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Former SA hostage tormented by husband's captivity

NICOLA MILTZ

Freed hostage Aviva Siegel has chosen not to watch the Hamas propaganda video of her beloved husband, Keith, whom she was forced to leave behind in Gaza after enduring 51 days of hell in Hamas captivity.

“My heart won’t handle it. It will break me up in pieces,” she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

The toll is evident on the South African-born nursery school teacher as she describes the unbearable pain of possibly seeing her husband’s suffering reflected in his kind eyes, a torment she knows all too well having endured the same captivity.

After months without any word from Keith or any of the hostages, Aviva, 63, received the first sign of life during Pesach. Hamas published an undated video on Saturday, 27 April, showing Keith, an American and Israeli citizen, along with another Israeli hostage, Omri Miran.

“I want to tell my family that I love you very much,” Keith, who turns 65 this week, says in the video. “It’s important to me that you know I’m OK, and I really hope you are too.”

During the video, he breaks down, and struggles to continue.

Both he and Miran mention the Passover holiday, suggesting the video was recorded recently. Miran says he has been held for 202 days.

It has been 216 days, at the time of going to print, since the start of the war, when the Siegels were abducted from their home in Kfar Aza, a kibbutz community near the Gaza border, and driven in their car at

gunpoint into Gaza. Hamas terrorists killed 62 people from their kibbutz and took 19 people hostage. Keith was shot in the hand and suffered broken ribs. The couple remained together in captivity until they were separated when Aviva was released during a brief ceasefire and hostage exchange deal in November.

Aviva never imagined that nearly five months after she said goodbye to her husband in Gaza, he would still be held captive.

Although the video has brought renewed hope, Aviva said she couldn’t bring herself to watch it. “It’s too much for me to see him in such pain. To look into his eyes, I’ll know

what he feels.”

Only one of the couple’s four children has summoned the courage to view the video.

“I know people tell me that he did it for me, for us, but we just can’t. It’s unbearably hard,” she said. Aviva, who was born in South Africa and grew up in Randfontein, said each day was a torment.

“My whole body hurts. We’re going through hell,” she said. One day, she wakes up feeling hopeful and imagines being reunited with her husband, described by his brother, Lee, as a sensitive, kind family man.

Her daughters, however, caution her not to get her hopes up. This after months of

back-and-forth negotiations culminating in fruitless outcomes. The next day, she’s gutted “the whole day”, as hopes of the hostages’ release dim yet again as negotiators reach another impasse. The cycle of hope and despair repeats endlessly. This week brought yet another round of perplexing news, with headlines flip-flopping between a truce deal being on and then off again, and Israel’s ground offensive in Rafah.

“I want to stand on the highest mountain and scream,” said Aviva. “Even if I do this, no-one will listen.”

Aviva has become one of Israel’s most vocal advocates for hostage families, appealing to Israeli legislators, world leaders, and international mediators to do more to secure their release.

She has spoken out about her captivity, testified before the Knesset on the sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas on female hostages, travelled to numerous countries including Geneva, where she addressed the Red Cross and the United Nations, and has met United States President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

“I told Keith I would be strong for him and would do everything I could to bring him home,” she said.

“I know the conditions they are living under. It’s too terrible. Every day that goes by puts them more at risk.”

Since the start of the war, 124 hostages have been freed, 105 of whom, including Aviva, were released in late November. As part of the truce, Israel released 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Israel

Continued on page 8>>

Never again ... again!



Holocaust survivor Irene Klass lights a memorial lamp to the six million Jews who perished during World War II

See pages 16 and 17

12 May

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'You are not alone': Biden in Holocaust remembrance speech vows to fight 7 October denialism

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

United States President Joe Biden aimed straight at American Jewish anxieties of the moment in a speech commemorating the Holocaust, pledging to keep alive the memory of Hamas's 7 October massacre in the face of waves of anti-Israel and antisemitic actions.

