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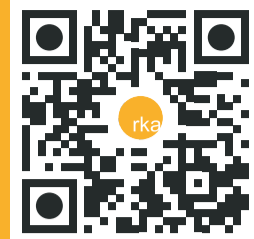
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Volume 27 – Number 11 ■ 4 April 2024 ■ 25 Adar II 5784

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Holocaust parody at UCT 'intended to offend Jews'

TALI FEINBERG

South African Jews were horrified this week at the erection of a deeply offensive sculpture on the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus on 2 April that mocks the horror inflicted upon Jews during the Holocaust.

Fine arts student Ylara Salie made a

copy of the bronze memorial plaque at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, which said, "Forever let this place be a cry of despair and a warning to humanity, where the Nazis murdered about one and a half million men, women and children, mainly Jews, from various countries of Europe. Auschwitz-Birkenau 1940-1945."

On her version, she placed the word

"Israel" over the words "the Nazis"; the number "28 000" over the words "one and a half million"; the word "Muslim" over the word "Jews"; the word "Gaza" over "various countries of Europe"; the word "Palestine" over the words "Auschwitz-Birkenau"; and the date "1948" over the date 1940-1945, implying that her version of a "Holocaust" began in 1948. She then called on students to adopt the Jewish memorial custom of placing pebbles on the plaque, which she titled, "Never Again".

This sculpture appeared a week after anti-Israel students and members of the public harassed and hurled abuse at Jewish students during so-called "Israeli Apartheid Week" (IAW).

"The sheer unapologetic antisemitism at UCT has gone too far," said South African Union of Jewish Students Western Cape (SAUJS WC) Chairperson Erin Dodo, speaking in her personal capacity. "How do you expect Jewish students to react to seeing their history literally erased for the purpose of an art project?"

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism used by most countries in the world makes it clear that "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" is antisemitic.

"The parody of the Auschwitz-Birkenau monument that appeared today on UCT campus goes beyond merely falsifying history for ideological purposes," read the SAUJS WC statement

released on 2 April, calling for the sculpture's permanent removal. "It's a deliberate distortion of past realities with an aim of causing maximum hurt to Jewish people.

"When protests against Israel take so ugly a form, it's clear that anti-Jewish bigotry is at the core of these protests rather than any valid concern about justice and human rights."

The sculpture has since been removed. It's unclear if Salie had permission to erect it, but Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch said the Cape SAJBD was investigating the matter.

"The Cape SAJBD believes in freedom of expression," said Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson. "However, the student at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts, which is part of UCT, has crossed the lines between innovative artwork and that which is offensive and hurtful.

"The use of the Holocaust plaque is highly insensitive and is disrespectful to the memory of the six million Jews who were systematically executed by the Nazis," said Jacobson. "While we mourn all loss of life and believe the death of Palestinian civilians is tragic, it doesn't give anyone the right to diminish



The defiled replica of the bronze memorial plaque from the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp at the University of Cape Town

the atrocities of the Holocaust. We're engaging with Michaelis, and will be investigating this matter further."

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, said, "The 'artwork's' message is doubly offensive. It invokes and literally overwrites the sacred memory of those who died at Auschwitz-Birkenau. And it lays the terrible price of the war in Gaza at the feet of the Jewish people – not Hamas, not Israel, but Jews. Given that UCT commits to principles and policies designed to advance inclusivity and respect and is otherwise intolerant of prejudice, I trust that the university will take appropriate action."

Jakub Nowakowski, the director of the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, said, "While the creator of this art project claims in her 'artist statement' that history repeats itself, we must make it clear that actually, it doesn't. In spite of the fact that after Auschwitz, the world witnessed other

Continued on page 8>>

Six months of solidarity

Grade 7s across King David schools form a giant ribbon in solidarity with the hostages taken in Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023, 124 of whom are still being held after six months in captivity.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

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Most American Jews report uptick in antisemitism

Most Americans, and nearly 90% of American Jews, say antisemitism has risen since 7 October, according to a new study.

But the survey also found that one in 10 respondents said Americans should be allowed to call for violence against Jews or Muslims. By contrast, 73% say such calls should be prohibited.

The survey, published on 2 April by the Pew Research Center, comes following widespread reports of rising antisemitism in the United States (US) since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October. It found that increasing shares of Americans and American Jews believe there's a high level of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the US.

But along with the minority of respondents who say calls for antisemitic or anti-Muslim violence should be allowed, the survey showed that most Americans say advocacy for the end of a Jewish state or the prevention of a Palestinian one should also be permitted. Adults under 50 were slightly more likely to say that calls for violence against either religious group should be allowed.

"[The survey] finds that Americans are broadly comfortable with speech both for and against Israeli and Palestinian statehood. But most US adults aren't OK with calls for violence against Jews or Muslims," reads an introduction to the survey on Pew's website.

The survey, taken in February, polled more than 12 600 people and had an overall margin of error of 1.5%.

Biden warns Gershkovich's continued detention will cost Russia

President Joe Biden said the US would continue to "impose costs" on Russia for its imprisonment of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, who was

arrested a year ago.

The *Journal* marked the 29 March anniversary by leaving most of its front page empty below a headline reading, "His story should be here."

"As I have told Evan's parents, I'll never give up hope either," Biden said. "We'll continue working every day to secure his release. We'll continue to denounce and impose costs for Russia's appalling attempts to use Americans as bargaining chips."

Gershkovich, the 32-year-old American son of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union, has been held on espionage charges since 29 March 2023, when he was arrested by Russian agents while on a reporting trip in the city of Yekaterinburg. Gershkovich, the US government, and the *Wall Street Journal* deny the allegations, for which the Russian government hasn't provided evidence. His arrest came amid an ongoing crackdown on the press during Russia's war on Ukraine.

On 30 January, a Moscow court extended his detention. Gershkovich has yet to be tried. If convicted, he could face up to 20 years in a penal colony.

Biden imposed sanctions on Russia's internal security service, the FSB, about a month after Gershkovich was detained, and has imposed multiple sanctions since then related to the Ukraine war and other malfeasance by the Putin regime. Both Russia and the US have floated the possibility of a

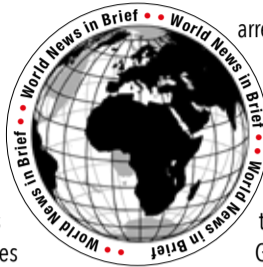


Photo: Natalia Kolesnikova-AFP via Getty Images

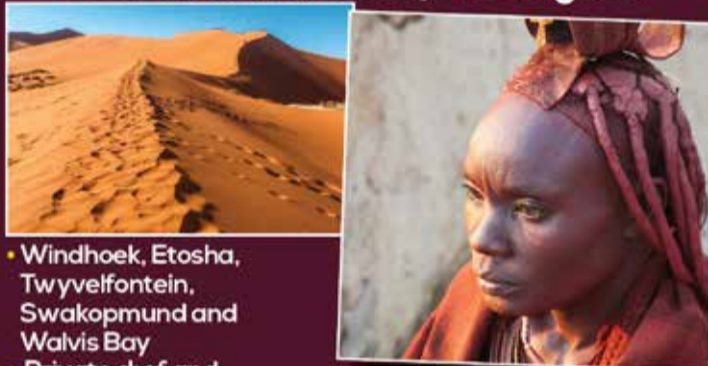
US journalist Evan Gershkovich stands inside a defendants' cage at Moscow City Court on 22 June 2023

prisoner exchange, though a deal has yet to materialise.

Jewish organisations and activists have taken up Gershkovich's cause, echoing the Soviet Jewry movement of decades ago.

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Truth and lies



Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg
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The prophet Micah said, "You will give truth to Yaakov and kindness to

Avraham as You took an oath to our forebears from days of old." The defining attribute of our father, Yaakov, was truth. When discussing the twins of Yitzchak, the Torah states, "The lads grew. Esau was a man who knew hunting, a man of the field, and Yaakov was a guileless [tam] man, living in tents."

Esau was an expert hunter, and hunting requires deception so that the animal will be caught unaware. Yaakov, on the other hand, was an *ish tam*, a guileless man. Rashi notes that *tam* refers to someone who isn't an expert in trickery and guile. "Yaakov wasn't an expert in all this. As his heart was, so was his mouth." The incident in which Yaakov disguises himself as Esau to deceive his father into blessing him is the exception that proves the rule. The rest of his life exemplified truth.

The sages called this world *alma d'shikra* (the world of falsehood), whereas the world to come is known as *alma d'kshut*, (the world of truth). G-d is concealed in the physical world. The word for world, "*olam*", has the same root as "*ne'elam*" (concealed). We're deceived into believing that the world operates independently, with no creator in charge. We speak of nature, with a capital "N", as an independent entity. And mankind is full of lies, as King David said, "In my haste, I said, 'All men are false.'" For a host of reasons, people will say one thing even when they believe something else. This could be because of shame, fear, self-preservation, or self-deception. The world has always been a place of falsehood, but with the advent of social media, the sheer quantity of lies and "fake news" has reached unprecedented levels. Lies are posted online and

shared *ad infinitum*. Even if they are debunked, the lies persist because there are masses of people who ignore the truth.

The so-called Simchat Torah War has brought to the fore the pervasiveness of falsehood. It's accepted as fact in many quarters that Israel is an apartheid state that practises genocide. None of these claims have any basis in reality, yet they are taken as the truth. Social media is awash with fake images, videos, statistics, and reports of the war in Gaza. I have seen artificial intelligence-generated "photographs" of scenes of destruction. I have seen a video of a photoshoot in which a young girl has fake blood

smeared on her face and is given torn clothing to wear. Some pictures of Gaza aren't Gaza at all, they are scenes from the civil war in Syria. An example of "Pallywood", Palestinian fake TV, is a certain man who pops up at every crisis situation, sometimes as a victim, sometimes as a doctor, and sometimes he's screaming hysterically at a so-called explosion site. The man is an actor paid by Hamas. He has been exposed by a number of news channels, yet the videos are still shared. It's difficult to counter the wave of falsehood. But we should be encouraged by the words of our sages, "Truth will stand, but falsehood won't stand." You can fool people for only so long.

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Shabbat HaChodesh precedes the month of Nissan, during which Passover is celebrated. On the first day of Nissan, G-d presented the first commandment of how to "sanctify the new moon" (*kiddush hachodesh*) for the onset of Rosh Chodesh. And so Nissan becomes the first month of the Jewish year (counting by months).
Please note that Israel time is one hour ahead of us

Sexual harassment allegations shake Beit Emanuel

NICOLA MILTZ

Beit Emanuel, one of the country's largest and oldest Progressive synagogues, is reeling after its former rabbi was expelled over sexual harassment allegations.

Israeli-born Rabbi Sa'ar Shaked, noted for his progressive ideas and often controversial views, has found himself at the centre of a storm following allegations by an employee of the shul and others.

Shaked is no longer a member of the South African Association of Progressive Rabbis (SAAPR) after the organisation ratified his expulsion in February.

"Sa'ar Shaked had been charged with violating Ethics Code Section V [Sexual Boundaries]," read a notice on the SAAPR website. "He was temporarily suspended pending an ethics enquiry during which time he resigned from the SAAPR. The ethics panel concluded its process, and recommended his expulsion, which was ratified by SAAPR members in February 2024. He's no longer a member of the SAAPR."

The rabbi resigned from the shul in July last year after a string of unrelated complaints and grievances against him around alleged inappropriate behaviour.

Shaked denies any claims of sexual harassment, but conceded he entered into emotional attachment with congregants.

"Rabbi Shaked's conduct has shaken our community," said Paul Davis, the chairperson of Beit Emanuel. "After a long process, we believe we've dealt with the matter appropriately, severing all ties with the rabbi and approving the South African Union of Progressive Judaism [SAUPJ] and its rabbinic association expelling him as a rabbi." Davis said the congregation had also updated its policy of transparency relating to the ethical conduct of rabbis and staff.

The saga dates back to 2014 involving another victim, a congregant who remained silent until recently. The latest victim, whose identity remains confidential, alleges not only sexual harassment since 2021 but has criticised the shul's inadequate handling of her original complaint. This sentiment is echoed by two other individuals who have come forward with similar allegations. It led to the formation of a support group to address what it says is a culture of silence surrounding such issues. Some high-ranking members of the congregation have also left the shul in the wake of the shul's response.

In a letter to the Beit Emanuel congregation, members of the support group wrote, "Over the past year of different people pleading with shul's leadership to act with kindness and integrity regarding this issue, three additional complaints have emerged from the broader interfaith community who, like us, trusted him because

he's a rabbi and because there had never been any public notice to be cautious with him."

Beit Emanuel's leadership asserts that it has adhered to protocols in addressing the allegations. In a statement to its congregation on 20 March, it acknowledged that the complainant "endured nearly two years of grooming, harassment, and a problematic transgression of sexual boundaries by the rabbi", adding, "as a religious community that vests a great deal of power and trust in a rabbi, this transgression is deeply upsetting".

The shul admitted that its response may not have been as clear-cut and immediate as it should have been, which caused the complainant to feel like she had to struggle through various hoops and obstacles to receive support.

"There was every intention to assist, and even though what was done was perceived to be inadequate, Beit Emanuel didn't wish the complainant to feel unprotected or unsupported."



Sa'ar Shaked

However, the controversy continues to grow as the victim seeks legal recourse.

Wendy Hendler, the co-director of Koleinu SA, a support organisation for victims of abuse, emphasised the seriousness of sexual harassment at shuls, schools, and communal organisations, noting the profound and lasting damage it can cause. Koleinu SA has developed Shulsafe, a comprehensive sexual-abuse policy for shuls. The policy, to be implemented in Johannesburg and Cape Town shuls, includes training, physical safety measures, staff screening, conduct codes, parent patrols, a safety committee, and protocols for handling abuse cases.

"Without protocols, and even with the best of intentions, shuls often fail [to deal with such cases], leaving victims feeling unheard and

unsupported," Hendler said.

She urged shuls to take all necessary steps, including legal action, to support victims and maintain safety standards.

Rozanne Sack, the co-director of Koleinu SA, said adherence to protocols protected the shul leadership from potential claims and demonstrated commitment to accountability.

Said Davis, "Beit Emanuel has a formal sexual harassment policy, with an independent ethics

committee to adjudicate future complaints, though we hope such a thing should never happen again and will do everything in our power to protect all those within our community, be they members or staff."

Meanwhile Shaked, a father of four, is now divorced and has recently trained as a sangoma. He described himself as living "in an authentic space" outside of Johannesburg "recovering and healing".

Silent since his expulsion in February, Shaked released a statement on 19 March to "set the record straight" about the "many misconceptions and misinterpretations" against him.

