and democratic state, a vibrant and free liberal democracy, economic success, and light upon the nations, and deterioration into a closed, autocratic, and gloomy state. I’m an Israeli patriot. I can assure you that I’ll do everything I can so that the state

chooses the first option.”

• Ben Caspit is one of Israel’s top columnists, a senior journalist on Maariv Hashavua (the weekly edition) and

author of “Netanyahu: The Road to Power”. This article was published with Caspit and Maariv’s permission.

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Lost and found: Torah's journey ends in discovery

TALI FEINBERG

For almost 40 years, Zimbabwean Brian Brom has wondered what happened to the Torah his father *leined* from as head of the tiny Gwelo (now Gwero) community in rural Zimbabwe. “After my father died suddenly in 1982 at the age of 60, every Jew soon left Gwelo,” remembers Brom. “My father came to Gwelo in 1936, and was the only one who could read from the Torah. He was the leader of the community, and held it together.”

So it goes without saying that the family felt closely connected to this particular Torah, which seemed to disappear into thin air in the late 1980s. Not only that, but the family faced more tragedy after Brom's father's sudden and early death. Brom's brother, Dr Les Brom, died in a car accident in 2005. Soon after, Brom dedicated a park to his brother in Israel. And in recent weeks, he discovered that this park is just a few kilometres from where the Gwelo Torah was eventually found.

“My father lost his entire family in the Holocaust in Lithuania. The other members of the Gwelo congregation were either British or German, with no real knowledge of taking services, *leining*, or Yiddishkeit in general,” says Brom. “My father took all the services for more than 40 years, and he and my mother kept the community together, especially after numbers started to dwindle. In effect, the Torah was in the Gwelo community for more than 80 years and before that in Europe for 20 years – its estimated age is 150 years.

It was like my father came back to us, after 45 years. Everyone was crying. It's like the renewal of life – a living, breathing legacy.

“That's why it was so important for me to connect with the Torah and re-establish a connection to my father's *neshoma* [soul],” says Brom, who left his hometown when he went to study accountancy in South Africa. However, he always maintained a connection. “I never gave up my Zimbabwean passport, and I travel often between Harare and Johannesburg,” he says. He often visits Gwelo, where his father is buried, and ensures that the 52 graves in the Jewish cemetery are maintained.

“For decades, I searched for the Torah. I had given up hope of finding it, and then a few months ago, I read an astounding article describing what had happened to it,” he says. Discovering its whereabouts and its incredible journey was “a mind-blowing experience. I

almost passed out reading the article.”

Brom had stumbled across a *Jerusalem Post* article by Richard Shavei-Zion describing a daring plan in 1987 to smuggle the Gwelo Torah out of Zimbabwe so that it could be taken to Israel for safety and use by a new community. The person who completed this risky mission was Capetonian Gilad Stern, who placed the Torah in the backseat of his station wagon to make it look like part of his children's toys on a family holiday – essentially hiding it in plain sight. The plan worked, and the Torah was safely escorted over the border in spite of hostile border guards. It was taken to Cape Town and then Israel.

After the event, Stern decided he would never do something so risky again, and eventually forgot about it. It was only by chance that it recently came up in a conversation and was eventually relayed to Shavei-Zion, and then separately to the *SA Jewish Report*.

These two articles changed Brom's life. “It was divine providence. It was like my father came back to me,” says Brom, who hosted an emotional and lively gathering on 2 August at the Beit Yatir settlement, the place where the Torah has been actively used all these years. Brom and his wife, Audrey, travelled especially to Israel for the occasion and hosted a day-long celebration to mark this miracle. The Torah was re-dedicated with a new mantle cover, inscribed with the words, “Honouring the Gwelo Hebrew Congregation, Zimbabwe. In loving memory of Myer Brom, leader of the community's services over 40 years.” Brom and his children *leined* from it, just as his father had done for four decades in a different place and time.

Wanting others to share in his joy, Brom invited every Zimbabwean he knew in Israel, as well as South Africans and other family and friends to join him in the celebration. The group took buses to the venue, and the event included speeches, dancing, singing, eating, and reminiscing. For Brom and everyone there, it was an unforgettable day.

“This experience has exposed memories and emotions I didn't even know I had,” says Brom. “It was like my father came back to us, after 45 years. Everyone was crying. It's like the renewal of life – a living, breathing legacy. My father and his leadership of the community were never memorialised until now. It was like something was missing,

and we've finally filled that gap and come full circle. It's comforting to know that the guardians of the Torah in Yatir treated it with respect and dignity rather than it being relegated to a dusty attic or *geniza* [hiding place].”

Brom isn't active on social media, yet the story has “gone viral” and he has been contacted by friends all over the world delighted to hear about his discovery and celebration.



Brian Brom and Rabbi Yochanan Pilchik

It's not the end of the story, as Brom will now maintain a connection with the Torah's community. The area now holds a special place in his heart as it memorialises his father and brother's lives.

Meanwhile, the 150-year-old Torah is in perfect condition, and has never had to have any repairs. “[Former Rosh Beth Din] Rabbi [Moshe] Kurstag came to the event with 30 family members. He said the lettering is of an incredibly high standard and quality. It has truly stood the test of time.”

Brom is deeply grateful to Stern for risking his own safety and that of his family to smuggle the Torah out of Zimbabwe, and is also thankful to all those who played a part in getting it to Israel.

Stern couldn't make it to the celebration, but is delighted that the story unfolded in this way. He says that at the time, his part seemed insignificant, but now he sees the wider picture and he's glad he could play that role.

“When Brian contacted me, I was blown away,” says Stern. “It's filled in the puzzle piece I never fully understood. It's like when someone donates an organ, something of that person lives on in someone else. And now this Torah and the Zimbabwean Jewish experience lives on in Israel.”

Cape community steps in as strike deteriorates

>>Continued from page 4

road.” This is because vehicles have been attacked, including buses.

“In addition, the supply chain has been completely disrupted and we rely on fresh fish being delivered from the airport,” Isaacs says. “The airport roads are cut off [sporadically]. That's again completely disruptive. The wastage [of expensive produce] adds to the devastation. Those of us who have been through the COVID-19 pandemic and then loadshedding, and now this, it's just too much. I have no resilience left.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on 7 August, one large business owner who asked not to be named said, “We had very few workers today and couldn't operate. We closed at lunchtime.” On 8 August, he said four out of six of his branches were closed, and essentially the business couldn't operate. “We're at about 10% capacity in Cape Town.”

In a message to the residents of Cape Town, Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis said on Monday, 7 August, that the city wouldn't negotiate “with a [literal] gun to our heads”. Lawyers acting for the city said that negotiations between city officials and Santaco had broken down because some Santaco representatives had arrived at negotiations with AK47s and assault rifles.

“There can be no further discussions with local Santaco leadership until their violence stops,” Hill-Lewis said. “The rule of law isn't up for negotiation. This isn't the way we'll ever build a successful society in South Africa. The law applies equally to everyone.

“We're protecting residents and commuters by opening roads, running buses with escorts, and arresting perpetrators of violence,” he said. “Most road closures and blockages have been cleared quickly, and traffic is free flowing for the most part.”

The Western Cape High Court on 7 August granted another interdict against Santaco and its affiliates, prohibiting them from unreasonably blocking roads with the intention of harming or delaying passengers using other modes of transport.

“On Friday [4 August] there was a productive meeting between the city, province, and Santaco, in which constructive proposals were made and agreed to,” Hill-Lewis said. “On Saturday, Santaco made entirely new demands, and since then, there has been an escalation of violence. Santaco is free to end its strike and accept the terms of Friday's discussion at any time. If Santaco doesn't choose to end its strike, then we will need to be prepared to stay the course.

“As ever, I'm grateful for the many people who have been in contact constantly to reaffirm their support for doing what's right in spite of the difficulty,” he said.

OPEN LETTER



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Barbie takes feminism into real world

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It seems particularly fitting that Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie*, a film that tackles feminism in often surprising ways, has this week reached the \$1 billion (R18.6 billion) mark at the global box office, becoming the highest grossing film headed by a solo female director. In light of Women’s Day this week, we look at how the film is bringing questions of feminism and the patriarchy into mainstream media.

“It’s literally impossible to be a woman,” says Gloria (America Ferrera), a character who inadvertently transfers her stresses and worries from the real world onto Barbie (Margot Robbie). This is the opening line of a powerful movie monologue that illuminates the contradictory expectations placed on women. “I’m just so tired of watching myself and every single other woman tie herself into knots so that people will like us,” she says. “And if all of that is also true for a doll just representing women, then I don’t even know.”

While a film that follows a “stereotypical Barbie” who ventures into the real world may be an unlikely mouthpiece for issues around gender equality, the strong responses it has ignited have thrust it into this role. Jessica Goldblatt, an English literature masters student specialising in issues of gender and religion, says that although the film is far from a perfect representation of modern feminism, the debate it has ignited is where its strength lies. “Now, people are talking about patriarchy, and thinking about feminism in such a widespread way – one that is nothing short of remarkable.”

It’s a view shared by Debby Edelstein, a Johannesburg-based women’s leadership expert who runs women’s empowerment and inclusion programmes in traditionally male-dominated industries around the world. “For too long, feminism has been a word that has been polarised by those for and against it, even though at its simplest,

all feminism really means is that all genders should have equal rights and opportunities. It feels a little surreal that it would be Barbie who would take the conversation around gender equality mainstream, but this is precisely what has happened.”

