



# South African Jewish Report

Volume 27 – Number 13 ■ 18 April 2024 ■ 10 Nisan 5784

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# Let my People go!

Adar Tamir 38,  
Al-Sayed Hisham Shaaban  
35, AlZayadni Hamzah 22,  
AlZayadni Yosef 53, Alatrash Muhammad  
40, Albag Liri 18, Alex...

Edan 20, Alkadi  
Qaid Farhan 53, Angr...  
21, Argamani Noa  
26, ...  
Karina 19, Baruch Sahar  
26, ...  
Uriel 35, ...  
Ami Ol...  
Benjamin ... 53, ...  
19, ...  
Berman

Gali 26, ...  
Ziv ...  
Bibas Ariel 4,  
Bibas Kfir 1, Bibas ...  
52, Bibas Yarden  
34, Bohbot Elkana 34, Braslavski Rom, Buchshtab  
34, ...  
Buskila Esther

Amit 28, ...  
Itay 19, Cohen Eliya,  
Cohen Nimrod 19, Cohen ...  
85, ...  
Ariel 26,  
D...  
33, ...  
Alex...  
7, ...  
Danino Ori 24, David  
Evyatar 25, Dek...  
Sagi...  
Gagarat Itzhk 68, Gat Carmel 39,  
Gelerenter Itzhak 56, Gil...  
Daniel 19, Gilboa-Dalal Guy 22, Godard  
Meny 74, Goldin Hada...  
Goldin Oren...  
Gonen Romi 23, Gvili Ran 24, Haggai  
Gad 73, Haiman Inbar 27, Herku...  
Hernandez Oryon 30, Hersh Goldberg  
Polin 23, Horn Eitan 37, Horn...  
15, ...  
Sachi...  
Bipin 23, Kalderon Ofer 53,  
Kalfon Segev 25, Kozlov Andre...  
Kun...  
Meir...  
22, ...  
Mason...  
10, Levy Eitan 53, Levy  
Naama 19, Levy Or 33, ...  
Liyakim...  
Ajshitz Od...  
Lob...  
Alex...  
32, Manson...  
Sh...  
5, Meir Jan Almog...  
Eng...  
Avera...  
Letz...  
Oran...  
Mir...  
Omri 46, Molllel Joshua Le...  
Or Eit...  
Oran...  
Gadi Moshe 79,  
Munder Abraham...  
Neu...  
Mer...  
Amir...  
Nisenbaum  
Mi...  
9, Ohana Yos...  
Oh...  
22, Or Avinathan 30,  
Or Dror 48, Oz Daniel...  
Oran...  
Chaim 79, Popplewell  
Nadav 51, Rudaeff Lior 61, Samerano Yonathan  
Mordechai 21, Sarusi Almog 26, Sharabi Eli 51,  
Sharabi Y...  
Oran 30, Shem Tov O...  
Shoham...  
38, S...  
Ida...  
S...  
Samuel...  
64,  
...  
...  
30, ...  
Orsky  
...  
35, Tru...  
Bob Al...  
Lider (S...  
28,  
W...  
in Judy...  
Miss Il...  
Wenkert  
...  
22, Yablonka Chanan...  
Yahalomi,  
Ohad 49, Yair Yaakov 59, Yehoud Arbel 28,  
Yehoud Dolev 35, Yerushalmi Eden  
24, Zangai...  
PESACH  
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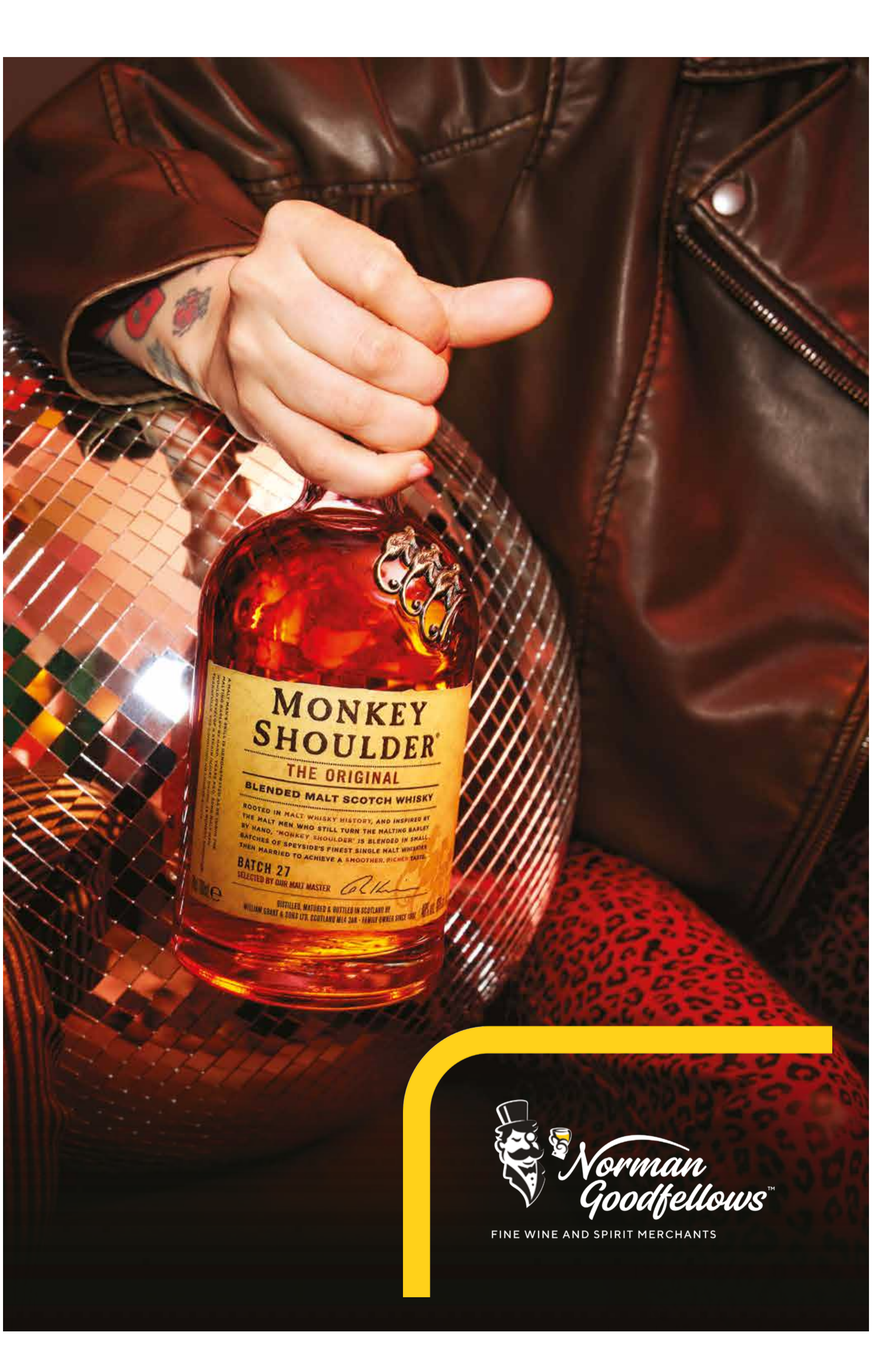
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# South African Jewish Report

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■ Volume 27 – Number 13 ■ 18 April 2024 ■ 10 Nisan 5784

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## US Congressmen accuse Pandor of antisemitism

NICOLA MILTZ

President Cyril Ramaphosa has been rapped over the knuckles by members of the United States (US) Congress, who have accused Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor of antisemitism.

In a strongly-worded letter addressed to Ramaphosa headed by two members of Congress and co-signed by other members of Congress, dated 12 April, they said Pandor's recent threat to arrest members of the South African Jewish community serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) smacked of antisemitism.

Addressed directly to the South African president, the letter reads, "South Africa is home to a Jewish population of more than 70 000 individuals. For Foreign Minister Pandor to state, 'I have already issued a statement alerting those who are South African and are fighting alongside or in the Israel Defense Forces: We are ready. When you come home, we're going to arrest you,' demonstrates a significant appearance of antisemitism."

It furthermore requested that the South African government explain what steps were being taken to ensure that Jewish South Africans were protected against growing antisemitism, "specifically as senior government officials are increasing their hostile antisemitic statements".

Members of Congress asked Ramaphosa what steps were in place to ensure that dual citizens weren't falsely charged with genocide and war crimes in the "same manner as the false ICJ [International Court of Justice] accusations levelled in January".

"If you and your government arrest soldiers of our allies, it will have consequences for the United States-South Africa relationship. While this plan was only introduced by Foreign Minister Pandor speaking of dual nationals, that may not be the case tomorrow as her personal opinions obfuscate the truth and justice."

They asked what would happen in future to US dual nationals that served in the IDF who are on vacation to South Africa.

"Is your government prepared for the perpetration of false arrests on US citizens and the dire consequences that will follow?"

Political commentator and former US diplomat Brooks Spector said the letter wasn't written by Congress, it was written by two members of Congress and co-signed by others which is a "distinction that has to be made".

"It's expressing an opinion - a very strong one - by several members of Congress, as opposed to a resolution passed by Congress. However the president should take all communication by representatives of a foreign country seriously.

"He should read it and respond, and shouldn't brush it off or ignore it," Spector said.

The letter was headed by Members of Congress Joe Wilson and Jared Moskowitz, and co-signed by Maria Elvira Salazar, Josh Gottheimer, James Richard Baird, Michael Walz, and Don Bacon.

Wilson posted on X (formerly Twitter), "Grateful to lead a letter with @RepMoskowitz to @PresidencyZA over their disgusting announcement of South Africa's intent to arrest civilians for serving in the @IDF. The US will always stand with our ally Israel against gross judicial malfeasance".

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said, "We welcome this action, and congratulate the US for standing both with the people of Israel and Jewish South Africans. Minister Pandor has relentlessly attempted to intimidate South African Jewry. Her undiplomatic behaviour, which she pursues with zealous vigour - such as her call for protests outside embassies - is being noted in the diplomatic world, and she's now being held to account."

Continued on page 2>>

## From the pens of our youth



See pages 24-27

Picture: Sara Meltzer, Grade 8, Torah Academy

## 'Too close' say SA expats of Bondi mall massacre

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish South African expat Dr Carly Levetan and her family visit the massive Westfield Bondi Junction mall in Sydney every Saturday for her son's weekly jujitsu class. More than a mall, the centre houses children's extra-curricular activities, doctors' offices, gyms, and cinemas.

On the morning of Saturday, 13 April, a man named Joel Cauchi reportedly ate breakfast opposite to where Levetan's son's class was held. Just hours later, after Levetan and her family had left the mall, Cauchi went on a senseless stabbing spree, killing five women and one male security guard, and injuring about 12 others.

"It's a super-busy place, especially on the weekends," says Levetan. "Everyone I know was

either there recently, or on the day of the attack. It could have been any of us." Her friend, Dr Candyce Levin, says her husband was at the mall just 30 minutes before Cauchi attacked. "We go to that centre all the time," she says. "It's the equivalent of the Waterfront in Cape Town in terms of how often we go there. This was scary, and way too close for comfort."

Many Jewish South African expats told the SA Jewish Report that they had been at the mall mere hours or minutes before the attack, often with children in tow. "My sister-in-law and niece were there two hours before it happened," says Craig Nudelman. "It was pretty intense. Our babysitter who came later that night is Israeli, and she said it was like being in Israel again. She was quite shocked."

Continued on page 12>>

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## US Congressmen accuse Pandor of antisemitism

>> Continued from page 1

The letter starts off by saying how on 10 March, Pandor announced at a Palestinian solidarity event that the South African government intended to arrest dual citizens with the state of Israel who were serving either compulsorily or voluntarily in Israel's operation in Gaza.

"This is a gross miscarriage of justice that continues to perpetrate dangerous sentiments against Israeli citizens and the state of Israel's right to exist," said the letter. "Israel, like every other nation, has a right to defend itself against terrorism."

It described the events of 7 October as acts of terrorism by Hamas and said, "The international law of armed conflict doesn't prohibit the citizens of any state from serving in the military of a nation to which the individual owes allegiance."

It accused the South African government of filing "unfounded charges" at the ICJ "falsely alleging genocide in Gaza". The letter highlighted a letter by the ICJ, which stated, "Indeed, South Africa is engaged in an abusive exploitation of the court's

procedures. It ignores inconvenient facts, and distorts others in an offensive and tendentious manner as request follows request with barely time to draw breath", and stated, "And yet, your government extends beyond the unfounded ICJ case to now miscarry justice against your own citizens serving their second allegiance."

A Washington insider told the SA Jewish Report that there was "definitely more awareness in Congress" about what South Africa has done, is doing, and saying on issues affecting Israel and related issues.

"The House Bill talks about re-examining and re-evaluating the relationship between South Africa and the US, and one could speculate that this is all because of South Africa's increasingly one-sided attention on Israel including the case before the ICJ," he said.

"Any foreign policy observer would say that this is an extraordinary development that occurred during the foreign minister's trip to Washington, and leading up to national elections in South Africa."

Read the South African Jewish Report online  
[sajewishreport.co.za](http://sajewishreport.co.za)

## Competing seders

Torah Thought



Rabbi Dovid Wineberg  
 Hamakom – The Space,  
 Cape Town

The number one Jewish question in South Africa furiously making the rounds in the Norwood Pick n Pay and Checkers in Cape Town is, "Where are you for first night?"

For more than 3 000 years, our people have been choosing where and with whom to have their seders. Families negotiate, friends invite, traditions are asserted.

But did you know that the haggadah is essentially the story of competing seders?

The most famous seder in Jewish history took place in the early second century in B'nei Brak, in the home of the town's *rov*, Rabbi Akiva. Immortalised in the haggadah, this seder was attended by some of our greatest sages.

There's another account recorded in *Tosefta Pesachim* of a very similar seder. This seder took place in the city of Lod – today near Ben Gurion Airport – and was led by the nasi, leader of the generation, Rabban Gamliel.

Well, we know which seder the author of the haggadah chose to visit. Rabbi Akiva's

seder gets pride of place at our table, yet Rabban Gamliel's seder doesn't even get a mention. Were the kneidlach that much better in B'nei Brak?

Not since a terrorist blew up the seder at the Park Hotel in Netanya 22 years ago have our people sat down to the seder with such heavy hearts. Israel is at war, more than 130 hostages are trapped in the terror tunnels of Gaza, and Iran has notched things up with a direct missile attack on Israel.

With such pain and uncertainty, one can be tempted to dial down the jubilant expression of the seder. How do you sing the *Dayenu* ditty when our brothers and sisters have only maror to eat this Pesach? Some have suggested leaving an empty chair to remember the hostages – the Rebbe would suggest that we rather fill another chair in their honour – and Israel's Chief Rabbi David Lau has composed a prayer to be recited just before singing *Vehi She'amda*. Our people are struggling to find the right balance between pain and hope.

It was in this environment that Jews found themselves having to choose between Rabbi Akiva's seder in B'nei Brak or Rabban Gamliel's seder in Lod. In living memory of the destruction of the Second Temple, while living through the cruel Hadrianic persecutions,

our beleaguered ancestors wondered what message should come through their Pesach practice.

Indeed, Rabban Gamliel insists that we hold the bitter herbs in hand and elaborate how embittered our lives were in Egypt. There's pain in memory and hope can be bittersweet. So, many gathered around his seder in Lod to grieve and hope for better days.

Rabbi Akiva on the other hand is Judaism's foremost optimist, who laughs even in the face of destruction. At his seder in B'nei Brak, they insisted that one must recall the exodus even at night. Even in the face of darkness, we must celebrate our innate freedom gifted to us at the exodus. Rabbi Akiva saw redemption in the persecution; the dawn that would surely follow the darkest of night.

Jewish history has proven Rabbi Akiva right. We're an eternal people of the eternal G-d, and we'll come through stronger and more united. Many are hearing the footsteps of Moshiach finally at our door. The pain in our collective heart spurs us to sing our story with more gusto, to eat the matzah with more relish, and to see Moshiach just on the other side of midnight.

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Gqeberha	17:28	18:19	18:18	17:23	18:15	17:21	18:13	18:12
Plettenberg Bay	17:37	18:28	18:27	17:32	18:24	17:30	18:22	18:21
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# Jewish supporters of Rise Mzansi ‘betrayed’ by anti-Israel agenda

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish supporters of Songezo Zibi, the leader of Rise Mzansi, feel “betrayed” and “conned” as high-ranking party members have been posting antisemitic and anti-Israel disinformation online since the 7 October Hamas attacks in Israel. Many have withdrawn ongoing support for the party.

Prominent Jewish backers of this newly-formed party are angry following the alleged antisemitic and anti-Israel stances held by key figures within the party. It has raised questions about the party’s alignment and the integrity of its leadership, putting its viability in jeopardy.

Community members were drawn to Zibi’s calm and moderate approach as a fresh African political voice, and provided support from donations to advice and guidance. However, after 7 October, as new members joined, party members took a strong anti-Israel stance.

Zibi supported South Africa’s case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), advocating a war-crimes investigation into Israel, and calling for a ceasefire. Furthermore, he promoted members to prominent parliamentary and provincial positions who harbour vehement anti-Israel views, which some supporters described as “rabidly” antisemitic.

Louise van Rhyn has been selected to be number six on the Rise Mzansi parliamentary list. Van Rhyn has thousands of followers on X (formerly Twitter), and has used her platform to disseminate and repost wildly anti-Israel disinformation. In one of them, she posted five broken heart emojis and reposted someone saying, “Israel stole the organs of 80 Palestinian bodies, then dumped them in Gaza.” The post continues: “For decades, we’ve known about the Israeli organ banks – some of the largest in the world. And we also know that the Israelis never donate organs as they’re usually stolen from Palestinian prisoners.”

In one post she said, “This makes me so angry. The Zionists have infiltrated all the important decision-making bodies in the world. And we have allowed them!”

There are more than 200 examples of such posts and reposts, including posts by known Israel haters Roger Waters and Andrew Feinstein.

Anti-Israel activist Irfaan Mangera, whose X handle is #StopTheGenocide, is a member of the party’s national leadership. He previously served as the youth activism programme manager at the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation. He wears a keffiyeh at party and public gatherings. In 2021, he posted on Twitter: “We maintain – there can be no peace without justice. The two-state solution isn’t viable. Israel

is a settler colonial apartheid state and must be treated as such. Boycott, divestment, and sanctions now!”

He called early on for the closure of the Israeli embassy in South Africa, posting in 2021, “We’re here to call for the closure of the Israeli embassy and expulsion of apartheid ambassador #GazaUnderAttack.”

Jitendrakumar (Jeets) Hargovan, number 17 on the parliamentary list, has “Free Palestine” in his X handle. He posted a picture of the Israeli flag with the words, “Israel is a terrorist state.”

Several party members, including author Erika Bornman, have posted “problematic” anti-Israel posts and reposts online, with one businessman describing them as “despicable and outrageous”.

Those close to Zibi told the *SA Jewish Report* they imagine he would be “horrified” by this antisemitic narrative. However, Zibi did not respond to questions by the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Many Jewish donors and supporters have written to complain,” said one source.



Songezo Zibi

One concerned member of the community who has been passionate about his involvement in Rise Mzansi described some of the comments posted online as “flagrantly antisemitic”, and told the *SA Jewish Report*, “The leadership of Rise Mzansi is aware of these diabolical comments by members of the party, and Songezo will be judged based on what he does about it. We’re all

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dismayed by this rogue element that has hijacked the plane. Many of us had front row seats to Zibi’s ideas, views, strategy, and manifesto, and now feel a profound sense of betrayal.”

The *SA Jewish Report* has spoken to a number of supporters who for personal reasons did not want to be publicly named.

A well-known Johannesburg businessman said his company supported Rise Mzansi in good faith, hoping that its leader would focus on local issues.

“Had we known then what we know now, we would never have backed Rise Mzansi. We’re upset and feel betrayed. We’re ashamed that our support has gone towards empowering the promotion of an anti-Israel, antisemitic agenda.”

One businessman said he saw the writing on the wall from the get-go, and withheld all support.

“Sadly, for those who cared to look beneath the surface, it wasn’t hard to uncover the involvement of the anti-Israel lobby within the new party, as Irfaan Mangera, a member of its national leadership, appeared on its website and was active in the media. While celebrating his ‘human rights’ achievements, Mangera saw no double-standard in aligning it with his role as a youth activism programme manager at the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which is openly hostile to the existence of Israel, or celebrating his support of the Free Palestine movement on social media platforms.”

When confronted with this early in 2023, Jewish fundraisers aligned with the party “turned a blind eye”, he said, or claimed, “somewhat incredibly” to be unaware of it.

Though the alarm was raised, no-one could have imagined life after the 7 October massacre and the degree of destructive reach and influence the anti-Israel lobby held across a range of organisations, the businessman said.

“Rise Mzansi can’t have it both ways, asking for our support while allowing calls for Israel’s destruction and our way of life. The Jewish community must demand a clear narrative on

Israel and a far higher standard from those who ask for our support,” he said.

“No-one is asking Zibi to kowtow, we’re asking him to do the right thing,” said a source close to the party. “There should be intolerance for all forms of prejudice within the party, and that extends to [that shown to] Jewish people.”

“The South African Zionist Federation has strongly condemned the support that Rise Mzansi has given to the African National Congress’s attempts to put the Jewish state on public trial at the ICJ and delegitimise her right of self-defence,” said National Chairperson Rowan Polovin.

“We’re concerned that the party’s staff and parliamentary list include individuals who support the antisemitic BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement and regularly promote anti-Jewish conspiracies and blood libels in public. A party that claims to support the two-state solution cannot have members who promote such agendas. We advise our community to give due consideration to the above when deciding whether to provide financial or electoral support.”

Community member Alan Fischer is the party’s fundraiser. He referred all questions about this issue to Mabine Seabe, the party’s national communications director. Seabe said donors were presented with the party’s set of principles, ideology, and political outlook as outlined in “our politics” documents.

He wouldn’t be drawn on whether the party would address members who had posted offensive comments online.

Instead, he said, “At all times, our foreign policy should reflect our values of human rights and constitutional democracy based on self-determination, government by and for the people, and social justice. This applies to the Middle East, where our consistent position has been that there should be an immediate ceasefire, a return of all hostages, and peaceful negotiations aimed at securing lasting peace and the existence of independent and sovereign states of Israel and Palestine.”

One of the party’s lead Jewish supporters, who won’t be contributing any more, said, “I feel like we’ve been slapped in the face.”

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# UCT alumni urged to vote for council

TALI FEINBERG

University of Cape Town (UCT) alumni have the chance to change the trajectory of their alma mater by voting in a crucial ballot for four new candidates to the institution's highest decision-making body.

The university, which has played a vital role in the lives and careers of many in the South Africa Jewish community, has recently seen unprecedented antisemitism on campus. In addition, in recent years the institution has suffered unprecedented protests and discord, intimidation, cancel culture, leadership crises, and financial challenges.

Alumni have until 23 April to have their say in the future of their university by casting their ballot for the four new candidates to the UCT Council.

The council's responsibilities include determining the mission, objectives, goals, strategies, and policies for the progress of the institution. It has the responsibility of maintaining and ensuring a financially secure, healthy, and viable environment, and accounting for all decisions taken at UCT, including the submission of required reports and documents to the education minister.

Three nominees standing for these prestigious and important positions are Jewish: legal academic, criminal justice consultant, and Herzlia alumnus Kelly Phelps; Professor Emeritus Brian Kantor; and Advocate Mark Oppenheimer.

"For generations, the University of Cape Town has been regarded as the greatest university on the African continent. It has been a place for all people to excel, to learn about the riches of human knowledge, and to build a better South Africa," Oppenheimer says.

"Jews have played an important role at UCT, and we have thrived in the top echelons of its staff and student body," he says. "However, in recent years, Jews have been made to feel unsafe and unwelcome, and many have fled the campus to other universities or other countries. I intend to help restore UCT to its former glory, and ensure that all staff and students are able to flourish in an environment free from persecution."

All three are looking to help restore stability and support the university's commitment to academic excellence and freedom.

They are joined by David Ansara, the chief executive of the Free Market Foundation (FMF), a classical liberal think tank headquartered in Johannesburg, who told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Like many in the Jewish community, I'm increasingly concerned by the intolerance of dissenting views and the threats to academic freedom displayed at the University of Cape Town."

"The FMF frequently engages in public advocacy and strategic litigation which aligns with the interests of the Jewish community. For example, the FMF's Rule of Law Project joined proceedings in the hate speech case against Bongani Masuku in the Constitutional Court, which held Masuku liable for his antisemitic remarks. He later apologised unconditionally to the Jewish community."

"The Rule of Law Project also drafted a legal opinion which was used by lawyers opposing UCT's academic boycott of Israel in 2019. Our submission argued that the academic boycott would be illegal, and ultimately persuaded the UCT Council to oppose the boycott," says Ansara. "For Jews and other minorities to thrive in South Africa, we need institutions of higher learning to promote and protect a diversity of political beliefs. The only way to achieve this is through a vigorous defence of academic freedom and free expression. This will be my main focus on the Council."

Ansara also says he's concerned by the "recent governance and

A pro-Palestine supporter at the University of Cape Town in March 2024



financial problems that have affected the university. The legacy of disputations in student life and unstable leadership have wrought enormous damage to a once respected institution."

Therefore, as a member of council, he'll assist in "appointing a suitably qualified leadership team based solely on its competency and personal integrity, and developing a strategy to address the growing funding crisis confronting the university".

Kantor has had a long association with UCT, where he served as lecturer, senior lecturer, professor of economics, head of the school of economics, and dean of the faculty of commerce. His career includes stints as a visiting professor at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh and Columbia University Graduate School of Business in New York.

"My purpose in serving on the governing council would be

## Israel shouldn't retaliate, Blinken tells Jewish leaders

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

The Biden administration doesn't want tension between Iran and Israel to "escalate" after Iran's massive attack on Israel over the weekend, United States (US) Secretary of State Antony Blinken told American Jewish leaders.

Blinken called the meeting at the state department on Tuesday, 16 April, as Israel contemplated how and when to retaliate against Iran, underscoring how eager the Biden administration is for the Israel-Hamas war not to spread across the region.

"We understand and appreciate why the Israelis feel like they must respond," Blinken said. "In our estimation, it's not in Israel's or America's interest for this to escalate. However, that's a decision for Israel to make. We would never tell Israel what to do. We just give the best advice we can."

That message came after reports that President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the US wouldn't participate in or support an Israeli attack on Iran. The US did help defend Israel from the Iranian attack, shooting down missiles and drones. It was part of a coalition that came to Israel's defence, including the United Kingdom, France, and Jordan.

to help the university to serve the best interests of its students and academics, and by doing so, serve the welfare of the South African nation, which depends upon the contributions made by its universities," he says.

"These interests are best served by the university pursuing excellence in teaching and research. As a member of its governing council, I would actively promote UCT as one of but a few elite South African universities – elite in the measured quality of the student and academic bodies that could compete with the best universities anywhere.

"Good teaching and excellent research have a symbiotic relationship," says Kantor. "I would encourage all academic staff to engage in the classroom fully and enthusiastically, and to share their research-based insights actively with broader society. I would hope to improve the governance of UCT by diligently applying my experience and values."

Phelps, who spent 18 years teaching at UCT and left a year and a half ago, says she's willing to return to the institution in this role because she has been "at the frontlines of the university when it had everything from protests to leadership crises, and I've seen how unstable leadership can cause enormous strain on staff and students and the quality of education. The institution requires stable, ethical, responsible, and reliable leadership."

All UCT alumni are members of the convocation by default, which gives them the right to vote four members of UCT convocation onto the council. They should have received an email about the vote. If not, they may request a username and password by emailing [convocationelection@uct.ac.za](mailto:convocationelection@uct.ac.za), with "voter registration" as the subject line.

In the email, they should include their student number if known; their surname; previous surname at the time of graduating if applicable; first names; date of birth using the YYYYMMDD format; year(s) of graduation; and degree(s)/diploma(s) obtained.

Once their standing as a member of convocation has been verified, a username, password, and voting instructions will be sent to them by email. The registration process will close at 16:00 South African Standard Time on 22 April 2024, and the vote for the council will close on 23 April 2024.

To learn more about the candidates and their visions, visit <https://tinyurl.com/fnftnvyd>

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# Drakensberg hikers rescued after river of trouble

TALI FEINBERG

Seven Crouse and his friends believe that being rescued from the Drakensberg wilderness on 9 April, two raging rivers away from safety, was their own Pesach miracle.

Crouse, seven friends and their mountain guide, had all but dismissed the bad weather warning, having many years of hiking experience, until they found themselves trapped at the mercy of the unrelenting elements.

"They say there's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing," Crouse said. He, Neil Jankelowitz, Neil Hermann, Tal Twersky, Darryl Oberstein, Neil Novick, Darren Horwitz, and Brett Levitas and guide Deon Small, began their hike on 3 April.

