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Rosh Hashanah

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Jews and Jewish sites survive Morocco earthquake unscathed

PHILISSA CRAMER, ELIYAHU FREEDMAN – JTA

Jews and Jewish sites appear to have largely been spared following the devastating earthquake that struck Morocco late on 8 September, killing at least 2 600 people and plunging some of the poorest areas of the northwest African country into ruins.

The export of etrogs, the citrus fruit harvested locally and used ritually in the upcoming festival of Sukkot, also appears to be continuing largely unabated.

Israeli rescue teams are on the ground, and the country has offered additional aid to Morocco, as a massive humanitarian effort takes shape in the hours after the quake, the region's largest in more than a century. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) which has operated in Morocco since 1947, has sent staff to begin an aid operation there.

Dov Maisel, the vice-president of operations at Israel Hatzalah, an emergency aid non-profit organisation, said a preliminary team of four people with experience in disaster management had travelled to Morocco early on 10 September.

"They are describing terrible sites of

destruction," he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), saying that his group would determine the size and scope of its ultimate mission based on what the team observed. "Will it be more medical? Search and rescue? Psycho-trauma? This is the evaluation they are doing right now."

The 6.8-magnitude earthquake, centred in the Atlas Mountains near Marrakesh, struck at a time of heightened Jewish tourism, following Israel's normalisation of relations with Morocco in 2020. Israel said it was aware of 479 Israelis in the country at the time of the quake, and had accounted for the safety of all of them.

The quake came on the eve of a major pilgrimage timed to the anniversary of a Moroccan rabbi's death, and as the country's etrog farms were completing their harvests of etrogs leading up to the fall harvest festival of Sukkot, which begins this year in less than three weeks, on 29 September. Hundreds of thousands of etrogs are grown in Morocco annually ahead of the holiday.

Tradition holds that etrog trees were first planted in the Atlas Mountains nearly 2 000 years ago by Jews who found shelter among the Berber tribes there after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Today, the etrog farms in the Atlas Mountains are largely staffed by Berbers and owned by Jews living in Israel or

in Agadir, a coastal city that was flattened in 1960 by an earthquake that, according to JTA's reports at the time, killed a third of the local population overall and two-thirds of its Jewish community, about 1 500 people.

Like many people involved in the etrog trade, Tsvi Dahan was spending Shabbat in Agadir, where there's a



The rubble of damaged buildings in Moulay Ibrahim, Morocco from the earthquake on 8 September

tiny remaining Jewish community that grows during the etrog harvest. An Israeli who owns a grove about an hour away, Dahan was sleeping in a local hotel when the earth started shaking.

"I knew immediately that it was an earthquake," Dahan said. His wife, Deborah Dahan, is a JTA correspondent in Israel. "I put my head on the pillow and felt the bed move. I saw that the room was continuing to shake. In

Continued on page 18>>

Shofar – an instrument of healing Torah Thought



Rabbi Shmuel Ozhekh
Ohr Somayach Cape Town and the founder of **Rejewvinate** and The **Eden Meditation App**

We create so much mind noise for ourselves, from the myriad disappointments to the anxious anticipation of the future.

Rosh Hashanah is a time where we spiritually detox our minds, hearts, and bodies from all the residual pain and worry we carry, transforming the *raash hashanah* (the noise of the year) to Rosh Hashanah (regaining the head of the year).

The blasts of the shofar are transcendental sounds that are there to wake us up from our unconsciousness and break through the boundaries of our constricted thinking.

Shofar comes from the word "*sha'per*" (to heal and fix) and is the quintessence of the day of Rosh Hashanah,

and one of the most powerful instruments of healing for our soul.

The first sound that we experience through the shofar is the Tekiah, a clean, long sound that represents clarity and tranquillity.

The word "*tekiah*" comes from the word "*teka*" (to establish). This sound represents letting go of our need to be king/queen in our life and recognise G-d as all that there is. In this first step, we renounce control and perceived dominion, nullify ourself to the Ultimate Oneness, and strive to become conduits for the expression of that Oneness

into this world.

The second sound of the shofar is Shevarim, three broken blows, and comes from the word "*shever*" (broken).

The sound resembles a cry, and is an important part of repairing our mind and soul.

It's a cathartic cry, an emotional expression of the deep longing that we have to be reunited with our inner self and the essence of life.

Just like Joseph cried when he was reunited with his father, on Rosh Hashanah, we too are reunited with "our supernal father", and are so overwhelmed by the clarity and tranquillity, we cry over what we have been missing and the realisation of the pain of living without this consciousness always in our life.

The third sound is Teruah, and

resembles an alarm, beckoning us to action and movement.

Using the emotion of Shevarim, we sense inside ourselves a deep urgency to transform ourselves, take practical steps to live with humility, inner silence, and spiritual connection. We realise how distant we may have become, and feel the motivation to rectify the distance by living consciously through our actions.

The final sound is that of the Tekiah Gedolah. We end off by returning to a sense of immense connection and sanctity, uniting with the g-dliness that is found within and all around us, feeling the deep peace and tranquillity in the embrace of Hashem.

Wishing you a meaningful Rosh Hashanah, and a sweet, connected, and tranquil new year.

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The most common name for our new year is Rosh Hashanah, the name used in the tractate of Talmud devoted to the holiday. The Torah refers to this day as Yom Teruah (Day of Shofar Blowing). In our prayers, we often call it Yom Hazikaron (Day of Remembrance) and Yom Hadin (Day of Judgement) since this is the day when G-d recalls all of His creations and determines their fate for the year ahead. Shana Tova to You and You You You You You

SA conservationist lends support to baby gorilla

NICOLA MILTZ

Former South African businessman turned wildlife philanthropist and conservationist, Larry Green, was recently honoured to be able to name a baby gorilla in Rwanda’s annual Kwita Izina gorilla naming ceremony.

Green, dressed in traditional Rwandan robes made for the ceremony, stood before a crowd of thousands of local Rwandans and international dignitaries and celebrities, and named a baby gorilla girl born in February this year.

“Her name is Ingoboka which means ‘support’. She comes from the Hirwa family of gorillas, and her mother’s name is Akarabo,” said Green, who is the incoming chairperson of the global board of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF).

He was one of 23 prominent individuals, called namers, who attended Rwanda’s annual gorilla naming ceremony, which took place on Friday, 1 September. It’s a highlight in the Rwandan calendar, attracting thousands.

The ceremony has been ongoing since 2005, and this year marked the 19th edition.

Being a namer is an honour bestowed on a select few individuals each year, marking the births of every baby born in the year.

British actor Idris Elba, comedian Kevin Hart, and soccer stars Sol Campbell and Bernard Lama were among other prominent namers. Last year, the then Prince Charles was given the honour.

“I had the honour of naming one of 23 new-born baby gorillas. This is a big annual celebration in Rwanda that focuses on a conservation programme that not only protects and has increased the gorilla population, but has had great economic impact on local communities and the country in general,” Green told the *SA Jewish Report*.

A photograph of baby Ingoboka shows her sporting a soft coat of ebony fur with delicate hints of grey and brown framing her face, which shows expressive eyes shimmering with curiosity. The Kwita

Izina ceremony celebrates the country’s commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism, and is based on another centuries-old tradition, in which Rwandans name their children in the presence of family and friends, according to the site Visit Rwanda. In 2005, Rwanda began officially naming mountain gorillas in what has become a global celebration of nature.

“By giving a name to these majestic animals, we give them a value they undoubtedly deserve,” it says. The ceremony gives the community and the country’s leadership an opportunity to thank the communities that live around Volcanoes National Park, research partners, vets, and the dedicated conservationists, rangers, and trackers who protect the gorillas. To date, 397 mountain gorillas have been named.



Larry Green

“The annual event in northern Rwanda celebrates the country’s efforts to protect this endangered species,” said Green.

“There were 22 other namers, some big names. In my case, I’ve made some financial contributions to a programme to expand the forest sonar, which can increase the gorilla population while funding better housing and healthcare for

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local communities. The African Wildlife Foundation works all over Africa, with Rwanda being one of our focal countries,” he said.

Kevin Hart and his family went on a Rwandan safari trip, which Hart later said was “one of the best experiences I’ve ever had in my life”.

After their wilderness hike, Hart said, “I just got to see an amazing family of gorillas, and now because of the amazing things and gorillas I got to see, I get to take the liberty of actually naming a gorilla.”

Green told the *SA Jewish Report* that the beautiful name, Ingoboka, reflects the bond between the Rwandan gorilla population and the local community.

He said at the ceremony, “I have no doubt baby Ingoboka will be a great pleasure and huge support, joy, and inspiration to the family of Hirwa, who has lost a number of members of her family over the past number of years.”

He said her name reflected the support that “happens on a much greater level, which is about how the gorilla population really supports the community and the people of Rwanda, and how the people of Rwanda and the community really support the gorillas”. It’s a “mutual love affair,” Green said.

Green, who lives with his wife, Debbie, in California, was born and raised in Johannesburg.

He attended King David Linksfield and matriculated from Damelin.

An entrepreneur from a young age, he co-founded SA Paving at the age of 21, later establishing a similar company, System Pavers, when the family emigrated to the United States (US).

He spent 10 years on the board of the AWF, and following his recent retirement

from System Pavers accepted the role as incoming chairperson.

His love for wildlife and conservation has spanned many years.

“I belonged to the Young President’s Organisation [YPO] in South Africa, and continued my involvement in the US. After we settled there, my wife and I began bringing some of our YPO friends over to South Africa to experience safaris. On our first trip, we brought more than 72 people. This continued to evolve, and became an annual thing,” he said.

Through this, he made several contacts in the wildlife arena, and soon found himself on the board of the AWF, a non-profit organisation headquartered in Nairobi and Washington, D.C.

“I slowly became more involved in wildlife philanthropy and conservation. I got exposure to other parts of Africa such as Kenya, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Cameroon. I travelled to Rwanda a lot,” he said.

Green described the Kwita Izina ceremony as “exciting and meaningful. Rwanda is an amazing country,” he said, “It’s the shining star of Africa, and when you look at where it was 30 years ago and what it has managed to achieve since then, it’s extraordinary, and creates a lot of hope. Rwanda is an example of what can be established in a lot of places on the continent with African ownership and leadership. Decisions are being made there by young African leaders, many of them women. The future of Africa rests on the shoulders of future young leaders, and you can see this happening in this environment.

“It’s easy to be sucked down by challenges, but with good leadership, policies, and commitment, things can be better on so many levels,” he said.” The Kwita Izina ceremony is a real model of how nature can equal good business. One doesn’t have to destroy nature to make economies develop.

“Africa is the fastest growing population in the world. It’s so important to have economic development hopefully side by side with nature.”

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Having European citizenship offers many **benefits** besides the fact that it makes travel a lot easier than with a South African passport.

And, as we are fully aware, South Africa faces many uncertainties, not just today, but for our children as well. Though we still have it relatively good here, we know that the time will come when, as Jews, we will seek alternative options. European citizenship will be the tool we're looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived. Therefore, they are entitled to reinstate citizenship and obtain an EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is that prior to the end of World War I, the European map was very different from the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania didn't exist as independent countries, and until 1918, these territories were known only as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Russia empire, which ruled all of north eastern Europe.



Until 1918, residents of these territories had Russian citizenship as Polish and Lithuanian citizenship didn't exist. Therefore, applications for reinstatement of these citizenships are based only on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen. The descendants of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 won't be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after World War II, eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor originated.

For example, Jews who left Vilnius and its region could be declined, whereas a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.

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I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every three to four months, which will allow us to meet in person.

My next trip to South Africa will be 29 October to 9 November 2023

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4 SA JEWISH REPORT

14 – 21 September 2023

Patriotic Alliance says no to Leila Khaled Drive

NICOLA MILTZ

Patriotic Alliance (PA) Deputy President Kenny Kunene, as member of the mayoral committee (MMC) of the City of Johannesburg for roads and transport, has refused outright to allow the renaming of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive.

This emerged last Shabbos, when he and PA President Gayton McKenzie spoke at the Great Park Synagogue in Johannesburg on Saturday after shul.

The pair were invited to share insights into their recent trip to Israel and to address members following the shul service.

The controversial renaming of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive came up for discussion, during which McKenzie said his party “would never allow it”.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, he said, “I disagree strongly with the renaming of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive and the Patriotic Alliance will never vote for it.” He was opposed to it, he said, because “we have many local heroes that are more deserving of such an honour”.

He wouldn't comment on whether his views had anything to do with the fact that Khaled was the first woman to hijack a plane as a member of the terrorist organisation Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

McKenzie told the *SA Jewish Report* that the matter had been raised among coalition parties. “It was discussed together with the name change of William Nicol Drive to Winnie Mandela Drive, only Winnie Mandela Drive had consensus among all of us. Al Jama-ah comrades approached us to help them with the name change. We flatly refused.

“There's great appetite for the name change, but we're not in agreement. We're clear that we'll not support it. Kenny Kunene is MMC of roads and it needs his sign off. We aren't people that hide our views on any matter,” he said. “I must add that the other parties respect our view.”

He didn't elaborate which parties he was referring to.

Great Park Shul Rabbi Dovid Hazdan corroborated what they said. “They vociferously opposed the renaming of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive,” he said.

The topic was raised after the pair spoke about their impressions of Israel following their recent trip in July, where they met President Isaac Herzog among others to learn about coalition governments, water treatment, and wastewater management.

“The shul doesn't align itself with any particular candidate or political party, and we'll welcome those with different perspectives and opinions over the next months to present to our community,” Hazdan said.

“They spoke about their visit and why they went there, which we found interesting,” he said. “They also spoke about their perspectives on the future of South Africa. There were a lot of strong, hard questions and engagement.”

The pair arrived early on Saturday morning, and stayed for the duration of the service, Hazdan said. “They respectfully wanted to be part of the service,” he said.

In the face of criticism from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition, McKenzie said his party's decision to visit the Jewish state was correct. “Israel has many of the answers to the problems being faced by South Africa, and we need to work with each other. South Africa needs friends, not enemies.

“Being pro-Israel doesn't mean you have to be anti-Palestine. That's a false dichotomy that



Kenny Kunene blocked the name change of Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive

will take us nowhere. We cannot – and should not – wish for Israel to stop existing, which unfortunately is the starting point for many of those who are ostensibly on Palestine's side. That cannot and will not happen. What's important is to look at solutions to improve life for Palestine and everyday Palestinians without needing to wipe Israel off the map.”

The pair said they had gleaned valuable information about coalition governments from the Israeli president and McKenzie said that the PA would be a key player in coalitions after next year's national election.

McKenzie said he found the shul service “most interesting and spiritually fulfilling. People were extremely friendly and accommodating. We spoke about how Israel has many solutions to the problems of South Africa, and that we shouldn't put political animosity ahead of people's needs and the betterment of people's lives,” he said.

In 2018, the Johannesburg City Council adopted a motion to rename Sandton Drive – the location of the United States consulate – after Palestinian militant Leila Khaled.

We cannot – and should not – wish for Israel to stop existing, which unfortunately is the starting point for many of those who are ostensibly on Palestine's side.

Khaled, 79, has visited South Africa several times. She's known as the poster girl of Palestinian militancy for her role in hijacking TWA flight 840 from Rome to Tel Aviv in 1969 and El Al flight 219 in 1970. A portrait of her as a young woman holding an AK-47 is a symbol of the Palestinian liberation struggle. Several countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel consider the PFLP to be a terrorist organisation.

It was then councillor Thapelo Amad of the minor Al Jama-ah party – now the former mayor of Johannesburg who lasted three months in office – who originally brought the motion before the council. Al Jama-ah holds three out of 270 seats in the Johannesburg City Council. The name was opposed by the Democratic Alliance (DA), which said it would be wasteful expenditure.

An amendment to the motion was then tabled and accepted, calling for renaming the road after Khaled. The DA didn't support the motion, but was outnumbered when the Economic Freedom Fighters and African National Congress voted in favour of it.



Shana Tova.

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Live for the moment

As we are about to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, I have been marvelling at how fast the year has flown by, not necessarily happily as nobody wants their lives to fly past. It seems to me that the year has sped by, and at this moment, it feels like I simply haven’t done enough in the time.

And, as you will see when you read the opinion piece by Rav Avtzon, I mentioned this to a couple of rabbis when I asked that they write for our special Rosh Hashanah edition.



His reaction was to write about it in his OpEd, succinctly pointing out to me and everyone else who feels this way to reconsider the mindset that this idea presents.

Avtzon makes the point that it could mean we’re not reflecting or processing our experiences enough.

He says a full year doesn’t fly by, and it’s incumbent on us to make sure that time counts. It’s up to us to make the months, days, hours, even moments count.

How do we do that?

To me it means needing to live in the present. To live in the now. How much time do we spend preparing for something – a deadline, a job, an event, while time passes us by? So many of us spend our present hankering or perhaps regretting the past, and worrying about the future.

How often do we sit with people who are special to us, and our minds wander to what time we have to leave or something we have to prepare for? How often do we pass something beautiful and not notice it? How often does someone say something meaningful to us, and we don’t absorb it?

How often do we check our phones repetitively, and not actually be in a moment that could be special if we involved ourselves in it?

I know I’m guilty of many of these things, and that’s not how I want to live my life.

I guess the first step is to be conscious of it, and make a concerted effort to savour the moment, be it writing my editorials once a week, interviewing someone for a story, dancing, going for a walk, reading a good book, spending time with my phenomenal family and friends, or just being.

I don’t want to get to this time next year and not be able to look back on special moments in my year and recognise them for what they are, not just seconds that sped past like a freight train.

Though this specific insight hit home for me, it’s that time of year when we’re all looking for the “aha” moments that will bring us home to ourselves and guide us to find what it is in our lives we want to change.

Avtzon’s writing is just one of the incredibly insightful opinion pieces written specially for this Rosh Hashanah edition. We’re so lucky to have access to such great minds.

It may be something that another spiritual leader wrote, or perhaps one of the school children, or one of our journalists that gives you food for thought. Hopefully, there will be more than just one piece in this edition that will offer you guidance in finding the change you want to make in your life. It may be a tiny alteration to your life that will make the difference, or perhaps a mammoth change that you believe is necessary. Only you know what you need to enhance your moments, days, and months to come.

That’s what this time of year, Rosh Hashanah and the high holidays, is all about.

For me, it’s also about looking at mistakes made and the things we might have said that could have hurt someone. I do believe it’s a rare individual who goes out to hurt people. I’m not one of those. But, as we’re all human, we’re imperfect, and it can and does happen.

I would like to look at what triggered the anger or hurt, and try to find ways to avoid it. Perhaps that means not taking life, work – everything really – so seriously. Perhaps it means bringing lightness into every day. I can’t specifically say, but this is the stuff that I would like to work on.

So, I have given you some insight into what I believe I could do to make my life and the life of those around me better.

What do you believe you need?

Some of us are battling demons far bigger than anything I have mentioned above – with grief or financial devastation. There are so many reasons for people’s lives to go off track. For them, it’s not simple. It’s not just about soul searching, but there are people who can and will help. They are out there in our community.

As we sit with Stage 6 loadshedding and doomsayers giving hopeless economic predictions, we can choose how to look at things. We can buy into the negativity, but we really don’t have to.

I know there are those who believe they are being pragmatic and realistic when they see the glass not just half empty, but shattered. Their pragmatism is, for me, negativity, and it doesn’t help anyone, certainly not the person who sees the world through those eyes.

I would much rather see the possibilities in our society, community, country, and world. That, too, is a choice.

I’m inspired by people like Lael Bethlehem, on this page, who sees solutions to problems others say are insurmountable. I’m inspired by people who see the potential in the inner city of Johannesburg, rather than the hopelessness.

At the end of the day, getting involved in uplifting our country is the best way to make sure it happens. Let’s get stuck in!

Shana tova and Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost

Editor

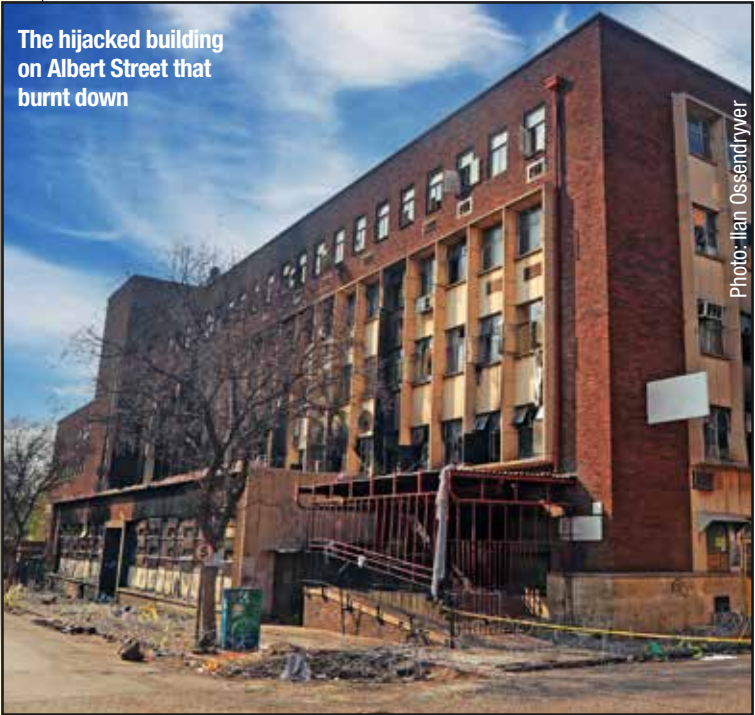
How to take Johannesburg back from the brink

OPINION

LAEL BETHLEHEM

The terrible fire in Albert Street has re-focused our attention on the Joburg central business district (CBD), the city centre. The city centre enjoyed a revival from the early 2000s to about 2015, when the city’s leadership showed real commitment to the regeneration of the city, directed funding to the area, and worked with the private sector. Hundreds of millions of rand of private investment followed, especially in affordable housing, and to some extent in retail and office space. There was a palpable sense of excitement about the inner city, and a great deal of goodwill.

After the departure of Mayor Amos Masondo, however, the city’s leadership seemed to lose interest in the CBD. In the minds of many public leaders, the CBD became associated with foreign nationals. Aside from the terrible xenophobia of this idea, it’s simply inaccurate. The CBD is home to corporate head offices, numerous public institutions, trade unions, major universities, and schools. It provides the backbone of the public transport system, is a huge retail centre, and provides thousands of renovated and well-run affordable housing units to South Africans. Though foreign nationals are certainly part of the environment – as immigrants have always been – they remain a minority in all but a few pockets of the inner city.



The hijacked building on Albert Street that burnt down

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

The explosion in Bree Street in July and the fire in Albert Street in August are symptoms of neglect. And though Johannesburg’s problems aren’t limited to the inner city, they tend to manifest there because of the huge density of the area and the age of the infrastructure.

How do we address the urgent problems of the city as a whole and the CBD in particular? The first step is to improve the governance of the city. The instability and political chaos of the past few years have been very destructive. The city’s elected leaders seem to care more about the short-term success of their coalitions than they do about the fate of the city. Like any organisation, poor governance leads to a downward spiral.

If we’re able to improve the city’s governance, what should be done to address the problems of the CBD? Here are the priorities:

1: Hijacked and dysfunctional buildings

There are hundreds of buildings in the same state as 80 Albert Street. The best way to address these is for the city to take over the building, offer temporary alternate accommodation to the occupants, and offer the buildings to private companies to renovate. The city used to do exactly this, through the Better Buildings Programme, which was discontinued by the city some years ago. It’s not an easy process and it requires skilled management, but it can be done.

2: Electricity infrastructure

We need a seven to 10-year programme to rebuild our electrical substations, starting with the oldest and most vulnerable, and we need an ongoing

programme to protect cables and other key transmission infrastructure. Priority should be given to the inner city substations which are the oldest, most densely used, and most vulnerable. This is especially so given that there has been such an increase in the provision of affordable housing units over the past two decades. The units provide decent living conditions for hundreds of thousands of people, but they increase the demand for power. Investment by the private sector requires investment by the public sector, especially in the area of infrastructure.

3: Water and sewerage

The explosion in Lilian Ngoyi (Bree Street) demonstrates that when water pipes and sewers are severely neglected, there are serious consequences. Joburg Water needs a major programme to repair blocked and collapsed sewerage lines and water mains. In the long run, this will save the city money, as it loses so much fresh water due to leaking pipes.

4: Transport infrastructure

The CBD is a transport hub for the city as a whole, and a major point of connection between the city and township residential areas. The taxi industry is the life-blood of the city, yet successive democratically elected administrations of Johannesburg have paid very little attention to its needs. We need larger taxi ranks, taxi ranks that are safe and secure for women, and we need to fix and manage key taxi routes such as Bree Street. We need to take a proper look at how taxis operate, especially in the inner city, and we need to invest in expanding the ranks and managing the routes. The city needs to work with the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa to fix the train service between Soweto and the CBD. In addition to this, the Rea Vaya system should be completed. It works well between Johannesburg and Soweto. The CBD-Alexandra route needs to be completed and made operational.

5: Homelessness

We must acknowledge that indigent and homeless people are part of our city, and provide at least some of their basic needs. A good start is to create public shower and toilet facilities in the CBD and in the informal settlements, and to manage these properly. Such facilities are offered in many cities, and while they are difficult to manage, they aren’t impossible. There are some outstanding non-governmental organisations already working in this space and they need support.

How do we do this?

At the national level, the chief executives of more than 115 companies have agreed to use their resources and expertise to help the national government address South Africa’s most urgent problems. It may be possible to do the same in Johannesburg. There are already some initiatives underway in this regard, but we need the city to embrace them. There’s still a great love for Johannesburg, and there are many people with extraordinary skills and commitment. With the right will and organisation, we can take our city back from the brink, and build a city that we can all be proud of.

• *Lael Bethlehem is the former chief executive of the Johannesburg Development Agency. She’s currently Chief ESG Officer at Sedibelo Resources, a platinum mining company, where she’s responsible for driving its social, environmental, and energy programmes.*

Israel’s religion and state not so far apart

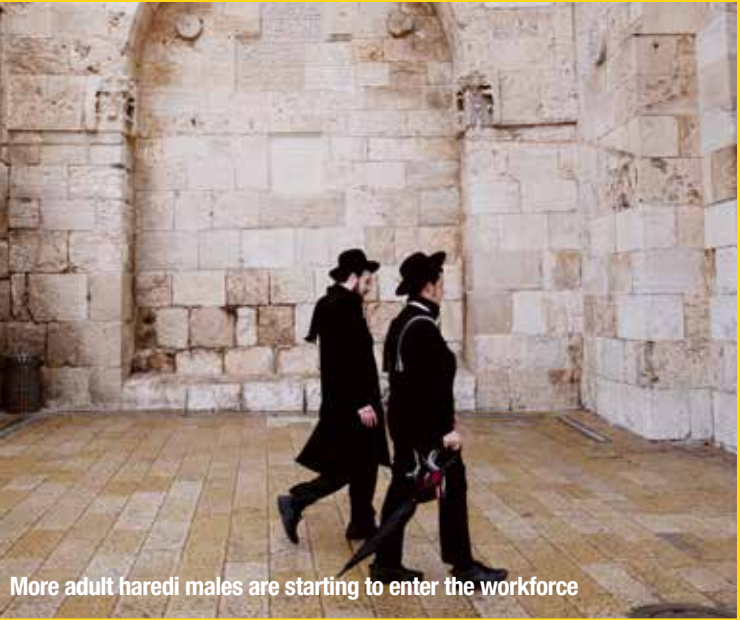
OPINION

DOV LIPMAN



The doomsday scenario that Jewish communities worldwide are hearing and feeling about religion and state in Israel ignores one thing: the realities on the ground.