A tongue-in-cheek dive into the world of an iconic female toy, the film’s fun and colourful exterior is underpinned by



Margot Robbie as Barbie

Photo: Facebook

a somewhat darker reality. “Like all good satire, it serves a deep political purpose,” says internationally bestselling author, women’s rights activist, and writing mentor, Joanne Fedler. “It punches up – making fun of the existing, often invisible power structures which hold women back and define how we see ourselves.”

In this way, the movie collapses the idea of patriarchy – a system where positions of power and privilege are held

primarily by men. In spite of many who have claimed otherwise, this message is not anti-men, but rather anti-patriarchy – it reveals how patriarchy is in fact as limiting to men as it is to women.

“Patriarchal societies pigeonhole men and women,” says Goldblatt. “Men feel the need to assume certain dominant roles, and this can be damaging to their sense of self. “Women’s talents and abilities are ignored, and they become accessories to men. The film’s basic message is that both men and women are worthy, unique, and interesting, and should be encouraged to develop their uniqueness, without rigid gender roles.”

Struck by a friend’s 11-year-old daughter who loved *Barbie* but found it sad, Fedler delves further into how the movie tackles patriarchy. “What’s ‘sad’ about the *Barbie* movie is that while there’s nothing remotely threatening about seeing Kens disempowered – it’s funny, because it’s make-believe – there’s something almost hauntingly menacing in the contrast between the Barbie world and the real world.”

Though issues of gender violence aren’t explicitly tackled, they hover beneath the surface, especially when patriarchy is placed under the microscope. “Perhaps even 11-year-olds understand that something disquieting lurks in what remains unsaid,” says Fedler. While in Barbie Land, women call the shots – at least initially – in the real world, they’re objectified in a way that horrifies Barbie when she visits.

While Barbie herself has long been responsible for creating unrealistic beauty standards, Gerwig acknowledges that Robbie’s Barbie character is stereotypical and that these stereotypes are dangerous, says Goldblatt. “Gerwig’s Barbie Land is beautifully diverse, with Barbies of different sizes and races. In this Barbie Land, everything is perfect for women: there’s a female president and women run the Supreme Court. Women have no sense of insecurity, imposter syndrome, or fear.

“And then, Barbie goes into the real world, and of course, everything is different. As a viewer, you go through

the disappointment with her. Barbie Land is held out to you as this incredible possibility, and the patriarchal real world falls so short in comparison.”

Yet, though the real world disappoints Barbie, there’s a seemingly simple scene that holds another of the film’s key themes – that of self-esteem. “My favourite moment was when Barbie tells an old woman at the bus stop that she’s beautiful, and she says, ‘Don’t I know it?’” says Fedler. “Right there is the message – beauty is self-love. Nothing more.”

This is especially resonant in a society not only dominated by unrealistic internal and external expectations of women, but also one in which women feel particularly vulnerable. Reflecting on the state of our world right now with war, intolerance, and unprecedented levels of violence against women and children, Edelstein says that “It’s clear that a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it is an intolerable, unhealthy way to live.”

That’s why the conversations that Barbie has started are so timely. “Discussions about how we live, lead, and treat each other are essential if we are to build a healthier world,” Edelstein says. “It should no longer be radical to say that all genders should be allowed to participate equally in making this happen.”

Such conversations need to start in the home when children are very young, she suggests. “We need to have discussions about how women are treated by others in the workplace and in the world but long before that, we have to start with how women and girls are treated at home. The most important conversations around gender dynamics take place not in the boardroom but in the breakfast nook. This is where we’re first introduced to the unequal power dynamics around gender.”

Goldblatt says that simply starting such conversations is often the most difficult step in tackling these issues. “This is an especially important conversation for us to be having in the Jewish community,” she says. “Talk about gender roles and patriarchy rarely happens, in my experience, in these spaces. We need to start these conversations even if they’re going to be difficult and complex.”

German roots – SA family finds its past

PERSONAL STORY

MARC BLOCH



A South African family’s determination to retrace its German ancestors’ steps before the Holocaust has unearthed valuable archival material and introduced never-before-seen family members.

It all started with an invitation back in April 1989 when Hans Schropf, the mayor of a quaint town named Weiden in der Oberpfalz in Bavaria invited Irma Frenkel to return to the place from where, as a young girl, she was forced to flee from the impending devastation.

At the time, Schropf was extending an invitation to all surviving Jews born in Weiden and forced to flee to return to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the town’s synagogue.

When Irma, sitting in her home in Johannesburg, read the invitation, she dismissed it outright, saying that she would never return to a country that had banished her and killed so many of her relatives and friends.

Her daughter, Marion Bloch, tried to convince her mother to go but, in spite of all attempts, Irma was having none of it. However, the invitation fuelled a deep desire in Bloch to go to Germany to explore her parents’ roots.

After they passed away, this burning desire to discover her history led Bloch to embark on an expedition in April, along with her four children.

The first stop was to a small cemetery in Mertloch, 3.2km from the small village of Polch, in which her father, Max Frenkel, had grown up. The family came from a long line of cattle dealers, affording their eldest son, Max, the opportunity to study at the University of Cologne for a BCom. Thereafter, he worked at the Research Institute for the Retail Trades at Cologne University. This abruptly ended when he was arrested on campus for publicly expressing anti-Hitler sentiments.

On his release, after spending six months in prison, his girlfriend met him at the police station with a packed suitcase and an exhortation from his parents not to return home. They feared for his safety as the SS (Schutzstaffel) had made it known that it was after him again. He fled to Paris and three years later, finding the anti-Jewish climate there untenable, journeyed to South Africa, arriving on 3 October 1936.

The village of Polch had only a small Jewish population before the war. In 1925, there were 59 Jews and 3 000 gentiles. Bloch had done research before her journey to track down where her great-grandparents, Friederich-Wilhelm Anschel and Auguste Anschel, were buried. In an off-the-beaten-track open field, she found the cemetery, with no more than 80 graves.

The family recited a memorial prayer for those buried, probably the first time it had been recited at this location since 1939.

The next stop was the Polch synagogue, built in 1876, which was partially destroyed on 9 November 1938 in the Kristallnacht madness. Fortunately, a large part of the building was salvaged. Several years later, the community helped to restore it and transform it into an exhibition centre. The family felt the very present horrors of that blood-stained night. After praying the afternoon service, the caretaker told the family that prayers hadn’t been heard in that synagogue since 1938.

The family went on to find Max’s childhood home, which was a challenge as they knew the name of the street but not the house number.

Fortunately, Bloch had a faded photograph of her father as a young child, taken in front of the house in which he had grown up. They eventually stumbled upon it. Bloch stood aghast, staring at the exterior of the house that mirrored the image she held in her hand. Apart from a coat of paint, the house hadn’t changed an iota in 84 years!

The house had apparently been sold by Max’s parents in 1939, just before they fled Germany, but the new owners resold it in 1959.

After a quick tour, reluctantly given by the new tenant, they met the only Jew left in Polch, Inge Kahn, a 95-year-old Holocaust survivor who recalled fond memories of some of Bloch’s family. Kahn and her own mother had been taken to Theresienstadt and her father to Auschwitz, but they survived both camps.

The next leg of the journey was a trip 402km east to Weiden, where Irma grew up.

Before the trip, Bloch had spent hours speaking to archivist Dr Sebastian Schott, the mayor of Weiden, and

others in preparation. No sooner had the train pulled into the station than the archivist whisked them off to meet the mayor. Walking through the pebbled streets of the old city of this quaint little town, Bloch, together with her children, could only conjecture what life had been like pre-Holocaust and what could have been.

At the cultural office, the archivist handed the family a large folder of documents containing various registration certificates of births and marriages spanning the years 1850 to 1936. Along with those were photographs of Irma, aunts, uncles, and grandparents whom they were seeing for the first time. These documents had been discovered in the basement below the building, amidst a vast collection of records pertaining to hundreds of Jewish families. On the basis of these records, they assured the family German citizenship, if so desired.

Schott then excitedly ushered the family into a large, adjacent archives room cluttered with files, scanners, and computers. With a boyish grin on his face, he announced that there was yet another surprise.

With that, a video cranked into action on one of the large computer screens. It jumped incessantly, clearly showing signs of age, but the promotional film produced in 1926 to entice people to come live in Weiden showed a vibrant, bustling town, boasting a wide range of shops and beautiful landmarks.

Irma’s father, Victor Katz, ran his successful retail store



Marion Bloch and her children reading the inscription on Marion’s great-grandparents’ grave



Max Frenkel in 1950

in the town centre, which was the ground floor of their home. Bloch said she had always tried to imagine what merchandise it sold, when there, before her eyes, a frame of Victor Katz’s shop entrance suddenly popped onto the screen. The family watched agog while this movie took them on a tour inside the shop, bringing the store to life.

The trip ended with the mayor escorting the family to the one and only synagogue in Weiden, the very same one which Irma had attended growing up.

While walking up the steps leading to the main prayer room, one of Bloch’s children spotted a picture on the wall of a young girl that he thought bore an uncanny resemblance to Irma. Upon closer examination, it was indeed a picture of her as Habonim madrich at a camp in 1934.

It’s remarkable that a Jewish community exists there today, living a Jewish life in a place in which 80 years ago, they were killed or forced to flee.

Jewish tradition is steeped in the belief in the transmission of knowledge, values, and heritage from one generation to the next and so, returning home from the trip, the family felt a profound sense of accomplishment at unearthing the many documents that could have been lost to it forever.

• Marc Bloch is the second oldest of Marion Bloch’s four children. He lives in London, England.

