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# What we know about the hostage deal

PHILISSA CRAMER, BEN SALES – JTA

When it attacked Israel on 7 October, killing 1 200 people and wounding thousands, Hamas also took an estimated 240 people hostage. Some of those captives are about to be released in a deal between Israel and Hamas.

The hostages range from Israeli soldiers to the elderly to small children. The deal finalised on Wednesday, 22 November, will free children, women, and some of the oldest hostages in exchange for women and youths held by Israel on national security charges, and will trigger a pause in the war between Israel and Hamas. It will be Israel's first prisoner exchange with Hamas in more than a decade, and by far the largest in history.

Under the deal, 50 hostages will be released during the initial pause, about a dozen a day. Afterward, Hamas can extend the truce by releasing an additional 10 hostages a day. Up to 80 hostages could be released.

The first tranche of hostages to be released will include children held by Hamas – a number Israel estimates at 40. They include a 10-month-old baby and his four-

year-old sister, Kfir and Ariel Bibas; Abigail Mor Idan, three, a United States citizen who is being held without anyone else in her family; Emily Hand, whose parents first believed her to be dead and who just

releases was subject to an agreement with Israel. Israel rescued one hostage, a soldier, on 30 October.

In addition, some of the hostages are known to have died after being taken



Pictures of hostages held by Hamas terrorists in Gaza placed on chairs at the Pais Arena stadium in Jerusalem

turned nine in captivity; Erez and Sahar Kalderon, whose grandmother and cousin were murdered; and Yigal Yaakov, 13, who appeared in a hostage video released earlier this month.

Elderly women are also expected to be released as part of the deal.

About a month ago, Hamas released two women, aged 79 and 85, but the husband of one of them is still being held by Hamas. Hamas also released an American mother and daughter last month. Neither of those

captive. Others were severely injured before being abducted to Gaza. The condition and location of the remaining hostages may not easily be known. Even those who are alive could be hard to find in a region where the vast majority of people have been displaced since 7 October.

Some of the hostages are soldiers and don't appear to be represented in the deal at all. It also appears that adult men who aren't soldiers aren't set for imminent release.

Continued on page 5>>

## Rolling Stones



Rabbi Rodney Richard  
Emmarentia Shul

In this week's Torah portion, we read that Yaakov encountered three flocks of sheep, together with their shepherds, by the well. We read, further, that a large stone covered the opening of the well. Yaakov questioned the shepherds why they were delaying in watering their sheep. They replied, "lo nuchal" – we cannot roll the stone by ourselves, it's impossible, we need to wait for the other shepherds to arrive. Yaakov then promptly approached the well and effortlessly removed the stone. What appeared to these shepherds as a large boulder, appeared as a mere pebble to Yaakov.

Our rabbis teach us that the biblical well represents the forces for growth and accomplishment, the unique talents and innate abilities, within each of us, waiting to be released. The stone represents the difficulties and challenges that we each face in actualising our latent potential.

It is our attitude towards the stone – our perception and evaluation of these difficulties – which determines whether we will be able to roll it out of the way, like Yaakov, or leave it dormant, like the shepherds. The way we perceive a challenge determines the resultant action or inaction. Success or failure.

Yaakov's strength lay not in his muscles but in his mind. His "never say die" attitude ensured that he would overcome all the trials and tribulations in his life. In next week's Torah reading, we read of the struggle between Yaakov and the angel of Eisav. This was the ultimate battle for spiritual supremacy; the battle of good versus evil (a battle which still wages today). Rabbi Norman Lamm points out that when Yaakov overcame Eisav's angel, the Torah records, "vayar ki lo yachol lo", the angel saw that it could not gain advantage over Yaakov.

Remarkably, the same root word, "yachol" is used. Yaakov had never learned to utter the words, "lo nuchal" (it's impossible). "Surrender" was not in his vocabulary.

We see this remarkable wordplay yet again when Hashem changed Yaakov's name to Yisrael, "Ki sarita im elohim ve'im anashim vatuchal", you fought with angels and with men and you prevailed.

We are all the b'nei Yisrael, the descendants of Yisrael (Yaakov). Our forefather's spiritual DNA has been passed down to us through the generations. We, thus, all possess this inherent spiritual fortitude and resilience. For the nation of Israel, nothing is impossible.

On the individual level, may we continue to move the stones that impede our personal development, perceiving them as mere pebbles. Let us remember that no challenge is too great, no task impossible.

On a national level, Bereishis Rabbah (70:9) records another interpretation of the well; the well represents Zion. At a time where Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael are experiencing some of its greatest challenges, may Hashem remove all impediments and usher in the period of Redemption – a time when the waters of Torah and G-dliness will flow freely.

Torah Thought

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# Ex-mayor comes out guns blazing in support of Hamas

TALI FEINBERG

With his assault rifle and Hamas flag, former Johannesburg mayor and Al Jama-ah city councillor Thapelo Amad would have blended right in with those of the terrorists that attacked, killed, maimed, raped, dismembered, beheaded, abducted, tortured, and burned alive hundreds of innocent civilians in the south of Israel on 7 October 2023.

Proudly posing in a post on social media with an assault rifle and a flag with the Hamas logo on 21 November, Amad said, “We stand with Hamas, Hamas stands with us, together we are Palestin [sic] and Palestin [sic] will be free. With our souls, with our blood, we will conquer Al Aqsa.” The post has since been deleted, but Amad later defended the post, saying, “I stand firm by my post. I will never deter in standing for what I believe in. People should not be told how to protest in South Africa. I have the right to protest. The protest was peaceful.”

His post came just a few days after he told a local news outlet that he was setting his sights on becoming the next Gauteng premier, and that he would be the face of Al Jama-ah in the 2024 general elections.

The assault rifle post follows a previous post by Amad on 5 November inciting violence against anyone who supports Israel, in which he said, “Death to the Zionist Israeli and its supporters for killing innocent civilians, i.e. women and children.”

The post with the assault rifle came in the same week that placards reading “One Zionist, one bullet” and “Keep the world clean”, with an Israeli flag in a bin, were seen in a car parked in Sea Point, Cape Town. In addition, a placard outside a memorial service in Cape Town read: “Israehell = Zionazis.”

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says Amad’s assault rifle post “tells you everything you need to know about this party and the outrageous extremes that the anti-Israel fanatics are prepared to go to. It shouldn’t be necessary to remind people of the horrific crimes of Hamas, including documented rape, torture, and kidnap. These are the people that Al Jama-ah chose to align themselves with. The need to use a gun as a prop tells us all we need to know about the desire for peace. This pathetic posturing does nothing for the plight of innocent Palestinians in Gaza.

Nor, clearly, is it in the interest of peace.” She noted that “Amad’s latest inflammatory posts come less than 24 hours after President Cyril Ramaphosa declared that there’s ‘no place in South Africa for violence or threats of violence against those who hold contrary views’, and further urged South Africans not to allow the Israel-Hamas conflict to turn them against one another.”

“Amad’s posts exacerbated an already dangerous situation in which attacks on the Jewish community, a number of them violent, have increased almost 10-fold since the outbreak of the current conflict in the Middle East,” Milner says. “This kind of incitement is unacceptable for any South African, but it’s all the more deplorable from a political leader. We call on President Ramaphosa to address this very serious issue and for Councillor Amad to be strongly censured for his reprehensible conduct.”

Lior Haiat, the spokesperson of the foreign affairs ministry in Israel, says, “This is a despicable show of support for a terror organisation. This is a pure antisemitism of the worst kind.”

Communication strategist and safety expert Tim Flack reported Amad to the South African Human Rights Commission



(SAHRC), complaining that his post constituted hate speech and incitement to violence. Flack said the social media post was damaging to Jews in South Africa. “Given the historical context of violence

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and conflict between Hamas and Israel, endorsing Hamas, especially following its recent attacks in Israel, can be perceived as an endorsement of violence against Jewish people. This goes against the spirit of tolerance and respect for all ethnic and religious groups, which is a cornerstone of our democratic society,” Flack said.

“Amad’s public support for an organisation involved in such acts, and his use of imagery and language that could incite violence and propagate hatred aren’t only damaging to social cohesion but potentially dangerous. I urge the SAHRC to take appropriate action,” Flack said.

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer, who has appeared in the Supreme Court of Appeal and the Constitutional Court in a series of cases that seek to determine the boundary between freedom of expression and genuine hate speech, says, “The crime of incitement is found in the Riotous Assemblies Act, and any person who incites someone else to commit a serious crime is guilty of an offence and liable to conviction. So, when Amad calls for the killing of supporters of Israel, that would be an offence of criminal incitement.

“Arguably a hate speech case could also be made on the basis that when he refers to supporters of Israel, it includes Jews and Zionists, who are both protected groups on the grounds of religion and belief. The words themselves propagate hatred and are an incitement to harm,” Oppenheimer says. “The image of the Hamas flag and the use of the gun also demonstrate an endorsement of Hamas. Those words and the use of that symbol amount to the propagation of hatred and speech that is directly harmful, given that the image is made very soon after the massacre of Jews in Israel. And it may also be a tacit incitement of harm on the grounds that there’s an implicit call for action, which would make the image and the words both incitement in the criminal sense and also

hate speech.” Amad’s post came around the same time as President Cyril Ramaphosa’s weekly letter on 20 November, in which he said, “There’s no place in South Africa for violence or threats of violence against those who hold contrary views. There’s no place in our society for antisemitism.”

GIVEN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT BETWEEN HAMAS AND ISRAEL, ENDORSING HAMAS, ESPECIALLY FOLLOWING ITS RECENT ATTACKS IN ISRAEL, CAN BE PERCEIVED AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWISH PEOPLE.

“Not since the 1930s and 1940s have Jews felt as besieged and vulnerable as they do today,” wrote Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town and antisemitism expert, in *Business Day* on 22 November. “The [South African] government’s failure to condemn unequivocally the 7 October outrage in its immediate aftermath was especially galling. Today, South African Jews feel under siege. Calls have been made to close – by force if necessary – a Jewish school in Cape Town; Jews have been intimidated at places of work; Jewish-owned or associated businesses have been targeted; and some Jews have even been threatened in their homes. ‘The only good Jew is a dead Jew,’ articulated one person on social media.” Now, as in the case of Amad, “Speed and connectivity are everything: the ‘new’ Judeophobes can take the age-old antisemitic narrative, link it to highly inflammatory images of real conflict and spread a toxic message of fanaticism and Jew hatred that can reach millions of people at the click of a mouse,” Shain said.

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# SA embassy’s closure leaves South Africans in limbo

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa’s decision to recall its diplomats in Israel as a way of censuring the Jewish state means that the South African embassy in Ramat Gan, which was a liaison office, is now closed. This decision, made on 6 November, impacts immigrants, tourists, and many other South Africans.

It’s effectively the end point of the downgrading process that the African National Congress (ANC) voted into action in 2017. However, it may not be permanent as the diplomats have been recalled for “consultation”.

“It’s outrageous that South African citizens arrived at the South African embassy in Ramat Gan to find a notice stuck on the door saying, ‘This office will be closed until further notice’,” says South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn.