I won’t enter the fray of the debate over judicial reform in this OpEd. That’s for another time. But the quiet changes taking place in Israel are setting the stage for positive developments in finding the balance between a Jewish and democratic state.



More adult haredi males are starting to enter the workforce

Let’s start with education. Schools that teach general studies are opening throughout the haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community. Rabbi Menachem Bombach, a Vishnitzer chassid from Mea She’arim, founded the Netzach Education Network, which now has 16 branches throughout Israel. These schools teach students a full general studies curriculum that prepares them for *bagruyot* – Israel’s matriculation exams – as thousands of haredi boys and girls are being prepared for college and entering the workforce.

Yes, the current government is doing whatever it can to stop haredi schools from teaching general studies. But that train has left the station. Thanks to these schools, the many others not affiliated with this network, and the many new ones that will be opened by Netzach Education Network, Israel will be filled with haredi doctors, lawyers, accountants, and hi-tech entrepreneurs.

The number of adult haredi males entering the workforce has been quite low, but there are many efforts to change this. For example, Avodot Laharedim, an employment service run by haredim, has helped more than 100 000 men find jobs. That and other initiatives are helping to create homes in which parents support their families with dignity. Those parents will most likely send their children to schools that teach general studies to empower them to enter the workforce at an even higher level.

The haredi community, on the whole, doesn’t accept mandatory service in the Israel Defense Forces because of the religious challenges that soldiers face in the largely secular environment of the army. But over the past decades, numerous programmes have been established that draw haredim to serve in the military, including exclusively haredi units. I was privileged to be the Knesset member who helped obtain official government recognition for the first ever haredi Hesder Yeshiva, Beit Midrash Derech Chaim. It’s a five-year programme in which the young men study in a yeshiva in the morning and afternoon for three years, and are trained in various vocations at night. Then, for years four and five, they leave yeshiva in the morning to serve in the army in their area of expertise and return to the yeshiva to study at night. What began with a mere handful of students has now grown to hundreds.

Why is all this relevant to religion and state in Israel? An overwhelming majority of Israelis believe that compromises need to be made by all sides to reach agreements about all the major religion and state issues in Israel. These include the most difficult ones, such as determining the laws of marriage

and how public transportation and commerce on Shabbat should work. The challenge is the haredi political power, which blocks any progress on resolving these issues. Many believe that since the haredi community has more children than the rest of Israel, haredi political power will continue to grow, thereby preventing any compromise and resolution to the religion and state issues.

However, careful analysis of election results shows that haredi political power isn’t growing alongside population growth. United Torah Judaism remains at about seven seats each election. Shas is predominantly traditional and even secular Sephardim, with only a few of its mandates representing haredim who seek to maintain the status quo on religion-and-state issues. That’s happening because of the large numbers – especially among the younger members of the community – who are integrating into Israeli society. To clarify, integration doesn’t mean that they cease to be haredi. Instead, it means that they learn to combine being Torah scholars and fervently religious with general studies and supporting their families in a dignified manner. Those haredim aren’t voting for haredi parties simply because they are told to do so. They choose the party and leaders they believe

are best for Israel. The proof took place five years ago in my home town of Bet Shemesh. A religious Zionist woman with a PhD, Dr Aliza Bloch, defeated a two-time incumbent haredi mayor in a city that has a haredi majority. Thousands of haredim either voted for Bloch or didn’t vote to enable her to win. These are primarily the haredim working, serving, or enrolling their children in schools with general studies.

I’m confident that due to all the above developments, Israel will, over time, have a political constellation that will allow for the compromises from both sides necessary to solve its religion and state challenges. That will hopefully be concretised in a Constitution as well. For now, we need diaspora Jewry to remain engaged with Israel and continue to raise its voice in favour of an embracing Jewish state that seeks solutions to these issues.

In spite of all the negativity and doomsday scenarios, good news is on the horizon.

• *Dov Lipman served as a member of the 19th Knesset, and is the founder and chief executive of Yad L’Olim, a non-government organisation that assists, guides, and advocates for olim from around the world [www.yadlolim.org].*

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True friend: Buthelezi’s 50-year relationship with SA Jewry

TRIBUTE

Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who passed away over the weekend at the age of 95, will be remembered for many things. His role, specifically during the traumatic final decade of white minority rule, remains a matter of much debate, and his legacy is inevitably a complex one.

For South African Jewry, however, he’ll be remembered as a loyal friend and supporter as well as a valued partner in building a better society, particularly in his native KwaZulu-Natal.

From the time of his appointment as chief minister of the newly formed KwaZulu homeland in the early 1970s until his death more than 50 years later, Buthelezi regularly engaged with Jewish leadership, speaking on numerous important communal platforms.

He further acknowledged the important role Jews had in combating the injustices of apartheid, consistently denounced antisemitism, and was a staunch advocate for maintaining and building on the South Africa-Israel relationship, even when it became increasingly unpopular to do so.

In one of his first reported public speaking



Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi

DAVID SAKS



apartheid or in the hopeful new era of non-racial democracy that replaced it, Prince Buthelezi has always been willing to engage with our community, build bridges, and forge partnerships in creating a better society for all,” Zagnoev said.

Zagnoev further noted how through the partnerships built between Buthelezi and the Jewish community in KwaZulu-Natal, it had been possible to implement numerous important projects in the field of education and HIV-AIDS prevention.

Many individual members of the Jewish community were also among Buthelezi’s close friends and supporters. They included anti-apartheid lawyer Rowley Arenstein; famed liberal opposition parliamentarian Helen Suzman; long-serving Inkatha Freedom Party senator and MP, Dr Ruth Rabinowitz – whom he affectionally dubbed his “Julu”; and Arnold and Rosemary Zulman. Buthelezi and his wife, Irene, spent many evenings in the latter’s Durban home during the apartheid years and they retained their close connection even after the Zulmans had emigrated to the United States.

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the themes that would feature in his future interactions with the community.

Acknowledging how Jews had been persecuted for centuries and yet had triumphed in spite of it, he appealed to his audience to do all they could to help black people uplift themselves as Jews had done for so long.

Paying tribute to those Jewish South Africans who had “stuck their necks out for the dispossessed and the powerless”, he expressed his belief that like him, the Jewish community was “convinced that South Africa cannot survive very long if her wealth is built on the shaky and rotten foundations of denying us human rights”.

Buthelezi would later often recall the many Jewish leaders he met and befriended as he became increasingly involved in the liberation struggle from his time as a student at the University of Fort Hare onwards. Like him, they were “working toward the same goals of political franchise, equality, and social justice in South Africa”.

Buthelezi consistently denounced

Sanctions (BDS)-inspired boycott action against Israel. Among other things, he sharply disagreed with the African National Congress’ decision to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel, calling it “short-sighted and regressive” as well as being “in opposition to our country’s role as a mediator for peace”.

Buthelezi visited Israel for the first time in August 1985, at the invitation of then Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Both as a committed Christian and a political leader confronted by a time of great turmoil and difficulty in South Africa, the visit was deeply meaningful to him. He was especially moved by his private meeting with Peres, who asked that he come back to see him at the end of his visit to tell him how the trip went.

“As we talked, he leaned towards me and said, ‘We’re brothers in suffering.’ It was a poignant moment, for I realised then that he understood my struggle for South Africa,” Buthelezi later recalled. About two decades later, Buthelezi was again invited to Israel by Peres to celebrate the latter’s 80th birthday. It was there that he first met Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, with whom he also developed a strong connection.

In October 2018, a special event co-organised by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), South African Zionist Federation, and SA-Israel Forum was held at Yeshiva College shul for South African Jewry to pay tribute to Buthelezi on his 90th birthday. Speaking on that occasion, SAJBD National Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev described the veteran leader as a warm and loyal friend of the Jewish community whose door had always been open whenever it needed his counsel or assistance.

“Whether it was during the dark days of

Speaking at the 90th birthday event in his honour, Buthelezi placed special emphasis on his friendship with the Zulmans. “These days, someone can be called a friend simply because they follow you on Facebook or they liked your profile. When I speak of having friends in the Jewish community during apartheid, I’m talking about people who opened their homes to my wife and I. The home of Arnold and Rosemary Zulman in Durban was our home away from home. Even though they have migrated abroad, Arnold Zulman has travelled all the way from the United States to comfort us when we buried some of our deceased children. He was at my side in Ulundi on 27 August this year when I turned 90. This is what I’m referring to when I speak of the meaning of true friendship”.

Buthelezi further noted how Zulman had built the first Com-Tech High School in KwaZulu-Natal, in Umlazi township.

The Jewish community’s connections with Buthelezi continued after his official retirement from political life. In 2022, Susan Abro, the president of the Council for KwaZulu-Natal Jewry; SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn; and other Jewish communal leaders were among those who attended the launch of the Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi Foundation. Recently, in response to the SAJBD’s letter wishing him well in light of his recent illness, Buthelezi sent a warm letter of appreciation, in which he thanked the Jewish community for its “consistent kindness and friendship”.

• David Saks is the associate director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies

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Farewell to the humble grocer who became a giant

TALI FEINBERG

"Our father was multidimensional: a family man, a strong entrepreneur, and a statesman. They don't make them like that anymore," Suzanne Ackerman-Berman told the *SA Jewish Report* on the passing of her father, Raymond David Ackerman, who died at the age of 92 on 6 August 2023.

"We're obviously heartbroken at losing dad, and overwhelmed at the affection in which he was held by so many," she says, speaking on behalf of the Ackerman family. "We have received thousands of messages, and we're very grateful for them all."

Most well-known as the founder of retail giant Pick n Pay, Ackerman-Berman says, "Our father was involved in Pick n Pay until the very last. He was interested, enthusiastic, and positive. The creation of Pick n Pay and the love of his family were his greatest achievements."

Looking back, she says he was brought up in a retail family, "which obviously set him on his career path. But our grandfather, Gus, thought he was too soft for retail. As it turns out, he couldn't have been more wrong. Doing good is how my father built Pick n Pay, and this philosophy sustains to this day." At the last count, he employed about 90 000 staff.

Ackerman grew up in Cape Town, matriculated from the Bishops Diocesan College, and gained a commerce degree from the University of Cape Town. He started his career with Ackermans, the retail chain which was founded by his father. In 1946, the chain was sold to Greatermans, which started the supermarket group Checkers. Ackerman became chief executive of Checkers in 1959, but seven years later, was fired following clashes with the Greatermans board. In 1967, he bought four Cape Town stores named Pick n Pay with the help of investors.

Ackerman-Berman says "being fired and starting Pick n Pay was the greatest challenge he faced. When he was fired, he had to think quickly and carefully since he was married with three children, and had one on the way.

"Buying four small stores with savings and borrowed money was an enormous gamble," she says. "Through sheer grit and determination, what he'd learnt about modern grocery retailing in the United States, and a strong philosophy and value system, he built Pick n Pay. The early days were incredibly challenging, and it's credit to Raymond and [his wife], Wendy's, character how well they succeeded. Raymond certainly couldn't have done it without Wendy solidly supporting him.

"He had what so very few have: the common touch," Ackerman-Berman says. "He treated everyone exactly the same, wherever they came from. He had a way with people, and would always listen carefully to what they said. He always made everyone feel comfortable."

This is clear from the thousands of posts on social media from ordinary people, talking about the impact of Ackerman on their lives.

"He wasn't just a successful entrepreneur, he was a passionate advocate for empowering youth and fostering entrepreneurship," wrote Amos Smanga Magqazana.

"In 2014, The Ackerman Foundation's Raymond Ackerman Academy partnered with the University of Johannesburg to implement a Youth Entrepreneurial Development programme. Through this programme, he extended a hand to young individuals from underprivileged backgrounds, offering them the tools, knowledge, and support they needed to realise their entrepreneurial dreams."

Ryland Ficher wrote, "I have many memories of Raymond Ackerman, but one that stands out was one year when I was watching the New Year test at Newlands. Sitting in the railway stand, I turned around and saw him sitting behind me, wearing a bucket hat, with binoculars in hand.

"I asked him why he was sitting in the stand and not in his company's suite, and he replied, 'I'm here to watch cricket. The people who come to the suite aren't interested in watching the game.' I realised once again why I had so much respect for him."

"During those big fires in the South Peninsula a few years ago, Raymond and Wendy made sandwiches and drove themselves in the middle of the

night to provide sustenance to the firefighters," wrote Chris Giffard. "It could have been easy to send employees, but they did it themselves."

A range of organisations thanked him for his support, from the Reach for a Dream Foundation to Johannesburg Business School, to the Zip Zap Circus, which uses the circus arts as a powerful tool for social transformation. The organisation said, "He loved the circus and over the past three decades, we have built some beautiful memories together, including celebrating the 40th anniversary of Pick n Pay with a massive swing to flying trapeze over Raymond's head!"

Fellow giants in the retail space deeply admired him, with Woolworths calling him a "fierce competitor".

Ackerman-Berman says his Jewish identity was important to him. "The values inherent in Judaism were important in how he treated people," she says. He supported a wide range of Jewish community organisations.

In a statement, the United Orthodox Synagogue's Cape Council said Ackerman "changed the lives of so many people in our Cape Town Jewish community and South Africa at large. We thank him for his commitment and support of our communal structures and for pioneering and supporting kashrut and our kashrut infrastructure within the South African retail industry."

Ackerman was a member of the Cape Town Progressive Hebrew Congregation [Temple Israel], and the shul paid tribute to him, saying, "Temple Israel mourns the passing of our beloved member and patron. His and Wendy's mark is found all over South Africa in the staff trained, organisations started, charities supported, and businesses incubated. No less in the Jewish community, where their concerns have always been around education, inspiration, and inclusivity."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Temple's Israel's Rabbi Greg Alexander says, "The Talmud teaches that monuments don't need to be erected for the



Raymond Ackerman and his wife Wendy on his 91st birthday

righteous *tzadikim*. Their deeds are their memorials. As the messages have poured in, I watched as his family gasped in amazement. The fact that they underestimated how loved he was, the extent of the impact on every person in this country, is testimony to his own humility.

"And that was just how he was," says Alexander. "No fanfare, no pretence, just a down-to-earth man with family, dogs, and a garden, peanut butter on his challah on Friday nights, and a twinkle in the eye. He was a giant, but he saw himself as a busy grocer. While others complained about this country, he built this country."

Ackerman also inspired the next generation of entrepreneurs. "Few people fought for their customers and people the way he did," wrote M&C Saatchi Abel founder Mike Abel. "He was led by his enduring and truly admirable values, which one scarcely sees in business."

"His legacy of doing good lives on at Pick n Pay, and in the way his family approaches life," says Ackerman-Berman. "We're grateful for the messages of condolence, and the many stories people have recounted. These have all helped during our time of loss. Raymond would have loved his memorial to be everyone shopping at Pick n Pay."

Ackerman is survived by his beloved wife, Wendy, his children, Gareth, Kathy, Suzanne, and Jonathan, 12 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

Academic maligns SA Jewry with 'dangerous conspiracy theories'

>>>Continued from page 1

In the SAJBD's right of reply, Saks laid out why O'Riordan's theories about the youth movements, the CSO, and the community are "sinister conspiratorial thinking". "As the saying goes, 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'," he said. Too easily it can lead to people presuming to make authoritative pronouncements on issues they barely understand and getting things dead wrong."

Several people commenting on the article online criticised O'Riordan's article. "Yes, Jewish violence and intimidation in Israel exists, but suggesting it is fed from a pipeline of South African Zionists is the ramblings of a conspiracy theorist," said Michael Sandler. "There are many Jewish institutions and people who work to limit

intermarriage, but it's laughable to count the CSO among them. Their sole focus is protecting Jews from terrorism and other violence or crime. That's it. And they do it well."

Malcolm Datz wrote, "The mind boggles that someone can pen an article of such unsubstantiated drivel, and *Daily Maverick* publish it without first checking the facts. Clearly, no research has gone into any of the organisations mentioned, not of their political or cultural standpoints, or the purpose and roles they play within the Jewish community and their contribution to society at large. This is the hallmark of an agenda, with an all-too-common narrative of gaslighting Jews."

The *SA Jewish Report* repeatedly approached *Daily Maverick* editor Branko

Brkic and opinions editor Tony Weaver for comment. Brkic didn't respond. Weaver first referred the *SA Jewish Report* to Saks' right of reply, then suggested that, "you approach Alexander O'Riordan for comment, as this was an 'opinionista' [opinion piece.]"

When the *SA Jewish Report* emphasised that it was asking *Daily Maverick* to respond to the community's concerns about the OpEd, Weaver suggested that the author of this story submit her own opinion piece.

A local media expert, who asked not to be named, said, "*Daily Maverick* made a decision to carry this, so it should be able to tell you how and why it made that decision. It isn't just a platform open to everyone – it decides what to carry and what to leave out. And in terms of the press code, it's accountable for those decisions."

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Farewell to ambassador from “Der Heim”

Last month, the Lithuanian ambassador to South Africa, Dainius Junevičius, packed up his official residence, boarded a plane back to Vilnius, and retired from public life, after a long distinguished diplomatic career. He left behind many friends in South Africa. In addition to being his country's representative in South Africa, Junevičius has been the fulcrum in the relationship between the Lithuanian government and Litvaks, Jews of Lithuanian decent, around the world. Prior to his departure from Pretoria, **Howard Sackstein**, the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report, met the ambassador for a frank discussion.

Why does a small country like Lithuania have such a big presence in South Africa?

One of the reasons why Lithuania has an embassy in South Africa is the big Lithuanian Jewish community. We have more than 3 000 Lithuanian citizens here, and of course, South Africa is an important country on the African continent.

Most of the Jews left Lithuania for South Africa before 1930. At that time, antisemitism in Lithuania was less than in South Africa. The main reason for immigration was economic benefits and family connections. In the 19th century, an additional factor was young men who didn't want to serve in the Russian army.

For many Jews in South Africa, obtaining a Lithuanian passport and thereby access to the European Union is a priority.

Lithuania is indeed open for those who would like to reinstate their citizenship. We did a lot to make this process easier and to remove some limitations to get citizenship. Only about 15% to 20% of applications are unsuccessful. Most of the applications have positive results.

One of the concerns isn't the policy on the reinstatement of citizenship but the practice – the bureaucrats who implement the policies may not be as supportive of the process as some of the politicians.

It's quite a long process, but the rules are clear. It's clear what type of documents you have to present, and how to do that. And now it's even easier because you can apply online. Of course, you can get the help of lawyers, but you can do it on your own without additional expenses.

It's no secret that South Africa's support for Russia has caused rifts between European ambassadors and the South African government. What's the relationship like now?

Although South Africa says it's neutral, we consider

that it is supporting Russia, and it was the biggest disappointment for me and, I think, all European countries.

Has that put a strain on relations between the countries?

The deputy minister of international relations and cooperation, Alvin Botes, went to Lithuania for political consultation last October, and the deputy ministers met. They had open, frank discussions, and we know the positions of each country.

As part of the SA Jewish Report webinar series, we flighted the movie J'accuse, the story of how Jonas Noreika, a genocidal Holocaust war criminal, became a national hero in Lithuania. The movie had a huge response, with more than 106 800 people watching in a week.

The film had a big audience. It was screened recently in Vilnius, in the Jewish Public Library. Silvia Foti was present, her book was published in Lithuania, and it's a topic which we don't avoid. I didn't watch the whole movie, but we know the position of Grant Gochin. Some things he states are correct, especially some history, and there are people who still have monuments to them although it's clear that they took part in the Holocaust. I hope that they will be removed.

Gochin is incorrect about what the Lithuanian government is doing. The position is clear. There's no place for antisemitism, and there's no place for distortion of the Holocaust or Holocaust denial. There are problems which have to be solved at a lower municipal level.

What's the status of the Noreika monument?

It's a plaque on the building in which he worked after 1944 when he returned from Stutthof concentration camp. The plaque states that he worked in this building and was caught and sentenced to death by the communist regime. Currently the building is under renovation, the plaque has been removed.

Who makes the decision whether the plaque goes back up?

It could be the director of the library or the municipality. I don't know exactly which.

If it does go up again, was Grant Gochin correct? Isn't this the litmus test?

Let's wait. The renovation will be finished by the end of the year. But it's complicated because he was a controversial figure. He fought for Lithuanian independence. He fought against the Soviet occupation, so people see only that.

In the same way that some people believe that the legacy of colonialism was a good thing because they built good roads?

History is complicated. It's not an easy thing, but we have to be sincere. If a person committed crimes, then all other merits are deleted.

What are Lithuanian children taught about the Holocaust and Lithuania's role in it? Is there an acceptance of accountability for the Holocaust? Although instigated by the Nazis, the Holocaust in Lithuania was perpetrated by the people next to whom the Jewish community had lived for hundreds of years. Is that part of the school curriculum?

How the Holocaust is presented depends very much on the teacher who does that, but the Holocaust is in the curriculum for Lithuanian schools. Today there are more than 150 tolerance education centres teaching children about the history of Holocaust and the Soviet resistance, about the local community which disappeared. Those teachers work in collaboration with Yad Vashem.

Before you leave, what are your thoughts about South Africa?

I'm disappointed that the country at age 30 hasn't progressed as it could have. Or you could even say it's declining in some senses. You see it with Eskom and



Former Lithuanian Ambassador to South Africa, Dainius Junevičius

the railways. But, we'll have the best memories of South Africa.


What are you planning to do now?

I will change my life completely. I've been researching the history of photography for many years. But now I'll devote my life to this.

My successor will come in one to two months. She's a young diplomat. I hope that she will maintain relations with the Jewish community and, in fact, intensify them. The Jewish community is part of South African society to which you don't need to explain what Lithuania is. So it's a bridge between Lithuania and South Africa.

Do you have a farewell message for the South African Jewish community?

I want to thank everybody for how my efforts were received. I'm also grateful to everyone who helped me and who was involved in different joint projects in Johannesburg and Pretoria, Cape Town, and elsewhere.



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Tackling bullying starts with tearing down its superstructure

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

From WhatsApp groups to social media platforms, there is no respite from bullying in our increasingly interconnected world. Yet what's bullying doing to our children, and how can understanding its complexities help to create meaningful change?

Educational psychologists Marina Bezuidenhout and Naveshini Thumbiran recently led a discussion on the intricacies of bullying, hosted by Chevrah Kadisha Community Social Services at The David Lopatie Conference Centre in Johannesburg.

Bezuidenhout said the scars from bullying could cause "genetic trauma", passed from generation to generation. "Many studies have been done that show it's the same fears, the same anxieties, which come through the generations," she said.

Though about 20 years ago, bullying was predominantly a physical phenomenon, today it's more insidious and underhanded, she said. "There has been an immense shift with the inception of social media. You cannot leave the bullying where it happens and have some kind of respite from it." The ongoing sense of isolation this breeds is increasingly prevalent, especially among teenagers.

Today, Bezuidenhout said, cybertechnology has become one of the leading causes of suicide. And only one in five cases of bullying are actually reported, so what happens when it remains undetected?

Focusing solely on helping those being bullied is, however, also a problem in that it puts the whole responsibility on the victim, said Bezuidenhout. They begin to feel like they're the problem, and that they have to do

the work needed to bring about change. Bullying is, in fact, a systemic problem and we need to understand all the people who make up that system.

Dismantling the structure underpinning this system begins with understanding the impact of bullying on the victim. Bullying causes increased absenteeism in school and illnesses as a physiological response to prolonged stress. "We see children who are extremely bullied at school who start having epileptic fits, but nothing shows up on scans," said Bezuidenhout.

"Yet, you can actually see the trauma that comes through and when we deal with the bullying and the mind-body connection, and it starts to feel better, all the symptoms eventually subside." Left unchecked, bullying can lead to depression, anxiety, and even suicidal ideation, an increasing concern.

"Bullycide' is now the word that they have coined for suicide as a result of bullying," she said.

The bullies themselves are often not who you'd expect them to be, Bezuidenhout said. They're no longer just the oafish or strange kids or the jocks. "It can be a popular child; someone the teachers really like and see as the golden child. They often get away with this murderous kind of behaviour because people don't see them for who they truly are." Bullies are also often risk takers, and may suffer from conduct disorders. "They often feel rejected by their peers."

Ironically, the group that sometimes struggles most with bullying is the bystanders, Bezuidenhout said. "They're too scared to do something. If they do get involved, they can often be rejected.



Sometimes they think it's better to observe or to say nothing, but that traumatises them in and of itself because they feel they didn't do anything to help the victim."

Bezuidenhout also spoke of kids getting away with highly inappropriate behaviour because of no discipline at home or at school. This lack of structure perpetuates bullying because these children think they can do whatever they want to with no consequences.

"Bullying is a normal part of growing up." "You'll get over it." "It will stop if you ignore it." Collapsing these and other myths surrounding bullying, Bezuidenhout said that children must be taught to respond rather than react to bullying. It's about saying things like, "I don't like what you've said to me, if you say it again, I'm going to tell someone," or "Let's go and tell on together," which often alarms the bully.

"One of the most powerful things to teach a child," she said, "is to diffuse a situation rather than to retaliate emotively. So, if the bully says, 'You've got a really big nose,' you say, 'Isn't it just beautiful?'" Bullies look for

victims who are going to be reactive, but if you diffuse it, it goes away."

We need to teach our kids the difference between conflict, playful banter, and bullying. "Bullying is repetitive behaviour," Bezuidenhout said. "It's intentional and purposeful in order to hurt, and it causes a power imbalance."

Bullies tend to shift blame and become defensive when confronted, she said. They won't take responsibility and they'll blame the victim, who often feels like they have to be "less than" in order not to antagonise the bully. "Kids who bully are actually extremely perceptive and excellent observers of behaviour. So, they watch, they know exactly who's going to be a possible victim of bullying." That's why projecting confidence through something as small as maintaining a good posture or eye contact is so important.

Bezuidenhout also stressed the need for schools themselves not to become bystanders as a result of being scared of upsetting parents. Schools cannot be complacent. They also must teach student

bystanders to be upstanders by telling the bullies to stop their behaviour. "Once we diffuse the fear and the attention, there's nothing to feed off."

Practical suggestions also include having a bench where someone who feels alone can sit, so that peers can then join or include them; or having a post box for kids to share their experiences of bullying with teachers. They can then respond, which helps the child feel less alone. "It's the isolation that causes things like suicidal ideation – that's where it's dangerous," Bezuidenhout said.

"Where we come from plays a huge role in whether we become bullies," Thumbiran said. "Whatever we hold in terms of toxicity spreads through our interactions." It's also about showing our kids the right way to behave through our own actions, said Bezuidenhout. They internalise what we do, not what we say.

Parents also need to be attuned to what's going on with their children. If they tell us about incidents of bullying, we must ensure that they know they are heard, supported, and that we'll take appropriate action. Ask your children what they need from you in such situations.

We also need to empower our kids to find themselves and own their identity. "Often bullies and victims struggle with belonging," Bezuidenhout said. "Belonging isn't the same as fitting in." Kids who will do anything to fit in will behave in ways that they shouldn't. She quoted professor and author Brené Brown who said, "Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are."