Crouse, who has been hiking for 12 years, from the famous Otter Trail to the Kruger Park to the Fish River Canyon, had planned this challenging hike for at least two years. So, when the weather forecast predicted heavy rain, he and his group still decided to go ahead.

Their 75km adventure would take them along the Northern Traverse of the Drakensberg, on the northernmost section of the Drakensberg escarpment, along the top of the berg mostly through Lesotho, descending again into South Africa and finishing at Cathedral Peak Hotel.

However, when they became stuck at an impassable river, and even the Mountain Search and Rescue (MSAR) organisation couldn't reach them or send a helicopter, they called on Jewish communal organisations, the CSO (Community Security Organisation) and Hatzolah, for help.

"To see the way they immediately rose to the challenge, that, for me, is the whole point of the story," Crouse said. "We live in a unique community, and when the chips were down, we saw how the organs of the community came together for us. Just seeing how that



worked was a massive source of comfort. It's a remarkable thing."

In the end, MSAR was finally able to reach and assist them across the raging rivers, but Crouse believes if it hadn't done so, the community would have made a plan.

Crouse recalled his journey. "We walked for the six days as planned, and covered the distances needed, but the weather hit us hard, and we had more rain than anything else. And at an average altitude of more than 3 000m, rain isn't your friend as nothing dries and your temperatures are already in the low single digits as it is. Our guide took

the decision to plot an alternate route down to minimise the impact of having to cross the flooded rivers once we were back down in the valleys, a kind of 'hope for the least-worst' strategy.

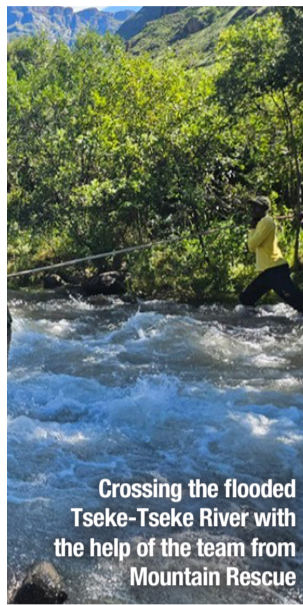
"Everything was going well until we got



to the second-last river crossing, just 3.5km from Cathedral Peak, and we found the Xenii River to be simply impassable," said Crouse. "To even try cross it on foot, even without a 20kg backpack, would be nothing short of suicidal. This usually 2m wide, 25cm-deep river was flowing at full force, spanning about 6m and almost 1m deep in places, with rapids everywhere. We were stuck with nowhere to go and zero cellphone signal. We weren't going to take any stupid chances.

"Our guide backtracked to higher ground, managed to get a signal, and called

mountain rescue to send in a team to get us across using ropes and equipment. We were expecting them shortly before sundown on Monday, 8 April, but they never came. They were unable to pass the next river, the Tseke-Tseke, that was flowing even faster, deeper, and wider than the Xenii!



Crossing the flooded Tseke-Tseke River with the help of the team from Mountain Rescue

"After five nights on the mountain already, we were forced to find a campsite in the dark and the rain and set up camp for the night again – we just weren't getting out that day!" He said they had enough food, but there were still fears they could run out. "We each had a bit of hot chocolate and cashew nuts on the Tuesday morning.

But in the cold, you need energy, and your mind starts playing tricks on you.

"On Tuesday morning [9 April], Deon hiked back up early to get signal, and was told the team was on their way. But in spite of the best assurances from mountain rescue, they just didn't arrive. At one point, they were given the wrong co-ordinates, and walked up the wrong valley, so it was a bit of a case of 'broken telephone,'" Crouse said.

At this point, the group was essentially told to wait it out as there were no injuries or emergency, and mountain rescue would send a helicopter only if that was the case.

In addition, the weather cleared, and the group enjoyed the glorious views from their campsite, surrounded by 10 waterfalls. "There are worse places to get stuck," said Crouse. The rescue organisation advised them to find another route, but that was impossible as their current route was the safest option available.

"We weren't in any danger," he emphasises. At that point, "we managed to get hold of the CSO and with the limited signal we had, we were trying to arrange a helicopter to fly in and get us out to safety." They also managed to reach their wives briefly and tell them about the situation.

"At about 12:30 on Tuesday, almost 24 hours after arriving at the Xenii, the mountain rescue team made it to the other side of the Xenii River from us, managed to get across to us, and secure ropes for a crossing. We all got across safely, and then had to repeat the exercise at the even more treacherous Tseke-Tseke River, a few kilometres downstream towards Cathedral Peak. All went well again, and we walked the last 1.5km to the hotel along with the rescue team of about 15 members!"

Crouse said that when he saw the rescue team arrive, "I won't lie, I cried. It was such a sense of relief. They were like angels from heaven, and such good people. They came with a real sense of *ubuntu*. They helped us pack up camp, and we all made our way across the rivers together. There was a lot of adrenaline, and it was a hell of an experience. With an extra and unplanned day and night behind us, we successfully traversed the full Northern Berg, a bit battered and bruised, with a bit of help from MSAR, and a heap of gratitude!"

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## The upside down world

**P**esach is a time when we look back on our past as slaves and how we broke free of our shackles, but this year is almost more about looking at our situation right now.

I don't recall a time where we were so concerned about the future of Israel and about antisemitism locally and globally. And the festival of Pesach, for me, is about learning about Jews being at their lowest ebb and finding a way back to full strength. Granted, it took more than 40 years, with a pitstop to pick up the 10 commandments!

We're at a pretty low point right now, albeit that violent antisemitism seems far worse in Europe and America than it does here. And those of us who stick to their community may not be aware of what's happening out there.

A friend of mine told me how she overheard someone at work speaking about "these damn Jews" when irritated with someone she had been speaking to on the phone.

Another recently told me of a workplace incident in which she had apologised to someone for what she believed could have been an overreaction to an anti-Israel comment. The person she apologised to responded, saying, "I understand, you can't help it that you're a Jew."

I was wide-eyed at this, and wish it wasn't true, because it means that antisemitism is rife in South Africa. And while those making these statements may claim it's all about Israel, they slip up so easily in blaming Jews.

On Saturday morning in Sydney, Australia, there was an attack at a mall frequented by many former South African Jews. Our page one story shares it with you.

However, as it turns out, the first person pinpointed as the culprit was a South African Jewish man who had nothing whatsoever to do with the event. But, I guess, perhaps he had a similar nose or look about him, so the media and others pointed fingers at him without even checking whether he was even there. Was it a coincidence that he's Jewish? I wonder...

I also wonder why in a country like Australia, where life is usually so even keeled and little happens, they have had two violent incidents in one weekend. It seems strange! I'm not for one moment suggesting that this has anything to do with antisemitism because the second attack was against a priest. But attacks like this don't happen Down Under.

But then, our world seems upside down right now. Suddenly, looking at social media, people around the world are making out as if Iran is a victim of some kind of war crime at the hands of Israel (read Jews).

What are they talking about? It's one thing to be worried about innocent Palestinians in Gaza, which I understand, but Iran is a major international power that Israel has never had even the smallest success in harming. We know Islamic Republic leaders would like to eradicate Jews off the face of the earth. They make it clear, but are they victims of Israel? Not so far...

Once again, it's all about antisemitism. Anyone against the Jews must be harmless victims, right?

On Saturday night, few Jews slept while they waited for the 350 cruise missiles, drones, and ballistic missiles fired from Teheran to Israel. Israelis were in their shelters, and Jews around the world braced themselves for the worst news, but hoped for the best.

The best happened. Israel, with the help of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Jordan, managed to ensure that they didn't harm Israel. It was no miracle, it was a feat of exceptional military prowess. It showed the incredible expertise of the Israeli Air Force. A 10-year-old Bedouin girl is now fighting for her life after she was injured when shrapnel from an intercepted ballistic missile fell on her family's home in the southern Negev.

Amazing how our haters, who seem to be growing in numbers, still find a way to turn around what Iran did and make it Israel's fault. Astonishing!

A young Iranian attorney and activist, Elica Le Bon, put out a video on Instagram this week on behalf of Iranian women. She was horrified at how the facts were distorted into the Islamic Republic becoming the victim. "When we were screaming for the past two years that they were lynching us, where were you? When we were screaming because they were killing Iranian women for not wearing a hijab, where were you? When they were lynching Iranian men from cranes for protesting, where were you? When they were explaining that this was a terrorist occupying force, where were you? But suddenly, everyone has graduated from Instagram school of law to say that this is a violation of international law, and Iran has the right to defend itself."

She made it clear that Iranians don't hate Israel, and in fact, want peace with Israel, and when the Islamic Republic does something, it's not on behalf of Iranian people. She called Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthi terror proxies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who are trying to destabilise the region. She said again and again, "Iranians have said they don't want war with Israel, they want peace."

She criticised those defending the Islamic State action of Saturday night, saying it was they who want war with Israel. "It's your hatred for Israel and Jews that's putting us in a war we didn't ask for. Have we not suffered enough for the last 45 years that we have to be used as pawns in your fantasy war with Israel? We don't want that. Don't put our lives at risk."

I couldn't have said it better. Those haters who choose to believe that the Islamic Republic is the victim and Israel, once again, is the aggressor are the ones with blood on their hands. Even the South African government speaks about this attack as a "retaliation" – a retaliation for what? Against terrorism? Against hatred for Israel? Against trying to survive as a nation?

The Islamic Republic isn't a victim, but seeing it as such is pure antisemitism and warmongering on the part of people sitting comfortably, wearing their Palestinian keffiyehs in their plush homes around the world while people die in the Middle East. Stop spreading lies and hatred!

We're reeling from what's happening in the world, but as Jews, we're strong and bonded. We've survived and will continue to survive.

In our special Pesach edition, I was bowled over by the depth of understanding and intuition of our youth. We called on youngsters to give us their insight into what freedom means to them right now as we head toward Pesach.

We were overwhelmed by how many children sent their work, and the quality of it.

We did a selection, but we were unable to fit everything we wanted onto our pages. So, we've extended it onto our website. Please go online to read more. It's a phenomenal way to understand where our children are at.

**Chag Pesach sameach!**

**Peta Krost  
Editor**

We won't be publishing for the next two weeks because of the *chaggim*. We'll be back on 9 May.



## Punching back at the Iranian puppet master

OPINION

PROFESSOR GLEN SEGELL



**I**srael's defence minister, Yoav Gallant, said, "Israel is waging war on eight separate fronts: Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, in cyberspace, and in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]." Israeli civilian and military targets have been struck from Eilat in the south to Metula in the north by rockets and drones from as far afield as Iran, Iraq, and Yemen, and it has reciprocated.

The common thread linking all of these is Iran as an ideological and religious inspirer and a puppet master to proxy forces. It provides the military intelligence to determine targets, and supplies the finance, training, rockets, missiles, and drones.

Most prominent are the three that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has given a common denominator of the letter "h" to: Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthi. These dominate in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

The Israel Defense Forces calculated that an air and ground military campaign was essential for Gaza to eliminate the Hamas threat and in part, handle the abductee issue. Further to the calculation, to limit the war in time, scope, and cost, the other seven fronts could best be handled by striking directly at the Iranian puppet master.

The daylight targeted assassination in Damascus of General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force in Syria and Lebanon, and his deputy, was one such strike. Iran responded with missile and drone strikes on Israel launched from Iran, Iraq, and Yemen. American, British, French, and Jordanian assistance ensured that most of these were intercepted before entering Israeli airspace. There will be more of this from all sides.

Though such tactics suit best the Hamas and Hezbollah fronts, they aren't effective in others, especially against the Houthi in Yemen. Iran is backing the Houthis against Saudi Arabian Sunni



groups in a proxy war there. In empathy with Hamas since October, the Houthis have banned vessels linked to Israel from sailing in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait. That's the narrow passage of water between Africa and Arabia. It leads up the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea.

In effect, this is a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran. Fortuitously, Iran miscalculated by escalating the attacks and hijacking ships of other countries. Like Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1943, it will be its downfall. These acts have had global implications for the global economy and so the world's maritime powers created two international naval forces. These have come under attack, and have counter attacked or engaged pre-emptively.

The largest is Operation Prosperity Guardian, an American-led coalition, with more than 20 members, including an American nuclear aircraft carrier battle group and navies from four

continents. The smaller is the European Union's naval mission EUNAVFOR Aspides, led by Greece, with five other participants. These forces have a United Nations (UN) mandate in UN Security Council Resolution 2722 (2024).

Their mission is to keep maritime trading routes open and free from Iranian-led threats and attacks. These have disrupted international trade on the shortest shipping route between Europe and Asia. According to UN shipping organisation, the International Maritime Organisation, in the months of December 2023 to March 2024, overall shipping traffic in the Suez Canal decreased 70% compared to the monthly average in the months of January to November 2023.

Because of this threat to shipping, at least 10 shipping companies, led by one of the world's largest, Maersk, have diverted ships across the Cape route. This has increased the time to reach their destination by between two to six weeks for most ships, with enormous costs.

Most affected has been the container ships that make up 40% of all world trade. That includes, for example, those from China to the Mediterranean Sea ports of Haifa and Ashdod. Before the start of the attacks, the costs of transporting a container were about \$1 400 each (R26 388 at today's exchange rate). The price peaked at the end of January to \$6 400 (R120 632) each. Israel imports about 290 000 containers of goods annually from Asia, Oceania, and Africa. That means extra freight charges on the order of millions of US dollars. Costs for European countries are higher.

The direct horizontal economic consequences are enormous. The share of Israeli trade exposed to Houthi attacks is about 9.2% of all Israeli trade – 15.7% of imports and 2.9% of exports – which is about 5.5% of Israeli gross domestic product.

More than shipping, economics, and trade, for Jews worldwide, the 7 October Hamas invasion was a wake-up call that deterrence and defence

aren't viable options. All of Israel's adversaries need to be defeated pre-emptively before they attack. The Jewish nation cannot risk – nor could it survive – an Iranian nuclear attack on its small and only homeland.

Similarly, the Iranian controlled shipping attacks have also been a wake-up call for many countries, especially those contributing to the two international naval forces. It's occurring both in the Bab al-Mandeb Strait by the Houthi and directly by Iran in the Straits of Hormuz that is the waterway between Iran and Arabia. Additionally, piracy has re-emerged off the Somali coast.

For how long can the world tolerate and afford to be held ransom to such commercial, economic, and fiscal consequences of threats and attacks on shipping?

It's fair to state then that the eight fronts of battle facing Israel following the Hamas invasion on 7 October have opened a Pandora's box for the global economy, one that like the original in Greek mythology has both evil and hope. Inside the box is the Iranian puppet master. The hope is that this is the opportunity to unite the world in dealing with the causes, not only the symptoms. That means uniting to remove the ayatollah regime in Teheran.

• *Glen Segell is a professor at the University of Cambridge; a visiting professor and research fellow in the department of political studies and governance, University of the Free State; and research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran and Gulf States Research, University of Haifa, Israel.*



# Star Wars and sirens

OPINION

Where were you when Iran attacked Israel? This will become a question that Jews will ask themselves for years to come. Saturday evening, 13 April, began with a calm directive from the Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command that the country was on an emergency footing and restrictions were in place. We knew what was coming. Like many around the country, I prepared my safe room, closed the metal window shield, and waited for what was to come. Drones were reportedly making their way to Israel. What happened next was unprecedented, both in scope of attack and Israel's defence.

For the first time in history, Iran attacked from Iranian soil towards Israeli sovereign territory. The attack came in five waves, with more than 300 projectiles fired, designed for maximum carnage. This was a significant departure from previous decades-long strategy to attack Israel and Israeli installations around the world via proxies like the Houthis in Yemen, who are disrupting shipping lines, Hamas, and Hezbollah, which routinely attack Israel. Iran said that this was retaliation for an alleged Israeli strike on a building adjacent to its embassy in Damascus that eliminated Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander Mohammad Reza Zahedi and several others.

"The numbers still aren't 100% clear, but I understand that 120 ballistic missiles and about 30 cruise missiles were fired, as well as about 170 explosive drones – explosive UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles]," Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner told CNN.

Israel's defence was exceptional. Even though the steady thunder of fighter jets as they intercepted ballistic missiles kept most of us up, it was a reassuring sound to hear the mighty Israel Air Force along with the Royal Air Force (RAF) flying manoeuvres quite literally above me. I was treated the next morning to seeing two jets flying tandem with a large plane that was likely a refuelling plane.

Israel, along with an international coalition that included the United States (US), United Kingdom, France, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia demolished the Iranian attack. You read that correctly. Jordan opened its airspace, and scrambled F-16s to destroy incoming projectiles. The Jordanians said it was to "protect their civilians", but two things are evident, first, the threat that Iran poses not just to Israel but to the region, and second, that in spite of harsh criticism over the past six months, our peace treaty is holding. A Saudi official connected to the Saudi Royal family told KAN, Israel's national broadcaster, that the country had a system automatically to intercept any suspicious entity in its airspace.

That source also charged that Iran had instigated the Gaza war through its proxy group, Hamas, to disrupt US efforts for a Saudi normalisation deal. "Iran is a country that sponsors terrorism, and it should have been stopped a long time ago," said the source.

Israel's air defence array including Iron Domes, David's Sling, Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 systems that are designed to destroy ballistic missiles in space, and exceptional flying by our fighter pilots along with the RAF. Sirens wailed in parts of the north and south and over Jerusalem. The images of Iron Dome defence missiles intercepting incoming projectiles over the Al-Aqsa Mosque will live in infamy. The visuals were like something out of a *Star Wars* movie.

US Central Command forces, supported by US European Command destroyers, successfully engaged and destroyed more than 80 one-way attack, uncrewed aerial vehicles and at least six ballistic missiles intended to strike Israel from Iran and Yemen.

Israel's chief military spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, said on Sunday that France was among the countries involved in defending against Iran's overnight attack on Israel.

"France has very good technology, jets, radar – and I know it was contributing in patrolling airspace," Hagari said.

Israelis were jubilant on Sunday morning, albeit exhausted. Achieving a 99% success rate on an assault this massive was nothing less than

extraordinary – and miraculous. We needed a win after months of derision from a world fast losing patience with the war in Gaza.

Where to from here, we wonder? There's no question that Israel will have to retaliate to an unprecedented Iranian assault on its territory. We won't just "take the win", as suggested by US President Joe Biden. Will it be a kinetic strike or something else? Israel can strike a significant blow to Iran in many different ways, including diplomatic and cyber. Israel will want to capitalise on growing diplomatic support, but also deal the neighbourhood bully a long awaited pounding.

This was a moment we knew would happen eventually. This was a day of reckoning. As many

Iron Dome anti-missile system fires interception missiles



Photo: Ayal Margolin-Flash90

ROLENE MARKS



around the globe worry if we're teetering on another world war, Israelis remain resolute and resilient. As we approach Pesach and recount our delivery from slavery to freedom and the miracles that preceded that, I wonder to myself, is Israel the Moses ready to lead the world out of the tyranny of terror? We've never been more ready.

• 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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# US pressure leads Israel to abandon battle plan

OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



Overtaking the headlines on 8 April, which stated that Israel had pulled all its ground troops out of southern Gaza for “tactical reasons”, was the report of a massive Iranian strike of more than 300 drones and missiles directed at Israel from Iranian territory.

Iran’s “retaliatory” bombardment signified a significant strategic departure for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Instead of using its proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, or the Houthis, Iran attacked Israel directly for the first time in its history. In a similar fashion to the world’s initial reaction to 8 October, the attack garnered immediate condemnation from many quarters, thereby buying Israel a short respite from the constant media attacks surrounding the conduct of its war in Gaza.

In spite of Iran’s deadly intent, the missile attack leaves a massive credibility gap in the Iranian capability of inflicting harm on Israel via the air. All but a few of the 300 missiles were either shot down or crashed on their own accord, inflicting minimal damage. Israel can claim a massive victory for its Iron Dome system, and celebrate the fact that the Jordanians and Syrians accounted for several of the Iranian missile losses. However, it seems that the United States (US) has again restricted any Israeli counterattack, which squanders a rare opportunity to neutralise some Iranian military assets.

Quite simply, US President Joe Biden and his administration have put the brakes on Israeli military actions. Israel has lost the ability to deploy its military at the operational and strategic level of war without the US’s permission. Losing this independence of action poses a significant problem for Israel’s successful execution of the war in Gaza. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza deployed 18 brigades in December 2023 – about 90 000 troops – and then trimmed it down to five brigades at the end of March. The IDF now fields a single brigade in Gaza, leaving Khan Younis and Gaza City unoccupied. Undoubtedly, the IDF’s hasty withdrawal isn’t for any sound military reason. Instead, the IDF has succumbed to European and belated pressure from the US to change its tactics drastically as world opinion has turned decidedly against the Israelis. The original IDF plan of occupying Gaza in its entirety and eliminating Hamas as a military and political force lies in tatters.

Initially, Israel adopted a persisting strategy, placing a large number of boots on the ground, deliberately advancing at a slow, careful pace into the heart of

US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in October 2023



Photo: Avi Ohayon, Israel Government Press Office

Gaza. The IDF skilfully concentrated its forces using combined arms teams down to the lowest tactical level. It carefully accumulated overwhelming firepower at the focal points, sometimes advancing only mere meters in a given day. With great tactical skill and impeccable doctrine, the IDF produced innovative tactics to overcome most of the attackers’ disadvantages in dense urban areas. The urban environment overwhelmingly favours Hamas. New IDF tactics are under tight wraps, but Israel’s allies are watching closely and will undoubtedly incorporate these combat innovations into their urban-warfare doctrine. At least up to December, the Israelis made slow but significant progress in defeating Hamas in the field as well as destroying vast tracts of the tunnel system. The IDF badly mauled Hamas at a relatively low casualty cost, inflicting an estimated 30% to 50% loss on its fighting power before forcing it to withdraw to Rafah to conduct what would have been its last stand before destruction.

In spite of registering significant gains at tactical and operational level, Israel is steadily losing the propaganda war. The world’s outrage at the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October began to recede almost immediately. If Israel ever had a chance to strike using a persisting strategy – occupying territory and putting boots on the ground – it would have had to execute with lightning speed. A cautious approach led to it being caught offside by the capricious support it had initially garnered on 7 October. Israel chose to minimise IDF and civilian casualties,

and the sands of time have run out. The media’s constant barrage of civilian casualty figures, as reported by Hamas, has alienated many of Israel’s US and European backers. The breathtaking hypocrisy of mainstream media has drowned out lone voices of reason, such as Douglas Murray. A discredited Norman Finkelstein, sidelined even by the Palestinians and now comparing Gaza to a concentration camp, has found new vigour and appreciative audiences. Rochdale in the United Kingdom has elected George Galloway, long consigned to the looney left fringe, as member of Parliament on a pro-Hamas and virulently anti-Israel ticket. Friends, it would seem, are few.

**Biden has insinuated that if the Israelis don’t curtail operations in Gaza, then the supply of American arms will come under threat.**

Israel has to contend with an increasingly frayed relationship with the US. Support among younger Americans for Israel is rapidly fading. Biden has insinuated that if the Israelis don’t curtail operations in Gaza, then the supply of American arms will come under threat. There are lessons to be learned by those desirous of conducting an independent foreign policy free from American influence. A home-grown defence industry that supplies the lion’s share of one’s military needs is a fundamental

prerequisite. Surely, Israel regrets abandoning the Israeli Air Force Industries Lavi Jet Fighter programme in favour of the US’s F-16? The US no doubt had a significant role in eliminating the Lavi as a possible competitor in the lucrative arms-trade industry.

Israel cannot independently conduct its operations in Gaza without the US’s implicit or explicit approval. That’s the price of dependence on the US for the supply of essential arms and munitions. Ukraine faces a similar dilemma of relying on the West to supply essential military equipment for survival. When the time comes, Ukraine will have little choice but to comply with the West’s version of a peace settlement. Israel has withdrawn from the south of Gaza, and significantly reduced its troop numbers there, not of its own choice, but on instruction from the US.

So where to from here? The IDF has abandoned a highly successful persisting strategy, in which it placed boots on the ground, occupied territory, and advanced methodically and innovatively by using combined arms warfare to eliminate Hamas’s fighting power in the north of Gaza. The military endgame was in sight. All that remained was to capture Rafah and remove Hamas in its entirety. Israel, succumbing to American pressure, now has no option but to resort to a raiding strategy. The IDF will attempt to remove Hamas targets through precision ground and air strikes surgically. The danger of this strategy can already be seen, with close to 2 000 Hamas fighters infiltrating their way back into Gaza City in the absence of Israeli ground forces.

History has shown that wars cannot be won using a raiding strategy exclusively. Targeting Iranian, Hezbollah, and Hamas operatives outside of Gaza to weaken the terrorist superstructure is also not a strategy which will eliminate Hamas. The hope of a more friendly future US government is uncertain and, at best, many months away. The release of hostages, if any are alive, seems remote. An emboldened Hamas continued to hold out for the best terms for a ceasefire. Retaliation for the latest Iranian attack is firmly off the cards. Israel faces tough months ahead.

*Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.*

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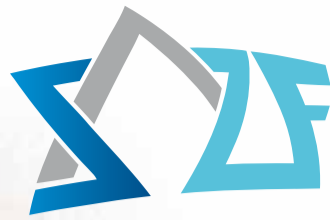
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# SA Litvaks urged to vote in poll for dual citizenship

LEE TANKLE

Members of the Lithuanian government are calling on South Africans holding Lithuanian citizenship to vote in the upcoming election, saying its outcome could determine the future of dual passports.

Voting is essential, they say, because part of the election includes a referendum allowing Lithuanian citizens the right to hold dual passports. As it stands, Jews of Lithuanian origin are among the few who are entitled to this. So, should dual citizenship not be accepted across the board, it may have a negative impact on those who hold dual passports and those trying to attain them.

"It's crucial for South Africans holding Lithuanian passports to participate in the elections as their votes can influence decisions related to citizenship laws, including the possibility of allowing dual citizenship," said the Lithuanian ambassador in South Africa, Rasa Jankauskaitė. "By exercising their right to vote, they can advocate for policies that have a direct impact on their status and rights."

Between 3 000 and 7 000 South Africans are believed to hold Lithuanian citizenship. Businessman Howard Sackstein, one of them, said, "If we fail to vote, we put our hard work and effort into making sure that we can regain our Lithuanian citizenship at risk."

"Therefore, it's crucial that every South African who has regained their Lithuanian citizenship vote in the referendum for their interests. If this referendum fails, ultimately, it will open the door to a risk that Lithuania can say, 'Choose'. That will force many people to either leave South Africa, and give up their South African citizenship, or give up their Lithuanian citizenship. That's not in any of our interests."

The Lithuanian election is on 12 May, just four weeks away. It entitles citizens to vote for the president of the

country and to change the Lithuanian Constitution.

The referendum is specifically to amend the Constitution to allow all Lithuanian citizens to hold multiple citizenships. Those who hold Lithuanian citizenship can also vote for members of the European Parliament and Lithuanian Parliament in May and October respectively.

"Currently, the law on citizenship allows dual citizenship only in exceptional cases for those whose ancestors left Lithuania before the independence restoration in 1990, but still had Lithuanian citizenship in 1940," said the ambassador.



Nida Degutienė, Lithuanian emigration consultant, said, "Citizenship is considered one of the most important pillars of Lithuania's Constitution and statehood, therefore it can be changed only if the vast majority of all persons having a right to vote express their willingness to change it, in other words, if 75% say yes."

"This is why voting in the 2024 referendum is extremely important. Every vote counts, every person's participation is crucial."

Sackstein said a special amendment was created to give Jews of Lithuanian descent, commonly known as Litvaks, the unique opportunity to apply for Lithuanian citizenship. "But there's no guarantee that the provision will last," he said. "We need to secure the citizenship that we've received by ensuring that all Lithuanians are entitled to dual citizenship. That's the only way we can guarantee that we can retain our Lithuanian and South African citizenship."

Member of Parliament Dalia Asanavičiūtė of The Homeland Union, the Lithuanian Christian Democrats Party, spearheaded the recent changes to the Citizenship law of Lithuania, which got 100% support during its parliamentary vote. These changes made the process of applying for citizenship reinstatement for South African Jews whose ancestors once held Lithuanian citizenship easier and simpler, and it removed unnecessary legal obstacles which had created much frustration and anger for South African Litvaks.

According to the Lithuanian government, an average 1 000 people lose their Lithuanian citizenship annually because they acquire citizenship of another country.

Said Degutienė, "A high number of participants in the referendum for dual citizenship is crucial for the success of the referendum. Every vote is needed. Lithuania cannot afford to lose so many citizens annually because of the single citizenship rule, and changing the Constitution requires extremely active participation."

Said the ambassador, "Elections are the cornerstone of democracy. This is particularly significant today as democratic values face threats in various parts of the world."

"This vote presents a critical opportunity for South Africans with Lithuanian passports to influence decisions that directly affect their citizenship status. By voting now, they can actively contribute to shaping laws and policies that have an impact on their rights and freedoms,

including potential recognition of dual citizenship."