Petrol, oil, water – and a whole lot of Hebrew

HANNA RESNICK

When Sydenham Shul’s Rabbi Yehuda Stern drove into the Shell Garage in Sandringham last week, he wasn’t expecting to be greeted with the words, “*Shalom, boker tov*.”

“At first, I thought, ‘Wow, that was a nice welcome’, but I wasn’t expecting much more,” Stern said. However, when the petrol attendant continued to speak in Hebrew, Stern got out his phone and asked if he could record the interaction.

“He wanted to know if I needed oil and water – *shemen* and *mayim*,” he said. “And then he went out to my windows, or *chalonot*, and then *tzmigim* (tyres). What cracked me up was when he said “2.2” in Hebrew. I asked him if those were the only numbers he knows, but he was able to tell me what “2.4” was as well.”

Sibisiso Zulu, who calls himself Baruch because his first name means “blessing”, lives in Berea and hails from Jericho in the North West Province. He’s a supervisor at Shell Garage Sandringham, having worked there for about seven years.

Five years ago, Sibisiso recalls, he heard a couple of clients saying the words “Baruch Hashem”. He asked what the phrase meant, and they told him it meant “G-d bless you.” After that encounter, he started using the phrase with Jewish clients. “They would ask me how I know these words, and would teach me other ones,” he said. Slowly, he began to learn new words and phrases from different clients.

He said that although it’s a difficult language to master, he was happy to learn. “Working in a Jewish area, it’s nice to be able to accommodate my clients,” he said.

Clients are often surprised that he’s able to speak Hebrew, but also excited about it. “Sometimes, if a client comes in in a bad mood and they meet me and I speak to them in Hebrew, I’m able to put a smile on their faces.”

you will not get in other places in the world. This morning, I experienced one of those: a warm and friendly petrol assistant who greeted me with an innocent ‘*Shalom boker tov*’.

“Initially I didn’t think much of it because you get that quite often around the Jewish neighbourhood. But then Sibisiso, or Baruch as he refers to himself, begins asking me questions re my car and specific

Johannesburg last week from a symposium for Jewish and Hebrew in Education in Cape Town when he too was surprised by a Zimbabwean, calling himself Israel, who spoke convincing Hebrew. Widmonte was also so thrilled by this, he recorded a conversation with the man, which he posted on Facebook. In the recording, Israel told the rabbi that he learnt to speak Hebrew when studying at a Jewish school in Harare for three years.

The rabbi wrote on the social media platform, “What an astounding encounter.” Unfortunately, he was unable to comment further.



Rabbi Yehuda Stern and Sibisiso (Baruch) Zulu

Since Stern posted the video of their encounter on Instagram, Sibisiso says he has had people coming up to him at work to speak to him in Hebrew or ask him about the video.

The caption of the video reads: “Living in South Africa has its challenges, but there’s certain beautiful things you get here that

petrol requirements in Hebrew. He was hilarious, and put a big smile on my face. You’ve really got to love Africa!”

By Monday evening, the video had been viewed by 7 000 people.

Another rabbi, Rav Ramon Widmonte, the dean of the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, was returning to

Cycling philanthropist rides to victory in Scotland

JACOB GURVIS – JTA

Israeli-Canadian billionaire and philanthropist Sylvan Adams, a key figure in the development of Israeli competitive cycling, won a world championship of his own in the sport’s 65 to 69 age group.

At the 2023 UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale) Cycling World Championships in Scotland, Adams, who owns the Israel-Premier Tech Cycling Team, finished first in the Masters 65-69 age group on 4 August. Then on Monday, Adams, who turns 65 in November, also finished first in his age bracket in the championship’s individual time trial.

In spite of not picking up cycling until he was in his 40s, Adams has previously won numerous international competitions, including the 2017 World Championship in Manchester, England, run by the UCI – the main body that oversees world cycling events.

But he said his latest victory had extra significance because it’s his first world championship as an Israeli cyclist. He had previously competed under the Canadian flag.

“I’m happy my hard training paid off, and proud to have won this world title for Israel,” Adams said after winning the championship, according to a press release. “My eyes were moist as they played our national anthem, *Hatikvah*, to which I emotionally sang along.”

The former real-estate executive has been a key proponent and funder of cycling in Israel, where he has lived since 2015. Adams helped to establish the Sylvan Adams Cycling Network, the country’s first cycling institute, at Tel Aviv University in 2017, and he also donated money to support the creation of a commuter bike path in Tel Aviv, also named for him.

In 2018, Adams established the first velodrome, or track cycling arena, in the Middle East, in Tel Aviv. He also donated \$80 million (R1.4 billion) to help bring the opening stage of the Giro d’Italia to Israel in 2018 – the first time the century-old competition was held outside of Europe.

Adams was the son of Marcel Adams (originally Abramovich), a Holocaust survivor from Romania who would go on to become a billionaire real-estate titan



Sylvan Adams

in Canada. The elder Adams died in 2020 at 100 years old.

Aside from cycling, Adams and his family foundation have also supported the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities; Spacell, Israel’s non-profit space organisation; and multiple medical centres in Israel. He additionally played a role in bringing pop star Madonna to the Eurovision song competition in Israel in 2019.

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Bima and beyond – Barmitzvah boys go the distance

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Whether they live in places with minimal access to Jewish life or have a connection to a specific shul or teacher far away, some boys literally go the extra mile when it comes to their Barmitzvah.

And, in connecting online with their teachers abroad, not only do they strengthen their ties to Judaism, they bring their families along for the ride.

When Riley Chait started preparing for his Barmitzvah in February, he didn't just have to learn his portion, he had to learn the Hebrew alphabet – entirely online. Riley, who lives with his parents and younger brother in Gaborone, Botswana, celebrated his Barmitzvah at Sydenham Shul on 29 July.

"Riley had never experienced a Barmitzvah before his own and had no real expectation or understanding of what was expected on the day," said his parents, David and Isobel, who met and married in Port Elizabeth, now Gqeberha.



Rabbi Yehuda Stern and Riley Chait

Though both their children, Riley and his younger brother, Callum, were born in the city, the family lived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for five years, briefly returned to South Africa, and then moved to Gaborone, where David heads up Botswana operations for Coca-Cola Beverages Africa.

Jewish heritage has always been important to the Chaits, yet communal life in Botswana is limited. "The kids' exposure to their Jewish heritage was purely from family and other Jewish friends in our small communities who would bring us together on Jewish holy days," they say. "They had no formal education or instruction on Hebrew or Judaica prior to the Barmitzvah." Though there's a very small Jewish community in Gaborone, which is five hours from Johannesburg, there's no shul there.

As Riley's Barmitzvah approached, his parents decided to find a Johannesburg shul that would assist them. "It was important to us to give Riley the experience of standing up in a shul and reading from the Torah," they said. Seeking a shul with a vibrant, welcoming, and young community that balanced services with an active events calendar, Isobel came across a post by Sydenham Shul's youth group and contacted Rabbi Yehuda Stern. "It sounded like exactly what we were looking for," she said.

Riley soon began learning his portion online with the shul's Barmitzvah teacher, Jonty Cohen, who began by teaching him Hebrew. Having become accustomed to online instruction for his Barmitzvah students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cohen embraced the challenge. Though loadshedding, concentration, and a lack of face-to-face contact were challenging, he



Austin, Rordan, Cillian, and Melissa Fagan

Photo: Natalie Sternberg

said occasionally seeing Riley in person helped to allay any concerns.

"Putting on tefillin with Riley and taking the Torah out with him for the first time filled me with a sense of achievement, and confirmed for me the love of what I do and why I continue to do it," he said.

Today, Cohen calls Riley a friend and an inspiration. "While I might have been his teacher for the past five months, Riley has taught me a great deal about adversity, determination, and perseverance. With all the uncertainty, never once did Riley give up. He stayed true to himself, his parents, and most of all, to his learning, his upbringing, and his Jewish heritage," he said.

The Barmitzvah process was a growth experience for Riley, say his parents. "For a kid who had never been exposed to an occasion of such significance in the Jewish religion, it was really meaningful for his identity as a Jewish boy growing into a Jewish man. To see and connect with such a warm community and rabbi at Sydenham Shul was a hugely positive experience for him. It showed him that his identity isn't just his family, his religion is also an important part of who he is."

It's an experience echoed by Riley. "It made me feel a lot more connected to Judaism and gave the religion a lot more meaning in my life," he said.

Stern said Riley's Barmitzvah had inspired his brother, and was a trigger for the family to embrace Jewish learning, even though living in Botswana made it more of a challenge. "What Riley has perhaps done is reconnect his own parents to Jewish life and to their upbringing and community experience," he said.

Stern also highlighted the knock-on effect that Riley's Barmitzvah had on a young member of the Sydenham congregation who attended shul on the weekend of the Barmitzvah after an extended absence. Greeting him, Stern asked what brought him to shul. He said, "When I saw on social media that you're celebrating a Barmitzvah boy from Botswana, I was so inspired that I said if that boy can have his Barmitzvah at shul, I need to be at shul as well."

In spite of moving from Cape Town to a town in Ireland at the age of 11, Cillian Fagan had his Barmitzvah at Cape Town's Temple Israel Congregation earlier this year. His family remain online members of the shul as they haven't found an accessible progressive Jewish community

in a predominantly Catholic country.

"Cillian had a year of Hebrew lessons online with a teacher allocated by Temple Israel," said his mother, Melissa. "Making the journey to Cape Town for the service allowed us to gather for a *simcha* and

simultaneously have a long overdue family reunion."

Her younger son, Rordan, is learning Hebrew online through Temple Israel, and will celebrate his Barmitzvah there next year. "Because our family is mixed – my husband isn't Jewish – it's important to me to expose our sons to our traditions and especially important that they have Barmitzvahs," said Melissa.