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TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Generous *tzedakah* key to transforming our community

OPINION

Can you imagine our South African Jewish community having everything it needs? A community where all parents can afford school fees? Where everyone has access to the best medical care? Where no-one is living in poverty or unable to meet basic needs? Where our communal bodies – our shuls and schools, our welfare institutions, our security and other organisations – have the funds they need to fulfil and extend their vital mandates? Can you imagine a thriving South African Jewish community that has all of the financial resources it needs to be strong, robust, and vibrant?

We don't need to imagine it. It's in our hands to create this bright future for our community. One single *mitzvah* holds the key – *tzedakah*.

At first glance, *tzedakah* may not seem all that extraordinary. It's a *mitzvah* we know well and subscribe to. We all recognise its importance and desirability. It's even something most of us already do, to a certain extent. And yet, when done right, *tzedakah* can be completely transformative.

What's the "right way" to give *tzedakah*? What exactly makes this *mitzvah* so revolutionary? The idea that, according to our Torah sources, we're required to give at least 10% of our earnings to *tzedakah*.

Of course, there are exceptions. The *halacha* guides us on issues of affordability, with the very wealthy being able to give even more than 20% and those unable to give 10% giving what they can afford, within the *halachic* guidelines assessing what that means for each individual. But everyone, irrespective of their means, is included in this great *mitzvah*. Even those who rely on



tzedakah should give a nominal amount. We can all be givers.

But the standard measure of giving for most people is 10%. The divine genius of this *halacha* – of all *halacha* – is to translate vague, well-meaning values like generosity into real, tangible, measurable action. The idea of 10% is so simple, so clear, and so revolutionary.

It gives us total clarity on what we need to do. It measures the value of giving proportionately. Rather than raw rands and cents, it's about the percentage relative to each individual. By proactively separating a fixed percentage every year, we remind ourselves that the money we give didn't belong to us in the first place – that we are simply G-d's trustees of the 10% we are mandated to use to help the needy and support worthy

causes for the betterment of society.

This idea of dedicating 10% of our earnings to *tzedakah*, has been carried out meticulously by generations of Jews. It's a standard we have stood by throughout the ages, through exile and dispersion, across continents, during good times and bad.

And it holds the key no less for us here, today. I have no doubt that if we each gave our 10%, we would unleash a wave of unprecedented growth and energy in our community. No-one would go without, and all our organisations would have what they needed to thrive.

In recent times, I've seen this in action, via a series of remarkable crowd-funded *tzedakah* campaigns. Shuls and schools and other communal organisations, having set themselves sizeable targets, have met – and often

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



exceeded – those targets each time. Contributions big and small have flooded in from people directly involved and those simply eager to support a worthy cause. Call centres have buzzed with enthusiastic volunteers. It's been inspiring to watch it all unfold; to witness such open-hearted generosity.

And each of these organisations has harnessed that generosity to unleash tremendous growth – rolling out new programmes; expanding existing ones; upgrading services and facilities; attracting more people; and doing more good.

They've shown us that *tzedakah* is transformative. As a community, instead of talking about donor fatigue, we need to think about how we can increase our giving. There's so much goodwill, generosity, and abundant resources. There are donors big and small. We need to tap into it. So much can be achieved in our community if we have the funding.

The transformative power of giving is a subject close to my heart. It was a key message in my address at last month's annual rabbinical conference, and is the theme of my 5784 New Year message to the community.

Now, as the new year begins, is the time to dedicate ourselves to the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. Let 5784 be the year we start a *tzedakah* revolution.

In this merit, may Hashem inscribe and seal us all for a year of blessing and abundance.

• *The chief rabbi's New Year message, "Let's start a revolution – how tzedakah can change the world", will be available at your shul or school, or to download at chiefrabbi.co.za.*

Being nice isn't just manners, it's a spiritual imperative

OPINION

RABBI RICKY SEEFF



Social media is great. It allows us to connect. To share. To access the world.

It also allows us to exclude. To hurt. To mimic foreign values.

It's becoming increasingly evident that the pros of social media are counter balanced, or outweighed, by the cons it presents.

The social lives of teens are unbelievably complex. That was before social media came onto the scene. The constant comparisons, snide remarks on chats, exclusion from groups, and uninterrupted access to other teens' lives is taking an emotional toll.

What does this have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

It's the day of judgement, a great day that approaches, and we all sense its magnitude, like an impending job interview or meeting with the principal. A day when we begin the 10-day process of *teshuvah* – looking inward and changing our relationship with Hashem and spirituality.

It's the anniversary of the day Adam and Eve were created and, for that reason, we stand in the dock and essentially try to justify our creation by demonstrating that our real and pure intentions are to be better Jews – at least better than we were the year before.

It's therefore quite strange that in the process of *teshuvah*, the easiest acts to improve on and get given a clean slate for are those *mitzvot* between man and G-d. We apologise and

commit ourselves wholeheartedly to improving and, hopefully, Hashem forgives us.

Yet, when it comes to the interpersonal infractions, the wrongs we have done to others, we cannot be forgiven by Hashem. Those acts remain on our "record" until we ask the people we have harmed for forgiveness. Hashem cannot overwrite these wrongs. We have to put in the effort, face the music and the heat, and apologise.

This fact isn't insignificant. We're held accountable spiritually for our relationships with other people. Judaism demands of us that we behave in a certain way to others. It's not just good manners, it's a spiritual requirement.

This is captured in a powerful Mishna in Pirkei Avot (Chapter 3 Mishna 10): "Chanina ben Dosa would also say: 'One whom his fellow men find him to be pleasant, Hashem also finds pleasant. But one whom people do not find pleasant, Hashem does not find pleasant'."

Hashem gets pleasure with people only when they are held in good esteem with others. G-d cares how you treat others.

The issue with our interactions on social media is that it's so easy to do the wrong

thing. The platforms enable impulsive responses – just take Donald Trump and Kanye West as clear illustrations.

We don't think before we post. A harmful "chirp" here, and a nasty emoji there. We also don't see the issue in posting Instagram pictures to everyone in the grade, and not thinking of those we left out of the picture.

As this beautiful, powerful, and holy day of introspection and *teshuvah* approaches, let's think about our lives in a broader way. Let's think about how critical our relationships with our peers are, and how they are actually something important to Hashem and something intrinsically spiritual.

We can use social media to do good, to be kind and inclusive, or the opposite. Let's start off the new year mindful of our friends and their feelings. It sure beats needing to ask them for forgiveness.

• *Rabbi Ricky Seeff is the general director of the South African Jewish Board of Education and former principal of King David Primary School Victory Park.*

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BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY: RENEWING OUR TIES

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has a long and storied history in South Africa. Spearheaded by **Bertie Lubner** and his wife, **Hillary**, and now continued by his son, **Marc**, the connections ran deep for more than 40 years. **Bertie** believed that BGU could play an important role in collaborating with South Africa to overcome its challenges. To honour him, the university awarded him an honorary doctorate and a lifetime achievement award.

Solly Yellin, **Eric Samson**, and the **Yach Family** - **Dianna**, **Jonathan**, and **Estelle** - have also played pivotal roles over the years. **Dianna Yach**, the chairperson of the Mauerberger Foundation, has supported the Mauerberger Foundation Scholarships to empower women Bedouin students.

In 1997, the late **Nelson Mandela** received an honorary doctorate from BGU thanks to **Bertie's** efforts.

Recently, BGU has renewed its relationships in South Africa. **Jeff Kaye**, the vice-president for public affairs and resource development, and **Liv Sperber**, the director of global development, English speakers, recently visited to meet academics, businessmen, farmers, and leaders in the Jewish community to discuss how BGU could co-operate with the South African Jewish community and the wider South African communities for the mutual benefit of all.

"Ben-Gurion University has thrived thanks to the generosity of friends from South Africa," says **Kaye**. "The challenges are even greater now, and we believe we have solutions

that could benefit many here. To do so, we're seeking to make new friends who believe in our vision of changing the world through practical science and technology."

They also held meetings with several South African academic institutes to discuss mutual research collaborations.

African studies

BGU is uniquely suited to collaborate with South Africa as it faces its challenges. University faculty members are conversant in the issues facing the country and the continent. Africa has a bright economic future, though the current challenges run deep. Through the Tamar Golan Africa Centre, the premier research centre of its kind in Israel, Professor **Lynn Schler** has devoted her career to studying Africa. She believes that the continent, with its young and eager populations, will play an important role in the global economy in the future.

"Being aware of Africa and the rapid changes occurring there, we'll understand and engage with the major trends that will shape all aspects of the 21st century globally," she says.

Her latest innovation is a Master's degree programme in African sustainable communities. The vision is to create lasting solutions tailored to local communities. South African students can come to BGU to learn the tools necessary to return with a sustainable initiative for their own communities.

Climate change

Climate change has become the buzz word in recent years, but BGU has taken advantage of one of the harshest natural laboratories in the world - the Negev desert - to innovate solutions to water scarcity, famine, and drought, and for alternative energy creation. The university hasn't just hopped on the bandwagon looking to cash in on the buzz, it has been researching and innovating for more than 50 years, leading to some impressive breakthroughs, from desalination to cherry tomatoes.

South Africa has been buffeted by extreme weather and scarce water resources. BGU knows how to make the most of a little bit of water, and its experts in water treatment and agriculture have been active in Africa for years.

"We're eager to bring that knowledge to South Africa and co-operate with local academia, farmers, and various local organisations to solve local water and agriculture issues together," says Professor **Noam Weisbrod**, the director of the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research. The institutes' researchers are exploring water, agriculture, and energy issues, and welcome students from all over the world to study for advanced degrees in these fields to bring back cutting edge expertise to their home countries. Graduates have risen to important positions in many countries around the world, including African countries, and could do the same in South Africa.

BGU plant biologist Professor **Simon Barak** is already collaborating with a South African colleague on an exciting project - growing plants on the moon. Their project will be one of two on the Beresheet2 moon lander scheduled for launch in the next couple of years. It's an exciting exploration of agriculture beyond Earth, as natural resources here dwindle.

Prof. Lynn Schler with her students.
above

Helping underserved populations

BGU wasn't founded as an isolated ivory tower, but is devoted to being a catalyst for the underserved populations of the Negev. The university has always looked outward: from mobile health units to economic opportunities and providing education to those who historically, were shut out of higher education. The university actively recruits brilliant faculty members who are interested in changing the world, not just researching it from afar.

The Guilford Glazer Faculty of Business and Management focuses on myriad ways to develop economic opportunities for the immigrant, Bedouin, and other populations of the Negev. The lessons the faculty has learned in the Negev are applicable to inequalities in South Africa. Solutions developed in Israel could be modified and applied to South African challenges in co-operation with South African partners.

Medicine and global health

Even more opportunities will be made available to South African students in the near future. BGU's international medical school will open in the coming year to South Africans with Israeli citizenship who are interested in studying medicine in a four-year, American-style programme in English. There are scholarships available through Telfed.

With a global health focus, the medical school prepares students to meet the dire shortage of doctors in Israel and to treat all the myriad illnesses and diseases of Israel's multiethnic, multicultural society.

"We have received so much from our friends in South Africa for many years, and we are here to give back to the Jewish community in South Africa and the country as a whole," says **Sperber**.



Jeff Kaye and Liv Sperber with future BGU student Kenneth Mokgathe



Ben-Gurion University
of the Negev

For more information about Ben-Gurion University and its activities in Israel and South Africa, contact Liv Sperber, Ben-Gurion University's director of global development, English speakers at: livsperber@bgu.ac.il.

Let this be the year

OPINION

RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN



The volume of Google searches for the word “diet” increases exponentially on – yes, you’ve guessed correctly – 1 January. During the first two weeks of the secular year, you’ll struggle to find parking at the local gym. Fear not, the run on the treadmills will soon end as the resolve of the amazing but often unrealistic New Year’s resolutions start to melt away. Within days, search engines will be used to look up calorie-laden recipes and the queues for fitness equipment at the sports club will disappear.

For spiritual and religious pledges, the red-letter day is of course 1 Tishrei. On Rosh Hashanah, we take a good and deep look at who we are, what we do, and how we relate to others and to G-d. We firmly resolve to improve in every area of our lives. We want to become better spouses, parents, children, employers, employees, friends. We commit to act kinder, to speak nicer, and even wish we could control our innermost thoughts and impulses. We want to become more connected to our Maker, and wish to pray more often and more meaningfully, to perform more *mitzvot* more regularly.

In truth, we cannot compare the energy of the two dates. New Year’s Day is nothing more than a random date on the calendar. Yes, the diary pages are blank and there’s the promise of freshness and renewal. For that reason, it’s a propitious time to commit to change and improvement. But it’s also a day many spend nursing a hangover following the excesses of the previous night.

Rosh Hashanah is a day filled with spiritual energy. The name says it all – head of the year – not just another arbitrary day. As the brain is

the seat of the highest and most crucial forms of human functioning, this day is metaphysically connected with the rest of the year. It’s not only the day when we renew our commitment and connection with the One Above. It’s also the anniversary of the world’s creation, and the day on which G-d renews His contract with the



universe. Not only is it an appropriate day for introspection and resolution, it’s an auspicious day to do so successfully.

However, it cannot be said that Rosh Hashanah commitments will automatically carry more effectively than those made on 1 January.

In Deuteronomy (11,12), the annual cycle is described as “from the beginning of the year until the end of a year”. Grammatically,

this is awkward, with an inconsistent use of the definite article. “Beginning of the year to end of the year” seems more correct, as would be “beginning of a year to end of a year”. The dissonance actually carries a powerful message. Each of us, at the beginning of a year, resolves firmly, “This will be the year, different from all previous ones, when I will realise my full potential and implement real change”. Twelve months later, as we reach the end of the year, the definite article is dropped, and we sadly have to accept it was just “a year”.

How do we make sure that the powerful energy of the high holidays doesn’t go up in smoke soon after the end-of-Yom-Kippur shofar blast?

Here are a few practical suggestions, most of which work just as well for diets and fitness plans:

Resolutions must be specific. Vague commitments, such as “This year will be better than last” or “I’m going to be a better person” are unlikely to stick. Concrete undertakings, like “I’ll attend shul once a week”; “I’ll be home for work no later than 18:00”; “I’ll no longer use my cellphone while driving my kids to/from school”, have a far higher chance of success.

Aim for achievable objectives. Going from 0 to 120 in the course of one Unetane Tokef isn’t possible, as moving as the chazan may have been. Changing from total shul absenteeism to attending shacharit and mincha/maariv seven days a week isn’t sustainable. It will also be less daunting to make a time-capped resolution – being good forever is so scary.

Finally, follow the Talmudic advice, “Accept

upon yourself a teacher and acquire a friend,” (Ethics of the Fathers 1,6). Change is easier and more lasting with a mentor who can guide and advise, tell you what’s realistic and what’s not, and what your next steps should be. This person will also be able to monitor progress, and if you are open to this, gently remind, prod, and nag as necessary. A good friend can also be your buddy along this road – less threatening and daunting than an authority figure, yet impartial enough to be honest and open with you.

Rabbi Sholom Ber of Lubavitch (1860-1920) was travelling through Italy. While waiting at a train station, he observed a brand-new powerful locomotive being prepared for a journey. There was much activity around the mighty machine – people running to and fro, shouting instructions, shovelling coal, planning and executing. After much preparation, the engine was ready to go. With waving flags and the sound of a whistle, the station master instructed the driver to leave the platform. The horn blew, a huge puff of steam was let out, and the locomotive slowly made its way down the tracks, leaving behind the entire train. Nobody had remembered to couple the wagons! Upon his return to Russia, Rabbi Sholom Ber related the story to the chassidim. The moral was obvious.

The head of our year is that powerful steam engine. Our challenge is to hitch the rest of the year to the head.

Shana tova, and let this be the year.

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul, and the chairperson of the South African Rabbinical Association.



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Travelling ‘shulsmen’ ensure services continue in small centres

TALI FEINBERG

The tradition of Jews from larger South African Jewish communities visiting smaller country communities over the high holidays has been going on for decades. Now, as communities dwindle both within the big cities and the small towns, individuals and families remain committed to keeping this time-honoured tradition alive.

“For as long as the community wants to do this, I will continue to come for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur,” says Nachi Ash, who has spent every *yomtov* for the past 23 years visiting the Kimberley Jewish community. “If there’s one Jew, I promise to bring nine.”

“It’s the most uplifting, meaningful *yomtov*,” says Ash. “Instead of being surrounded by a huge community and a full shul, it’s just 10 people or so. But it’s so powerful. It changes the community for the rest of the year. It’s when it feels its identity the most. Its beautiful shul is opened and its members see three full services a day, a full *minyan*, *leining*, *davening*, and the blowing of the shofar. The most important thing to me is that it uplifts the community, it gives its members the strength to

continue, and it makes them feel alive.”

The relationship goes both ways, and Ash says he has developed wonderful friendships with members of the community, including its chairperson, Barney Horwitz, and his family. Ash and his friend, Yos Shishler, have come every year, from when they were teenagers. Later, Ash and Shishler brought their wives and children along for every *yomtov*. “My kids spent every *yomtov* of their lives at Kimberley Shul,” says Ash. “Now they’re all grown up and they’ve stayed in Johannesburg over the past two years, but that hasn’t stopped me from returning.”

Not even the COVID-19 pandemic stopped Ash. “I said to them, ‘We cannot break the cycle, which has been going since the community was founded in 1902. It’s the second oldest shul in South Africa. So we even continued to have COVID-19-safe services over those years.’”

Ash says he “takes his hat off” to Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, who has been the driving force and co-ordinator of this initiative in recent decades. Says Silberhaft, “The programme began in 1949, when the country communities department was established [by

the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD)].” Country communities used to pay for visitors to come, Ash says, which would cover their expenses. Nowadays, there aren’t the funds to do that, but volunteers still make the trip. “We take over a guesthouse and bring kosher food,” says Ash. “There have been many families who have joined us over the years. One family drives up from Cape Town every year.”

This year, Silberhaft will be in Bloemfontein for Rosh Hashanah. “I’ve been travelling since I was 14 to small communities, from when I was at Yeshiva College,” he says. “I started off in a town called Messina. Except for three *yomtovs* since then, I’ve been with communities around sub-Saharan Africa as the travelling rabbi for the SAJBD and now the Small Jewish Communities Association of South Africa.”

He has since guided other young men to follow in his footsteps. “What’s fantastic about this programme is that it’s not only for the benefit of small communities, it’s also for those that go out. They learn about country life and the challenges people experience.” Most importantly, they meet people from different walks of life and build long-lasting relationships, often returning every year.

Josh Marcus has been going to small communities since he was 13. “I went to Kroonstad for five years, Rondebosch for three years, and now Plettenberg Bay for three years. Twenty or more years ago, there was an abundance of places to go. Subsequently, there are far less places due to the dwindling of the communities. I co-ordinate with Plett Shul directly, as well as with Rabbi Silberhaft.

“I love helping people and using my strengths to assist with whatever I can,” he says. “As a *chazan* and singer, this falls into my repertoire. I lead services, read from the Torah, blow the shofar, and give sermons. The

most uplifting part is being able to bring people to shul who wouldn’t have access to a *minyan* or services otherwise. The most challenging aspect is tailoring the services to the community. While all the prayers are done correctly, it’s about singing the specific, known songs and emphasising the correct prayers, as recognised by the community.”

He often brings his family along, but once left his family over Pesach. “Though it was difficult, it was rewarding as people came specifically for *yomtov*, and they knew that the shul would be manned.

“I would advise all those able to do this to do it,” he says. “It’s rewarding and you get to meet a lot of people. It also gives you the opportunity to see new places and experience new things. We need to remember the smaller, outlying communities. It’s our heritage. We can move forward and grow only when we recognise where

we came from.” Gidon Erster has been travelling to country communities for more than 20 years. “I’ve gone mainly for the high holidays, but I’ve also helped out over a Shabbos when there has been a need. I’ve been to Gqeberha, Cape Town, Hermanus, Bloemfontein, and Durban. I’ll be going to Bloemfontein this year. I was there last year as well. I don’t get to choose where I go, I fill a gap for a community that needs help.”

As a Barmitzvah teacher, “I love to sing, lead shul services, and read from the Torah. A friend of my father’s once told me that Hashem blessed me with the ability to sing, and that I must always use this blessing for good, wherever and whenever I possibly could.

“Knowing that you are responsible for ensuring

Jews and Jewish sites survive Morocco earthquake unscathed >>>Continued from page 2

seven seconds I was downstairs without anything, just my shirt and underwear.”

The hotel didn’t let guests re-enter, so Dahan and others spent the rest of the night sleeping outside the synagogue. The building, like the rest in the city, was built after 1960 as Agadir was reconstructed closer to the shore, downhill from the ruined city.

Dahan said he had quickly connected with Bilaid el Bouhali, the Berber who manages his grove, and learned that while el Bouhali was safe, his city of Oulad Berhil, in the mountains between Marrakesh and Agadir, was in ruins.

On Sunday, Dahan was trying to figure out how to get himself and the etrogs out of the country. Marrakesh Menara Airport is closed until further notice, but Dahan said he thought the first etrog shipments would depart on schedule.

In Marrakesh, where about 120 Jews live, many buildings have collapsed, and authorities have instructed residents to sleep outdoors for the next several days in case of aftershocks. The majority of Morocco’s 1 500 Jews live in Casablanca, which wasn’t affected by the earthquake. But though many homes lay in ruins, including Dahan’s family home, where his grandmother and uncles lived until recently, relatively few deaths occurred there.

“Everything is okay. not a single Jew was injured,” said Menachem Danino, a Casablanca-born Israeli who runs a Facebook group for Moroccans in Israel. “All of the houses in the quarter were destroyed except the synagogue, which is fine with the exception of some cracks in the walls.”

Just a few miles outside the city, entire villages have crumbled, and an accounting of the injured and dead is still taking place.

“Throughout the day, they have been meeting

that the few Jewish men and woman in the smaller communities in South Africa can still celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur or a particular Shabbos is the most uplifting aspect of doing this,” he says. “The most challenging aspect is definitely being away from my family for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or Shabbos.”

Still, he would encourage “all those who have the ability and skills to *daven* and *lein* from the Torah to do this, even just once. It’s such a rewarding and inspiring opportunity. Not everybody knows how to lead the services or read from the Torah. If you have that talent and skill, you must use it. I want to thank all the communities that have hosted me over the years and given me the special task of ensuring that shul services continue as often as possible, wherever they may be in South Africa.”

officials on the ground and going out to villages between 15km to 20km outside of Marrakesh, where the earthquake really wiped the villages off the face of this earth,” Maisel said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu opened his Sunday Cabinet meeting by pledging support for Morocco. An official request for aid hadn’t yet been made by midday on 10 September, Israeli officials said.

Another Israeli non-profit organisation, SmartAID, said it had sent 20 people along with technology that could facilitate communication and medical care in areas without electricity and running water. And the JDC is building up a team around its Casablanca-based Morocco director for a sustained aid operation.

“As we mourn the loss of life and devastation in Morocco,

we’re working with the Moroccan Jewish community to provide assistance to those most impacted in Marrakesh and ensure their most basic needs are being met,” said Pablo Weinstein, JDC’s chief operating officer. “As we in the Jewish community approach the high holidays, weighing the uncertain balance between life and death and the importance of aiding those most in need, we’re on the ground in Morocco to preserve life, to comfort and support the most vulnerable, and to fulfil our commitment to repairing a broken world.”

Danino said he saw divine intervention in the fact that Morocco’s many Jewish sites had apparently survived the quake.

“Graves of Jewish sages [in the affected area] weren’t damaged,” he said, noting that he had spoken to the people responsible for the upkeep of the tomb of Rabbi Shlomo Bel Hench, a chief rabbi of Marrakesh who died 500 years ago and is buried outside the city in Ourika.

There have been funerals day and night at the cemetery but the tomb of Rabbi Shlomo was not damaged at all.

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OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



I still remember Mr Seligman, my old English teacher back in high school in Brooklyn, standing at the head of the class, acting out the scene from our set work, the story of *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, published in 1861.

With power and passion, he dramatised how the miserly man would count his gold pieces so lovingly as the shiny coins slipped through his fingers.

The image comes to mind as we are in the days before Rosh Hashanah, preparing for the days of judgement ahead. Over the coming days of awe, we will, no doubt, be hearing many rabbis pontificating in shul about South Africa, Israel, and the world stage. Indeed, there's much to talk about.

But, at the end of the day, or at the beginning of a new year, surely what matters most is us – that is me, you, and every single individual. Will we as individuals have any meaningful impact on our country, or our homeland, or the world? Surely our greatest impact and influence will be on ourselves, our families, and our immediate spheres of influence. Yes, hopefully, bit by bit, person by person, the effects we have on ourselves and our families can add up and make a big difference in the wider world. But it all starts at home. In fact, it starts with the individual.

Old Silas Marner counted what was most precious to him – his gold. G-d, too, counts that which is most precious to Him – us. How often G-d would call for a census to be taken of the Jewish people. And sometimes I wonder if we ourselves realise how treasured we are in Hashem's eyes.

In any census, there are no distinctions made between people. Every individual counts as one, no more and no less. When we're looking to make up a *minyan*, we need 10 Jews. Nobody asks you for your resume, how much money you have, or how much Torah you've studied. Great or ordinary, we all count for one. Moshe Rabeinu, Moshe Dayan, or Moshe Chaim Goldberg, Maimonides or Mendelsohn, Rabbi Shmulewitz or Mr Shlemiel, all count for one. No more, no less.

But, significantly, every one of us does count. And the Jewish people count on us, every one of us.

The cosmic mission

This little old Jew, wearing thick glasses and pushing a walker, hobbles into the NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration) recruitment office in Cape Canaveral. The young woman at the desk asks how she can help him. The man says, "It's about your advertisement, where you say you're looking for new astronauts for the next space mission."

"Yes?" says the woman, rather perplexed. "We're looking for young men who are qualified pilots, in excellent physical condition, with perfect eyesight."

"Well," says the old man, "I just wanted you to know that on me you shouldn't rely."

How many of us say, "Don't rely on me?" or "Don't count on me." But we all count. And, yes, we do count on you.

Speaking of astronauts, I remember hearing the Rebbe speaking at a farbrengen and using the astronaut on a space mission as an illustration for the keen sense of responsibility every Jew should feel about our own historic, national mission.

What if the astronaut on board the spacecraft decided one day that he was going to "do his own thing", that instead of working according to the meticulous plan given to him by mission control, today he would take a break, play it cool, and relax? Obviously, this would be a disaster in the making. With so much time, money, and resources invested in his training, such a thought would be absolute madness and would compromise and threaten the entire project.

Well, said the Rebbe, we Jews too have invested centuries, indeed millennia, into the project of Jewish continuity. We have educated and nurtured generations of young people to fulfil their role as dedicated members of our people and to be committed to our national mission. And now? A Jew with such an awesome heritage and huge responsibility will simply walk away from the project and "do his own thing"? Surely this would be no less of a disaster than that of our foolish, reckless astronaut.

Whether we're considering our marriage choices, what kind of home we wish to establish, or how we will educate our own children, we all should appreciate that every single one of us counts. And, yes, the Jewish people are counting on us.

When push comes to shove

Here in South Africa, we used to have many small Jewish country communities scattered throughout the land. Today, the vast majority of these have declined and disintegrated as the younger generations came to the big cities to study, work, and find suitable marriage partners. But a fascinating thing about those smaller communities was the dedication of ordinary people to keep the communal infrastructure going. And it wasn't only about keeping up the shul or the *minyan*. I knew people who weren't necessarily "religious" but they headed up the town's Chevrah Kadisha. They would personally participate in doing the *taharas* – preparing the deceased for a traditional Jewish burial. That's dedication!