In it, he said, "I confirm that I engaged in an emotional relationship with a congregant from 2014 to 2015, which developed into a platonic friendship. Our relationship grew into one which

extended to a friendship within our families. It breaks my heart today to read that the same was perceived with an eye of sexual harassment when I had neither made any sexual advances nor suggested that our relationship become physical.

"I further confirm that during 2022 to 2023, I was emotionally involved with a co-worker at Beit Emanuel. I want to reaffirm my stance, that I acknowledge and recognise an emotional connection, but strongly deny any suggestion of sexual intent.

"No sexual suggestion was made and no physical boundaries were crossed," Shaked told the *SA Jewish Report*. "This shouldn't be misinterpreted to negate the subjective experience the complainants underwent.

"Irrespective of the specific accusations, I fully understand the moral failing that these relationships represent. As a spiritual leader, I bear the responsibility of upholding boundaries and conducting myself with unwavering integrity. Regrettably, I fell short in this regard."

He said he understood what he had done had a negative impact on others. "Mainly, I grieve for the impact it has had on my family."

Shaked said he had started a company to facilitate life-cycle events, online courses in Judaism, and similar cultural work, not an interfaith congregation.

"Also, as per the sangoma training, I went there for the sake of my own healing. I didn't claim, nor is it my intention to work as a practising traditional healer. I remain devoted to Jewish knowledge, culture, and way of life."

Lisa Hack, the national chairperson of the SAUPJ said it and the SAAPR "deeply regretted" the situation.

SAAPR Chairperson Rabbi Emma Gottlieb said, "We take the ethical conduct of rabbis very seriously, and are greatly saddened by what has transpired."

Said Hack, "After a deplorable incident of this nature, as a movement, we're looking at opportunities to educate our rabbinic leaders, lay leaders, and synagogue staff, as well as community members to guard against future occurrences."

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Nomadic life or insecure existence? *Olim* weigh options

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been six months since 7 October, and life for *olim* evacuated from their homes is far from normal.

There are 104 ex-South African families – roughly 450 *olim* – whose lives have been profoundly disrupted by evacuation.

Displaced and uncertain about the future, many are torn about

whether to return to their homes now that the Israeli government has said it's relatively safe to do so, or to start all over again elsewhere in seemingly safer areas. This while there appears no end in sight to the conflict, and rocket fire and alert sirens remain a reality in many of the areas they fled.

Talya Kuzi, 42, and her husband Shani, 46 from Moshav Sde

Nitzan in the Eshkol Regional Council close to Gaza arrived home on 6 October after a two-week family holiday in Cape Town, where her parents were born and raised before making aliya. Upon arrival, they found themselves in their safe room on the moshav with sounds of war all around them, petrified and anxious about the well-being of other family members on kibbutzim nearby.

The day after that, they were forced to flee, evacuated under army protection, leaving behind all they knew and loved.

"We hadn't even unpacked our suitcases when we fled our home with them and nothing else but our dog and the clothes on our backs," said Talya.

For four months, they moved around, settling for some time in an hotel in Eilat, where they shared one small room with their son, 10, daughter, 7, and their dog.

"Though it was a beautiful hotel and we considered ourselves fortunate, it wasn't like we were on vacation. There were scenes of trauma with other evacuees, our lives were severely disrupted, nothing was normal.

"Soon, my husband had to return to work on the moshav where he manages the potato packing shed and sells wine in the area. He'd leave during the week, and return when he could on weekends," she said. "It was challenging. I found it difficult to work, there was no formal schooling, no kitchen, all the little things made it unsettling," said Talya.

Her mother, Cynthia Field, who was born and raised in Cape Town, refused to leave the moshav.

"It's been her home since the 1970s. I understand this because when we considered moving to a new home, I had a breakdown. All I wanted was to return home," she said.

Last month, her family was one of the first to return, and only a trickle of families followed suit.

"It has been lonely, especially for my son. Many of our friends haven't returned. At least six young families say they'll never come back. Many are opting to rent out their homes and wait to see what happens, while their children have registered at new schools."

She said that the school which served the area overlooked Gaza and hasn't reopened. A makeshift

Talya and Shani Kuzi with their children



school has been set up in buildings on a nearby kibbutz, some classes take place in tents or caravans as more children start returning, causing overcrowding. Many teachers haven't returned. Some are in the army.

Southern Israeli residents evacuated after 7 October have been allowed to return to their homes since 1 March. However, they also have the option of remaining in the hotels, paid for by the government, until 7 July.

An estimated 200 000 Israelis were forced to relocate temporarily. The government provided accommodation at hotels and empty apartments, and offered a daily stipend to those who chose to find alternate accommodation.

As evacuees from the south trickle back, roughly 80 000 people still displaced from northern Israel grapple with rockets, tight living quarters, and dispersed families.

Telfed, which supports South African *olim*, has offered financial assistance as well as English trauma counselling services and in some cases, rent-free accommodation to evacuees. Dorron Kline, the chief executive of Telfed, said most *olim* hadn't returned to their homes, some because there's nothing left of them, some because they still fear for their safety.

Evacuated families have received financial assistance from Telfed, with a grant of NIS 1000 (R5 128) per person. In addition, families have received gift cards to purchase new clothes and care packages, which include things like hand-crocheted blankets by elderly *olim*, all of which have been personally delivered by Telfed Chairperson Maish Isaacson. The organisation purchased 40 laptops for displaced families as children resumed remote learning, provided transport for farmers, as well as many other

war-relief efforts such as toys and bicycles for children.

Said Isaacson, "The evacuees can be broken up into three different camps: those that say they'll never go back; those that say they will, but not yet; and those that aren't sure."

"Everyone is having trauma therapy," said Isaacson, who has tried to visit as many evacuees as possible, travelling the length and breadth of the country to connect with them and reassure them that they're not alone. Isaacson is a former deputy mayor of Ra'anana, volunteers for emergency response organisation Zaka, and is a captain in the police with 30 volunteers under him.

David Michaelowsky from Gqeberha and his wife, Jenny, narrowly escaped the attack on 7 October when they dashed to safety, fleeing their home in Sderot after spending 25 hours cooped up in their safe room. They have spent the past five months relying on the generosity of family and friends for accommodation. What would normally take Michaelowsky 15 minutes to commute to work in Ashkelon is now a four-hour round trip which he does a few times a week, but he says work has kept him sane.

Since the war broke out, they have been back to Sderot only twice to collect some important documents and clothes, and each time found it to be "like a ghost town"

Now that the trains are starting to run and the supermarkets beginning to open, Michaelowsky said he has "mixed emotions" about going back.

"I'm not convinced it's safe. Every now and then it still comes under rocket attack. It will be like going back to a city that has undergone a huge, unbelievable trauma. It's not the same place anymore. My wife isn't ready."

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OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



I cry every day, and I'm not the only one. The tears are for the trauma we've endured, for those we lost, for those who remain captive in Gaza, and for those who pay the ultimate price in defence of our beloved country. The past nearly six months have taught me that the human body is capable of producing an infinite amount of tears. Sometimes there are tears of pride as well, and defiant resilience.

Israelis seem to appear to be going about their normal lives, but the reality is that we're far from normal. We're a country at war, deep in shock and trauma, but we all know what our collective mission is, so going about our daily lives is an act of resilience. We're a country fighting an existential threat – our existence as the nation state of the Jewish people is at stake – and we must do whatever we can as individuals and as a collective to ensure *yachad nenatzeach* (together, we'll win). We must win.

Many of us wear metal dog tags with the Hebrew inscription that translates to "our hearts are captive in Gaza". They really are. We cannot rest or even begin to deal with our trauma until the hostages are home. Posters of the hostages are everywhere.

The atrocities of 7 October

were a seminal moment in Jewish history that has deeply traumatised Israelis and our global Jewish community. Israelis are still in shock and haven't moved to the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stage. We're anticipating a tsunami of mental health issues in the months to come.

the government is conducting the war. Many feel that there isn't enough focus on the hostages and too much on preserving legacies.

Israel is a country where our soldiers are our "citizen army". It's our husbands, sons, brothers, lovers, colleagues, friends, and family that are fighting this war, which is on our doorstep, and

our cities when there are funerals, and it's profoundly moving.

We're worried about the safety of diaspora communities, and outraged at the blatant antisemitism around the world. Why does the world not understand that we're fighting an evil enemy on behalf of all people who value freedom?

We're perplexed at the hostility shown towards Israel, although I do believe the silent majority stands with the Jewish state. I just wish they weren't silent.

As the national holidays Yom Hashoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Yom Ha'Atzmaut approach, we're filled with mounting anxiety. The emotional toll of these solemn days followed by an extremely subdued day of independence is a lot to bear. The Israeli Air Force has said there will be no flyover, a highly anticipated annual event of spectacular feats of flying. Cities, including mine, Modi'in, have said we'll have no fireworks out of respect for our soldiers enduring PTSD and to be honest, we're not in the mood for celebrating as we struggle to come to terms with our grief.

Israelis go about their daily routine without having to explain to each other what we're feeling as individuals. It goes without saying. We all understand each other, just look into our eyes.

A good friend of mine wrote a book called *Israsilience*, which is filled with individual stories of Israelis who have shown resilience throughout our history. I draw strength from these stories of individual courage.



Hostages Square in Tel Aviv

A good friend of mine described his recent visit to Israel as "a visit to a Shiva house". It's the most apt description. It almost feels like a hush has descended over the country. Though we're united, there's growing anger at the way

to date, we've lost 600. The loss is felt personally. When we read those ominous words "cleared for publication", we all feel that familiar sense of dread. Do I know him? Even if we don't, we feel the loss. We form honour guards in

A good friend of mine described his recent visit to Israel as "a visit to a Shiva house".

Resilience is what makes us a great nation – the stubborn seed of hope that's always there in spite of the darkness. It's the secret to the sauce, and it's why we'll be victorious. The ultimate act of resilience is to live. Even though sometimes we may be going through the motions, we still do it defiantly. This week marks six months since that Black Sabbath. It's unfathomable.

Israelis say that we'll dance again. We'll live for those so brutally taken from us. It will just take time.

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.

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The simplified process

Initiating the journey merely requires booking a free consultation with the legal expert, Dainius Ambrazaitis, who specializes in Lithuanian citizenship. The success rate is astonishing, with the vast majority of cases leading to positive outcomes, debunking the myth that a lack of documents is a roadblock."

"I had never thought that I would say that I am a Lithuanian citizen. With minimal information around my maternal and paternal Lithuanian background, Dainius had assured me that my application would be valid." G. Saben, SA

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Picture tells a thousand horrors

"There are none so blind as those who will not see." This phrase, of disputed origin, is so apt in relation to Israel, Gaza, and Jews.

This week marks six months since thousands of Hamas terrorists infiltrated Israel and went on a rampage of raping, burning, and murdering people in the south of the country.

Initially, the world was aghast, but within days of Israel launching a war against Hamas, so many in the world – not least of all the media – managed to erase what happened on 7 October in Israel from their memory and history.

There's an unfathomable refusal to accept the horror of what happened. How does that work, when the very perpetrators filmed what they did and put much of it out into the world on social media? If you have seen those images, you can't unsee them. How then does so much of the world blindly accept what happened in Israel and condemn the Jewish state for retaliating?

For those of us who woke up on 7 October to the horror of what was happening in Israel and as the images and footage emerged, our horror and outrage increased.

One photograph is indelibly inked into my head. It was of 22-year-old Shani Louk, whose almost naked body was strewn facedown across the back of an open-back bakkie in Gaza with terrorists celebrating while practically sitting on top her like hunters with some dead animal trophy.

When I saw this photograph, I felt physically ill, and the reality of the depravity of 7 October became blatantly apparent. I knew then that this day was always going to be marked in our history as "never again" happening again... for one day.

It was this very photograph that made me realise that Hamas must never be allowed to commit atrocities like this again to our people – or anyone else.

This same photograph made the horror of the sexual violence perpetrated against Jewish people, particularly women, so blatant. There's no way, looking at this photograph, that anyone can deny the horror of what they did to Jewish women.

This photograph, taken by Mahmud Ali, who was apparently employed as a freelance photographer by Associated Press, was the winner of Team Picture Story of the Year in the Pictures of the Year International competition.

There's no doubt in my mind that this photograph encapsulates that horrific day and what Hamas did. And it makes it clear to me that Shani Louk was murdered and most likely gang raped by a group of depraved terrorists for no other reason than that she was a Jew.

It captured a moment that showed 7 October for what it truly was – a day in which Hamas fulfilled its dream of killing and perversely having its way with as many Jews as possible. Hamas make no bones about how much it wants to eliminate all of us, not only from the Middle East, but from the face of the earth. It did its damndest, and Israel must now ensure that it cannot happen again.

However, should the photographer be awarded for being embedded with terrorists who infiltrated Israel, murdered 1 200 people, brutalised thousands of others, and grabbed 240 people, including Shani, and forced them into Gaza as captives?

Is this acceptable? As a *New York Post* editorial is quoted as saying, all it took to win a prestigious photojournalism award from a leading public university was to "embed with a crew of Islamist killers and snap pics of them exulting in the murder of an innocent woman".

For many among us, winning an award for this photograph is tacit approval of what Hamas did, which wouldn't be surprising considering the biased international and local media regarding this war.

As a journalist, I hate the idea that someone who supported and apparently went with Hamas into Israel and helped it to document its dastardly deeds, has won an international award – or any award.

However, this photograph tells so much, and I cannot deny the impact it had on me and almost everyone I know. It's a brilliant news photograph. But awarding someone like this makes me feel ill.

Photojournalists often tread a fine line in capturing trauma for the world to see, witnessing and doing nothing about it when perhaps they could. But that isn't their task.

I recall a friend of mine who took his life just months after winning a Pulitzer Prize for photojournalism. Kevin Carter won the award in 1994 for a photograph epitomising famine in Sudan. It was of a starving child that had keeled over, with a vulture seen waiting in the background.

While the photograph was brilliant, there were many who criticised Kevin, claiming he was as much of a predator under the circumstances and could have helped the child. The *St Petersburg Times* was quoted as saying, "The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene."

Kevin, like most photojournalists, was aware of this painful dilemma. Just months after being on top of the world, winning the most prestigious international award possible, he took his own life. In his note, left next to him, he apologised profusely, saying, "The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy doesn't exist."

Looking back at what happened to Kevin reveals the huge dilemma in the media of capturing the horror to show the world. Was Mahmud Ali forsaking his morality and integrity as a person by taking this photograph and putting it out there? If it was captured by another unbiased photographer, should it have won an international award for achieving what it did?