Asanavičiūtė, who was behind the early change in Parliament, called on the South African Litvak community to do its bit. "I kindly invite all South African Litvaks to contribute to the cause by becoming global ambassadors for Lithuania, to spread the word about the referendum on the retention of citizenship, and encourage family members, friends, and acquaintances who are eligible to vote to come to the ballot box."

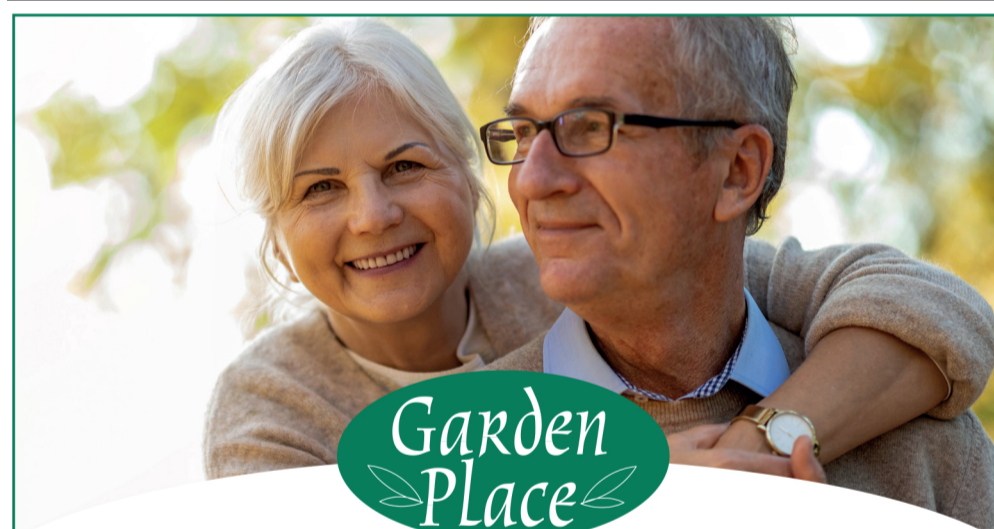
Litvak, Bernard Seeff, said, "We must all vote on this issue to ensure that all Lithuanians can get dual citizenship. It's important that we vote in these elections in the same way that it's incumbent on everyone who is a South African citizen to vote in the South African elections."

Another, David Saks, said, "Lithuania was the heartland of one of the greatest Jewish civilisations in the diaspora, and as a community largely of Litvak origin, South African Jewry have been able to build on that proud legacy. Since the downfall of communism, it has been possible, albeit to a modest extent, for people in our community to re-forge that connection. Allowing them to hold dual citizenship would obviously go a long way towards building on this in future."

"Being a South African Jew of Lithuanian descent, I know that our roots are important," said Reeva Forman, another Lithuanian citizen. "To have dual citizenship for whatever reason reminds me personally of my roots and being able to have a say in an election that's not in the country I live in but one that I consider to be my own is extremely important."

Litvaks who intend to vote need to register by 20 April on the website of The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, and may vote in person at the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Pretoria or by post.

Additionally, polling stations might be set up in Johannesburg. The addresses of polling stations and their working hours will be announced on the website and Facebook page of the Lithuanian Embassy.



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# ANC rout ends at rural firewall, says expert

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The African National Congress (ANC) is likely to get between 46% and 52% of the vote, with the Democratic Alliance (DA) remaining the official opposition although losing some ground. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) will remain the third largest party, but won't do as well as people expect. The Mkhonto weSizwe (MK) party will cause a shock in KwaZulu-Natal, and end up fourth. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) will grow, but fall behind MK.

This was local political analyst Wayne Sussman's prediction for the upcoming elections in May when he spoke at Taste of Limmud in Johannesburg on 16 April.

He also shared seven options for the ANC's hierarchy of collation parties, the first being a "less is more" combination with the African Independent Congress, Al Jama-ah, Good, and National Freedom Party (NFP); the sixth being the ANC adopting a "from heartache to makeup" approach by partnering with Jacob Zuma and Ace Magashule's African Congress for Transformation. The last option involved the ANC considering working with the Multi-Party Charter should it defy the odds and succeed at the polls.

He said, however, that Zuma's MK could contribute to the ANC losing half of its support in KwaZulu-Natal in the upcoming general election.

Although the ANC has declined by 4% in every national election since 2009, and goes into this election without "Ramaphoria", the party is boosted by its "rural firewall" in Limpopo and Mangaung, a supporter base which is nowhere close to being penetrated, and the party's phenomenal by-election results in the platinum belt of the North West since the 2021 local government elections, Sussman said.

He said key to the 2024 national election is Mangaung, South Africa's eighth most populous metro, where, in 2021, the ANC got 12 000 votes more than in its stronghold in Thohoyandou, Limpopo. "What am I trying to tell you? There are large, rural, swathes of this country, which we in our beautiful urban bubble don't pay attention to, that are going to have a significant impact on the outcome of this election.

"One poll I was involved in had the ANC at 41%. I know the methodology is sound, but I just don't think we can rule out the ANC when you see this rural firewall."

In addition, he cited the ANC's support in the platinum belt in North West. "This is called the Bojanala District. Forty-six percent of North West voters are there. This includes Sun City, Pilanesberg, Rustenburg – tons of North West voters. This district, the Eastern Cape, and Limpopo is a quarter of the voters in this election. This is going to be significant."

Only three of the 14 parties contesting this election have different leaders compared to the last election, Sussman said. The IFP and NFP leaders passed away, while "the DA was the only party where the leader had to fall on his sword. This creates a precedent. If the DA loses ground, will Steenhuisen have to fall on his sword?"

In the 2019 national election, the breakout winner was the EFF, which jumped from 6% to 11%. "How did it do this? It did it in a province called KwaZulu-Natal, where 20% of our voters are."

"In 1994 and 1999, the ANC tried to be a party for all South Africans – diversity, urban, rich, business, etc. The DA tried that in 2016, as well in the recent local government election. We start seeing parties which are unapologetic about who they represent starting to do well in elections. That's the IFP and the Freedom Front Plus [FF+]."

In the 2021 local government election, the ANC and DA also lost a lot of ground, the latter being affected by ActionSA trying to appeal to numerous South African groups, the FF+ trying to appeal to white Afrikaners, and the Patriotic Alliance (PA) trying to appeal to coloured South Africans.

"Almost 24% of registered voters are in Gauteng. What happens here has a big effect on the entire country in the upcoming elections. When I analysed all the voting districts, where more than 95% of the people are black voters, the ANC has fallen in those areas from 59% to 29%. The ANC as a tough task to pull back voters it has lost. This should worry them greatly."

This explains why Ramaphosa "is spending so much time in Gauteng. He's greatly concerned that places like Soweto are not as loyal as they once were to the ANC," Sussman said.

He also believes Ramaphosa should be concerned by the "chaos in the KwaZulu-Natal electoral kraal".

MK has done phenomenally well in the three by-elections it has contested in KwaZulu-Natal. "The ANC and the IFP have years of experience, years of passion, years of connecting with voters there, and this new kid on the block comes and gets more than 20%. This



is significant.

"If MK gets 25% of KwaZulu-Natal – one in five voters there – that means it gets 5% of the national vote. This shows you why KwaZulu-Natal is so important.


"You can criticise Zuma all you want. His one big gift at the ANC was southern KwaZulu-Natal. I'm speaking about places like Port Shepstone, Margate, the southern area from Durban all the way to the Eastern Cape. When you look at the election returns there, in 2009 and 2014, it's as good as the rural parts of the Eastern Cape. Zuma gave the ANC a big gift here."

In the Western Cape, 63% of the province's voters are in the city of Cape Town. "We don't know yet how strong the DA's blue wall is based on places like Mitchells Plain, Athlone, Tafelsig, and Hanover Park. If the DA falls below 50%, Alan Winde will still probably return as premier, with the FF+, ACDP, or ActionSA."

The PA has made deep inroads in the Western Cape. This trend extends to other areas of the country with sizeable coloured populations.



Wayne Sussman





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# 'Too close' say SA expats of Bondi mall massacre

>>Continued from page 1

Yvonne Weinberg, who is believed to be a Jewish South African expat, was stabbed but survived. Her husband, Isaac Weinberg, told news outlets outside a hospital, "They said [she was] stabbed in the top-right corner of her back."

Vic Alhadeff, a former Australian Jewish leader and South African expat, says the community has been feeling "exceptionally vulnerable" in the aftermath of 7 October. "The terrible incident in Bondi Junction certainly compounded that."

The immediate reaction was shock and grief for the families of those whose lives were brutally and randomly cut short. Compounding the angst was the fact that the motivation of the assailant was unknown, the very real fear of terrorism, and the fact that the shopping centre is frequented by many members of the community.

"Adding to the consternation was the baseless accusation that a Jewish man – originally from South Africa – named Ben Cohen was the murderer," says Alhadeff. "The claim was circulated on mainstream and social media, prompting thousands of comments and causing undue distress to the family and the community."

A new immigrant from South Africa, who asked not to be named, saw images on TV of her children's friends running out of the mall and being interviewed after the attack. "Everything starts and ends at 'the Junction', and when you first arrive in Sydney, you're there on a daily basis



Joel Cauchi on a stabbing spree at the Westfield Bondi Junction mall in Sydney

**What happened at the mall was a tiny version of what happened at the Nova festival and those kibbutzim.**

She thought she got punched, and then there was blood. Apart from that, she's okay. She's alive, and that's all that matters."

short. Compounding the angst was the fact that the motivation of the assailant was unknown, the very real fear of terrorism, and the fact that the



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as there's a 'home affairs' office there," she says. "As a newcomer to Sydney, the attack was a massive shock," she says. "I don't know who is more shocked – those who have been here for many years, or those who recently came here. What has been very difficult for people to grasp is the feeling that 'it could have been me, and would have been me, and quite frankly maybe should have been me' because everybody has been at Westfield Bondi Junction on the weekend, and many people were there minutes or hours before."

"As a parent, it was a huge jolt, because the biggest advantage of moving to Australia is the freedom and independence for my children. From a very young age, kids here are out and about on their own, and this incident has really shaken that feeling, at least for me and my kids."

"The stabbing occurred at a time when Australian multiculturalism is being tested like never before," says Alhadeff. "This nation has been home to Jews since day one of non-indigenous settlement, and Jews have served as head of the Australian Defence Force, as governor-general, and on government front benches."

"Australia 2024 is definitely not Germany 1933, yet for Jews born after the Holocaust, the tsunami of anti-Jewish hatred which swept Australia since 7 October is the most all-pervasive and terrifying in our lives and, in fact, in our country's history," he says.

"Racist epithets which were previously whispered are trumpeted brazenly, signs outside an apartment block declared, 'Kill Jews' and 'Jew lives here', a vehicle was spotted with Nazi registration plates, and hundreds of Jewish artists and academics were doxxed. This in a country which has been home to thousands of Holocaust survivors, in fact, the highest percentage of any community in the world, outside Israel."

Author, women's rights activist, and South African expat Joanne Fedler was flying to South Africa when the attack happened. "I landed and switched on my phone, and there were 50 messages asking if I was okay. It's my local shopping centre. My daughter and her partner both work at Apple there. My husband says the place is now deserted and eerie, with police tape everywhere."

She also feels that something has shifted. "For me, this is a symptom of a culture that has really lost its way, and I don't just mean in Sydney or Western society. I think the glorification of violence and the events of 7 October in which Hamas broadcast its rampage against young people [is a factor]. What happened at the mall was a tiny version of what happened at the Nova festival and those kibbutzim. These things aren't unconnected at all. I feel when you live in a society where people are excusing and even considering that what was done on 7 October is justified, it glorifies violence."

Levetan says the incident highlights the urgent need worldwide for more resources to be devoted to mental health, the need for it to be taken more seriously, and the importance of ensuring that patients don't fall through the cracks.

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# 'Silence equals complicity' in fight against sexual violence

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

The weaponisation of rape and sexual violence at times of war and conflict is sadly nothing new. Yet the denialism, silence, and victim-blaming that has accompanied the brutal sexual atrocities perpetrated by Hamas in Israel on 7 October is horrific, said a panel of experts at a recent Women's Action Campaign South Africa (WACSA) webinar.

Brutal gang rape. Broken pelvises. Genital mutilation. These and other horrific acts were perpetrated against Israeli women, children, and men on 7 October – all livestreamed by the terrorists themselves. Sadly, very few lived to tell their stories. Around the world, and particularly in South Africa, a country plagued by one of the highest global rates of gender-based violence (GBV), the lack of discussion about and support for the victims of what has been reported as "systemic sexual violence" has been jarring.

So said the panel of experts who participated in a discussion moderated by renowned South African broadcast journalist Annika Larsen on 15 April.

"I see what happened on 7 October as a 'life-quake', which encapsulates the horrific realities of genocide, a seismic event that shatters lives and communities," said panellist Danielle Ofek, an American-based Israeli who started the #MeToo\_Unless\_UR\_a\_Jew campaign in response to the global silence surrounding the sexual violence on 7 October.

Hamas committed these attacks with

a clear goal in mind: the genocide of the people of Israel and eradication of the land of Israel, she said. What's more, the narrative of disbelief and victim-blaming in the region started decades before 7 October.

"Today, we can see clearly how international institutions contribute to upholding and continuing this false narrative," Ofek said. "For example, the United Nations (UN) and UN Women are taken as the gold standard in terms of human rights and women's advocacy in the assumption that they are unbiased.



"Yet, as we've seen before and after 7 October, their leadership carries strong biases. You would expect an organisation that champions women's rights to be the first to call out gang rape and GBV." Yet it took the UN five months to write a report on the sexual violence perpetrated on 7 October, which still distorted the truth, she said.

These organisations also consistently remain silent with regards to the hostages,

Ofek said. "The hostages are probably going through sexual assault as we speak. It's unbelievable." Asked for the reason for their silence, Ofek said the leadership had an antisemitic agenda.

"South Africa is among the top three rape capitals in the world, so we live in a society where these types of acts are almost normalised," said Rozanne Sack, the Johannesburg-based co-founder and director of anti-abuse organisation Koleinu SA and a WACSA member. Sack, one of the panellists, said the fact that such a country was silent around sexual violence on 7 October was "unconscionable".

"This minimisation and denialism equates to silence for victims. If you say that these barbaric acts were part of resistance, that's silence for victims. If you have a mentality that only people living in underprivileged or difficult circumstances are legitimate victims, and Israelis can therefore never be seen as legitimate victims, that also represents silence for victims all over the world. That silence equals complicity to a certain extent."

Sack referenced a poll conducted by WACSA that explored attitudes towards rape and GBV in South Africa. "What was shocking was that one in four South Africans believe that rape can be justified in certain circumstances, with these results spread

equally between men and women," she said.

Asked why women would believe this, Sack said a factor was the entrenchment of patriarchy and toxic masculinity in certain cultures. "In some cases, the woman feels she's almost to blame, accepting the narrative that she did something to provoke the attack and that what happened to her is justified. Victim-blaming [internal and external] is a huge part of what keeps women silent. They are also often financially dependent on their partners."

That's why re-establishing control for survivors is so important, said panellist Dr Mushira Aboo Dia, an obstetrician and gynaecologist at Hadassah University Medical Center in Jerusalem and a sexual-



Dr Mushira Aboo Dia

abuse specialist at Hadassah's Bat Ami Center. Here, the woman determines what she

wants to discuss, and whether she wants the police involved.

Though the centre didn't work with 7 October survivors, Aboo Dia pointed out how difficult it was for those who have been through such traumatic events to talk about their experiences. "They might relive the horrific event multiple

times, which can cause re-traumatisation, which later on can play a role in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder." Research shows that secondary traumatisation can be even more damaging to a victim than the act of the abuse itself, according to Sack.

Additionally, when a survivor experiences victim-blaming, it can affect her chances of rehabilitation, said Aboo Dia. Being believed is a crucial part of healing.

"They need us to give them time to talk about what happened, even if it takes months," she said, referring to the released hostages. This was the case for freed hostage Amit Soussana, who recently spoke to the *New York Times*.

When the media is almost salivating to get the traumatic details from survivors, Larsen said, it makes it that much harder to speak up. In a world where the burden of responsibility seems very high for victims of sexual violence, believing women is vital, she said.

That's why, said Ofek, it was so disturbing to see how international organisations, which have in their mission statement believing all women, reacted to sexual violence on 7 October. "It's terrifying how violence against Israeli women has been denied, ignored, contextualised and even politicised," she said. "The crimes of 7 October were a crime against humanity. It should be a global concern. Rape isn't resistance; sexual violence is never acceptable. When brutal sexual violence is swept under the rug in our region, you embolden the perpetrators and enable it to continue happening elsewhere."



Danielle Ofek

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## Child abuse activist sees “life-changing” Israeli trauma

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“In South Africa, one in three children is a victim of sexual abuse,” says a renowned child abuse activist who cannot be named for her security. “This is something they’ve never seen in Israel.” That’s why after the horrific events of 7 October, she was determined to go to Israel and help.

Born in Israel to Holocaust survivors who later moved to South Africa, \*Sara Levy is grateful that her parents insisted that she remain fluent in Hebrew, allowing her to share her rare set of skills in Israel. As the trauma of 7 October came to light, she was convinced that these skills could be of use.

A neurodevelopmental specialist and leading child abuse expert at various institutions, Levy also conducts medical forensic examinations on children who have been raped and physically abused and as such, is an expert witness in court.

Levy travelled to Israel at the end of November 2023 to help released hostages navigate their trauma. Though she ultimately didn’t meet them, she worked with survivors of the massacre at Sheba Medical Center. Speaking to the Women’s International Zionist Organisation’s Johannesburg branch on 10 April, she says the experience changed her forever.

Landing in Israel, she saw F-16s on the tarmac. “You realise very quickly where you’ve arrived,” she said. Within two hours of arriving at her sister’s home in Rishon LeZion, the sirens sounded. “It was like a sick joke. We live with so much crime in South Africa so you think, how bad can it be?” It was, in fact, the stuff of nightmares. Levy’s sister lives right behind an Iron Dome substation, which amplified the screeching sound of metal and explosions.

“I managed to get my mom, who was staying with my sister, into the safe room,” Levy said. “At one point, the noise was so bad, I literally fell off the bed and held onto my mom’s feet. That’s how scared I was. And I’m tough. I spend my days in court with rapists and murderers. So, imagine being a child hearing this all the time.” And that’s only those who didn’t directly experience the violence of 7 October.

“My trip was a watershed event in my life,” Levy said. Among the many lessons she learned from working in what was essentially a war zone was just how much the world hates us. “Yet, I didn’t realise that there was also so much love. The love that Jews have for one another is just immense.”

When she found out that the child hostages had already been examined and sent home, Levy changed course, and worked with other victims of the massacre. “We want to limit secondary trauma and so, the most important thing was to get these released kids back home back into routines,” she said.

“I didn’t know that one could experience such intense and intractable sadness and strength simultaneously,” she said. Her patients included the Bachar family, whose story has been widely shared in the media. Living on Kibbutz Be’eri, the father, Avida, hid with his wife and two of their children in a safe room when Hamas terrorists broke into their home. Avida and his 13-year-old daughter, Hadar, were the only two who made it out alive. Carmel, his 15-year-old son, and his wife, Dana, ultimately died of their bullet wounds while hiding in the safe room.

In spite of his heartbreak, Avida was inspired by the man who lay alongside him at Sheba, a rabbi who screamed in pain as his dressings were changed, but who kept saying thank you. The rabbi said he was grateful to G-d to have reached this point, and to have had this experience in spite of his suffering. “Avida internalised this, and said the fact that he had his wife for so long and his son for 15 years was what he was thankful for.”

Levy also spoke of the children she met. “I didn’t imagine that I could meet such courageous and broken children, the children who endured 7 October and would present with such intense and paralyzing trauma. The intense separation anxiety, heightened intrusive thoughts, and flashbacks, are something we need to think about because this is how we’re now moulding these young brains. This is the future of Israel. You’ve got all this trauma, and these kids can’t process any of it because the trauma itself is blocking it.

“The lesson I want to highlight is how debilitating these emotions are,” she said. “The fear the horror, the anger, and the guilt – there’s a lot of survival guilt.” According to statistics from 7 October released by Channel 12 News, 84% of parents reported that their children were experiencing debilitating distress, and 64% reported that they had an intense fear and dread.

“So how are we going to rehabilitate these kids?” Levy asked. “What Israel did from the get-go was to start play therapy. They made sure the children got back to routine, allowing kids to be kids, encouraging play and sport. With my modest contribution, I was able to engage with parents and give them advice on how to help them cope in these situations. We want to minimise secondary trauma. Yet that’s the beauty of Israel, it’s the Jewish thing to do – that ability to rise up after breaking down.”

Levy stressed the need to rehabilitate children on both sides of the conflict to have any hope of healing. “The truth is, we aren’t just going to have to deal with children in Israel. We’re going to have to deal with children in Gaza as well. If we can repair all of our children, we’ll build healthy adults.”

• Sara Levy is not her real surname, but is used to protect her identity.



# Christian manifesto calls for peace of Jerusalem

HEATHER DJUNGA

Christian delegates, among them pastors, evangelists, ministry, worship, and church leaders from all denominations around South Africa, recently gathered in a display of solidarity at the Mount Zion Prayer Hill in Meadowdale, Johannesburg, to launch a manifesto focused on promoting the peace of Jerusalem.

The proceedings were brought alive by the blast of shofars and collective declarations, in which Christian participants said they would commit themselves to praying for peace, and promote Jerusalem's prosperity.

Titled the Jerusalem Manifesto, it encourages Christians not to get lost in the distraction and chaos of unfolding events, but to set their sights on Jerusalem and what G-d has established through the city as the "heart of the world".

Mount Zion visionary Dr Nico Landman said, "Manifestos have always been used as an instrument to bring clarity and stability during a time of transition. This manifesto is designed to bring focus to local churches and the community to create solidarity of purpose, which is to step up as 'watchmen on the wall' for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem. The scripture given on the day was Isaiah 62:6-7: 'I have posted watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.'"

Mount Zion in Jerusalem



Mount Zion Prayer Hill in Meadowdale, Johannesburg

was a seed of love for Jerusalem that would grow in the hearts of Christians. He made an analogy with the founding with his wife, Mimi, of the Mount Zion Prayer Hill on 11 September 2002, 21 years ago, when he and Mimi dedicated it to the Lord.

"Today, different nations meet here, and we hold large conferences and worship and prayer gatherings which bring Christian communities together. But this all started with just a seed, which was ignited by the

spirit of G-d. We believe the same will be true for this manifesto."

Landman said the manifesto's launch was just the starting point for a national roll-out, with an indefinite finishing line. He said a YouTube channel and social media pages would be set up, allowing for the sharing of content promoting the prosperity and peace of Jerusalem, which encouraged contributions from all residents, even those of the Jewish faith, united by a love for the G-d of Israel.

advertorial

## Yad Aharon & Michael's recent gala dinner fundraiser, *Behind the Silhouettes*, shone light on the 750 families who receive food assistance from the organisation.

Guests experienced a profound metaphorical journey into the depths of human experience. Just as a silhouette represents a mere outline devoid of detail, so too can the stories of those who receive food parcels from Yad initially seem obscured by the shadows of anonymity and despair. However, as one delves deeper by shining

**"Moving and perfectly balanced between tears and laughter, pain and joy."**

the light of compassion and understanding onto the silhouettes, they reveal intricate and unique narratives. By shedding light on a handful of stories, the audience was humbled by recipients' struggles, resilience, strength, and bravery.

On arrival, guests were guided through an installation depicting what 750 food boxes look like. They were then introduced to recipients' stories in a performance produced by Gina

**"Sensational night. A masterpiece."**

Shmukler. Thereafter, a video displayed the raw courage of recipients. Our unique and exquisite shadow dance journeyed from despair and hunger to joy and food security - choreographed by Talia Kodesh and Marise Dusheiko Mishan. We held onto every word shared by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, and the event culminated with a keynote address by Yad Chief Executive Lauren Silberman, saying, "I implore each of you to open your



hearts and to join us as champions by supporting the work of Yad Aharon. Together, we'll ensure that those most in need continue to receive the most basic and fundamental right to food."

**"Yad Aharon provides us with weekly food without judgement. This has been a lifeline."**

**"Yad has embraced me with unparalleled kindness. Words fail to express my gratitude to the donors for the invaluable support they've provided."**

**"Your generosity is a beacon of light in our lives, offering hope and sustenance when we need it most."**

**"We've had to explain to our children why we receive food parcels, teaching them gratitude while longing for a different reality. Your generosity sustains us, and I'm grateful for the portion of hope you provide with each donation."**

**"Yad Aharon's generosity has helped me to rebuild my life. I'm profoundly grateful towards every donor for their kindness and compassion, which have brought hope into my darkest days."**

Landman said the meeting wasn't a political platform. "We don't belong to this or that group, but we stand for Jesus, whom we believe is the prince of peace. We believe it's only the covenant-keeping G-d of Israel who can establish unity in diversity."

Landman referred to South Africa, the so-called "Rainbow Nation", with its many languages, tribes, people and diversity, and then to Jerusalem, through the gates of which different "tribes" entered to come together in unity.

"You're rightly referred to as the religious and historical epicentre of the world," Landman read about Jerusalem to the crowds. "Your city is a mix of ancient and present culture, with many archaeological layers of civilisation which have been established over four millennia."

Landman said he believed the manifesto

# BEHIND THE SILHOUETTES



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# Pesach: freedom from binary thinking

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



I recently met a delegation from the World Union of Jewish Students. These university students had come to South Africa from countries around the world on a solidarity mission in the wake of the African National Congress (ANC) government's hateful stance on Israel.

My conversations with these young leaders of tomorrow were really eye-opening. Their preconceptions of South Africa were of a country hostile to Jews, of an embattled Jewish community cowering in fear. One student from France had even gone so far as to register himself with the local French embassy for fear of what could happen to him. But then, when they arrived, they were astounded.

They were astounded at the nature of campus life for our students, at our vocal Jewish student organisations, and at Jewish students proudly and openly wearing yellow ribbons, kippot and tzitzit, and speaking up for Israel – a stark contrast to the climate of fear at campuses in the United States (US) and elsewhere.

They were particularly astounded at the vibrancy of our Jewish community – the bustling shuls and schools, the streets thronging with Jewish families over Shabbat, the warm hospitality they enjoyed staying at people's homes, and sharing Shabbat meals.

In general, the sheer energy and positivity of the community took their breath away. And they were amazed by the atmosphere of tolerance and openness in South Africa, the fact that Jews can display their Jewishness loudly and proudly. Many come from countries in which that's simply not possible.

And yet, as a community, we've endured real trauma these past few months

since the 7 October attacks, with the ANC government supporting Iran and Hamas and, absurdly, charging Israel with genocide. We've also witnessed proud Jews like Philip Krawitz and David Teegeer being targeted. It's true, there are many troubling issues we're facing, but we need to liberate ourselves from binary thinking, to hold both the positive and negative in our hearts and minds.

That's one of the lessons of the Pesach seder. On the night, we eat maror and matzah, embracing both the bitter herbs – the pain of slavery, and the "bread of freedom" – the ecstasy of redemption. We recount the suffering of more than two centuries of slavery in Egypt – we face the pain head-on.

But we also give thanks to Hashem for the incredible miracles – the great "signs and wonders" – that accompanied our liberation and our birth as a nation.

It's not a binary story of all good or all bad. It's complex, like our world. And in telling that story, we make space in our hearts for paradoxical emotions – pain and joy, fear and confidence. That complexity is the key to unlocking Jewish history; to understanding who we are as Jews, as individuals, and as a community. It takes emotional and intellectual maturity to see the big picture without being caught in binary thinking; to appreciate our many challenges and opportunities, difficulties and blessings, strengths and weaknesses.

This applies to the way we relate to our own South African Jewish community, but also to our reflections on Israel. It was inspiring to witness

the incredible miracles of Saturday night, the hundreds of drones and missiles shot down in mid-air, and the remarkable multinational coalition, including the US, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, that came to Israel's aid.

And yet, at the same time, our hearts are filled with so much pain for the families in Israel who will be sitting at their seder tables without loved ones – those who were savagely murdered on 7 October; brave soldiers who gave their lives in the Gaza war; and hostages who remain in the hands of sadistic terrorists.

As we sit at our own seders, free citizens of South Africa, free to live our Judaism as few have been in previous generations, with formidable challenges and astonishing blessings, let's all keep in mind the hostages – our Jewish brothers and sisters who remain captive, their freedom taken away by terrible Hamas oppressors. Just before the *Vehi Sheamda*, let's take a minute to say the words of this moving prayer for the return of the hostages, composed by Israel's Chief Rabbi David Lau, to be said at seders across the Jewish world:

*"May it be the will of our Father in Heaven who took his nation Israel out of the yoke of Egypt, He should bless and save our brothers and sisters, the hostages, who are held in iron chains. Strengthen their souls and faith, protect them from all harm and sickness, have mercy on his sons and daughters who look for his salvation, annul all cruel decrees. With His great kindness, He shall send their redemption and speedily take them from darkness to light and from the abyss of captivity to eternal freedom, and return them safely to their families and homes. Please, plant brotherhood, peace, and friendship in everyone's hearts. Remove jealousy and baseless hatred, and spread over us the shelter of Your peace, so that we should soon merit to sing before You a new song."*

Wishing our entire community a *chag kasher v'sameach*, with beautiful and meaningful Pesach seders.

• Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is the chief rabbi of South Africa.



Jewish life in South Africa is still strong and vibrant

# Break the shackles and be truly free

OPINION

If not for that one short paragraph, the seder night could be so relaxed and so much fun. After all, it's about celebrating our victory over Pharaoh all those years ago. It's about recalling our origins and how we came to be a nation. It's about remembrance rituals, good food, and nice songs accompanying a beautiful narrative. And most of all, it's about tradition.

Along comes this little passage, and creates a total shift in the direction of the evening. "*Bechol dor vador*" (In every single generation, one should consider himself as if he himself had come out of Egypt.) It's no longer about them, our ancestors, and very much about us, forcing us to stop, consider, and turn the evening from commemorative to contemporary.

What does it mean to consider that we ourselves have come out of Egypt? The ancient Egyptian empire crumpled thousands of years ago, its civilization

is extinct, and its values supplanted by those of subsequent great nations. Slavery, for the most part at least, has been eradicated from the globe. So, how are we to make the exodus personal and relevant?

It seems it's possible to live as a free human being in a free society and yet be a slave in *Mitzrayim* (Egypt). We can benefit from all the privileges granted by the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and still be slaves. For there is more to freedom than that of the body. So many live imprisoned within their own bodies,

which prevent their souls from achieving their true potential. Our physical bodies lead us to lust, greed, jealousy, and the need to satisfy every longing and

Picture drawn by Zahara Lurie, Grade 9, Torah Academy Girls High



RABBI YOSSI CHAIKIN



desire. Even our minds can become a jail. We pride ourselves on being rational and intelligent human beings. Indeed, we understand more about the universe, nature, and physics than any previous generation. We've become too clever for our own good, refusing to accept that there are things in this world we cannot and will not be able to comprehend. This blocks our pathway to blind faith and to many elements of religious observance. Probably the biggest form of slavery is incarceration in society. We're so

needy of social acceptance that we measure our potential growth and progress against the norms of those around us. How will my family, friends, and co-workers relate to me if I suddenly decide that I want to wear a kippah or tzitzit, keep kosher, or Shabbat?

Another huge inhibitor is fear of failure. If we're honest with ourselves, how many challenges have we turned down in our lives not because we weren't up to them, but because of performance anxiety and the aversion to risk taking?

Let's not forget how we've all become total slaves to our generation's technological advances, chained as we are to our various devices and unable to break those shackles.

The Hebrew word for Egypt – *Mitzrayim* – is related to the word for straights and narrow places – *metzarim*. Leaving Egypt today is about freeing ourselves from contemporary slavery, from self-imposed limitations, and imaginary glass ceilings.

By all means, let's eat and be merry on Pesach night. There's much to celebrate as we ponder our origins and the many miracles that have helped our people survive to observe the holiday for 33 successive centuries. Let's drink and sing, laugh and tell tales. But let's make sure that exodus doesn't remain merely a historical concept. For if we have spent an evening asking four questions, eating matzah and maror, reclining to symbolise our freedom, reading the haggadah from cover to cover, and given full justice to the culinary delights on offer, yet we wake up as slaves the following morning, we've truly missed a golden opportunity. *Chag kasher vesameach*.

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

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# Night of paradox and personal conviction

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



Life is supposed to make sense. And for me, it generally does. Even the impossible question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is often abstract and impersonal. My lack of understanding doesn't often hit me in the gut. I'm comfortable with the limits of my comprehension.

And then, my father died. Suddenly. On my mother's birthday. It was Wednesday afternoon in early January 2019, just hours before my wife was scheduled to board a direct flight from our home town of Johannesburg to New York City for her brother's wedding. I was going to watch the kids in Johannesburg. The flight was at 21:40. My wife was packed, and I was working on an essay. At 15:13, I saw a WhatsApp message on my family group.

"Emergency!!!!!!!"  
 "Tehillim."  
 "Dad isn't responsive!!!!!!!"  
 "We're calling Hatzalah."  
 Nine endless minutes later,  
 "Nothing they can do."  
 "Baruch dayan haemet"  
 "Get over here now!"

We soon found out that he had died peacefully in his sleep from a massive heart attack.

There was no time even to feel. Logistics took over. The flight to New York was leaving in six hours. We quickly bought a ticket. Three hours later, we were heading to the airport. My sister-in-law and her parents graciously took in the kids for the week.

I was going to a funeral. My wife was headed to a sibling's wedding. On the very same flight! She was flying with her gowns; I was flying with clothes that would soon be ripped and then worn for the week of mourning.

It was surreal. I kept pinching myself to remind myself that it was real. My young father had gone without warning, and my dear brother-in-law was getting married. All at once. The 16-hour flight is always long, but this time it was endless.

On that flight, I let go of logic. Logic was of no help.

We landed on Thursday morning, and soon went to the funeral. Three days later, my wife put on her gown and joined her siblings, parents, grandparents, and hundreds of others at a beautiful wedding, just five minute's walk from where my mother, siblings, aunts, uncles, and I were sitting *shiva*.

Just minutes before the ceremony was to begin, the groom stopped by. I walked outside as, according to Jewish law, a bride or groom may not enter a home of mourning on their wedding day. He was dressed so handsomely. I was in ripped, scruffy clothing. We hugged. We cried. I blessed him with everything good in this world. He shared words of comfort. And then I went back to join the ring of mourners and he went to put a ring on his bride's finger.

Talk about mixed emotions!

I share this personal anecdote because I believe that Pesach 2024 will be a somewhat similar experience for all of us. We'll be forced to confront very opposite emotions. Freedom and slavery – may the hostages come home! Gratitude and apprehension. Pride in our identity, and slight nervousness about the virulent antisemitism running rampant in the hearts of humans who we believed had a conscience.

In fact, however, it's not just this year's Pesach that confronts us with the paradox of opposing emotions. Rather, this paradox is built into the very fabric of the Pesach seder each year.

Salt water – to commemorate the tears; wine – to celebrate freedom; bitter herbs – it was so hard in Egypt; recline while you eat – because you're now free; matzah – food of slavery; and matzah – food of freedom. "This year, we're slaves. Next year, we'll be free!"

Then, of course, we have the four sons. The one who is over-excited to know every detail. The passive-aggressive dude with 14 earrings in each earlobe. The simple fellow who wants to be involved but is holding the book upside

down and can't even remember that there are four questions, let alone what they are. Finally, the fellow who doesn't know what hit him and has the gobsmacked face of Columbus arriving in the New World who doesn't have a clue where he is, who he's looking at, and what language is being spoken by the natives.

And yet, they're all at the seder. They all belong. Because the night of the seder is the night of paradox. We do unusual things just to arouse the curiosity of the kids. We sing songs about goats "*Chad gadya... beh!*" And dip our bitter herbs in some concoction that's supposed to resemble cement.



And, let's not forget how complicated the seder evening will inevitably be.

Your off-tune uncle will grate your ears all the same. He'll insist on reading every word in Hebrew and English out loud, and on sharing with you all the long paragraphs of commentaries from the haggadah he bought last week. "You need to hear this magnificent 40-minute thought I heard from Rabbi Cohen on YouTube. He's amazing! You just need to subscribe to his channel and listen to his four-hour podcasts at least twice a week!"

Your cousin will ask, once again, five minutes into the

seder, "How long until we finish? I want my phone! Do we have to do this? This is so irrelevant! I need to check my Instagram to see what my favourite celeb is eating for dinner! Priorities, man!"

Once again, those relatives with young kids will disappear for three quarters of the seder because, "We were putting the kids to sleep, of course. And it's all about the kids."

Gran will wax nostalgic about the good old days when seders were so special, when 75 family members would all come together in perfect harmony around this huge mahogany table, and everyone behaved so nicely. It was all perfect. These days, all the relatives are *faribeled* with one another, of course.

Once again, your auntie – and many others – will have way too much wine to drink, and by the time it comes time for the kneidlach, she'll be laughing at everything and everyone at top volume.

And the *kvetching* about living in South Africa will be the same. And the cost of Pesach food! There will be so much knowledge and prophecies to share! "I'm telling you, South Africa has three years left! Mark my words!" Spare me.

In this maelstrom of chaos, oxymorons, and conflicting emotions, we'll remember once again that the heart is big enough for lots of emotions. We can cry and dance; mourn and celebrate; miss the past and embrace the present; cringe at our mother-in-law's comment; and still love her. Okay, maybe that's too much to ask – how about tolerate her. We can be proud of who we are, and pray hard for better times.

We can remember that life isn't perfect, but we never give up hope for "Next year in Jerusalem!"

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

## UNDERSTANDING SENIOR LIVING. WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

**Finding an appropriate senior living community as one ages is an essential component of retirement planning beyond the necessities of shelter and healthcare.**

It's about ensuring a vibrant, fulfilling future as we age. With 70% of individuals over 65 requiring some form of long-term care during their lifetime, the need for proactive planning is clear yet often overlooked. Auria Senior Living communities offer a holistic approach to senior living, catering to the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual well-being of their residents. This comprehensive care model is designed to support an active and engaging lifestyle, fostering independence and assurance of care and financial predictability.

Many older adults fall into the trap of the "immortal teenager" fallacy, believing they will always live in their home without ever needing additional care for the remainder of their lives. However, the reality of ageing and its complexities soon become apparent. It's important to consider an environment that encourages active ageing and a holistic approach to wellness, ensuring that support and care are available at short notice when needed.

Some older adults plan to bring services into their homes, a fragmented approach that often falls short of addressing all healthcare needs. While it may be easy to find gardening or maintenance services, it often becomes more complex with issues such as care and assistance with activities of daily living. Auria Senior Living offers a more integrated solution, with a community that ensures healthcare services are readily accessible,

delivered by trusted professionals, and managed by a multi-disciplinary team which can respond correctly to changing care needs.

The cohabitation option, where one plans to move in with one's children, can have an impact on independence and family dynamics. There's a distinct lack of options for social activities in such instances, and often loneliness and isolation result, with numerous impacts on quality of life and wellbeing. Auria Senior Living offers a more autonomous alternative, promoting independence and community living among peers, where social interactions and independence are paramount.

Then there's the reactive approach of seeking care in response to a crisis, often resulting in compromised choices. Auria provides a sense of preparedness, offering options and support even in unexpected situations.

The Continuing Care Retirement Community model, exemplified by Auria Senior Living, addresses concerns about cost, quality, and location of care for future needs. It ensures a vibrant, independent, and engaging lifestyle, with the assurance of receiving necessary care and support from familiar staff every single day.

Choosing Auria Senior Living is more than just selecting a place to live post-retirement. It's about embracing a lifestyle that prioritises quality of life, focusing on engaging living, compassionate care, and peace of mind. Auria isn't just a senior living option, it's a pathway to later years filled with richness of life and vitality, ensuring that you don't just plan for the future, but create a desirable one.

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# Feel free to reflect, and choose moral path

DENNIS DAVIS



A rabbi was asked by one of his students why G-d created atheists. The rabbi responded, "G-d created atheists to teach us the most important lesson of them all, the lesson of true compassion. You see, when an atheist performs an act of charity, visits someone who is sick, helps someone in need, and cares for the world, he's not doing so because of some religious teaching. He doesn't believe that G-d commanded him to perform this act. In fact, he doesn't believe in G-d at all so his actions are based on his sense of morality. Look at the kindness he bestows on others simply because he feels it's right. When someone reaches out to you for help, you should never say, 'I pray that G-d will help you.' Instead, for that moment, you should become an atheist. Imagine there's no G-d who can help, and say, 'I'll help you.'"

This profound lesson, from Martin Buber in his book, *Tales of the Hasidim*, teaches us that in place of a fundamentalist literal reading which so dominates orthodoxy at present, namely that we conduct ourselves by virtue of a literal reading of the text, we should accept the burden of human agency and be guided by our sense of morality and what's right.

Pesach is the focal festival in which we are told to place ourselves in a position as if we had been liberated from slavery. It thus demands that we search in an existential manner for what the festival means for us in the here and now. Inspired by a tradition that talks at its best to the human condition, how can we attain greater levels of freedom for ourselves, for our community, and for the world? The tradition isn't about pilpul – arcane Talmudic debate – or a ritual incantation of the haggadah. Instead, it should concentrate our minds on what freedom in the third decade of the 21st century should mean. Like Buber's atheist, we're required to make decisions for ourselves shaped by our

application of the tradition to the contemporary world in which we live.

What this tells us is that ritual isn't there as an end in itself, but rather serves as an inspiration for us to engage individually with the inner significance of the festival so that it can enrich our lives and the lives of those affected by us and our conduct.

In short, we read in the haggadah that in every generation, it's incumbent upon a person to see himself or herself as if he or she was liberated from slavery. We must ask what we're required to achieve with our newly gained freedom?

the Egyptians against the children of Israel reflected within the modern context on the oppressive conduct of the apartheid regime towards the majority of South Africans.

It wasn't possible to celebrate a festival of freedom without reflecting on the very conditions in which we as South African Jewry were located – albeit that much of the establishment did exactly the opposite.

And that must be so in every generation. The festival should be located within the context in which the seder is conducted. The ritual should stimulate a re-examination, to see our world in the best possible moral light.

To be sure, throughout the generations, the precarious nature of Jewish life meant that a primary concern was to ensure freedom for our own community. But when we start the seder itself and speak of the bread of slavery and affliction and that anyone who is hungry should come and eat and anyone who is in need should come and partake in the Pesach sacrifice, we make a far more universal claim. That's that freedom is indivisible.

We didn't have it when we were slaves, and this necessitates that we must demand it for ourselves in every generation as well as for those who, like us, are denied their freedom.

The tragedy is that all too often, the gaze of the festival has become myopic and imbued with a rigid application of ritual and a good dose of xenophobia in which we fail to lift our gaze to see the broader consequences. This makes this so important a period within our calendar to stimulate us to be better participants in the development of all of humanity.

• Judge Dennis Davis is an honorary professor of law at the University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand, and University of the Western Cape.



Surely it's not simply the concept of negative liberty, as articulated by Isaiah Berlin. It's not freedom from but rather freedom to choose that matters most. That's freedom to choose a moral life, freedom to choose the idea that we have an obligation to construct a world when all will be free, not just simply a select group of us.

During apartheid, the vicious practices perpetrated by

## Strangers in a strange land – HIAS fills the gap

TALI FEINBERG

The Pesach story delves deep into the idea of being a refugee, the meaning of freedom, and the imperative of welcoming the stranger, so it's meaningful that a new Jewish organisation, HIAS South Africa, devoted to these ideas, recently opened in South Africa.

More than 100 years ago, Jews in the United States founded HIAS – originally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society – in New York City, the immigrant gateway to America. Supporting Jews fleeing persecution and poverty in Eastern Europe, the founders were guided by the traditions, texts, and history of the Jewish people, a history of oppression, displacement, and diaspora. HIAS has since helped generations of Jews facing violence, and remains committed to helping Jewish refugees anywhere in the world.

Today, HIAS is a multi-continent, multi-pronged humanitarian aid and advocacy organisation with thousands of employees dedicated to helping all forcibly displaced people around the world, in keeping with the organisation's Jewish ethical roots.

When a shooter opened fire and killed 11 congregants at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, he cited HIAS as the reason he wanted to attack Jews. The organisation hasn't let his hatred deter it in its vital work, now the world's oldest refugee agency has opened a branch in this country, headed up by

community activist Alana Baranov.

"HIAS provides vital services to refugees and asylum seekers in more than 20 countries," says Baranov. "We advocate for the rights of all forcibly displaced people to rebuild their lives and seek to create a world in which they find welcome, safety, and opportunity."

Explaining how the South African branch came about, Baranov says, "I've been working with HIAS for the past 10 years. It has a relationship with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD], and when Mark Hetfield, the chief executive of HIAS would come out to South Africa, I would help on behalf of the SAJBD and organise meetings for him with the refugee community and refugee organisations."

"Over the past decade, I've attended meetings of HIAS internationally, and we've always spoken about how amazing it would be for HIAS to be here in South Africa. Last year, there were two scoping missions to the country. The first was in February, the second in August."

"During those two missions, the leadership of HIAS came out and learned more about the context in South Africa,

the challenges in the country, and the challenges specifically for the refugee and asylum seeker community," says Baranov. "They met Jewish communal leaders and refugee and asylum seeker nongovernment organisations (NGOs), and wider community leaders. It was then decided that it would



Alana Baranov with some refugees and asylum seekers

open officially in the country. We started operations on 1 October 2023.

"We're initially based in Durban," says Baranov. "That's because it's a province that has a refugee population and there are some NGOs that work with refugees and asylum seekers but not really a plethora of organisations. Gaps exist, and there's an opening for HIAS to come in and make a critical difference. We want to grow slowly and sustainably, but the plan is that we'll

soon expand to other regions in the country and into various sectors."

HIAS has five signature approaches: providing legal services and support; working to end gender-based violence; community-based mental health programmes; economic inclusion; and advocacy.

"Because we're a small office, we're initially going to focus on two key areas," says Baranov. "The first is legal protection, to assist refugees with the correct documentation, running legal help desks, and free legal clinics for refugees. We'll also be running 'know your rights' campaigns – getting information out to the refugee community and the broader South African public about the rights that refugees and asylum seekers have in the country. We'll also see where we can assist other NGOs in the sector with strategic litigation on key points of refugee policy."

"The second focus will be on combating, preventing, and addressing rampant xenophobia in South Africa. Xenophobia is becoming entrenched and is only growing, and we want to see how HIAS South Africa can be involved in terms of advocacy, engaging with the media, with civil society networks and initiatives, being involved in interfaith work, and doing what we can to

combat this hate.

"HIAS South Africa sees itself as playing a convening role, because we have such a vibrant civil society in South Africa with so much amazing work being done on these issues," says Baranov. "We don't want to come in and re-invent the wheel, rather to see where there are gaps where we can bring our best practice and expertise from our other offices around the globe, and to help resource and increase capacity in local networks and local refugee-led organisations."

"At Pesach, we gather together to tell the story of the Jewish people's original flight from persecution, and we hold in our minds the more than 110 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes," says Baranov. "On this holiday, we know that our own freedom is inextricable from that of all people fleeing violence and toward safety."

She recommends downloading the HIAS haggadah from the organisation's website. "Updated in 2023/5783, it's full of readings and stories which connect the foundational liberation story of the Jewish people with the reality of the refugee experience in the 21st century."

"We're told 36 times in the Torah to love those who are strangers," says Baranov. "We understand that their stories are our story. We see our past and our future in their search for safety and a safe future for generations to come."





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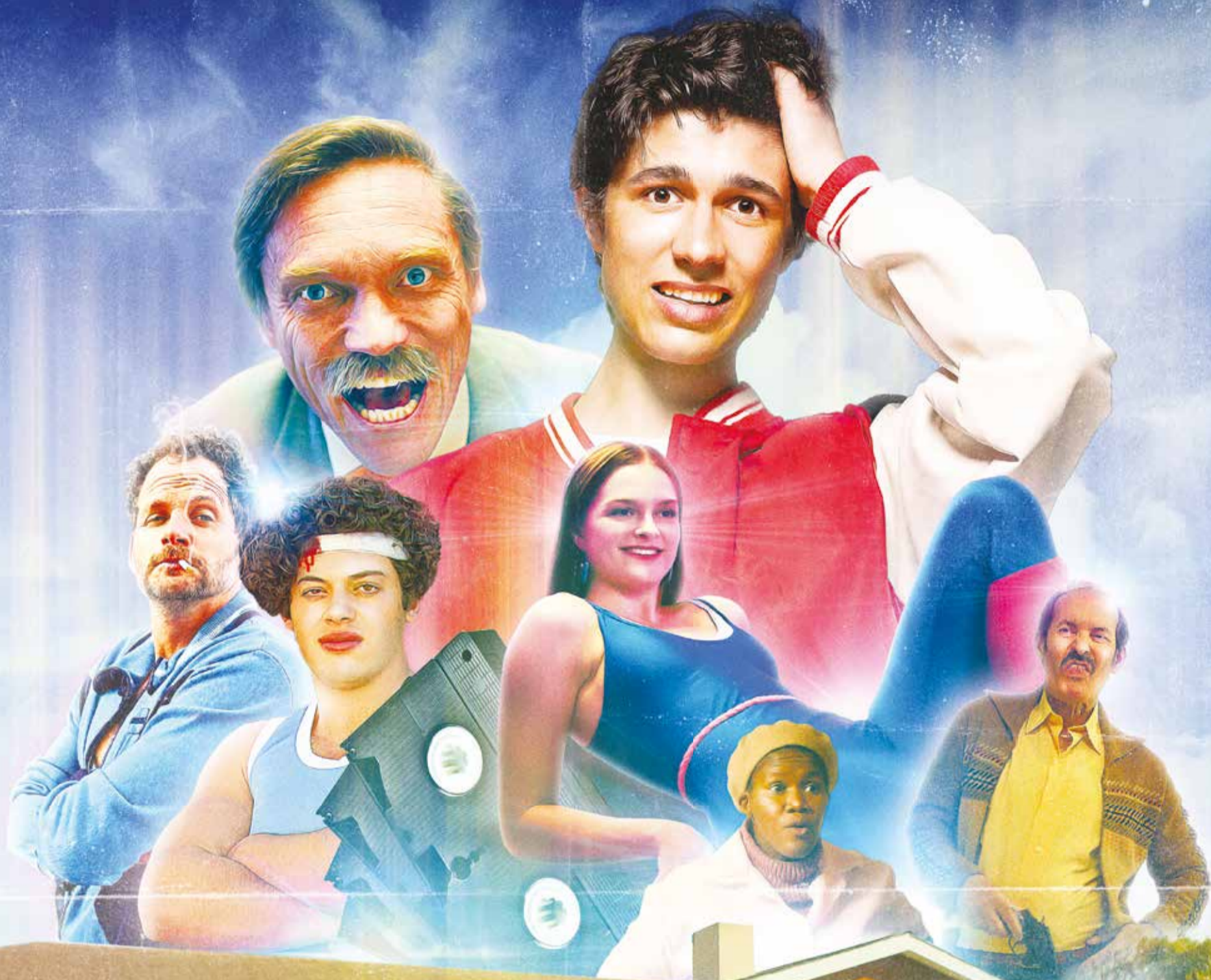


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# No need to justify, just to educate

OPINION

RABBI RICKY SEEFF



“Three hundred years ago, there came to the New World a boat, and its name was the Mayflower. The Mayflower’s landing on Plymouth Rock was one of the great historical events in the history of England and America. But I would like to ask any Englishman sitting here on the commission, what day did the Mayflower leave port? What date was it? I’d like to ask the Americans: do they know what date the Mayflower left port in England? How many people were on the boat? Who were their leaders? What kind of food did they eat on the boat?”

“More than 3 300 years ago, long before the Mayflower, our people left Egypt, and every Jew in the world, wherever he is, knows what day they left. And he knows what food they ate. We still eat that food every anniversary. We know who our leader was, and we sit down and tell the story to our children and grandchildren in order to guarantee that it will never be forgotten. And we say our two slogans, ‘Now we may be enslaved, but next year, we’ll be a free people.’”

This is an excerpt from David Ben Gurion’s famous speech to the Peel Commission in 1936 during the British Mandate of Palestine, which was appointed to study the rising violence between Arabs and Jews and propose a solution. Ben Gurion invokes Pesach as the illustration of our claim to Israel. Pesach is the festival of the Jewish family. It’s the festival where Jews, across the religious spectrum, gather to celebrate a seder together. It’s a festival that symbolises, more than any other, commitment to Jewish continuity and to the land of Israel.

Isn’t it ironic that in 2024, 88 years after Ben Gurion’s speech invoking Pesach, we’re still locked in a battle with our enemies and many around the world trying to justify our claim to Israel. A claim that preceded the existence of any of the nations that seek to delegitimise Israel. In spite of the superb efforts of journalists and community leaders around the world, even those of different faiths, we’re besieged globally by marches of thousands calling for Israel’s destruction with their ill-disguised antisemitic chants. It seems like our justifications fall on deaf ears, generation after generation.

Perhaps, therein lies the issue. We don’t need to justify. We need to educate. Ourselves.

There’s no *mitzvah* in the Torah which calls on us to explain ourselves to others. There’s no festival in which we dedicate ourselves to spreading the Jewish faith or belief to other nations. There’s only a *mitzvah* to tell our story to our children. There’s only a *mitzvah* to ensure that our children know who they are, where they come from, and how they are part of Jewish destiny.

When we sing the beautiful *V’hi Sheamda* on seder night, we remind ourselves that in every generation, there are those that rise up to destroy us, and it’s only

our faith, tradition, and connection to Torah that ensures our survival.

In gematria the word “*v’hi*” is made up of four letters: a *vav* – numerical value six; *hay* – numerical value five; *yud* – numerical value 10; and *alef* – numerical value one, which our sages teach is a reference to the six books of the Mishna; the five books of the Torah; the 10 commandments; and the *alef* representing one G-d, Hashem. It’s only these that we can rely on, not Joe Biden.

Advocacy has its place and is important. However, Jewish education is paramount. Our homes and our seder tables are the foundation of Jewish continuity. It’s here that we sit at a magnificent multi-generational event and imbibe, deep into our consciousness, and remind ourselves of our roots. It’s around these tables that our children learn that in spite of what others think, and without the need to justify ourselves, Israel is the Jewish homeland because Hashem promised it to us. He took us out of Egypt and into Israel, where we established a homeland. There was no Peel Commission, there was no United Nations. Just a people and a divine promise. And that’s good enough.

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

# Five lessons we never forget

OPINION

REBBETZIN GINA GOLDSTEIN



The focus of the seder night is telling the story of the exodus from Egypt and the miracles done by G-d for us, His children. This is a once a year opportunity! G-d wants us to remember our national story of origin forever, and transmit it continuously to future generations. Everything we do at the seder is in pursuit and support of this goal. In a sense, this is the original night to “never forget” our roots in slavery and struggle, leading to our miraculous national redemption.

The haggadah is designed with some strange and surprising things, like three layers of matzah; four questions; four cups; four sons; and eating matzah and maror sandwiches. We do all this in an engaging, creative, and interactive way. We want “to make the children ask”. We want to incite their curiosity and questions. All this in order to do the main *mitzvah* of the night, the *magid* (telling the story), the *mitzvah* around which all the other *mitzvahs* of the night revolve.

Because we don’t just tell the story, we make it understood. The seder is an audiovisual production. We have some lively fun in pursuit of this lofty goal. It’s not really a night of learning Torah or prayer, above all, it’s an emotional, experiential, child-centred night of optimism and faith. The greatest purpose of this night is to feel deep gratitude and submission before G-d.

As we follow the narrative of the haggadah, many themes emerge. Here are some valuable ideas to share and discuss at the family seder. They include educational insights and important lessons. These themes have never been more relevant than they are in today’s context, especially this year in the shadow of Israel’s war on Hamas.

- “Seder” means order or structure. Our Pesach seder must blend order with inspiration, Jewish law with creativity. The most beautiful and successful musicians, sportsmen, and artists have integrated structure and discipline with creativity and inspiration. So, too, for the *mitzvahs* of Jewish life. “*B’seder*” means “in order”, “ok”, and “all good”. The seder is made up of 14 parts, which are unpacked and explained with everyone present. We know that high achievement isn’t spontaneous and haphazard. Rather, it’s a well-planned and disciplined integration of natural talent and a lot of hard work. Most importantly, our life is in order because it’s overseen by G-d. Nothing is coincidence or random. It’s all “meant to be”. We’re all on a road map so we won’t get lost.
- We’re the children of Hashem. The four questions are asked by the youngest child, and if there are no children, then by the adults present. “And even if we’re the wisest and most insightful of all men who know the whole Torah, we must still talk about this history, and the more we do so, the better.” Children have the wonder, curiosity, and excitement that adults may have replaced with cynicism, scepticism, and resentment. We should remember to simplify and to have a certain childlike faith in G-d. No-one is more helpless and vulnerable than a newborn baby, but that baby feels utter peace and calm when it’s in the arms of its parents. So, too, seder night is the night to feel and transmit ideas around simple faith. Like a baby in Hashem’s arms, we’re safe and without worries in His world. In the Torah, the seder night is called “*Leil shimurim*” (A night of protection and being guarded). At the end of the seder, we all sing, “Who knows one?” because all we really know is “One is Hashem of the heaven and the earth.”
- Modesty and humility is symbolised by the matzah itself

being the simplest food – not enriched, not fancy, not luxurious. Matzah is food for the soul. We’re eating uncomplicated simplicity and humility. We’re not puffed up and full of ourselves. Just like children are naturally themselves, with no airs and graces, so, too, we would like to be sincere and authentic in our character and behaviour. Matzah is the bread of the poor, the bread of faith, and symbolises going back to basics. In spite of the miracles and victory in Egypt, we remain humble and simple.