“As South African citizens, Jewish and Christian, we have a right to diplomatic and consular support, and to simply shut this down with no consultation is a dereliction of the responsibility of our country’s leadership

to its citizens.

“We’ve written to President Cyril Ramaphosa to request an opportunity to share the impact this will have on the lives of Jewish South Africans living or visiting Israel. These are practical considerations, and shouldn’t be determined based on political posturing in Parliament and in political discourse.”

Kim Kur, who has supported South Africans fleeing crises from the COVID-19 pandemic to the Ukraine war, says, “I’ve tried to appeal to Dirco [the department of international relations and cooperation] officials personally, regarding at least having an honorary consul in place for issuing of emergency travel certificates, registration of South African babies, and the repatriation of remains. I’ve advised that this is closing the humanitarian corridor for South Africans needing to exit Israel – the very same corridor they called to be provided for those needing to leave Gaza.”

Kur’s advice to South African *olim* needing to renew their South African passports and coming to South Africa is to “fly on their Israeli passport with the 90-day visa

exemption still available to Israeli passport holders as well as their South African ID/ birth certificate and expired passport for now.

“It’s important to note that according to clause 26B of the Citizenship Act, a dual national South African ‘major’ is legally required to enter and exit South Africa on their South African passport and can be denied exit on their Israeli passport or be banned for overstaying if they don’t leave on their new South African passport,” she says.

“So, they must ensure they show proof of their appointment on arrival, apply and collect prior to departure, as one can collect on their behalf as of August 2022.” Anyone needing support can join Kur’s Facebook page, Community Circle SA.

Kahn said that if South Africans face difficulties as a result of the current closing of the embassy, they can contact the SAJBD for support.

South African *olah* Liora Blum said, “Three hours after I picked up my passport, I was notified that the embassy was closed. I keep thinking, ‘What if I hadn’t gone to collect it immediately?’”

South Africa’s International Relations and Cooperation Minister Dr Naledi Pandor called the return of diplomats a “normal practice” to determine “whether there’s any potential for you [the diplomats] to be of assistance and whether the continued relationship is actually able to be sustained in all terms”.

Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni said, “Another Holocaust in the history of humankind is unacceptable, and the South African government has decided to withdraw all its diplomats in Tel Aviv for consultation.” Comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to the Nazis is antisemitic, according to the widely adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism. This is the second time since 7 October that Ntshavheni has compared Israel’s actions to that of the Nazis.

Lior Haiat, a spokesperson for the Israeli minister of foreign affairs, said South Africa’s decision to recall its diplomatic staff was a “victory for the Hamas terrorist organisation, and rewards it for the massacre” of 7 October.

“Israel expects South Africa to condemn Hamas, which is worse than ISIS [Islamic State], and to respect Israel’s right to defend itself against an attack by a horrific terrorist organisation that has engraved on its flag a call for the destruction of the state of Israel,” Haiat posted on social media platform X.

In 2019, an article on the *Daily Maverick* website by Hamas member Dr Basem Naim praising the downgrading of South Africa’s

embassy essentially proved Haiat’s point. “South Africa stands on the right side of history,” wrote Naim.

With the embassy having been downgraded, it was already difficult for *olim* and others to receive consular services. “I was pleasantly surprised that it [the passport] was ready at all,” says Blum. “There had been a small complication at the application stage, and no matter how many emails I sent, I received no answer for the past few months, so had no clue if I would ever receive it!”

But now, even that small possibility of intermittent consular services has ended. “I won’t be able to apply for a new South African passport as I was intending to,” says South African *oleh* Gerald Davids. “With family living in South Africa, I still intend to travel there. There can be major

problems entering South Africa on any foreign passport.


“People say you have to apply to the South African embassy here [in Israel] a year in advance of the expiry of the old one,” he says. “My passport expires only at the beginning 2025, but I was planning to do it at the beginning of 2024 for that reason. Now, of course, I can’t do that, and who knows if the embassy here will ever re-open. And even if it does, it might be in six months’ time, which would be too late. I might then have to travel to South Africa mid-2024 and stay with family until it’s ready there.”

Another *olah*, Michelle Essers, believes the decision is “an excuse to prevent expats from voting in the next South African elections against the ANC”.

Anati Kiesel Salama, also an *olah*, says, “There was absolutely no reason for them to close the South African embassy other than pure antisemitism. [The decision to close the embassy] is an immoral and despicable move on their part. The embassy is an asylum for those that need aid for whatever link they still may have with South Africa. Without it, they are purposely making Jewish people denounce their citizenship so that Jews in Israel won’t be able to renew their passports.”

“It’s going to affect more Christians, especially tours and pilgrimages to Israel,” says South African Friends of Israel spokesperson Bafana Modise. “I know pastors that do trips every year to Israel. They’re going to be affected by this.”






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# Killed and missing: Tanzanians shattered by Hamas

TALI FEINBERG

All that Clemence Felix Mtenga (22) and Joshua Loitu Mollel (21) wanted was to learn the art of agriculture in Israel, return to their home country of Tanzania, and provide for their families. But those dreams were destroyed on the morning of 7 October, when they were attacked by Hamas at Kibbutz Nir Oz in the Gaza envelope.

On 17 November, Tanzania's foreign ministry announced Mtenga's death. Though it was at first suspected that he had been taken hostage by Hamas, Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported on 18 November that he was murdered in his home on the morning of the attack, saying, "His body was conclusively identified only last week."

"As a team leader of his group, I received with deep sadness the information of his death," wrote Venance Fredrick on Facebook from Israel. "As a family, we're heartbroken and we mourn his death. We Tanzanians are all bereaved. Rest in eternal peace CF Mtenga."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Israel, Fredrick said that Mtenga and Mollel were two of a group of 260 interns on a programme which is part of a co-operation plan between the governments of Tanzania and Israel. "It's an agro-studies programme in Israel. The programme is an agriculture-based internship. We're brought by the Tanzanian government to learn the sophisticated means of production in agriculture and agri-business," he said. "We were on the programme for the year

2023/2024. We travelled in groups: Clemence, Joshua, and I travelled to Israel on 13 September 2023 as the second group, and I was the team leader. Joshua and Clemence lived at Kibbutz Nahal Oz at the cattle farms since we arrived in Israel, but they weren't living together."

Describing his experience of the morning of 7 October, Fredrick says, "It was on Saturday morning of the Jewish holiday. My colleagues and I lived in Sderot, but some like Joshua were on the farm. Clemence was waiting for the afternoon shift with other Thais at their apartment. "We were awakened by sounds of bombs, missiles, sirens, and strangers were shooting on the road to the Sderot police station. It was very scary.

"We stayed in a safe room for about a week, but our co-ordinator in Israel helped us to get food. He created a WhatsApp group chat that added all the Tanzanian students to know their whereabouts, but unfortunately, some of our friends reported the absence of two of our friends. Their WhatsApp last-seen information showed up at about 10:00. We checked them through their phone numbers and WhatsApp without success."

He describes Mtenga as having "a good heart" and someone with big dreams, saying, "Many people

loved him very much." They grew up together in the same area. He knew Mollel less well, but got a very positive impression of him when they travelled to Israel together.

"Everyone on this programme is so enthusiastic about agriculture and agribusiness. Everyone's wish is to invest in agribusiness," Fredrick says.

The Tanzanian ministry is in contact with Israeli authorities about bringing Mtenga's body back to Tanzania for burial.

This was the first time that both young men had travelled out of their home country. According to international media reports, Mtenga was shy and studious, and was excited to study in Israel. "He was so excited to learn and meet new people," his sister, Alphoncena Mtenga, told news agencies. "He wanted to start his own agribusiness."

She said Mtenga was the youngest of four siblings, and attended church every Sunday and sang in the choir. "He had a beautiful voice. He dreamed of being a successful person."

Ezekiel Kitiku, a fellow Tanzanian intern, was living and working with Mtenga on Kibbutz Nir Oz at the dairy farm. As the sirens sounded on 7 October and he ran for shelter, he texted Mtenga and Mollel. "They told me that there were so many rockets coming from Gaza and that they were going to the shelters too," he says. But a few hours later, they were no longer answering.

Mollel's father, Loitu Mollel, says, "My son isn't a warrior. He just went for training but is now in trouble." He last spoke to his son on the evening of 5

October. "I've been going through difficult moments since then with sleepless nights. As parents, we're living in very challenging times without any clue about the safety of our son."

He describes his son as "polite, obedient, and serious about his work". The eldest of five children, he had finished a diploma in agriculture studies from a college in the eastern Tanzanian city of Morogoro and left for Israel in September. The last words he said to his son were, "Be on your best behaviour because you're somewhere new, and make the most of the internship."

Mollel says that once the Israeli internship was finished, his son wanted to find his fortune in agriculture as either a farmer or an expert in the field. The Tanzanian government has been in regular contact with the family. So far, nine Tanzanians living in Israel have returned home with the assistance of the government.

Fredrick has decided to stay in Israel, and has been relocated to Afula in the north. "We now do our programme at Bustan Cooperative Packing house in the Jordan River Valley near the Israel-Jordan border," he says, sharing photos of him and other interns working with maize in a factory. To the South African Jewish community, he says, "They must know that they are in a safe place in Africa, and Africa is their home. Secondly, I need to say sorry for what happened in this sweet country [Israel]. Israel is safe and everything is going forward. I love the Jewish community with their golden hearts."



Clemence Felix Mtenga



Joshua Loitu Mollel

## SA Jews condemn vote to suspend Israel ties

>>>Continued from page 1

pronouncements from the ANC over the years that it would be ready to provide assistance in terms of conflict resolution. This puts the nail in that coffin."

Ramaphosa "knows that any pretence at playing some sort of mediatory role has ended", said Sara Gon of the Institute of Race Relations. "South Africa will have no influence whatsoever with whatever may pan out from here onwards. He also knows that the relationship with the Jewish community is over, and he daren't ask anything of it. The South African mission in Ramallah is likely to be left adrift without a South African embassy in Israel, which has to be a necessary consequence of his decision.

"He must know that the decision doesn't just affect the rights of South African Jews; it will affect South Africans of all stripes negatively. All of this is likely not to override the need to save his

presidency."

She said the ANC did create a "get-out-of-jail card" by amending the EFF's resolution.

"In other words, Ramaphosa will be relying on a ceasefire or something he can call a ceasefire – like the hostage deal – to not have to close down the embassy for good."

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said the Israeli ambassador's recall took place against the background of a "sustained campaign of demonisation and bullying of the Israeli ambassador by the ANC and the South African government in a way that was uncondusive to dialogue and engagement".

She said the debate in Parliament was a pointless exercise as it doesn't determine the international relations, and especially pointless given Israel's decision to withdraw its ambassador for consultation.

## What we know about the hostage deal

>>>Continued from page 2

All those slated for release have Israeli citizenship. Perhaps dozens of the hostages are foreign nationals who were in Israel as guest workers.

Some hostages aren't in Hamas' control. Hostages were held by three different terrorist groups in Gaza: Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and a smaller militia. Negotiations have involved only Hamas. According to Israeli reports, only 30 of the estimated 40 child hostages are being held by Hamas. The deal reportedly includes a guarantee that the Red Cross will be able to visit and provide medical care to the remaining hostages.