I don't have the answers because I'm torn, and the life of Shani Louk represents the life of a young, vibrant woman who was treated with depravity and scorn. She represents every Jewish woman who was brutalised in the attack. She represents #MeTooUnlessYou'reAJew. So, I hate the idea that showing her like this has been awarded, but I also understand that those of us who care and saw that photograph will forever understand what happened on that day because of it.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



US 'non-veto' threatens increasing isolation for Israel

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



On 25 March, the United States (US) abstained from and declined to exercise its veto power against a United Nations Security Council Resolution which explicitly called for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war. It also called for the release of all the hostages, but didn't clearly link the two as previous resolutions had done.

Of course, this isn't the first time that the US has refused to veto a Security Council Resolution against Israel to make a point. Barack Obama famously allowed Security Council Resolution 2334 against Israeli settlements to pass in December 2016. However, Israel wasn't at war then, and that failure to veto was more academic. After this current resolution passed, the US administration characterised it as "non-binding", which itself is debatable – international law is impossible to understand – and commentators referred to it as "high on symbolism and low on substance". Added to this, clearly the US won't allow the Security Council to pass any enforcement measures against Israel to back up this resolution, so why is everyone in Israel so concerned?

Although Israel is an independent and proud sovereign country and cannot just be expected to show subservience or obedience to the US, it's an issue of vital national strategic importance that it has a positive and working relationship with the US and its sitting leadership. Only the US will veto future Security Council Resolutions against Israel, supply it with vital ammunition and hardware, and provide it with funds to purchase and develop its own armaments industry.

Don't forget the north

In addition to the above, the low-level war in the north and its major consequences for the people of Israel shouldn't be forgotten. An article on Reuters on 27 March, titled "Abandoned Israeli farms cling to life in evacuation zone" details how the forced evacuation of residents of the north has turned some of Israel's most productive farming communities into ghost towns. It referred to Kibbutz Snir, which rears cows and chickens and grows avocados and some vegetables about 3km from the Lebanese border, and

which is now hardly being looked after, as an example. It said Israel's northern region accounts for a third of the country's agricultural land, and about 73% of its domestic egg production concentrated in the Galilee and Golan regions. In fact, it went so far as to say that in February, the agricultural ministry said it would lift duties on imported eggs to meet the needs for Pesach, forecasting a drop in local production due in part to the security situation. It should never be forgotten that 100 000 Israelis have had to evacuate their homes in the north for six months now. This isn't sustainable. Something has to give in the north.

Hope for the future

In spite of the challenges facing Israel, there's still much to be positive about. Its people have proven to be patriotic and resilient during this war. As *The Times of Israel* so eruditely puts it, "somehow, this remarkable people of ours, hundreds of thousands of whom constitute its army, has managed to fight the war and maintain some semblance of what used to be normality". This war will eventually end. That should lead to a process

where the hostages are returned and Hamas is no longer in a position to threaten Israel. The big carrot that awaits Israel once that process unfolds is a normalisation deal with the Saudis, as well as potentially increased Gulf investment in the rebuilding of Gaza, and an Arab coalition force to assist in the security and policing of Gaza. That will lead to an overhaul and rejuvenation of the entire architecture of the Middle East, with Israel drawing nearer to the Sunni Arab countries in the region and the resultant ending of attempts to isolate it, all of which can only be to its benefit. However, this will require the leadership to be street smart, astute, and shrewd in how it manages the labyrinth of different international challenges that will arise. One hopes the current leadership is up to the task. In addition, there's a long way to go before this potential end game is arrived at, and it's by no means certain things will unfold in this way.

In spite of the difficult times Israel is facing, there are grounds for hope and a pathway to a more positive future. However, make no mistake, the road to that positive future is going to be extremely bumpy, and huge challenges await in the next few months. Bringing this war to a successful conclusion is still going to be a hugely tricky and complex exercise, given all the obstacles that remain in the path. Solving the problem in the north is going to be more difficult still, and could well lead to an even bigger war. However, Israel has faced and survived many dangerous perils in the past, and it will no doubt survive and get through this one as well. One can only hope that its leadership is alert to and quick to manage the major risks of increased international isolation.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.



Israel is becoming increasingly isolated on the world stage

Israel isolated

Last week, both *The Economist* – "Israel alone" – and *The Times of Israel* – "Silver linings in an ongoing nightmare" – published articles detailing how isolated Israel has become on the international stage. *The Economist* described Israel as "deeply vulnerable and needing a better strategy". *The Times of Israel*, although coming from a totally different angle, described the "extent to which the conflict has been widely misrepresented abroad; that 7 October has been airbrushed away; that Hamas's misrepresentations are widely disseminated, including on issues as basic as its death-toll summations; and that its manifest abuse of hospitals and mosques as military bases is glossed over." Taking this point further, even *The Economist*, traditionally no great supporter of Israel, in the article mentioned above, almost implored Israel to avoid "clumsy diplomacy" and "estrangement from the West". The gist of its entire article stressed that Israel is facing its greatest challenges since the 1948 War of Independence due to its increasing international isolation.

US warning

With this background context, the non-veto by the US is a shot across the bow and a warning to Israel not to take the US's support for granted. But although intended to be symbolic, it highlights the great risks to Israel if the relationship with its most important – and in many ways only – strategic ally ruptures. Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu has become increasingly estranged from US President Joe Biden due to his refusal to present a coherent picture for the "day after", in other words what will happen in Gaza after the war ends. There's also no agreement on what a campaign in Rafah would look like.

Pandor's threat to prosecute fighters not merely hot air



MICHELLE NEL

OPINION

South African Foreign Minister Dr Naledi Pandor has warned citizens fighting for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza that they face prosecution upon their return.

There's a history of South African citizens of Jewish descent fighting for Israel, but the number involved in the current war is unknown. *The Conversation Africa* asked Michelle Nel, an expert in international and military law, for her insights.

Which South African law bars its citizens from fighting in foreign wars or armies?

South Africa explicitly prohibits citizens from rendering any foreign military assistance without the permission of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC). The committee is appointed by the president, and controls all issues related to conventional arms.

Section 198(b) of the Constitution precludes South African citizens from participating in any foreign armed conflict. The Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act, 1998, effectively criminalises such actions.

In an apparent hardening of the South African government's position against Israel, Pandor hasn't just threatened to have South African citizens fighting in the IDF prosecuted. The government also warned in December 2023 that naturalised South Africans could have their citizenship revoked for joining foreign armed forces engaged in wars the country didn't agree with.

Citizenship is governed by the South African Citizenship Act of 1995. It can revoke South African citizenship where a citizen engages, under the flag of another country, in a war that the republic doesn't support.

However, Section 20 of the Constitution also determines that no citizen may be deprived of citizenship.

What does the law prohibit?

The Constitution creates a wide framework for prohibiting

participation by citizens in armed conflict.

South Africans are prohibited from engaging in any kind of mercenary activity or taking part in any military action on behalf of a foreign country without the express authorisation of the NCACC. Legal entities such as a company, permanent residents, and foreign nationals are also prohibited from rendering such assistance within the borders of the country.

"Foreign military assistance" is widely defined. It includes not only the actual rendering of such assistance, but any attempt to render assistance, any encouragement, incitement, or solicitation thereof.

It criminalises:

- Providing advice or training any personnel or operational support;
- Recruitment;
- Medical services;
- Procurement of equipment;
- Security services such as those rendered by private military companies in areas of conflict; and
- Assisting in coups or furthering the military interests of parties to a conflict.

The Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act is set to be repealed by the Prohibition of Mercenary Activities and Regulations of Certain Activities in Country of Armed Conflict Act, 2006, which is yet to be promulgated. This new Act goes as far as prohibiting the rendering of humanitarian assistance in a country of armed conflict unless the organisation involved is duly registered with the arms control committee.

How has the law been applied in the past?

In 2009, the Palestinian Solidarity Alliance handed a list of 73 South Africans of Jewish descent who had fought for the Israeli military in 2008 and 2009 to the National Prosecuting Authority. The authority declined to prosecute. This was followed by a case brought against another South African citizen serving in the Israeli military in 2014. A docket was opened in the

Western Cape, but no information could be found as to whether he was, in fact, prosecuted.

In 2015, about 100 former South African soldiers reportedly left to train the Nigerian military to combat Boko Haram. Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula reportedly said that they should be arrested upon their return to South Africa. Information about whether these arrests and prosecutions in fact took place isn't readily accessible.

Many South Africans continue to serve in foreign armed forces and private military companies yet the prosecuting authority hasn't succeeded in prosecuting any of them. Some cases have been settled by way of plea bargain, with fines and suspended prison sentences.

Ultimately, the efficacy of the legislation depends on its consistent enforcement. The history of inconsistent prosecution and accountability in terms of the Mercenary Activities Act raises questions about the prosecuting authority's ability to successfully prosecute the South Africans fighting for Israel.

Do other countries have similar laws? Are they a good thing?

Very few countries have legislation prohibiting their nationals from joining foreign armed forces. The United Kingdom prohibits its citizens from joining foreign armed forces. In the United States (US), they may forfeit their citizenship. Joining a foreign force fighting against the US is seen as treason.

The Netherlands doesn't prohibit citizens from joining a foreign armed force as long as the country isn't at war with the

country concerned. Canadians are prohibited from joining any foreign armed force that's at war with a friendly nation.

There are more countries prohibiting mercenaries. They include France and Germany. South Africa is among the few that prohibit any form of engagement in the service of a foreign force.

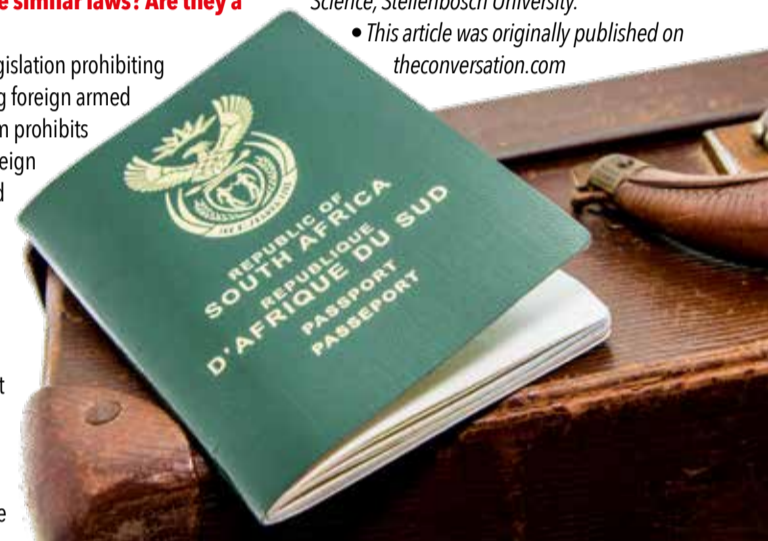
Since the war between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, questions have been raised about the legal status of foreigner volunteers fighting in support of Ukraine within the wider ambit of international law.

Some of them have been killed. What would happen to those captured by the enemy?

The treatment of these foreign nationals could complicate diplomatic relations. It's therefore in the interest of any country to control its citizens' ability to participate in foreign conflicts.

• Michelle Nel is a lecturer in criminal and military law and the law of armed conflict at the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University.

• This article was originally published on theconversation.com



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Israeli civil protest movement pivots to support civilians

TALI FEINBERG

The movement behind protesting the judicial overhaul before 7 October has become a major source of support for Israelis who needed evacuation, clothes, food, shelter, or just about any problem it can assist with.

Roe Neuman, who has South African roots, and was one of its leaders, says that since 7 October, the protest movement, which appeared to have disappeared overnight, has pivoted to become a key source of support to all Israelis.

Neuman is one of the many who have thrown themselves into this new civil society movement, which has no name but is there for all Israelis from north to south. Just as he led the protest movement, he's motivated by love of his country and its people, and the Jewish values he learnt growing up.

Before 'Black Saturday', the key issue within Israeli society was the government's planned judicial overhaul. The movement that galvanised Israelis to take to the streets was a powerful force that wanted only the best for Israel, according to Neuman.

"On 7 October, I woke up to the sounds of alarms and went to the shelter," he says. "We were supposed to have our 40th demonstration that evening, but we cancelled it at that moment. It took us a couple of hours to see that our staff members' families were okay and to get assistance to whoever we could. We took the decision to transform all our organisations and infrastructure to assist Israelis. We joined forces that morning to build headquarters that became the main source of support to Israelis who needed evacuation, clothes, food, shelter, or help with any other problem."

Like most Israelis, Neuman and the protest movement have been directly impacted by the Hamas massacre. "The people in the kibbutzim around Gaza are a big part of the protest movement," he says. "We all lost friends, family members, and partners. The first two weeks, we were going from funeral to funeral of family members of

our staff who died on 7 October.

"We went to the hotels where the refugees were and met our friends who had been hiding in the shelters for more than 24 hours. The stories we've heard changed all of us forever. I remember sitting with a seven-year-old girl, and she was telling us how she came to the protests with her friend but now wouldn't come anymore because her friend was brutally murdered with her family. You just couldn't believe what this innocent girl had been through."

Neuman was born and raised in Nes Ziona, south of Tel Aviv. Since 2011, he's been a media consultant, working mainly in the political field and with non-government organisations. "My mom, Sandra Neuman, was born and raised in Cape Town. She's the daughter of Philip Zetler, a pharmacist originally from Stellenbosch, and Elfreda Zetler, a nurse and Holocaust survivor who went to South Africa after the war," he says. His father, Yoram Neuman, "was born in Moscow and came to Israel as a young child with his family. He met my mother in Cape Town while visiting his aunt who was living there."

In the days after the massacre, the protest movement's role was "mainly to function wherever the state didn't, which unfortunately was almost any walk of life," says Neuman. "We had programmes from the high-tech sector to scan the network for information about the hostages, to programmes to find a home for lost dogs from the combat zone. It was a replacement for the government in the first few months."

At the height of the protests against judicial overhaul, army reservists warned that they would stop volunteering for duty if the coalition unilaterally passed laws to curtail the judiciary. But now, "it's clear to the vast majority of Israelis that we can't live side by side with Hamas on our borders," says Neuman. "We fully support the Israel Defense Forces in its mission to eradicate Hamas. A lot of people from the protest movement are still fighting in Gaza. On the morning of 7 October, we put out a message that called anyone who could do so to join the battle."



The judicial overhaul protest movement still exists, he says. "In the past few weeks, protests started again on a small scale to call for elections. The people and the values are still there, and will be the base for a new movement that will work not only to stop legislation, but to re-build Israel."