Clearly, people living in those small towns were more committed because they knew that if not for them, there might be no-one else to do the job. With fewer people available, they felt a deeper sense of responsibility. Interestingly, when those same people moved to the bigger cities, they often no longer had that same degree of

involvement in communal affairs.

Rosh Hashanah is a good time to stop and think about our importance in the community and, indeed, in the grand scheme of creation.

Rav Yisroel Salanter, the 19th century father of the Mussar movement, once said that "every Jew should feel as if he or she is the last Jew on earth". And if they won't do what needs to be done, there will be no-one else to do it.

Over the years, I've made the point to many a Barmitzvah boy that "You count! And you, yes you, are personally responsible for the future of the Jewish people!"

I know it's a bit of a guilt trip, but imagine if every Jew felt that way. Rochel and I wish you *shana tova*, a wonderful new year filled with all Hashem's abundant blessings for you and your family.

- *With acknowledgments to chabad.org.*
- *Rabbi Yossy Goldman is life rabbi emeritus at Sydenham Shul, and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association.*

Trial and teshuva

OPINION

REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY



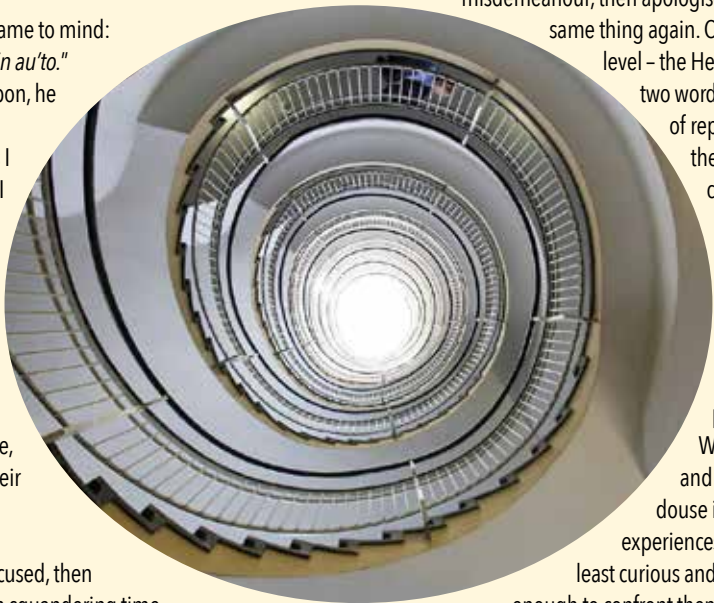
The morning was clear, the sun had just peeped over the horizon, and I found myself sitting on the sand, watching the waves as they gently lapped back and forth, the fresh breeze welcoming a new day. It was a moment of quiet respite in a world gone mad. How perfect, soothing, and embracing it was simply to bask in the sun's rays and watch the rhythm of the sea. Yet, somewhere in the background, I could hear the street, the world, the hustle and bustle, the challenge and the pain, the confusion, and the noise.

A statement in the Gemarah (Makos 10b) came to mind: "*Baderech she'adam rotze lailech ba – molochin au'to.*" (Whatever path a person wishes to proceed upon, he will be lead and assisted.)

So where was I heading? What journey was I taking? Where was G-d leading me? At times, I feel that I'm sucked into the vortex of simply walking this earth, with all its challenges and difficulties. The stress and anxiety is often overwhelming, and the journey feels so painful. And there are times when I'm blessed to have a moment of respite, like now, on the beach, where the world is just so natural, where everything is where it should be, and each element, including me, is playing their part in G-d's magnificent symphony.

My journey, like most humans, is one of vacillation – connected, then disconnected; focused, then wandering around aimlessly; purposeful, then squandering time indiscriminately. So, the path I tread is a complicated one, yet you need to realise that G-d is leading you down this path.

In a few days, we'll stand before the Master of the Universe and request another year of life, filled with His abundant blessings. Time, as we know it, is a helix – it travels round and comes back to the same point every year. The only moving part is us! Man is called a "*mehalech*" – one who walks/goes. Since we are now finishing orbiting a time helix, it's an apt time to consider what we accomplished this cycle; where we have tread; what we contributed to this world this year. Did we walk this year heavily invested in our ego, subservient to all its whims and desires, or did we walk the path of resistance



and discover that which is beyond ourselves. Did we stretch and grow? Or did we stagnate and even go backwards? Did we take steps to explore new possibilities and ideas, or did we remain stubborn and stuck in our preconceived notions?

One of the main ideas of the high holidays is the concept of *teshuva* (repentance). There are practical steps that we need to take in order to repent – first, recognise the misdemeanour, then apologise to man and G-d and resolve not to do the same thing again. Chassidic philosophy, however, teaches a deeper level – the Hebrew word *teshuva* can be broken up into two words – "*teshuv hay*" – meaning that the process of repentance is nothing more than returning to the "*hay*" which is metaphoric for G-d. We all carry within us a piece of g-dliness, a soul, and ultimately, G-d leads us along the path we chose, our trials and tribulations uniquely chosen, presenting opportunities that highlight our weaknesses and difficulties, but ultimately they all are an opportunity for growth and for us to return – back to the pristine, quintessential person we truly are. We human beings despise pain, difficulty, and challenge. We'll do anything to minimise it, douse it, or simply ignore it. But it's in these painful experiences that growth is found. We need to learn to be at least curious and questioning about them, and better still, brave enough to confront them.

As the curtain closes on 5783, ponder what path G-d has lead you on this past year. Find a virtual spot of quietness where you can access your soul, your inner desires, and hear the calling of your true self. Know that G-d is leading you, and everything that comes your way is a gift for you to open and explore. May this year be filled with G-d's abundant love and blessings, materially and spiritually.

Shana tova umetukah!

- *Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah and applies it to contemporary times.*





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Lingering sense of Judaism a taste worth cultivating

OPINION

Jewish tradition has a unique way of associating our *chagim* with smells, tastes, and sounds. Is there anything that tugs on our hearts in the same way as the haunting call of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah? Is there any taste that lingers in the soul more than the final taste of afikoman at the Pesach seder? And is there anything as sweet as 02:00 cheesecake and coffee on Shavuot morning?

We live in a world that’s increasingly rootless compared to generations passed. This rootlessness extends to many areas of our lives. We live in homes for far shorter than we did in the past. There was a time when a family home housed generations, and while that still can occur today, it’s far from the norm. In America, for example, the average person can expect to move home 11 times in their lifetime. In South Africa, it’s an unfortunate reality that many of our families are continents apart, and many of us spend *yomtov* with a part of our heart in another country that’s home to parents, children, or siblings. Furthermore, we’re increasingly becoming citizens of the digital world, which brings with it a great deal of benefits. For example, a great deal of our Jewish education in South Africa is linked with and supported by programmes and people in Israel, and connecting with them has never been easier. Through email, WhatsApp, and Zoom, the boundaries vanish as we all connect online, but on the other hand, we become that much more distant from physical presence and rootedness.

It’s our Jewish practices and traditions that ground and connect us in this world – to one another, and to ourselves throughout



time. Although I’m a different person this year to who I was five, 10, and certainly 30 years ago, the sweet crunch of apples and honey that I eat on Rosh Hashanah night stays with me and connects my past and present self across the decades. At that moment, as the honey lingers on my tongue, I’m again five years old in my parent’s home in Durban, sitting with my mom, dad, brother, and sister. I’m again 20 years old, at Yeshiva in Johannesburg, immersed in Torah study with my fellow *bochrim*. I’m again 30 years old, a rabbi in Cape Town, sharing Rosh Hashanah with my new community members. No matter who I become, the apples and honey of Rosh Hashanah stay with me and tether me.

Even more so the sound of the shofar. The shofar changes from year to year, both because of changes in tokeia and shofar. I use an unusual shofar made from a mouflon sheep, a gift from a dear friend and master tokeia, which has an exceptionally deep tone, contrasting with the higher pitch that I usually hear. But it’s also because the shofar means something different to me each year. Some years it’s the shofar of *Har Sinai*, sounded by Hashem at the giving of the Torah, invoking His presence and preparing us to greet our teacher, and other years it’s the shofar sounded at the coronation of the king, as was done for David HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech, and as we are doing to declare Hashem our king. Still other years,

it’s the crying of my soul, saddened by bad decisions I have made over the year and the chasm that has opened between me and my creator. But in all of those times, the shofar becomes a hinge around which the rest of my life turns, an immovable peg in a dynamic life.

In my work as an educator, this phenomenon becomes not just an experience of my own life, but a goal to create such experiences in the lives of my students. Rabbi Yehuda Amital, the rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion (the Gush) said once that young people who were raised observant but move away from it often suffer from a deficiency of kneidlach and noodle kugel, or perhaps of the Pesach seder’s aromas and the melodies of the *yamim noraim* (the high holidays).

This challenge, dear readers and friends, now becomes yours too by virtue of reading this article. You’ve become complicit in the task of conveying these experiences to our people; to reinforce and compound these islands of Jewish practice in their lives; and in partnering with them in traditions that will linger in their senses. We’re truly blessed with a Jewish life that draws on the richest depths of our past and guides us towards a magnificent future. My prayer for you – and for us all – is that this Rosh Hashanah brings with it both of these things – a return to the best of our past, and a path forward to an even brighter future.

Shana tova umetukah!

• Rabbi Sam Thurgood is the head of Jewish life and learning at United Herzlia Schools.



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“The trouble is: you think you have time.” Buddha

With many permanent residency programmes in Europe no longer available or becoming more expensive, there are fewer and fewer options to consider.

Over the past few months, the following substantial changes have occurred: Portugal has closed its golden visa programme; Greece has increased the minimum investment amount to €500 000; Ireland has abolished the residency by investment scheme; Malta requires proof of assets of at least €500 000 with at least €150 000 in financial assets; and Spain is considering doubling the minimum investment amount or abolishing the programme altogether.

But Cyprus is still open!



Earlier this year, Cyprus made two changes to its fast-track permanent residency programme: Parents and parents-in-law of the main investor no longer qualify, however, the spouse and all dependent children up to the age of 25 still

qualify; and there's an increase in the proof of annual income for the main investor, the spouse, and dependent children.

With the minimum property investment amount remaining unchanged, this is the only English-speaking country in Europe with an affordable and attractive programme still available.

There's never been a better time to explore investing in Cyprus to realise your plan B!

The three main benefits of investing in Cyprus are securing permanent residency through property investment; the lifestyle options on offer; and the peace of mind that Cyprus is a secure investment destination.

Plan B

The permanent residency programme on offer in Cyprus is almost the only one available, so is the best in Europe. Two generations in the same family line qualify, including dependent children up to the age of 25. Not only is the application process quick – it takes just four months for residency to be approved – permanent residency status for the whole family is for life, the permit never expiring nor needing to be renewed. Another benefit is that you don't need to live in Cyprus to retain your residency status. Cypriot permanent residents have the right to apply for citizenship following their physical presence in the country for a number of years, so will follow a naturalisation programme.



Lifestyle

Being an ex-British colony, there's no language barrier. Everyone speaks English, and all the documentation is in English. Cyprus has a relaxed, stress-free lifestyle, offering an ideal family environment.

Safe investment destination

Cyprus has been voted one of the safest countries in the world, and offers a solid environment in which to invest in real estate. Properties in Cyprus offer excellent value for money when compared to other European countries, especially homes right on or near to the Mediterranean.

In Cyprus, as an ex-pat, you're not restricted to buying only in special designated areas, nor are you prescribed to stay in the country every year to retain your residency. Being able to rent your property out has the real benefit of being able to

earn a decent euro-based income. There's high demand for both long-term rentals and short-term holiday lets. Not only will your asset generate income for you, you have complete peace of mind that the property purchase is legitimate and your ownership is guaranteed.

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Cypriot Realty, a proudly South African company in operation for more than 15 years with offices in South Africa and Cyprus, is your trusted partner to realise your plan B in Europe. We're recognised as southern Africa's authoritative investment specialists promoting Cyprus as an ideal destination for acquiring European Union citizenship or permanent residency, for property investment, for immigration or retirement, and starting an EU-based business. We understand investors' needs, and we have an impressive track record showcasing our success.

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Special inspection trip offer

Cyprus really is the perfect choice!



YOUR KEY TO LIVING IN BEAUTIFUL CYPRUS

New year, new olim. Celebration or challenge?

Being in a new country for Rosh Hashanah has its challenges. The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to recent *olim* to find out what this time of year is like for them, and how they plan to celebrate the year 5784.

Tayla Lemmer

Six months ago, I said goodbye to my life in Johannesburg and began my aliya journey. Now, I'm celebrating my first Rosh Hashanah as an Israeli citizen. This time of year always has us looking back into the past and the past six months have been a whirlwind. Making aliya fresh out of university comes with its challenges. But Israel has given me a profound sense of independence and pride.

There are certain sacrifices you have to make as a 23-year-old when making aliya – no washing is done for me; no dinner is made when I get home; I pay the bills; I do the grocery shopping; I go to work; and I take it all day by day.

Making aliya isn't easy, but it's the most rewarding adventure.

Many strangers have asked me why I chose to come to Israel, especially in its current political state. My answer is that I came here to build a brighter future for myself, one that doesn't involve the hardships in South Africa. But the truth is, my life in South Africa was beautiful. I understand now why people say there is no Jewish community like the South African Jewish community.

My journey has caused a lot of tears, involved a lot of planning, and taken a lot of courage. But most importantly, it has taught me to take each day as it comes, to live in the moment, and be grateful for the life I'm building for myself. This time last year, I was with my family singing, "Next year in Jerusalem". This year, I have made that a reality.

• *Tayla Lemmer is a recent digital design graduate.*

Susan Fine

My partner, Mark Isaacs, and I made aliya in December 2022 because I have two daughters living in Israel and I wanted to be closer to them. We'll be at home for the first night of Rosh Hashanah with my daughter and her family. The second night, my daughter is hosting, and my younger daughter will join us. For lunch, we'll be at home. We're not yet



Susan Fine, her granddaughter Zoe Sasson, and her partner Mark Isaacs

members of a shul, and will try to find one to go to. The shul that Mark goes to on Saturdays is full for the holidays. In Ra'anana, they put up tents for additional shuls for the *chagim*, so we'll try to find one nearby.

In South Africa, we had our routine for the holidays, and I suspect it will be similar here, just in a different environment with different people. I'm excited to experience *chagim* in the

"holy land". Besides some family and friends left in South Africa, I'm happy to be here.

• *Susan Fine is from Pretoria and Mark Isaacs is the former director of the Jaffa Old Age Home in Pretoria.*

Menashe Rossouw

I feel at peace in Israel, and life here flows beautifully. I'm surrounded by beauty, and have amazing family and friends here. My plan for Rosh Hashanah is to reunite with my parents, who are travelling from Cape Town. This will be their first ever Rosh Hashanah experience in Israel, and I'm lucky to share this moment with them.

My passion lies in theatre and film, and there's a place in Israel for me to explore this industry with the right connections and community.

I'm motivated to live in Israel with a healthy mindset. Cape Town will always be my home, and has its unique beauty, however, being in Israel is the best decision for me.

My family and friends will always be close to my heart. I have a special bond with the people I love, and I'm excited to create more memories here.

• *Menashe Rossouw is an aspiring actor and a recruiter for Israel Experience and Masa Israel Teaching Fellows.*



Menashe Rossouw

my daughter that I should make aliya and be close to them. I made a promise to Tessa that I would do so. It made sense. I love Israel, and spent nine months here in 1967 as a volunteer.

Going from a big house with a pool, a BMW, and the obvious inverter system to a two-bed apartment in Ra'anana isn't easy, but I realised this from the start. I knew there would be red tape, I knew there would be frustration and a host of other things I wouldn't have thought of.

But knowing this beforehand made the transition that much easier, and I strongly urge others who are contemplating aliya to be strong and jump those hurdles.

The choices were stark: be alone in Cape Town or near my children and grandchildren.

I'm in a state of peace and nostalgia, as whenever I pass a place where we were together two years ago, it becomes difficult for a while.

Continued on page 32>>



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Continued on page 46>>

Beinonim: why it’s important to embrace average

OPINION

RABBA SARA HURWITZ



“On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.”

When we think about those elusive heavenly books, we usually think of two books: a book of death; and book of life. And yet, the Gemarah in Rosh Hashanah 16b imagines that there are three books, not two, that are open on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur: “One of absolute sinners; one of absolute *tzadikim*; and one of *beinonim* (in-betweeners).”

The Gemarah introduces the category of *beinonim*, translated here as a person who is in the middle, from the word “*bein*” (in-between) – middling people, who are neither good, nor bad, waiting for their fate to be determined.

It’s these middling people, according to the Gemarah, who are influenced by the evil inclination and the good inclination, the *yetzer hara* and *yetzer tov*. (Rosh Hashanah 61b)

And who among us aren’t *beinonim*? Who hasn’t had the experience of cultivating the best parts of ourselves, even as the worst parts threaten to emerge? Of grappling with behaviours that may be destructive while at the same time, being arbitrators of *chesed* and kindness? This duality is entirely human, as old as Adam and Chava, who ate from a Tree of Knowledge, and from that day on, had to contend with the choices, good and bad, the ethical dilemmas that inundate our lives.

Who among us isn’t an in-betweener?

The Gemarah continues with this point exactly: “Rabba said, ‘People like us are middling.’” Rabba, a third-generation amora (scholar), the head of the Yeshiva in Pumbedita and teacher to many, describes himself as a *beinonim*? To which Abaya, his student and nephew, quips, “If the master claims that he’s merely middling, he doesn’t leave room for any creature to live. If a person like you is middling, what of the rest of us?”

If Rabba is just average, aren’t we all indeed *beinonim*? I believe the answer to this question is a resounding yes.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, understood our average, middling humanness inherently. The Alter Rebbe, as he was known, was the founder of the Chabad movement. He’s the author of *Tanya*, written in 1797, as a compilation of Chassidic philosophy. The Alter Rebbe subtitled *Tanya*, “Sefer shel benonim”, the book of in-betweeners. In fact, he originally wanted to call the book “Sefer shel benonim”, intending it to be primarily for the average person. In his research on *Tanya*, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz explains why the book was written for *beinonim*, saying that being a *tzadik*, a perfectly righteous individual, isn’t attainable for most of us, and it’s not even expected that we can and will reach such heights. The *beinoni*, however, is an ideal that everyone can attain.

Rabbi Steinsaltz explains, “The intermediate person isn’t merely the median, the halfway point between utter evil and utter goodness. Neither compromise nor a composite, the *beinoni* is in a class alone, an elevated individual.”

The *beinonim* have to build up a store of resilience. The hardship and struggles of our world have the potential to send us into a tailspin. If we expect perfection from ourselves, I can only imagine that we demand the same perfection from others. When we confront inevitable struggle, it’s the *beinonim*, those of us who are used to navigating the slippery and difficult pathways of our lives, that have built the resilience to emerge. It’s this attitude of *beinonim* that will prepare us for the disappointments and hardships in our lives.

I was taken by an OpEd in *The New York Times* by Sarah Wildman, titled, “I don’t need my life to be remarkable.” She describes how when she was young, newly married, and carefree, an older friend advised, “Don’t look for every moment to be a 10. Sometimes you have to celebrate the fours, fives, and sixes.”

They would laugh at this unimaginable thought of not striving for perfection. Anything else would be akin to failure. And then the inevitable trials and tribulations of life hit them, and they were no longer laughing. She writes, “I’ve come to see the wisdom in not just seeking but finding joy in the mundane, in the unremarkable, even in the frankly boring,

particularly in this era of global – and personal – illness.” And then she quotes the line from *Unetaneh Tokef* – not the famous “Who shall live and who shall die” but, “Who shall be at rest and who shall wander.” In Hebrew, that sentence is a play on words, a single letter altering the meaning from “rest” (*yanuach*) to “wander” (*yanuah*). I have wondered how my family can find rest as we wander. It has been, and continues to be in these small, in-between moments, in the noticing.”

We end *Musaf* with the prayer, “Today

may you strengthen us. Today may you bless us.” In the Hebrew language, the word used to describe the present tense is *zman beinoni* or “intermediate time”. The present tense is called *beinoni* because it’s in the middle, between the past and the future. We can grasp the past; we can measure and describe it. We can also imagine and estimate what will be in the future. But the present is ours to grab hold of and determine how to live.

This year, we have to recalibrate what is normal. If we keep pounding away at ourselves to achieve perfection, if

we keep raising the bar for ourselves and others, we may be doomed to disappointment at best, and sheer inability to move forward at worst. But, with resilience, if we can grab a hold of imagining the present, a day that’s entirely average, and the fact that we’re good enough, then we have a chance of feeling joy and even satisfaction in who we are and what we’ve achieved.

Not every moment can be a 10. We should give ourselves permission to experience our lives as average, to recalibrate our expectations to

appreciate the mundane, to embrace those moments that are just *beinoni*. Just average. As we think about our lives, let’s try to embrace not only the 10s, but the 4s and 5s as well.

• *Rabba Sara Hurwitz is the cofounder and president of Maharat, the first institution to ordain Orthodox women as clergy. She also serves on the rabbinic staff at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.*

Point a finger, and three fingers point back

OPINION

STUDENT RABBI ANDREA KUTI



Here we are, it’s Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of humanity, which brings with it apples and honey, songs and shofar blasts, excited children and adults, new clothes, and the Torah scrolls dressed in white. Friends and long-not-seen members of the community gather and wish one another a sweet and happy New Year. Large meals are made ready for after the synagogue for extended families and friends. It’s a party, right?

And yet, in the synagogue at the heart of the Torah service, we read about the tragically painful complicated stories of our first Jewish ancestors. Our heroes, our giants, the exceptionally beautiful Sarah and her husband, Abraham, who were the first to hear the call of G-d for a higher purpose, to follow their hearts and G-d’s voice – “*lech lecha* to a place that I will show you” – to new possibilities, to create a new nation, to bring blessings and light to the world, broke down in trying to hold this vision. As they grew older, and had no child, with each passing day, G-d’s promise to them seemed to be farther away. There’s nothing wrong with taking matters into one’s own hands, but they took Hagar, Sarah’s slave woman, into their marriage, to bear Abraham’s first son, Ishmael, and with that hurt, distrust, objectification, humiliation, oppression, selfishness, and power struggle arose and multiplied.

What’s the purpose of this challenging story at the centre of this beautiful, literally sweet holiday? There are no winners here. The model couple is struggling, the women are hurting each other, Hagar nearly kills Ishmael then leaves, with her – their – son, and when Abraham is ready to sacrifice Isaac, his and Sarah’s only son, their hope, their promise, Sarah, heartbroken, dies. Even if G-d comes in the end scene to redeem Isaac with a ram, Isaac and Abraham depart, never again to talk to each other. And with that, trauma continues within our sacred story

for generations and for centuries. Neat!

What do we learn? That even our best, our most beloved ones can mess up? That even when we’re in pursuit of the highest of values, nothing less than the call of G-d, things can go wrong? And that, unless we do something, even when we’re celebrating and glazing apples and challah with honey, our unresolved stories will haunt us! We need to remember that we have work to do, because this story is a space holder for all the messy stories in our lives.



But how, you might ask?

Well, you know, we’ve inherited a wealth of wisdom for *teshuvah*, for repairing ourselves and the world. Jewish tradition laid out distinct steps for this process: acknowledging harm done; feeling remorse about it; restitution; committing to not doing that same act again in a similar situation; confession; asking for forgiveness, really, in any order, each essential to clear up our mess, and among these, I found something truly unique, truly phenomenal, and game changing.

Our confessional prayer on Yom Kippur, the Viddui, features a long list of transgressions in the first person

plural “we”, in other words, what we have done. Why? Surely it can’t be possible that we have done all those, right? So why are we saying them?

Perhaps we say them so that we create a protective cover for those who do need to say them, but for whom it would be unsafe or embarrassing to say it as an individual. That’s caring, right? But not very challenging for ourselves. We can always say, “That one was for someone else.”

Or perhaps, as one of my Batmitzvah students pointed out, it’s for the healing which is much more powerful if done communally. “For example, to heal the environment, I can alone decide not to use plastic, but if my whole community also decides this, the impact is more profound.” The quote from the Talmud that “All Israel are sureties – responsible – for another” fits her explanation. No matter who committed the wrong, we’re all responsible together to fix even the mistake of our fellows as well.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, the famous 20th century rabbi, philosopher, theologian, and human rights activist adds to the weight of responsibility. He said it isn’t just that we’re sureties for one another, but that “indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible”. If we didn’t speak up, didn’t step in to stop or prevent harm, we’re just as responsible for its occurrence. Can you yet hear that voice inside your head about the time you didn’t speak up?

There’s yet one more step closer. In the realm of restorative justice, there’s an understanding that in a group or community situation, the trouble is never the fault of one person, but everyone’s. While the most common practice in our society is to find the culprit

Continued on page 31>>

REINSTATING LITHUANIAN CITIZENSHIP: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES FOR SUCCESS

In my 13 years of professional practice, I have seen many cases of individuals reaching out in desperation and frustration after their Lithuanian citizenship application was put on hold. The hurdles are not limited to the initial phase of assembling the application and collecting the required documents. In fact, the real challenges often arise after submitting the application to the Migration Department in Lithuania. If authorities find insufficient proof or inconsistency in your application and records, they can pause your application for a year. They'll send you an official notice in complex bureaucratic language that explains the suspension reasons. This notice can be hard to understand even for native Lithuanian speakers. Reactivating your application depends on understanding their demands and obtaining necessary extra documents (if legally required) or providing a strong explanation to the Migration Department that additional records aren't necessary. The Migration Department lacks a clear list of required documents, leaving applicants frustrated as they spend time and money obtaining what they believe is sufficient evidence. However, the department might remain unconvinced, resulting in further delays or even application denial.

At IN JURE Law Firm, we have been a steadfast partner for applicants facing such challenges. With over 2000 successfully reinstated applications, we have encountered a diversity of scenarios and legally challenging situations. What sets IN JURE Law Firm apart is our unique approach - the All Inclusive Success Fee. Under this model, clients pay only after their application is approved. There is absolutely no upfront payment required. Additionally, the All Inclusive Success Fee covers all expenses on the Lithuanian side, including archival investigations, application fees, document translations, and litigation costs. If your Lithuanian citizenship application has hit roadblocks, remember that the game is far from over. With the right support and guidance, it is possible to overcome challenges and achieve success.

"Despite numerous unexpected challenges Dainius persisted and ultimately got our citizenship reinstated following an Appeal with the Ministry of the Interior. During the entire process he did not require any payment up front, despite undertaking a very significant amount of work on our behalf, as well as his firm's costs. He took payment only after everything was successfully completed."

Tracey J., SA

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Really living is mostly up to us

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



The message arrived from the *SA Jewish Report*, “Good morning, rabbi, how are you? We’re gearing up for our Rosh Hashanah edition, which has suddenly snuck up on us. The year really goes too fast, doesn’t it? Would you consider putting the pressure of being written in the Book of Life into perspective? Is it a big exam? Are we on trial for our lives?”

Gulp. That’s a big ask.

Allow me to take one paragraph at a time, and address the statement that Rosh Hashanah has snuck up on us.

Until moving to South Africa almost 13 years ago, I had never heard that statement. Maybe it’s because, in the northern hemisphere, July and August are holiday times. Everyone knows that immediately after summer comes the high holidays.