"I've seen an incredible change in Cillian since the event. He's more mature and thoughtful. Knowing his heritage and learning the Jewish way of life, however you look at it, whether you're frum or progressive, has much to offer in terms of living as a responsible and compassionate member of our global society."

Adina Roth, a clinical psychologist who runs Barmitzvah, Batmitzvah, and Jewish Studies programmes, left South Africa in October 2022 to become head of Jewish life at Emanuel School in Sydney. Roth has been teaching B'nai mitzvah classes online for many years, first because of

previous connections with families who lived overseas, and then due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching online, she built on the trust and familiarity of her established relationships and embraced the chance to adapt her methods during the pandemic.

When she moved to Australia, Roth committed to completing lessons with existing students through private online Barmitzvah lessons and a group Batmitzvah course. Though time differences required sacrifices, she and her students embraced the journey and co-ordinated ceremony dates so that she could attend in person.

"I feel a sense of closure having walked them through this process and also being able to run the ceremonies for my B'nai mitzvah," she says. "Now, although I'm super busy in Sydney, there's an opportunity to keep these connections going through this kind of online model. We'll see what the future holds."

When crisis becomes a drama: a survivors' tale

HEATHER DJUNGA

The COVID-19 pandemic and electricity crisis have pushed many creatives in our community – especially those who require an audience – to the limit, but for many, it has spurred creativity to change, adapt, and grow.

The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to artistes and entertainment professionals who have used the winds of change to propel them in new directions.

Actress, playwright, and director Sharon Spiegel-Wagner wears many caps as a professional. She said the COVID-19 pandemic had been a huge game changer for her and many other industry professionals because, 'there was room to own a bigger piece of artistic identity'.

"From vocalists singing from the balconies of Italy to Broadway stars singing in their living rooms on Zoom, entertainers and performers tried desperately to stay relevant during the pandemic," she said. "Many of us, pushed to the point of desperation and needing an outlet for the fear and insecurity caused by the pandemic, finally said, 'I'm trying this. If it doesn't work, it doesn't matter because at least I tried.'"

The result of this striving for Spiegel-Wagner was the production *Locked Upside Down*, showcased at Daphne Kuhn's Theatre on the Square in Sandton.

She wrote it alongside friend and fellow playwright, actress, and co-director Lorri Strauss. The moms shared their experiences during lockdown and realised that they had good material under their noses for a production.

"We laughed about home schooling; only being able to walk outside at certain hours; only getting essentials for food. It was a complete horror show." However, instead of crying, they chose to laugh about what was happening and teamed with Alan Swerdlow to create their stage gem.

Strauss said she had learned much about herself and her capabilities through the challenges of the past few years. "I have discovered that I'm resilient," she said. She also honed her professional skills during lockdown. "I signed up for online courses on Masterclass during lockdown. I did an acting course with Natalie Portman, and a singing course with Christina Aguilera, to name a few."

Spiegel-Wagner believes that the pandemic and current challenges have forced all artistes, even the most established and experienced, to reinvent and pivot their skill set. "They have put so many things into perspective for us and in many ways, this is the first time that all artists are in the same boat."

Dorothy Gould, the founder of Johannesburg Awakening Minds (JAM), which she founded to teach acting to Johannesburg's homeless and underprivileged, said history had shown that pressure was the catalyst for masterpieces. "Shakespeare wrote 37 of his plays and many poems during the Black Death," Gould said.

She believes pressure is a catalyst for reinventing and honing skills, and gaining new artistic direction "because creativity gives a voice to the deep-seated emotions created by change and uncertainty". She chose Shakespeare as the material of choice for JAM because of the plethora of emotions expressed in the scripts which allow actors to find solace and expression by stepping into the characters' shoes.

Vicky Friedman, the new chief executive of the National Children's Theatre, said she believed artists had always been a resilient sort as the creative industry is traditionally tough, and requires determination and a measure of resilience to earn an income.

Friedman decided to work with her passion for children's theatre shortly before the onset of the pandemic. When it interrupted her plans, she sought out a plan B, and started writing a children's musical focused on climate change. It will be released early next year.



Vicky Friedman

The challenges of recent years have given Friedman greater professional clarity, and prepared her for her new position at the Children's Theatre. When the position recently became vacant, she realised her passion and experience were a perfect fit.

Some artistes were forced to extend their skills to survive during the difficult pandemic months.

Actress, director, and producer Gina Shmukler said though she has had many titles as a creative, she was forced to adopt new ones as a result of COVID-19, saying that the tragic and tough period forced many to go beyond their realm of comfort and explore new territory professionally.

Shmukler had two clients who were a godsend during this time and allowed her to "get on their raft" during the tough months of the pandemic. Like many businesses, they explored the online

world of virtual events and Shmukler honed her skills on this platform. She said there were times where as many as 500 attendants were at an "event", and though she longed to be in the room with those present, she realised the new platform was essential for her and others' survival.

Other artistes have found new creative direction, seeking to use difficult circumstances to give meaning to their experiences.

Megan Choritz, the owner of theatre company Improvisation, said the COVID-19 lockdown happened shortly after her marriage fell apart. Isolated in her home and going through a divorce, she took what she had in her hand – a skill for writing and her story – and began to write. The result, her recently published book, *Lost Property*.

"It wasn't that I hadn't written before. However, the challenges put me in a situation where it felt like writing was my way of surviving. The book gave me some kind of refuge, and became a way to share meaning with others."

"Perhaps in a decade's time, when we look back, we'll be able to pinpoint the masterpieces that were created in the years that followed the pandemic, such as Master KG's *Jerusalema* or *Mandela the Musical*," said Friedman.

Shmukler said it would be interesting to see what became of the "unprocessed trauma" which she believes still exists in professionals following those years. "Who knows how it will come out? I suspect it might find its way onto the stage," she said.

Active citizenship good news story of the day

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Corruption, crime, maladministration, economic woes, Eskom – there’s no escaping the negativity that pervades South Africa’s news headlines. Yet, there’s another South African story, one of ordinary people making an extraordinary difference in the country they love.

So said renowned journalist and author, Mandy Wiener, and Good Things Guy founder Brent Lindeque in a joint keynote address at Sydenham Hebrew Preschool in Johannesburg last week. In her weekday 702 radio show, articles, and books, Wiener seeks to bring light to heavy media content, while through his website, goodthingsguy.com, Lindeque works to counter prevailing negativity with stories of hope and inspiration.

Together, they stressed that we need to acknowledge the challenges South Africa faces in order to make a change. “We need to have an understanding of where we are as a country if we’re going to get a full appreciation of what needs to be done to fix it,” said Wiener.

Though she says her job is literally to tell South Africans how bad things are in the country, Wiener also consciously looks to add a dose of positivity. There’s a negativity bias in news reporting that goes back to our inborn survival instinct, but there’s also recognition of the need for light and shade in the media to bring some balance, she said. “People are looking for some kind of reprieve from the negativity,” which is why she chats to Lindeque once a week on her radio show, one of its most popular features.

“When you start to surround yourself with good news, you start to see more good news,” said Lindeque. Yet, though he’s in the job of spreading positive stories, he said having uncomfortable conversations is necessary, pointing out that “hope alone can’t fix what’s broken”.

“We’re in a serious crisis as a country,” said Wiener. Though we’re not a failed state as many argue, things are definitely concerning, she said, referencing slow growth, high unemployment, and widespread corruption and its detrimental economic impact.

That’s our can-do spirit as South Africans - people look at the chaos and see opportunity

In our daily lives, we feel the impact of the rising cost of living coupled with service delivery failures – from potholes to water challenges to electricity. “Loadshedding isn’t just about what it’s doing to our businesses, to the traffic, or cellphone networks,” said Lindeque. “It’s also huge when it comes to our mental health. Loadshedding has been far worse this year than any other years before.” The impact on our state of mind is undeniable.

Yet, he said, “We’re *gatvol* but not yet despondent.” Wiener agrees. “Though we can’t gloss over the reality of the situation, we’re seeing that South Africans don’t just want to complain. They want to do something; they’re asking how they can make things better. The reality is that the default negative narrative about South Africa isn’t true.

“There are incredible South Africans every day who are changing the narrative of the country,” said Wiener. “These are people who are patriots, who stand up and do the right thing – good civil servants, active citizens, and whistleblowers.” By so often amplifying negative stories, we’re not giving enough attention to the stories about the heroes, the helpers, and the hope-dealers, said Lindeque.

Lindeque’s inbox overflows with good news stories every day – stories of active citizens physically getting involved and making a difference. There’s the story of a senior citizen who fixed more than 50 potholes in his neighbourhood in two months. There’s another about a woman who decided to clean Hennops River, inspired her community to join her, and started a non-profit organisation called Hennops Revival, which recently celebrated

removing two million kilograms of trash out of the river.

There are countless stories of such individuals as well as whistleblowers, charitable organisations, and businesses changing their own narrative as well as the narrative of the country, said Wiener. “In every instance where government has failed in South Africa, civil society has stepped into the breach and held the line. Of course, government needs to come to the party too, though, it can’t merely outsource the responsibility of running the country to the private sector and civil society. Public-private partnerships are also key. A combination of these things need to work to make sure that the country functions.”

From challenge comes opportunity, said Wiener. “That’s our can-do spirit as South Africans – people look at the chaos and see opportunity.” We see it through small businesses run by passionate entrepreneurs and in the country’s informal sector, which despite the red tape is making things happen.