"I see your fear, your hurt, your pain," Biden said on Tuesday, 7 May, at the annual commemoration at the US Capitol, organised by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Let me reassure you as your president, you're not alone." The audience of Holocaust survivors, Jewish legislators, students, and Jewish officials applauded.

Biden's pledge comes as Israel launches a major operation in Rafah targeting Hamas, whose terrorists launched the war on 7 October, and as public sentiment – especially among Democrats, long the political home of the Jewish community – turns against Israel over a war that has resulted in a large number of civilian casualties.

"Here we are, not 75 years later, but just seven and a half months later, people are already forgetting that Hamas unleashed this terror," Biden said, flanked by

the flags of the US military units that liberated Nazi death and concentration camps. "I haven't forgotten and nor have you, and we won't forget."

Biden drew a direct line between Holocaust denial, long entrenched as a facet of antisemitism, and the tendency by some to minimise or even deny the atrocities of 7 October.

"Too many people are denying, downplaying, rationalising, or ignoring the horrors of the Holocaust and 7 October, including Hamas's appalling use of sexual violence, torture, and terrorising," he said. "It's absolutely despicable, and must stop."

Biden, like virtually every other speaker, addressed the pro-Palestinian campus protests that have swept universities across the nation, in some cases culminating in violence and police raids. As he did last week in a special statement, he said he would uphold free speech but drew the line at violence and hate speech.

"There's no place on any campus in America – any place in America – for antisemitism or hate speech or threats of violence of any kind," he said.

Other speakers included House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican; Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat; and Abe Foxman, a Holocaust survivor and the former national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Johnson has been leading efforts by Republicans to tie

the campus protests to the Biden administration, as well as link them to right-wing accusations of a liberal drift in academia. In his remarks, he compared the campus pro-Palestinian protests to the assault on Jewish students and academics before and during the Holocaust.

Biden's speech comes a year after his administration launched a strategy to combat antisemitism.

Before the speech, the White House listed new measures under the strategy that it would launch in coming days, including a letter from the education department to schools and universities around the country outlining how expressions of antisemitism could spark investigations. Dozens of campuses have been investigated since 7 October.

Also listed were a planned guide for campus safety resources, and the development of best practices to prevent violence, both spearheaded by the department of homeland security.

The state department's office of the special envoy to combat antisemitism, Deborah Lipstadt, would convene technology companies to discuss how best to deal with online antisemitic content, the White House said in its release.



United States President Joe Biden

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Torah Thought



Rabbi Osher Feldman Gardens Shul

The Jewish spirit is alive. And it's burning brightly. Whether you attribute it to fear, resilience, or a rude

awakening, the fact is that Jewish identity is stronger today than it has been for a long time.

Of course, we still bicker and argue. This is a tradition as old as the Jewish people themselves. And I can't imagine that it will stop any time soon.

But there's undoubtedly a renewed bond that has emerged among our people.

There's an old story of a congregant who stopped coming to shul. After a few weeks, the rabbi went to visit him in his home. It was a cold winter's night. The congregant was sitting by the fireplace. The rabbi walked over to the fireplace, removed a single coal from the fire and placed it on the side. The coal quickly died out. The rabbi left without saying a word.

The next week, the congregant was back in shul. Since the horrors of 7 October, many isolated coals have rejoined the fire. The embers buried deep are being reignited. We're reclaiming our power.

One of the historic blessings of the South African community has been our strong sense of *kehilla* (community).

But there are still far too many isolated coals in our community, locally and abroad.

At the Gardens Shul in Cape Town, we're launching a programme called "Gardens Global". Its aim is to connect the global South African Jewish community and unleash its power.

There are Gardens Global Ambassadors in Tel Aviv, London, New York, Sydney, Dubai, and Amsterdam.

Gardens Global is being launched in London at a special "Friday Night Live" Shabbat service on 17 May.

Please contact us or go to www.gardensglobal.com

if you know of any South Africans locally and overseas who could benefit from this community initiative.

Collecting the isolated coals is done both at macro and micro level.