Israel will release 150 Palestinian women and teenage prisoners. That represents only a tiny fraction of the approximately 5 000 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons prior to 7 October.

Israel is also agreeing to pause its offensive in Gaza for at least four days.

Israeli soldiers will remain in northern Gaza during the pause.

The number of trucks bringing in humanitarian aid during the pause will increase under the terms of the deal. Two weeks ago, Israel began allowing 100 trucks a day into Gaza, a goal the US had laid out. Under the deal, that number will increase to 200 a day.

Israel says it plans to resume fighting as soon as the pause expires. But a provision in the terms of the deal allows for its extension if Hamas releases more hostages – 10 freed captives for each additional day of calm.

A lot can happen during a pause in fighting: both sides can regroup, but there could also be continued talks that would lay the groundwork for a more lasting cessation of hostilities. Previous Israel-Hamas humanitarian pauses have also been broken, plunging both sides back into the fighting.

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# Not understanding G-d’s plan makes us more human

OPINION

It’s not easy being G-d’s defence attorney these days. That’s why I quit. I – and I believe I can speak on behalf of my colleagues – am not going to be answering on behalf of G-d any longer.

The truth is that we never accepted that role in the first place. No-one should be talking on behalf of G-d or explaining why things happen. We can explore lessons, but never offer explanations.

From the dawn of our nation, we find our founders and leaders unwilling to accept the seeming unfairness of life. Abraham cried out against G-d’s decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Moshe Rabeinu (Moses) cried out to G-d, “Why have you been so harsh to this nation?” In hard times, when G-d’s face was hidden and they were confronted by the darker side of reality, they chose the prosecution rather than opting for the role of the defence.

There’s a misconception that believing in G-d means that we don’t question, we don’t cry, we don’t feel. In this theory, the believer develops a heart of stone in the face of tragedy because they feel that “because everything comes from G-d, there’s no room for any discomfort with the sorrow and hardship of this world”.

That couldn’t be further from the truth. The greatest Jewish leaders felt the pain of their nation in a deep way, and didn’t explain it away with platitudes. For their own suffering and pain, they would often rely heavily on faith and try to rise above it, but for the pain of others, they were inconsolable.

While their faith was strong and they deeply believed that G-d knows what’s best, they also understood that the human experience of suffering is real and heart breaking. They understood that compassion and empathy aren’t a contradiction of faith, but rather part and parcel of the journey of the believer. There has been research to show that believing people are often more charitable and involved in more community projects than their non-believing brothers. Faith leads to charity not to apathy.

The believer understands, whether consciously or intuitively, that the divine design is that when we see lack and imperfection in this world and within the lives of our neighbour, we try to fill it and fix it rather than merely passing by the beggar, apathetically thinking: why should I alleviate their poverty if G-d orchestrated it all? Their suffering is G-d’s will!

No way! Faith isn’t an excuse to ignore evil and pain. On the contrary, it’s the call to partner with G-d and make His world a little closer to its intended home for the divine. We’re called upon to use our free choice and make the world a little more wholesome and healed.

Let’s not forget that the same Torah that teaches us to believe in the creator – “*Shema Yisrael*” – is the very same Torah that teaches us how to treat the widow, orphan, stranger, the ill, and the mourners.

Until the messianic age, we live in an imperfect world – that’s the understatement of the century! Heaven is perfect. Heaven is peace. Heaven is clarity. Life on earth, however, is messy, with the human characteristic of – and consequences of – free choice. Some people choose to become angels, while others choose the road of Satan. We’re called upon never to waver in our convictions so that we can make as many good choices as possible. Bad choices are the outcomes of unhealthy convictions and unmastered impulses.

Why would G-d allow humanity to be able to fall so low into the abyss of depravity? That’s a question that has plagued humanity since the dawn of creation when Cain killed Abel, and the entire generation of Noah got so corrupted that G-d chose to restart the human experiment with Noah and his family.

Let’s repeat that it’s not our job to explain or



defend G-d, but it is our job to better this world and be a light to the nations – a light of clear moral thinking, a light of loving-kindness, a light of strong moral convictions.

Why did G-d allow 7 October to happen? I don’t know, and I’m not sure that I want to know. If I knew, I would become less angry about what happened and less determined to heal this world. Were I to understand darkness, I would inevitably become apathetic to the pain and suffering of my fellow human.

and confusion? Will I cower in fear in the face of ignoble hatred and self-righteous antisemitism? Will I waver in my beliefs when I see many educated people and nations lose their G-d-given moral compass?

Or will I take more pride than ever in my faith, nation, and homeland? Will I stop being defensive in the face of poorly masked Jew-hatred and wear my kippah and chai necklace prouder than ever? Will my mezuzah stand proudly on my doorpost? Will I wear tefillin proudly on the plane or while on holiday? Will I

The correct question, and the consequential question is: what will I do within my power to heal this world and add light to a world gone dark? Will my faith drive me forward to bring light and clarity to a world that’s suffering from moral darkness

light my Chanukah candles with more pride than ever before, determined to fight darkness with light? Will I believe in G-d’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the land of Israel will be given to the Jewish people as an everlasting inheritance, and that that is our strongest claim to the land? No other country is more morally justified in its existence than the land of Israel – given by G-d to *am Yisrael*!

So, yes, we cry out to the G-d we believe in, “Please stop the sorrow! Bring Moshiach now!” We cry because we believe. If we didn’t believe, then the questions are mute in the first place. At the same time, we stand determined to bring an end to sorrow by realising that we were given the opportunity to add our piece to the puzzle of world betterment. Light will always outlive darkness. Love will always overcome hate. And the Jewish people will outlive all our enemies. Ask Pharaoh, Haman, and Hitler. Stand tall.

You are the answer to the most important question: what now?

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.



RABBI LEVI AVTZON

## Far left or far right ends in fascism

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Last week, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led the charge in Parliament to expel the Israeli ambassador from South African soil, before he was dramatically “recalled for consultation” by the Israeli government. EFF Commander-in-Chief Julius Malema spilled hateful invective about “Zionists” from the benches of the National Assembly. The EFF is a party considered to be on the radical far left of South African politics. Its regular calls for “expropriation without compensation” to accelerate land reform and “radical economic transformation” find resonance in the left-leaning elements of the African National Congress (ANC). The EFF pressurises the ANC to take ever more extreme positions. But the tactics adopted by the EFF are those of right-wing fascists – thuggish and brutish bullying, including in Parliament; targeting and ransacking businesses that the EFF doesn’t agree with, including Jewish-owned firms like Cape Union Mart; and generally showing violent intolerance for differing views. So, do the terms “left” and “right” still hold meaning in this rapidly changing world?

These terms made their first appearance in 1789 during the French Revolution. Supporters of the revolution sat to the left of the president of the National Assembly, and those supporting the monarchical old order (*ancien regime*) were seated to his right. One legislator, the Baron de Gauville, said, “We began to recognise each other: those who were loyal to religion and the king took up positions to the right of the chair so as to avoid the shouts, oaths, and indecencies that enjoyed free rein in the opposing camp.” Views considered “liberal” lie to the left, those considered “conservative” lie to the right – although most would agree that politicians simply lie to everyone!

According to international-relations scholar Andrew Heywood, the left wing is characterised by an emphasis on “ideas

such as freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform, and internationalism” while the right-wing is characterised by an emphasis on “notions such as authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction, and nationalism”. Anarchists, communists, and socialists are on the left; conservatives, monarchists, and fascists are on the right. There are nuances, of course, with parties in the middle described as “centre left” or “centre right” according to their ideological positions.

As seen by the example of the EFF, it’s not so simple anymore. The ideology can be decidedly leftist, while the tactics are those of the authoritarian right. And the other way around too.

Often those on the extremes of the political spectrum – far left and far right – have more in common with one another than the more moderate parties in the centre.

That’s certainly the case with antisemitism, where neo-Nazis on the far right find common cause with neo-Marxists on the far left when it comes to hating Jews and the Jewish state of Israel.

The current conflict between Hamas and Israel following the heinous attack on Israel on 7 October and Israel’s relentless raids on Gaza has had far-reaching repercussions. We’ve witnessed an exponential rise in antisemitic incidents around the world, from both the left and the right. Relations between Muslims and Jews have been especially inflamed, including in South Africa. Anti-Israel demonstrations easily and quickly slip into antisemitic rants. Protesters tear down Israeli flags and provocatively direct their anger at Jewish businesses, communal buildings, and the American and Israeli embassies. They spray-paint swastikas and evoke Hitler on social media when they aren’t accusing Jews of being Nazis themselves.

The attacks on Jews and the Jewish state are flying in from all sides.

It’s pretty hard to tell your left from your right these days.

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



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# In the valley of the shadow of death



ROLENE MARKS

PERSONAL STORY

**Warning: graphic content**

It has been several days since I took a trip to the south of Israel to the areas targeted by Hamas terrorists on 7 October. Travelling down south with me was photojournalist Ilan Ossendryver, and in the 45-minute drive from Tel Aviv to Sderot, our first destination, we discussed how as journalists, we have an imperative to suspend emotions for the time being and cover the story at hand – especially the murder, torture, rapes, and kidnapping of our citizens. We would focus on our work, and deal with the emotions later. Until we reached Sderot.

Sderot is a town close to my heart. I visit there often, meeting delegations and briefing them about how the town is the most bunkered in the

world, having endured rocket attacks from terror entities in the Gaza strip for decades.

Sderot is a veritable ghost town, the remaining residents evacuated as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and first responders station themselves in and around the town. In my mind’s eye, I pictured the events of 7 October, the terrorists storming around the traffic circle in the entrance to the town, murdering people on the street. I thought of those on their way to synagogue and the tour of elderly people headed to the Dead Sea before we saw the images of their slaughtered bodies – people going about their business only to be slaughtered without mercy.

The evidence is everywhere. The buildings are pockmarked from

bullets, shattered glass on the floor. Next to a synagogue the terrorists were aiming for, a rocket has caused damage to a roof. The sukkah still stands, a heart breaking reminder that this massacre took place on the last day of this joyous festival. Cars are full of bullet holes, windscreens shattered. We got to what remains of Sderot Police Station. I’ve been to the police station often to show delegations what used to be the “Museum of Rockets” – a bank displaying the different kind of rockets that were relentlessly fired towards Sderot. No matter when I went, a gracious, friendly officer was more than happy to speak to the groups. On 7 October, Hamas terrorists commandeered the police station, murdering the officers



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

Burnt car graveyard

inside. The station was detonated to eliminate the terrorists. When I saw what remained of it, I fell apart. A lone Israeli flag and yahrtzeit candle stand there in mournful tribute. Several police officers arrived to pay tribute, the sadness etched in their eyes.

The air was punctuated every now and then by the whooshing sound of an Iron Dome interception and the loud bangs of tank artillery being fired onto Hamas targets in the Gaza strip.