Government does get some things right, she said. “Operation Vulindlela, a joint initiative of the presidency and National Treasury, aimed at reducing red tape across government departments, has had successes. We’re also still living in a functional democracy, there isn’t complete anarchy on the streets. We still have one of the most remarkable Constitutions in the world. That’s something that you should be proud of.”

So, what can we do as individuals to change the narrative that surrounds us every day? “You don’t have to take on an enormous project,” said Wiener. “You can have little wins, do things that can create change and also be the catalyst for change.”

Acknowledging that many are contemplating emigration, Wiener said it was a necessary consideration. “We’re not saying that you have to stay here,” she said. “However, if you do choose to stay, then you’ve got to be here and do something about what’s going on.”

Offering practical tools on how to become change agents, Wiener and Lindeque stressed the need to educate yourself about what’s happening around you. Know the contact details of your neighbourhood police chief or area councillor. Consider the news you consume and share. “People tend to seek out that which amplifies their

perception, but you’re never going to change your perspective if you continue viewing the world in the same way,” said Wiener.

They also suggested being an advocate, whether by offering your skills or donating to civil groups. Focus on solutions rather than problems, and get others involved.

Wiener stressed the importance of voting, especially in a country where only 25% of eligible South Africans voted in the last election. We may find ourselves in a coalition government at national level in 2024, so every vote truly counts, she said.

Kindness is also key, concluded Lindeque, especially in inspiring active citizenship. He shared a quote from late American TV host Fred Rogers, who said, “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You’ll always find people who are helping.’”


This thinking underpins Lindeque’s philosophy. “When the news is at

its worst and scariest, I wait an hour or two for that helper to appear, and those are the stories we tell,” he said.

“So, how do you make change? If you can’t see a helper, then it’s your responsibility to become one.”

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Amateur filmmaker lands big fish with documentary award

TALI FEINBERG

When Capetonian David Nivison (23) decided to give up his studies and try his hand at filmmaking, it was a huge risk. Never did he imagine that just three years later, he would win the Audience Choice Award at the recent Art of Documentary (AOD) One Day Documentary Film Festival for his short film *Oscar: Portrait of a Photojournalist*. AOD is a leading online film academy. Nivison's film gives a short but fascinating snapshot of the life of Guatemalan photojournalist Oscar Gutierrez, who lives in the small Cape fishing village of Kalk Bay.

This is also where Nivison has made his home. It's on the other side of the peninsula to the Jewish hub of Sea Point, yet just like that cosmopolitan suburb, it offers a wide variety of characters and stories for filmmakers like Nivison, who graduated from the Orms Cape Town School of Photography. Nivison's debut documentary, *Of the Sea*, took an intimate look at the impact of commercial overfishing on the fishermen and women who have worked out of Kalk Bay harbour for generations, and focused on an 85-year-old lifelong fisherman by the name of Solly Solomon. "It formed part of my final assignment at Orms," says Nivison. "I wanted to shine a light on people and individuals in the Kalk Bay fishing community who were being negatively affected by laws and tenders put in place by the government."

Now, he has continued to spotlight this vibrant community in his award-winning film. "Oscar swims at the Dalebrook tidal pool every day. You can't live in Kalk Bay and not be acquainted in some way with him," says Nivison. "I was looking for a subject for the AOD Festival, and he was intriguing for me just as a character. I arranged to meet him for coffee, and told him about the festival. He was on board immediately."

"I suppose it's a coincidence that my two documentaries have focused on individuals from the Kalk Bay community. It definitely wasn't intended to be this way. I guess it says a lot about the community as whole. It's rich in history, and

culturally diverse. There are characters from all walks of life. You don't have to go far to find someone with a story worth telling."

Nivison, who was born and raised in Cape Town, attended Bishops Diocesan College in Rondebosch. His father was a TV commercials producer and owned a production company during what he would describe as the golden era of TV and commercial films in South Africa. So, Nivison was aware of film from a young age, but picked up a camera for the first time only when he was about 17.

"After I finished matric, I wasn't 100% sure what I wanted to study. My school never really advertised the possibility of travelling or taking a gap year. I think in hindsight this is something that I would have loved to do," he says.

Shining a small light on the abundant life of Oscar was such an incredible privilege, and I hope this film did justice in capturing his joyful, quirky, and effervescent nature. Such a zest for life is truly hard to come by.

"The options we were exposed to were simple – Go to UCT [the University of Cape Town] or Stellenbosch, study a commerce degree, and enter the corporate world after that. Originally, I wanted to study architecture, but the more research I did, the more I realised it wasn't exactly for me. I thought property studies would be a good plan B, but it ended up being very commerce-based."

"When the COVID-19 pandemic came around, it gave me a lot of time to think about what I really enjoyed and what I wanted to pursue. With the support of my parents, I made the decision to pull out of my studies and pursue something with more creative stimulus. I decided to pick up a camera, and from there I'd say the rest is history."

"To have received the Audience Choice Award among many other beautiful and unique films really validated my decision to pursue filmmaking as a full-time career," he says. "It was an absolute joy to film and cut this piece together. Shining a small light on the abundant life of Oscar was such an incredible privilege, and I hope this film did justice in capturing his joyful, quirky, and effervescent nature. Such a zest for life is truly hard to come by."

During the pandemic, Gutierrez decided to scan a lifetime's worth of photography negatives so that his legacy could live on through his images. Nivison's film gives a glimpse into this process, and a day in the life of Gutierrez. The entirety of the film was shot in a single day, which included Nivison getting into the icy ocean to film Gutierrez taking his daily morning swim.

David Nivison

"He has led a fascinating life," says Nivison. "He also wants to leave a tangible legacy, which is something I can relate to, I suppose. The biggest challenge of making the film was definitely the time frame. We had one day so shoot the entirety of the film and it was a one-man crew. We shot morning to night, and squeezing in everything was quite a big ask."

Nivison says he was "completely shocked" when he was officially selected as a finalist in the festival, "let alone winning the award! I felt proud to have received this award, especially because it was the festival attendees who decided

that mine stood out to them." Where to from here? "I'm just building up my reel and gaining experience in the industry. I do a lot of editing work, and this has been my bread and butter recently. I want to experience as many aspects of the industry as possible and gain more experience and knowledge. In terms of *Oscar*, I'm still trying to figure out the best way to market and leverage it. My greatest aspiration is to shoot short dock-style films for brands and clients that I believe in and have an affinity with. Anything related to the ocean is a win for me." He doesn't feel like he's in a position

to give advice to other aspiring filmmakers, although he says "passion projects are a really great way to produce work that you enjoy. It's probably the best way to build up your reel when you just start off – that's how I did it at least. Finding mentors and people in the industry that you can learn from is also beneficial." Nivison says he's proud of his Jewish upbringing and heritage. "As Jewish people, we understand the importance of community. This could possibly be why I've always chosen subjects who really value the communities that surround them," he says.

Winning with witty theatre about family ties

Israeli actor and director, Roy Horovitz, had just arrived in South Africa to perform *Do I win, or do I lose?* when the *SA Jewish Report* caught up with him.

What drew you to working in theatre?

I was born in Haifa, Israel, and studied at Tel Aviv University, and got a PhD in theatre and comparative literature from Bar-Ilan University. I started acting as early as 10 years old. A friend of mine dragged me along to an acting class. He landed up staying only a week, and I loved it, never leaving. My parents have never forgiven my friend for introducing me to acting!

What inspired *Do I win, or do I lose?*

I don't want to give away too much, but it's based on a true story. I met a guy in Edinburgh, Scotland, and he told me a story about his grandfather. It was moving, as well as funny, and included themes of victory and living life to the fullest, which really inspired me.



What can we expect in this show?

A combination of humour and heavy subject matter – it really has it all. The show is moving and funny, as well as witty and clever. We did a post-show discussion with the audience after one show where people were saying how much the show reminded them of their own families.

Why will watching the show leave us rushing to embrace our loved ones?

It highlights the importance of family ties – why it's so important to spend as much time as possible with loved ones and not take things for granted. If you can't embrace your loved ones, you're more than welcome to hug me after the show!

Why bring this show to South Africa?

This is my fourth or fifth time in South Africa, and I have even been to the Grahamstown Festival, so South Africa is like my second home. I met Daphne Kuhn a few years ago at the International Exposure of Israeli Theatre (Isra-Drama), which is a festival

that promotes Israeli plays and theatre.

Do I win, or do I lose? has universal appeal. We've done shows in Canada and the United States, and have plans to go to Turkey and Malta. It's a play for everyone, not only Jews or Israelis.

What is it about South Africa that brings you back here?

The warm welcome and the passion people have for theatre. I also love the nature – the Kruger National Park especially – and the food is great.

What's your message for the South African Jewish community?

I know many ex-South Africans in Ra'anana (Ra'ananafontein). Fingers crossed, everyone keeps safe and healthy here. This is a wonderful community where I have had great past experiences.

How do you feel about the anti-Israel sentiment you find in South Africa?

It's a global thing, but I hope for better days soon. The Israeli government is problematic at the moment, which doesn't help, but I'm hopeful things will get better.

What's your response to this sentiment?

We're all humans at the end of the day, and I hope the show helps to change people's minds about Israel.

Is it true that Israel has the highest rate of theatre goers in the world? If so, why do you believe this is?

It's true. For the past 12 to 13 years, Israel has had the highest rate of theatre goers per capita. It's something we're very proud of. In cities like New York

and London, many tourists go and see theatre, but Israel is different because it's the locals who go. Israel is in love with theatre!

You've played to audiences all over the world. How does the South African audience compare?