- Gratitude, perspective, and appreciation is a strong theme as we tell the story from the negative to the positive. Once we were slaves and before that, we worshipped idols.

We came from nothing! We were nobodies until we were redeemed, chosen, and shepherded towards the *har Sinai* experience. Our trajectory was changed. We went from the greatest depth to the greatest height. We appreciate freedom, family, and being Jewish only if we absorb where we came from. Food tastes best when we’re hungry. Freedom tastes best when we recall what it was like to be enslaved. Pesach is called *zman cheruteinu* (the time of our freedom) because we don’t take freedom for granted. Once we were beggars, but now we’re free!

*Dayenu!* Author Slovie Jungreis-Wolff once said, “We mistakenly believe that the more we give our children, the happier they’ll be, but in truth, the more they appreciate, the happier they’ll become.”

- At the seder, we learn that adversity and struggle gave us strength as a people. We learn the value of grit and resilience. We became great because of the hardship we endured. The hard-boiled egg is symbolic – the more heat, the tougher we become. Adversity is a catalyst for growth. The maror we eat forges us into a nation. Now we say, “Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are needy join us.” Some are in need of love or friendship, some are in need of time or education. Being in need makes us who we are today. *Yachatz* is the broken matzah. We all suffer, but we break bread and share it with anyone who needs it. This is *chesed* (kindness), a foundation of our identity as a people.

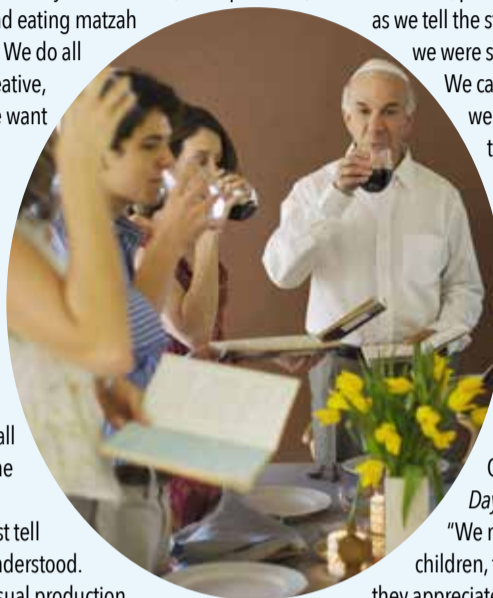
All the lessons and ideas we talk about on seder night link to what we say and eat. It’s an audiovisual show of smells, tastes, stories, and wonder for all. We draw the attention and interest of all our guests and inspire their curiosity and questions. We create an emotional and experiential seder not only an intellectual one. One of the four sons “doesn’t know how to ask”. It says you open his mind for him, and his educational path.

All six *mitzvahs* of seder night support the telling of the story. We eat the matzah and the maror, drink four cups of wine, eat the afikomen, and say Hallel.

We mustn’t forget our broader goal. There’s a job even more important than making our children happy. The ultimate goal of a Jewish parent is to raise Jewish children who are closely connected to Hashem and other Jews, children who are wrapped up with the mission and destiny of the Jewish people as a whole. Children to whom we have successfully transmitted our faith and trust in G-d. Children who faithfully observe and guard all the *mitzvot* out of love and gratitude to Hashem. Successful Jewish parenting isn’t just about teaching information but about education in this broad sense. Our whole Jewish future depends on it. We’re always only one generation away from failure – G-d forbid! The *mitzvah* to explain and transmit our history, values, and identity, is the lifeblood of our future as a nation. In this sense, parenting is part of our national mission. May we all be blessed with success!

Next year in Jerusalem!

- Gina Goldstein is a rebbetzin, mother and grandmother, and is the wife of Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and co-founder of the Shabbos Project.”



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# Feel and be transformed – it's seder school 101



RABBI GAVRIEL ZIEGLER

OPINION

We're just a few days away from one of the highlights in the Jewish calendar: the seder nights, which, as a principal and teacher, I find educationally exciting.

The seder is the event that the great sages from previous generations chose to use to instil identity into the next generation. The tools they used always leave me amazed at how advanced their perspectives were when it comes to education. Examples range from experiential learning; and avoiding lecturing but getting everyone involved with their senses from smells to taste, as visceral learning becomes embodied. Visual learners will take in the beautiful scene of the set table and the seder plate. Auditory learners will connect with the songs and conversation. All of this should be conducted in an engaging way of storytelling and questioning.

I think of one Sephardi custom in which the seder leader takes the seder plate and holds it for some moments over each person's head like a spotlight, encouraging them to focus, and singing a song of exiting Egypt, making each participant imagine for a moment what this might have been like. Ideas range from dressing up to beautiful haggadah illustrations, and more. At my last seder, someone contrasted the plagues to our universal recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how just like one plague was almost like 50 plagues each, COVID-19 wasn't just about terrible illness, but about loss of income, families cooped up trying to survive without help, the frustration of not getting out, and the fear of harming people and many other far-reaching



consequences. Thinking of the plagues like this made them that much more relatable and potent.

These are teaching skills 101, and would be expected of any teacher worth their salt.

As Rabbi Reuven Leuchter points out, the seders often aren't an experientially transformative story, but an evening where a few people share *drashot* and insights into the texts. Even when they attempt to include their children or grandchildren, it's about them repeating intellectual lessons

learned at school. He stresses that the seder must be an experience, where children feel and understand to some extent what it means to be a part of the Jewish people, be in slavery, and what redemption might feel like. There should be greater empathy with the pain of being a stranger, as well as the responsibilities that come with becoming a sovereign nation.

In thinking of this experience of slavery and redemption, in her book *Seder Talk*, Dr Erica Brown has an article about the

different perspectives on redemption. Redemption has two features that are ever present: "wait" and "hope". These two words help us to understand the process of redemption. As Brown writes, "Redemption isn't only about possibility. It's also about patience, the emotional fortitude required to wait for the small, interconnecting pieces of a story to come together organically."

When we speak about redemption, there are two forces at play – pressure and patience – knowing when to push for redemption and when to accept that more time is needed. This tension is connected to the final redemption, and is reflected in the verse from Yeshayahu referring to the coming of Moshiach, "*Beitah achishena*" (In its time, I will hasten it). As the Gemara of Sanhedrin explains it, if Jews merit it, then "*achishena*" (I will hasten the final redemption). If they don't merit it, they need to be patient and wait for redemption, "*be'itah*", at the right time. The lesson of Pesach is that "*Yeshuat Hashem keheref ayin*" (The salvation of Hashem comes in the blink of an eye). When the time is right, Hashem can make anything happen. However, one needs understanding and maturity to know when to leap and take hold of the moment, and when to be patient and wait for another opportunity. Even at the coming out of Egypt, the Midrash tells us that 300 000 Jews tried to leave early from Egypt and were unsuccessful. Their timing wasn't right, they pushed at a time that they should have been resilient and patient.

It reminds me of the serenity prayer that's used by recovering addicts, "G-d, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I

can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

As mentioned at the beginning of this piece, the seder should be a night that changes one, not just a night of sharing "cute" ideas. So how do you make this lesson of redemption a transformative learning experience? Aside from "waiting" and "hoping" for the food to arrive during the seder, ask people around the table what redemption they are hoping and waiting for personally. In everyday life, we all have our struggles that we're working to conquer and are praying for help with. We need to have the mindset that Hashem can deliver us at any minute from these struggles, in the blink of an eye. Yet, we also need to bear in mind that we're obligated to do as much work as possible to bring about that redemption, and be ready for when the time comes to break free and grab the opportunity firmly with both hands. It might happen that people around the table feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable and share personal stories that bring the Passover experience to life in the present.

On this Pesach, may we experience the many lessons that are on offer at the seder. May we be prepared for Hashem's salvation at any minute, while at the same time, having the patience and fortitude to wait when we need to. May we all do what we can to bring about the reality necessary to allow that final redemption to be heralded, and may we grab that opportunity with full and zealous hearts.

• Rabbi Gavriel Ziegler is the principal of the Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School in Cape Town.

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Saturday	27 April 2024	18h30 - 22h00
Sunday	28 April 2024	08h00 - 16h00
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# Freedom – from the pens of our youth

The SA Jewish Report asked Jewish pupils to capture what freedom looks like for them in the light of Pesach, what happened in Israel on 7 October, Israel's war against Hamas, and rising antisemitism in the world. We received such outstanding work, we had to complete it online due to space limitations in the newspaper. See sajr.co.za for more.

## Ask and ye shall receive

**AYALA SIFRIS, GRADE 11, YESHIVA COLLEGE**

The prayer *Vehi She'amda* sung at our Pesach seders each year will be felt like a crushing weight on our souls as our eyes leak with tears and our glasses with wine.

"*Sheloh echad bilvad, umad aleynu lechalotaynu. Elah, she bechol dor vador, omdim aleynu lechalotaynu.*" (There has not only been one who has risen to destroy us, but rather in every generation, they try to destroy us.)

This year, recent images flood our minds. Massacred bodies, burnt cities, innocent people in the hands of terrorists, and more than 1 500 beautiful souls murdered. And when we sing at our *seders*, it won't be a foreign thought, but rather the present enemy that has arisen "*bador shelanu*" (in our generation).

For this year, our imaginations will picture Pharaoh alongside an ordinary-looking man in keffiyeh with a scarf of green, red, black, and white chanting, "From the river to the sea", a euphemism for "Wipe Israel and the Jews off the map." And in our mind's eyes, we'll see Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen raising their staffs to the heavens alongside saluting 18, 19, 20, 45, and 50-year-old heroes in uniforms green with the emblem of Hashem on their chest: "IDF" (Israel Defense Forces).

As our enemies chant in support

of terrorists, commend the atrocities of 7 October, and spread hate in the name of freedom, I wonder what we're asking when we pray, sing, and beg Hashem for freedom? My childish visuals of rainbows and people holding hands disintegrated after my teenage mind was engulfed in the images and news from my phone *motzei* Simchat Torah.

"*Hatikvah but shnot ulpayim, lihiyot um chofshi beurtzaynu, eretz Zion Yerushalayim*" (The hope that is 2 000 years old: to be a free nation in our land, the land of Zion, Jerusalem.)

The words of *Hatikvah* illustrate the Jewish mindset and vision.

Freedom is to be free from fear of invasion. Freedom is to dance at a musical festival in Be'eri. Freedom is to wear an Israeli flag on your back and a Magen David on your heart with pride. Freedom is parents holding their children, young kids riding bikes and laughing in the streets without the empty chair at their dining table waiting at home. Freedom is to live life according to the beliefs you cherish.

In this time of turmoil, our faith strengthens as we wait every day for the return of our hostages, the end of this war, and the final redemption. This year, *Vehi She'amda* shall be felt as a breeze of relief filling the cracks of our soul, for the hymn concludes with an everlasting promise:

"Every generation, Hashem saves us from their hands."



Torah Academy

## Proud and free

**JESSIE SHERMAN, GRADE 11, HERZLIA HIGH SCHOOL**

Her Magen David feels cold against her skin, hidden underneath her sweater.

His kippah, although on, is tucked beneath his hat.

They are scared. She sits inside her basement, patiently waiting for the shelling to halt.

He sits by the telephone, awaiting any news on his wife's safe return. They are scared. She hides inside her closet, hoping the intruders won't hear her.

He grips his phone tightly, telling his family that he loves them.

They are scared. I wish for a world without fear.

A world where we aren't forced to hide ourselves away,

A world where IDF (Israel Defense Forces) soldiers can return to their families,

A world in which we have freedom – the freedom to exist.

Together, we can build a world that's free.

She removes the necklace from beneath her sweater, now proudly on display.

He takes off his cap, allowing for his kippah to be in full view.

They are proud.

## We're not free until our family is free

**CHAYALE FINKELSTEIN AND MUSHKA FEINBLUM, GRADE 10, TORAH ACADEMY**

While our sun rose, so did theirs.

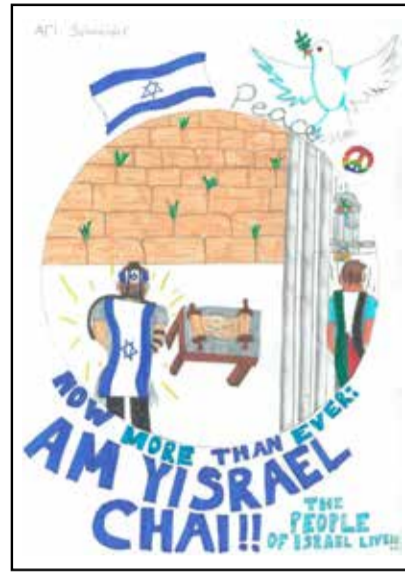
While we went to shul, they went to war.

While we sang, they bled.

*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh.* (All Jews are responsible for each other.)

On 7 October, our brothers and sisters were brutally attacked as if they weren't human. Our principal, Morah Rebecca Sarchi, asked us to raise our hands if any of us had lost a family member in the conflict. When we looked around, there was a single person with a raised hand. Morah asked her who she had lost, and she replied that every girl should be raising their hand as every Jew is a part of our family – *klal Yisrael* – (#mytwin).

The holiday of Pesach is focused on freedom and redemption of the Jewish nation. This year, it's even more important to take the lessons to heart. We may not feel the war firsthand, but we're not truly free until our entire family is free as well. May Pesach this year bring freedom with the coming of *Moshiach*.



Ari Schneider, Grade 7, Torah Academy Boys High



Meir Smadja, Grade 7, Torah Academy Boys High



## YOM HASHOAH

Monday, 6 May 2024

West Park Cemetery

11h45

Survivor testimony by  
Rena Quint Survivor guest  
speaker Miriam Lazarus

"We have an important role... to speak and make sure that other people will be remembered."

Listen. Learn. Remember.





# Boundaries and brotherhood

**Yael Hurwitz, Grade 9,  
Torah Academy**

A man stands on a flat roof in the wind and the rain. He takes a step towards the edge, and then another, until there's space only for three more steps. A man stands on a well fenced roof in the wind and the rain. He safely walks up to edge of the roof until he's resting against the fence. For the safety of the man on the unfenced roof, he cannot go so far to the edge, but when a fence is put up, the man on the roof can walk up until the edge of the roof. The same fence that represents restrictions, allows freedom. Ironically, I feel most free when I'm in a locked house with high walls, fencing, and burglar bars on every tightly closed window. As a Jewish female living in South Africa, I'm the freest when everything around me is locked up. In an ideal world, I wouldn't be bothered about safety in my home. Yet safety in my own home is one of my most anxiety provoking obsessions.

Being a female in the 21st century, relates me to many real-life horror stories I've heard, most of which have happened to women. Being located in South Africa, it's pretty self-explanatory. Just ask an American, and they will tell you how we're constantly escaping cheetahs' jaws and being trampled by elephants. Above all, as a Jew, our circumstances force the clock to tick slower than my stumbled Hebrew reading. It's almost as if since 7 October, time has stood still. As a Jewish people, we've held our breath, waiting for the release of our families. And we're just that. A Jewish people that stands together united as one, like family. Family that argues sometimes, don't get me wrong, but nonetheless a family that sticks together, until *mechitzas* do us part. In order for us to feel truly free at such a restricting time, we need boundaries that allow us to walk far and friendships to rely on. We need perseverance to get us through the hardships. Most importantly, we need ourselves because we're constantly with ourselves. And trust me, I'm always talking to myself.



**Chanan Medalie, Grade 7,  
Torah Academy Boys High**

# Fight for what we've lost

**Chaya Lipskar, Grade 7,  
Torah Academy**

Freedom. A blissful feeling that we once had as Jews. Being able to walk freely and not be afraid to share your true identity. But that was taken away from us on 7 October by the evil, horrendous, Hamas. A dark day we'll never forget. Jews in Israel are worried about what's going to happen next. We're lost and confused as we try to straighten out our lives and act as if life is going on normally. Closer to home, we see yellow ribbons on trees, hostage signs all around, and yet, antisemitism lives on here, just not as "revealed" as in other places. As for Israel, wherever you walk, there's a sense of fear, worry, and anxiety. We want freedom, a way to walk in the streets and not have to watch the skies for bombs. A way to reveal that you're Jewish without worry. A way to

feel comfortable in your own skin. When I close my eyes to envision what freedom looks like, a picture-perfect image starts to form in my mind. People can walk down the streets, feeling the freedom in the air, being able to express their opinions and thoughts with carefree minds and without a worry in the world. Hamas has taken away our sense of freedom. Will we allow it to have the satisfaction of seeing us helpless and lost? Feeling like all the hope in the world belongs to everyone besides us? Or are we going to fight back, not only literally on the battlefield but also to feel free, even when we don't? As author Stephen Covey once said, "Our ultimate freedom is the right and power to decide how anybody or anything outside ourselves will affect us."



**Yakov Apfel, Grade 7,  
Torah Academy Boys High**

# Our superpower

**Rachel Ginsberg, Grade 9, Cape Town Torah High**

In 2024, in light of what happened in Israel on 7 October 2023, the country's war against Hamas, and rising antisemitism in the world, when we call for freedom, what exactly are we asking for and what does it look like? Following 7 October, there has been a rise in antisemitism in the world. At the same time, there has been a rise in unity among all Jews everywhere, no matter how religious, no matter how Zionist. Amidst all of this hatred and evil, there's hope and strength. This is the superpower of the Jews: to unite in the

face of adversity. There are now pro-Israel rallies, and many Jews are calling for freedom, but what does it even mean? According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "Freedom is the condition or right of being able or allowed to do, say, think whatever you want to, without being controlled or limited." There are many types of freedom too: freedom of speech, freedom of action, freedom of choice, freedom of thought, freedom of information, and freedom from injustice or persecution. I find it interesting that everyone is calling for freedom when Jews haven't had freedom from injustice, freedom of speech, freedom of information, or freedom of

thought since 7 October. Freedom takes many different forms for many different people. For me, freedom looks like a society based on discussion and truth. For me, it looks like a society with no need for hate speech, violence, or other forms of persecution. Freedom is a society with no need for control. Freedom is being able to walk down the street without people shouting, "Free Palestine!". Freedom is being able to say anything related to Israel to antisemites without being shouted at. Freedom is being able to be yourself without judgement or hatred. Freedom is existing in peace with everyone else, and for everyone else to exist in peace with you.

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# Thousands of years of resilience

**JOSH WOOLF, GRADE 10, KING DAVID VICTORY PARK**

"For to be free isn't merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." – Nelson Mandela

Freedom. A word presenting hope and new horizons but laced in a background of captivity and destruction. For what is freedom truly worth without its counterpart: slavery and imprisonment?

Simchat Torah 5784. Hamas launches an attack on an unsuspecting Israel, resulting in more than 1 300 civilians murdered and 240 kidnapped and taken hostage. A massacre of a magnitude which hasn't been seen in Israel in roughly 80 years arrives – bang – on our doorstep!

This counterpart of freedom is nothing new for us Jews. For thousands of years, we've suffered at the hands of our enemies. On 7 October, Hamas showed the world that the suffering continues.

Jews' ongoing struggle for freedom is more visible to us now than ever before in our lifetime. The destruction of homes and countless families; settlements with desolate and death-ridden streets. Today, the Jewish nation is subject to extremist antisemitic terrorists, who are masters at manipulating the audiences behind differing mediums, diminishing our freedom. We want to be free of the propaganda and undeserved prejudice. We call for people to stop believing the first read headline. Research. Find out more. Seek the truth. Don't let narrow-minded explanations suffice.

Through newspapers, television, and social media, protests of hate and violence, people all over the globe call for our annihilation. Our enemy has cunningly placed "reporters" ready to conduct interviews condemning Israeli forces for war crimes they haven't committed.

Innocent people are being held hostage on your soil! We call for their immediate release, and for their freedom.

#Bringthemhome #Letourpeoplego

This article began with the words of none other than Nelson Mandela. As a Jewish South African, I feel disappointed in my government. A nation that has a rich understanding of discrimination and injustice refuses to acknowledge the severity and reality of our conflict. For me, freedom means not being exposed to hate speech and racism by a fellow South Africans.

It's not easy for me to approach such a complex topic. It's not easy for Jews to get up and keep going. But we do. There's a certain maturity that Jews have been forced to adopt in order to survive. We know the true value of freedom. We understood it when we left the cruel hands of Pharaoh and crossed the Red Sea, just as we will realise it today.

As you set your seder table, create matzah-balls, and revise our swift exit from *Mitzrayim*, keep in mind that you embody the rare characteristic of Jewish resilience, a trait which humanity cannot take away from us.



**Gavi Schneider, Grade 10, Torah Academy Boys High**

# The right to feel safe everywhere

**YITZCHOK PINK, GRADE 9, TORAH ACADEMY BOYS HIGH**

The date 7 October definitely changed my perspective on freedom. Before 7 October, freedom meant becoming more independent as an adult. But since 7 October, it has become centred on being Jewish.

With all that's happened since 7 October, it feels like as a people we're under attack. It's no secret – we still have hostages in Gaza, and antisemitism is rampant.

Freedom before 7 October was a given, but now in April 2024, it's a hazy vision ahead. Freedom now means being able to be a proud Jew anywhere in the world.

Freedom now means having the right to our homeland without it being questioned. I've always felt that freedom should be a right, not a privilege, that every person in any country should have. And there are lots of organisations working for human rights and freedom for people all over the world. And while as Jews, we have lots of Jewish organisations fighting for us, we don't have the world fighting for us. As time has gone by since 7 October, our allies have started to dwindle in support.

The fact that Jewish people everywhere at times feel anxious and nervous when travelling is a problem. Maybe I'm naive, but I can't think of another people who would have to be nervous when travelling other than Jews. Obviously, there are other people who are prosecuted for their beliefs like Christians in northern Africa and non-religious Muslims in Afghanistan and Iran, but it's not a global issue for them.

Jews should be able to feel safe anywhere and everywhere. We should be free to travel anywhere and everywhere. We should be free to live anywhere and everywhere. We should have the freedom of any other person. And it's not just us, innocent Palestinians in Gaza should be free to live under a non-Hamas government. The hostages should have the freedom to live in peace. Israel should have the freedom to defend itself without the world questioning it.

Because freedom is a right and our right to freedom is being compromised.

# Ability to choose

**CHEN MANDELBERG, GRADE 7, TORAH ACADEMY**

Once believed that the height of freedom meant my parents going out for the day and leaving me all alone with no homework to do.

Similarly, when *bnei Yisrael* were taken out of Egypt, although they were finally free, they were so used to slavery, they didn't know how to react. Instead, they complained, longing for the small comforts that they had enjoyed in Egypt. The fish that they had eaten *b'chinam* in Egypt. But *chinam* is never free. It's simply the wool that we pull over our eyes. The comfy blanket that allows us to carry on sleeping.

Before the horror of 7 October, we Jews were free. We were able to walk on the streets freely without having to worry. We could go to sleep at night without fearing for our sons and daughters, siblings, or partners. We never imagined for a second that they would go out one day and not come home. We could spend time with our loved ones without worrying that they could possibly be kidnapped or murdered.

And all this just because we're Jews?

As crazy as it may seem, these are the times we now live in. But like every event in our lives, great or small, it gives us a choice: we can either choose to accept our reality and act accordingly, or try to hide from it. Sadly, throughout history, this has always been our reality and our choice.

From the Jews in the desert who lost an entire generation before they were truly free of their chains, to Queen Esther, who had to face the reality of no more being able to hide in the palace than the holy martyrs of Europe could hide from the Nazis.

But therein lies the secret to our freedom. Because we Jews are never victims. We never give up. We never stop fighting, growing, learning ... hoping.

For in the end, as author Viktor Frankl taught us, from the depths of the hell of Auschwitz, freedom is only ever one thing – choice.

We cannot choose what happens to us, but we can choose to face it with courage, determination, and *emunah* (belief). May we all merit to that kind of choice this Pesach.

# Unity is strength

**JARRED ZOLTY, GRADE 12, CAPE TOWN TORAH HIGH**

It has been just more than six months since the atrocity that was the 7 October massacre, and still we don't have all the hostages back, nor are we yet at a time of peace. Jews around the world continue to suffer from aggressive demonstrations of blatant antisemitism in no way limited to anti-Zionism.

Jews have to be even more cautious while doing mundane everyday things, especially on university campuses globally. Locally, going on the promenade on the wrong day can be dangerous.

As the festival of freedom approaches this year, we must all take a moment to be grateful to have full tables and think about the families that have an empty chair at their Pesach seders. Freedom for them will be having their children,

siblings, or parents return home, but freedom for us will be when we can freely practice our faith without any fear of facing a protest; when we're free of our haters preventing us from living our belief as Jews.

Freedom for Israel is being able to fight a war in the most moral way and not receiving hate from other countries or being told how to fight in a better way. Freedom for Israel would be to lose the expectation of being held to a higher standard of fighting, and fight a just war as morally as it already does. Freedom for us is being able to go to university and feel accepted for who we are. Freedom for me is when the Jewish people are free from infighting, when everyone puts aside their personal political views as well as their level of observance, and stands together as one nation. That's why this year above all else, I can thank G-d that we're a free nation.



**Talia Steyn, Grade 5, King David Victory Park**

# End of the eclipse

**SHIRA EPHRON, GRADE 12, KING DAVID VICTORY PARK**

The atrocities of 7 October won't be an eclipse of Jewish history, a dark moment in time that silently passes over. As a young, Jewish liberal student living far from Israel, I hope the world can recognise that the actions that happened on that day were brutal towards Israelis, no matter the other side's history. I hope the world listens to the children who grew up too quickly that day, to the women who were treated like rag dolls, and the families who grieve the loss. Freedom looks like open conversations and being able to learn from what occurred. I hope as Jews that in the future, we can strive for peace, even if it's difficult, and not hate. As the chief rabbi said, "An eye for an eye can make the world blind." As a student of history, I hope for freedom, and that society can realise that the conflict has sides. And as

humans, we must look to both sides and realise that people are getting hurt in the crossfire of this war.

I hope that in the future, as a Jew, I won't feel a shadow of fear lurk over me when I tell people my religion. I hope that I have freedom to feel safe in my identity. I hope that the innocent people in Gaza get a leadership that cares more for their well-being than the current leadership does. Because at the end of the day, mothers and fathers are losing their children to the political climate and poverty. I would be a hypocrite to use the word freedom if I pretended there no was suffering in Gaza too, no matter the reason or what side I'm on. Who's free in this war? Who's free from worry? I hope as Jews we can dance again, but never forget the eclipse of 7 October. And as people, we can understand that the actions were done by the other side because they know a different history. I hope freedom can dance hand in hand with empathy.



## Chag Pesach Sameach

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## Freedom to do what's right

**TIPIKI KIEVMAN, GRADE 8, TORAH ACADEMY**

The definition of freedom is "the power to act, speak, or think how one wants", but in my opinion, it can sometimes be the complete opposite. In this war, we witness again and again how doing whatever you want is the biggest threat to freedom.

By "acting however you want", so many people are getting killed, tortured, kidnapped just because they're Jewish or just happened to be visiting a family member in Israel. With people acting as they want, none of the aid is getting to the Palestinian civilians, and our hostages are probably far from Gaza by now.

People are speaking as they want to, spreading false information about the Israelis. People are being told how terrible they are for all the torture going on, but honestly, what other nation sends aid to the very country killing their people. All this false news leads to the propagation of hate, the very thing we're trying to diminish.

So I don't think that's the definition of freedom, but I do believe that if people stopped telling lies, there would be freedom. If people knew what was actually going on in Israel, then maybe it would be stopped, and there might even be peace, and peace is a step closer to freedom.

People need to understand what's going on before they spread rumours.

Freedom when you're able to feel safe in your own home and aren't scared of being murdered in your bed, when people don't do whatever they feel like just because they want to. That kind of freedom leads to violence and death.

So I stand with the famous words of Peter Marshall, who said, "May we think of freedom not as the right to do whatever we please, but as the opportunity to do what's right."

## Victory is belief in Hashem

**YISROEL SIMPSON, GRADE 9, TORAH ACADEMY BOYS HIGH**

Being free means being able to live your life without being undermined because of your beliefs. Nowadays unfortunately, that's just what's happening. Jews are being attacked and persecuted just because they are Jews. But this isn't a new phenomenon. For thousands of years, Jews have been oppressed, expelled, and tortured for the crime of being Jewish. It has happened during the Holocaust, pogroms, expulsions, 7 October massacre, dating all the way back to biblical times.

But throughout all of these years, the one thing we have in common is that we've made it through, in spite of being a relatively small nation. This isn't because of military strength or diplomatic relations, which are of course important, but because of Hashem, who helps us through all our challenges. When we all realise that victory isn't the result of our own power, and we trust completely in Hashem, we'll merit to have everlasting peace and freedom without any concern of future attacks or threats.

## When 'never again' is now

**RIVKY ZWICK, GRADE 9, TORAH ACADEMY**

Never again. We remember. Our people have left Egypt, the Holocaust is over, Israel finally belongs to us. Judaism is alive and thriving globally like never before.