Sderot has rocket shelters dotted around the town. When the red alert is sounded, residents have a matter of seconds to seek shelter. These

We were driving to a place that I was dreading seeing but knew we had to. The importance of bearing witness has never been more crucial as the horrific trend of massacre denial grows. Then we saw it – the “car graveyard”, the place with all the burnt-out remains of cars that belonged to Supernova festival revellers or those from the kibbutzim.

I looked at these decimated vehicles, and each one told me a story about who owned them. The young, vibrant festival goers, dancing for peace until the break of dawn – the metaphor wasn’t lost on me; the peaceniks who lived on

the kibbutzim – each one a story. My heart shattered. There were four young soldiers whom we spoke to and one told me that the faint stench I could smell wasn’t burnt metal, but flesh. Some of the owners of these cars were

Rocket that hit the roof of the building next to the synagogue



shelters are small, designed to hold about 10 to 12 people. I thought of the revellers from the Supernova music festival, seeking shelter on that black Sabbath from the rockets and the terror, 20-40 cramming inside. Grenades were lobbed in and AK47s opened fire on these defenceless, terrified people by brutal barbarians. It was like a punch to the gut to realise just how vulnerable everyone was.

We drove further south towards Netivot. I looked at the road, the bomb shelters dotted around, and thought how it looked on that horrific day when bodies and burnt cars lined the roads in a testament to the carnage of the day.

We could see one of the decimated kibbutzim in the distance. Where picturesque houses once spoke of a vibrant community, all that’s left is a burnt-out husk that bore witness to the atrocities of the day.

We could see the plumes of smoke where the IDF were striking Hamas targets in the Gaza strip, hear the roar of the fighter jets above, and the loud whirr of the helicopter blades high up in the air.

burnt alive in them or shot to death. I reeled. The cars screamed at me, “Tell our stories, tell the world what happened here!” One young soldier told me his car was also there. He was from Nahal Oz. he told me it was so important that the world understood the legitimacy of Israel’s military operations in Gaza. “We were all peaceniks,” he says, “Now, they must live their lives and we must live ours, but never again can they come into Israel. I want peace but we cannot live with these people, not anymore.”

On the drive home, accompanied by alerts of rockets fired on nearby

The remains of the Sderot Police Station



Ashkelon, I tried to make sense of what I had seen in a place I know so well. Days later, I’m still struggling to process it all. I don’t think I ever will. • Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.

## Israel advocacy essential, but it’s a minefield

LEE TANKLE

While Israel is trying to recover from the horrific events of 7 October, a frightening war is being fought on the social media battlefield, says David Rebel, a social media influencer.

“What’s more devastating is that the battlefield isn’t only in Gaza, but also on social media,” said Rebel, who works with Israel Is, a non-government organisation of young friends who have been telling their stories about Israel since 2017.

Israel Is was started by a group of friends after completing their army service, travelling the world, and discovering that people have a lot of misconceptions about Israel. Israel Is dedicates itself to enhancing Israel’s global image through the voice of its people.

“We in Israel understand the scale of the disaster that’s happening on social media, and we understand that all the hatred and antisemitism directly affects Jewish people in the diaspora. We’re one people, we’re Jewish people, and we need to understand that the war on social media is important to defend,” Rebel said, speaking on a South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) webinar in collaboration with Israel Is on 16 November. The webinar focused on navigating the social media battlefield.

“While we pray for the protection and peace of Israel and the immediate release of hostages, it’s now more important than ever to counteract the social media distortion of Israel,” said Stacey Dembo, SAZF executive director.

On social media, Jews “face challenges from BDS [the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions organisation] and the so-called anti-Zionist movement”, Rebel said. They try to portray their antisemitism as hatred for Israel, but it’s clear to see. “As we can see, there has been a 300% increase in antisemitism around the world, so it’s not about Israel. This is a disaster, something that starts online is being taken to the streets. Jewish schools in France, Italy, the United States, and even in Israel, are being targeted,” Rebel said.

“The people who started Israel Is used their own experience to start the influencer organisation, and we continue with this idea. We believe a personal story from a person from a certain country can change a lot. Sharing a personal story is better than sharing an article or statement from the spokesperson of the Israel Defense Forces because a personal story is more understandable to the general public,” Rebel said.

“One of the tasks in *hasbara* is to humanise Israel. There are a lot of people who talk about facts, but unfortunately, facts don’t matter to some people. So, we need to bring in personal stories. If you look at Palestinian propaganda,

they don’t use facts, they use only emotions. We need to humanise Israel by using our personal stories,” Rebel said.

Rebel went on to give some useful dos and don’ts about social media advocacy. “Avoid sharing information from unreliable sources. Telegram is fake-news heaven,” he said, pointing out that if you open a site purporting to be a news channel and see a lot of low-quality videos, be suspicious as it’s likely to be fake. The problem is that if you land up posting these videos that you were led to believe are from Hamas now and are in fact from Syria in 2015, and they are proven to be fake, you’re caught in a lie.

“There has been a 300% increase in antisemitism around the world, so it’s not about Israel.”

“We need to double-check. If we’re caught in a lie, it can get worse.” If you’re caught putting up fake information, how do people trust you when the information is correct, he asks. “We mustn’t share content that could be used against our interests. Avoid responding to clear anti-Israel or antisemitic content, rather block and report those profiles. You’re not going to change their position if they have already been poisoned by Palestinian propaganda. Avoid graphic content that might be hard to watch or can be removed. If we share graphic content – such as dead bodies – without explanation, the message we want to transfer is lost,” Rebel said.

In terms of what we should do, Rebel suggested sharing testimonies of survivors and residents through photos, stories, and videos. “Survived to Tell is a great example as there are no graphic images, with personal stories with emotions,” he said. Rebel emphasised that we need to share our truth respectfully, and that we must prioritise our shared values. “We’re fighting for the restoration of peace. The intention is to fight Hamas in the same way the world fights ISIS,” he said.

“We don’t need to exaggerate with over posting or oversharing on social media. Three to five stories a day can start to look like propaganda, which is something we need to avoid,” Rebel said.

Rebel suggested sharing reliable news sources like *The Jerusalem Post*, *Times of Israel*, and *StandwithUs*, as well as posts by commentators Uri Cohn, Noa Tishby, and Yoseph Haddad, among others. If we see a post that could use some more attention, tag news organisations and use viral hashtags such as #HamasisIsis, #Israelunderattack, #bringthemback or #Westisnext in getting people’s attention to social media.

“You don’t need to turn your Instagram, Facebook or Twitter page into an Israel advocacy page. You can combine Israeli advocacy with your normal content,” he said.



David Rebel



# Customers refuse to have Woolworths pulled over their eyes

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Following the controversy surrounding Woolworths’ decision to remove its only Israeli product from its shelves, many in the Jewish community are demanding answers and reconsidering their longstanding support of the beloved retail chain.

On the flip side, targeted Jewish-owned businesses are continuing to bear the brunt of virulent anti-Israel boycott campaigns.

“Removing the one product we had on our shelves that was imported from Israel, Pearl Couscous, wasn’t a decision we took lightly,” a Woolworths spokesperson told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “We faced credible threats of protest action, and we needed to keep our employees and customers out of harm’s way.”

Yet, amid feverish headlines declaring the company’s decision to “boycott Israeli products”, and in response to a press statement issued by “human rights non-government organisation” Africa4Palestine welcoming such a move, rumours began to swirl. Local Jewish consumers, many of whom either have Woolworths shares or shop there frequently enough to be considered honorary shareholders, were left reeling.

For many, a press statement issued by Woolworths on 17 November in response to the media storm brought little comfort. “Articles claiming that Woolworths supports an Israeli boycott are inaccurate, and we want to set the record straight,” the company stated. “In spite of reports commending us for taking a pro-Palestinian or anti-Israeli position, we haven’t. Woolworths would like to explicitly affirm that we neither support nor boycott anyone. Woolworths has no political affiliations, and doesn’t support any political party, organisation, or country.”

Though the statement says Woolworths made the “decision to pre-emptively suspend the sale” of its one Israeli import to ensure the safety and well-being of employees and customers, it remains the subject

of much debate among many Jewish organisations, businesspeople, and consumers.

“Woolies always endeavours to do the right thing by our employees, our customers, and society at large,” the company’s statement concluded. “We continue to do this as we navigate these very challenging times.”

For many Jewish consumers and Woolworths investors, this statement simply wasn’t enough. “I sold all my shares yesterday, and wrote a letter of no confidence to the chief executive, Roy Bagattini,” says a

“In my opinion, conceding to a third party as you have done, is an indication of your management’s unwillingness to take a stand and rather seek the easy way out. If you do so on this issue, how many other decisions do you take that are simply more expedient than moral?”

Emphasising that he has sold his holdings in Woolworths, the businessman hopes that other “moral investors” follow suit.

Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South

Jewish-owned businesses including Cape Union Mart and Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream have intensified in the past week, with pro-Palestinian supporters even protesting outside selected stores at Rosebank Mall over the weekend. Indeed, many boycotted businesses are becoming progressively quieter amidst increased vitriolic messages being spread by BDS.

“The boycotts of South African Jewish businesses are antisemitic to the core, representing acts reminiscent of the worst period in Jewish history,” says Milner. “They will have no impact whatsoever on Israel or the war in Gaza, but are designed simply to hurt Jews.” The SAJBD has written to Trade and Industry Minister Ebrahim Patel, calling on him to support these businesses. We encourage all South Africans to do likewise, thus continuing to protect South African jobs and support our economy.

Many Jewish consumers have heeded this call, encouraging those on their social media pages and groups to do the same. One such advocate is Benji Shulman, the director of public policy for the South African Zionist Federation, who for his birthday this week, launched what he termed a “buycott”. Instead of traditional presents, he asked his friends to buy products from retailers who have been targeted by anti-Israel crusaders, such as Cape Union Mart, Poetry, Paul’s Homemade Ice Cream, Dis-Chem, and others. He asked them to send him pictures of themselves with the item, and a short message.

“Buy something, anything, big or small, and keep it or give to it to a friend, a colleague, a family member, the security guard, or a random,” he wrote. “I intend to print an album of all the photos and messages I receive as a record of my people for this year’s birthday.”

“Given what’s been going on, a normal celebration didn’t quite feel in order,” says Shulman, explaining the thinking behind his idea. The album Shulman plans to make will serve as a special birthday present that, in years to come, will be a reminder of what the community faced at this time.



Photo: www.woolworths.co.za

Johannesburg Jewish businessman who is believed to be one of a number of Jewish businesspeople who have taken similar steps.

“Dear Sir,” the businessman wrote in his letter, “I was most disappointed to read your company’s announcement that you had capitulated to certain threats and have decided to remove an Israeli-made product from your shelves. Even if it’s only one product, it sends a message where you stand in the conflict, and I doubt Woolworths will order Israeli products in the future.

“You may say that you’re trying to protect your customers and staff,” he says, “but if you give in to extortion once, you’re leaving the company open to future such threats, and come across as a soft target.

African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), says, “We’re pleased that Woolworths has clarified that there’s no boycott of Israeli goods, confirming once again that the [members of the] Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [BDS] [movement] are liars. However, its position that Israeli goods were removed by it due to fear of disruption is highly problematic. If there’s a credible threat, Woolworths needs to lay charges, alert the authorities, and return those goods to its stores.”