In this town, you can’t arrive at Rosh Hashanah without hearing at least 1 000 times “Rov, can you believe how quickly the year has flown by? Time flies, doesn’t it?”

Ahem. Well, in my line of work, in which Rosh Hashanah is the biggest time of the year, you can be sure that it doesn’t ‘sneak up’ on me. We rabbis are preparing months in advance for the big day. So, no, sorry, it hasn’t come ‘early this year’, and apologies if I don’t nod in agreement to that yearly refrain about the year ‘flying by’.

More importantly, the statement generates a question: is it a good thing for a year to fly by? What does it say about the year if it passed me by and suddenly the big month of Tishrei has snuck up on me?

I’d argue that a year that goes by fast isn’t necessarily a good thing. It can mean that the year lacked in reflection, and it was a year in which we didn’t process our experiences and lessons at the level we’re called upon to do. A full year doesn’t fly by.

Let’s put it this way. Imagine that I challenged you to share with me one special moment that happened to you during every month of the year – one moment

per month – would you be able to do so easily? Having posed this question to many, the usual response is that it would be difficult to reflect and articulate on 12 special moments that happened in each year. Possible, but hard.

Remember, we’re not talking about one lesson per day or one lesson per week! We’re asking for 12 powerful moments over 12 months, and yet many of us would struggle to name those moments.



Why?

Perhaps because we allow our lives to fly by us. Time ought to be full and rich. A year full of experiences, growth, productivity, meaning, love, faith, discipline, study, meditation, and kindnesses is a full year, and such a year doesn’t fly by.

Time that flies and time that drags are both not ideal. Time needs to count. Years matter. Months matter. Weeks matter. Days matter. Hours matter. Seconds matter.

Marc Levy put it this way, “If you want to know the value of one year, just ask a student who failed a course.

If you want to know the value of one month, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby. If you want to know the value of one hour, ask the lovers waiting to meet. If you want to know the value of one minute, ask the person who just missed the bus. If you want to know the value of one second, ask the person who just escaped death in a car accident. And if you want to know the value of one-hundredth of a second, ask the athlete who won a

The bigger stress, however, isn’t what G-d will do for us this coming year, but rather what we’ll do for ourselves. Because, let’s be honest, the being who has the most power to affect how our year will play out is us.

“Everything is in the hand of Heaven other than our fear of Heaven,” thus our choices. (Talmud Brachot 33b)

Does G-d decide how I’ll treat my spouse this year and what my marriage will look like? I do. The two of us must work on it, obviously with the strength we receive from above.

Does G-d decide if I’ll have a balanced life of work, family, health, play, and learning? I do. I’ll ask Hashem for His assistance, but I must take ownership.

Does G-d decide whether I’ll be offended by every wedding invitation I don’t get and other *faribels* like, “Why didn’t I sit at the cool part of the table at the Rosh Hashanah dinner?” I do. I could talk myself out of the pettiness of grudges.

Does G-d decide if I’ll grow in my faith and observance of the Torah and *mitzvot*? I do. I have the gift of free choice. He might inspire me, but I still have to run with that inspiration and make it a reality in my life.

Yes, there’s so much in G-d’s department. Life itself – whether we will live or die – that’s a big one! Our health – although we have a role in some of that as well. Eat well. Sleep. Exercise. Have a social life, etc. Our livelihood. And much more. And to that, we turn to G-d as our king and father and ask for the good stuff to come our way.

But the biggest pressure of it all is when I grow up and acknowledge that “Clearly the matter depends on nothing other than myself.” (Talmud Avodah Zara 17a) I have to make the next year into a year of meaning and growth.

It’s on me. With G-d’s help.

Let do this, friends!

Shana tova!

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.



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Yad Aharon & Michael is grateful for the indispensable role it has been able to play in the Jewish community in providing food assistance to those in need for the past three decades.

We thank Hashem for raining miracles down on **Yad**, and we pay tribute to our founders and past leaders of the organisation who selflessly invested in the growth and sustainability of this organisation.

What started as a passion project in the early 90s has grown to become a vital and indispensable pillar of Joburg Jewish life, relied on by hundreds of families for basic sustenance. Today, we're the largest kosher food bank on the continent, ensuring that no Jewish person in our midst goes to bed hungry.

In 1992, two compassionate women residing in Yeoville became aware of Jewish families who were struggling to feed their families. Without hesitation, they formed a support group to distribute home-made meals to these households. Back then, Yeoville had a large and vibrant Jewish community, abuzz with kosher delis, shuls, and Jewish day schools, and the small food fund started to expand into neighbouring Jewish areas.

Devastatingly, the following year, the lives of Rabbi Aharon Pfeuffer and Michael Zive were cut short in a tragic car accident, and in their memory, the food fund

was officially named **Yad Aharon & Michael**.

Since that time, our role has remained steadfast in ensuring that no Jewish person in our community ever knows the pangs of hunger, and our hope is that those in need never feel shame in asking for help. We hold

dear the anonymity and dignity of every recipient, and food parcels are distributed by "box number". People around us are struggling, and no one bears greater witness to this than **Yad** as we sit with a staggering number of 750 boxes.

Thankfully, and to our merit, the Jewish nation are givers by nature, and tzedakah (charity) is part of the intricate system on which our entire existence is based - that of give and take.

Just as plants need the carbon dioxide that humans exhale,

humans need the oxygen that plants produce. Tzedakah is one expression of this pattern - giver and receiver need each other.

On our 30th anniversary - and always - we remain humble and grateful to you all for the countless lives we have touched together. So long as there remains those in need, we'll help them, not only for their sake, but for ours.



EXTRACT FROM CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN'S ADDRESS AT YAD AHARON'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT

"The biggest question I'm asked by top business leaders in our community who commit themselves to giving their minimum 10% tzedakah is how to allocate the money. **So, when an organisation like Yad Aharon comes along and says that it needs help, well, that's an opportunity.**

If everyone gave their 10% there would be no poverty. The biggest problem we would have in our community would be what to do with the surplus.

The greatest gift we can give ourselves is to give our 10%, and Hashem will give it back and more. The greatest investment we ever make in our lives is the money we give away.

In fact, it's the only money we take with us when we leave this world. Everything else we make in this world we leave behind. At the end, the money we give to tzedakah, to the needy, that money is our mitzvah forever, and you take it with you forever. It's the only guaranteed investment which is stored in a place where no one can touch it. Nothing else is guaranteed.

May this special and magnificent mitzvah be a merit for you and our Jewish community."



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Rosh Hashanah Message from our Chief Executive



As we approach Rosh Hashana and the high holy days, marking not only the beginning of a new year but also a time of self-reflection and spiritual awakening, I find myself deeply humbled by the incredible journey that I have experienced over the past 18 months as chief executive of **Yad Aharon & Michael**.

This role has been an immense honour, allowing me to witness firsthand the power of communal support and our shared commitment to fulfilling the timeless Jewish value of tikkun olam (repairing the world). Our communal journey, much like the rhythm of the Jewish calendar, has seen its fair share of highs and lows, but what remains constant is our collective determination to alleviate food insecurity and provide nourishment for those in need.

In these turbulent times, as the world grapples with unprecedented difficulties, our resolve at **Yad Aharon** has created an unwavering beacon of hope for more than 750 families within our Jewish community who are reliant on us for the provision of life’s most basic need – food. But for **Yad Aharon**, which exists solely because of the community’s generosity and support, there are 2 000 mouths within our community that otherwise would go without food. Together, our partnership ensures that it won’t happen.

With the rapid and ever-increasing price of food that has had an impact on almost all households in South Africa, **Yad Aharon** has a R27 million budget for 2023. Aside from some operational costs, the bulk is needed to purchase food items. We undertake to provide weekly boxes throughout the year, and during the chaggim, we provide additional food items to ensure dignified

meals. We also distribute monthly Ohr Natanel (kiddies school lunch boxes), which sustain our children during their busy days. Our soup kitchen, **Yad’s Soup for the Soul**, runs weekly, ensuring that warm and nourishing meals are enjoyed by recipients when collecting their food boxes.


Our high holy day campaign this year is aptly named **Project Wake Up Call**, inspired by the poignant sound of the shofar that resonates throughout this auspicious time. Maimonides teaches that the sound of the shofar moves us to return to G-d. It’s like a voice calling, “Wake up, you sleepers, and return to your real purpose, the purpose why you are here in the world.” Teshuva. Tefilla. Tzedakah.

Of all the “doing” mitzvahs our sages place on a pedestal above and beyond any other mitzvah, the greatest is tzedakah. We’re told that the merit of the mitzvah of tzedakah in weight is equal to all the other mitzvahs combined. As we come together to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, let’s heed this wake-up call and remember those who rely on us for their most basic needs. I call upon all members of our community to join hands with **Yad Aharon & Michael**. Each of us can make a difference by contributing and together, we’ll ensure that plentiful and traditional yom tov meals reach every Jewish family in need, brightening their lives and affirming our collective commitment to one another.


May this Rosh Hashanah be a time of renewed strength, hope, and unity for us all. Let’s embrace the opportunities before us, fortified in the knowledge that each new year presents us with a chance for transformation and growth. Together, let’s inscribe a new chapter in the unwavering story of **Yad Aharon & Michael**, making a lasting impact for generations to come.

Wishing you all a shanah tovah u’metukah (a good and sweet year ahead).
Lauren Silberman, chief executive


Yad at a glance




750
families



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High Holy Days



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PROJECT WAKE-UP CALL

ONE PAYDAY FROM STANDING IN THE FOOD QUEUE - ADINA MENHARD

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our most basic need is the need for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behaviour. How much more motivation would one need than that of feeding our families?

As the **manager of the recipient wellness division at Yad Aharon & Michael**, the most humbling realisation in my more than 30 years of Jewish community work is that for many of us, we're just one payday away from standing in the queue. Historically, **Yad Aharon** provided food for the most impoverished in our community, those who had little to no food or means. But today, our recipient base paints a vastly different picture, and daily, we're adding families onto our system. This has become unavoidable, as the ever-increasing needs have filtered through into our community at an alarming rate and our everyday working families are impacted by the devastation not only of the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by the economic turmoil of the financial world.

We know that financial stress is the result of multiple causes not just the lack of a sustainable income. This stress that has had an impact on a significant percentage of our recipient base stems from life choices that have resulted in them overextending themselves - some living above their means with no way of fulfilling their financial obligations; and the daunting responsibility of raising children and giving them the best possible opportunities available. Some recipients are in relationships with people who are impulsive or irresponsible with money. Many have either been retrenched or have retired, with insufficient financial provisions made. The list is endless.

What's evident is that money stresses can consume one, and aside from the physical health problems that often develop, financial stress can also affect mental health. Studies show that individuals dealing with financial stress have a higher chance of experiencing mental-health issues such as depression than those who are free from debt. Research has also shown that people with financial stress may be tempted to engage in unhealthy behaviour such as drug or alcohol abuse or overeating to alleviate this stress. Even if one earns more than a basic salary, the fear of the impact of inflation, which exponentially increases the price of basic needs such as food, petrol, and housing bonds, makes for a financially distressing outlook for many people.

The number of "generational families" who rely on our food parcels is worrying, and the impact it has on their children, for whom the world of welfare has become normal,



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to run, thank you for being there for us.
Thank you from the bottom of my heart for
all the compassion. The help so generously given
is appreciated more than I can put into mere words.
I don't know how to thank you for your kindness.
Hashem's richest blessings to every one of you.
With deep gratitude."*

*"I'm a single mother of three, and only since I've been
getting the food parcels do I realise how little food
I had been trying to survive on. Now, when my
children ask for second helpings, I can say,
'Yes, only with pleasure.' I thank everyone at
Yad Aharon. And I thank those of you
who donate. Each one of you is so
deeply appreciated."*

is concerning. Behaviour is learnt from our environment, including the behaviour of parents. This learning may well produce the next generation of dependency on our system. Generational poverty has many layers and contributing factors that trap families in a painful cycle, the process by which conditions of poverty are passed from one generation to the next. Families in this generational trap often have limited or no resources to create opportunities to advance themselves, which leaves them stuck with financial insecurity and an inability to move forward and find new beginnings. The cycle of poverty is a set of influences or events by which poverty, once started, is likely to continue unless there's outside intervention. Much of the time, families experiencing poverty lack access to the right support to move into financial security. Poverty isn't just an individual problem, but a broader social problem.

Our commitment at **Yad Aharon** to provide weekly food so that every recipient in our system can put food on their table not only fulfils a basic need for survival, but assists with the alleviation of the financial pressure of having to source food from already limited financial resources. It takes a village to end this continuous cycle of deprivation. We're blessed to have so many welfare organisations which do offer support, on a number of levels, but the magnitude of the challenges of so many in need far outweigh our means.

Sweeten your year by sweetening it for others



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PROJECT WAKE-UP CALL

Letter from an international donor

Dearest Lauren,

I was brought to tears by your original email and the plight of our brethren in South Africa, more so by the incredible work you all do on our behalf. My late mom taught me an invaluable lesson. We were brought up relying on welfare, and especially because of this, my mom said, "Give immediately with an open heart and maintain the dignity of the recipient, and always give what's needed and asked for. Don't calculate whether you can afford it or not, or whether it's justified or not."

I'm always reminded by what the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks said. "It's called tzedakah because it's really justice. All we're doing is redistributing money, which Hashem enable us with, to people who really need it."
Yad Aharon. Thank you for asking for the donation.



**Interview with longest standing
Yad employee, Michael Kabango (Alfonso),
who joined Yad in 2001.**

"I've heard some people say that all Jews are rich. They don't know what they're talking about. It isn't true. I go to people's homes weekly. I've been going for many, many years to deliver food parcels, and what I see is heartbreaking. People are battling more than you would ever want to think about. But this community is special. It will put food on your table. It will give you a bed to sleep on. That's love."



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PROJECT WAKE-UP CALL

Opening our homes for the holidays feeds the soul

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Not only is Rosh Hashanah a special time spent with family and loved ones, it's also an opportune moment to show kindness to those without a place to spend *yomtov*. By opening their tables, homes, and hearts to strangers, these community members have gained as much as they've given.

Unofficial Chabad *shluchim* (emissaries) Elisheva Liberman, her husband, and their children, now based in their native United States, have also lived in South Africa and Israel. Throughout their 23 years of marriage and travels, the Libermans have always opened their *yomtov* and Shabbat table to strangers in the surrounding Jewish communities.

"When I was younger, I didn't have a big family to go to, and I was often alone, for example as a student and so on," says Liberman. "People would sometimes say, 'We reserve our *yomtov* table for family, and we're not having guests.' Yet, what does that do for people who don't have a family, who are having a family difficulty that year, or who are alone? I said to myself, 'If you want a solution to something, you have to make the solution.'"

So, Liberman decided always to reach out to people who might not have a place for *yomtov*, who are going through a difficult year, feel lonely, or just can't manage to make a meal. Through social media and other channels, she let community members know that she and her family would be excited to have them over.

"We have made the most amazing contacts through this, people who we never would have met otherwise," she says. "It's really changed our lives. These people have literally become part of our family. We have people from South Africa who, even though we left a few years ago, we're still in touch with."

Each year, Liberman's children tell her not to forget to extend her *yomtov* invitations. "My kids have gained tremendously," she says. "They have learned

to be incredibly giving people." They also help her prepare for the guests, learning the value of hard work. Liberman recalls how one year in South Africa, her then 12-year-old son urged her to accommodate a group of eight Israeli Dead Sea product sales people for a seder at the last minute, even though she didn't have enough space in her home to do so.



The Liberman children

As a result of having to rearrange tables, Liberman seated her son with these visitors. "Afterwards, he told me that he'd had the most meaningful seder of his entire life," she recalls. The guests had questioned him about his belief in G-d; the meaning of the seder; and why it was important to him. "He told me, 'I had to really think about it. Why did it matter to me? Why was it important?' And I thought that that

was very profound. I was happy about that," says his mother.

Dalya Erster invites community members without a place to go to her *yomtov* table, and arranges for like-minded individuals to do the same. "We've set up quite a few people. So many are willing to host, whether they are young, old, single, or married," she

says. "The response this year has been amazing."

Erster says that she was inspired by the incredible Jewish Johannesburg community, which is unlike any other. "That's the sentiment shared by people who visit – about the kindness here, the sense that my home is yours. When there's an opportunity to include community members, people are so willing."

Whether they once had a long *yomtov* table but now have kids or family living overseas, or their circumstances have changed, there are now a significant number of people who aren't a part of something over Rosh Hashanah, Erster says. Yet, everyone deserves to experience the beauty and communal spirit of *yomtov*, even more so after the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many were alone.

For Erster, helping to facilitate connections with other potential hosts is about paying it forward. "If people aren't part of an inner circle, whether it's at shul or within their families, there might be a sense of exclusion, wondering where to go, how to get involved,

and mark *yomtov*. It's about just reaching out."

This idea can be applied to all aspects of our lives, serving as an example to our children, she says, especially the kids who aren't in the inner circle at school. "It's about the power of noticing and including others."

This also ties into one of the themes of Rosh Hashanah, also known as Yom Hazikaron – the day of remembrance. "We want Hashem to remember us for a good and healthy year, to notice us and not let us fall by the wayside, so can we do that for others?" Erster asks. "In the spirit of this, Hashem, please G-d, can remember us."

Having started Sandton Central Shul in 2012 on the back of a Chabad visitor centre they ran to accommodate Jewish tourists during the FIFA World Cup, Rabbi Ari Kievman and his wife, Batya's, congregation was formed on a foundation of hospitality. "Today, Shabbos hospitality at the shul and at our home is a favourite," says the rabbi. "Our children love to be involved in community activities."

"It's a fundamental *mitzvah* in the Torah that while we care for ourselves over the holidays, we have to care for others," he says. This is a basic tenet of Judaism, in which in the Torah, even Avraham and Sara were renowned for their hospitality and care for others.

In welcoming people into their own home and community over Shabbat and *yomtov*, the Kievmans have had interesting experiences. Hosting strangers, often from around the world, isn't always smooth sailing, Kievman admits. "We've sometimes experienced some strange characters coming into our home and having to deal with that, which can be challenging."

Yet, the experience has been overwhelmingly positive. "Some of our guests have become lifelong sponsors and wonderful friends," the rabbi says. "We've seen articles in Hebrew, French, and English being written by tourists who visited our shul, joined us for meals, had a great time, and chose to write about it."



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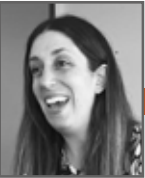
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Israeli song gives Seder Ha'avodah new impetus

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



The centre of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the mussaf service. Within that, the centre of the mussaf is the Seder Ha'avodah, a liturgical sprawl which traces the actions of the *kohen gadol* as he trepidly seeks atonement for all of Israel and on receiving it, is illuminated with a bright countenance. For many, this literal recall of the highly detailed priestly service has felt remote. However, a modern Israeli song, *Seder Ha'avodah*, by Ishay Ribo, has transformed my understanding of this part of the service. This year, I'll see the Seder Ha'avodah not as a ponderous recounting of what happened but rather as a personal invitation to our potential.

In Ribo's song, we meet the *kohen gadol* in the opening lines, and are told, "*Bah mimakom she'huh ba, ve'halach le'makom she'halach.*" (He comes from where he comes, and he goes to the place that he goes.) The lack of specificity tells us that Ribo has made a jump. The high priest on his Yom Kippur journey is every man, or woman, you or me. We come from our different places, and we'll all travel on after Yom Kippur to our various destinies. But in this instance, we, like the *kohen gadol*, have arrived for this indescribable moment.

Drawing on the traditional liturgy, Ribo imagines the *kohen gadol* counting. In the machzor, he is counting the blood sprinkling of the korban but here there's no blood. Rather, he counts his sins, his lacks, and his losses. "*Achat v'chat, achat ushtayim, achat ve'shalosh.*" No longer is the *kohen gadol* performing an ancient sacrificial ritual, he is each of us, reflecting on the moments of waste, the poor choices, the regrets, the searing fallibility of our humanity.

As the song soars, we're suddenly in the heart of the service, as Ribo recalls how the priest and the people would stand together in the *azarah*. As the *kohen gadol* would call out the hidden name of G-d, the people would bow down and cry aloud, "*Baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed*" (Blessed is the name of G-d's glorious kingdom forever and ever.)

From the high priest and the people, we're brought to our shuls, the *ba'al koreh*, and the community in exquisite synergy. Ribo's capturing of the dance between the *kohen gadol* and the people reminds us that *tefilah* requires a sensitive attunement between the prayer leaders and ourselves. They carry us through the service and we, through our attention and our responsiveness, carry them.

Ribo returns to the counting. This time, the *kohen gadol* is counting his blessings, numbering his reasons for gratitude, *achat ve'achat*. With deft



beauty, Ribo has transformed the external, ritualised actions of the ancient high priest to the inner psychological moments of a modern human – self-examination and gratitude are our counts and our inventories.

Then, the music moves to a crescendo as Ribo imagines the high priest emerging from the Holy of Holies. He walks back to his home, while the people walk with him. This is the apotheosis of the song as Ribo interweaves

the mirth of the people with the mystical song that imagines the beauty and radiance of the high priest's face, knowing he has achieved atonement for all.

The illumination of the *kohen* (*mareh kohen*) is some of the greatest poetry in Jewish liturgy. We sing, "Like the full moon on the festival/like the sun shining on the Temple/like a rainbow in the clouds/like the blossoms of branches in springtime was the countenance of the priest." Like him, we've done our count, examined fearlessly, and expressed full gratitude. We're forgiven by ourselves and by G-d. The *mareh kohen* is an invitation to us all. As we arrive to the crescendo of the mussaf service, we too can touch the mystical illumination. The Seder Ha'avodah is no longer a literal sacrifice, but rather a profound inner journey we each undertake, filled with courage.

Ribo takes the high priest's ancient ritual and transforms it to a modern psychological journey. Gone is the blood and gore. In its place is the unflinching desire to be honest with ourselves and to be compassionate. Yet, even as he points to the difference between him and us, Ribo's rendition connects us to the *kohen gadol* and the ancient Israelites. The process of the *avodah* (work) was both for them then and for us now, a devotion that could take us to a "lily on running waters, the rose planted in a pleasant garden"

• Adina Roth is head of Jewish Life at Emanuel School Sydney, and in her final year of rabbinical school at Maharat in New York.

Point a finger, and three fingers point back

>>Continued from page 23

or scapegoat and remove them from society to the naughty corner or prison, which was part of the ancient Yom Kippur ritual as well, in which they would chase away the scapegoat with their sins, this custom has been replaced and outgrown by this truly amazing communal confessional prayer, the Viddui, in which we take responsibility communally.

We cannot point a finger at any one in a family, a workplace, city, country, or world, because then three fingers will immediately point back at ourselves. We're part of an organic whole, and we're part of every action. With our actions, or lack thereof, we each write our communal story for better or for worse. And that's a radical acknowledgment that in any harm done, we've been part of it and we need to take responsibility for the harm done as our own, and so each member of that conflict. That's a radical concept and if

practiced, a lot of stories out there would change. Can you imagine Abraham, Sarah, Hagar and, possibly G-d, or the voice Abraham heard doing their Viddui together: "We have hurt, we distrusted, we objectified our fellows, we humiliated, we oppressed."

My student asked with uncertainty on her face, "Would that be enough though?" She was right, it's not enough. There are still all the other steps out there, but taking ownership for any wrong done together is a good start to heal the stories that we carry from generation to generation, from family to family, to workplaces, to *faribels*. Try it out! See how the story changes.

I wish you all *shana tova*, a truly sweet New Year!

• Andrea Kuti is originally from Budapest, living in Cape Town, and is in her last year of rabbinical studies at ALEPH, Renewal Rabbinical Seminary.

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New year, new *olim*. Celebration or challenge?

>>Continued from page 22

On a lighter note, while Israelis may outwardly appear brusque and impatient, they embrace *olim* irrespective of age. Israelis have taught me how to navigate rules and regulations to my advantage. Bend the rules, but don't break them!

• *Selwyn Epstein, a Herzliya high school alumnus, has a real-estate company in Cape Town.*

Leanne Zabow

I made aliya with my husband and twin daughters (aged five) two months ago. My husband, Rafi, wanted to return to Israel, having lived here during his school years and served in the army. I made aliya to widen opportunities

for my children and increase the likelihood of geographical proximity to them later in their lives.

I also feel comfortable in Israel. It's a vibrant place filled with interesting opportunities. Some of the difficulties involved in living in South Africa also influenced us to make this move.

We live in Ra'anana, and haven't yet had time to attend the different shuls in the area and decide which one is for us. In South Africa, I would have been with my parents and extended family, and would have spent time davening at my dad's *minyán* in the garden at his apartment block, and at one of the *minyanim* on the Yeshiva College campus. We're considering attending

Kehillat Bnei Aharon, a lovely, warm shul with serious *tefilah* about a kilometre away from our apartment. We're not sure how much of the service we'll attend because we aren't sure about options for children. They have made some friends in our building, and we're hoping to enlist some of the older children as babysitters during the service.

We're fortunate to have my husband's family nearby in Kfar Saba, and we'll be walking there to join them for first night dinner. This helps with a sense of belonging and familial warmth. We're also fortunate to have been invited to new and old friends during the day. Reaching out to people through WhatsApp groups has helped



Rafael, Leanne, Liya, and Gal Zabow

us. Everyone is looking to create a community here as we're all far from our original home.

There's some aching for home and familiarity at this time of year, when we tend to feel connected to the community. There's a feeling of dislocation and confusion, and an awareness of having to rebuild. At the same time, everyone around is gearing up for the holiday, which feels special.

• *Leanne Zabow from Johannesburg is a clinical psychologist and entrepreneur.*

Hayley Katzer

We made aliya in November 2022 to Ra'anana mainly for the sake of our nine-year-old son, our craving for Judaism, and our love for the holy land.

We came from Durban, and unfortunately, we belonged to a small and ageing community. There were many limitations for our son, Asher, and we wanted to bring him up in a traditional Jewish way with Jewish children his age.

Our aliya process has been a complete blessing from Hashem, and nine months later, we're all thriving in our new home and have adapted amazingly to the different but special way of life.

This will be our first Rosh Hashanah in Israel, and we'll be with family and friends. There's a special feeling around the entire country as the New Year is upon us and we're honoured to be able to spend this special, holy time in Israel.

It's also a little bittersweet as we're not going to be able to spend Rosh Hashanah with family in South Africa, but we'll be together in mind and spirit and we know how proud of us they are for making aliya in search of a better life and future.

• *Hayley Katzer is a private nursery school teacher and her husband, Darren, is a sports analyst.*



Darren, Asher, and Hayley Katzer

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Embrace change and grow – what we’ll do differently

Rosh Hashanah is a time to consider the changes and improvements we can make in our lives. The SA Jewish Report asked Jewish school students what they would like to do differently in the new year, and how they would bring about these changes.

Noah Zive, Grade 11, Herzlia High School

Fellow Herzlia pupils have suggested doing more acts of kindness, wanting to be more confident, eating more kosher food, and saying prayers more frequently. These are all amazing ideas, but I would like to touch on how we speak.

We often don't realise the impact our words have. One thing can make or break someone's day. Remember to spend each day saying one extra kind thing to someone you love because eventually it adds up.

Another element is trying not to speak *lashon harah* (slander), no matter how tempting it may be. We often don't realise the importance of this, and how it would improve our year to go out of our way to stop talking about others.