It's the best! It's warm, smart, not afraid to laugh, and not reserved.

What would you like the take-home message to be?

Take advantage of any given moment. Be good to one another. (I know that sounds cliché.)

What's next for you?

I'm off to Belgrade, Serbia. We start rehearsals for a play called *The Irish Curse*, which is a book by Martin Casella. It's about a support group for five men with small packages. It's funny and witty.

• *Do I win or Do I Lose?* is at *Theatre on the Square* from 8 to 19 August.

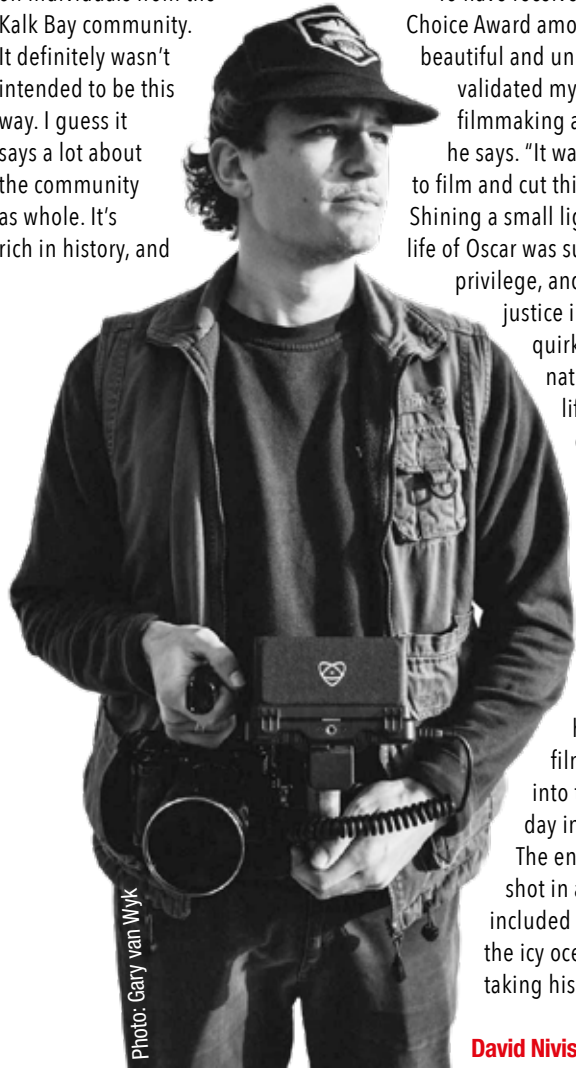


Photo: Gary van Wyk

Forensic pathologist Ryan Blumenthal has just brought out a new book titled *Risking Life for Death – Lessons for the Living from the Autopsy Table*. The SA Jewish Report speaks to him.

Suffice to say, there was simply no other discipline which could contain my unique kind of “mindedness”.

I can tell a lot of what is happening in the world just from noticing what's happening on my autopsy table. I can tell if a new gang has moved into the neighbourhood. I can tell if there's a new or emergent drug or disease, and I can even get a good sense of the health (physical, mental, and psychological) of the nation without necessarily venturing outdoors. You need resilience in the face of the reality of death and tragedy. It's a calling, requiring absolute professionalism. One of the greatest challenges is to maintain a positive, optimistic attitude.



Collecting data for *Risking Life for Death* was like having a thousand puzzle pieces in a box. Until you put all the pieces together, you really have no idea what the final picture looks like. And now, at long last, after years of rearranging those puzzle pieces, they finally make sense to me. My duty was to escort the reader down my long path of discovery.

I felt it was a moral obligation. There remains so much injustice in this world because some truly evil people share this planet with us. In the battle against the forces of evil, forensic pathology isn't some side show, it plays a central role.

It highlights the many dangers forensic pathologists are exposed to daily. As we try to unravel the puzzle of someone's death, we often face life-threatening infections, toxic gases, and the hazards associated with high-profile cases – in effect, risking our own lives to solve someone else's death.

It's the bedrock of modern forensics. Everyone's favourite detective uses it. Dr Edmond Locard formulated the basic principle that with contact between two items, there will be an exchange, or stated another way, every contact leaves a trace. The principle holds, in essence, that the perpetrator of a crime will bring something into the crime scene and leave with something from it, and both of these can be used as forensic evidence.

I argue that everything can be trace-and-tracked back to its origin using Locard's Exchange Principle. I believe the dead have so much to teach the living. I believe that much of the unhappiness in this world is preventable. I also believe that an understanding of "contact theory" can help provide us with a better philosophy for growing older.

In Africa, every day you go to work you're at risk: you never know what may be lurking inside – or outside – a dead body. I have been present when a cocked-and-loaded gun has fallen out of a victim's trousers, and I have found sharp knives, needles, and even screwdrivers on bodies.

Other hazards are Hepatitis, HIV, and other blood-borne diseases, as well as exposure to dangerous biologic agents such as other highly infective viruses or bacteria. There could be dangerous foreign bodies hidden within the body: hidden sharp objects; needle fragments in intravenous drug users; implanted cardioverter defibrillators which can shock the pathologist; or dangerous bullets.

Sometimes, we're exposed to dangerous chemicals: nerve agents; blood agents; blister agents; heavy metals; volatile toxins; pulmonary agents; incapacitating agents; explosives;

flammable gases; poisonous industrial gases; or corrosive industrial acids and bases. We may even be exposed to radioactive beads from thyroid or prostate cancer patients.

Often, huge amounts of money are at stake, depending on whether a death resulted from injury at work, whether a shooting was accidental or suicidal, or whether a heart attack occurred before, during, or after a motor vehicle accident.

Occasionally, we have to deal with a “hot potato” case. This is a case that’s so politically charged and highly publicised that no-one wants to deal with it. We may even be asked to investigate war crimes, high-profile assassinations, mass disasters, and armed conflicts. For these cases, one needs a really thick skin. Our patients may have died due to political, gang, or mafia-related agencies.

As a forensic pathologist, you obviously never want to miss a murder. Therefore, we treat every single case as a possible murder. In South Africa, because we don't have all the fancy gadgets, we're limited in how many special investigations we can do. Yet, you would be surprised by what can be diagnosed with the most basic of senses: sight, hearing, touch, and smell.

There are two basic rules: assume that murderers are cleverer than you, and assume that they know all the methods. They may have downloaded the latest forensic journals, or could even own copies of all the forensic homicide investigation books. They could also have watched shows like *CSI* or *The Mentalist*.

Generally speaking, not that much is new in murder. South Africans mostly die from firearms, blunt-force trauma, and sharp-force trauma. The biblical ways of killing and dying are still very much alive and well in these modern times. But some causes of death we'll never know.

The fancy equipment one sees on hit television series such as *CSI* simply isn't available, there are regular labour issues such as strikes, there's often no electricity (the result of loadshedding), running water, or insect spray, and there are flies. Lots and lots of flies.

Since the publication of my first book, *Autopsy: Life in the Trenches with a Forensic Pathologist*, people have sent me long messages about how the book affected them. There came a flood of Facebook friend requests, and I received countless selfies of strangers on Instagram holding my book. One of these was from someone in a maximum-security prison whose picture was taken in full prison uniform with handcuffs on, while holding my book.

The youngest person to claim to have read my book was seven years old, while the oldest, was 96. At the time of writing, I have received countless questions and comments from as far afield as Marion Island. My new book is written for the same diverse audience.

If you hear advice from grandparents or elders, odds are that it works most of the time. So too with the ancient religions – there’s a lot of wisdom in Judaism, especially when it comes to one’s “moral compass”. One of my favourite quotes is from Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi


(1745-1812), the founder of Chabad. It pretty much sums it all

up: "A little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness."



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Banyana Banyana glory focuses attention on women’s sport

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Spectators went crazy cheering the Banyana Banyana players during their lap of honour after their 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup Round of 16 match against the Netherlands at Sydney’s Allianz Stadium on 6 August, according to South African Jocelyn Kuper, who attended the game.

“Given that it’s Women’s Month, I hope a lot more South Africans see women’s football and women’s sport for the passion, togetherness, and celebration that it brings to South Africa,” says Erin Herz, who appears to be the first Jewish woman to play for Banyana Banyana. “I’m really hoping it’s going to have a huge impact on the overall outlook of women’s sport in South Africa. Banyana Banyana definitely stands out as one of our most successful national teams.”

Although Banyana Banyana lost 2-0 to the Netherlands and thus exited the tournament, they were the first South African team – including men and women – to qualify for the Round of 16.

were well prepared and meticulous, there was still some incredible play from the Banyana Banyana side and some moments where the teams were evenly matched. Banyana Banyana played their hearts out.”

Kuper, who headed up a marketing

goosebumps for me and my son,” Kuper says. “We left the stadium pleased for our team, which had done well and had handled itself well in defeat. It was great to feel so attached to South Africa and its soccer passion on a chilly Sydney evening.”

belief that the team’s sponsor, Sasol, had in them”.