When questioned about the origin and nature of the threats Woolworths received, the Woolworths spokesperson told us, “We’re unable to make this information public as the matter is being attended to by our compliance and risk department.”

In the meantime, impassioned boycotts against





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# SA volunteers to Israel give and receive comfort

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Israeli solidarity missions are attracting South African community members, whether it be to make a difference on the ground, bear witness to the atrocities of 7 October, or show Israel just how united the Jewish nation is.

“You can read as many articles as you like or see as many pictures as you like, but until you stand on the ground in Be’eri and until you look into the eyes of the people who’ve been broken by the events of 7 October, you can’t really understand,” says Gabi Bricker, the chairperson of Mizrachi South Africa. Bricker is among about 14 South Africans on the Mizrachi and Yeshiva College Solidarity Mission to Israel.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* after completing the first day of the tour, Bricker, who has always had a deep connection to Israel, has already been profoundly impacted by the experience. Aimed at bearing witness to what happened, demonstrating that the Jews are one nation, and providing practical assistance, the tour has a varied and intense schedule that changes with the evolving situation.

“We’re also here to give strength where we can,” Bricker says. “We met Tamar Ratson who is from a small *yishuv* called Shlomit on the border of Gaza and Egypt, who told the story of looking after her five small children in their safe room while there were bombs falling everywhere. She talked about how the husbands of four of her close friends left their homes to protect the *yishuv* next door. Just to look into her eyes, and see the deep trauma of what it means not to feel safe – I don’t know if we appreciate this fully. Though we potentially feel a little more unsafe than we used to living with current levels of antisemitism, it’s not this deep-rooted fear that we saw in her eyes.”

The group also met the head of World Mizrachi, Johannesburg-born Rabbi Doron

Perez, whose message of strength and conviction in the Jewish people and our future was inspirational, says Bricker. “Both the rabbi and Tamar spoke about what it means to see Jews coming from all over the world. They said this isn’t about Israelis, or a particular sect, this is about all Jews – we really are all one nation with one heart. You can’t demonstrate that as effectively from afar.”

Naomi Hadar, the executive director of African Friends of Sheba Medical Center, is planning a Friends of Sheba mission to Israel open to people across its worldwide hubs. She’s hoping to get 10 South African participants on one of the packed weekly flights to Israel on El Al in December.

“The mission involves volunteering for a few afternoons at the Sheba Medical Center in Israel to meet soldiers, affected families, victims of terror, and possibly some parents of Hamas hostages, as well as those involved in *Achim La’Chaim* [Brothers for Life], a non-profit organisation which provides support for wounded Israeli soldiers,” Hadar says. Participants will also travel to kibbutzim, moshavim, and the police station in Sderot, all of which were attacked on 7 October, and will volunteer in the hard-hit agricultural sector.

“The feeling in Israel is that nobody cares about us, especially in South Africa, in which the government and senior politicians are against Israel,” says Hadar. “So, to see a group

of people coming from South Africa and supporting Israel, it’s heartwarming.”

Praising South Africa’s medical community, Hadar says that immediately after the 7 October massacre, the African Friends of Sheba Medical Center was overwhelmed by the number of doctors in South Africa who were – and still are – willing to volunteer in Israel.



Tamar Ratson from Shlomit, on the border of Gaza and Egypt, tells the story of the Shlomit community

Thankfully, Sheba doesn’t need their services at the moment as its doctors around the world have all returned to Israel. However, there’s still a list of these more than 50 South African doctors, psychologists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists, who are ready to be called upon.

“South African volunteers are well known in Israel,” she says, “even since 1948, when the state of Israel was declared and a South African established our air force. A number of South African doctors also established hospitals and medical facilities in Israel.”

Michal Kahanovitz recently returned from

a week-long solidarity trip to Israel organised by Midreshet Harova and World Mizrachi. “We went to provide strength, comfort, to volunteer, and to help,” she says, “Yet, what I don’t think we realised was how much strength and comfort the people we met would give us. We met and held the survivors, the refugees, the *chayalim* [soldiers], and the nation, and they held us.”

Another aim of the trip was to bear witness to unspeakable atrocities. Though the group heard many chilling, first-hand survivor testimonies, Kahanovitz was particularly struck by a survivor who shared his story while sitting in his kibbutz home.

“Hearing his personal story of fear, death, and destruction on the worst day in recent Jewish history while sitting in a home that’s still scattered with bullet holes, shattered glass, the belongings of the terrorist, and blood, was truly heartbreaking,” she says. “This soft-spoken man in his early 20s told his story of how he battled against the invading terrorists, lost his father and uncle, and will be going back into Gaza to continue his fight.”

Masa, which offers immersive international experiences in Israel for young adults, is also planning Israel solidarity trips for those aged between 18 and 40. For now, three groups are going, with the first departing on 5 December, says Mendy Grauman, Masa Israel Journey’s Israel youth programme consultant.

“Fellows will have options so that they end up volunteering in places where they can make the biggest difference,” says Grauman. “They will generally volunteer four to five times a week in various roles including in education, humanitarian work, social action, kibbutz, coexistence, and more. Fellows can also choose to volunteer in high-risk communities assisting with displaced families, mentoring displaced children, agricultural support, and other initiatives,” he says.

## Mourning together, working together – *olim* join war effort

LEE TANKLE

South African *olim* have joined the many Israelis who haven’t been called up in volunteering to help the war effort. Here are the stories of just a few.

Dave Bloom, originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, made aliya in 1974 and has been a Telfed volunteer for more than 25 years. Chairperson of the lone soldiers committee, Bloom said, “We have 120 lone soldiers that we take care of. Our job is to get in touch with them to check how they are doing, and assist them with anything else they may need. That can be socks, underwear, laundry, or food.

“I had a mother overseas phone me recently saying that her son who is serving in the army is about to celebrate his 20th birthday and wanting to see if we could organise a birthday cake to be delivered to his army base. We were able to do it, and it was amazing in lifting morale,” said Bloom.

Bloom has also organised Zoom support sessions for soldiers’ families around the world, bringing psychologists into these sessions to give them the support they need.

And he has been involved in helping the 130 000 refugees from the kibbutzim in the north and south of Israel who are now living in the centre of the country. “I was approached to see if we could buy laptops for children who had to leave their homes so they could attend school,” he said. “It’s not easy for them being so far away from home, and often these families had to flee their homes with only the clothes on their backs and what they could grab.” He was able to get 40 laptops to distribute to the children as well as some adults so that they could continue to work remotely. “They were so grateful to have some sort of normalcy,” said Bloom.

Daniel Taitz and Wayne Gluckman, old friends from their days at Yeshiva College, have been working together with

the organisation JustOneChesed in which Gluckman is the director of technology and Taitz regularly volunteers. When war broke out, the pair wanted to help. JustOneChesed was faced with more than 1 000 families who had to leave their homes and were living in Beit Shemesh in empty apartments allocated to them.



Wayne Gluckman and Daniel Taitz

“We wanted to find a way to kit out these apartments to make them comfortable for the families. Within a few days, we were set up with a warehouse and had created an online platform to make sure that these families get whatever they need. We have baby items like nappies, appliances like toaster ovens and kettles, even second-hand furniture,” said Gluckman.

“People can place orders for what they need and what they want to donate, and then the families come and collect what we have for them. We’ve been able to talk to the families and

see how dire their situation is,” said Taitz. “Right now we’re distributing everything in our warehouse in Beit Shemesh, and have helped more than 1 000 families,” said Gluckman.

Eli Rudolph and Kayla Glick, members of the Shivtei community in Ra’anana, made aliya 11 years ago, Rudolph with her husband and two young children – a third was born in Israel – and Glick as a tween of just 12 years old with her parents and three younger siblings.

Rudolph is the co-ordinator of *chesed* for the Shivtei community, and works for My Israel, an organisation that assists small charities in the country.

Glick, a student at Hebrew University studying biology and business, had completed her first year and was enjoying the last week of the summer holiday while looking for an internship when the war started and all studies were suspended. She was at a loose end, but was determined to help in any way she could.

Within half an hour of turning on her phone on the night of 7 October, Rudolph was fielding multiple offers of assistance from the community, and by the next day, the requests started coming in – up to 15 a day from army bases needing food and supplies for up to 60 soldiers at a time.

The donations poured in, and Rudolph’s house became the collection point for drop-offs. Every day, she co-ordinates the efforts of multiple volunteers who come past to help her pack and prepare the donated supplies which are sent out to the bases between five and six times a day.

Glick converted her garage into a shop for Ra’anana’s soldiers. “We don’t want the soldiers to waste their precious time at home trying to shop,” she said. “This way they can come in, pick up anything they need, and then spend time with their families.” The shop offers everything from toiletries and snacks to chargers, socks, and underwear.

“The response has been unbelievable,” said Glick “People have been bringing stuff constantly.” “Everyone has given whatever they can, whether they are rich or poor,” said Rudolph.

“This is how we survive. We unite to get things done. We mourn together, and we work together,” she said.



# Hostage brought seeds of hope to Africa

TALI FEINBERG

One of the 239 Israelis taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October, Dr Shoshan Haran, was in Cape Town in June this year attending an international seed conference, part of her work that has changed the lives of rural farmers in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

Viv Anstey, a Cape Town Jewish community leader, met Haran when she and Dr Alon Haberfeld were in South Africa. “Shoshan has been taken hostage with seven of her family members. Her husband, sister, and other family members were killed on the day of the attack [on 7 October] at Kibbutz Be’eri,” says Anstey.

“Shoshan, aged 67, and a beloved mother and grandmother, is the founder of Fair Planet, which has changed the lives of rural African farmers by supplying them with good quality seeds. This is a story of impact and dedication in Africa that needs to be told.”

Haran’s Fair Planet is an internationally acclaimed farming project that over the past decade has enabled tens of thousands of previously impoverished farmers to earn a good living while providing an estimated one million Africans with a reliable source of food. Now, with Haran being held hostage, the project – along with her life – is suddenly in jeopardy. With South Africa being a member state of the African Union (AU), Anstey hopes that Haran’s impact in Africa can be conveyed to that body through our government, and that the AU could possibly play a role in getting her released.

“We’re taught ‘Whoever saves a life, it’s as though he had saved the entire world,’” says Anstey. In Haran’s case, this can be taken literally, as many saw her work as saving the planet, one seed at a time.

After meeting Haran in Cape Town, Anstey planted the seed of an idea that Fair Planet’s impact could be expanded to South Africa and South African Jewry could support this revolutionary work being done on our continent. Now, this

is in limbo as Haran is held hostage along with her daughter, Adi Shoham, son-in-law Tal Shoham, grandchildren Yahel and Naveh, sister Lilach Kipnis, her sister-in-law, Sharon Avigdori, and her daughter, Noam.

“Everything we do is aimed at the success of smallholder farmers in developing countries,” says Dr Haberfeld, who is also spending every waking moment working towards Haran’s release. “People in Africa are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. Fair Planet seeks to provide them with food security and economic opportunities by making high-quality vegetable

seeds suitable to local conditions accessible and affordable to local farmers. We bridge the gap between existing high-quality seed varieties developed by leading seed companies and transfer technologies and know-how to smallholder farmers in Africa.”