In a dramatic move on the evening of Saturday 30 March, relatives of more than a dozen hostages came out strongly against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, declaring him an obstacle to reaching an agreement for the captives' release. They announced that they would join up with anti-government protesters who have held weekly demonstrations in Tel Aviv, leaving behind weekly rallies – held at the same time in Tel Aviv – by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which until now has been the main group representing families of those kidnapped on 7 October.

"Bringing the hostages home isn't just a priority, but the most important thing by far," says Neuman. "At the base of the Israeli identity is the notion that we never leave anyone behind. That's always been

who we are, and if we won't do anything to bring them back, that will change us forever. Israel and its government have to bring them back home safely."

What he wants people to understand about Israel is that "all across the world, we're in April 2024, but in Israel, the date is still 7 October 2023. We're a nation in suffering, fighting to bring back security to our people. We'll recover and become stronger, but here, we're still in mourning and shock, and hundreds of thousands of Israelis are still refugees."

Israel changed dramatically on 7 October 2023, he says. "We've been through wars and terror – we're used to it. But something fundamentally changed. We always knew that the army and government would be there to protect us as a nation, but they weren't there. We feel like we've lost our security in the institutions we always had. On the other hand, people are much more united because we know that together, we can build something new. We're in a transition period, and it's up to the people not the leaders to build something new and better."

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Holocaust parody at UCT 'intended to offend Jews'

>>Continued from page 1

acts of genocide, never ever again was a site like Auschwitz-Birkenau created.

"The plaque that the project is based on is situated at the very end of the train track, which was purposely built in 1944 to allow for a more efficient process of killing more than 400 000 Hungarian Jews. It was almost 80 years ago, in May of 1944, when that mass-murder process began. The process of killing took place in gas chambers, which served no other goal but killing. The bodies were burned in crematorium ovens that served no other purpose than burning bodies. In such a way, 400 000 Hungarian Jews were killed in less than three months.

"Using the memory of those who suffered and died in such a place for an art project distorts history and reveals the author's lack of understanding of basic historical facts. It's also problematic because today, we understand how damaging it is to appropriate anyone's suffering. There's no doubt that the innocent victims of every conflict deserve remembrance. However, this shouldn't come at the expense of the memory of anyone else, including the more than one million Jews and tens of thousands of other victims who are remembered at Auschwitz."

Benji Shulman, the director of public policy at the South African Zionist Federation, said, "One of the cruellest aspects of the new antisemitism is its perverse use of the Holocaust as a stick to beat Jews. Our enemies make use of the Holocaust to criticise Israel and the Jews by equating Israel with Nazi Germany, and to characterise the Holocaust as a moral lesson from which the Jews have failed to learn.

"The accusation of genocide during the Israel-Hamas war is a false narrative," he said. "According to retired British Colonel Richard Kemp, the average combatant-to-civilian death ratio is about 1 to 1.5. This is astonishing since according to the United

Nations, the average combatant-to-civilian death ratio in urban warfare has been 1 to 9. It's concerning that the artist, who visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, is unable to differentiate genocide from war."

"My inspiration came from Auschwitz-Birkenau," Salie, a third year sculpture student at UCT, wrote in her artist statement. "I visited the camp in December 2023. I couldn't understand how the same group of people that endured the horrors of the Holocaust was perpetuating the same violence against another group of people. The piece was created with the intention of showing the irony of the plaque I saw at Auschwitz-Birkenau."

Salie saw no irony in the fact that the war was started by Hamas after it perpetrated the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, on 7 October.

Responding to SAUJS's statement, she said she was "being silenced" by "the weaponisation of antisemitism".

The virulently antisemitic and terrorist-supporting UCT Palestinian Solidarity Forum (UCT PSF) said the artistic statement wasn't "meant to offend anyone besides the genocide supporters and Zionists in disguise. If the shoe fits, wear it."

On the same day, the UCT PSF said it supported a post titled "Reject normalisation, support the resistance: we don't want peace, we want freedom. We don't want to live side-by-side, we want the settlers to leave our land. There's no conversation to be had."

Along with abusing Jewish students during IAW, the UCT PSF invited Hezbollah and Houthi leaders to address UCT students via video calls. The Cape SAJBD continues to engage with the university to investigate these events.

UCT told the SA Jewish Report it was looking into the matter, but wasn't able to respond by the deadline given.

Rambam Trust 'like family', say Jews in debt

LEE TANKLE

Over the past few years, Pam Cohen's* expenses and those of her children far exceeded what she was making in her little business, and she got further and further into debt. No matter what she did, it seemed to get her into further trouble, and she believed she had nowhere to turn.

Then she heard about the Rambam Charitable Trust, a communal loan society, which was able to help her find her way out of debt.

"It's wonderful that they're Jewish, so it's like speaking to family."

She's not alone. With so many in the community in financial straits, the trust has become a lifeline, providing R215 million to members of the community since its inception in 1995.

"I'm lucky enough to have full-time work, but regardless, the cost of living is tremendous," said single father Yonatan Rosenberg*, another of the trust's borrowers.

"I managed to get myself into quite a lot of debt over time. My monthly expenses and debits coming off my account were just so incredible that I didn't have the

money to buy food," he said.

The Rambam Trust assists about 170 borrowers annually. It's committed to assisting any and all members of the South African Jewish community with a range in age, profession, and walks of life.

"The community's needs have evolved," Craig Sacks, the director of the Rambam Trust, told the SA Jewish Report. "Though the pandemic had immediate economic impacts, ongoing challenges persist. We've adapted our support to address shifting needs, focusing on long-term financial stability for our beneficiaries."

"We've noticed that since the pandemic, our community is facing

tremendous financial challenges. Last year, we saw a need to focus more attention on interest-bearing debt such as credit cards, which have high interest rates."

The trust assists the borrower in repaying the high-interest debt by rather paying the capital back to the trust over up to three years instead of the bank.

"This can be a lifeline for a person who may be drowning in debt with no realistic way of servicing the interest and capital

repayments. Current challenges include various expenses such as medical, car repair, varsity and school fees, *simchas*, credit card debt, sometimes even just living expenses."

Yoseph Frischman*, another borrower, said that when he was unable to sell his property and needed some financial assistance, he

Similarly, Tamar Goldman* said that even though she had a full-time job, when it was time for her to buy a car and manage her living expenses, she was under a lot of financial pressure. Goldman applied for a loan from the Rambam Trust as she didn't want to accrue a lot of debt. After paying back the money from the initial loan, Goldman applied for

the cost of the debt, and now I don't have to worry about interest accruing and just getting into more and more debt."

Sacks said the trust didn't charge interest on loans, which is prohibited by Jewish law, "so we're always in a battle against inflation. To counteract inflation, we're always raising additional funds to supplement the trust's capital. We also rely on the community for word-of-mouth referrals to friends and family. Our purpose is to help as many members of our South African Jewish community as possible, and for that we need people to be talking about the Rambam Trust."

"I didn't feel like I was coming as a beggar," said another borrower. "They made me feel like a *mensch*, like a human being. They treated me well. They didn't give me any problems. It was never intrusive or difficult. The whole scenario was just very good."

Said Rosenberg, another borrower, "They treated me with the most incredible amount of honour. They helped me pay off all the smaller loans or debts I had accumulated over years. I landed up paying a lot less every month than I had with all those small debts accumulated over a good two years or so. It's made my life so much easier and more manageable."

*Not her/his real name.



The Rambam Trust reduces stress by helping community members manage their debt

approached the trust in mid-2023 to get help. "It's wonderful that they're Jewish, so it's like speaking to family. And they're really patient, understanding, and caring. They were able to help me. It made a stressful situation a lot less stressful," Frischman said.

a second loan. "My credit card bill was stressing me out because I'd gone on a trip to Israel, and then some money that I was expecting to come through couldn't come through, and I was left with this big credit card debt. It wasn't huge, but for me it was big. The Rambam Trust covered

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Israel Centre director turns attention to education

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Dafi Forer Kremer, the new director of the Israel Centre in South Africa, is determined to assist Jewish educators to teach South Africans about Israel.

Having spearheaded many successful projects during her 25 years in the non-profit sector, Kremer is now focused on giving teachers the skills and knowledge they need to educate people about Israel, addressing challenges they face in the classroom, and talking about the dilemmas facing Israel and Jews.

The skills will be taught through webinars, a five-day seminar in Israel starting on 14 July, and educational projects aimed at influencing participants' students and colleagues. Kremer is looking for candidates who are passionate about changing the way Israel is taught at educational institutions.

She feels a special connection to South Africa, having first come to the country from Israel in 2004, when she arrived with her husband, Shay, and their three boys after Shay was appointed *shaliach* (emissary) of the Jewish Agency for Israel. As Kremer was accompanying him, Emunah offered her the role of director of its women's learning programme. She ran a variety of projects in



Dafi Forer Kremer

this position, and doubled the number of participants in Emunah Beit Midrash to 2 000.

"During this time, I gave birth to my first daughter," says Kremer, who is also a committed runner and coach who has completed half marathons. The Kremers went back to Israel in 2007. "We had another girl. Since then, we came back to South Africa on various occasions with the other four staying in Israel. Two of them are married."

When Kremer returned to South Africa in January this year to take up the directorship position, she received a warm welcome from the Jewish community.

She says South Africa has the most unique Jewish community in the world, and applauds the way it looks after *shlichim*.

Her other agenda as director is to "create a programme that will help people interested in making aliya to do it in the easiest way possible".

To South Africans seeking to make aliya, she says, "We need you. Hamas tries to destroy us. They have caused so much destruction in the south, we need people to come and rebuild the state. Israelis are back to routine life even though a war is still being fought in Gaza, and many communities still have soldiers on the front.

The Jewish community in South Africa is amazing, and we need this quality of people."

Kremer plans to create a group of doctors who can work in Israel, a country desperate for

good doctors. "In government hospitals in South Africa, doctors get exposed to severe and complicated cases. They get excellent experience. In Israel, we need doctors at this level. In fact, South Africa is still recognised as offering a high-level academic medical programme at university. Israel doesn't ask for the South African doctors to write its exam, unlike Russian doctors."

She will also continue the Israel quizzes and teaching tours to Israel conducted by schools and non-formal educational organisations.

Kremer's role as Israel Centre director came about unexpectedly late last year. Having worked for 20 years in the field of fundraising, she decided to try a more management-orientated role. This resulted in her becoming programme director of a pluralistic non-profit organisation called ITIM (Resources and Advocacy for Jewish Life).

"While running this team [through ITIM], I had a meeting with the chairperson of the Jewish Agency for Israel," she says.

Afterwards, Kremer spoke with some people there about their common experiences in South Africa. "I said the Jewish community in South Africa was amazing, and I was so in touch with its members, and that I would go back tomorrow. They said, 'We're seriously looking for someone to replace the current *shaliach*. Please would you apply for the position?'"

Kremer called her husband to ask him what he thought about a possible three-year position in South Africa. "What's the question? Of course!" he responded.

When the duo arrived in South Africa in January, "It was difficult, knowing that we were going to be away with the war going on in Gaza," Kremer says. "We didn't know how long our son, who is married, would be in Gaza." It was also difficult, she says, to deal with South African government hostility to Israel, and its accusation

that the Israel Defense Forces was committing genocide.

Not long ago, Kremer altruistically donated a kidney to an Arab citizen, a Bedouin resident of Rahat, with whose family she has maintained close ties. In an article she wrote last year, she said she would be happy to donate to anyone regardless of religious, ethnic, or gender distinctions.

Kremer, who has degrees in political science and public policy, helped build up the Bnei Akiva youth movement in Israel. "I built up the development resources department," she says, which entailed creating a pool of former members and getting them to pay member fees. These fees went towards former members in need and to organise events for former members.

"I created day-to-day activities to support the movement, especially focusing on underprivileged societies in Israel. I established a communal theatre for Ethiopian kids. They themselves write the scripts of the shows from their own life."

After leaving South Africa in 2007, she spent nine years with Bnei Akiva in Israel before joining Tzohar-Rabbinic, an organisation dealing with religion and state in Israel, as well as fundraising. She was responsible for raising more than 20 million shekels (R102.5 million at today's exchange rates) annually, and managed a team of raising funds around the world.

She helped Tzohar with one of its Jewish life-cycle programmes – a trip to St Petersburg in Russia for couples to prove their Jewishness by, among other things, accessing documents hidden in forgotten archives pertaining to Jews who had to flee the Soviet Union during World War II.

"Most of the participants' fees supported the continuation of the programme to help more couples prove their Jewish name," she says.

Aid worker bombing sparks debate in US

BEN SALES – JTA

Some worked with World Central Kitchen and mourned the loss of their partners. Others say they have been sounding the alarm bell about a humanitarian crisis in Gaza that has only become more urgent.

Still others say, or suggest, that blame for the Israeli bomb that killed seven aid workers in Gaza lies with Hamas.

Taken together, a range of American Jewish organisations' statements on the strike that killed World Central Kitchen's humanitarian staffers reflects American Jewish anguish about the war and impending famine that aid groups have warned of in Gaza. In response to a Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) request for comment about the strike and the humanitarian crisis, most groups mourned the loss and a few had harsh words for Israel on the shortfall in aid for civilians in Gaza.

Others focused criticism on Hamas. The Jewish Federations of North America declined to comment, and bodies representing Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Jews didn't respond to inquiries or said they couldn't formulate a response by press time.

Israel is facing pressure more broadly. In the wake of the strike on Monday, 1 April, its leadership has apologised and pledged to investigate, the White House has condemned the bombing, and humanitarian organisations have withdrawn from Gaza, further imperilling the flow of aid. Governments and humanitarian agencies called on Israel to do more to protect aid workers.

Joining that call was IsraAid, an Israeli relief group that has worked in disaster zones across the world and in Israel with the onset of the war. On some of those missions, the group has worked alongside World Central Kitchen, which provides food in conflict areas and set up shop in Israel following Hamas's invasion on 7 October.

IsraAid called World Central Kitchen "an important partner" in crisis response around the world.

"We're shocked and devastated by the deaths of World Central Kitchen team members in Gaza," the group said. "For humanitarian aid organisations to do their jobs

effectively and deliver lifesaving support, we need safe access to crisis-affected populations, wherever they are. We call on all parties to do everything they can to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and the communities they serve."

T'ruah, criticised Israel's "failure to protect civilians including deconflicted humanitarian organisations".

"The killing of aid workers from World Central Kitchen is a horrific tragedy, first for their families and friends, and second for the people of Gaza who are experiencing

a humanitarian crisis and great risk of famine," Jacobs told JTA. "While the incident must be fully investigated, it's clear that this is one more example of Israel failing to take proper measures to protect civilians, including humanitarian workers, too many of whom have already been killed in this war."