And then it happened again. Simchat Torah, October 2023. There was joy and laughter. Communities and friends gathered together. Cups were raised, and the Torah was uncovered. The celebrations lasted long into the night.

The devastating news lingered over the community the very next day, with remnants of the previous night's celebrations still scattered in the wind. You could cut the anguish in the air with a knife.

Never again happened again. Our people have been targeted, lives have been lost, and our cries have been lifted to the heavens in desperation. And now, six months later, we find ourselves in the month of Nissan, *zman cherotenu* (the time of our freedom). Our oppressors still hold our people in captivity, bombs and missiles still fall, and tears still stain our faces.

In a world where free speech is encouraged and embraced, our voices have been silenced by the comment section, and individuals that wish to extinguish our everlasting flame.

As Pesach approaches, it's becoming clear that our people simply cannot achieve freedom through the world's acceptance of us. Because the world never will accept us. It will continue to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear towards the truth. These facts are rightfully hard to accept, as people shouldn't have to accept prejudice and let injustice roll off their shoulders, especially when it's towards their own kind.

The story about the Jews in the time of Pesach teaches us what it actually means to be free. At a time when the Jews were tied down to slavery and cruelty, they were able to take an Egyptian god and put it on the fire, for all to see. Their fear and shame were overruled by their Jewish pride.

From them, we learn that freedom is a state of mind far more than it's a physical entity. Freedom is sitting around the seder table with our matzah and our wine, singing our songs and raising our cups to the fact that the hand that Hashem reached out to us in Egypt is still holding on tight.

As the Jewish nation, we must come to terms with the fact that for as long as our feet walk on the earth and our lungs breathe the air, we'll be a free nation.

*Am Yisrael Chai vechofshi.* (The nation of Israel is alive and free.)



## Stand together

**DANIELA SACKS, GRADE 8, TORAH ACADEMY**

Israel is under attack  
 People start running, some start to pack  
 Sirens are ringing  
 People stop singing  
 Rockets are fired  
 People are tired  
 Some think it's fake  
 But the army stands awake  
 Lots are injured as well as killed  
 The bomb shelters are filled  
 Some kidnapped, some mourn  
 But the hearts of the Jews aren't torn  
 Stand together as one  
 Until this war is done  
 We pray day and night  
 And won't go down without a fight

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# The light has dawned

OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



Jews have always been fond of answering one question with another. In fact, Golda Meir was once asked by a journalist, "Why do Jews always answer one question with another question?" She gave a simple answer. "Why not?"

So here's question number one: Moses is the hero and main protagonist in the story of Pesach and the exodus from Egypt. And yet, the haggadah read on seder night telling the story of slavery and redemption hardly mentions his name at all. There's but one mention in passing where the verse from the Splitting of the Sea is quoted, "And they believed in G-d and in Moses, His servant." I wouldn't exactly call that getting his name in neon lights. But surely Moshe is the "star of the show" and deserves to be highlighted throughout the narrative? Why is he "missing in action" in the haggadah?

Allow me to answer this question with another.

One of the most famous passages from the haggadah recounts the story of some of the greatest sages of the time who gathered in Bnei Brak for the Pesach seder and "they were discussing the exodus from Egypt all that night, until their students came and told them, 'Our masters, the time has come for reciting the morning Shema.'"

Here's question number two: If your rabbi and teacher was giving a shiur and he was going on a bit, and sunset was approaching, and it was time to *daven* Mincha, would you interrupt him to tell him? I can say with certainty that if I was listening to my teacher and mentor, the Rebbe, and he was giving a talk and sunset was approaching I would remain absolutely *shutum!* I would never have the *chutzpah* to interrupt my saintly teacher. And here are some of the greatest sages of the generation – Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon – and these young students have the cheek and audacity to show them their watch, to tell them to hurry and finish their discussions as it's getting late to recite the Shema? What gall! What temerity!

I once came across an interpretation that answers this question beautifully. It's somewhat alternative, but it's in the classic mode of *drush*, what we call homiletics. This is where the word "*drosha*" comes from, meaning a sermon. In sermons, rabbis often employ the methodology of *drush* in expounding and interpreting a Torah verse in an original, creative way to give the congregation a meaningful message beyond the simple, straightforward explanation of the Torah verse.

Basically, in our haggadah passage, if we move the comma just one word forward, it sheds altogether new light on this story. The traditional understanding is that the rabbis were discussing the exodus all night, and in the morning, their students arrived and said, "Our masters, the time has come for reciting the morning Shema."

However, if we move the comma just one word later, it has a whole new meaning. The passage would then read: "The rabbis were discussing the exodus all that night, until their students came, and our rabbis told them, 'The time for the morning Shema has arrived.'"

In other words, the statement about the time for the morning Shema wasn't made by the students, but by the rabbis themselves.

You see, these great rabbis were up all Pesach night discussing the exodus story, its deepest meanings and interpretations. Night symbolises darkness. Indeed, they were living in the dark, depressing era after the Romans had destroyed the Second Temple and were brutally occupying Israel. No doubt, they were bemoaning the state of the holy land and its Jewish community in that terrible era. Would there be a future for Judaism? Could the Jewish people rebuild and regenerate after such a calamitous tragedy? These must have been the questions

they were grappling with.

Until the morning dawned, and their students arrived. And suddenly, the rabbis were encouraged and their mood lightened. The arrival of a group of young Torah scholars hungry to learn brought them new hope for the Jewish people. They saw a brighter future, now assured by a new generation of dedicated students eager to keep the faith and study Torah. "The morning has arrived!" the rabbis gratefully proclaimed. They beheld a new light bringing new hope and confidence in the Jewish future.



Photo: Anna Risi

Elijah the Prophet, is prominent in every Jewish home on seder night. There's the very visible Fifth Cup of Elijah, and in the latter part of the haggadah recital, we also open the door for Elijah.

Moshe is described as our first redeemer. Eliyahu, however, represents the final redemption. In Jewish tradition, Elijah is known as the harbinger of Moshiach. He'll arrive and announce the great redeemer's imminent coming, please G-d. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before that great, awesome day," says the verse in Malachi, which we read on Shabbat Hagadol just before Pesach. Elijah will be the one to herald the final redemption.

Those rabbis of old were comforted and reassured by the arrival of a new crop of young Torah students. And at our seder tables, too, we want to focus our attention not only on the past but on the future; not only on the redemption from Egypt, but on the final redemption of Moshiach. Hopefully, this can help us to better understand why, at the seder, Eliyahu gets more coverage than Moshe.

Like Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, we, too, live in the shadow of the destruction of European Jewry and the Holocaust. Nor are we yet finished with Hamas & Co. But in spite of all our challenges,

we're heartened by the emergence of a new generation dedicated to Torah study and Jewish continuity. Like the rabbis at their seder, we, too, have reason to be confident that a new dawn has risen and who will proudly proclaim "*Shema Yisrael*" and the eternal oneness of G-d.

Wherever we may be celebrating Pesach this year, may we all be together "next year in Jerusalem!"

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is the life rabbi emeritus at Sydenham Shul, and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.



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# Is there a future for us?

OPINION

REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY



The headlines are screaming, the news is overbearing, and a general sense of despondency hovers over us. This world has turned upside down, mostly because of 7 October, but undoubtedly, it was simmering to a boil even before that. There's wars, terrorism, scandals, and political upheaval. We're suffering from financial instability, divorce and infidelity, physical, emotional, and mental maladies. There have been quite a few people I have engaged with recently who have expressed their concern whether a "brighter" future is possible, and here in South Africa, just the loadshedding schedule can plunge us into a dark and grim reality.

Sadly, and for me quite shockingly, some of these people argued quite strongly that the world looks too bleak, and there's no place right now to bring children into this world and expect that they will be able to live a wholesome life. Well, I thought, they do have a point. For those of us that belong to the

other millennia, when we cast our minds back to our childhoods of carefree days, filled with fun, laughter, outdoor activity, engagement in imaginative play, and reliant on "good-old-fashioned" stability around a home and family, it does feel like eons away in another space, unhindered by the pressure, stress, and anxiety of a kid growing up today.

And then I thought to myself, this isn't the first time the world looks like it's gone mad. You're probably reading this in "Pesach mode", so let's look at the world then, pre-exodus. The Jewish people were enslaved, shackled to the dictatorship of a despot Pharaoh, who didn't care for any human rights whatsoever. Even worse, he exploited his position and brought about profound human suffering, tragedy, and



hardship. Imagine the trauma of living there under these conditions? Knowing every day when you wake up that your baby might be thrust from your care and thrown into the Nile River, or even worse, killed and drained of their blood so a maniacal tyrant could bathe in it. Imagine witnessing a loved one whipped to death and then used as a missing brick in the pyramids? Imagine the backbreaking work, the endless hours of continuous suffering, and the bitterness and tears that engulfed the nation.

Truthfully, this reality did break the people, and the Torah tells us that many demoralised men abstained from intimacy with their wives. Who wants to bring children into this world? And by the time the evil decree came to throw all Jewish boys into the Nile, even the leader of the Jewish people at that time, Amram, succumbed to their despondency and he, too, separated from his wife.

It took a visionary and a hero to save the Jewish people, and it came in the form of a young girl called Miriam, Amram's only daughter. "You're worse than Pharaoh," she argued. "He decreed that no Jewish boys should live, but by you choosing not to have any more children, you're essentially decreeing that there won't be a future generation!" And Amram the Sage took heed, remarried his wife, and convinced the other men to follow suit. That re-union gave birth to the redeemer, Moses, who eventually took all the Jews out from slavery to freedom. The wives beautified themselves and allured their husbands back, resulting in the birth of new generations of Jews that lived not only to see the redemption, receive the Torah, and settle the land, but by extension, today we're grateful to call them our great-grandparents.

Who are we to judge the value of one more Jewish soul? Who are we to judge the value of a child who has the potential literally to change the whole world? Miriam believed in the intrinsic value of the Jewish nation, and by extension so did all the Jewish women. Today, we're thankful that they didn't succumb to despondency but rather held on to a faith of a better, brighter tomorrow. As the Torah teaches us, "In the merit of the righteous women of Egypt, we merited to be redeemed." And this happened repeatedly in history. We can simply cast our minds back to the broken souls that hobbled out of Auschwitz and went on to build families and generations that thrive and contribute today.

Interestingly, there's another part to the quote above about the righteous women. According to the master kabbalist, the Arizal, the souls of the final generation before Mashiach's arrival are reincarnations of the souls of the generation of the exodus. Just as then it was in the merit of the women's faith that the Israelites were redeemed, so, too, it will be in the merit of the righteous women of our generation, and our unwavering belief in the redemption, that we'll be redeemed once again. So now, how's that for the flip of the coin. You still don't see a "bright" future?

On the contrary, we need to gird ourselves with positivity, practice our faith with joy, raise our families with love, and continue to build our land with determination. In each and every heart, deep in your soul, there's a burning desire to make this world a better place, a dwelling for the Almighty, and we're guaranteed that just like in the days of Egypt, we too will be redeemed. And this time, it will be forever. May we merit this immediately!

*Chag sameach vekasher.*

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



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# Remembering redemption in light and in darkness

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



The great book of Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, imagines that when Jewish people tell the story of *yetziat Mitzrayim* (exodus from Egypt) at the Passover seder, we bring down the angels who delight in our storytelling. Telling the story during the seder (*magid*), is a grand act of remembering. In fact, we're meant to remember the exodus from Egypt every

longing and hope.

Indeed, so serious are we about remembering, that just as we start dreaming about granny's kneidlach and soup during the seder, we read a teaching from Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. He says, "All my life I never understood why we're told to remember the story of Pesach '*kol yemei chayecha*' [all the days of your life]."

Nachum of Chernobyl offers a Hasidic reading of Ben Zoma's "*kol*" suggesting that telling our story in the day is about telling our story when our consciousness is in a state of illumination, *bahir*. In modern terms, I would understand telling the story when things are *bahir* as telling the story when life is light-filled, when there's clarity and understanding of how the world works, when we have the gift of hindsight and can say we're in a good place. It's a tremendously rare luxury to tell the story of *yetziat Mitzrayim* from a place of unadulterated joy. Understanding this, the Chernobler adds that remembering is also required of us in what he calls the time of "*chasheichut*" (darkness). Darkness doesn't absolve us of remembering.

There's a particular pain and poignancy in thinking of telling the story of exodus at a time of *chasheichut* or darkness. For surely, while our hostages remain in the tunnels of Gaza, a pall of darkness hangs over the Jewish people. Therefore, Ben Zoma's reading is apt. Even when times are dark, perhaps especially so, we're enjoined to remember!

This year, as we recount the four children of the seder – the wise, the wicked, the simple, and the one who doesn't know how to ask, we'll surely all remember a fifth child – the human who isn't able to be present at the seder because they are literally held hostage in Gaza. The hostages will be holding the most dismal seder – the concrete tunnels their only *charoset* and their only *maror* being their bitter tears. Yet, I hope that somehow, the hostages will still remember the story of exodus and perhaps it will give

them hope. The Chernobler enjoins us to remember in *chasheichut* because that's sometimes when we need it most!

My teacher, Rabbi Dr Erin Leib Smokler, shared that she struggles with the late night start to the seder, particularly in the American summer. The children are tired, and she might be too. But she said something about the Jewish way means that our remembering and our telling is inextricably linked to telling the story in our nights. We tell the story of our redemption in the hardest of places.

I pray that if the hostages are aware it's Pesach, they have enough spirit remaining in them to audaciously recall that the Jewish people have been in narrow places before and have been saved. Let them not lose hope! I also pray that in some mystical sense, the angels of the Zohar find their way into the tunnels, and bring the hostages comfort, paving the way for their redemption! But this year, whether they are able to tell their story or not, we need to hold onto hope and tell the story for the hostages. And for the hostages and for us, may the students come at the end of this long, dark night, and invite us to the recitation of the morning Shema. May dawn come!

*Chag kasher ve'sameach.*

• Adina Roth is director of Jewish Life at Emanuel School, Sydney, and is a final year student at Yeshivat Maharat, studying towards her Orthodox ordination. With thanks to her teacher, Rabbi Dr Erin Leib Smokler's hassidut class for the ideas from the Chernobler Rebbe.



day. Most days, I struggle to remember what uniform my child is wearing, but luckily, the remembering of Egypt is built into our morning and evening *Shema*! However, on Pesach, we perform a grand, spectacular retelling, along with food that reminds us of the cement, the tears, and the matzah we ate as we fled in haste. Remembering is an audacious, heart-stirring activity of human

Here Rabbi Elazar is wondering, in typical rabbinic fashion, why the word "*kol*" (all) is included, when simply "the days of your life" would suffice. He quotes Ben Zoma to suggest that the word "*kol*" encapsulates a double remembering: we remember the exodus not just during the day but also at night – and we thought night time was for Netflix! The Hasidic Rebbe Menachem



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# After darkness of massacre, a night of miracles



RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

As Pesach approaches, our minds and hearts are flooded with a range of conflicting emotions. The date 7 October was the darkest day in modern Jewish history. Our people were savagely attacked in their homeland. We incorrectly assumed that rape, murder, and the torture of innocent and defenceless Jews were scenes from our painful exile and couldn't occur in Israel. That day left us with so many questions, chief among them: how could Hashem allow this to happen?

For the past six months, as we've battled to defend our land and our people, Hashem's presence hasn't always been evident. In a world of pure evil, rabid hatred, and fabricated truths, it was sometimes difficult to detect the presence of Hashem. We've lived through an agonising period of *hester panim* in which the face of Hashem is concealed. The Pesach haggadah phrase which best typifies this period is the lament of "V'hi she'amda" (In every generation, they rise up against us to annihilate us). So many whom we thought were enlightened and possessed a moral conscience have risen up against us in fanatical hatred. The world has felt dark and broken.

A week ago, on *motzei* Shabbat, this reality partially shifted. On one remarkable evening, Hashem's presence became more apparent. We were savagely attacked by an Iranian missile blitz aimed at inflicting enormous casualties upon innocent civilians. Astonishingly, almost none of these death warheads penetrated Israeli airspace, and no lives were lost. Hashem

enabled our military scientists and engineers to develop a system to protect us from lethal weapons which literally fall from the sky.

The Talmud Yerushalmi reports that on the first Saturday night after creation, Hashem gave Adam fire, signalling his desire that man's divinely endowed creativity be employed to perfect Hashem's

dark periods, Hashem's presence is manifested when a cure appears prior to an illness or the *refuah* (complete healing) prior to the *makkah* (blow). A few years ago, the world suffered an unforeseen pandemic which disrupted every aspect of our reality. The outbreak of the coronavirus launched a frenzied worldwide campaign to develop a vaccine. Though a vaccine solution was

distance and altitude between them. While humans inhabit earth, Hashem resides in heaven. The loud and crackling thunder of *barad*, coupled with the fiery hailstorm, stressed the awesome might of a G-d who exists beyond human imagination. Shifting the Egyptians' attention toward heaven visually underscored the difference between man and Hashem.

This past Saturday night was an extremely loud battle waged entirely in heaven. Unlike the ground invasion of 7 October, the entire war was waged above. Ballistic missiles leave our atmosphere and reach the edge of space. Wars in heaven have a divine feel to them. It was deeply symbolic that, with Hashem's assistance, we defeated our enemies on His turf and in His realm. Hashem delivered us the technology to triumph in His realm.

It was also significant that the defence of our land was achieved through international co-operation. For the past 75 years, we've stood alone, facing a consortium of hostile enemies as we defended our

rights to our ancient homeland. This past Saturday night, a collation of our allies helped to defend Israel. Jewish history is cyclical. What happened before will happen again. But it also changes and advances. Just as we recall and celebrate the past, we must also appreciate when history evolves.

This Pesach, we juggle mixed, even contradictory feelings. The long road of Jewish history reminds us that sometimes we see Hashem's presence and sometimes we don't. Faith should steady us, enabling us to weather difficult periods and to celebrate our success. Hashem is always present supervising human affairs. Sometimes we understand His ways, and sometimes we don't. Faith should help smooth out the differences between periods of clarity and periods of confusion.

We must also thank Hashem for the minor miracles even if our larger victory isn't complete. In spite of the joy and triumph of this past Saturday night, we're still entangled in a delicate and fragile predicament. The Iranian threat is far from neutralised, and we still face a complex situation in Azza. Our hostages are still suffering, and families across Israel face a heartbreaking first Pesach without their loved ones. It's naïve and insensitive to celebrate the past week's miracle while ignoring the continuing danger and the larger tragedy.

Yet we thank Hashem for mini-victories even if we can't yet see the fuller picture. *Dayenu!* Step by step. We appreciate all we've been given while we yearn for much that's missing. Even if we don't achieve everything, we thank Hashem.

Life isn't binary and doesn't easily break down into moments of darkness and moments of light. Darkness and light overlap. Joy and sadness go hand in hand. This Pesach, celebrate Jewish triumphs of the past and the present without whitewashing suffering of simplifying struggle.

In every generation, they rise against us. Yet we thank You. *Dayenu!*

• Moshe Taragin is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has *smicha* and a Bachelor of Arts in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a Master's degree in English literature from the City University of New York.



Photo: Facebook

deliberately imperfect world. This past *motzei* Shabbat, we deployed Hashem's gift of creativity to preserve human life. In the wake of this extraordinary evening, Hashem's hand has become more easily visible.

We also felt His love and caring. The Gemara in Megillah comments that during

ultimately developed, it arrived too late to save those who had already succumbed to the disease. In this instance, the world didn't receive the cure before the illness struck.

This past *motzei* Shabbat was different. We had been developing anti-missile defence systems for years. Yet, in spite of its importance, this project went relatively unappreciated, save for those directly involved – until this past *motzei* Shabbat. Facing a massive and unprecedented attack from a range of different missiles, we discovered that, in our case, the remedy was delivered prior to the threat. Through human agents, Hashem delivered a solution even before the peril surfaced.

The evening wasn't just miraculous, it was also historically resonant. As I sat in my safe area waiting for the danger to pass, I recalled the Jews of Egypt on the night of *yetziat Mitzrayim* (exodus from Egypt), trapped in their own homes, waiting for the danger overhead to pass. Just as they awoke the next morning to safety, Israelis awoke feeling sheltered and protected. Death had literally passed over us. It was a night of protection, similar to an earlier original night of protection at the dawn of Jewish history.

Though the similarities of this miracle to the plague of the first born were obvious, I was more intrigued by the similarities to the plague of *barad* (hailstones). This loud and fiery hailstorm was initiated by Moshe Rabbeinu lifting his hands to the heavens. All the previous plagues occurred at ground level. The Nile was converted to blood; reptiles swarmed over the country; Egypt teemed with vermin; and dead animal carcasses dotted the land. The initial series of plagues unfolded beneath the feet of the Egyptians.

*Barad*, however, redirected Egyptian eyes heavenward. Once their eyes were lifted to heaven, they never returned to earth, as the ensuing plagues of locusts and darkness, and the massacre of the first born were all centred in heaven.

Directing their attention skyward gave the Egyptians a lesson about a G-d who inhabited the heavens. Hashem lies beyond human imagination and cannot be captured by human thought or terminology. This hierarchy between man and Hashem is exemplified by the

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# Why this night will be different

OPINION

The *magid* of the Pesach seder begins with the *Arbah Kashiyot*, the Four Questions that ask "Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol halailot?" (Why is this night different from all other nights?). This Pesach of 5784 should be looked at through the lens of a paraphrased version of this ancient question from the haggadah: "Mah nishtanah haPesach hazeh mikol haPesachim shel ha-avar?" (Why is this Pesach different from all the previous Pesachs?).

The pogrom of 7 October 2023, during which more than 1 300 Israeli civilians were massacred and more than 200 were kidnapped and taken to Gaza, was perpetrated on the last festival of Tishrei – Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah. This festival celebrating the Torah will never be as joyous as it was in previous years as it will always be the *yahrzeit* of the victims of Hamas's abominable acts of inhumanity. The celebration of ending and restarting the Torah reading cycle will now always be overshadowed by the plight of the hostages, some of whom are still held in captivity in Gaza six months later.



RABBI MALCOLM MATITIANI



The date 7 October 2023, 22 Tishrei 5784, was the day that sparked a war that has resulted in the death of thousands of people of all ages, the destruction of infrastructure, and the disruption of basic humanitarian needs – the supply of food, water, and medicine. The war has also resulted in a tangible rise of antisemitism around the world, including countries and institutions that were always perceived as safe spaces for Jews.

Though in a democracy everyone has a right to protest, the very sight of people waving Palestinian flags and chanting for the cessation of the war in Gaza instills fear in the hearts of many Jews. The chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," shouted by vast numbers of people during pro-Palestinian rallies across the world invoke images of 1930s Europe and the resultant genocide that was committed from 1938 to 1945.

It's in this context that Jews around the world will be observing Pesach, the ancient festival of freedom and human dignity. Pesach is a major festival for Jews because it celebrates the liberation of our ancient ancestors from Egyptian bondage and the passing of the Hebrews, together with the *eirev rav* (the mixed multitude) (Exodus 12:38) through the birth canal of the Sea of Reeds to form *bnei Yisrael* (the Israelites). Though this collective memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim* (the exodus from Egypt) is intrinsic to our identity as Jews, the narrative of the exodus resonates with all people as it's a story of human freedom and dignity. Thus, the biblical story of Moses and the slave revolt against the mighty Pharaoh inspired the anti-slavery movement in the United States and the resultant Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Nelson Mandela stated that the story of exodus encouraged the South African anti-apartheid movement.

Raban Gamaliel (Pesachim 10:5) teaches that we should celebrate Pesach as if we ourselves went out of Egypt. This teaching is included in the haggadah and the Torah continually reminds us that we were once slaves in Egypt and therefore should be empathetic to the suffering of others (Ex 22:20, 23:9, Lev 19:34, Deut 10:19). This year, I'm sure that an empty chair will be a feature at the table of many *sedarim* as we think of the hostages still in Gaza and all the lives that have been lost in the terrible conflict in the area. Our Pesach celebrations should also be tainted by the plight of victims of all wars that are taking place in our violent world.

A profound ritual of the Pesach seder is the spilling of wine for each of the plagues that were wrought upon the Egyptians. As each plague is called out, participants place a drop of wine on their side plate with their pinky finger as a display of their sorrow that the Egyptians had to suffer so that Pharaoh would agree to set our ancestors free. According to tradition, we must dry our finger on a serviette and not lick it so that we do not enjoy the wine that we have spilled. This ritual is based on an *aggadah* (Sanhedrin 39b) that describes G-d's disapproval of the angels rejoicing over the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Sea of Reeds. The discouragement of jubilation over the defeat of the enemy is also the reason for reciting only the half *Hallel* during the *shacharit* services of *chol ha-moed Pesach*.

Though our Pesach celebrations this year will definitely be overshadowed by the war in Gaza and the immense loss of life and freedom, we need to take inspiration from the narrative of *yetziat Mitzrayim*, and be hopeful that good and right will prevail over evil and hatred. Just as the exodus from Egypt gave birth to *Am Yisrael*, so may Pesach 5784 be the start of a process of working towards a better world, a world devoid of hatred and violence, a world in which the dignity of all is upheld. This hope for a better future, while seemingly naïve, is a longing inherent in Judaism and expressed by the statement that ends the haggadah: "L'shanah haba'ah biyrushalayim" (next year in Jerusalem).

• Rabbi Malcolm Matitiani heads the *Jews by Choice Programme* at Temple Israel and is passionate about teaching the values and traditions of Judaism to those eager to learn and embrace the Jewish way of life.

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# The tragic war that brought us together

OPINION

RABBI DOV LIPMAN



On 6 October 2023, the relationship between diaspora Jewry and Israel was quite fragile. As I travelled to communities around the world and hosted delegations in Israel, I heard many populations that felt distant from Israel:

- Non-Orthodox denominations that didn't feel at home in Israel;
- College students who weren't at ease with some of Israel's policies; and
- Young Jews who didn't see Israel as being relevant to their lives.

One rabbi told me that his temple offered him a contract for employment which included a clause that he couldn't talk about Israel from the pulpit! Many college students who grew up in Zionist homes were shifting to support the anti-Israel groups on campus.

On 7 October 2023, all that changed in an instant. Diaspora Jewry, without hesitation, was galvanised to help Israel. The amounts of money that were sent, the numbers of duffle bags filled with goods for soldiers and evacuees that people brought, and the size and frequency of solidarity missions to Israel have been historic in their scope.

In the first month of the war alone, the Jewish Federation of North America, made up of mostly non-Orthodox leaders and donors, sent half a billion dollars to help Israel. No vote had to be held. No-one questioned religious and state controversies. Israel was in need. And they jumped to help.

My organisation, Yad L'Olim, has been instrumental in working with customs at Ben Gurion Airport to help get the duffle bags loaded with donations into Israel. We're talking about tens of thousands of bags, with everything



Rabbi Dov Lipman with sleeping bags and handwritten notes for the Israeli soldiers

ranging from sophisticated equipment for commandos to diapers for babies who were evacuated from their homes. The outpouring from diaspora Jewry has been nothing short of inspiring.

Then there are the college students. Jewish students have woken up, and are standing up in massive numbers as proud Jews and in support of Israel. They are doing so with bravery and courage in very challenging, and sometimes dangerous environments. Interest in learning

more about Zionism and Israel is on the rise among younger Jews as they seek to understand why the world around them has suddenly turned on them.

I must also mention the acts of solidarity we've witnessed worldwide. A skydiving group in California jumped out of an airplane and formed a Star of David in the air. A person in Pennsylvania flew their plane with an app that shows the route on a map, and drew the words "Bring them home" via the flight path. A former all-star Jewish baseball player, Ian Kinsler, wore an Israel jersey as he threw out the honorary first pitch before an audience of millions at a playoff game. Minnesota Vikings placekicker Greg Joseph wore blue and white cleats which featured the Star of David and the words "Am Yisrael Chai." Of course he kicked the game winning field goal for his team!

And then there are the rallies. Whether it's 300 000 people in Washington or 10 people on a street corner in Johannesburg, the public displays of support for Israel have given Israelis a major boost and have served as a remarkable reminder of our joint peoplehood and destiny in spite of the oceans that divide us.

The Hamas massacre and the ensuing war have been devastating and painful. The losses are difficult to fathom and process. But this tragedy has also brought us together as a nation – both within Israel and internationally.

The Israeli-diaspora connection has never been stronger. May it always be this way.

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

## Seder night 2024: the significance of remembrance

OPINION

RABBI YUVAL CHERLOW



The formative event in the foundation of the Jewish people was undoubtedly the exodus from Egypt. After hundreds of years as slaves, we were granted freedom. The philosopher, Sir Isaiah Berlin, once observed that the Jewish freedom wasn't only gaining freedom from something but also freedom for something.

In this sense, there are two very different types of freedoms. Freedom can be a sense that we're free to act as we please, without any higher being or authority to limit our actions. But real freedom isn't only the absence of authority but the realisation that because we're free to act, we also have a responsibility to act responsibly and bring something positive to our world. Specifically, this means that we must take the freedom bestowed upon us and act ethically and with morality on personal, communal, and national levels.