It's important to keep your speech clean in general, and as holy and as kind as possible. We don't realise the impact our words can have.



Yona Treger, Grade 11, Yeshiva College

In the intricate fabric of our lives, we often encounter new people, each with their own unique stories and potential. Among these encounters, some develop into deep connections, while others remain passing acquaintances.

Occasionally, by chance, we're bestowed with the precious gift of authentic friendships. This year has been truly exceptional in terms of these connections.



Yossi Shaw, Grade 11, Torah Academy Boys High

In life, change is essential to becoming a better human. But too much change isn't necessarily a good thing. In order for change to be a process of transformation, it needs to be done slowly with concentration. Rushing it might lead to not completing it or slipping back to old ways.

It's important to take on the challenge of continuous improvement, and to have the ambition of doing more than before. We need to improve constantly and push others to change themselves as well.

"Change" could apply to pushing ourselves out of our comfort zone. My example is Cycalive, in which five groups of schools cycle from Johannesburg to Durban in five days. On the second day of Cycalive, I decided that I didn't want to get back on the bike. I felt unfit and the least experienced in my group. But the others weren't happy with my decision, and wanted me to push myself. With their encouragement, I forced myself out my comfort zone. I loved it, and it gave me the confidence to ride as much as I could over the course of Cycalive. I learned to change my state of mind.

Change is essential. Improve yourself at your own pace, and strive to go beyond your comfort zone, as shown in the example above. Change may be beneficial or disadvantageous. In the end, it's up to you how far you're willing to go to change yourself.



Mendy Uzvolk, Grade 7, Torah Academy Boys High

Rosh Hashanah is a new beginning. It's a perfect time to contemplate our past year and change what we're dissatisfied with.

Here's a simple example. There was once a little boy who had a messy bedroom. The boy's mother constantly begged him to clean his room, but he never did. One day, he decided to do so, just to make her happy. First, he began by taking everything out of the room and sorting through it. Then, he brought the things he wanted back inside the room, and organised them neatly.

Once he had finished, he called his mother to come and look. The boy's mother was delighted to see what he had accomplished, and asked him how it felt to have such a clean bedroom. He replied that he felt less stressed, disturbed, and free to think straight.

In the same way, we can purify ourselves by taking everything out, sorting through it, and bringing back the things that we want, leaving behind what we don't want.

Having said that, this year I would like to leave behind the negative way in which I sometimes see things.



Unfortunately, there's the all-too-common narrative of relationships fading away.

As I look ahead to the coming year, I'm determined to maintain the bonds forged during my various adventures.

The exceptional individuals I had the privilege of meeting during my time on the Johannesburg Junior Council hold a special place in my heart. Their stories, perspectives, and dedication have left an enduring mark on my soul. As our council term nears its end in November, I aspire to continue to nurture and sustain our connections.

Community is an enduring pillar of Jewish life. Through these connections, we not only pay homage to our cultural heritage, but also satisfy our need for deep and lasting bonds. In this commitment, we discover purpose, and in these connections, we find the comforting embrace of belonging.



Shaina Rodal, Grade 10, Torah Academy

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, we try to be better Jews by connecting to Hashem in various different ways. We do *teshuvah*.

Teshuvah literally means "to return". The high holidays may seem daunting to some and it may be perceived as unrealistic to become a better person. However, from the theme of the season – *teshuvah* – we know that we must return. Return means you were once there before. Hashem isn't asking us to change our whole lifestyle, Hashem is asking us to return to our roots.

No-one is born bad. The choice about what we'll make of our existence, whether we'll be virtuous or immoral, is in our own hands.

When the cycle of life ends and our *neshoma* leaves the body, Hashem won't ask us why we weren't like someone else, Hashem will ask us why we weren't like ourselves.

It's a lesson for us to be the best version of ourselves all the time.

Continued on page 34>>

SA JEWS OF LITHUANIAN & POLISH HERITAGE ARE ELIGIBLE TO OBTAIN EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP & EU PASSPORT

A common misconception people have is that European citizenship and EU Passport can only be obtained if one has documents proving lineage. **The fact is that not having documents proving lineage, does not lead to your disqualification of eligibility.**

In many cases the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin!



Having European citizenship offers more than one benefit, besides the fact that it makes traveling far easier than with a South African passport...

As we are all fully aware of the current situation in South Africa where we face many uncertainties not just for today but for our children's future too.

While we are still having it relatively good here. We know that the time will come where as Jews we will look for alternative options. **Then having a**

European citizenship will be that tool we are looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore you are now entitled to reinstate it and obtain your EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is understanding that prior to the end of WWII, the European map was very different from the one we know today.

Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and till 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Great Russia Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe.

Until 1918 residents of these territories were of Russian citizenship – as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships did not exist. Therefore applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on if one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen.

However, a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 – will not be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after WWII, one's eligibility for a Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the City from which his/her ancestor lived in. Where borders shifted and cities changed nationalities Jews who left Vilnius and its region will be declined where as a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.



I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

With only a 4 hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius this enables me to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I closely collaborate with local professionals in assisting me trace required documents for your successful applications to reinstate you as an European citizen.

"Having lived in Poland for 7 years I have great in-depth understanding of European immigration laws."

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every 3-4 months which will allow us to meet in-person.

My next trip to South Africa will be 29 October to 9 November 2023

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Embrace change and grow – what we’ll do differently

>>>Continued from page 33

Chayale Goldman, Grade 11, Torah Academy

Why is it that only a third of alcoholics manage to stop drinking after attempting to do so? Why are nearly one in three adults overweight when it’s known that obesity leads to depression? If you know that something is bad for you, why can’t you stop doing it?

“Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken,” says American businessman and philanthropist Warren Buffet.

Each one of us suffers daily not only from one bad habit but many. When we’re anxious or bored, we rush to perform actions to give us feelings of relaxation or contentment and replace the feelings of emptiness and frustration.

When I’m bored or stressed, the first thing I do is turn to my fridge. Our stress hormones react by releasing cortisol, which makes us crave fatty, sweet, and salty foods in order to fuel our brain to fight off the pressure. Stress eating becomes a habit which we need to eliminate. Sleeping the right amount of hours every night, eating a healthy diet, and exercising often are healthier ways to cope with stress.

The key to eradicating bad habits is to replace them with better ones. But, if we want the transformation to be successful, we need to set realistic goals, know why we’re determined to get rid of the habit, and identify the triggers along the journey. This can be a slow process.

A typical example of a bad habit is having late nights. I used to be unable to get out of bed, and I would spend 45 minutes being irritated as I would continuously put my alarm clock on snooze. Going to bed late, cramming my studies, being unable to wake up, and feeling exasperated. became a daily pattern until I recognised the foolishness of my actions, and slowly changed my sleeping habits.

In his book *Atomic Habits*, James Clear says of maintaining good habits, “Do it often before you do it perfectly. Focus on who you want to become, not on what you want to achieve.”

My message in the month of Elul is to change your habits, otherwise your habits will change you.



Shira Ephron, Grade 11, King David High School, Victory Park

My first goal for the new year is to improve the way I treat myself as an individual, the way I speak to myself, and to create a space for myself just to “be”.

We can either hinder our growth or foster it. I need to get out of my comfort zone, because the things I found daunting last year now seem routine this year. I hope with the current Grade 11 tests and expectations that worry me, in the new year, I’ll look back and think that they were nothing to worry about.

Another goal is to be present in the now instead of having an ocean of “what ifs” and “whys”. I can practice being present simply by sitting in nature or meditating and doing nothing. With social media or school, we never have moments just to breathe and hear the rustling of nature and traffic.

The next goal is to learn to listen and not just answer. When people tell us a story, our first instinct is to reply or think of a story that can relate to theirs. I want to learn to listen. I want to discuss topics and not debate them. A conversation isn’t always about winning an argument. This skill takes time and practice.

The last goal is to try not to control life and rather enjoy it. Trying to control life is like trying to stop popcorn kernels from popping in the microwave under pressure. Life is unpredictable, and it’s about embracing the good, the bad, and the ugly.



Hannah Sophie, Grade 11, Yeshiva College

Every year, glittering inspiration flashes through my mind. I will be better. I must be better. This year, I’m dumbfounded. How do I create realistic change? Not too lazy, not too ambitious, just realistic.

The words of my maths teacher echo through my mind: “Three hundred and sixty degrees is a revolution, a full circle.” Three

hundred and sixty four days later, I’ve come all the way back

to where I started. To avoid repeating the same aimless circular motions, I have to scrutinise myself in the mirror – more than myself, the bog of confusion that clouds my gaze.

The next year is unpredictable and completely unknown. However, my future has one defining feature – I’m in it! So that’s what I’ll focus on. Not on others or my impact on them, but I’ll start with the source. I’ll aim to make personal changes that can be realised even if it’s 1% better each day, which is 1% ahead of yesterday’s self, and one step closer to next year’s salvation.

Meah Radford, Grade 11, King David High School Victory Park

As we contemplate our hope for a sweet year ahead, I wonder what truly makes a year sweet? Ourselves.

We’re given a choice, a second chance to shape the upcoming year. The pivotal question we all ponder is, “What am I going to do differently?”

The new year is like a blank canvas, waiting for us to paint it in vibrant colours. Yet, we cannot miss this opportunity – these alterations require thoughtful consideration. This is our spiritual chance to set forth on a path of positive transformation, one paved with success and happiness.

This day serves as an occasion to communicate with Hashem, seeking guidance for the changes I aspire to make in my life. Knowing that I have a divine guide assures me that, as I approach 5784 after this upcoming new year, I’ll have realised my aspirations. Though I may not be able to change the essence of my life, I can certainly mould it according to my desires within certain constraints.

This time of the year grants me the opportunity to deepen my connection with Hashem, finding peace through life’s challenges, and nurturing self-love. It calls for heightened awareness of my own needs and desires, and a stronger belief in myself. So, as I dip that apple in honey and take the first bite, I embark on the journey of 5784, hand in hand with my loved ones. It will be a journey filled with length and depth, an experience that will shape the course of my life, for each action carries profound consequences.



Dina Scop, Grade 11, King David High School Victory Park

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, I think about the goals I can set for myself. Although it seems simple, I struggle. At first, I want to change the world. I write myself an in-depth checklist, stating all the charities I’ll donate to and all the organisations I’ll volunteer for. However, it’s unrealistic. A Grade 11 student cannot possibly carry it all. If I cannot change the world and make an instrumental difference, what goals can I set for myself? With this, I begin to compile a new list, one that’s more realistic but just as important:

As the new year approaches, I want to give others the benefit of the doubt; and smile more. So often, I find myself looking at a situation from my viewpoint and forget to include a broader perspective. When looking at a situation from the perspective of the speaker, a whole new world emerges. Listening and discussing their perspective gives me a new way to solve my own challenges.

My great-grandmother used to tell us to “smile, it costs nothing but makes a big difference to someone else’s day”. When I remember her words and apply them, I notice that I actually have a different day. I feel more gratitude and enjoyment. Not only does smiling improve someone else’s day, it improves my own.

This Rosh Hashanah, even though I might not be changing the world, I will still strive to make a difference in my life and to those around me.



Yeshaya Glass, Grade 10, Torah Academy Boys High

The word “change” is important. A seed needs water, sunlight, and moist soil to sprout. Then it starts its journey of changing and growing into a fully-fledged tree, which is then able to convert carbon dioxide to oxygen and bear tasty fruit.

Similarly, we also need things like a loving home, education, and good friends to evolve. As I grow up, I start to realise that my needs are changing. As a child, my parents took care of my every need. As a teenager, I’m beginning to take on more responsibilities such as getting a job; helping make a *minyan* at shul; doing chores around the house like making supper; taking the trash outside; and cleaning my room instead of making my parents clean it up.

I will soon have to start studying for my learner’s license, and begin saving money for leaving home and living independently. But before I can begin my own life, I need to acquire certain

tools. These are taught to me by role models. The strongest is my brother. He has inspired me to be a happy person and always be sensitive and fair. My parents have also taught me much about life. They have shown me what it means to be a proud Jew; that the Torah is a great way to live life; as well as giving me an appreciation of the history of our nation. I cannot describe my gratitude.

Another tool is education. This includes how to live life knowing the difference between what’s moral and immoral; polite and impolite; appropriate and inappropriate. Education makes me feel proud and confident. It will prepare me for finding a job or getting accepted into a university.

Being aware of society is also helpful for fitting in and making new friends in different places.

Change is essential for growing, being independent, and able to enjoy life. The world is continuously changing. Therefore, it’s important to embrace change.



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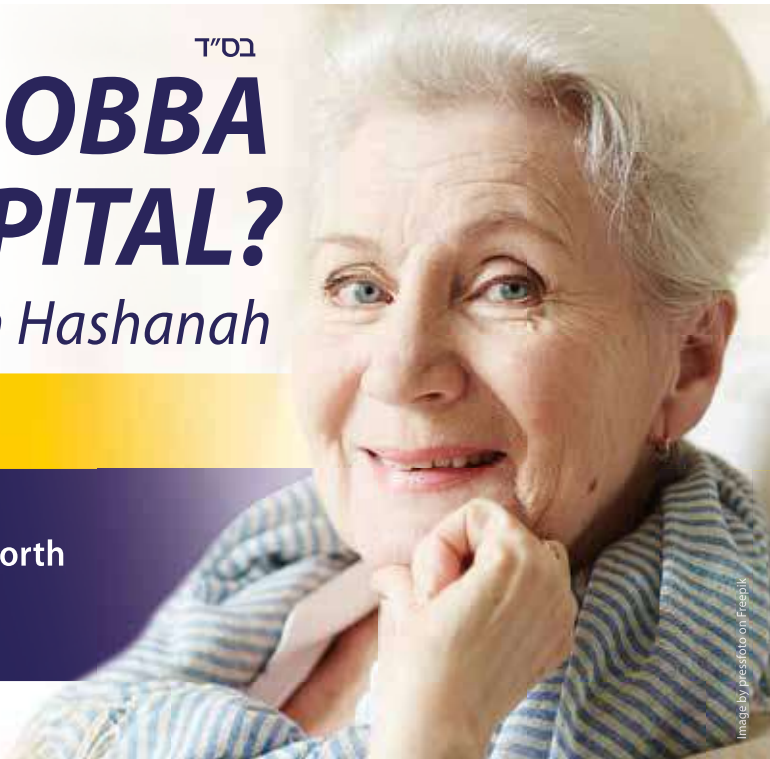
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Soviet-era high holiday about food and freedom

SONYA SANFORD – JTA

Most of my American Jewish friends ate brisket, kugel, and babka at their family high holiday feasts. I often imagined what that would be like, curious about the dishes that were so popular with my friends but were never served in my own home. In my Soviet immigrant family, our holiday meals looked quite different.

Typically, my maternal grandmother, Mira, hosted both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at her home. These meals always had a very specific four-course order. The conversations were lively, imperfect, raucously joyous – sometimes tears were shed or voices were raised.

My family would often discuss the acute contrast to what life was like in Seattle as compared to Ukraine and the former Soviet Union. I would listen with rapt attention, the first born American in a family of refugees. I heard the stories of having to go to work on Yom

Kippur and pretending like one wasn't fasting to avoid being caught observing the holiday. It was illegal to practice Judaism there. My family told me about lighting candles with closed blinds, as any neighbour was a potential threat to them being discovered defiantly observing their faith.

The world they came from felt so close and yet, unimaginably far away. Each course brought me closer to my family's past. The dishes only ever changed slightly year after year; the holiday food was sacred.

Walking into the dining room after temple services, the table would already be filled with zakuski – an assortment of small dishes and appetizers. For our family, that included a spread of smoked and cured fish like pickled herring, smoked mackerel, homemade gravlax, or gefilte fish. There would also be salads and spreads cramming the table, like pashtet (chopped liver), eggplant caviar, pickled mushrooms, marinated red peppers, and salad Olivier. We would sit down to the colourful array of offerings and wait for the



prayers to be said over the wine and the bread. A golden loaf of challah was then sliced and shared, served alongside thick pieces of dark Russian brown bread.

As we ate, my grandmother slowly inched dishes closer to each person's plate in a not-so-subtle attempt to encourage taking seconds. Each extra helping was interpreted as a clear sign of love and affection; and conversely, any refusal was the ultimate sign of rejection. "Do you not like my cooking? You haven't eaten anything!" We would laugh and poke fun at her, as we carefully avoided over-filling our plates. Even if one managed to eat a modest portion, it was easy to start feeling full from the abundant first course.

Next came soup served in good china. Silver-rimmed floral print bowls were filled with impossibly clear chicken consommé, sometimes served with perfectly fluffy matzah balls, and other times with bright golden egg noodles. Chicken soup was called bouillon, and no holiday meal was complete without it. While we ate the soup course, tummies would fill, glasses of Manischewitz would pour, and we paused to raise our glasses over and over. We toasted to my grandmother and her cooking, then my father toasted to the beloveds who were not with us at the table but were always with us in spirit. "*L'Chaim, l'chaim!*" Glasses clinked. Bowls emptied, and we'd sit and wait as my grandfather ever so slowly finished his bouillon. He couldn't bear to eat anything that was hotter than seventy degrees, and carefully blew on each spoonful of broth long after his soup stopped steaming. My grandmother told us about how when my grandfather was in the Russian army during World War II, he never had enough time to finish his meals. He would still be blowing on his soup while the other soldiers had finished their main courses. This made my grandfather laugh. Stories of survival were always infused with self-deprecation and a strong sense of humour.

Finally, the third course would come. By this point, I would have landed myself in Baba Mira's tiny kitchen, asking if I could help her bring anything out to the table. She would lovingly hand me a small platter of fried potatoes or a mix of vegetables, pan-fried with matzah meal, or grechka (buckwheat) cooked with caramelised onions. Then she would bring out a whole duck roasted with prunes or a special chicken dish. Along with the duck, she might also serve a whole piece of baked salmon, loaded with fresh herbs and citrus. By this point in the meal, the bread basket started to empty, and my grandfather would reach for one last piece of brown bread to sop up his plate. Inevitably, I'd fall asleep on the couch as everyone else remained at the table sharing anecdotes and jokes, lingering in each others' satiated company.

No meal was complete without a cup of hot chai (tea). My grandmother would bring out one of her stunning honey cakes, wishing all of us sweetness in the new year. She'd serve it alongside ripe fall fruit like Italian plums and sweet grapes. If it was a particularly festive gathering, there might also be dark chocolates filled with liqueur to end the meal.

This was the seder, the order, for each of our family gatherings. Here we were, free to eat whatever we wanted, to celebrate our faith openly, to be Jewish and American. A dream was realised, with or without brisket, and always with a hot bowl of chicken soup.

- This story originally appeared on The Nosh.



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How to lighten the load over yomtov

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

For some who have lost loved ones, live far from home, or are battling loneliness, *yomtov* can be a triggering time, evoking feelings of loss, emptiness, or pain. Yet by confronting difficult emotions, making a difference, or embracing community, the load can be lightened.

For Helen Fraser, Rosh Hashanah is associated with the heartbreaking loss of her daughter, Hayley, who was 29 when she passed away on 15 September 2012. Fraser, her husband, Mel, and their other daughters, Kerry and Gaby, find it hard to accept that such *simchas* pass without Hayley’s larger-than-life presence.

“It was Saturday, Rosh Hashanah was on Sunday, my brother had already arrived from Cape Town, and the food was prepared,” says Fraser, recalling the day she lost her daughter. “I always did one night and one lunch on Rosh Hashanah as well as breaking the fast after Yom Kippur. There was always a big crowd.”

On Saturday, Fraser received a call from her youngest daughter, Gaby, saying that Hayley was in intensive care in London, where all three sisters lived. Having spoken to Hayley the previous day, Fraser knew that she wasn’t feeling well and had gone to the doctor, who had said it was asthma. Hayley wasn’t asthmatic but used an asthma pump to better tolerate the air in London. Having studied medicine for three years, Fraser knew that her daughter didn’t have asthma and something was wrong. “I could hear she wasn’t breathing properly and told her to get to the doctor.”

Upon receiving Gaby’s call the next day, Fraser booked the first flight out to London. Mel decided to stay to take care of their guests

over *yomtov* and fly out later. They went to the airport together. Panicking after hearing that Hayley would probably not make it through the night from a friend at her bedside, Fraser was rushed through passport control by the amazing Virgin Atlantic staff. “The next minute, Mel, who by then had left the airport, phoned, and he was screaming,” Fraser recalls. “‘She’s gone,’ he said.” Friends rushed to the Fraser’s home, where they helped Mel book flights for the next day as his wife’s plane was about to take off.

“He flew on Sunday, on *yomtov*, which was horrific for us,” says Fraser. “It was a *yomtov* I wish to forget.” In Johannesburg, her friends banded together and fetched Fraser’s mother and brother for *yomtov* meals so they wouldn’t be alone in their grief. Dealing with the nightmarish paperwork required to repatriate Hayley’s body, through which it was determined that she died of undiagnosed multiple pulmonary embolisms, the family later flew back to Johannesburg for the funeral.

“I haven’t had a *yomtov* in my home since then. I don’t know if I ever will,” Fraser says. “It should be a happy time. Our friends take care of us, but I just find it so hard, as does my husband. The girls are in London, and we’re here – it’s difficult.” This year, first night Rosh Hashanah coincides with the Gregorian date of Hayley’s death, which makes it even more painful. However, Fraser is hosting a handful of close friends for second day lunch who would otherwise be alone.

A few years after Hayley’s death, Fraser was introduced to the founders of community organisation “Challah”ishing For Change. They suggested a challah bake in Hayley’s memory. Through this, donations were made to the

Nashua Children’s Charity Foundation, where Fraser serves as operations director and Jewish food fund Yad Aharon & Michael. Fraser now runs an annual online *yomtov* charity drive for the same beneficiaries. Each year, she encourages community members to do what Hayley loved best – give.

For Carrie Miller, a South African expat who has been living in the United Kingdom (UK) for nine years, celebrating *yomtov* with family has

more difficult. “*Yomtov* was really hard for the first few years. We were able to spend it with special friends, but I felt heartsore about not being with my family.” Though she has sometimes spent Pesach in South Africa with her mom and sisters since moving, it’s never worked out over Rosh Hashanah.

Over the years, Miller has become more used to being away over *yomtov*, but she still misses her family. Yet not only does she now have cousins close by, but her aunt and uncle moved to the UK at the end of 2022. “It’s wonderful to be able to celebrate together again,” she says.

“In order to avoid painful losses or loneliness, we often keep busy on a daily basis. However, when the *chagim* come around, we’re forced to stop what we’re doing and confront that painful emptiness – which for some is very triggering,” says counselling psychologist Lisa Hirschowitz.

Yet, instead of avoiding *yomtov* celebrations, a natural response when confronting loneliness or pain, she suggests immersing oneself in community events to develop new avenues of support. “This may be extremely difficult at first, but with time, new relationships can be forged.”

As *yomtov* approaches, Hirschowitz also advises speaking to a trusted friend or professional ahead of time to better navigate the feelings it may evoke. Remembering lost loved ones or those who are far away in various ways over *yomtov* can also be of comfort.

“Many people feel a sense of guilt if they feel joy without their loved ones,” she says. “Letting go of this guilt is also an essential part of healing. As a community, we should be sensitive to others’ circumstances and offer more support to those who are suffering or lonely.”



Helen and Hayley Fraser in 2012

always been something to look forward to. “I have wonderful memories of *yomtov* meals with family in South Africa,” she says. “We always had one night with my mom’s family and the next with my dad’s – it was really special.”

Losing her father in 2007 made these family gatherings increasingly meaningful. So, being away from family members over Rosh Hashanah immediately after she and her husband emigrated was therefore that much



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Head over heels for the perfect kippah

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

The kippah, or yarmulke, may be small in size, but it has a mighty presence in Jewish men’s lives. Not just men, but the mothers of men, who have to make sure that their sons have something to wear. This can be challenging, as boys – and sometimes men – treat kippahs like disposable plates, using and losing them.

It wouldn’t be so much of an issue if they were priced like paper plates, but kippahs are expensive, often retailing for more than R200 a kippah. So, what’s a mother to do?

My history with kippahs goes back almost 20 years, to the time I was living in Paris in the Marais, the traditionally Jewish section of this ancient city. We were living on Rue Chapon. *Chappo* is a synonym for *chapeau* (hat), and rumour had it that the street was named after the “Jewish hat” people wore. It was just a curiosity to me then. Little did I know that kippahs would soon become larger than life because I had two sons who both went to King David and had to wear one every day.

My boys never had a kippah when they needed it, and invariably, there would be a last-minute scramble to find one in the car on dropping them off at school. Each kippah would inevitably disappear into the black (velvet) hole reserved for kippahs. Replacing pretty versions

with generic black nylon kippahs, I was amazed – actually dismayed – by the price of these scraps of sewed fabric. How could they be so expensive? And we thought uniforms were pricey! How would I survive 24 years of kippah wearing school days? I would have to make them myself!

So began a sewing/ knitting/crocheting adventure, and I realised why they are so expensive. Kippahs are, to put it bluntly, not easy to make – you could even describe them as a dark art. My first attempt at sewing a kippah was so laughable, it was good for nothing other than being hidden in my car to use in emergencies in the dark.

I moved on to crocheting kippahs. Endless YouTube videos followed, at which women with heavy accents (Hebrew? Russian?) spoke about how to make a “magic circle”. But the magic of the circle eluded me, and my kippahs either ended up looking like a warped plate or a bubble that had shrunk in the wash.

“Keep your tension even. Use a smaller crochet hook,” were my sister’s instructions, but this made no difference. It turns out that as well as requiring “magic circles”,



kippahs need to have an exquisite balance between increasing and not increasing stitches to get that rounded shape.

It’s a bit like life – moderation, balance, and judgement is everything. Also, how do you know when one row starts and the other ends? Kippahs are infinite – one row blends into the next. Clearly, I wasn’t evolved enough for this task. Who knew you had to be a sage to do this work?

I decided to consult an experienced craftswoman, my brother-in-law’s mother, who has

been sewing and knitting for close to 70 years and has even sold her work to shops. She can’t remember when she started making kippahs, but does admit that she has ripped up her work “many times” – which is what happened to my work when she saw it.

My mentor taught me to increase gradually and only when needed, and to chain stitch at the end of each row, a hack (hook?) not found on the internet, but passed on by word of mouth over generations. Even the words “chain stitch” imply some sort of female conspiracy.

After a couple of hours of double-treble crocheting – which incidently is called triple crochet in the United States just to add to the general sense of confusion – my kippah resembled the half-moon shape sought after by craftspeople since the beginning of time.

It’s all about mathematics, says accomplished artist and self-described “craftivist”, Stacey Rozen, who goes by the name @curioussleuth when she’s “yarnbombing” the neighbourhood. “If you don’t have higher grade maths, you can’t crochet,” she says, talking about “denominations of five; number series; and times tables”.

Rozen, who gave a talk at the recent Goethe-Institut’s TextILE event exploring the synergy between crafts and technology, says the perfect kippah starts by creating the perfect circle. It’s ultimately all about engineering, she says, pointing out that knitting patterns are essentially coding without a computer.

“Craftivism is a gentle process,” Rozen says in response to my comment that unsuccessful kippah making can make you commit *harakiri* – but that doesn’t mean that it isn’t lethally effective.