The liberal Israel lobby J Street, likewise, said it was "utterly horrified" by the bombing, and cited figures saying

that almost 200 aid workers have been killed in the war.

J Street, like T'ruah and other liberal Zionist groups, has become more critical of Israel's conduct as the war has gone on. They were among the signatories to a letter on 5 March calling for a "bilateral ceasefire that brings a stop to fighting, a release of all hostages, and a surge in humanitarian assistance".

"The work of humanitarian groups and agencies in Gaza is nothing short of heroic, and is essential to alleviate the catastrophic level of suffering. They must be protected," J Street said. "With famine beginning to spread in Gaza, there's an urgent need for the Israeli government to facilitate and co-ordinate the delivery of massively increased levels of humanitarian aid rather than impede and obstruct it."

The anti-Zionist group Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) claimed without evidence that Israel intentionally targeted the aid trucks. It posted online, "Listen to Palestinians first – and immediately – whenever they endure Israeli genocide and colonisation. The Israeli military's killing of anyone in Gaza is conscious and

calculated." Its frequent partner, IfNotNow, which like JVP has accused Israel of "genocide", called the strike a "massacre".

The Reform movement, the largest and most progressive of the three major American Jewish denominations, mourned the losses and juxtaposed the provision of humanitarian aid to Israel's fight against Hamas, which it said it supported. "We remain committed to both Israel's ability to defend itself from Hamas's ongoing efforts to achieve its destruction, and to the delivery of aid to Palestinians suffering terribly during this war," it said.

Several groups highlighted the fact that Israel had pledged to investigate the bombing. That includes the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee), which shared a series of statements from Israeli officials on social media pledging to probe how the strike took place. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) also noted that "Israel immediately took responsibility, launched an investigation, and grieves the circumstances that have resulted from a war it didn't seek." It also mourned World Central Kitchen's loss, and praised its work.

The AJC statement then pivoted to condemning Hamas, and saying it had the ability to end the war.

"Hamas continues to violate international law every day – intentionally and with no remorse," the statement said. "Hamas has the power to prevent further loss of innocent life by releasing the hostages and surrendering."

Other groups have been less focused on the strike. Morton Klein, the president of the right-wing Zionist Organisation of America, said that he didn't know about the incident before being informed of it by JTA on Tuesday in the early afternoon. "Now that you've made me aware of it, obviously I'm devastated that totally innocent people trying to do humanitarian work have lost their lives, I'm sure unintentionally," he said.

But he pointed out that the ultimate responsibility for the aid workers' death belongs to Hamas.

"I blame Hamas. Every single fatality is blamed on Hamas for launching this war. In any war you'll have deaths of civilians that are unintentional. In a war, mistakes are made, targets are missed. If one takes the position that one doesn't go to war if any innocents will be killed, you won't go to war and Hamas tyrants will win."

The car belonging to World Central Kitchen, that was hit by an Israeli air strike in Gaza on 2 April



Two other Jewish groups that focus on food security also mourned the loss of the aid workers. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which helps Jews in need in countries around the world, said, "We mourn this loss of lives, especially as [we] have worked with World Central Kitchen in the wake of natural disasters in the past."

Also expressing condolences was Mazon, a Jewish anti-hunger group that has been providing relief in Israel since 7 October, though it placed the ultimate blame for starting the fighting with Hamas.

"We're devastated to learn that, yet again, humanitarian aid workers were killed while risking their lives to provide food to those in need," the group said. "We mourn alongside our friends at World Central Kitchen, who have lost colleagues and friends in this tragic conflict sparked by Hamas's horrific attack on 7 October."

Groups on the left on the pro-Israel spectrum were more critical of Israeli policy. Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the chief executive of the liberal rabbinic human rights group

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SAA adrift in changing market dynamics

PETA KROST

The last EL AL Airlines flight from South Africa left last weekend, leaving the South African Jewish community feeling emotional.

"But the airline industry isn't about emotions, it's business," says Gidon Novick, the chief executive and founder of LIFT, a new domestic airline, and the founder of kulula.com and former joint chief executive of Comair.

"I know we loved seeing the planes with Magen Davids on our tarmacs, and I know people don't like to hear this, but a direct service between South Africa and Israel does not appear viable. The volume of passengers just isn't there. It's far more worthwhile to have daily flights that connect you via global hubs and within 12 hours, you're there or back."



Novick, they have become significant and competitive. On the African continent, Ethiopian Air has followed this model.

"Now, air travel is more about connecting traffic, not taking people from one country to their destination," Novick said. "With scale and numbers comes efficiency." South Africa, he said, used to be the prime regional hub, but isn't necessarily that anymore. "However South Africans are lucky because we have some of the best airlines travelling here like KLM, British Airways, Lufthansa, Air France, Swiss, Delta, and United."

Locally, he said, there has also been a chance with Comair exiting, and Safair, which is foreign-owned and funded, growing substantially, and competing, while his own airline, which he says is still small, launched during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then there's AirlinK, which covers the smaller routes, which he says is problematic for SAA, as it used to be dominant in the regional routes now covered by AirlinK. "This is a lot of challenges for SAA. It still has potential on regional routes, and it could still excel on the continental flights into the region," he said.

Novick believes that with a good strategy, business plan, and management, SAA could come back fighting, but he questions

whether it's a necessity to have a national carrier. He doesn't believe it is.

If called on, Novick said he's not averse to getting involved with SAA again, but he isn't running to offer his services. He says the brand has been damaged, and people are likely not to trust the airline right now and so, on that front, there's much work to be done. "There is also a need for many infrastructure changes and a driven strategy. What's important to look at is where there's demand for its services, allowing existing carriers to do what they are doing well."

However, SAA's survival isn't a given, he says, because now that the government isn't willing to put any more money into the parastatal, it will require a great deal of money from investors or people willing to lend the money. "It would also require recognising the market changes and where its competitive margins lie, recognising that the brand has been tarnished, and rebuilding



Gidon Novick

trust to get this back," he said. Working in collaboration and co-operation with other airlines would also help a lot. "Clever alliances, collaboration, and code shares could be so effective, and would help SAA. In other words, when you buy a ticket from SAA, another airline would carry you part of the way to the destination and en route home too."

Novick doesn't believe every country needs a national airline, and many countries have lost their national carrier while others have become successful privately-owned public companies.

However, SAA is just the microcosm of the macrocosm of South Africa's problems, and there are far bigger issues for the country to deal with as a matter of urgency.

Baby, that April Fool's joke fell flat!

LEE TANKLE

Life can be pretty absurd! Women have been known to give birth to a baby when they never knew they were pregnant. A tiger can break out of a zoo and walk around the streets of Edenvale in Johannesburg. In Paris, waiters and waitresses run in a race carrying water and a croissant on a tray. Marshmallows can fall from a helicopter in the United States, and children run to get them.

"Reality is so absurd, the jokes cannot compete," Arthur Goldstuck, author and journalist, told the SA Jewish Report this week.

This is probably why when we reached out to members of the community to share amusing stories they had about April Fool's jokes or Purim *spies* they had played on people, few responded. Although, from those who did, it was clear that the community has a sense of humour.

Johannesburg real estate agent Spencer Schwartz describes a prank that he and YouRealty pulled in 2021. For April Fool's Day, YouRealty put out an advertisement on Facebook saying that the Ponte Tower, near Hillbrow, was going to become exclusively Jewish, and would be renamed Azrieli Tower.

The advertisement promised "affordable living focused on the Jewish community of Joburg". It also promised a "Chabad of Berea" and a "fully stocked KoshersWorld, as well as many retail space opportunities, CAP security offices, and training centres, two out of eight lifts that could be used on Shabbat, and 24-hour hi-tech access control".

Schwartz says that after putting out the prank, he received many messages asking for all sorts of things, including if they could design the kitchen in the flats or if they could rent out shops in the buildings.

"Many people believed it," he said. "Many told me it was one of the best April Fool's pranks in a long time."

Community member Noah Geller* (who asked not to reveal his real name) told how in 2020, he decided that he would play a joke on his friends by telling them that he was going to be making aliya because it seemed like it was the right time, given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much to his dismay, only three of his friends reached out asking if it was real, and how he could make aliya in the middle of lockdown. "I learned who my real friends were that day," he said.

Another community member spoke about an April Fool's prank that seriously backfired and almost caused divorce. She already had four children, and on her Facebook page on 1 April, she referred to being excited because number five was on its way.

She had errands to run and things to do that day, and was shocked when her furious husband, who had had a vasectomy after their fourth child, called her in hysterics, asking, "What are you saying? Did you have an affair? How could this be possible?" He was so angry, he didn't let her get a word in to explain that it was a joke before slamming down the phone.

She tried calling him, and eventually WhatsApped

him, saying, "April Fool!" It took him a few months to see the humour in her prank, but they are still happily married with four kids.

Another member of the community thought it was hilarious to put a fake but realistic looking snake just outside his mother's bedroom door on 1 April a few years back, and then he went off to school nearby. She was alone in the house with her phone in the lounge and was so terrified, she didn't leave her bedroom until her son returned from school hours later. She didn't see the humour, and he didn't either for long after he was grounded every weekend for two months after that.

In corporate April Fool's Day fashion, Woolworths posted that it was going to release a cosmetic line with its famous confection *Chuckles*. In a joke social media post, Woolworths wrote, "Two iconic Woolies brands, WBeauty and Chuckles, have partnered to bring you a limited-edition range of bath and beauty treats. Arriving soon at a store near you." Commenters were quick to point out that this was an April Fool's joke, as this isn't the first time Woolworths has attempted to trick the public in this way.

In 2022, Woolworths announced that it would be combining its two most famous items to create Rotisserie Chicken-flavoured Chuckles. "We're excited to announce our newest Chuckles creation - Rotisserie Chicken-flavoured Chuckles!" wrote the brand on Twitter, saying, "Think malt balls infused with delectable rotisserie chicken flavour, enrobed in rich, creamy milk chocolate. Slightly savoury, complemented by deliciously sweet... It's a winner!" Packaging was drawn up, and consumers were rightly horrified by the prospect. Twitter was ablaze at the awfulness of a roast chicken-flavoured puff enrobed in chocolate, however on Facebook, commenters were in on the joke, and laughed at the prospect.

Lucky Star Pilchards tweeted on 1 April 2024 that it would be releasing a new limited-edition vanilla custard-infused pilchards, and that it would be expanding its dessert selection. While many online caught onto the fact that it was a joke, many tweeted in disgust that they wouldn't be trying this new treat, with one user replying with a GIF of a baby vomiting.

Similarly, in 2019, sweets maker Mister Sweet posted on its Facebook page that it would be discontinuing the fan favourite *Speckled Eggs* which the company had created. The post, seeming official, caused distress to all who saw the post. The comment section was filled with customers angry that it would be discontinuing the brand's most popular sweet.

*not his real name

Mayfair a one-way street of Israel hatred

SAUL KAMIONSKY

You may have driven along Johannesburg roads like Vilakazi Street and Beyers Naudé Drive, named after a distinguished Zulu poet and Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist respectively. Now, you can drive on Palestinian Street, as Krause Street in Mayfair, Johannesburg, has been nicknamed.

About 50 graffiti messages that are pro-Palestine or anti-Israel have been painted on the wall along this street. The messages include "Israel has no history – only a criminal record", and "Barbaric apartheid Israel

kills women and children to steal Palestine land!"

"It's terrible," says SA Jewish Report photographer Ilan Ossendryver. He came across the graffiti as he often goes to Mayfair to buy spices. "Mayfair used to have a shul and was a very Jewish area, so I also drive there to look around," Ossendryver says.

He says the graffiti appears to have been painted recently with Royal Paints paint, and the painters might be a group of people from Fordsburg who were doing a lot of street signage.

Craig Pantanowitz, the deputy chairperson of the South African

Zionist Federation, says the paintings "promote a one-sided narrative that ignores the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Painting Israel as a villain while disregarding the historical context and the legitimate security concerns faced by the nation, and ignoring the crimes of Hamas and the plight of the hostages undermines efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict and the end of Hamas rule over Gaza.

"As residents of Johannesburg, we must stand together against hatred and intolerance in all its forms. We must unequivocally condemn the vandalism and dissemination of anti-Israel propaganda on our



Krause Street (nicknamed Palestinian Street) in Mayfair

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

streets. Instead, as a community, we must redouble our efforts to alert the world to the dangers of this extremism for Jews, South Africans, and the entire world."

There has been overt support for Palestine in Mayfair before. In November last year, Mayfair residents organised an event to promote unity in the community and create awareness and raise funds for the Palestinian cause, according to broadcaster Salaamedia.

As of 2014, Palestinian pastries at King Arabic Sandwiches in Mayfair were selling well. This bakery was opened by a Palestinian couple who arrived in Johannesburg from the al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza. One of their offerings was iced petits fours emblazoned with the Palestinian flag.

Pantanowitz says suburban Johannesburg streets have become "the unfortunate canvas for a disturbing display of anti-Israel sentiment. Posters and

messages, laden with vitriol and misinformation, have been plastered across public spaces, spreading hateful rhetoric and fuelling tension. Such actions not only undermine efforts towards peace and understanding, but perpetuate division and hostility within the South African community."

Johannesburg isn't the first province to jump on the pro-Palestine art bandwagon. In Durban, the Durban Wall of Existence on the corners of Currie and Springfield roads is another mural expressing solidarity with Palestine. It was unveiled by members of African Artists Against Apartheid, KZN Palestine Solidarity Forum, and SA Muslim Network.

In Cape Town, a Palestinian flag is painted across a block of 20 to 25 flats in Astana Street, Bo-Kaap, the product of a team of artists and residents who painted it ahead of Reconciliation Day last year. It's reportedly the largest among several murals painted across homes

in the picturesque Bo-Kaap in a community solidarity campaign titled "Murals for Gaza".

The Palestine Chronicle quoted organiser Obeidullah Gierdien as saying, "Flags tear and weather, people march, but you can march for only so many hours, but a mural is something that can be destroyed only when someone actively destroys it. Other than that, a mural is here to stay."

One mural there depicts a timeline of "the history of the occupied land, beginning with the birth of Zionism through to the Balfour Declaration, the Nakba, the Intifada, up to the present day".

In 2018, the SA Jewish Report reported that Bo-Kaap activists compared their struggle to retain the area's heritage to the Palestinian struggle, and Mandla Mandela addressed the Bo-Kaap Youth Movement about showing support for Palestine in the area and making it "a no-go zone for all apartheid Israel products".