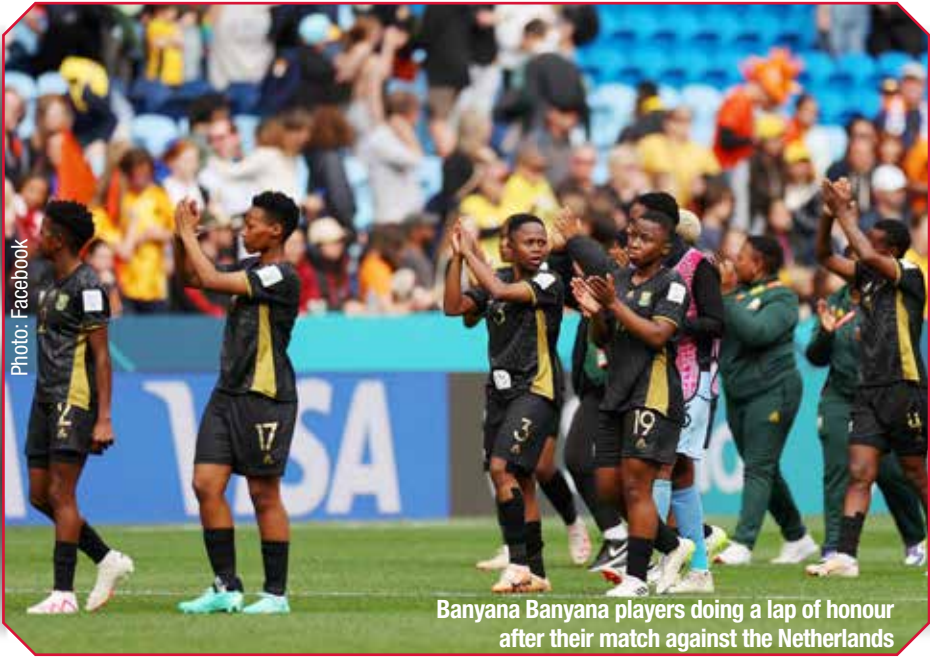
“I know this because I negotiated the sponsor with then South African Football Association President Molefi Oliphant in 2006 and 2008. Finance for the players and organisation of the team is done through Sasol. Because it’s a stable environment, they succeed.”

players who play for clubs in their respective countries. “The emergence of African footballers is going to be evident in the next four years,” Hack says. They are a lot stronger, quicker, and more technically advanced. More of them will get to play for clubs in Europe.”

Says Roth, “What makes it so poignant is that each woman in the South African team has a story to tell, a profound and inspiring back story as to how she came to play for our national soccer team.”

Each Banyana Banyana player will receive US\$60 000 (R1.1m) from FIFA for reaching the Round of 16. Banyana Banyana goalkeeper Kaylin Swart, who has a nine-to-five job, said “this is life-changing for us”, while Banyana Banyana attacking star Hildah “Breadwinner” Magaia said the payment would help her provide for her family.

Hack says women’s football has come a long way in general in the past four years, “when it was all about the United States and Europe. Don’t write off Japan – who take on Sweden in the quarters on 11 August – to win the World Cup. I made this prediction eight or 10 years ago because they’ve got the ability and infrastructure.”



Banyana Banyana players doing a lap of honour after their match against the Netherlands

and media research company in South Africa, now lives in England and was in Australia to visit her son, business leader Dr Andy Kuper.

“The match started with *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, which brought

Veteran South African football administrator Raymond Hack says the Banyana Banyana players did “fantastically” in this year’s showpiece, and attributes their success to their hard work and “the

Multinational team drives SA girls soccer in US

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Team Maccabi South Africa’s girls’ soccer coach Darryn Edinburg is counting on his squad to have a special kind of *gees* at the JCC (Jewish Community Center) Maccabi Games in Fort Lauderdale, United States (US), this month.

That’s because two America-based players from JCC San Diego have joined the nine South Africans in his multinational team. “I’m excited about having the US girls,” says Edinburg, a Johannesburg physiotherapist. “We have to open up and see how the other girls do things and accommodate them. It’s an amazing life lesson for the South African girls”.

Luna Beyhan, a Grade 10 pupil at Herzlia who has been playing soccer since she was four, is the team’s captain and the vice-captain is Edinburg’s daughter, Livya, a Grade 9 pupil at King David Linksfield (KDL) who plays for the Gauteng Development League Ladies Highlands Park team.

On 7 August, the team lost their first game 7-3 against a combined US team from JCC Philadelphia, Ohio, and Cleveland – many of the teams are made up of different JCCs – before succumbing to a 4-2 defeat against JCC Dallas in a scorching hot Fort Lauderdale. Beyhan scored in both matches and that night, she was Team SA’s flag bearer at the opening ceremony. Her team played Argentina and Fort Lauderdale the following day.

Mia Kayle, 15, who plays for KDL’s first team, and Herzlia’s Amy Distiller, 14, are excited to be representing Team SA at the games. “I was a bit apprehensive as I’ve never been to America before and it’s a long flight, but the organisers have been amazing,” Kayle says. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Besides goalkeeper Kayle and fullback/defensive midfielder Distiller, the other

South Africans in the team are KDL’s Dakota Trakman, Raquel Bravo, and Livya Edinburg; and Herzlia’s Izzy Abrahamson, Luna Beyhan, and Ruby Snaid.

“The potential of these girls is good,” Edinburg says. “The only obstacle from a preparation point of view was getting the Joburg and Cape Town girls together, which was difficult in terms of the timing of this tournament – it’s literally just after the school



Team South Africa before their first JCC Maccabi Games match

holidays. The girls trained in two separate units in Joburg and in Cape Town, and had a few practices in the US before the tournament.”

Nearly 2 000 Jewish teens from the US, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Ukraine, Israel, Great Britain, and Mexico headed to Fort Lauderdale for the games, which take place from 6 to 11 August. Team SA is represented in dance and girls’ soccer, the other sports being baseball, basketball, ice hockey, girls’ volleyball, flag football, table tennis, tennis, and swimming.

The soccer at the games is seven-a-side. “It’s similar to the sevens rugby,” Edinburg says. “It’s pretty much on a full field, so there’s a lot of running and work to be done.”



Amy Distiller

He says Team SA’s Cape Town-based players play a lot of futsal, which is five-a-side, so they are used to small-sided games. “When I’ve been taking the Johannesburg girls for training, we’ve been playing small-sided games as well just to get used to the pace, movement, and difference of not being able to count on the other four players that you normally have. So we’re quite well prepared from a theoretical point of view.”

Though Kayle says she loves the “tranquillity” on the field, Distiller likes the outdoors, physicality, and athleticism and team environment associated with soccer.

Distiller, who captains the under-16 team of Cape Town club Badgers, has been watching the ongoing FIFA Women’s World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. “Although Amy likes to play more than she likes to watch, she has been following it and the Netball World Cup too,” says her mom, Suki.

The South African players were selected at trials in Johannesburg and Cape Town. “I went down a couple of months ago to Cape Town for the trials there,” Edinburg says, “and was very pleasantly surprised with the standard of the soccer players there.”

For the games, his players are donning kit with the JCC San Diego logo, and have the privilege of a green home strip and gold away strip.

The girls are being hosted by local Jewish families, including ex-pat Clive Horwitz, his wife, Debbie, and their son, Dylan, who is competing in swimming. “At the Maccabi Games, you stay all together as a country. But for the JCC, the girls are being split up into different groups. My daughter and three of her teammates are staying with the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Speaking to her on Zoom to introduce ourselves, she had tears in her eyes, saying that it was such a *mitzvah* for them to host the kids.”



Mia Kayle

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

The ceremony honoured Kallenbach, a pioneering early Johannesburg Jewish architect and developer, for making Tolstoy Farm a possibility by buying the 1 000-acre property in 1910 and donating it to the Satyagraha Movement.



"Tolstoy Farm was part of a chain of progressive,

The plaques include a third, photographic plaque titled "A Staunch Tolstoyan" which shows Kallenbach walking the almost 35km from Tolstoy Farm to Johannesburg, which he apparently did often.

The farm has recently been nominated for

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Our manners in mourning

There needs to be an *Idiot’s Guide to Death and Mourning*. Not for the mourners necessarily, but for those who insist on making the lives of who those who have just lost loved ones more unpleasant than they might already be. The book, maybe termed *Death for Dummies*, would dispense step by step “do’s and don’ts”, with more focus on the latter than the former.

Here’s a “don’t”. A week ago, I needed to attend a funeral. Although the weather at the cemetery is always either too cold, too windy, too wet, or too hot, that morning was pleasant. The walk to the “new section” at Westpark Cemetery was a surprising distance, and the many people in attendance walked in quiet respect for the deceased and the family. The only disturbance along the way was the sound of smart watches chiming when attendees reached their Discovery required daily steps – I did say it was far.

It was a solemn affair, as funerals tend to be. At the conclusion of the graveside service the family, in terms of Jewish custom walk past the community, again in silence, aside from the traditional wishes, followed by the community, who then can greet them personally and express their condolences.

It was at this point that I heard a loud voice behind me. “It’s the COVID-19 vaccine!” it said. “We never had cancer like this before the vaccine!” Thankfully, the mourners were further down the hill and didn’t hear him. But others did, and shrank away in discomfort. I’m not a discomfort shrinker, quite the opposite, and having puffed out my chest, pulled myself to as tall as my 1.7m would allow as I prepared to turn around and, well, deck him.

“Dad!” said my son, who was there. “Walk away! Just walk away!” as he gently shoved

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



me away from the scene of the crime. I listened to him, but the inappropriate comment stayed with me as I walked the 5km back to my car, and then drove home.

Later that day, I heard from my son that the same fellow, when greeting the widower who had not left the graveside area, after acknowledging his loss, found a moment of silence to ask, “So tell me, did your wife have the COVID-19 vaccine?”

Turns out, I should have smacked him. Because someone’s loss isn’t about your view of the vaccine. Or of the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s not about assuaging your curiosity. Because it’s not about you. It’s only about the mourners. And you’re relevant, in this case, only in relation to your ability to give comfort.