On seder night, we dedicate ourselves to the acknowledgement of our exodus and being granted that particularly unique Jewish type of freedom.

But it's also important to remember that our holidays aren't simply acknowledgements and recollections of important historical events, but days of remembrance. Some might think this is simply an issue of nuance, but indeed, there's a very important distinction. Holidays based on history alone would mean that we simply recall what occurred, perhaps discuss or research its anthropology, or make some sort of an archaeological pilgrimage to the sites where those events might have occurred.

But a day of remembrance has a far deeper meaning. We're not only hoping to recall the past, but in a

very special sense, restore the past and bring those events into our contemporary being.

This year, that recognition will certainly take on deeper significance. We must look at our historical exodus from Egypt, and

and loss have been an almost eternal part of our national history. Just like thousands of years ago, when we were forced to fight evil with goodness, that truth remains an ever-present reality of our Jewish lives today.

example where we understand that life is often bitter and hard. Challenge, loss, and tragedy aren't simply elements of our history. They need to be remembered because they are ever-present aspects of who we are today. This

Not even for a moment can we be allowed to forget that the holiday will be marked by families who have lost loved ones or have been injured themselves, as well as thousands of people who remain evacuated from their homes. Of course, while we sincerely pray that by seder night, the hostages will have been released, as I write these words, I'm forced to contend with the recognition that 134 people still remain captive, representing one of the most bitter chapters in our nation's history.

This seder night, perhaps more so than any Pesach experienced in our generation, we'll be celebrating the holiday in ways that we perhaps hoped might never again be necessary. But remembrance also demands us to acknowledge that, just like in eras past where Jewry was exposed to massive tragedy, pain, and loss, again today we live with the firm faith that we'll be victorious. And as difficult as it is to imagine it in times like the present, we can live with the confidence that far better days lie ahead.

• Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is the director of the Tzohar Center for Jewish Ethics.



internalise how those events relate to the challenges that we're living through today.

To do so most effectively, we can look at the three prime symbols of the day – the Pesach sacrifice; the matzah; and the maror, each with its own significance.

Pesach reminds us of the plagues and that real freedom certainly never comes easy. We were slaves and suffered terribly and in order to be freed from such sheer evil, we needed to work tirelessly to create a better world. That's a message that has stayed true throughout history, but is perhaps clearer today than ever. Overcoming pain

Matzah is by definition a humble bread. Simple flour and water, without any binding ingredients, flavouring, or the chance to rise. Humility is critical because it demands that we remember that we can never take any aspect of our existence for granted. Being overly proud and haughty is a flaw. Once again, this year this is a truth that we came to appreciate in an all-too-tragic way, when perhaps we grew too comfortable with our security. But our prayer through this symbol of the matzah is that we'll overcome, just as we have many times in our past.

Maror is perhaps the clearest

year, Jews in Israel and all across the diaspora are experiencing an enormous amount of bitterness.

### Hot prizes for your support

On Sunday, 14 April, the SA Jewish Report ran a poll during the "Cooked on Pesach" webinar in which viewers stood a chance to win prizes for pledging donations to the newspaper. Thank you to prize sponsors Eiger from SMD Technologies, Jawitz Properties, and to KosherWorld and Mantis Security for sponsoring the

webinar.

The winners are as follows: Doreen Abelman wins an air fryer; Barbara Lilienfeld and Phyllis Rubin win toasters; while Bryonie Frame, Norma E Shippel, Elaine Scher, Helene Wendy Pincus, Michelle Josset, Avril Forman, Pamela Buckham, Nadine Gotlieb, and Maureen Shaftoe will receive top kosher wines.



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# Speaking to the four sons – an eternal lesson

OPINION

SHELLEY FEINBLUM



Jewish law maintains that anyone who reads the Megillah backwards on Purim doesn't fulfil his or her obligation. A deeper dimension of this halacha is that anyone who sees the lessons of the Megillah as "behind us", in the past, falls short of his or her obligation. This is true, not only of the Purim story but of all of Judaism's teachings. They aren't antiquated tales and doctrines of yesteryear, but are contemporary lessons that should inform and guide our everyday lives. This sentiment is underscored on Pesach, when every generation is specifically charged to see itself as being liberated from Egypt.

The relevance of freedom from bondage is as significant now as it was 3 000 years ago. Many laws and customs of the seder attest to our emancipation. Drinking four cups of wine is central to the seder experience. All form part and parcel of the same *mitzvah*, to express different aspects of freedom. And yet, each cup stands alone.

The first cup sanctifies the day and our people; the second is drunk at the conclusion of the *magid*; the retelling of the Passover story; the third is blessed with grace after meals; and the fourth celebrates our status as Hashem's nation.

At the seder, we welcome four sons, each individual and unique, and we're called upon to interact with each in a dialect that will be accepted and internalised on their terms. Perhaps this is one of the endearing and relevant facets of being liberated: to embrace all of our children, not as we are or as we want them to be, but in a manner that appreciates each one of them as they are. Like the wine, each child forms an intrinsic part of the family, but each stands alone in how he or she is to be included, treated, and ultimately celebrated.

For the lessons of the past to touch our present and shape our future, we cannot present a one-size-fits-all way of educating our children. To pass on the torch of our precious traditions effectively requires effort, patience, and consideration. We need to embrace and accept every child, and sit joyfully united around the table. That's timeless Torah. When we find that capacity within ourselves, it will usher in a time of boundless liberation, and we'll indeed celebrate next year in Jerusalem.

• Shelley Feinblum is the head of department for *limudei kodesh* at Yeshiva College Primary School.

# This seder is different – let's use it

OPINION

LISA HACK



Freedom, love, justice. This three-part Passover message has reverberated through the generations.

The exodus story is our master narrative. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Moses rose as their liberator, helping the Jewish people to overcome oppression and stand for freedom.

How resonant is the story this year!

As we gather around the seder table to retell the story of liberation this year, we must make

hope even in the face of adversity.

It's also a theme we've witnessed since the heinous 7 October attacks – empty seats for our hostages. A space at the table awaiting their return. This year, Elijah's seat is a compelling reminder of loved ones who cannot join the table, and symbolises solidarity with those suffering unimaginable loss.

This year, no doubt, the maror will taste more bitter than in previous years; the salt water all the saltier for the tears we have shed these past months.

Then, there are the four questions asked during the seder. This year, let's ask a fifth: "When will the hostages come home?" It's a question that weighs heavily on the global Jewish community as we consider the plight of those separated from loved ones and deprived of their freedom.

We'll sing, "Let my people go" with aching souls and greater *kavanah* (sincerity) than in previous years as we honour the memory of those no longer with us and pray for the safe return of those still missing.

This Pesach is different from all others. Let's use it for reflection, hope, and solidarity. Let's acknowledge that the story of the exodus isn't just about a historical event, but a timeless reminder of the enduring human spirit of the pursuit of liberty.

Let's recognise that our freedom is intertwined with the freedom of others.

As we sit down this year, just as we do every year, we'll read, "This year, we are slaves. Next year, may we all be free."

*Ken yehi ratzon.* (May it be so.)

*Chag sameach!*

• Lisa Hack is national chairperson of the South African Union of Progressive Judaism.



space in our hearts for the Israeli hostages, those who perished, and those who continue to fight for freedom.

Several other Pesach traditions will be carried out this year with heavy hearts and great intention.

Let's start with Elijah's space at the table. The prophet's presence powerfully reminds us of enduring hope for redemption and liberty. It's a stark reminder that we must continue to hold onto

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# Have an extra chair, but you can fill it, urge rabbis

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Leaving an additional empty chair at our seder tables, possibly with a photograph of a hostage, is one way of bringing into our homes the plight of the Jews being held captive in Gaza and remembering the victims of 7 October and the ongoing war.

This is the view of Rabbi Azriel Uzvolk of Victory Park Shul and the Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNFSA). Uzvolk said this was a common practice during the “Let my people go” campaign for Russian Jewry when they were being refused permission to make aliya between 1967 and 1989. “The seder can be used not only as a night of telling the story, but also as a night of prayer that the miracles of redemption be repeated in our days,” Uzvolk said.

JNFSA has offered to supply photographs of hostages for the empty chairs, together with a new prayer specifically composed by Israel’s chief rabbi for the community to include in their seders, says Chairperson Michael Kransdorff.

Rabbi Levi Avtzon of Linksfield Senderwood Hebrew Congregation, however, believes that we shouldn’t just add an extra seat to our seder tables, but fill it with a Jew who has no seder to go to or whom we would never have invited.

In fact, several mothers of hostages in Gaza have urged the global Jewish community to invite as many Jews as possible to their seders.

This is part of the Chabad-led #SeatAtTheSeder campaign, inspired by the Rebbe’s response to the Soviet Union’s decades-long refusal to allow Jews to immigrate to Israel, where they would be free to practice their religion.

At several points in the 1970s, when some Jewish organisations suggested placing an empty chair at seder tables in protest, the Rebbe

urged world Jewry to add chairs and fill them in the merit of those unable to attend.

Avtzon said the Rebbe’s advice in the 1960s, when the idea came up to pay tribute to Jews locked behind the Iron Curtain in the Soviet Union was, “It’s a great idea to have an extra chair, but why leave it empty? Why not find a Jew who doesn’t have a place to go, and fill it?”

“Since 7 October, that’s been in my thoughts,” he said.

We’re in the midst of a war between light and dark, Avtzon says. “You win this war by adding light. Yes, an empty seat brings strong sentiment with it and is commendable, but we can do so much more by not only paying tribute but adding light to the world. Adding a seat doesn’t bring nearly as much light as having another person at the chair who wouldn’t have a seder to participate in.”

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) is encouraging the community to say a special seder prayer for the safe return of the hostages.

“Then, together, let’s also say, *L’Shana haba’ah b’Yerushalayim* (Next year in Jerusalem),” says Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the SAZF.

The World International Zionist Organisation’s (WIZO) Cape Town branch hopes to place a bouquet of yellow flowers in as

many homes as possible, symbolising hope and freedom for the hostages still held in captivity in Gaza as part of its “Bouquet of Hope” initiative to spread love this Pesach.

WIZO Cape Town’s Simone Meyerowitz says, “Each yellow flower serves as a reminder of every individual held hostage, ensuring that none are forgotten. All proceeds from sales will

be donated to the WIZO emergency fund supporting Israel and her people in times of need.”

WIZO is also offering personalised Pesach greeting cards, with all profits raised going towards the “Back to Sderot” project. Sderot was the biggest Israeli city Hamas attacked on 7 October.

Most of Sderot’s 39 000 residents were evacuated to hotels across the country.

Temple Israel will have a communal seder led by Rabbi Emma Gottlieb, and Rabbi Greg Alexander is doing a big seder at home. They are remembering the hostages in different ways.

As well as setting an extra place, the communal seder will include contemporary readings and rituals to help reflect on how the stories and questions of Passover connect and can bring meaning to life post 7 October and during the war in Gaza.

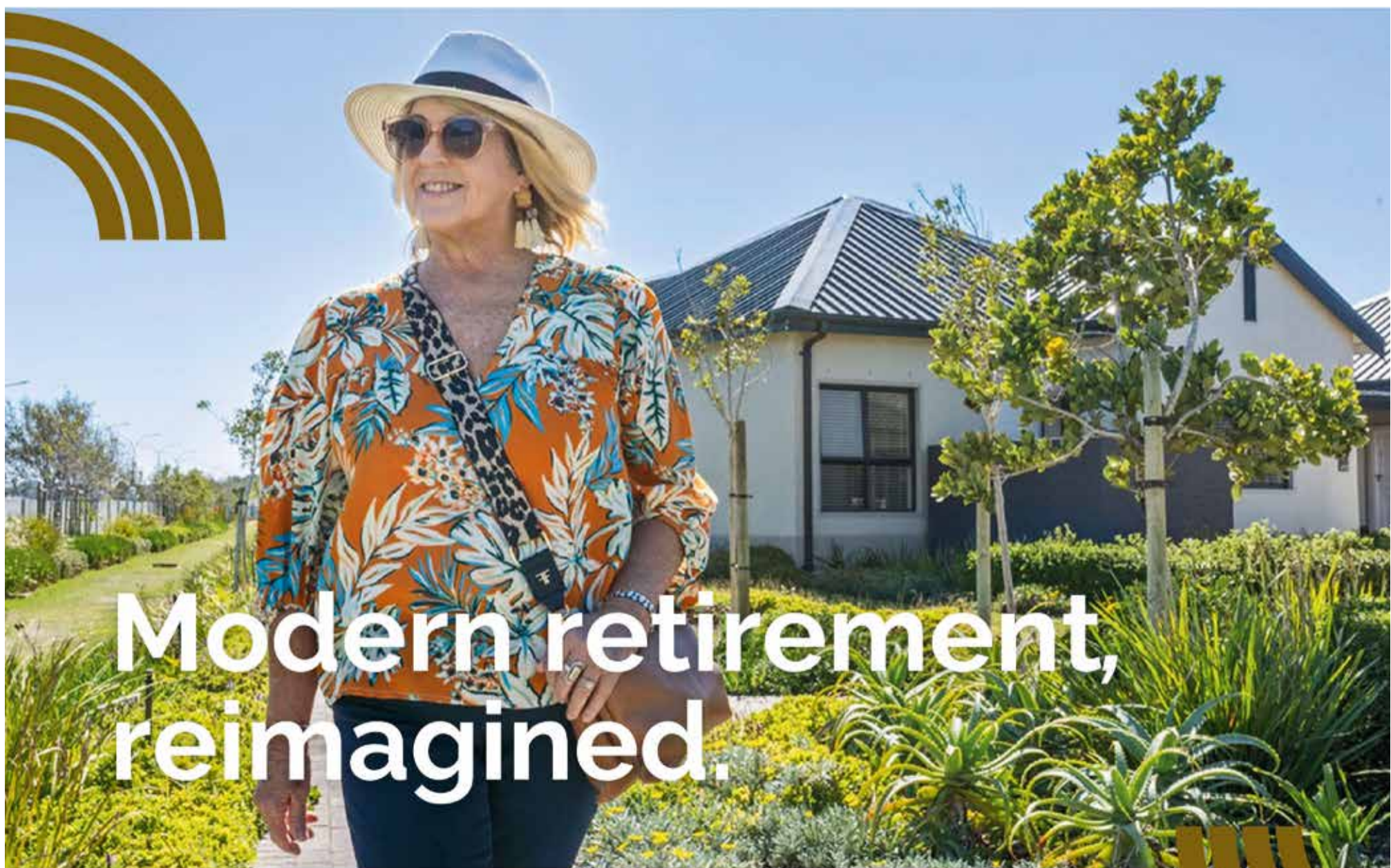
Alexander is adding an extra *matzah* to the three *matzot*, which will be described as the *matzah refuah* (matzah of healing) for everyone impacted by the war.

Rabbi Sam Thurgood, the head of Jewish Life and Learning at Herzlia Schools, says, “The main change for me this Pesach is the sense of how we’ve been through difficult times before, as challenging and painful as they are now. It reminds us of the fact that our ancestors were slaves in Egypt, and have been oppressed. What we say in the haggadah is that in every generation, they rise up to destroy us. It all feels that much more real now.

“In previous years, it’s been easier to approach Pesach with a sense of complacency, with a sense of having arrived at our destination, whereas now we understand that the process of redemption is constantly unfolding and continues through every generation. Our sages said every generation needed to see themselves as if they themselves had left Egypt.

“Many of our rabbis understand this to mean that Hashem’s process of redemption is one that’s taking place today as well. The story of exodus continues, and at the same time, we’ve been taught every year to feel as if we were slaves, to relate to that sense of oppression, being alienated, and made not to feel at home within our country.

“The Pesach story teaches us to live with difficulty, to be able to accept it when it comes, and move forward.”



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# Delicious food that's different from all other faire

This year's Pesach seders will be bittersweet, but there's no reason why we can't have delectable treats to enjoy while we consider the plight of our people back in Egypt and today. We're Jews after all – and this is food! So, we asked the inimitable **Sharon Glass**, **Lauren Boolkin**, and **Juliet Sack** (on page 41) to write a few recipes for us.

## SHARON GLASS

### OVEN ROASTED RAISIN RIB WITH VEGETABLES

I often think it unnecessary to use an expensive cut of meat if you're going to slow cook it for hours to soften and then slice it. The meat should be falling apart when you eat it. This particular one is so easy, and it can be made ahead and frozen or refrigerated and heated as necessary. It's delicious, and needs no fancy extras to serve with it.

#### Ingredients

- One 3kg to 4kg Raisin Rib (with a nice piece of fat on it)
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2 large onions, sliced thickly
- 4 large carrots, cut down the centre and then cut

- into thick pieces
- 1kg baby potatoes, unpeeled
- 250g large white mushrooms, whole
- 3 cups beef stock mixed with 3 to 4 Tbsp beef stock powder
- To thicken the sauce: 1-2 Tbsp potato starch mixed with some cold water

#### Method

- In a large heavy roasting pan or pot, rub the meat all over with the olive oil and season well with salt and pepper. Heat the pot until very hot, and brown the roast on all sides until well browned. Set aside.
- In the same pot, add a little more olive oil, and sauté the onions and carrots until golden, but not too browned. Remove them from the pot. Add the beef stock, and stir in the tomato sauce.
- Preheat oven to 160°C.
- Place the meat back into the pot with the onions and carrots, or transfer to a heavy roasting pan.



- Place the whole potatoes and mushrooms on top of and around the meat.
- Cover with baking paper and foil, and seal tightly.
- Place on the second rack from the bottom and roast for about three hours, turning the meat if necessary until it's very soft. If not, add another hour to the cooking time. The meat should be very soft and falling apart.
- Remove the meat and vegetables from the roasting pan. Set aside.
- Stir 1 to 2 Tbsp potato starch with a little cold water to make a runny sauce and stir into the sauce in the roasting pan. Place back on the stove, bring to a boil, and stir until sauce is reduced and thickened.
- Taste for seasoning, adding more stock powder if necessary. Place the meat and vegetables back into the sauce, and cool before refrigerating.

Serves 12-15

### ROASTED VEGETABLE SALAD WITH LABNEH/QUINOA AND CITRUS DRESSING

This is one of those salads that you'll fall in love with and make over and over again. It's certainly become one of my favourites.

#### Ingredients

- 250g butternut cubes
- 250g beetroot cubes
- 250g baby marrow chunks
- 1 red onion, sliced into thick quarters
- Olive oil, salt, pepper

#### Method

- Preheat oven to 200°C.
- Precook the butternut and beetroot cubes for about five minutes in the microwave.
- Coat them in olive oil, sprinkle generously with salt and pepper, and roast in the oven for at least 30 to 40 minutes or until blackened and softened.
- Add the red onion and baby marrow chunks for the last 30 minutes to soften and cook them through.
- Set vegetables aside.
- These can be roasted the day before, and refrigerated until ready to serve.
- Cook half a cup of quinoa in 1/2 tsp salt, 2tsp olive oil; and 1 1/4 cups of water.
- Place the quinoa in a pot with the salt, olive oil, and water. Bring to a boil. Turn stove down to low, and simmer for 20 minutes or until quinoa is cooked. Turn off stove, and leave to steam in the pot until cool.

#### To make your own labneh (if making dairy)

- Hang 500ml of thick plain yoghurt in a cheesecloth overnight over the sink to drain out any excess water. I used the Genuine Foods full fat plain yoghurt, but would normally use a double thick yoghurt.

Note: the labneh can be made and kept in the fridge for at least four to five days.

#### Dressing

- 150ml olive oil – not a strong one. I mix sunflower and olive oil
- 3/4 tsp salt



- 1/3 cup naartjie juice or orange juice. (I used the SOGA frozen naartjie juice)
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 4 Tbsp fresh lemon juice

- 1/2 tsp minced garlic
  - ground black pepper
- Whisk all ingredients together, and keep in fridge until ready to use.

- Rind of two lemons (keep separate)
- Fresh pomegranates
- Fresh herbs
- Caramelised nuts
- 1/2 cup pecans, chopped
- 1/2 cup flaked almonds
- 2 tsp honey
- 2 tsp sugar

#### Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C. Toss the nuts with the honey and sugar. Place on some baking paper in the oven on a baking tray, and bake for at least 10 minutes until golden. Stir to mix. Remove from oven, and cool until crispy. Break into small pieces, and keep in a Ziploc bag until ready to use.

#### To serve

- Spoon the vegetables into the centre of the dish on top of the quinoa or labneh.
- Sprinkle with more lemon rind.
- Drizzle with more dressing. Sprinkle with pomegranates and lemon rind and herbs to decorate.
- Just before serving, drizzle with remaining dressing. Serves eight.

### DELICIOUS PASSOVER CHEESE BLINTZE BAKE

This is the yummiest thing you'll make for Passover. Try to fry the crepes as thinly as possible when you make them. Let them crisp around the edges, and only then turn them.

#### Ingredients

- 1 cup potato starch
- 1 tsp Passover baking powder (optional if available)
- 2 Tbsp castor sugar
- pinch salt
- 3 jumbo eggs
- 1 cup milk

#### Method

- Stir together the potato starch, baking powder, castor sugar, and salt.
- Whisk in the eggs and the milk. Leave to stand for half an hour. If batter is too thick, thin with a little water.
- Heat a non-stick frying pan on medium-high heat. Dot the pan with a little butter, and ladle into the pan. Brown and set on one side before turning onto other side.
- Makes 10 blintzes

#### Cheese filling

- 500g chunky cottage cheese, drained
- 6 Tbsp smooth cream cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 1/2 cup castor sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla essence



- Stir all ingredients together with a spoon in a bowl and set aside.

#### Topping

- 1 to 2 cups cream
- Cinnamon/sugar for sprinkling (2 tsp cinnamon mixed with 2 Tbsp sugar)

#### Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C.
- Spray an ovenproof dish.
- Spoon a large spoonful of cheese filling into the centre of the crepe into a long strip.
- Roll up gently.
- Cut each crepe into three slices.
- Pour a little cream into the baking dish.
- Stand the filled crepes inside the dish with the fold on the inside. Pack them quite tightly.
- Pour more cream over them to cover the crepes half full in the dish.

- Sprinkle with a generous amount of cinnamon sugar.
- Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden and crispy.

NOTE: If making the crepes ahead of time, place them covered in the microwave to warm them. Then fill them, roll, and cut them. Place in the prepared dish. Only cover with remaining cream and cinnamon sugar just before baking. They can be baked and reheated. Don't bake too long if pre-baking. Makes 10 (x 3)

## LAUREN BOOLKIN

I could begin my article with my yearly rhetoric, "I can't believe I'm back talking about Pesach recipes," but it feels a bit empty this year. Though time may feel like it has flown by for me, I imagine that for our brothers deep in the tunnels of Gaza, the days are never ending. So, while I sit here thinking of my celebratory meal, my heart goes out to the hostages and their families who certainly won't be celebrating this year.

### KIBBEH

These delicious appetizers can be made well ahead and frozen – a good reason to get ahead and change over early. They are delicious with soup, and wonderful to have ready in the freezer when you get the "I can't get full" Pesach feeling.

#### Ingredients

##### Filling

- 1/2 cup sunflower oil
- 500g beef or lamb mince
- 1 onion chopped
- 1 clove garlic chopped
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1/2 tsp cumin

##### Dough

- 3 cups matzah meal
- 1 1/2 cups potato flour
- 3 1/2 cups of water
- 5 Tbsp oil (preferably the leftover oil from

your meat)

- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- Black pepper

#### Method

- Sauté onions and garlic on a low heat until translucent. Add the meat and gently brown. Add the spices, and then place the mixture in a strainer over a bowl to catch the oil. Prepare the dough either by hand or in a food processor, adding a tablespoon



- of water if it doesn't pull together.
- Roll a golf-ball sized portion, and using your thumb and forefinger hollow out the middle. Fill with one teaspoon of the meat, and shape into an oval tapered at the ends.
- Place on a baking paper-lined baking sheet and flash freeze before putting them into a Ziploc bag. They can be fried immediately too.

### CHOCOLATE PAVLOVA SMOTHERED IN RASPBERRY CURD

I'm honestly the worst pavlova maker. My pavlovas don't tower or peak. However, this one was so delicious, I had to forgive its ugliness. The raspberry curd can be used with a boxed chocolate cake or spooned over delicious fresh mango. The pavlova was even more delicious the next day, when the chocolate softened within the meringue.

#### Ingredients

- 6 egg whites
- 1 1/2 cups castor sugar
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tsp balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup sifted cocoa powder
- 55g chopped dark chocolate

#### Method

- Preheat your oven to 150°C. Trace two 20cm circles on baking paper and place on a baking sheet pencil side down.
- Beat the egg whites until soft peaks form, then add the sugar spoon by spoon until the mixture is thick and shiny. Sprinkle on the salt, vinegar, cocoa powder, and chopped chocolate, and gently blend. Dollop onto the parchment paper. Place in the oven and immediately reduce

the temperature to 125°C. Bake for about 75 minutes, and then switch off the oven and allow the meringues to cool in the oven. I wedge an oven glove into the door so that it remains slightly ajar.



### RASPBERRY CURD

#### Ingredients

- 5 cups raspberries
- 4 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 cup sugar
- 6 large egg yolks
- 6 Tbsp coconut oil

#### Method

- Puree the raspberries in a food processor, and then push them through a sieve to get rid of the pips. Place one cup of the puree in a double boiler or in a bowl over a pot of water and add all the other ingredients except the coconut oil. Make sure the water in the pot doesn't touch the bowl. Whisk briskly until the mixture thickens. When it does, remove the bowl and gradually whisk in the coconut oil. Allow to cool.

#### To serve

- Sandwich the meringue with the raspberry puree. Decorate with shaved dark chocolate and fresh raspberries and mint leaves.



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# Just Now Jeffrey feels like right now – and very Jewish

REVIEW

PETA KROST



Watching *Just Now Jeffrey*, the soon to be launched South African movie, was like a trip down memory lane, watching my youth through the eyes of the boys I could have grown up with.

It felt almost biographical, like someone stepped into our shoes back in the late 1980s in Jewish South Africa. The cast could have lived in Linksfield, Victory Park, Sea Point, or Milnerton, or just about anywhere that was predominantly Jewish here in the late 1980s.

It's so easy to forget what it was like living under an apartheid government, and having VHS and Betamax video machines, cassette tapes, faxes, and phones attached to our walls. But the movie was a warm reminder of those days.

The Pesach seder was a classic, with the one child in the family, Jeffrey Greenbaum, the lead actor – played by Julian Robinson – focused totally on his hormonal urges, while his sister could think only of the injustices in South Africa under apartheid. Meanwhile, the uncle, who lives with them, sees only *swart gevaar* and ugliness. That could have been my own family's seder table, and probably most tables in the community back then.

Though the story is universal in terms of being about a teenage boy and his sexual

urges, singular focus on getting laid, and interactions with big bullies and the opposite sex, it's deeply enmeshed in the South African Jewish community. It's a very Jewish, edgy, coming of age story. The "Yiddishisms" and



A Pesach seder scene in *Just Now Jeffrey*

"Hebrenglish" slang is so much a part of our language even today, it may not be so easy for people outside of the community to understand, but I could be wrong.

My favourite character was Moshik, the Israeli school sports instructor, played by Nik Rabinowitz, who I found totally hilarious, but also so similar to sports coaches I knew and was so fond of back in my day at King David School.

What was also amusing for me is how in 1989, the headlines on newspapers were about the country being "on a knife edge", and the community talking about how it was going down the tubes, but not only did that not happen, we're still saying the same things so many decades later.

The antisemitism seen in the movie may look extreme and almost over the top, but it feels a little like what's happening right now. Same same, just a little different! Back then, it was Afrikaans people who were pushing our buttons in South Africa. Now it's the trendy left who wrap themselves up in Israel-hating keffiyehs and claim that their gripe is definitely not about Jews but anyone who aligns themselves with Israel. Right!

It's fascinating how watching *Just Now Jeffrey*, you notice how much time has passed, but there are so many similarities with how we live now. Granted back then, the domestic worker ran the home, but potentially got paid a pittance and had no time for a personal life, and that wouldn't work today. She's still running the home, though, and she still has our children's backs.

Our children are still trying to get out of PT at school, using every excuse in the book, only now they don't call it PT, but PE

(physical education).

And today, those sitting at the table who might once have been the anti-apartheid activists, are now sitting at the seder or Shabbos table criticising Israel, making us feel equally uncomfortable.

This wonderful movie, which is partially a parody of our younger lives and partially a blisteringly real replay, feels so Jewish to me. The terminology, behaviour, experiences, et al fit so perfectly into our community's past, that I have no doubt it will go down in history in our community as being the local film you cannot miss.

However, I wonder how it will be received by a gentile audience? Will they get the nuances, and does it matter if they don't? How will our community be seen in their eyes – and again, does it really matter?

Go see for yourself! I have no doubt that though a younger audience will love it, those of us past our halfway mark, will see it a little differently.