It all started with Haran. After studying plant biology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Rutgers University in New Jersey, she built a successful career at a leading seed producer. “She could have easily stayed – she had a well-paying job with lots of trips to Europe and other perks,” said her brother, Aviv Havron. “But something inside of her wanted to do something more.”

Hybrid seeds that earn seed companies hundreds of millions of dollars a year in Western markets are adapted to the soil and climate conditions of specific regions in the Western world. However, “no-one was developing seeds for the farmers of Africa,” said Haran in a film about her work, pointing

out that there are years when pests wipe out the entire crop of many farmers. “Even in good years, the seeds gathered at the end of the growing season offer low yields.”

In 2011, Haran took a risk by quitting, and together with Haberfeld, a seed expert, founded Fair Planet. Their idea was simple and ingenious. “Farmers already know how to grow crops. They just don’t have high-quality seeds,” said Haran, noting that the seed with the potential to benefit African farmers already existed. The challenge was to see which ones would suit a specific African region. Over a period of two years, Haran and her team patiently

experimented with numerous seed varieties until they found the type that best suited Butajira, a region in central Ethiopia.

A pilot project involving 20 tomato farmers was started. The results of the first season’s crop were dramatic. The farmers’ tomato yield increased an average five-fold, and they could sell their tomatoes at a higher price because they lasted longer without spoiling.

“By using better vegetable seeds, local farmers can increase their yield more than three times,” says Haberfeld. “Daily income for a smallholder farmer is about \$1.50 [R27.50]. Their land is used for subsistence farming, but climate change and outbreaks of pests threaten their survival. More than seven million people suffer from malnutrition in Ethiopia alone. However, locally produced vegetables allow farmers to benefit from improved nutrition. From producing high-quality vegetables in only one season on a small plot of 1 000 square meters, smallholder farmers can generate profit that increases their household’s annual income by 26%.

“When I met Shoshan, my impression was of the most down-to-earth person – literally,” says Anstey. “She’s the kind of person who is always happy to get her hands dirty and find a solution to a problem. When we met, they were mainly fundraising in Europe, but their beneficiaries were in Africa, so I thought it would be helpful if the South African Jewish community could get involved. Her work supports millions of Muslim and black farmers, and now their livelihoods are also on the line. With South Africa being part of the AU, what’s our role here – how can we help?”

Anstey says she, her husband, and son took a sabbatical in Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya some years ago, and Haran’s work reminded her of that time and South African Jewry’s connection to the wider African continent.

When she heard Haran had been taken captive, she was “devastated”. But instead of feeling helpless, she hopes to share Haran’s story and her vital role in uplifting humanity. “Her work and organisation are rudderless. We feel so far away and so removed, but we’re actually so close to this story, and we have a role to play – whether it’s conveying Shoshan’s story to our government and in turn the AU, or contributing to her work.”

Haran has German citizenship, and her great-grandmother was killed in Theresienstadt in 1942. Her ancestors came to Israel to build it as a place of safety for Jews. Now, the nightmare they experienced at the hands of the Nazis is echoing down the generations. Haran, who symbolises the strength, resilience, and generosity of Israel, is being held captive by a ruthless, heartless enemy. Anstey hopes that this time, Haran and the other hostages can be saved, returning her to a world that so desperately needs her wisdom.



Dr Shoshan Haran


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# Mitzvah School to close after 40 years

NICOLA MILTZ

The Mitzvah School, which has taught disadvantaged students in their final year of school for nearly four decades, is closing its doors at the end of the month because it no longer has premises to operate.

It marks the end of an era for the school, which has provided a quality education, transforming the trajectory of hundreds of matric students' lives over many years. "Sadly, we've been asked to leave our beautiful premises in Morningside, Sandton, to make way for a corporate educational institution," said the school's co-founder and director, Lesley Rosenberg.

Rosenberg, 79, said she was "heartbroken" to see the school close after 37 years of dedication and passion. Alternative premises haven't been sourced, and it was a fait accompli, she said, leaving the school with no option but to accept it.

"This special place has been my life for nearly 40 years," said the mother of four and grandmother of eight,

reflecting on a journey which began during the dark, dying years of apartheid.

Established in 1986 by trailblazers Molly Smith, since retired, and Rosenberg, the Mitzvah School emerged in response to the educational challenges fuelled by political unrest. Disturbed by the widespread denial of education to matric students, especially during a period marked by the mantra "liberation before education" in townships, the pair provided a lifeline for about 25 pupils from Alexandra, enabling them to pursue their matric exams.

"There were kids desperate to write their final matric exams at the end of 1987, and we wanted to make a difference," said Rosenberg, who grew up in Yeoville and matriculated from Barnato Park High School.

"We wanted to do a *mitzvah* and run a school for a year with Molly as the principal and me as the fundraiser and student liaison." Little did they know that they were embarking on the adventure of a lifetime. In a world



Lesley Rosenberg (centre) with matric students Rosina Mathole, Tshiamo Segwatle, Lucy Ramaboka, Keamogetse Segale, and Siyabonga Ntshingila

where opportunities for pupils were scarce, the Mitzvah School was a guiding light to a brighter future.

It started out on the property of Temple David synagogue, now Bet David, previously the house of the rabbi.

"What we did in those days was totally illegal," said Rosenberg, "People thought we were crazy to bring black children from a township into the then all-white suburbs. The pupils were registered with Alexandra Secondary School and it was a turbulent time," she said.

Initially most of the students

came from a youth centre in Alexandra called Thusong. They were attending a crisis class being run at the old Sandton Civic Centre.

With the assistance of companies, donors, and the Bet David congregation, the school opened with its first 25 pupils. Since then, more than 1 000 pupils have passed through its doors.

"From doctors, lawyers, accountants, and teachers, we've produced them all," said Rosenberg with pride.

Many students return to inspire other pupils and chat to the teachers that changed their lives.

"My greatest joy comes from those who tell me about how they have given back to their community," said Rosenberg.

Smith and Rosenberg originally thought they'd assist pupils to complete their final year of schooling only until things improved – maybe for a year or so. "That was nearly 40 years ago, and education is still in crisis," said Rosenberg, who is proud of the fact that the school often

achieved a 100% pass rate.

Recalling those first few years, Rosenberg said they came with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

"Every day was a learning curve. The kids were growing up in an atmosphere of turbulence and distrust. We needed funding, teachers, transport for the kids, textbooks, stationery, the syllabus, the list was endless. Most importantly, we needed to work with the Alexandra community to gain its approval and trust."

They made several trips into Alexandra to meet community leaders to ask for help.

"That first year, the students were a mixed bunch, some much older as they had stayed away from school and were highly politicised. Some had never met a white person before, and were suspicious of us. Many were hungry, so we would do sandwich making at first break."

While township unrest or teacher strikes paralysed other learning institutions with countless stayaways, the Mitzvah School stood resilient. Amidst a serene landscape, impassioned educators guided young minds to surmount academic challenges.

The Mitzvah School established itself as a permanent, fully accredited institution staffed by highly qualified, dedicated teachers, with selected pupils numbering at one time 50-odd annually. Today, it has 27 undergoing their final examinations.

It soon started a feeding scheme in Alexandra in 8th Avenue, which runs to this day.

"I would go to local Pick n Pay stores in the area and stand outside myself asking shoppers for groceries which they'd kindly contribute," said Rosenberg.

The students continue to assist in collecting food for the kitchen. With the help of the Bet David Sisterhood, the school has consistently been involved in many upliftment projects in Alexandra.

"The Mitzvah School has had a profound impact on the lives of countless young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. It's a sad day to see it close," said Principal Cheryl Crossman, who has taught at the school for 27 years.

Registered with the Gauteng Education Department as a non-profit organisation that received no funding from government, pupils paid a small monthly fee, with most of the funding coming from the community, businesses, and individual sponsors.

One of Rosenberg's greatest achievements was when she and Smith were awarded the Rabbi Cyril and Ann Harris Human Rights Award by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies for "going beyond the confines of the community to help fellow South Africans achieve their dreams and fulfil their potential".

In a letter to the school, past pupil, Ntsoaki Ngwenya, who went on to become an admitted attorney wrote, "We were raw diamonds that you shaped through academic opportunity, instilling discipline and commitment. We saw life outside of Alex, and were able to realise who we were created to be."

## Breast cancer – a life sentence, not a death warrant

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It's a diagnosis no-one ever wants to get, but it's not the end, say three inspiring breast cancer survivors. Breast Cancer Awareness Month may be long over, but considering the fact that early detection improves one's prognosis, raising awareness is vital throughout the year.

Diagnosed with left breast cancer in June 2009, just four days before her youngest child's first birthday, Desirée Firer had a single left breast mastectomy within a week of the diagnosis. "The irony was that I had been checked for the BRCA gene [which examines DNA changes that increase one's risk of breast and ovarian cancer] three years before I was diagnosed, and I had come up completely clear," she says. In November 2009, she began a year of chemotherapy treatments.

After completing chemotherapy, Firer underwent a breast reconstruction in February 2011. "I didn't want silicone or implants because I was scared of putting foreign matter into my body, so the surgeons cut my stomach muscles, the transverse rectus abdominus muscle and they built the breast from that," she says. "I was put on a regimen of Tamoxifen – a progesterone and oestrogen inhibitor – from December 2010 for just more than 10 years."

Always a keen runner and cyclist, by mid-2011, Firer had slowly built up to completing running road marathons again. "In March 2012, I ran the full Jerusalem Marathon, 42.2kms in rainy, freezing weather," she says. Afterwards, she kept competing. In early June, she finished the Comrades Marathon and in September, the 50km City2City Marathon.

Firer completed the Jerusalem Marathon with co-runners including Alan Jacobson, who was on the board of DL Link, a non-profit organisation that provides care and support for patients going through cancer treatment as well as their families. Michelle Goodman, the founder of DL Link, heard about Firer's run and they had a meeting where the idea of using the marathon as a DL Link fundraiser was born.

"I became their Jerusalem Marathon consultant," Firer says. "I had shown that it could be done, and I was asked to speak at pre-run parties for runners before they left for Israel. I cannot take credit for what DL Link has done with the Jerusalem Marathon since – it orbits a completely

different solar system."

In mid-2014, just after the Cape Town marathon, Firer discovered a "callous" on her right foot, which turned out to be a breast cancer lesion – a complete anomaly. After a wider excision on her foot, she underwent 30 sessions of targeted radiation therapy. Today Firer is cancer free and, though she no longer runs marathons, she does trail running, which is less taxing on her foot.

"If I had to have cancer, thank G-d both times it was caught in the very early stages," she says. "I went back to running, working, and raising my four magnificent children, and I've realised that cancer, especially breast cancer, isn't a death sentence. What it is though is a life sentence, one has to remain vigilant and routinely undergo annual, nerve-racking scans and checks.

There's constant fear that dissipates only after the checks are done. Yet there's joy in the fact that though hair and nails grow back, not always so the cancer. The aesthetic losses are only temporary – full recovery is possible."