In an article titled “How knitting won the war”, Rozen writes about a top-secret mission by the allies in World War II for accomplished craftswomen to code essential information into knitted garments and send them across enemy lines. “The granny who was coding during World War II was the first developer of computer programming today,” she says.

She sends me the mathematical equation for a perfect circle. It’s all a bit overwhelming for this maths-challenged mother who has trouble following instructions. “Imperfection is really nice,” Rozen says, referring to her many creations which have tiny mistakes in them. It’s small consolation from this accomplished crafter, but I’ll keep it in mind the next time I’m inspired to make the perfect kippah, and it turns out to be the perfect waffle.



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Poetry in a backstory: the tale of Issy Lieberman

PERSONAL STORY

GUY LIEBERMAN



*“If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies;
Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too
wise...”*

This excerpt from Rudyard Kipling’s 1895 poem *If* represents a long and consequential history in the Lieberman family. While many know of and have appreciated Kipling’s ode to a stoic life, it holds particular resonance for us. The backstory follows.

Abraham Lieberman was, by all accounts, a troubled man. The father of five children and one on the way, he was, as with many other Jews in Russia in the 1890s, confronted with some of life’s big quandaries – the survival of his family, for one. The Jewish communities of the Baltic and their neighbouring states had been suffering from a slate of pogroms, with thousands being killed, and it was clear that the Liebermans’ shtetl was eventually going to be engulfed in the violence. Like others in the same situation, responsibility rested on Abraham to find safe harbour for the family.

Abraham’s wife, Rachel, pregnant at the time, told him, “If you’re going, take Israel with you. He’s the naughtiest.”

Israel, or Issy to the family, was their middle child. He had just turned seven. A freckled, ginger lad, Issy was brazen, energetic, and mischievous. The parents agreed that it would be more useful for Issy to travel with his father than to stay home. And so, the large, red-bearded Abraham and small, pale Issy with his shock of ginger hair embarked on their long journey south. By road, rail, and sea, they arrived in Cape Town in 1898.



Robert Lieberman at age 93

The Cape Colony was under British rule, and on the brink of war with the Boers. Neither father nor son spoke a word of English. After disembarking, Abraham told Issy to wait with their luggage by the harbour office while he went to find some lodging. “Don’t move from this place until I return,” were his instructions to the boy.

Issy waited. Hours went by. Eventually, night fell. Still, the child waited. His father didn’t return. The following morning, now aching with hunger, Issy continued to wait. Abraham had clearly disappeared. The boy had no choice but to leave and try to find his father.

After ordering Issy to stay put, Abraham had left the port in search of somewhere to stay. This was not meant to take much time. It wasn’t long, however, before he was noticed by a British patrol. Already on high alert – the Boer rebels had come within 80km of Cape Town – they quickly assumed that this large redbeard was from the enemy camp. They arrested Abraham on the spot, transporting him to a nearby concentration camp. He resisted, tried to explain, but to the overwrought British soldiers there was no way

they could tell whether this panicked foreigner was pleading in Afrikaans or Yiddish.

For three days, the British held Abraham in the camp, until it became clear to them that he was not, after all, a Boer, nor was he a rebel. “Redbeard” over here was Russian, and they had no quarrel with his people. So they released him. Abraham hastily returned to the port to find Issy, but the child was gone.

The father searched Cape Town for his young son for three months. The city was teeming with the multitudes – soldiers, traders, foreigners, and families. The boy had vanished. Eventually, Abraham concluded that there was no way that the little child could have survived – a helpless, juvenile non-English speaking immigrant. He wrote home to Rachel in Russia, explaining to his wife that Issy had been eaten by wolves, and was dead.

In the meantime, Issy, after failing to find his father, was now entirely guided by his stomach and the need to eat. He started searching for food. For days, he survived on scraps that he found in bins on the street. One day, he came upon a large, discarded barrel, tipped it on its side, and lay down some material he had found on the street. It became his night shelter. In the days and weeks ahead, Issy got smarter about his surroundings, and he started pilfering bottles of fresh milk delivered at sunrise to the front steps of the wealthy colonial homes. He even found a puppy which he took in, and it became his companion.

Eventually, a group of coloured street urchins noticed this very white-skinned ginger kid who was clearly running solo, but doing so on their turf. They approached him, and promptly inducted him into their ranks. Issy had found comrades, community, and the chance to learn some English. They introduced him to their neighbourhood on the other side of town.

Over time, Issy was noticed by a coloured family, who realised that something must have gone terribly wrong for this pale Russian child to have found himself alone on the streets of Cape Town, clearly far from his people. Themselves mired in poverty, they decided to take him in and make sure he survived. He lived with them for several years.

What followed was an orphaned childhood, with Issy surviving on a combination of his own wits, the kindness of strangers, and his desire to survive. Unlike his father, however, his mother, Rachel, had never given up on finding Issy. When she arrived with the rest of the children in South Africa some years later, she launched a searched for Issy. After a miraculous and providential series of events, Issy reunited with his family at the age of 18, in 1909, 11 years after he got lost.

Issy ended up having eight children, my late father, Julius, being the youngest son. Stories abound about Issy’s astonishing young life, including the few indelible impressions that he made on his children – Kipling’s poem *If* being one of them. If anything was Issy’s north star, it was Kipling’s treatise on how to navigate life, approaching travails and triumphs “just the same”.

My uncle, Robert, one of my father’s elder brothers, was the Lieberman family patriarch for the last five decades. At 93, on 30 August, Issy’s last surviving son passed away at his home in Johannesburg. Robert was a successful and generous man, a guiding light for the family, making sure that all members of

our large clan were taken care of. In researching Issy’s story, and in order to spend time with my uncle when I could, over the past few years, Robert and I were in fairly consistent contact. On one recent occasion we had a long and deeply insightful conversation, where he shared a memory from his childhood. It offered the most profound perspective on my *zeide*, Issy’s, character, and something he hoped his progeny would live by. Issy had framed and hung a large, coloured print of the poem in the house, and told his kids that should any of them be able to recite the poem by heart – clearly with the intention that they absorb the wisdom therein – that that child would receive two and sixpence,

a fair sum at the time! Robert could still deliver the poem from memory, which he did for me there and then.

An era has ended in the Lieberman family with the passing of our beloved uncle Robert, who is survived by his wife, Fanny, and sons Eric and Alan. In his memory, may the perpetual wisdom of Kipling’s poem abide and roll through to the next generations.

• *Guy Lieberman is a cultural activist, writer, filmmaker and, very recently, a podcaster. He lives in Zichron Yaakov, Israel. His podcast The Hadedá can be found on Spotify.*

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The rookie rabbi who pioneered SA Progressive Judaism

STEVEN GRUZD

With his arrival in 1933, the charisma, chutzpah, and public speaking prowess of Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler launched Progressive Judaism in South Africa. Some of the practices he instituted were straight from American Reform Judaism; others he made up himself. This larger-than-life rookie rabbi left his mark on the movement he helped to propel, illustrated in an irreverent historical talk by writer and historian Irwin Manoim, the author of *Mavericks Inside the Tent: The Progressive Jewish Movement in South Africa and Its Impact on the Wider Community*.

Manoim was speaking at the celebration of 90 years of Progressive Judaism in South Africa, marked from Weiler’s arrival, held at Beit Emanuel in Parktown on 30 August. He recounted how the 26-year-old Weiler landed in Cape Town from America on 6 August 1933. In the pouring rain, no-one was there to meet him at the docks. He took the first train to Johannesburg, where 17 people met him, but 14 disappeared when a newspaper photographer took his picture. The Orthodox establishment had been extremely hostile to the arrival of Progressive Judaism in South Africa, fearing this “apostasy” that had “already poisoned American Jewry” would attract their congregants and the unaffiliated, Manoim said. At the time, of the 30 000 estimated Jews in Johannesburg, only 2 000 were members of Orthodox shuls. “Rabbi Weiler became the most hated Jew in South Africa,” Manoim said. Weiler was clean-shaven, hatless and inexperienced – and therefore cheap – his starting salary was £40 a month. Born in Riga, Latvia, in 1907, he was descended from a long

line of Orthodox rabbis. His father took the family to live in Israel, and started a chocolate factory there. Weiler spoke English, German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. A brilliant student, Weiler won a scholarship to study in the United States, where he was attracted to Progressive Judaism and then ordained as a Reform rabbi. When Weiler gave his first speech in Johannesburg, the room was bursting at the seams with the curious and several hecklers.



He soon became a sought-after speaker around the country. “His charisma built the movement,” Manoim said, with people joining his congregation to hear his masterful oratory. Weiler’s Shabbat evening services started at 20:15 to encourage women to attend after dinner. Strict decorum and silence were demanded, and latecomers were locked out. Men and women sat together, and both had to cover their heads – whereas the yarmulke was becoming obsolete in many American Reform

shuls. Lay leaders led the service, and Weiler’s sermon subject was pre-announced in the newspapers. A mixed choir was accompanied by an organ, violins, and cellos. At the end of the service, *Hatikvah* was sung along with *G-d Save the King*. Not everything worked. Weiler’s efforts to make membership free went awry, and he had to abandon his idea of abolishing the Barmitzvah in favour of a “confirmation ceremony” for 16-year-olds. His congregation, for one thing, thought the name was too Christian. He conducted the first Batmitzvah in South Africa in 1937. He wanted to build a magnificent Temple to thumb his nose at his Orthodox rivals, Manoim recounted. He enlisted well-known architect Hermann Kallenbach, but grandiose plans for lavish gardens and a massive building in Parktown had to be scaled down in the Recession. Objections arose from Christian residents, foreshadowing the antisemitism of the 1930s and 1940s. His spectacular Temple was never built; a smaller but beautiful shul, Temple Israel, opened in Hillbrow in September 1937. It still operates today, in spite of the changed demographics of the area. Weiler launched 24 more Progressive communities across southern Africa. The Orthodox head of the Beth Din, Rabbi Isaac Kossovsky, set out to marginalise and ostracise the Progressive movement, branding it inauthentic and an existential threat to Judaism. He was largely successful, Manoim noted, with no recognition of Reform rabbis, conversions, weddings, and separate burial areas in cemeteries. Weiler’s wedding to Una Galman from

Bulawayo was held in great secrecy. Manoim speculated that Chief Rabbi Julius Landau, who got on famously with Weiler, might have married them, necessitating the clandestine measures. “Una was the model anti-rebbetzin,” Manoim said. “She was never at his side, and appears in only one photograph next to him.” She was more interested in riding her Vespa motorbike than in anything Weiler was doing. She was a passionate educator though, running one of South Africa’s first Montessori schools. In 1944, with the help of women of the Temple Sisterhood, she started what became the MC Weiler Primary School in Alexandra township in Johannesburg. Today it has 800 pupils, and it survived multiple attempts by the apartheid government to shut it down. In 1956, Weiler stunned the community by announcing he was making aliya. He gave a year’s notice, but it took four years to find a replacement, during which time the Progressive movement lost impetus and started a slow decline, according to Manoim. “The movement was built around the personality of one man.” Nevertheless, Progressive Judaism in South Africa grew and endured, practicing gender equality; holding most of the services in Hebrew, minus the organs; and embracing non-racialism long before the Orthodox. Weiler tragically lost two sons in action defending Israel in their early twenties. He died in 2000. Manoim’s talk coincided with the opening of the exhibition titled “Groundbreakers: Progressive Judaism in South Africa,” which has moved to Beit Emanuel in Johannesburg from the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town.



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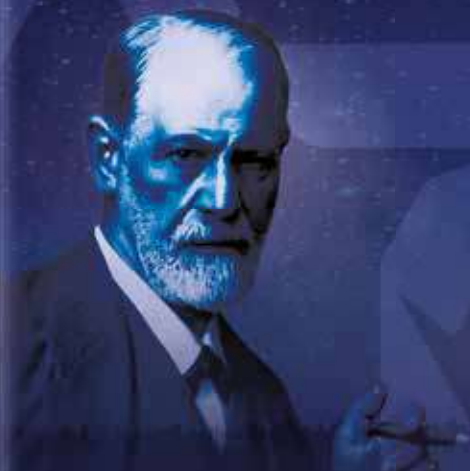
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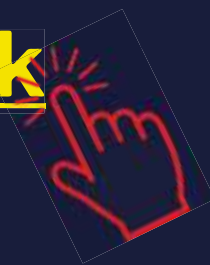
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World acclaimed novel *The Promise* premieres on stage

NICOLA MILTZ

“It has been an absolute honour and privilege to have played a part in bringing to life the world premiere of the stage adaptation of Damon Galgut’s Booker Prize-winning novel *The Promise*, says businessman and philanthropist Derek Lubner, who through his production company Club Dezza Productions is behind the opening this weekend in Cape Town of the much anticipated play.

“I’m a big supporter of the arts, and was impressed by Damon when he was in London two years ago promoting his incredible South African novel which has universal themes that resonate with all of us,” said Lubner from London this week.

“This is an exciting venture,” said Lubner. “It has a star-studded South African cast and creative team, and I believe it has what it takes to go global and reach a wide audience.”

“I had worked with internationally acclaimed and multiple award-winning director Sylvaine Strike before in 2018, so when she approached me to become involved in *The Promise*, I was keen,” he said. Lubner worked with Strike previously in Samuel Becket’s *Endgame*, so “to work with her again came easily,” he said.

The Promise – On Stage is written by Galgut, directed by Strike, with stage adaptation by both.

Galgut, who lives in Cape Town, was awarded the prestigious Booker Prize for *The Promise* in 2021. It’s only the third time a South African writer has been given that honour.

Simply put, the story revolves around a small farm outside Pretoria. The Swart family, “a typical bunch of white South Africans”, tries to hold itself together through the violent lurches of recent history. They have promised to give a small piece of land with a tiny house on it to Salome, the Sotho woman who has worked for them her whole life. It’s a worthless property, but still, they won’t give it up.

One by one, members of the family die – there are four funerals, one of which is a Jewish funeral – while everything around them changes and they try to stay the same. Only two siblings are eventually left, facing each other over a great divide: Anton, the tormented older brother; and Amor, his strange younger sister.

Galgut said he didn’t consider the idea of *The Promise* being adapted for stage at the time of writing it.

“Sylvaine had a clear vision for how it could work, and this opened a door to a whole new theatrical language,” Galgut told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Theatre isn’t totally out of left field for me. When I started my career, I was torn between becoming a playwright or a novelist, and after drama school in Cape Town, I knew I was better at



A scene from *The Promise*

writing novels,” he said.

“We had the luxury of a week’s workshop with a full cast, which was exciting. I re-worked the play furiously afterwards, making numerous changes,” he said.

He described the workshop as an “emotionally charged experience”.

“It was emotional for everyone as it threw up all kinds of South African moments, stories from our past which we had to unpack,” he said.

Galgut, who is technically Jewish, admits to coming from a “fractured religious background”.

At the centre of *The Promise*, is, in fact, a Jewish mother, whose presence is felt across generations, tied to a promise made long ago.

“I do have Jewish heritage. My father is Jewish and my mother converted Orthodox when she married him. It wasn’t an easy process,” said Galgut. Along the same vein, the Jewish mother in the story, Rachel, also converted to Judaism.

“I was converted to Judaism at the age of two, though I was never subsequently raised in the Jewish tradition. I speak no Hebrew and never had a Barmitzvah,” he said. “My motivation in writing it this way [having a Jewish mother at the centre of the story] was purely to cover the major religious traditions of white South Africa. There’s not only a Jewish element to the book, but a Catholic, Calvinist, and New Age one too,” he says.

When he was researching the novel, he consulted a local rabbi in Cape Town. “It did occur to me at the ripe age of 59 that perhaps I should be chasing up roots,” he thought afterwards.

He published his first novel at 17, and since then, his work has been translated into 34 languages. Two other novels, *The Good Doctor*, and *In a Strange Room*, have also previously been shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Two films were made of his book *The Quarry*. Locally, his previous novel, *Arctic Summer*, was awarded the *Sunday Times* fiction prize. Galgut is also a past winner of the Commonwealth Prize Africa Region.

“We have been reflecting on ourselves as South Africans, with the recent events in our country highlighting how disparate our daily experiences are,” said Silke of the play’s rehearsals. “It serves as

a sharp reminder that the themes of *The Promise* remain absolutely relevant, and how vital it is to have continued conversations around these realities.” She has described the play as funny,

confrontational, and powerful, supported by a uniquely chorus-driven narration.

“This isn’t laugh-a-minute stuff. It’s quite a serious play, a commentary on South Africa past

and present,” said Lubner. “I cannot act or direct, but in my small way, I have loved being a part of the creative process. Being able to back the production is my way into this exciting theatrical world.

“It has been a fantastic privilege to get to know somebody like Damon and work with Sylvaine, visualizing the best outcome for the production, pushing ourselves to be the best we can be. It’s a world-class show that can stand anywhere in the world,” Lubner said.

“The Promise – On Stage” will run from 16 September to 6 October at The Star Theatre at the Homecoming Centre in Cape Town and at The Market Theatre from 18 October to 5 November. Bookings can be made at Webtickets.

Ireland’s first kosher deli in decades an all-round hit

JACOB JUDAH – JTA

The first kosher delicatessen to open in Ireland in over half a century is proving a surprise hit among Dubliners since it opened its doors in March – and not only among Jews.

Located in the southern part of the city, Deli 613 has been serving up a mix of local fare, such as salt beef sandwiches and chopped herring, alongside Israeli comfort food. And the cozy deli – named after the number of *mitzvot*, or commandments, in the Torah – has quickly cultivated a following.

In May, the *Irish Times* awarded Deli 613 four and a half stars out of five in a rave review that described the eatery as a “great addition” to the Dublin scene. Leo Varadkar, Ireland’s head of government, stopped by for latkes and matzah ball soup in July. Former Scottish soccer star Graeme Souness, *Star Trek* actor Colm Meaney, and TV chef Donal Skehan have also dropped in.

“We have a counter full of food, shelves and a full fridge with grab-and-go items like sandwiches and salads,” said Rifky Lent, who runs the restaurant with her husband, Zalman, a rabbi. The pair are Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries who live in Dublin. “We also have typical things like hummus, tahina, chopped liver, and herring, that we make in-house.”

Celebrities aside, Deli 613 has won a following among both local and visiting Jews. “We also have the local Jewish population, a lot of whom are elderly, and they were very excited to come and buy things like chopped liver,” said Lent.

Dublin, a technology hub, also plays host to a large number of Israelis who have been scouring the city for favourites from back home. “We have Israelis that are looking for things like Bamba, as well as Israeli dishes like hummus, shawarma, and sabich,” an egg and eggplant sandwich, she said.

Since the space is small, patrons tend to sit and enjoy coffee and food on the tables outside.

In the future, the deli plans to offer formal table service once a week.

For now, reviewers have praised both the quality and freshness of the food on offer – which is made by a non-Jewish chef.

“We decided to hire a good chef who was very experienced in the Irish food market who is not Jewish,” said Lent. “He was excited about trying something new and different,” she said, adding that he was working alongside a part-time Jewish chef in the kitchen.

The Lents, who have lived in Ireland since 2000, had been planning for the opening of a new Chabad centre in southern Dublin. They had also been helping Ireland’s local community grapple with a shortage of kosher food that followed the United Kingdom’s recent withdrawal from the European Union, of which Ireland is a member. Jews in Ireland had traditionally relied on suppliers in neighbouring Great Britain for kosher products,

but new regulatory checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea have added costs and entailed mountains of paperwork.

These complications made it difficult for Irish Jews to find the goods they needed. Deli 613 has managed to fill some of that niche.

“There were a few things that happened at the same time that made us think: let’s do it,” recalled Lent.

But she added that the deli itself has had to overcome some Brexit hurdles.

“It’s really complicated,” said Lent. “We tried getting suppliers from England, and we did manage to order a few times from there, but it’s very difficult ordering directly from Britain now. It’s a nightmare with paperwork, and businesses are generally not very willing to do it.”

For example, in a process that Lent called a “bit ridiculous”, the deli orders meat that originates in Britain but must first pass through somewhere farther away in the EU to get to Ireland.

In spite of these difficulties, stocking the products that Irish Jews recognised – such as specific cold cuts – was important, Lent said. “The Jewish food culture here is much more aligned with British food culture, so they are much more used to what Jews in England are eating.”

Deli 613’s full shelves may also provide a long-term supermarket option for kosher-keeping Jews in Dublin. After Brexit, the market that had traditionally supplied Irish Jews announced that it would no longer stock

kosher food. Though the local synagogue has opened a shop temporarily, Lent said it was not a long-term thing.

“We’re selling kosher meat, kosher chicken, matzah meal, the essentials of life,” she said.

Maurice Cohen, the president of the Ireland Jewish Representative Council, believes that Deli 613 is the first fully kosher eatery in Ireland since the late 1960s. There is, however, a nearby bakery that sells kosher bread. Only a few thousand Jews live in Ireland, a country of about five million people.

“That there is kosher food available is tremendous,” Cohen said.

Though only a few dozen families are thought to keep fully kosher in Dublin, many in the community have already begun to frequent Deli 613. “It has become a meeting place,” Cohen said. “People are going there at lunchtime. They sit outside and they have coffee.”

Though Lent says that she was initially surprised by how much Dubliners embraced Deli 613, Cohen says its success reflects how much Ireland’s tastes have changed.

“Dubliners are very interested in different foods and cuisines,” said Cohen, pointing out that the quality and types of food on offer in Dublin have grown exponentially over recent decades.

“I’ve been involved in the food industry for a long time,” he said. “Irish people have gone from having no palate to having a very sophisticated palate.”



Photo courtesy 613 Deli

Victory Park’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* simply Wonka-ful

REVIEW

HANNA RESNICK



King David Primary School Victory Park (KDVP) transported audiences to a world of pure imagination in its production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* from 4 to 7 September.

The vibrant musical adaptation of Roald Dahl’s children’s novel of the same name tells the rags-to-riches story of Charlie Bucket through his once-in-a-lifetime encounter with famous chocolatier Willy Wonka.

The show opened with the iconic song, *The Candyman*, inviting the audience into a world where anything is possible. Willy Wonka was played by music teacher and director Andrew Edgar.

Charlie, the meek, underprivileged protagonist, was played by Jonathan Wadsworth with a sweet, naive sincerity that lent itself perfectly to the character. The audience was introduced to the Bucket family, living in their tiny home, built upon a small moving set. This included the iconic bed, where all four grandparents lay – played by Judah Katz, Sammy Blend, Asher Smeatsky, and Hayley Levine.

The four other golden ticket winners, who, to quote another Roald Dahl musical, *Matilda*, can only be described as “revolting children”, each delivered their own character songs. We travelled around the world to Bavaria, the home of Augustus Gloop (Rael Fine); Russia, the home of Veruca Salt (Ariella Hurwitz); California, home of Violet Beauregarde (Emily Epstein); and Idaho, home to Mike Teavee (Jake Wolman).

The four young actors, as well as the actors playing Mrs Gloop (Ava Johnston-Kowen), Mr Salt (Ricky Kur), Mr Beauregarde (Phoenix Bernstein), and Mrs Teavee (Emma Drue) did an incredible job of their grotesque caricatures, from Augustus’ gluttony to Veruca’s spoiled attitude, to Violet’s brashness, to Mike’s aloofness.

Each winner was introduced by over-the-top TV presenters Jerry (Ava Rozen) and Cherry Sundae (Taylor Reichman-Israelsohn). And each character song featured an ensemble, from cheerleaders to a marching band. These songs also touched on deeper social issues, such as *What could possibly go wrong?*, which critiqued American society.

These humorous sketches were juxtaposed with Charlie’s family situation, particularly through the melancholic song that followed them, *If your father were here*. However, the heart-warming moment when Charlie finds the golden ticket managed to lighten the mood.

In the second act, the four other golden ticket winners each faced the end of their trip to the factory. A cloth was used to create the chocolate river that Augustus falls into, an elaborate sequence by the Oompa Loompas created a puff of smoke out of which came the piece of bubblegum that turned Violet violet – with a clever sleight of hand used to put blue paint on her face – a group of squirrels proclaimed Veruca to be a “bad nut”, which ended up landing her upside down in a trashcan, and, an audience favourite, the “shrinking” of Mike Teavee as a younger child dressed up in the same outfit was placed on the other side of the TVs.

Narrators Gabi Seymour, Cassie Nagle, and Sophia Stecker doubled as Willy Wonka’s assistants, along with the Oompa Loompas, who wore colourful, sparkly wigs. The ensemble was made up of various groups, from the townspeople to the Oompa Loompas, to the squirrels in Mr Wonka’s factory. Large dance numbers made the hall come alive, choreographed by Siphe Mashigo, Olga de Villiers, and Talia Kodesh.

Charlie, as the last “surviving” member of the group, went into the glass elevator, made from a moving trolley wrapped in plastic, with Willy Wonka, and was introduced to the



wonderland that he was now the rightful owner of.

The sets, created by KDVP parents, were impressive. The first backdrop featured a city skyline at night. It folded to create the gates of Wonka’s factory, with space for the actors to walk through the gates. The other side of the backdrop featured a colourful, dreamlike swirl, reminiscent of candy, which served as the backdrop for the chocolate factory. Scaffolding on either side of the stage made space for the large cast and immersed the audience into the show. The sets were brought to life by colourful props and fairy lights.

KDVP’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* was a candy-filled dream that united audiences of all ages in wonder and imagination.

• Hanna Resnick is an intern at the SA Jewish Report.

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Why are people *kvetching* about a *schnoz*?

LEE TANKLE

Should Jews be the only ones to portray Jews on film is the question being bandied about, particularly with the recent release of *Golda* (played by Dame Helen Mirren), and *Maestro*, the biopic of Leonard Bernstein (Bradley Cooper), at the Venice Film Festival.

South African theatrical experts believe the best person for the role is the best person, no matter what religion they follow.

There are many instances in which non-Jewish actors have been cast to play characters in which Judaism is a large part of their story. Some notables are Luke Kirby as the iconic Jewish comedian Lenny Bruce in *The Marvellous Mrs. Maisel*; Felicity Jones portraying the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the film *On the Basis of Sex*; and Michelle Williams as Mitzi Fableman in *The Fabelmans*. Many of these actors have received critical acclaim for their portrayal of these figures.

Criticism of non-Jews playing these roles is based on the belief that they don't have the cultural knowledge to be able to play the characters authentically.

One of the biggest advocates – and in turn critics of “inauthentic casting” – for Jews being used to bring Jewish stories to life is Jewish-British comedian David Baddiel. Baddiel says in his book, *Jews Don't Count* (2021), and a subsequent piece in *The Guardian* in 2022 that, “In the current culture of uplifting minority stories being told authentically, the same doesn't seem to apply when it comes to Jews. There seems to be a general rule in Hollywood these days saying that minority roles are allowed to be played only by that minority. It seems to be that the one exception to this rule is the Jewish community,” Baddiel says.

“Casting a non-minority actor to mimic that identity carries a sense of mockery, and this can thus reduce the complexity of that experience,” Baddiel says. “This also becomes an issue because that non-Jewish actor wouldn't know the lived experience of being a Jew, and thus it's a disservice to Jewish culture and history.”

Elysa Koplovitz Dutton, the producer of the recent Adam Sandler film, *You Are So Not Invited to My Bat Mitzvah* told *JewishUnpacked* that the casting of Jewish Actors (Sunny, Sadie, and Adam Sandler; Idina Menzel; and Jackie Hoffman among others) in Jewish roles and having a Jewish director showed dedication to the authenticity of the story.