Every mourner has a story of something inappropriate that was said to them. A spectacular one I recently heard was of a father, mourning the loss of an adult child, who was told that he should be comforted by the fact that he would join her soon.

I can only imagine how much comfort that must have given him.

There’s a good reason that there’s a Jewish tradition of not addressing mourners until they initiate a conversation. What needs to follow is the recognition that no matter what you think of the global response to COVID-19 or anything else, it’s unlikely that a mourner will care. Quite the contrary, in fact.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Scapegoating, stereotyping, and conspiracy theories

Looking for scapegoats in troubled times is intrinsic to the conspiratorial world view, and since Jews feature so prominently in such thinking, it’s common for them to be blamed even for issues that have nothing to do with them.

The backlash against the recent chanting of “Kill the Boer” and similarly problematical slogans at an Economic Freedom Fighters rally was yet another example of this. It took only a controversial tweet by someone who happens to be Jewish to result in a spate of invective against our community, showing once again how deeply the belief that global Jewry is orchestrating the destruction of the white races through their black proxies is ingrained in our country. Typically, the names of famous Jewish anti-apartheid activists were trotted out as “evidence” of how Jews seek to corrupt and overthrow white civilisation by promoting communism, liberalism, multiculturalism, and other race-mixing ideologies. One also saw the usual dehumanised, hook-nosed caricatures of Jews gleefully manipulating blacks into fighting this anti-white race war on their behalf. That reaction was predicated on the notion of collective guilt, whereby Jewish community members are seen not as individuals who think and act in their own distinct ways but as part of a homogenous whole. The essence of bigotry, in fact, is the attribution of innate negative character traits to people on the basis of their membership of a particular group, whether defined along ethnic, religious, or similar such lines.

The fact that many of the offensive posts originated overseas also showed how notions of a Jewish plot against whites is largely driven by right-wing white supremacist movements abroad, particularly in the United States. Robert Bowers, who last week was sentenced to death for the murder of 11 worshippers at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, was inspired by precisely such reasoning. However, as an offensive tweet about Jewish lawyers by US rap artist Cardi B recently showed, antisemitic stereotyping isn’t unique to any particular group. In fact, there has been a growing number of similar such



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

incidents aimed at creating tension between the black and Jewish communities in the US, and that’s starting to play out in South Africa as well. All this underlines the ongoing importance of Jewish representative groups around the world continuing to build bridges of friendship and understanding with the wider community so as to debunk these and other negative stereotypes, while also building partnerships in combating bigotry in all its forms, regardless of who the targets are.

Gwakwani centre creates new opportunities

Had it not been for our relationship with the University of Johannesburg (UJ), with which the Board regularly engages on Jewish-student issues, the remote Limpopo village of Gwakwani would never have come to our notice. It was through these engagements that we learned how UJ has since 2014 adopted the village and introduced various sustainable resources for the upliftment of the people in the area. This led to the Board’s partnering with UJ in establishing an education and resource centre that among other things includes uncapped Wi-Fi; computers (donated by Investec); and books for the local Hanyani school. Charisse Zeifert, the Board’s head of communications, headed up the project and last Friday, travelled to Gwakwani to participate in the official opening of the centre, aptly named Nga Tshumisano (Let’s work together). The venture was clearly branded as a Jewish initiative, and has generated enormous goodwill towards our community among those who until now would have had little or no meaningful contact with Jewish people. It has further helped cement the excellent working relationship we have with UJ, which we look forward to building on in the future.

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

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

Community donates 21st century resources to Limpopo school

Last Friday, a school in the far north-eastern part of the Vhemba district of Limpopo was brought into the 21st century by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

They partnered to open a new Learning Resource Centre at Hanyani School, equipped with uncapped Wi-Fi connectivity, computers (donated by Investec); resource books (donated by the community); as well as other learning materials.

The centre was named Nga Tshumisano (Tshivenda for “let’s work together”) by the school’s governing body at the launch on 4 August.

One of the villages the school caters for, Gwakwani, has been adopted by UJ, which since 2014 has introduced critical improvements such as a solar-powered bakery, solar pumps, and a crèche. The SAJBD wanted to partner with UJ because the work the academic institution was doing in Gwakwani was sustainable and could be replicated in many villages like it, said Charisse Zeifert, the head of communication for the SAJBD.

“The fact that the school was so remote further meant that the impact of our resource centre would be particularly meaningful,” she said.

UJ Vice Chancellor Professor Lethokwa Mpedi told school representatives at the launch that he himself had come from a rural village, and that he knew how hard it was to make it in the urban world.

The vice chancellor said that the sign to the classroom, which read, “donated with love by the South African Jewish community” reminded him of the song, *Children Hold On To Your Dreams* by William Howard. The lyrics include the words, “Life is hard, and so unfair/Unless you believe that someone cares ... The old world is very cold/ It favours not, the young or old/Life is hard and so unfair/ Unless you believe that someone cares”.

• If you would like to donate learner-appropriate books to the resource centre, please contact sajbd@sajbd.org



Photo: Styles Lucas Ledwaba

Learners rejoicing outside their new learning centre

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- Tuesday 15 August**
- Chabad of Sandton launches Chabad Prime with guest speaker Stan Smookler. Time: 19:15. Venue: Chabad of Sandton, 1 Chabad Weg, Gallo Manor. Cost: R50. Contact: www.chabadofsandton.co.za
- Saturday 19 August**
- Gather Events hosts a bowling evening for 27- to 39-year-olds. Time: 20:00. Venue: Xtreme Bowling, Midways Mall, Bramley. Cost: R70. Contact: 076 392 3552
- Sunday 20 August**
- The Jewish National Fund Hiker’s Club invites you to join them on an intermediate hike. Venue: Linksfild Ridge. Time: 10:00. Cost: R50. Contact: info@jnfsa.co.za

- Second Innings hosts a talk by Robyn Cowen on *Tools and techniques to move forward*. Time: 10:00. Venue: The Gerald Horwitz Lounge, Golden Acres. Cost: R40 (R20 for members). Contact: 082 561 3228
- Wednesday 23 August**
- Second Innings hosts the screening of movie *The Jazz Singer – Neil Diamond*. Time: 09:30. Venue: Military Museum, Saxonwold. Cost: R130. Contact: 082 561 3228
- Thursday 24 August**
- The Jewish National Fund hosts the pre-release premiere of *Golda*. Venue: Nu Metro Cinema, Hyde Park. Time: 19:00. Cost: R50. Contact: info@jnfsa.co.za



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Sandton Batmitzvah girls' Great Park mikvah meet

Just days before Women's Day on 9 August, Sandton Shul Batmitzvah girls and their moms were welcomed into the mikvah at Great Park Synagogue for a discussion about self-care, body image, and the power of women.



Sandton Shul Bat Mitzvah girls and their moms at the Great Park mikvah

Torah Academy discovers meaning in six million

Torah Academy Grade 6 classes attended a Holocaust education evening with their parents on 18 July, where they presented in creative ways the projects they did over the school holidays which depicted the value of each life. The programme included short video



Rabbi Rodal giving a presentation on the meaning of the number six million

clips about the Holocaust together with a presentation by Rabbi Berel Rodal on the meaning of the number six million with deep and practical take away messages.

It was an evening of deep impact, real emotion, and finding the true meaning of the value of human life and our inner purpose.

Letters

UOS SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT, BUT REMAIN DECOROUS

It's a sad day in the Jewish community when one of its own, maybe through bad business decisions he/she made, encounters losses and leaves staff/mashgichim without income. That sadness is exacerbated when the announcement made by the licensing authority "hangs the individual out to dry" as per Joel Merris' notice ("UOS warning about Cape diner causes uproar", SA Jewish Report, 3 August 2023).

Yes, be transparent. Announce closure of the facility, but stop there. The warning shows an arrogance that's an embarrassment to the community as a whole. It wasn't the *derech erez* (decorous) way. What Rabbi Bernstein has initiated is but a humane response to help a fellow Jew. We hope and trust, please G-d, that Avron Almeleh is able to get back on his feet and be more successful in future.

- Albert Glass, Cape Town

BEWARE ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTING ABSOLUTELY

Lawyers often bear the brunt of jocular jibes as well as serious admonition due to the nature of their profession. Lawyers take sides – it's their job, and they understand the value of convincing arguments.

In his excellent opinion piece, ("Israel judicial overhaul – exposing the myths", SA Jewish Report, 3 August 2023) Oshy Tugendhaft masterfully disseminates fact from fiction regarding the thorny topic that is dividing not only Israel but much of the Jewish world.

Chaim Hillel Myerson ("Encouraging anarchy isn't democratic, it's fascist") may have better understood the difference between democracy and fascism given the benefit of reading Tugendhaft's piece before penning his letter published in the same issue.

Tugendhaft writes, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." He then goes on to quote Itamar Ben-Gvir saying, "The salad bar is open." Coincidentally,

Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* mentioned that "It's their time to eat" in his brilliant webinar recently. And there's the danger. The power handed to racists and bigots in the legislature would be uncontrollable unless harnessed by a second legislative chamber, or a Constitution, neither of which exist in Israel. Therefore, the sole controlling barrier to abuse and worse would be an independent judiciary, which would be neutered by the selection of the judges by those wielding power. "The government would thus arrogate to itself unlimited power to determine the validity of its own laws."

In the absence of a separation of powers, Israel, therefore, fails to be a liberal democracy.

Myerson urges us to "Wait for the next election." Given the unbridled power of this far-right government, there may never be another election, and listening to what racists like Ben-Gvir, Bezalel Smotrich, and others espouse, that's a distinct possibility.

- Allan Wolman, Tel Aviv, Israel

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