Stacey Cohen, who was diagnosed with a third stage ductal carcinoma, an aggressive form of breast cancer, at the end of 2011, agrees. "A lot of breast cancer patients think it's a death sentence.

Many think, 'How am I going to get through this. Am I going to survive?' Especially now, 12 years after I was diagnosed, the treatments have come so far. It's not the end of your life when you're diagnosed. It's challenging, and if you have to go through treatment, it's not easy. You have to face many challenges: getting up every day, feeling sick and carrying on, but it's definitely not the end."

For Cohen, having two small children when she was diagnosed at the age of 35 became her driving force for survival. "A lot of people said, 'It must have been so hard with your kids so young', and it was tough – my son was five and my daughter was three," she says. "Yet, they were

the best distraction because I didn't have a choice, I had to get up." Though she had massive support from family, friends, and an au pair, Cohen knew her kids needed their mother. "I'd get up, put my wig on, go to their school events, and do as many lifts for them as possible. I didn't have a choice. I didn't want to die at 35 years old."

Having the right oncologist in her corner was also priceless, says Cohen. "My situation was bleak, but she said, 'I'm going to hit you so hard with the worst treatment that you can ever comprehend for a year and a bit, but after that you're going to be fine.' She was amazing, I held onto those words forever."

Cohen's treatment was harrowing and resulted in her losing all her teeth which necessitated two bone grafts. She also went into early menopause at 38, the effects of which she still battles with today. "But thank G-d, I'm healthy and I'm active," she says. Though her daughter doesn't remember her mother's cancer treatment, all these years later it's still imprinted on her, says Cohen. "She's proud that I fought it, and she speaks about it in every English speech she makes."

When Monique Wener woke up with a bleeding nipple, she immediately consulted her doctor. After a series of tests, she was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer. Then COVID-19 struck and so, when she underwent a double mastectomy in April 2020, she had to do it alone. "It was really hard and frightening when I had to go to hospital without anybody," she said.

Though she had amazing support from her family and colleagues, Wener had a difficult time processing what had happened to her. "When I came home from the hospital, I couldn't talk to anybody," she says. "I couldn't look at myself. I was really emotional. It took me a long time to look at myself again."

Wener chose not to have a breast reconstruction. "I didn't want to go through the pain," she says. "Even when I go for my scans every year, I get anxious because being tested through all those machines again is like a trauma. It's hard," she says. Now cancer free, Wener didn't require any chemotherapy or radiation, but remains on medication.

Today she gives talks about her cancer journey. "I didn't ever go for annual check ups, for mammograms, and I should have," she says. "I want to encourage people to do that. I want to be an inspiration to others and show them how far I've come and how strong I've become."



Desirée Firer



Stacey Cohen



Monique Wener



# Machaneh loud, proud, safe and sound, say organisers

STAFF REPORTER

Amidst an alarming rise in antisemitic incidents worldwide, some Jewish parents are hesitant to send their children to camp this December. However, the leaders of camps such as Habonim, Bnei Akiva, and Netzer, along with the community security organisation (CSO), have assured parents that the security measures in place probably make camp the safest place for their children to be.

“We’re excited for machaneh, and know it will be fun and a safe space to be,” said Mira Rudnick, rosh machaneh at Habonim. “It’s far better, just from a physical safety standpoint, to be at machaneh, where there’s 24/7 protection than being by yourself on a holiday or with your friends.”

It’s important for young people to go to machaneh, said Julian Gordon, the head of marketing for Netzer South Africa and head of finance for Machaneh Chevre. “First, it’s always such a fun and unique space. It has characteristics that you just don’t find in other areas of life. Second, in such an uncertain time, the benefit of bringing *chanichim* together is that they can make sense of the world around them in a sensitive and supportive way. This is especially because our *madrichim* want the best and safest environment for *chanichim*, and that shows in the *peulot* [activities] they’re planning, and just how they are as people.”

Rudnick agrees, saying, “There’s nothing more powerful than kids being able to hear a slightly older person speak in a way that’s relatable to them and not feel so isolated by the feelings that they’re feeling. If they’re experiencing antisemitism, feeling scared about Israel, feeling worried about their future, there’s nothing more impactful that we could give those young Jews other than a really excited and eager *maddie* who’s keen to talk about it, is having the same experience, and can come at it from a different perspective.”

Gordon said applications to Netzer this year were slower than in previous years. “Some parents are concerned about safety, but others are keen to send their kids to machaneh,” he said.

“It’s been a mix of both extremes,” said Rudnick. “Some kids have jumped at the opportunity to be in a Jewish space with their friends where they feel that they can be who they are, have fun, and be in a secure environment. But others have gone to the other extreme, and feel scared to come to machaneh and be in a Jewish space.”

Jacob Ogus, rosh machaneh of Bnei Akiva, said the number of kids signing up hadn’t changed. “People are confident that we’ll take the utmost precautions and put all the safety measures in place to ensure that machaneh runs safely,” he said.

Along with additional security, recent events in Israel have also necessitated changes to the camp programmes. “It would be quite difficult to run a Jewish machaneh without changing things,” said Rudnick. “But we understand the importance of making sure that our machaneh meets the expectations of kids and parents, education and activity-wise.”

In addition to physical safety, machaneh also prioritises *chanichim*’s emotional safety, said Rudnick. “If I was a kid right now and I felt worried about being Jewish and my future in South Africa, I would also just want a break from it. It’s all over social media, and we know kids are all over social media; there are announcements about it at schools; conversations at the Shabbos table with your family; at shul; it’s everywhere. Jewish people feel a need to speak about it, and that makes total sense, but the greatest gift parents can give their kids this December is a break from that conversation, certain moments of the day where kids should be able just to go to the beach feeling entirely safe and secure and proud of who they are.

“It can be a nice distraction and also a really beautiful light among this darkness right now, while ensuring that we’ve included educational emphasis on Jewish identity and pride, and feeling confident in the amazing Jewish leadership that exists in South Africa,” she said.

Gordon said the camps work consistently with the CSO, which has conducted campsite inspections to ensure safety at machaneh. “We’re also making sure that *chanichim* travelling to Cape Town will do so in the safest way possible,” he said.



“Parents shouldn’t be worried in the slightest,” said Ogus. “We’re confident in our security measures, in the CSO, in our relationships with the police force and law enforcement. We’re extremely excited for machaneh, and cannot wait for an unbelievable three weeks.”

“The CSO continues to cultivate its longstanding partnerships with the various camps to ensure that Jewish life and the Jewish way of life can continue to flourish in South Africa,” said Jevon Greenblatt, the director of operations at the CSO. “The teams consist of trained security officers from within our community working under experienced leaders within the

organisation, whose sole mission is to ensure safety and security. They are trained and equipped to deal with a variety of emergency situations, undergoing additional specialised training related to summer camps and *tiyulim*.

“Over the years, the CSO has formalised strong relationships with emergency services including local law enforcement agencies in the areas where camps will be taking place. We have been in communication with them, and have their full support and backing. With everybody co-operating and working together, we look forward to a fun, safe, and secure environment for all camp participants.”

“We’ve covered all our bases regarding physical and emotional safety,” said Rudnick. “It’s now just about giving our kids that opportunity to recoup, to go into a place where there are people whose mission every single day is to make sure that they’re the best versions of themselves, that they’re having the most fun that they possibly can and growing as people.

“Above all, they’re going to have a phenomenal time and make wonderful memories in spite of what we’re facing as Jews. That’s the most important thing Jewish people must strive for at this time – to continue living proudly and loudly.”

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# Art of avoiding car guards in cashless economy

I can't be the only one who avoids eye contact with car guards. Or who lies to them as I scuttle into a shopping mall, mumbling something like, "I'll give you when I come out," knowing that I won't. Because I don't carry cash, won't have loose change, and will wait until he's assisting someone else or looking the other way before I leopard crawl to my car to avoid him pointing out the obvious.

Pointing out that I'm a stingy and selfish person who can't spare a few rands for someone who suffers the indignity of spending the day dressed in a reflective vest.

Every now and then, I do it right. I get a whole bunch of R5 coins from the bank to keep in the car so that I don't have to experience the shame of playing Car Guard Dodge. A game that I'm terrible at. But somehow, in no time at all, the coins seem to evaporate, and within a week or so, I find myself back to bolting from a shop to my car as though I'm being chased by law enforcement.

Functions are no easier. Now not only do we need to remember to buy a gift for Simcha's Barmitzvah and for my wife to bring her glasses and driver's license in case I have a drink. We also have to rummage for some cash notes so that we aren't "tip shamed" when someone passes around the glass in which we plant the money for gratuity.

At many a function have I had to go in search of a sibling or friend to borrow R100 that not only should I have had on my person, but I also know I'll never return. Separate seating functions, where men and women are seated at different tables, results in double the stress and double the shame.

It's reached a stage that I prefer to decline invitations rather than deal with the whole

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



tipping issue.

We're smart people. To my understanding, Jews have already won about 136% of all available Nobel prizes in maths and stuff. We were the people who invented the Oedipus complex, we cured polio, produced Albert Einstein, and Dell computers. We gifted the world with Calvin Klein and Harrison Ford. We can claim Barbra Streisand, Bob Dylan, and Barbie. We can boast being the creators of the world's best – or worst – Ponzi schemes thanks to Bernard Madoff, and for those who need a laugh, know that Jerry Seinfeld, Jack Benny, and the Marx Brothers were members of the faith.

And still, with all this talent, no-one has found a way to tip the car guard in a cashless society.

Why do we have to solve it, you might ask? Simply because if we've learned anything since the events of 7 October 2023, it's that if we want something done, we have to do it ourselves. If there's a problem that needs to be dealt with, we can't expect any of our former friends to do it. They may be nice people, but they're unlikely to be found rushing to assist us at our time of need.

If most couldn't reach out to us when we needed them, if most don't march for us when others scream for our murder, it might be a little naïve to expect them to find a solution to our discomfort as we dash from Readers Warehouse, book in hand, for a car that we've left idling. Because then it's easier to accelerate the getaway vehicle from a car guard we promised we would tip on the way in.

## A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Posing and posturing

Since the conflict began, members of the Board have been inundated by requests for interviews and comment. We have made every effort to accede to these requests so that no opportunity to get our voice out there is lost. Recently, I was interviewed twice on the upsurge in antisemitism locally. Israel's decision to recall its ambassador for consultation followed by the vote on Tuesday, 21 November, in Parliament to suspend diplomatic ties with Israel resulted in another flurry of approaches for comment, with our national vice-presidents, Zev Krengel and Mary Kluk, being interviewed by SABC News and SAfm.

Regarding Ambassador Eli Belotsercovsky, we responded that it was a pity that the situation in the country had deteriorated to the degree that he has been recalled for consultation. We trusted that this, as well as the recall of the South African embassy staff in Israel, would be temporary and that dialogue and engagement would soon be resumed. So far as the debate in Parliament went, we commented that it was a pointless exercise since the executive and not Parliament determined international relations. Certainly, the appalling scene that was allowed to play out was disgraceful, but we also need to cut through what's no more than political posturing and what will in reality change on the ground. To reiterate what we have said on the matter, the decision to close an embassy or downgrade diplomatic relations isn't made at parliamentary level but is an executive decision, made by cabinet and the president. Practical considerations, which were largely ignored in the parliamentary discussion and vote, will need to be considered prior to any decisions being made.