*Just Now Jeffrey* will be released in cinemas across South Africa on 3 May.

• Peta Krost is the editor of the SA Jewish Report.

## Coming-of-age comedy resonates across generations

HANNA RESNICK

In spite of immense social turmoil over the past few decades, the teenage experience of angst and uncertainty remains largely unchanged. *Just Now Jeffrey* is a coming-of-age comedy film set in Johannesburg in 1989, when South Africa was on the brink of overthrowing the apartheid regime.

Written and directed by Hylton Tannenbaum and Brett Morris, it follows the story of Jeffrey Greenbaum, a Jewish high school student navigating school life, social life, and love life. Above all, he and his best friend, Brad Berman, are on a mission to lose their virginity before finishing school. However, their plan goes awry, and they find themselves caught up in a series of hilarious misadventures involving "love, lust, videotape piracy, rugby violence, political protest, and pornography".

Morris and Tannenbaum began their almost two-year writing process during the COVID-19 pandemic. "It was a rollercoaster of a process. It's fun, enjoyable, tough, painstaking, and fulfilling all at the same time," they said, comparing the journey to climbing a massive mountain. "Having an incredible group of investors believing in the project and supporting us got us to the summit."

The pair set out to represent their experience as teenagers growing up in 1980s South Africa, as well as to give a voice to the generation that grew up in South Africa towards the end of apartheid. "We found that South Africans were generally painted with the same brush," they said, "and we wanted to show all of the complexity and nuances across the political spectrum during that time: from right to left, and everything in between."

Making an independent film is no mean feat, and the creative team was faced with new challenges every day, be it creative, technical, or financial hurdles. "We soon realised that confronting the challenges was part of the process, and sometimes the obstacles were an opportunity to look at something differently and could even make the film better," said the directors. "We were also lucky enough to work with some incredibly talented cast and crew, who put their hearts and souls into making it as good as it could possibly be. South Africa has world-class talent, and when the chips were down, they made magic happen."

"Right from the outset, our guiding light was simply to make a film that we would enjoy watching," said Morris. Julian Robinson, who played the film's titular character, said he just wanted the audience to have fun. "It's a little breather in between a lot of other movies where everything's so sad and depressing. This film is one where you're just allowed to have a fun time," he said.

"We were trying to make a film quite outside the usual South African comedy," said Robinson. "It's very much out of left field. You don't really expect to find a movie about a Jewish guy who's just trying to get laid. It's a strange, unique concept."

Robinson said that having conversations with the directors was helpful when he was trying to get into character, as the film incorporated "snippets" of their lives, particularly during their youth. "It was their brainchild, and that helped a lot because on and off set, they were so accommodating and willing to talk and make it a collaborative process." Some of the scenes were ad-libbed or adjusted during the filming process.

"I'm also around Jeffrey's age, so I could sometimes look inward and grasp a little piece of my life that I thought would stitch well into Jeffrey's character," he said. Robinson was in matric when filming took place. "I

A scene from *Just Now Jeffrey*



did make things hard for myself," he admits. However, he said the passion and support from the rest of the cast and creative team kept him going. "It may sound corny, but it felt kind of like a family. I roomed with a co-actor for five weeks while we were shooting, and it was fun just to go out and buy groceries and things together."

According to the directors, the film's initial screening had an overwhelmingly positive response from people of all ages, races and genders. "Everyone found something about the story that resonated with them – whether it was the era, their childhood, the community, or the characters."

The film is filled with quips and anecdotes that are particularly relatable to those within the South African Jewish community, but can also resonate with the broader South African population. Audiences aren't just reacquainted with familiar faces, such as Rob van Vuuren and Nik Rabinowitz, but are introduced to young new faces.

*Just Now Jeffrey* will be released in cinemas around the country on 3 May.

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# King David knocks *School of Rock* out the park



HANNA RESNICK

REVIEW

From the popular 2003 comedy film starring Jack Black to the 2015 Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, or even the 2016 television adaptation, *School of Rock* is a well-loved story that can reunite any viewer with their inner child who would much rather join a rock band than attend class.

King David High School Victory Park's production of *School of Rock*, directed by Renos Spanoudes, which opened on 10 April with seven performances until 16 April, was a lively celebration of music and its ability to bring people together.



Photo: Trevor Sachis

The musical follows passionate, struggling guitarist Dewey Finn, who takes up his friend, Ned's, position as a substitute teacher at a posh school in order to make ends meet. However, after discovering his students' musical talents, he decides to form an undercover band with them. In spite of opposition from the school and parents, the kids form close bonds and excel in their performance in class. Ultimately, their passion shines at a battle of the bands competition, leading to a newfound appreciation for Dewey's unorthodox teaching methods.

As a comedy, the show is predominantly comprised of strong character roles with archetypal eccentricities and one-liners. Each of the students committed to their

individual characters, and made an impressive effort to sustain the energy throughout the show. Some stand-out character roles included Dewey (Ricky Kotton, Jethro Crawford); Billy (Naphtali Kramer, Samuel Bonner); Lawrence (Josh Woolf, Rael Fine); Rosalie (Raquel Katz, Liana Wes); Summer (Ella Passman, Meah Radford); Zack (Jake Wolman, Jed Miller); and Ned (Ayal Krawitz, Christian Lees), among many others.

Musical interludes and vocal performances by a number of students served as occasional breaks from the narrative, and provided an opportunity to highlight individual singers and dancers. The ensemble performances were full of energy and showcased many different personalities in the space of a single performance.

The live music was a highlight of the show as it lent authenticity and an appreciation of rock 'n roll. The band, led by musical directors Nikki Richard on saxophone and Simon Smith on guitar, included talented students Daniel Brenner, Asher Katzew, Ben Obel, Dylan Moyal, and Oliver Kennard. Along with the accompaniment of the main band, a few of the actors also exhibited their musical skills. There was a particular moment that satirised the classical music taught in most schools, in which the students "played" cardboard instruments with an overzealous conductor and obnoxiously timed cymbal clashing.

The school hall was fitted with an impressive number of detailed sets. The main stage was configured as a school classroom, with desks, chairs, and a chalkboard. This "classroom", of course, doubled as the space in which the students held their secret band rehearsals. The additional scaffolding on either side of the stage each contained two other sets. On the right-hand side, was the live band on the bottom half, and Ned's apartment above it. On the left-hand side was the school staff room, with a tuck shop

area underneath. At the end of the play, large panels of fabric were used to conceal parts of the set and create a performance space for the battle of the bands.

The space became an immersive environment through the placement of crates along one side, on which cast members sat, while other cast members performed in the aisles. Not to mention the School of Rock van, which drove through the hall, immediately grabbing the audience's attention, as well as the newsboy, who drove around on his bicycle.

The atmosphere on stage felt consistently lively and full, however, it was only during the finale that the audience could conceptualise just how many talented students were part of this cast, in addition to the dedicated SALT and PEPPER teams. This show truly encompassed the enthusiasm and collaborative effort of an authentic high school production.

• *Hanna Resnick is a former intern at the SA Jewish Report, now doing a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand.*

## Delicious food that's different from all other faire

>>Continued from page 38

JULIET SACK

### SWEET AND SOUR MARINATED SALMON WITH HORSE RADISH

#### Ingredients

- 10 medium slices of salmon or salmon trout or other firm fish with skin on
- 6 Tbsp sunflower oil for frying the fish
- ½ cup or more of matzah meal
- 3 large red onions sliced thinly
- 4 Tbsp raisins
- 6 bay leaves
- 1 cup balsamic vinegar or red wine vinegar
- ½ cup white vinegar
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup water
- 200g sugar
- 1 Tbsp whole peppercorns
- 2 Tbsp strong red horseradish
- ½ cup sour cream (can leave out and serve only with horseradish)



#### Method

- For the salmon, start making the sweet and sour mixture first. Heat a medium-sized pot with two Tbsp oil and fry the red onion until soft. Keep heat low so it doesn't burn. At the same time, you can add the raisins.
- Once the onions are soft, add the bay leaves, peppercorns, balsamic, white wine vinegar, white wine, water, and sugar, and cook slowly on low heat until slightly reduced. Check for seasoning.
- In a non-stick frying pan, heat

the rest of the oil, dry off the salmon pieces, and dust with matzah meal, lightly fry the salmon until nice and brown on each side, about two to three minutes per side. Remove from heat and set aside.

- Place the fish in a platter, and pour the sweet and sour sauce over it. Do this while all is still hot, and allow to marinate for a few hours or overnight.
- This can be made two days in advance.
- For the horseradish cream, mix the sour cream and horseradish together, serve with the salmon, or just serve with plain horseradish.
- Serve fish on a platter with the sweet and sour sauce, garnish with fresh herbs.

Serves 10

• *Juliet Sack is a prolific chef, and runs the Sally Williams School of Cookery, which was founded in 1971.*

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# The true essence of Soweto beyond the tourist attractions

PERSONAL STORY

KIM HATCHUEL



I was looking for interesting things to do with my brother, Steven, who hadn't spent much time in Johannesburg since emigrating with his family 21 years ago, when I heard of Ilan Ossendryver's Tour Soweto company and visits to Kliptown. Steven wasn't convinced initially, but we decided that it might be cool to visit the area where Nelson Mandela lived in Vilakazi Street.

Kliptown is the location where the Freedom Charter was adopted in June 1955. This historic moment was witnessed by various political organisations, trade unions, religious groups, and community associations. The document reflects the collective aspiration towards equality, justice, and democracy in South Africa.

Driving into Soweto, I grappled with anticipation and trepidation. As a white, female South African, the idea of a township tour made me uneasy. I'd heard stories about crime rates in townships, and was nervous to venture into these areas. I was also worried about how we would be perceived as white people visiting a predominantly black community.

However, any doubts I had soon dissipated as we were introduced to the residents of Kliptown. The first person we met was Thando, the local tour guide, who greeted us warmly. It was immediately apparent how much respect he had for Ilan, whom he affectionately referred to as a "nudnik", a Yiddish term used to describe someone annoying.

Thando introduced us to two young gentlemen who asked if they could sing for us. It was their way of welcoming us to the area and earning a bit of money. Their songs included one which they'd written themselves, and then a rendition of *Hevenu shalom aleichem*, which translates to, "We have brought peace upon you". Often sung as a part of Jewish rituals, the song expresses a desire for harmony, tranquillity, and goodwill towards others. We learned that their ability to harmonise was gleaned from Benjamin Zander, the world-renowned conductor who had visited Kliptown with Ilan a few years ago. Zander is a passionate advocate of classical music and a transformative approach to leadership and development through music.

The absence of the guitarist to accompany the singers was felt by everyone. We learned that he had been arrested over the weekend for taking the law into his own hands after he and two friends found the man who had raped his three-year-old daughter. It was a stark reminder of the harsh realities that plague the community.

After walking around for a short while, meeting some of the Mozambique locals in their fruit and veggie market and sampling their *vetkoek*, we crossed the railway bridge into Kliptown. The lack of drainage, running water, and toilets, as well as the fact that this is a township with no electricity, was evident. Dotted around the community were green porta loos, which Thando jokingly referred to as "ANC voting booths". It's clear that the ruling party has forgotten



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver



Steven and Kim Hatchuel with some of the Kliptown residents

about this community, and the residents don't have much faith in South Africa's leadership.

The children of the township were the most welcoming. With outstretched arms, they offered hugs and tiny hands to hold. We visited the local crèche, where two classes of excited but well-behaved children sang for us, and showed us what they were learning.

Another memorable encounter was meeting four drummers, the youngest of whom was 10, who entertained us with their incredible skills and an eight-

minute performance on their djembe drums. The four have entertained the congregations of Park and Oxford shuls at *chaggim* such as Lag Ba'Omer.

Our last meeting was with Bob, a gentle man whose eyes shone with the wisdom of a life lived fully. Bob lives with others in a large house, which he told us was the township's "kibbutz". As we shared stories, Bob told us of his transformative journey to Israel, where he had learned about keeping Shabbat, which had left an indelible imprint on him. Having never visited Israel ourselves, his stories offered a glimpse of a world where differences dissolved in shared traditions and sacred rituals.

As we said goodbye to the dusty streets of Kliptown, we felt a newfound sense of purpose and a deeper appreciation for the resilience of the human spirit.

On our way home, Ilan drove us through Vilakazi Street, past Nelson Mandela's

home. As much as the area boasts a rich legacy, including being home to two Nobel Peace Prize winners – Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu – we felt that the commercialisation detracted from its authenticity. But we were happy to have memories of Kliptown, where we discovered the essence and authentic moments of Soweto beyond the tourist attractions.

Do yourself a favour and spoil yourself to a day you'll never forget.

• Kim Hatchuel is the proofreader at the SA Jewish Report.

## AI is everywhere already – but don't panic

LEE TANKLE

Internet Communications Technology expert Arthur Goldstuck, whose latest book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to AI* was recently launched, says there's no reason to panic about artificial intelligence (AI) because we're already interacting with it all the time.

In conversation about AI with Steven Boykey Sidley, the award-winning author, AI expert, and professor, Goldstuck said, "Every single one of you is using AI, not just actively, but almost aggressively because you're using some of the most powerful AI tools we have ever seen, like spellcheck and Google Maps, but you don't see it as AI."

The two were having a public conversation at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre on 14 April.

"I believe we're going to see something similar to what we saw with the internet in coming years," said Goldstuck, a renowned information and communications technology expert and analyst. "Internet access is taken for granted. Internet use is almost critical for us to function in society. But when we use the tools that the internet makes possible, we're not conscious of the fact that we're using the internet.

"AI is already part of the fabric of everything you do. And you haven't been panicking about that because you've experienced the utility of AI. You haven't seen it as the utility of AI, but you've been experiencing it all along.

"I believe AI will disappear into the fabric of everything we do," he said.

Sidley agreed, saying, however, that "AI is the only technology we've ever developed that learns. If you take all the great technologies of history, you can start with fire, the wheel, the printing press, electricity, TV, radio, global positioning systems, personal computers, transistors, and smartphones, none of them knows how to learn. AI is the first. We don't understand what that means," Sidley said.

Goldstuck went on to tell Sidley how his journey into the world of AI started in 2017, when he attended a conference in Las Vegas at which the then-chief executive of Amazon web

services, Andy Jassy, unveiled no less than 22 new AI tools, features, and platforms that would run on the Amazon cloud.

"Five of those were, to me, utterly transformative," said Goldstuck. "It left the audience gasping. And it all sounded like science fiction. I knew that within five years, it would seem mainstream. Five years to the day, ChatGPT was launched."

AI learns at an exponential rate, and consequently "humans in the field of psychology have a terrible time understanding AI", according to Sidley.

Because of this, he believes, there are two main fields of understanding the future when it comes to AI: those who see a utopia because of this technology; and those who see a dystopian future.

"Utopia is an end to disease, an end to hunger, an end to hard labour. Even possibly an end to death. The others see this as the end of our privacy as a species, and even the end of us completely," said Sidley.

On the utopian side of AI, Sidley said, it could be used to analyse degenerative diseases like Parkinson's.

"Sometimes, the proteins which make up our DNA, which are three-dimensional molecules of great complexity, fold incorrectly, and when that happens, you get Parkinson's disease, you get Huntington's disease, and a whole host of other horrendous, painful, and life-changing conditions," he said. "The only way to address those incorrectly protein-folded conditions is to understand how that protein goes from 2D into 3D."

"That difference between our best old-style human approach to pharmacology or biochemistry or medical chemistry is far behind the magnitude of AI," he said.

Goldstuck said his favourite encounter

with AI development was when he visited the Oracle campus in Reading, England. The campus connected two beehives to an "internet of things" powered by AI. The "internet of things" was able to measure the climate, the weight of the bees, the weight of the queen, and track the buzzing of the bees," he recalled.

"The researchers combine what they gathered with a global database of knowledge of the flight patterns of bees and what they represent, and then combine all of that in the cloud. They aggregate that information. And in the cloud, they are running it through AI systems, combining all that knowledge. The multiple sources of information

are combined with what's being collected from those specific beehives.

What they've been able to do with all that information is to interpret the language of bees," Goldstuck said.

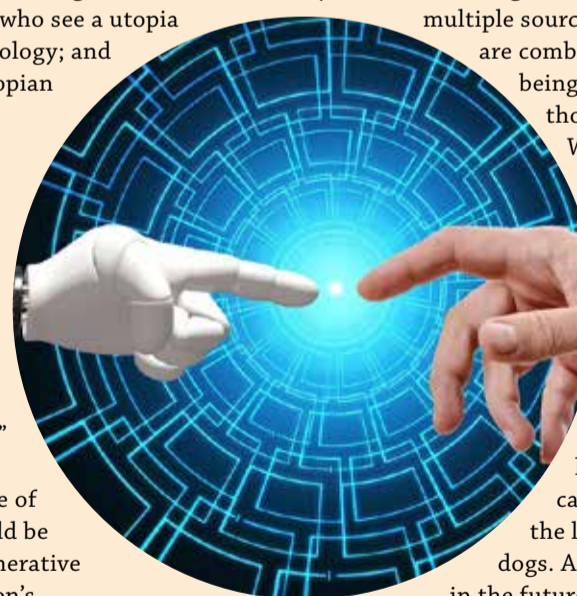
"The lesson of that case study is that if we can interpret the language of bees, we can certainly interpret the language of cats and dogs. And I believe that,

in the future, is going to be a massive commercial opportunity, selling pet owners tools that will enable them to understand the language of their pets."

This idea can also be extrapolated to those who are in a coma. With this technology, loved ones could talk to their loved ones who cannot communicate verbally, Goldstuck said.

On the other hand, said Sidley, American computer scientist and researcher, Eliezer Yudkowsky, has argued since the early 2000s that AI can destroy humanity and that developers of AI programmes should stop.

However, that panic is pointless now, Goldstuck said. "If you were going to panic, you should have panicked already."





30



YEARS AND BEYOND

# From Exodus to Empowerment: Afrika Tikkun's Journey in Pursuit of Freedom

**A**s Freedom Month coincides with Pesach, parallels emerge, linking historic struggles for liberation to Afrika Tikkun's 30-year journey. Pesach, recalling the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, mirrors the ongoing quest for freedom. Despite democratic gains over the last 30 years, economic disparity persists in South Africa. Afrika Tikkun's efforts in underprivileged communities highlight enduring challenges, where access to basic rights like food and education remains inadequate. Since 1994, through our holistic Cradle-to-Career 360° model and education and skills development programmes, we have impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and young people.

While we celebrate the democratic strides made since the end of apartheid, economic freedom remains elusive for many. Notably, like the Israelites who overcame slavery and oppression, our young people continue to personify resilience and perseverance. Afrika Tikkun's unwavering commitment to empowering under-resourced communities resonates with the essence of Pesach, where the quest for freedom is timeless. Join us in honouring this momentous occasion by supporting our mission to uplift and restore the dignity of those in need. Together, let's build a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive, flourish and be the best they can be; echoing the spirit of freedom embodied in Pesach.

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Left's twisted logic – an awesome gymnastic display



**INNER VOICE**  
Howard Feldman

I dedicate this column to the South African and global left. This is their time of need. I acknowledge that all too often, I get so caught up with my own worries and stresses that I forget that there are others suffering greater horrors than they would have imagined a short while ago. Because not only are they predisposed to experience more feelings than the rest of us, but the mental gymnastics required to stay afloat when everything around crumbles, must be exhausting.

And so, for a limited time only, I intend making this about "love and light" – their prevailing currency of care – and I will "hashtag" "healing vibes" a minimum of thrice per day to at least two social media platforms. Not once. Not twice. But thrice.

Because if anything speaks to the depth of care, it's posting #HealingVibes.

Whereas many of us haven't slept a peaceful night since 7 October, it's arrogant to think that we suffer alone. Consider the many challenges that those on the far left face each day. Just for starters, there's the steep curve of upskilling that was required since that date.

Not only did it become crucial to learn where Israel and Gaza were geographically – not everyone has that under their belt – but a completely new language had to be acquired. Words like "genocide", "apartheid", "Nazi", "Zionist", "concentration camp", and "ethnic cleansing" not only had to be misunderstood, but also learned to be used incorrectly in a sentence. Sometimes even in a paragraph.

"From the river to the sea!" needed to become a reflex, and so instinctive, it could be screamed in moments of confusion. It also had to be learned that "Free Palestine" wasn't a "buy-one-get-one-free offer". And that aside from the aid money stolen by Hamas, little in Gaza is free.

History had to be rewritten. "Context" needed to provide none. And an enormous number of facts had to be ignored. Not always easy.

A list of those who start their rants with "as a Jew" – or more commonly known as the "self-hating" kind – had to be studied and learned to provide a shield against accusations of antisemitism. "I can't be an

antisemite because Ronnie Kasrils is my friend's neighbour" and the much loved "I can't be an antisemite because Arabs are semites" need to sound sincere, along with bafflement at the mention of hostages.

"How to justify sexual assault" tutorial groups had to be formed, and the gay community assured that only other gay people are to be thrown off roofs in Gaza. Left-leaning gays need not worry. Because Hamas might not be shipshape when it comes to the basic human rights demanded by liberal democracies, but it would no doubt be so appreciative of the support by the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community, that it would turn over a completely new leaf when not battling the oppressive Nazi-like Zionists.

The dictum of dull isn't the only challenge. The attack by Iran has made life almost intolerable for the left. A well-known activist and equally known Israel-but-not-Jew hater on X tweeted, "The Iranian theocracy is a reactionary regime which cannot be supported. However, I stand with the people of Iran against the terror of Israel, the US, and the genocidal regime's European allies. #StopArmingIsrael #StopTheGenocide #StopTheWar."

Little doubt he had to lie down and catch his breath after engaging in that level of moral acrobatics. Sadly, he didn't stop to consider that as a gay person, if one finds oneself standing on the side of Iran – and pretending not to – it should be time to question that world view.

The cognitive dissonance, employment of replacement ideology, and inverted accusations that requires the left to stay in the game isn't to be underestimated. On some level, it even needs to be respected. And pitied. Which is why in the spirit of love and light, of hashtag blessed, for one day only, I'm sending #HealingVibes to those on the left. And will post that on social media, just to prove how darn deep I am.

# Yeshiva girls awarded for speaking



**T**ehilla Treger and Elisheva Kahn, both skilled public speakers, received master of ceremonies awards from the Speech and Drama College of South Africa on 9 April when they hosted the inter-school Speech and Drama Guild public speaking evening at Yeshiva College.

Tehilla Treger and Elisheva Kahn

# UJW's Bags for New Beginnings wins international award

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Johannesburg's Bags for New Beginnings project has won the 2023 Mitzvah Day International Award. The project, sponsored by Edwin and Esther Shuker, supports new mothers at state hospitals in South Africa. Edwin is an Iraqi-Jewish businessman and philanthropist, and the vice president of the British Board of Deputies.

On Mitzvah Day, more than 55 000 people around the world give of their time to make a difference to the community around them. On 19 November 2023, the UJW Johannesburg chose Bags for New Beginnings as its project. Volunteers of all ages and from different communities came together to pack 120 bags, which were given to new moms at the Hillbrow, Edenvale, and Alexandra clinics, as well as at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital, and via the Glow Movement, a support network for mothers.

Bags for New Beginnings is run by Bev Cohen, and was started as a Mandela Day project back in 2015. Mothers who have given birth at government hospitals are given invaluable items such as blankets, nappies, baby cream, wet wipes, sanitary pads, water, and biscuits. These bags give dignity and joy to new mothers as they start their journey.



A Bags for New Beginnings recipient at the Edenvale Hospital

# Iran uncloaked

**F**or decades, Iran has waged a ceaseless war against Israel through its Hamas, Hezbollah, and most recently, Houthis proxies, funding, arming, and doubtlessly directing them behind the scenes while they do the actual fighting.

All this changed on Saturday night, with the first-ever direct Iranian attack on the Jewish state. It wasn't a token operation to avenge the recent deaths of several high-ranking Iranian military personnel in an Israeli strike, but an all-out barrage of hundreds of deadly missiles. Thanks to Israel's outstanding air-defence capability along with the assistance of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and several Arab states, only a tiny fraction of these ultimately reached Israeli territory, and those that did caused negligible damage. For that, we're profoundly relieved. The fact that leading Arab states stood shoulder to shoulder with Israel against this blatant act of aggression by Iran was also a historic moment.

Unsurprisingly, South Africa's foreign affairs minister not only failed to condemn Iran's reckless and unlawful attack, but bizarrely intimated that it was Israel that was to blame for destabilising the region. As the statement we issued earlier this week put it, this only underscored "the moral bankruptcy of this government's foreign policy, where Iran and its proxy, Russia, and other rogue actors on the international stage are consistently given a free pass to continue wreaking their lawless mayhem around the globe".

In addition to its impact on broader geopolitics, the destabilisation of the global order by Israel-hating fundamentalists is happening continually at local, domestic level. Since 7 October, Jewish communities the world over have without exception experienced a steep rise in attacks against them. Especially threatened is the ability of community members to continue to identify with

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## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



and show support for Israel, something that in democratic societies was all but taken as a given in years gone by. The aggressive demonstrations outside the recent Aliyah Expos in Johannesburg and Cape Town were illustrative of how certain factions in this country are bent on preventing our community from expressing this aspect of their identity and beliefs. While the events themselves were well attended and went ahead without disruption, there were many instances of verbal abuse, intimidation, malicious damage to property, and even attempted assault outside the respective venues. We're in the process of following up on these incidents with our legal advisors, with charges having already been laid in two cases.

As this is the last issue of the SA Jewish Report until after Pesach, this is my last chance to remind everyone that Yom Hashoah will take place on 6 May. Guest speaker at West Park Cemetery will be survivor Miriam Lazarus, while there will be further, pre-recorded, survivor testimony from Rena Quint, who many will remember from when she came out from Israel to speak at Yom Hashoah in 2013. For more information about this year's ceremony, see our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X accounts.

On behalf of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, I wish everyone a *Chag Pesach kasher v'sameach*. As we join our families for the Pesach seders, I hope everyone has a meaningful and delicious seder, always mindful of the hostages still languishing in the tunnels of Gaza. We also think of the innocent victims of the war in Israel and Gaza, and pray for peace and the reunification of the hostages with their families.

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

# Sydenham Shul prints Tanya – a first for SA

**I**n what's believed to be the first time in South Africa, the moral/mystical classic work *Tanya* was recently printed in Sydenham Shul, Johannesburg, and published by the shul.

Authored by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and first published in Russia back in 1796, the *Tanya* is considered "the bible" of Chabad Chassidic philosophy and more than 8 000 different editions have been published around the world.

The *Tanya* had previously been printed in almost every city and town in South Africa wherever there was even the smallest Jewish community. In this case, the Sydenham Shul *Tanya* was printed and published by the shul in tribute to Rebbetzin Rochel Goldman for more than three decades of dedication to the congregation and the wider community in honour of her milestone birthday.

A beautiful, illuminated *Tanya* now adorns the wall where the printing press was set up, and a plaque honouring Rochel stands alongside it. It's believed to be the very first time the *Tanya* has been printed inside an actual shul in this country, and certainly the first to be published by a shul, perhaps even internationally.

The Sydenham Shul *Tanya* is the 8 068th edition. Since

then, more *Tanyas* continue to be printed around the world. In fact, during the current Gaza War, a *Tanya* was even printed inside Gaza!

The event was addressed by Rabbi Yehuda Stern; Rabbi Yossy Goldman; Rabbi Oshy Feldman of Gardens Shul, Cape Town and son-in-law of the Goldmans; and Rebbetzin Rochel Goldman concluded with her thanks and a mystical appreciation of the *Tanya*.

Back in 1978, the Lubavitcher Rebbe requested that the *Tanya* be printed in every Jewish community in the world. The Rebbe's intention was to "spread the light" of Chassidic mystical teachings throughout the world to help prepare for the messianic era. That was the spiritual,

mystical idea behind the project, but there was also the hope that more Jews would be encouraged to study the *Tanya* if they knew the book itself was printed in their own community.

The Sydenham Shul *Tanya* has been bound in a handsome, royal blue, hard cover book with gold print. Copies of the new *Tanya* are now in the library of Sydenham Shul.



Rebbetzin Rochel Goldman

# Never too young to make a difference on Purim

**T**wenty-month-old Benjamin Smilkstein from Sandton Sinai Nursery School won the Chevrah Kadisha's Purim Matanot Le'evyonim competition, in a fundraising project participated in by 27 Jewish schools.

Smilkstein won an iPad10, sponsored by iStore, which was presented to him by Chev Group Chief Executive Saul Tomson on 10 April.

Participants in the Purim *chesed* project collectively contributed 2 237 Matanot Le'evyonim donation envelopes. All of the funds were distributed to Jewish people in need on Purim.

"We're thrilled with the enthusiastic response from the kids," Tomson said, "who are learning at an early age about the joy of giving, the value of community, and the power of *tzedakah*. The winner was randomly selected but, as we know, all givers are winners."



Saul Tomson and Benjamin Smilkstein



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