Rabbis were brought in to help ensure that the Batmitzvah was shown authentically, according to *JewishUnpacked*. The show's popularity and the fact that it's now Adam Sandler's highest rated show is attributed to this authenticity.

Daphne Kuhn, the producer and owner of the Theatre on the Square, says, “As much as I would like to believe that a Jewish actor would resonate more and be able to

interpret a Jewish role in a better way for a play or movie, this isn't necessarily true at all.

“A consummate actor is trained and should have the emotional intelligence, technical skill, and intellect to play different parts,” she says.

“Dame Helen Mirren excels as *Golda*, and she's not Jewish. This is a good example. Ultimately the best person must get the role or job.”

“Acting is pretending,” says Megan Choritz, South African writer, actor-director, and improviser. “A good actor is committed to playing a role, and an actor doesn't have to be exactly like the character they're playing. An actor's cultural or religious heritage shouldn't play a role in the casting of a character. Casting directors should be choosing who can do the role in the best way. If that's not the case, this needs to be investigated”.

Vicky Friedman, a performer, choreographer, director, and the owner of Fame Academy, agrees, and reminds us that casting is a director's decision. “One shouldn't hold an actor back because they don't fit into a certain box when the actor can portray a character in a way in which the director would be happy,” she says.

“Many factors go into casting a character, but ultimately it's the director's job to decide what factors are most important for their production,” Friedman says. “The fact that an actor doesn't share a background with a character shouldn't preclude the actor from being able to play that part.

“You have to be careful, the situation depends on the context – of the director, the character, the production.”

Says Kuhn, “Most producers, directors, and casting agents believe that they are free to cast actors regardless of their background, as long as the portrayal is respectful and well-researched.”

On the use of prostheses when bringing a character to life, Choritz says, “Prostheses are used all the time for many different reasons. It might be an issue because it seems as if Jews nowadays are very sensitive to antisemitism, but this isn't antisemitism,” she says, while conceding that it's a controversial topic.

“If we say that Jews are the only ones who can play Jews, it becomes dangerous. It would mean that Jews wouldn't be able to play non-Jewish characters,” Choritz says.



Laugh until you cry – why it's funny to be Jewish

LEE TANKLE

“The hardest part about following your dreams as a Jew is how scared your mother is,” says Kate Pinchuck in discussing how her Jewish identity has influenced her career.

She was one of four Jewish comedians, including Gilli Apter, Glen Biderman-Pam, and Nik Rabinowitz – who agreed to chat about being Jewish and being a comedian.

For Pinchuck, there seems to be a direct correlation between Jewish identity and style of comedy. “Being Jewish is the reason that I'm doing comedy,” she says. “Comedy is an occupational hazard of being Jewish.”

Rabinowitz says that for him, “Coming from a long line of rabbis laid the foundation for a career in comedy. Doing comedy is basically the same thing as being a rabbi without as much community responsibility. And you don't have to stick to the script. Although people do still like to tell me a lot of their secret problems.”

Says Apter, “Suffering influences comedy. Coming from a historically oppressed background, there's a dispensation for comedy. There's this mentality in Jewish culture that's prone to being cynical and sceptical, qualities that make you question things. I possess that just by virtue of being in that environment my whole life. I don't think I would have the same sense of humour if I was born Jewish – or didn't know that I was Jewish and lived in the Australian outback,” says Apter.

Pinchuck backs this up, saying, “My comedy is extremely self-deprecating and self-aware. This seems painfully Jewish to me. I think that my Jewish identity has created an attitude in which I'm willing to joke about myself.”

Biderman-Pam says his Jewish identity has “helped [him] to find an identity. [My Jewish Identity] has helped me to understand the characters I have portrayed, for example, Rael in *Tali's Diary*. I'm able to embody the text and understand the nuances because I know the culture.

“I thought [performing in front of a Jewish audience] would be super easy because the audience would immediately understand me,” says Apter, “I wouldn't have to contextualise certain things as much, but that wasn't the case. It made people nervous. The audience sees this young Jewish woman, and it mixed with their sense of what a Jewish woman should be.

“They would see a woman in her thirties who isn't married and is doing comedy. It freaked them out, and I felt that.”

Pinchuck believes “Jewish audiences are more open to Jewish cultural references. I have to contextualise myself less in front of a Jewish audience.”

However, not all audiences – even specifically Jewish ones – are built the same. Apter and Pinchuck both tell stories of Jewish audiences that weren't so open to their comedy. “I did a fundraiser and it was like just round tables of people who knew that they were going to be asked to give money at the end of the event, and they were just looking at me,” Apter says. “They were tense and not out to have a good time. They were so uncomfortable.”

Leonard Bernstein's children supported Cooper in his portrayal of the late composer, prosthetic nose and all, telling *Insider*, “It happens to be true that Leonard Bernstein had a nice, big nose. Bradley [Cooper] chose to use makeup to amplify his resemblance, and we're perfectly fine with that. We're also certain that our dad would have been fine with it as well”.

The Anti-Defamation League has stated that the use of the prosthetic nose isn't antisemitic. Similarly,

Mirren said in an interview with the *Daily Mail* that she had concerns about the decision to cast her as Golda Meir, approaching director Guy Nattiv and saying that she would leave the project if he thought it would be a problem According to Mirren, “[Nattiv] very much wanted me to play the role, and off we went.”

Though there's no clear answer to this question, it seems that the overwhelming opinion locally is that insisting that only Jews play Jewish roles is a dangerous road to take.

Similarly, Pinchuck tells a story of when she was very young. “It was a gig at a golfing event. There were all these older Jewish men. I could see them thinking, ‘I hope my daughter doesn't do this.’”

Rabinowitz tells a story of being asked to exclude certain material. “I've had an event co-ordinator ask me not to include material about my *bris*. It was just after the COVID-19 pandemic, and people were sensitive about all sorts of things. She said, “Nik, please no race, no language, no religion, no politics, no accents, no disabilities, no vaccinations, no gender, no banana bread – might be a bit triggering for people with allergies – no clapping – it's ableist and there may be people with no arms in the audience – and definitely no circumcisions.”

“Jews love to hear Jewish jokes,” says Biderman-Pam. “But they can also be quite afraid to laugh at those jokes for fear of looking insensitive. So, it can be a tough gig.”

Rabinowitz could touch on only one major difference in his Jewish audiences, namely that “a Jewish audience parks around the corner when they come to my shows on a Friday night”. Says Pinchuck, “There are no-go zones when it comes to certain topics. I have learned that by going there.”

“There's always a joke good enough to overcome whatever the line is, in my opinion,” says Apter. “There's always going to be difficulty in getting 100% agreement on something in a room, but when a joke has gone badly, it's usually because of the quality of the joke and not the subject matter. It's not a line I look to push. But sometimes there's an opportunity that presents itself, and you go for it, and it can go either way”.

Rabinowitz says the only off-limit topic is his Jewish mother, however for those who attended his latest show, he spent a while delving into just that.

Says Pinchuck, “I've been censored in some instances. I've had to listen to my gut and what's appropriate for the setting. I've often been told to censor myself in a way that male comedians haven't. I have to remind myself that I have to be true to myself, even if it's harder to do so.” Apter says censorship exists more in a corporate setting. “People don't want you to talk about politics, religion, sex, etc. That's the fundamental backbone of all comedy, when you think about it. You're told to please come on stage and not talk about any societal issues, and you go along with it and make the joke anyway without any realisation from the audience. They don't realise you've made a certain joke if you've done it well because you haven't done a joke that offends them.”

“Go see local comedy,” Apter says to aspiring Jewish South African comedians. “Do as much stand-up as you can, and try to find your own voice,” advises Biderman-Pam. “You have to just get on stage. Talent is great, but hard work and persistence are what's important,” says Pinchuk. “If they ask you to keep it clean, don't resort to doing jokes about that week's parsha, it can backfire on you,” advises Rabinowitz. Perhaps the most apt piece of advice from Pinchuck is, “Don't tell your mother before your first performance. She'll freak you out.”



Soccer legend’s passing sparks ‘guilded’ memories

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Memories of the popular Jewish Guild social and sporting club in Johannesburg were brought to the fore following the passing of Kaizer Chiefs legend Frank ‘Jingles’ Pereira.

Portuguese-born Pereira played for Jewish Guild Football Club between 1972 and 1973 before joining Cape Town City in a transfer that made him the most expensive soccer player in South Africa.

“The Guild’s soccer club competed in the first division for a short while, but its main event was the get-togethers it held for the Jewish community,” says Solly Krok, who served as the guild’s president for a decade from January 1977.

The Jewish community played soccer, bowls, hockey, tennis, and ping-pong at the guild in Rivonia Road, Morningside, during the 1960s and 1970s. The guild also had its own orchestra and war memorial building.

“In 1975, Solly and Abe Krok redid the guild’s hall and improved the whole premises. Stan & Pete moved in as the caterers, and it became the most popular function venue for many years,” says Stan & Pete co-founder Stan Smookler.

Krok got involved with the guild, which was founded in the first half of the 20th century, when he was about 26 or 27 years old. He went on to receive special acknowledgement for his contribution as president.

The Jewish Guild was originally called the Jewish Guild Memorial, and was located on the corner of Von Brandis and Jeppe streets in downtown Johannesburg. It was a cultural centre and meeting place for Johannesburg Jews, including returning soldiers from both



with huge wooden plaques of the hundreds of names of South African Jewish servicemen who had lost their lives in all the conflicts during the 20th century, including the War of Independence.

“In the basement was the table tennis area, which produced some South African champions. Badminton was also played down there. There was a huge hall where wonderful Yiddish productions were held.”

However, the guild subsequently relocated, Krok says. “In the 1960s, the management

bought a block of land [in Morningside], and decided to have sporting clubs. The main people who drove the guild have all passed on. In the 1970s, I took on the mantle and became chairperson. Antisemitism had been around

wrote in *Stan The Good Shabbos Man* last year. “Built to hold 250, which often stretched to more than 300, the venue pumped with a Barmitzvah virtually every Saturday, and at least two more simchas mid-week. It squeezed 500 in for the Krok’s 50th medieval banquet.”

According to Smookler, the four bowling greens were full every weekend, and when groundsman Seymour Smith tried to close the greens for a week or two to trim them, he received a lot of abuse.

A couple of years after Jewish Guild Football Club gained promotion to the first division at the start of the 1971/1972 season, the Kroks brought former Manchester United winger George Best, one of the biggest names in world soccer, to South Africa, and watched him play three games for the guild.

“Eventually, I was instrumental in merging the Jewish Guild with Balfour Park Club,” Krok says. “I was a big shot who controlled both those operations for a while. Because the attendances were dropping, I eventually sold the Jewish Guild and the Balfour Park ground in around 1987.”

The guild subsequently moved to the top of Sylvia Pass in Observatory, Johannesburg, before closing down, Smookler says. “What remains of the guild now is the Holiday Inn on the property, plus a few offices and Virgin Active. The Krok brothers built Sports Connection, the first real gym in South Africa.”

The guild’s war memorial building had plaques with records of Jews who participated in the two world wars. Its cornerstone, which was unveiled by the late Jan Smuts on 8 November 1922, was moved to the grounds of the South African National Jewish War Memorial at Westpark Cemetery in a rededication ceremony 10 months ago.

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Pupil’s charitable initiative knocks King David’s socks off

King David School's 75th Birthday Sock Initiative, the brainchild of Grade 11 King David Linksfield pupil Gina Dave, exceeded expectations by raising R223 691, netting R158 534 after expenses for distribution to outreach programmes.

Launched in May to help King David celebrate its history, the initiative involved students from Grade 1 to 12 on all campuses wearing three designs of sock, designed by Dave, on Forever Young Fridays for the year. Its success is based on the 28 parents who sponsored it; the South African Jewish Board of Education (SABJE), which helped Dave drive the initiative; the principals who allow students to wear the socks on Fridays; and the many students who have bought a pair of socks and wear them.

At an assembly on 8 September, a cheque for the sum of R100 000 was presented to Nicole Katz, group manager of fundraising at the Chevrah Kadisha, for Arcadia Children's Home, and in the

sum of R58 500 to Connie Biyela, fundraiser at Kids Haven Bryanston.

Dave said the initiative exemplified King David Schools' and her personal values of community, outreach, and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the SABJE, commended Dave for conceiving the initiative and driving it. "King David Schools is proud of Gina's tireless efforts and cannot praise her enough for the valuable community work she has done, demonstrating our schools' values of *koach* [strength] and community," Seeff said.

Katz said she was overcome with gratitude and admiration for the community and for Dave, who singlehandedly brainstormed, fundraised, and brought to reality a logistically complex school-wide initiative. Not only had Arcadia benefitted, but also the children of Kids Haven, so *tzedakah* had reached the entire South African community through Gina's initiative.



Nicole Katz, Gina Dave, and Connie Biyela

Braverman talks to youth about Jewish identity

Gusti Braverman, the chairperson of the World Zionist Organization's diaspora activities department, addressed South African youth movement and school leaders on Israel and Jewish identity at Beyachad in Johannesburg on 5 September. Braverman was hosted by the South African Zionist Federation together with the Zionist Youth Council.



Yeshiva College opens media centre



Naftali Gavin

Yeshiva College opened its new media centre on 8 September, designed not only to offer space for books, but interesting experiences on every level. The amphitheatre, bookshelves, and storage areas all lend themselves to the exciting world of the imagination, with the promise of learning, growing, reading, listening, and playing in every nook and cranny.

Letters

DAVIS' JUDGEMENT OF ISRAEL'S GOVERNMENT UNTRUE AND OFFENSIVE

I refer to Judge Dennis Davis' opinion piece ("From democracy to autocracy: Israel's constitutional crisis", *SA Jewish Report*, 7 September.

I'm almost convinced that South Africa's minister of international relations and cooperation; the leadership of the Economic Freedom Fighters; as well as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition would give this article a standing ovation.

Not only does the learned judge sit in judgement of the present democratically elected government of Israel, with 64 majority Knesset seats, but he also attempts to predict, as a prophet would, that the Arab Israeli population will be disenfranchised in the future.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Israel is a mighty, robust democracy, as it has always been.

To compare Israeli politics to the South Africa of the past is not only offensive, but an insult to our intelligence.

I'm often asked how our Jewish brethren openly trash and slander democratically elected religious and observant ministers in the Knesset without concern, when their only goal and greatest concern is to protect the Jewish people.

One answer can be found in Isaiah, chapter 49 verse 17.

CONDOLENCES A SOURCE OF COMFORT AND STRENGTH

We wish to thank organisations and individuals in the community who so kindly reached out with words of comfort at the passing of our dear wife and mother, Batya.

The condolences were a source of comfort and strength at this sad time.

Hoping to connect, in future, on happy occasions.

Wishing you all a shana tova umetuka – health, happiness, and prosperity. – **Rabbi Moshe Kurtstag and family, Israel**





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Don't just pull up a chair

"Excuse me," she said a little aggressively. "Are you guys going to be long?" I was confused, as although it's not an unreasonable question – even if a little forward – to ask in a packed coffee shop, in this case, we were the only occupants of an otherwise empty restaurant.

I was quite certain that it wasn't her business how long we would still be.

At first, given the frequency of the occurrence in my life, I assumed that it was me she was approaching. But I was mistaken. She made a very clear beeline for my companion.

I was meeting a friend for a quick coffee. As much as we try, we very rarely get a chance to meet. He is under immense pressure, works in a particularly difficult profession, with too infrequent moments of reprieve.

Although I would hardly have it any other way, I too have more commitments than is healthy and few gaps in my day. And so, when we both found that our day had gifted us the same 30 minutes to exhale, we grabbed the opportunity to do so.

She found us 15 minutes into our 30-minute coffee.

The break was proving to be exactly what we both needed – until the "Excuse me!"

"Umm, probably 15 minutes," said my friend, stammering slightly and caught off guard. "Sorry" he added, "Do I know you?" "No," she replied confidently, "But I need to speak to you. I'll sit here and wait until you're done." And she did. She sat at the next table, and waited for us to finish so that she could have her word.

It was the end of our reprieve. Just like that, the stress was back, the world had returned, and our 30 minutes had become 15 minutes. We tried to ignore her, and when that didn't work, attempted to figure if we knew the intruder and what she could have wanted. It took a few minutes for me to accept that our coffee was over, and that I

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



might as well leave him to this woman.

It turned out that she had good reason to speak to him, and he was able to address an issue that she was concerned about. Given that it was ahead of Rosh Hashanah, we figured that maybe it was even a good thing that she had been given an opportunity to do this.

At the same time, because more than one thing can be true, we felt irritated by the fact that she hadn't given a moment of thought to others. She could have asked for his number, or looked it up and called his office, and she could have made an appointment. Instead, she chose to seize an opportunity at our expense.

The incident is objectively not a big one. No-one was hurt or died. And it didn't have a financial impact. But sometimes it's through these non-stories, perhaps because we don't get distracted by the grand consequences, that we're able to learn the biggest lessons.

This was about boundaries, about respecting spaces, and about our ability to recognise that there are people in our peripheral vision.

I often consider what the correct etiquette is when running into someone we know at a coffee shop. Do we wave and mouth, "Hi" from a distance? Do we walk over to the table and have a quick chat, or is it best to ignore them completely? I'm certain there's no perfect rule and that it depends on the relationship. What I do know, especially ahead of Rosh Hashanah, is that even if someone is placed in front of us, it doesn't mean we've been invited to pull up a chair.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Mauritius memorial and Jewish solidarity

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



I participated in a moving series of events in Mauritius last week held to mark the 83rd anniversary of the deportation and detention of nearly 1 600 Jewish refugees during World War II. The refugees were deported to the island after being refused entry into what was then the British Mandate of Palestine in 1940, and were detained there until the end of the war. The ambassador of Israel, the British consul, and the deputy ambassadors of Germany and Austria were represented at the event.

With other participants from Israel, the United States, South Africa, and Canada, I visited various sites associated with the detainees, including the Beau Bassin Prison, the Beau Bassin Aliyah Bet Detainees Memorial Museum, and the St Martin's Jewish cemetery, where those who died in captivity are buried. The programme concluded with a panel discussion on the topic, "Holocaust memory – between the past and the present", where I was one of three panellists.

I was deeply moved by the memorial service held at the cemetery, where 126 Jews who died during the detention are buried. It was sad to reflect how so many of those who escaped the Holocaust and hoped to build a new life for themselves in Israel instead died as captives in a foreign land far from the refuge they were trying to reach. The story of the cemetery has a strong South African connection. After the war, it was handed over by deed of grant to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), which thereafter was responsible for its maintenance. Through the Board and the African Jewish Congress (AJC), the cemetery was extensively restored, and today, it's beautifully maintained by the local Jewish community in consultation with the AJC.

South African Jewry, through the offices of the SAJBD, were a vital source of assistance to the detainees, providing them with material support and a link with the Jewish world. A plaque in the memorial centre records these

contributions. I also had the opportunity of lighting a candle to remember the deep bond of support between the SAJBD and the detainees during that difficult time. My thanks to Tali Nates of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Roni Mikel-Arieli from Tel Aviv University and, as always, the SAJBD for enabling me to be part of this amazing event and bear witness to this little known piece of history.

Yomtov greetings

This past year has been one of healing from the COVID-19 pandemic trauma, but has brought its own challenges. Loadshedding, in particular, is taking its toll on our physical, mental, and financial health. That being said, as a community, we are once again showing the strength that has made us one of the most admired Jewish communities in the world. In spite of dwindling numbers, South African Jewry remains vibrant on every front. The shuls are back and active, *shiurim* on so many topics are taking place every week, and this year, Limmud, that massive celebration of all kinds of Jewish learning, was back to almost record highs. Our superb network of Jewish institutions – among them the SAJBD, South African Zionist Federation, youth movements, Community Security Organisation, Hatzolah, South African Union of Jewish Students, women's organisations, Chevrah Kadisha, outreach organisations, the Union of Orthodox Synagogues, and the South African Union of Progressive Judaism – continue to work like trojans to protect and nurture our beautiful community, while our fine kosher restaurants and caterers offer a marvellous range of delicious food and cuisines. Plus, we won our opening match of the Rugby World Cup! On that hopeful note, on behalf of the SAJBD, I wish you all a *shana tova* – a year of sweet new beginnings for ourselves, our community, and our country.

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

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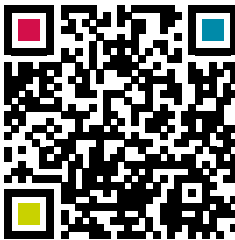
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FAIRVIEW CHEVIN CHEESE ASSTD 100G EACH



27⁹⁹

DELAVI ASSTD HERRING 500G EACH



26⁹⁹

THE NU TREE HONEYCOMB 100G

54⁹⁹

STEINZ HONEY 375G



49⁹⁹

SELWYN SEGAL 48HR CANDLE



51⁹⁹

TI FLAIR LUNCHEON DESIGNER 3PLY 20'S EACH



88⁹⁹

OH MIO GELATO ASSTD 500ML EACH

שנה טובה ומתוקה Store Trading Times 2023		
Friday 15 September	Erev Rosh Hashanah	07h00 - 16h00
Saturday 16 September	Rosh Hashanah 1st Day	CLOSED
Sunday 17 September	Rosh Hashanah 2nd Day	18h45 - 22h00
Mon - Thurs 18-21 September		07h00 - 22h00
Friday 22 September		07h00 - 16h00
Saturday 23 September		18h40 - 22h00
Sunday 24 September	Erev Yom Kippur	08h00 - 15h00
Monday 25 September		CLOSED
Tues - Thurs 26-28 September		17h00 - 22h00
Friday 29 September	Erev Sukkot	07h00 - 16h00
Saturday 30 September	Sukkot 1st Day	CLOSED
Sunday 1 October	Sukkot 2nd Day	18h50 - 22h00
Mon - Thurs 2-5 October	Chol Hamoed	07h00 - 22h00
Friday 6 October	Chol Hamoed	07h00 - 16h00
Saturday 7 October	Shemini Atzeret	CLOSED
Sunday 8 October	Simchat Torah	18h55 - 22h00

Feigels Est.1988

Yummy!

Muffins - Lemon & Poppy Seed, Carrot, Bran

194⁹

Hometown Pharmacy

Our Dispensary stocks Anti-Fungal Ointment for Finger Nail Infections

WART MAGIC For the treatment of warts and corns

79⁹⁹ WART MAGIC LIQUID 7MG

PROSANA Bitter Nail Polish 15ML (NAIL BITING & THUMB SUCKING)

69⁹⁹

087-803-4000 082-711-4342

HOMETOWNPHARMACY@PROPHARM.CO.ZA

24⁹⁹ GRANNY SMITH APPLES 1.5KG

29⁹⁹ EACH JUST ARRIVED!

2 FOR R45 SOFT DRINKS ASSTD NO SUGAR 2.25L

101⁹⁹ AMYS TEIGLACH 300G

21⁹⁹ FRUITREE JUICE ASSTD 1L EACH

2 FOR R47 COCA COLA SOFT DRINK ORIGINAL TASTE LESS SUGAR 2.25L

20% BUY 2 & SAVE

34⁹⁹ HERMES CONES ASSTD 20'S

5⁹⁹ DAIRYMAID ZOOTY POP ORANGE 60ML

5784 KOSHERWORLD CALENDAR NOW AVAILABLE IN-STORE *LIMITED STOCK

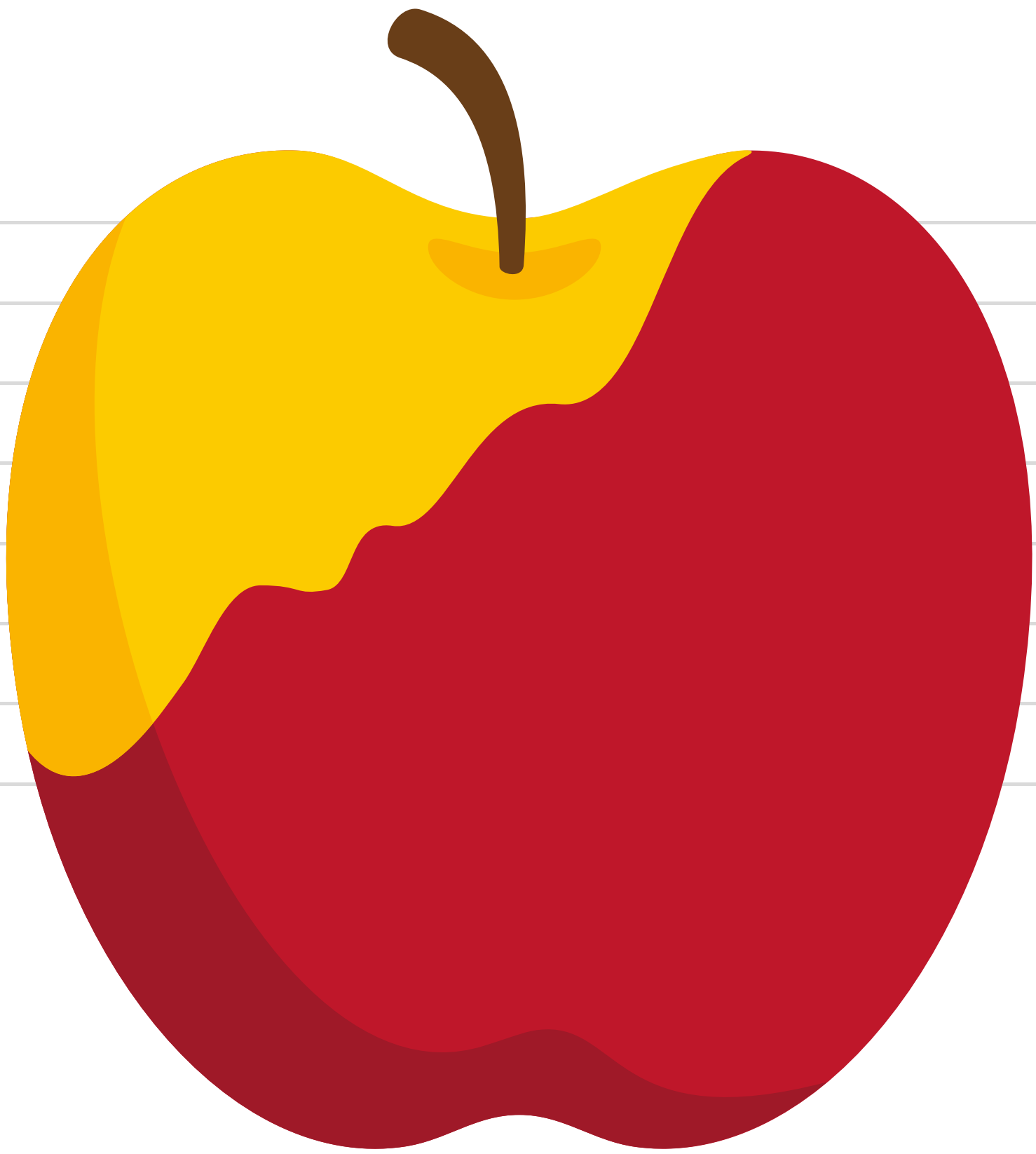
KOSHER AT EVERYDAY PRICES

CONCIERGE SHOPPING SERVICE orders@kosherworld.co.za

Actual offers may differ from visuals shown. KosherWorld is available at selected Checkers stores. We reserve the right to limit quantities. While stocks last. E&OE.

Offers valid till 20 SEPTEMBER 2022 or while stocks last

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