Though Belotsercovsky has returned to Israel for consultation, the Israeli embassy and consulate remains fully functional. Deputy Ambassador Adi Cohen Hazanov is here, as are consular staff, and operations continue.

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

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



Over the next days and weeks, we'll address the issues that are playing out in determining the future status of the Israeli embassy in Pretoria and the South African embassy in Tel Aviv. Where necessary, we'll challenge issues that have an impact on our community, using whatever is required, including local and international meetings, the media, and the legal realm.

### Continued incitement

On Monday, 20 November, President Cyril Ramaphosa finally responded to the high levels of incitement to hatred and violence around events in the Middle East by urging people to "guard against this conflict turning us against each other as South Africans", no matter how strong their views on the matter. He also reiterated that the Constitution protected everyone's right to freedom of opinion, expression, and association, and that there was "no place in South Africa for violence or threats of violence against those who hold contrary views".

Coming as it did after the violent disruption of two Christian prayer meetings in Cape Town, along with mounting threats and attacks against the Jewish community, Ramaphosa's call, however late, is to be welcomed. As soon became apparent, however, not everyone got the message. Less than 24 hours later, Al Jama-ah city councillor and former Johannesburg Mayor Thapelo Amad posted shocking images of himself posing with an assault rifle while declaring his unequivocal support for Hamas. Previously, he had posted a comment declaring, "Death to the Zionist Israeli and its supporters!" We have written to Ramaphosa calling on him to address this issue and for Amad to be strongly censured.

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

## Increased antisemitism strengthens Jewish identity

### LEE TANKLE

South African Jews aren't cowering from the increased antisemitism following the war between Israel and Hamas, but displaying their Judaism in any way possible. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to a random selection of people to find out how they are showing their identity.

"I come from a fiercely proud Jewish family, a pride instilled in me since I was a child. I moved to Cape Town this year, and my dad gave me a mezuzah for my front door, which eventually fell and was no longer kosher. I knew I needed to get a new one, but after 7 October and everything else that followed, I was compelled to put it up and mark my home as a Jewish one. I feel obliged to showcase my Judaism in spite of all this antisemitism. The best combatant of antisemitism is a proud Jew." – *Rachel Segel, a university student*

"I have a transgender child. For the past four years, my child was an ardent atheist. But, he has started wearing a kippah all the time and has been doing teaching sessions with our rabbi. It has been the most magical experience for me as a mom to see my child reconnect with his Judaism in a way that I never thought was possible before." – *Anonymous*

"I made bracelets that say, 'I stand with Israel', and wear them proudly together with my brothers for life bracelet." – *Anonymous*

"I wear my yarmulke everywhere. I don't care for negative comments, and I get respect." – *Allan Jacobson*

"I see some people talking about taking down their mezuzahs. Our chairperson, who lives down the passage from me, is racist and aggressive, and I discovered after a run-in with him that he's a Shi'ite Muslim. I'm not taking down my mezuzah for anyone." – *Lesley Jellin*

"I wear my Magen David and chai necklaces daily as a declaration of my Jewish heritage, a symbol of Jewish pride, and a symbol of unwavering love and support of the state of Israel. Wearing these Jewish symbols connects me to *am Yisrael*, it's part of my identity, and a constant reminder of who we are as a Jewish nation. By wearing Jewish symbols and acting with love and friendliness, we're showing the world the beauty of the Jewish nation. Wear it loud and proud. *Am Yisrael Chai!*" – *Ari Tucker*

"It's not just about wearing Magen Davids. I'm the deputy head of King David Sandton. We have boys who are wearing tzitzit now. It's the most beautiful thing to see." – *Hayley Schiffman*

"This fight is a necessary evil that has been forced upon Jews and everyone else on earth. We must do whatever we can as individuals to advocate that every chance we get in spite of being held hostage. And I fear we aren't." – *Delon Palm*

"Ever since the war broke out, my identity as a Jew changed. I saw the value of what it means to be Jewish and how we need to be proud of who we are and what we represent. This shocking attack on my brothers and sisters showed me that I need to be proud to be Jewish. It led me to wear a kippah every day and I started keeping Shabbos as I believe it's an imperative for every Jew. I'm now keeping my sixth Shabbos in a row due to the war." – *Daron Riback*

"With the increasing antisemitism raging throughout my university, the massive gatherings of anti-Israel protests, and the surge of hate, I strangely feel so much closer to Judaism than before. The lack of peace and the love for hate made me look for the light, and that's what I found. I put a mezuzah on my door so that I can be a part of that light and remove myself from all the darkness and negativity around me. I'm proud to be Jewish and proud of my identity. Whether in my residence or at home, I'm Jewish and that's what the mezuzah signifies." – *Anonymous*

"I have a friend who wears an Israeli flag on his motorbike riding jacket. He was at Mr Price in Norwood Mall, and the cashier made a negative comment saying, 'That's a bad flag you have on your jacket.' The hate is out there, but he'll wear this flag sewn on his jacket with pride." – *Garron David Zlotnick*

"Putting up a mezuzah is something my family has always placed importance on. We've never stayed in a home without one. It's always the first thing we do as soon as we move in. Every room I've ever stayed in had a mezuzah on the wall as well as on the front door. Our mezuzah recently fell down while we were away and it was my priority to get it replaced. My reason wasn't antisemitism, but because it's something I've always known to do to feel safe and protected in my home."

– *Talia Zalkiner, a university student in Cape Town*

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Tuesday was a deeply upsetting day for our community who saw the vicious grandstanding in parliament and the vote to close the Israeli Embassy in Tel Aviv.

### **Parliament Debate**

While the scene that played out was disgraceful, we need to cut through the political posturing to what will actually change on the ground. We want to reiterate that the decision to close an embassy or downgrade diplomatic relations is not made at a parliamentary level. It is an executive decision, made by cabinet and the President. Practical considerations, which were largely ignored in the parliamentary discussion and vote, will need to be considered prior to any decisions being made.

I would once again like to express our gratitude to the political parties who spoke out against the fiasco in parliament and who voted against this atrocious motion – the DA, the IFP, the ACDP and the FF+.

Over the next days and weeks, we will be seeking clarity on the exact status of both embassies, that being the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria and the South African Embassy in Tel Aviv. Where necessary we will challenge issues that impact on our community, using whatever is required, including local and international meetings, the media and in the legal realm.

### **Status of the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria**

While Ambassador Belotsercovsky has returned to Israel for consultation with his government, the Israeli Embassy and consulate remains fully functional. Deputy Ambassador Adi Cohen Hazanov is here, as are the consular staff and operations continue.

### **Status of the South African Embassy in Tel Aviv**

The SA Embassy in Tel Aviv is 'closed until further notice' due to their staff being 'recalled for consultation'. This is something we are challenging as it is a dereliction of responsibility to SA citizens on government's part. Should you have any issues that require intervention, please contact me and we will assist you. My email address is [wendy@sajbd.org](mailto:wendy@sajbd.org). I have already assisted a number of community members with consular issues.

### **Antisemitism**

We remain available to you to address any antisemitism or threats that you are experiencing. Should you experience, or otherwise become aware of, any form of hate or threat please contact our offices on [sajbd@sajbd.org](mailto:sajbd@sajbd.org) so that we can support you and respond if required. Should you feel there is imminent danger, please report the incident immediately to the CSO 24 Hour helpline Johannesburg and Kwa-Zulu Natal 0861800018 and Cape Town 0861891118.

Kind regards

**Wendy Kahn**  
National Director



Christian prayer service supports Israel

The Christian community came together on Sunday, 19 November, at Redemption Church in Greenstone in Johannesburg to show support for Israel and the Jewish people in a prayer and proclamation service organised by South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ).

The audience was addressed by Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, a South African evangelist, politician, and teacher, numerous Chirstian leaders and pastors, and Rabbi Devon Mogg. The atmosphere was charged, with a palpable sense of standing together in faith and acknowledging the special place Israel has in the hearts of all believers, Jew and Christian alike.

“We’re deeply moved by the enormous outpouring of support from our fellow believers,” said SAFI spokesperson Bafana Modise. “The solidarity we’ve experienced is a testament to the power of love and compassion within the Christian community.”

The service’s impact extended far beyond the walls of Redemption Church as it was live-streamed to a large online



Bafana Modise

audience, resonating with the wider Christian community.

SAFI extended a special note of gratitude to Vivienne Myburgh of the ICEJ for her work in spearheading this initiative. After the outrage of the previous Sunday, in which the Cape Town prayer event had to be cancelled due to an aggressive pro-Palestinian presence on the day, Myburgh put much effort into the Johannesburg event alongside Rachel Kalidass and a team of people from various organisations.

In a climate marked by division, the gathering at Redemption Church was testament to the transformative power of unity, gratitude, and the unwavering support of the Christian community.

UJW party and tea for Johannesburg housekeepers

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg held its Housekeepers’ Appreciation Tea on Thursday, 16 November, at Jabula Recreation Centre.

The tea, held annually, shows appreciation for housekeepers, who often aren’t merely employees but valued members of the family.

One hundred and thirty housekeepers from all over Johannesburg attended the morning, with speakers, prizes, music, dancing, goodie bags, and a delicious tea. Guest speaker Charley



Attendees at the appreciation tea

Pietersen, an author, inspirational speaker, life coach, and facilitator, spoke about single-mother households – sadly a huge reality in our country.

UJW executive member Bev Cohen demonstrated a no-bake melk tart, which was devoured, and the recipe given for everyone to try at home. The morning ended with music, singing, and dancing, thanks to singers and dancers from Soweto with Smiles who had everyone on the floor. The special guests enjoyed a delicious tea with time to re-connect with old friends.

Torah Academy pays tribute to ground staff

The Torah Academy schools came together on Thursday, 16 November, to pay tribute and thank the ground and security staff who work tirelessly, showing consistent love and commitment for education centres.

Two representatives from the boys’ high school spoke about the impact of the dedicated staff; the nursery-school sang a song; and primary school kids presented each staff member with a handmade card and a bag of treats.

Jordi Perel, Mimi Friedman, Martha Motsosi, Sara Rsa Kievman, and Shylee Orelowitz



Sunday 26 November

- Men and boys of all ages are invited to an Israel solidarity event with Torah learning and prayer. Time: 16:30. Register: [www.onetorah.co.za](http://www.onetorah.co.za)

Sunday 3 December

- Second Innings hosts its year-end function with a brunch and piano recital by Tony Bentel. Time: 09:45. Venue: Golden Acres, 85 George Avenue, Sandringham. Cost: R160 (R110 members). Contact: 082 561 3228

Tuesday 5 December

- Masa hosts a six-week volunteer programme in Israel for people aged 18-40 years old. Contact: 060 891 1557 or [masa@israelcentre.co.za](mailto:masa@israelcentre.co.za)

Wednesday 6 December

- Second Innings hosts the screening of *Born Free*. Time: 09:30. South African Military Museum, Saxonwold. Cost: R130. Contact: 082 561 3228



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