'We came as Christians, left as witnesses'

OPINION

PEARL KUPE



My interest in the Israeli-Palestinian-Gaza matter intensified after the South African government reported the state of Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Unbeknownst to many, the South African government's stance on Israel isn't widely supported by the majority of its citizens, and its perspective doesn't reflect the view of those on the ground.

A recent survey commissioned by the Women's Action Campaign SA shows that 79% of South Africans believe that Hamas is a terrorist group that must be reported for war crimes. It boggles the mind, therefore, how Israel can be reported for defending and protecting her citizens post 7 October 2023, while Hamas isn't taken to task for its attack on Israel.

As a lawyer and legal scholar, I was concerned that the decision of the ICJ could have negative implications for nations around the world. As an international organisation, the ICJ should never set a precedent that will disempower nations from defending themselves from terrorist attacks, ultimately supporting terrorism.

The ICJ has a duty to align with all international laws and policies that support anti-terrorism, which is something I asserted publicly in a YouTube video before the hearing at The Hague.

On Wednesday, 21 March, I was fortunate to be part of a 14-member South African Christian delegation that flew to Israel on a peace mission with prominent and influential political and religious leaders, which was organised

by DiploAct, a non-government organisation dedicated to combatting antisemitism, and SAFI (the South African Friends of Israel).

Proponents of the pro-Palestine Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement



Members of the South African Christian delegation at the Kotel in Jerusalem

and Hamas have been vocal about painting Israel as an apartheid state. The root of apartheid is discrimination and racism. It was interesting, therefore, for our group to make several pertinent observations during our visit.

After spending time with the speaker of the Knesset, Amir Ohana, we made the eye-opening discovery that the Knesset has Arab and Palestinian members. A question that ran through my mind was, "How could a nation that was described as being an apartheid state so freely accommodate individuals of a different faith, origin, and belief in its parliament?"

I also wondered how many Arab nations could boast about having Jewish members within their parliamentary structures and systems.

We were also privileged to visit the Save a Child's

Heart organisation, an Israeli-based international non-profit organisation with the mission of improving the quality of paediatric cardiac care. The centre helps children from all over the world who suffer from congenital heart defects, and trains doctors from various nations to help deal with such cases.

It was again interesting to find that the centre has a policy of non-discrimination, treating children from all nations with congenital heart defects, including Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims. Again, I asked myself the question, "How could a nation which is allegedly an apartheid state be treating children of all ethnicities and nationalities, including Palestinian children?"

We drove to the border of Gaza, and visited the Nova festival site where the 7 October massacre by Hamas took place. Hundreds of cars were set on fire. Occupants who tried to flee the scene were burnt alive in their cars. Ambulance staff who tried to help were also blocked and killed in violation of international war regulations. In southern Israel, babies were beheaded by Hamas terrorists. The scenes were too traumatic to describe, and the delegation was moved to tears.

We also visited the Nir Oz kibbutz to hear first-hand testimony from survivors. The delegation was shown around by Rita, who owes her life to the fact that she was away from the kibbutz at the time of the attack. The delegation witnessed the desolation of the attack site, with bullet riddled homes. Many of the homes were burnt down, and some of their occupants taken hostage.

We also visited Hostages Square, which is in a public plaza located in front of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The delegation heard first-hand testimony of individuals whose relatives were killed in horrific ways, kidnapped, and raped. Campaigns are being held at the square to urge the international community to call for the release of the hostages.

South Africa would do better to spend the hundreds of millions of rands squandered on the ICJ case on resolving serious local issues such as loadshedding and poverty-related problems, rather than continue with this farce.

As a group, we agreed with the popular saying that, "We didn't go as tourists, but as pilgrims. We went as Christians, but left as witnesses," and will continue to be witnesses in this regard.

Truth must be told. Hamas is a terrorist organisation that uses its own citizens, including women and children, as human shields. It continuously disregards international policies and rules of war. Any support for Hamas makes the supporter complicit in terrorism.

Israel has the know-how and experience to defeat Hamas, and must be given the opportunity to do so. The world must gather to guard against the "demonisation, delegitimisation, and double standards" that are being brought against Israel.

Am Yisrael Chai!

• Pearl Kupe is an attorney, and one of the leaders of the South African Christian Leaders Forum.



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Suicide's cruel toll on those left behind

LEE TANKLE

The loved ones left behind after suicide often have more questions than answers, said Liane Lurie, a Johannesburg clinical psychologist and Carin Marcus, a clinical social worker and logotherapist, at a Chevrah Kadisha talk on 13 March about processing the pain of loss.

Using their combined more than 25 years of experience, Lurie and Marcus spoke to a community shattered by the losses from suicide in recent months, touching on elements of shame, grief, and anger.

For the family left behind, the innumerable number of conceptualisations of "whys" may do little to soothe their shattered hearts, said Lurie. "And they ask, 'Why wasn't I good enough for them to stick around?' 'Why didn't they reach out to me and tell me what was wrong?' 'Why didn't they allow me to pull them out of the deepest, darkest recesses of their mind?' These are some of the thoughts, fixations, ruminations, and emotions that run recurrently through their mind," Lurie said.

"The worst critic in this space of bereavement is the bereaved themselves," Marcus said. "The game of 'what if' is the cruellest game you're ever going to play, because you're playing against yourself. You can ask, 'What if I did this?', 'What if I did that?', or 'What if I had done this?' There's no answer to the 'what ifs'. One has to journey through that space of asking 'what if' because it's then you realise there isn't an answer. Only then can one move into the 'what now'. And very often, it's a case of the person saying, 'But, even if I had, I know I would still be sitting here because I'm not G-d, and I don't have G-d's direct number.'"

Lurie said the truth about suicide "may prove unsettling because people ultimately have autonomy, they have independence. And they are the only ones who know when life is no longer liveable".

In the past, there was such a stigma attached to suicide that when someone took their own life, people would use euphemistic terms like "he had lead poisoning", "he committed a hose pipe", or "they fell down the stairs" to shield people from the truth, according to Lurie.

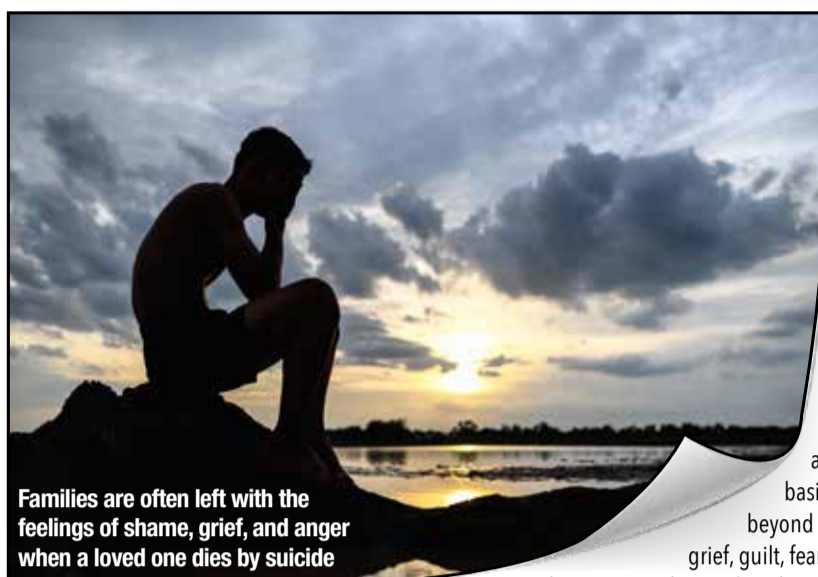
"In the same vein, families were often told to lie to friends and younger family members about the reality of what had happened. But when we were old enough to understand the true meaning of suicide, we were then conditioned to believe that it wasn't a choice, that it was some form of manipulation. Thereby, we were unable to find the gating, the genuine pain, distress, chronic emptiness, and often invisible illness plaguing the individual before they died."

The use of these euphemisms reinforces a family's sense of shame, they said.

They delved into the emotional crises that families grieving death by suicide battle through, saying, "After somebody has lost someone to suicide, there are those who can offer compassion, empathy, and support without the intellectual need to understand why. Conversely, there are those for whom the intellectual need for 'why' short-circuits their capacity for compassion and empathy."

"Each person's grief is like a fingerprint. No two people's grief is ever the same. So, as much as people might share common features of loss, no two losses will ever be the same."

Lurie told a story about her first



Families are often left with the feelings of shame, grief, and anger when a loved one dies by suicide

experience of a completed suicide when she was doing her internship. She described a vivacious young girl in a psych ward on suicide watch who had spoken of hope and plans for her future. The next day, when she arrived for her shift, she was notified that this girl had died

of suicide at 23:00 the night before. "I remember feeling sick and devastated, and I was debriefed and sent home. But as bewildered as I was, this wasn't about me. This was about a family for whom this wasn't an event they would just get over. Because it's a loss that's incurred repeatedly. And it's felt acutely on a day-to-day basis, the trauma of which is beyond comprehension. Shock, grief, guilt, fear of blame, self-doubt, shame, anger, betrayal, and profound anguish are some of the emotions that therapists, family members, friends, and community members experience upon learning that somebody has taken their own life. It's described as the single most significant event in a family's life, in a professional's life or career," said Lurie.

Said Marcus, "Often we blame ourselves because it's easier to feel we have control over something than to feel helpless. So, when we don't have control, we say to ourselves, 'If I had taken him sooner, if I had taken the gun out of his room, if I had taken the pills...' It's easier to blame ourselves than to leave it in a space of helplessness because it makes us feel more in control. But it's such a cruel narrative. And that's often what we're working with. You couldn't have known this. We don't have crystal balls."

"Our well-intentioned selves don't want to see people suffer. So, we quickly look for the silver lining, try to answer the 'why' question, or give answers. People are quick to say, 'But at least he's not suffering' or 'Luckily, he lived to a good age' and I often think we'd rather have him here sometimes suffering or at a ripe old age. We're never at an age enough to let go of people that we love. And often in suicide, too, we tend to want to find a silver lining for people. It's cruel. It's almost implying that there's a silver lining at that moment. That silver lining cannot be given to another person. It's got to be found through the journey of grief by the person. And we've got to be able to walk alongside that person to find a way in which they can make meaning of their loss."

Hard road to parent children with autism

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Parents of children diagnosed with autism often walk a lonely road. As we mark Autism Awareness Month, we chat to two mothers about the often-devastating condition.

"You're dealing with a child who needs constant attention and care. There's absolutely no reprieve. You're exhausted, you're sad. Yet, kindness from family, friends, and even strangers goes a long way to alleviating the pressures of an extraordinarily hard life," says Jacqui Miller, whose firstborn son Jude, now 11, has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a group of developmental disabilities that can cause a wide array of significant social, communication, and behavioural challenges.

These are defined in terms of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM-5. "They look at language, social, and repetitive behaviour, and make an autism diagnosis," says Ilana Gerschowitz, the author of *Saving my Sons: A Journey with Autism*, and the director of the Star Academy, which provides programmes for children on the autism spectrum as well as those with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) or any developmental delay.

Gerschowitz argues that with the absorption of Asperger's syndrome into the definition of ASD, the spectrum of autism has become too broad. "You can have a high functioning individual who can go to school, hold down a job, and get married on the one end, and then on the other, you have a completely non-vocal individual, somebody now labelled with what we call 'profound autism'."

For example, Jude is classified as having apraxia of speech, a neurological disorder that affects the brain pathways involved in producing speech. "Jude communicates through pictures and sounds on his iPad and with gestures such as pointing to or taking us to what he needs," says Miller. She recently wrote a book called *Hey Jude*, a cathartic experience that helped her to promote kindness in the face of struggle.

"Not being able to have a conversation with Jude is tremendously difficult, and breaks our hearts every day," says Miller, "but you develop a relationship based on true and pure love. When Jude is feeling sad, he tells us by hugging us deeply. We have to learn daily to try and understand his every emotion. This, in a way, has brought us to a closeness that's so unique and strong, it's almost indescribable." Yet this journey was the hardest thing she has had to endure, she says, which is why community support is so important.

While initially neurotypical, Jude withdrew into himself at about 22 months. "He had reached all of his milestones and in fact was ahead of some of his kids in his play groups," Miller recalls. "Then, he contracted a virus called Kawasaki disease, and this either brought on his limitations or he was predisposed to ASD, and the virus brought it out."

Indeed, says Gerschowitz, children who develop autism have vulnerable genetics. "When their genetics come into contact with environmental triggers including certain food, water, air, infection, and toxins, those

things act as a match that lights a pile of wood that makes a fire. Autism is the fire."

With dramatically rising rates of diagnosis, attributed to an increasingly toxic environment, finding the right treatment is more vital than ever, says Gerschowitz. "At the Star Academy, we use a teaching method called applied behaviour analysis [ABA], the only evidence-based treatment for children with autism. It identifies missing developmental skills and focuses on designing lesson programmes to teach acquisition of these skills and reduce challenging behaviours."

Though Gerschowitz says it's never too late to start the right treatment, early intervention sets the stage for the best outcome. In some cases, it brings about recovery, where a child is indistinguishable from his peers and is in mainstream schooling.

"Some children may be high functioning and with the right intervention, could land up at a mainstream school and be successful. With others who are more affected, we work towards their independence and functionality." Gerschowitz herself has experienced these diverse outcomes with two of her three sons.

"My oldest son, David, is 21 years old, and he's profoundly autistic," she says. "He has the kind of autism not portrayed in series or movies. The worst kind of autism, the kind that takes your breath away and changes you forever. For us and many other parents, this is our reality. Not, the 'my child is a gift' autism they love to talk about, or 'my child who sees the world differently' kind of autism we apparently must 'accept'. I don't accept anything. And I certainly don't celebrate autism."

"My heart breaks for all the families who suffer because autism stole from us – our children's health, their voice, and their functionality. The cricket matches and soccer tournaments and playdates and school uniforms." According to a research paper published in America, parents raising children on the spectrum have higher anxiety levels than a combat veteran, she says.

That's why Gerschowitz started the Star Academy, initially born of research into tackling David's condition. Though David hasn't recovered, ABA improved his functionality, empowering him to communicate his basic needs on an iPad and gain quality of life by working in a kitchen that helps to feed the homeless.

Her youngest son, now 11 and treated with a customised ABA programme early on, has been re-diagnosed as no longer having autism. "He's a miracle," she says. "When he was two or three years old, we were fighting for speech, for functionality, for language. We got our boy back, and I'm so grateful to Hashem."

Gerschowitz urges parents facing such a diagnosis to "keep finding ways to keep their hope alive". If your child isn't responding well to a treatment or therapist, find another one, she says. If they're battling at school, move them.

In her book, Miller says she and her husband will never give up hope. "There are days where I feel I could just run away, but that will never happen. We'll continue to fight this fight. Our gloves are on."



Ilana Gerschowitz with her son David



Wayne, Taye, Jacqui, and Jude Miller

The cancer warrior who connected a community

PERSONAL STORY

MICHELLE GOODMAN



The world is holding its breath on hearing that heir to the British throne, Prince William's, wife, Kate, has been diagnosed with cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy, but we know receiving such a diagnosis is like being thrown into a storm with no shelter in sight.

But what happens when you're not the one at the centre of the storm, but standing on the sidelines, watching seemingly powerlessly as someone you love battles the elements?

How do you cope knowing that your child will have to go through intense medical treatment, multiple hospital stays, surgeries, and never-ending poking and prodding? The honest answer is that you never accept it, but unfortunately, you learn to cope with this new way of life, and you fight with everything you have because there's no alternative.

Our precious daughter, Devorah Leah, was diagnosed at the age of 33. Her kids were two and three years old at the time. She was always the sunshine of our family, her laughter echoing through our home like a melody. When she was diagnosed, it felt like the sun had suddenly been snuffed out, leaving us in darkness.

Devorah Leah, in her typical selfless manner, tried to shield us from the full extent of her struggle, putting on a brave face. But behind closed doors, I'm sure, the facade crumbled, revealing the raw pain and anguish she was trying so desperately to conceal. We were also trying to conceal our fear and uncertainty.

Her siblings and friends tried to be there for her in any way they could, offering words of comfort and acts of kindness to lift her spirits. But there were moments when we were unable to ease her suffering, which left us feeling helpless.

At the time of her illness, our family was struggling just to get through the day, just grappling for any form of hope, be it input from friends or family, supplements that may have been suggested, alternative treatments, or just kind words. When the focus of our day became just "keeping our daughter, sister, mother, and wife alive", we would do anything and everything to do so, but it became overwhelming.

And then, at the moment when hope seemed distant, Devorah Leah initiated something that would change the lives of cancer warriors forever. She felt how overwhelmed she and her family had become, and believed that the existence of one place, one centre, to get everything one needs at this time, could help patient,

family, and caregivers. It inspired the DL Link, a support group for individuals and families affected by cancer. It was Devorah Leah's way of turning her pain into purpose, of reaching a hand to others who were walking a similar path.



Princess Kate announcing that she has been diagnosed with cancer

Photo: Screenshot

Of course, when we were given the answer we didn't really hope for, we knew this was what we now needed to do for our Devorah Leah.

As the mom of a cancer warrior, my way of coping was to hold on to my faith, to daven to Hashem every day, as I knew in my heart that whatever the outcome, it wasn't up to us. The only thing I was in control of was what was in front of me at that time: five other kids – Devorah Leah's siblings – to support, as well as her toddlers and her husband, who wasn't able to focus completely on his job.

I had to stop working, and became a full-time caregiver, nurse, mother, and grandmother. I had to fight with the medical aid to pass certain procedures, deal with the doctors, and get second and third opinions, even from across the world, at the same time dealing with a difficult financial situation as there were so many extra expenses.

It was only my belief in G-d and my strong will to keep my family afloat that carried me through.

Years later, I heard how Andreas Efthymiou and his family were living on the quiet outskirts of Lusaka, when their tranquil existence was shattered when his wife, Avlon, noticed two worrying growths at the base of their son, Stelio's, neck. This was back in December 2021.

What initially seemed innocuous soon spiralled into a nightmare as these small

marble-sized balls swiftly expanded in size. The Efthymiou family passed through the corridors of six hospitals in Zambia within a fortnight, grappling with uncertainty and fear.

Andreas later told us that on

18 December that year, they received a phone call from the doctor saying that Stelio had cancer. "They urged us to go to South Africa right away," he said. "So, on Monday, we packed up our lives, and by Tuesday morning, we were in South Africa – a story marked by love, resilience, and the cruel grasp of illness."

"Our journey took an unexpected turn when Simone Lockstone, a dear friend from my work at a local real estate company, introduced us to DL Link. Simone spoke of DL Link with such reverence, describing its people as angels who walk among us, bringing solace and support to those in need."

I recall how Stelio's mom would remind him every day how brave and strong he was and, above all, loved. I could see how she gave him the courage to face his battles head on. I witnessed her overlooking her own needs

in the relentless fight against his illness. We saw how she needed our support just as much as Stelio did.

You see, as Andreas said, "The journey and treatment is very long. After 18 months, I was swaying on my feet with exhaustion. It's a journey that tests the limits of endurance, physically and emotionally for warriors and their caregivers."

"In the paediatric oncology wing of the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre, we found ourselves surrounded by individuals fighting different battles against cancer," Andreas said. "In spite of the diversity of our struggle, we found solace and strength in one another. Conversation in the corridors, WhatsApp messages exchanged in the dead of night, and simple smiles between weary parents became our pillars of support."

I'm so grateful that Andreas and his family were led to us to help them. Just by helping them and so many others every day, I keep alive my beautiful daughter's memory and her passion for life.

I understand what Prince William and his family are going through. It's harrowing, but like others in our community, it's important to reach out for help and support from those who understand. You'll be surprised how much they want to help you.

• Michelle Goodman is the founder and chief executive of DL Link, an organisation that does whatever it can for people fighting cancer and their families.

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Monday 8 April

- Chabad Longevity Club hosts *Memory Enhancement Brain Games* with Cynthia Liptz. Time: 09:30. Contact: 011 440 6600 or rak@chabad.org.za

Tuesday 9 April

- ORT SA hosts a talk by Ian Mann on *Strategy that Works*. Time: 17:30. Contact: 011 728 7154 or admin@ortjet.org.za

Wednesday 10 April

- WIZO Johannesburg hosts a talk by a leading expert in child abuse. Time: 18:00. Cost: R200. Contact: wizojohannesburg011@gmail.com
- Chabad Longevity Club hosts *Medical Q&A* with a talk by Dr Adam Stern on *Mindfulness - Being in the Moment and Reducing Stress*. Time: 12:30. Contact: rak@chabad.org.za

Sunday 14 April

- Second Innings hosts a musical performance by Kevy G and Adam Pelkowitz. Time: 09:45. Cost: R60 (R30 members). Contact: 082 561 3228



Wildlife with gold taps – travel blog goes places

LEE TANKLE

What started as a way for former 702 radio presenter and travel blogger David Batzofin to create a portfolio for his travel writing 14 years ago has become an internationally recognised travel blog.



David Batzofin in a shul in Marrakesh, Morocco

Batzofin's blog, *Travel and Things* won Best Travel and Experience Blog – South Africa 2024 from British digital lifestyle magazine, *LUXLife* on 29 March.

The magazine covers all aspects of a high-end lifestyle including the finest food and drink, hotels and resorts, health and beauty, automotive, jewellery, art, and technology worldwide.

It wasn't a case of submitting his portfolio to be considered for the award, Batzofin said. "To the best of my knowledge, they found me. It's great because it gives me access to 92 000 people that I didn't have access to last week. It makes me believe that my work is being seen and appreciated by people who don't know me."

For winning the award, Batzofin was given a special badge of honour to put on his website, acknowledging his winning status. Though this is his first international award, he won best travel blog in the South African Blog Awards in 2019.

Batzofin started *Travel and Things* as a way for the articles he had written about his various travels to have a second life. "I have been writing for 20 years, and I wanted a second bite of the cherry," Batzofin said.

While working at 702, one of Batzofin's colleagues, Kate Turkington, was looking for travel writers and he suggested himself to her. "She said, 'I know you can speak, because I've heard you on the radio, but can you write?' I wrote her an article on a meal that I had at a restaurant in Pretoria, sent it off to her, and I got an email back saying, 'Is your suitcase packed? You leave tomorrow,'" said Batzofin.

The lust for travel and wildlife began for Batzofin when he was 13 years old and his father gave him a trip to the Kruger National Park for his Barmitzva. So it makes sense that a lot of the work Batzofin does with *Travel and Things* revolves around wildlife and game lodges, although he never intended it to be that way.

"Although the blog is wildlife heavy, it's not solely wildlife. Writing about wildlife is just what I'm passionate about. There are other destinations on the blog – beach destinations, international destinations, bush destinations, and island destinations. Cruises that we've been on and that we're hoping to go back to next year. There's all of that."

"There's something for everybody. There are book reviews, gear reviews, anything that crosses my desk that I find vaguely interesting, I'll do something about," he said.

While in Morocco recently, he was able to get a slice of Jewish life by visiting shuls there. "When we were in Marrakesh, we discovered a shul that had survived the earthquake a couple of years ago while a lot of the surrounding buildings were broken or flattened. This is the most amazing thing. The building right next door was flattened, yet

the shul is standing. And then, at the hotel, we were staying in, I met my first Moroccan Jew. We had a long chat, and he told me about his rabbi and his family.

"In Chefchaouen, we found the Jewish quarter," Batzofin said. "We didn't find any Jewish people because there are very few left. There were about a quarter of a million Jews

in Morocco at one stage. There are less than 2 000 now. Most of them went to Israel."

Batzofin said wherever he is at a particular moment is the best place he has visited. "Everything has something to offer, whether it's a high-end lodge where you're paying R40 000 a night to watch wildlife, or if you're staying in a tent. Either way, you're watching the same animals."

Batzofin described an occasion when he was travelling with two other journalists who were staying at a luxury game lodge, with luxury amenities like gold taps, while he wasn't staying anywhere fancy, yet all three saw the same wildlife. "I don't believe in gold taps because I want to be out of my room. I want to be out on a game drive or a walk so that I can enjoy nature," he said.

However, Madikwe Game Reserve in North West province on the Botswana border is Batzofin's favourite local destination, where he has stayed at 15 of the 22 camps. "The game is spectacular. You've got everything you could hope to see there. And it's closer than the Kruger National Park. It's just less than a four-hour drive from Johannesburg."

Like many travellers, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the operation of *Travel and Things*. "I became a non-travelling travel writer. It kept me sane. I'm lucky in that I'm both the writer and the photographer for my blog. And I always overshoot. So if somebody takes one picture of something, I'll take 10 pictures of the same thing. During the pandemic, I went into my archives and was able to write about places using archival footage and images that I had."

In addition to his written blog, he started a YouTube channel called *In Conversation With*, also on his website. "Going back to my days as a radio presenter, I just tapped into my little black book and found people who were as bored as I was. I interviewed them about a whole variety of topics, everything from authors to comedians to fellow travel writers to theatre people, you name it," he said.

To see his blog and website for yourself, go to www.travelandthings.co.za

Heartfelt cookbook gets to tooth of the matter

JESSICA CONNÉ

It was a birthday link to a website containing information by the Rebbe (Menachem Mendel Schneerson) that led South African-born Dr Linda Greenwall to give back in the best way she knew how – dentistry.

Then, a pandemic led her to fulfil another dream – that of writing a Jewish cookbook.

The former event took place 10 years ago, after she had moved from Cape Town to the United Kingdom. "It was a significant birthday when a friend sent me a link to a website containing information by the Rebbe on what you should do on your Hebrew birthday and how you should use your life to make the world a better place.

"So I sat down and thought about how I wanted to do that. I decided it was time to set up a charity to help children from a dental point of view to improve children's oral health globally."

Linda's grandfather and father were both dentists. Her husband and her son are dentists too. So, it made sense that she gave through this vocation. A decade ago, she set up the Dental Wellness Foundation in Cape Town and the Dental Wellness Trust in London.

She then set up a programme called LiveSmart, which facilitates supervised tooth brushing in Cape Town. The LiveSmart programme runs in various schools, Early Childhood Development Centres, crèches and nurseries, and facilitates supervised toothbrushing for more than 21 000 children.

"We have 16 amazing women called Toothbrush Mamas who provide oral health advice and education to children in the townships," Greenwall said. "The Toothbrush Mamas in the townships also supervise the running of 12 soup kitchens. These soup kitchens were started during the COVID-19 pandemic, and each kitchen feeds more than 100 children per day.

"Dental care is vital," she said. "Many children miss school because they are suffering from toothache and abscesses. The decay rates of Cape Town are some of the highest in South Africa. About 85% of children have decay. If they do have decay, 85% of their teeth are rotten due to sugar consumption, poor diet, lack of knowledge, and not being able to afford a toothbrush or toothpaste.

"Last time we did outreach, in October 2023, there was a child suffering from foetal alcohol

syndrome," Greenwall said. "At the age of 12, she had all her upper teeth – baby teeth and grown-up teeth – and was in terrible pain. We were able to give her the treatment she needed. She also said she was hungry. So, the Toothbrush Mama in the area helped her with this."

Because of the LiveSmart programme and food kitchens that run in the townships of Cape Town, Linda visits Cape Town every three months to make sure the programmes are running efficiently and effectively.

While giving back dentally is

as a recipe book, while others use it as an inspirational storybook of everyday heroes and the challenges they had. Everyone has a story in them, and the recipe and story are closely linked, giving an inspirational insight into people's lives.

"The book's audience is those who remember family time with their loved ones and special occasions such as Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, and Shabbat. And it's for all of those in the South African Jewish community who come from Lithuania and share a common heritage.



Dr Linda Greenwall

something she's driven to do, during the pandemic, she turned her sights on another passion – Jewish food.

During lockdown in London, Greenwall found a cheesecake recipe that her grandmother had put at the back of an envelope for Shavuot. "I thought about how our grandmothers had challenging, difficult lives. Through their cooking, they shared their Jewish values, love, the importance of family, and the connection to the next generation."

This inspired Linda to write *Food Memories – The Cookbook*. "I've written four other books, all about dentistry. My research area was in tooth whitening. This was my first book on Jewish food. It's a passion and hobby. It took me three years to research, interview people, and collate the history of our family," she says.

"The book was written with love to collate the stories of everyday heroes who had challenging and inspiring lives. Some people use the book purely

"The most meaningful part of writing the book was understanding what our great-grandparents gave up and suffered to provide for their families in times when food and money was scarce," Greenwall says. "Challenging times included pogroms and going on long journeys by sea to get to South Africa. The writing down of the recipe is part of the Jewish tradition and culture of showing love through food."

"It's important to remember where you come from to know where you're going. The food that we've eaten over generations is our heritage. It's the difficult journeys taken across continents to keep families together."

The book includes a dedicated chapter to becoming sugar free – which Greenwall points out is a major cause of tooth decay. All the proceeds go to the Dental Wellness Foundation to support 21 000 children, 12 soup kitchens, as well as the LiveSmart programmes in schools in Mfuleni, Khayelitsha, and Delft.

Krugersdorp Shul invites you for Shabbos

Krugersdorp Shul is alive and well on the West Rand, so if you're from the area – and even if you're not – don't hesitate to visit us!" says Marc Kopman, the chairperson of the United Hebrew Institutions of Krugersdorp.

The community, founded more than 130 years ago in 1894, might be small in number, but it's committed to keeping Jewish life active for the body of about 40 people in the suburb of Monument.

The rich and colourful history of the shul, which peaked at a community of 1 200 in the 1960s, lives on with a Shabbat minyan – or whenever someone has a yahrzeit – followed by a *brocha*, and the celebration of all *chaggim* and high holy days.



Members of the Krugersdorp community celebrating Purim

King David schools hit the track for hostages

Exactly 179 days since the war in Israel broke out on 7 October 2023, the King David Grade 7s took part in the Run for the Hostages race on Tuesday, 2 April, to show solidarity with the hostages. Students from King David Linksfield, Sandton, Victory Park, and Ariel gathered on the King David Sandton campus, where Craig Nerwich told them about his recent trip to Israel as well as his swim across the English Channel. Following the talk, students and staff members, dressed in their yellow "Am Yisrael Chai #Bringthemhome" T-shirts, completed an 18-minute run or walk around a designated track, creating an atmosphere of solidarity, strength, and unity.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Time to stand up

Our "call-up papers" didn't arrive by mail. They didn't reach us in a phone call, or by way of a community announcement. Nor did we receive them at the same time. Some of us were notified early, and for others, it has taken a little longer. But by April 2024, every connected Jew knew that they were responsible. Our grandparents, great-grandparents, children, and grandchildren have reached out to us. With a clear and urgent message. Letting us know that we're all on shift.

I've changed my mind. On 8 and 9 October, I was asked by a few people if they should stand up publicly for Israel. The answer I gave was a qualified one. I said that "this week", when sympathy is with Israel and with Jews, to stand up is relatively easy. But "next week", when Israel retaliates, it will be a lot less simple. I suggested that if their livelihood would be impacted, they should support in other, less public, ways. I thought that this situation, like others, would pass in a matter of weeks, and that they needed to consider the impact it would have on them and their families.

I might have been right then. But I'm dead wrong today.

We couldn't have anticipated it, we might not want to acknowledge it, but the reality is that Jews in 2024 know in their souls that we're on the frontline. Our generation has been "called up" to defend our people and others who might not yet realise they're next. Camouflage might have worked in the past, but won't serve us now.

If 7 October illuminated anything, it's that the world was already a tinder box of antisemitic hatred in need of a spark. And that if an invasion of Israel by 3 000 Hamas terrorists who filmed and celebrated their brutality wasn't enough to illustrate who wants who dead, then sadly nothing ever will. No amount of reasoning will bridge the gap of cognitive dissonance when the rationale is the loathing of our people.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



And nothing will protect us from that. It's far from simple. Jewish chief executives are responsible to their staff, their shareholders, and their customers. Public personalities have painstakingly built brands that might not have a Jewish or Israel element, and academics and sportsman might have little interest in Middle Eastern politics or even their own religion. But just as the residents of the Gaza Envelope didn't choose to become victims of the Hamas attack, so there's no longer an option but to stand up and speak up.

Because it's no longer a choice. One of my favourite biblical stories takes place at the edge of the Red Sea. The Children of Israel have left Egypt, only to hear that the army is pursuing them. In front of them is the sea, behind them, closing fast, are those who will slaughter them. The traumatised nation is horrified. Moses instructs them to walk forward into the water. But they're afraid. Until one guy, Nachshon ben Aminadav, takes the brave steps forward. And only then when he's in up to his neck does the sea finally split.

Nachshon had faith. Not just in G-d, but in himself. It took courage and belief to understand that he had been called up. And the certainty of knowing that he could make a difference. Now was his turn.

I felt confident about the advice that I gave on 8 and 9 October as it was based on what I considered to be a rational response to a complex situation. Only it never was complex. And it certainly isn't rational. It's simple hatred for Jews based on one of the oldest prejudices in the world, which means now it's our shift. Because each of us, like the Nachshons before us, can split the sea.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Hell's Kitchen

The loss of innocent lives has been especially heartbreaking during the seemingly endless war against Hamas in Gaza, and the deaths of the World Central Kitchen volunteers this week was unbearably painful and tragic. Providing humanitarian aid in a war zone is an enormously brave and critically important function. We also remember how in addition to helping Palestinian civilians caught up in combat areas, these people provided meals to the hundreds of thousands of Israelis vulnerable and displaced by the conflict. My deepest condolences go to their families and loved ones on their terrible loss. The hostages must be returned now to bring an end to this war and prevent further such tragedies.

Regardless of which side they may be on, the death of innocents in wartime is something that all humane people deeply regret. The perennial challenge of the civilised world is to do everything possible to prevent such conflicts from occurring in the first place, and failing that, to at least minimise as much as possible the harm to which non-combatants are exposed to. What we have seen, however, is that all too often, such tragedies have instead been consistently exploited in order to engage in atrocity mongering against Israel and its supporters around the world. Instead of seeking peaceful solutions aimed at ending the suffering they purport to deplore, such lobbies look to extract maximum political capital out of it for the purposes of demonising, defaming, and isolating the Jewish state.

The media is one of the main battlegrounds in which these issues are being continually fought over. Over the past nearly six months, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, working closely with our colleagues from the South African Zionist Federation and others, has been almost continually in the trenches responding to the myriad distorted and unbalanced attacks on Israel that have all but saturated mainstream and social media. However toxic the environment, it's a challenge that we

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



have no intention of backing away from. This is especially true when, as is very often the case, anti-Israel rhetoric crosses over into out-and-out antisemitism.

Since 7 October, the Board has, among other things, given hundreds of interviews; published scores of opinion pieces; issued dozens of statements; and strenuously engaged with editors, journalists, and other opinion makers to ensure that our community's voice is heard. Most recently, Communications Head Charisse Zeifert led a fact-finding visit to Israel by a group of local journalists. Charisse has successfully headed up many such visits over the years, but never before under such exceptionally difficult circumstances. Participants were taken on guided trips to the war-ravaged south of Israel, and up north to the Lebanese border to learn at first hand what's happening on the ground.

Our responses have not, of course, been limited to the media. Sometimes, it has been necessary to react to specific attacks against our community that truly cross the line. One such incident occurred earlier this week, when as part of what purported to be an "art project", a student at the University of Cape Town defaced a Holocaust memorial plaque, scratching out the words "Auschwitz-Birkenau" and writing the word "Israel" on top of "Nazis". The Board worked with the South African Union of Jewish Students in issuing an appropriate response to this outrage, which by invoking the atrocities of the Holocaust in this context went beyond simply falsifying history for ideological purposes to a deliberate attempt to cause maximum hurt and offence to Jewish people. We continue to follow up with the university to ascertain what took place, and why it was allowed to happen.

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

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

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Caleb Levitan to represent SA in chess 'world cup'

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Thirteen-year-old Caleb Levitan will represent South Africa at the Chess Olympiad in September, which is like a World Cup chess team event, after placing second at the South African Closed Chess Championships this week.

Levitan, the youngest player ever to make the South African team, was one of the top 12 players in the country invited to this championship to contest for what is effectively the spot as the best chess player in South Africa.

The competition, from 25 March to 2 April, encompassed a round-robin format in which all of the players played each other. "It was pretty gruelling," says Levitan's dad, Shaun.

CALEB'S RATING NOW PUTS HIM SOMEWHERE CLOSE TO THE TOP FIVE IN THE COUNTRY.

Levitan, in Grade 8 at King David High School Linksfield, set the record for the youngest player ever to have been selected to play in the championship. "The next youngest player, we were told, was a 15-year-old, some time back," Shaun says.

"The tournament has the prestige of being the event used for all South African team selections. When I say South Africa,

this isn't a junior team, this is the South African chess team. This event is usually held every two years." The players were competing to be one of the five players to represent South Africa at the 2024 Chess Olympiad in Budapest in September. "The Chess Olympiad is where every chess-playing nation has the right to send their team of five players for the premier chess competition around the world."

Shaun says all the best chess players, such as Norwegian chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen and Italian and American chess grandmaster Fabiano Caruana will represent their respective countries in Budapest. "The World Cup for chess is an individual event, but this is like the World Cup team event."

The first time Levitan played for South Africa was last month at the African Games in Ghana. He finished in the top 10 based on points.

Shaun says Caleb and his twin brother, Judah, who was awarded his Candidate Master title last November but didn't get invited to Closed Chess Championships, have been doing excellently this year.

"Caleb's rating now puts him somewhere close to the top five in the country. With the benefits of this tournament, I think the rest of the country has seen just how strong he is. A lot of his events are played overseas, and this was a South African



Photo: Flashlight Pictures

Caleb Levitan at the Closed Chess Championships

event against the strongest players here. In fact, many of the opponents, who are South African legends or at least known by name, played him for the very first time."

Levitan remained unbeaten in the competition all the way through to the final round. "I think it was just exhaustion, adrenaline, and perhaps the psychology of knowing he had qualified that made the final game just too much. There was a general sentiment of just how impressive it was, that people who would have expected to make the Olympiad team didn't

necessarily make it.

"For Caleb, this was really his first experience of playing in such a senior competition and to finish second says a huge amount not only about his talent but his ability to play under pressure," Shaun says. "There's obviously a huge psychological component to this type of competition, and we're just very proud of him."

Chess players don't necessarily experience improvement immediately, Levitan says. "We measure strength by rating, and Caleb's rating peaked last year at about 2 300. Then, at the start of this year, he was trying new things and experimenting a bit. It actually came down quite a bit and now it's stabilising again and coming back up. He's still young. He's a little inconsistent, but still growing. There's a fortune still to learn."

It's been said that chess isn't always about winning. "Sometimes, it's simply about learning. And so is life," according to a quote on numerous websites.

On that note, Levitan has missed a ton of school, his dad says. "King David has been exceptionally supportive. He leads a dual lifestyle of being good enough to compete with the men's team in South Africa in chess, but still has to go back and catch up with science and isiZulu."

Levitan's aspiration is to become an international master. "Hopefully he can do that either during the course of this year or next year," Shaun says.

Professional mermaid wins inaugural SA freediving competition

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African-Israeli freediving athlete, Thalia Sklair, says it was a surprise but a great feeling to be the best female freediver at the first official AIDA (International Association for the Development of Apnea) South African National Championships in Cape Town last month.

This 37-year-old King David Linksfield and University of the Witwatersrand alumnus was the best female athlete overall, and took first place for the static apnea discipline in this points-based competition. "Although I did the best in one discipline, I wasn't first in the others, but because it's an overall calculation, the points added up to best overall," she says.

This achievement was even more special for Sklair, who claimed the Israeli national record for women's static apnea last year, as it was notched up at the launch of AIDA South Africa. South African and international athletes took part in four disciplines in which they hold their breath for time and distance.

In the time discipline, called static apnea, Sklair came first with a time of just less than six minutes. That's impressive, given that the average human can reportedly hold their breath for 30 seconds to two minutes, and that's not even underwater.

The no-fins discipline, in which you swim without any added equipment, resulted in Sklair holding her breath while swimming 65m. Sklair, ranked third in Israel for women's dynamic apnea, accumulated 100m in the

bifins discipline, and 117m in the dynamic discipline.

There were 21 students on a judging course running concurrently with the freediving competition. "Because it was the launch of AIDA South Africa, a judge came from overseas to train a bunch of judges so that we can host our own competitions in South Africa or anywhere around the world," Sklair says. "The South African Freediving Federation had been running competitions, but it's not internationally recognised. So, they brought a judge from overseas who is from AIDA so that we can have official results in the rankings."

Sklair participated in this tournament through the little freediving community she has been training with in Johannesburg. She says freediving is quite a small sport in South Africa, but it's on the verge of exploding.

Sklair registered to compete under the Israel flag so that she could make a national record attempt, which she attained successfully.

She will continue to represent Israel as "it fits with me, and I feel like my loyalties lie there. I was born in South Africa, and I went to Israel for the first time when I wasn't even a year old. My mom is Israeli, and that whole side of the family is there. I've been going to Israel pretty much every year, once or twice a year, so it really is my second home.

"Last year, I was there for three months, and in November, literally two and a half weeks after the war broke out, I was supposed to go back from Croatia, but decided to come back to South Africa and then make

my way back to Israel, probably in June."

After that, she may go back to working on a boat, as she did last year. "Or I might stay in Israel from June to October."

Wherever she goes, she makes sure she can train there. "When I left Croatia last year, my plan was to be in a place that I could have a network and facilities to train, because you can't train on your own for some kinds of freediving because you're holding your breath in the water, and you always want to have your buddy with you in case something happens. So, instead of Israel, I came back here and met some of the Johannesburg freedivers whom I didn't know before."

She trains six days a week, and usually does a two-hour walk on

times. The sessions are generally 90 minutes to two hours. Twice a week, I do static apnea. Every day, I do stretching of the lungs and the thoracic area. I also do equalisation to train the muscles around the ears, jaw, and throat to be able to equalise ears at depth."

She's South Africa's first professional mermaid, swimming with a mermaid costume for shows and functions. "I decided to start



Photo: Arik Zinger



Thalia Sklair at the AIDA Championships

her recovery day. Training involves gym, strength, and endurance work as well as dynamic apnea training in the pool. "I swim and dive underwater to train [freediving at] lengths of various distances and

modelling underwater just to make the first silicon tail in South Africa. I hadn't started diving. I was still in Johannesburg, and we created a piece with a competitive freediving monofin inside the tail. It ended up weighing about 50kg, so little did I know, I was actually getting good strength

training for free diving while using the monofin, which set me up to have the right strength and mobility underwater. Then, when I moved to Durban, I did an apnea course with Natalie Rudman, the South African record holder for depth for some of the disciplines. I learned to hold my breath, got addicted to that feeling, and slowly started moving more into the sport side of things than modelling and performance.

"I started apnea in 2019, learning to hold my breath. But I've been in professional freediving training since only last year. I'm a little bit of a nomad, so as long as I have the facilities and someone to train with, it's good. The heated pools in the gyms are my training grounds at the moment."

Sklair wears a wetsuit, a thinner one for the dynamic disciplines. "You want to be as light and to create the least resistance possible," she says.

Her goal is to compete for Israel in the AIDA World Championships in June 2024 in Kaunas, Lithuania, her first world championships. "It will be an absolute honour to represent Israel among the best in the world," she says.

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