It can be as simple as inviting someone beyond your friend circle for a Shabbat meal, choosing to show up to a local community initiative, or – and this can often be challenging – demonstrating compassion and understanding for someone who sees the world, be it politically or religiously, through different lenses to yourself.

In this week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, we find the *mitzvah*: "You shall love your fellow as yourself. I am Hashem." (Leviticus, 19:18)

There's a double commandment of love in this verse – to love yourself and to love your fellow.

The Hebrew word for love is "*ahavah*". It has the *gematria* – numerical equivalent – of 13. Double the love – yourself and your fellow – and you get 26, the numerical value of G-d's name.

Expand your heart, and G-d's presence will be felt. Reach out to the coals, and the fire will burn brighter.

If there's anything recent events have reminded us of, it's the strength we draw from each other.

Wherever you may be reading this, please know you have a place in our community. And as we all know, there's no place like home.

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*Israel is one hour ahead of South Africa

South African Jewish Report

Editor Peta Krost – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz
Intern Lee Tankle • Editorial co-ordinator Dylan Berger – editorial@sajewishreport.co.za
Proofreader Kim Hatchuel/A-Proofed – kim@a-proofed.co.za • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver

Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za • Laura Kaufman – laura@sajewishreport.co.za
Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman • Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd
Tel: 0860 525 200 • Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.



Pro-Palestinian demands ignore plight of Wits students

TALI FEINBERG

While thousands of University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) students in residences in Braamfontein have no water or electricity, a hoard of anti-Israel protesters made written demands on Tuesday, 7 May, that the university's leadership focus on anti-Israel measures.

The Wits University Palestine Action Committee (WUPAC) and the Wits Palestine Solidarity Committee (Wits PSC), along with several other internal Wits bodies, and "concerned individual members of the Wits community" went to the university to hand over the letter publicly to Vice Chancellor Zebulon Vilakazi and Council Chairperson Isaac Shongwe, which they described as "putting Wits on notice".



"We find this aggressive stance to be particularly insensitive, as presently, thousands of students living in Braamfontein residences are experiencing a power and water crisis," says South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) Wits Chairperson Dani Frankel regarding the letter of demand.

The demands include that Wits doesn't employ "members of staff who are active members of pro-Israeli Zionist organisations and former members of the Israeli military forces", and that "the university must allow for the free expression of Palestine solidarity activities on its campuses. This includes preventing the deliberate disruption of the annual Israeli Apartheid Week by organisations such as the South African Union of Jewish Students." The letter called for Wits to "allow its campuses to become sites of Palestinian solidarity".

"Instead of choosing to uplift, contribute, and be active in the Wits community, these parties have instead chosen to promote hate against Jewish students, thinly veiled behind the guise of 'anti-Zionism,'" says Frankel. "In contrast, SAUJS, in collaboration with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD], provided 7 000 meals to those in need over the past weekend as part of our ongoing efforts to support students in need."

The Israel-hating groups called for "full disclosure regarding Wits' relations with Israeli and Israel-aligned institutions and companies; a public position in solidarity with Palestine; the adoption of a BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions]-aligned position regarding

procurement, investment, and collaboration; sincere reflection on the meaning of academic freedom; and an end to the censorship and intimidation of pro-Palestinian activists and activities on campus."

Wits Senior Communications Officer Buhle Zima told the SA Jewish Report, "The university can confirm that student groups handed over a memorandum to university executives. The memorandum will be reviewed, and the university will respond to the students in due course. The event was peaceful."

The letter comes after relative quiet from pro-Palestinian activists on the university's campus. However, on 7 October 2023, the Wits PSC released a statement supporting the barbaric atrocities that Hamas committed that day, saying, "We applaud the resilience of the Palestinians as they defend their land, families, and human rights."

On 11 October, it called for protests "in support of Palestinian resistance" outside the United States consulate in Sandton and the Jewish community centre in Cape Town. Since 7 October, it has stated multiple times that "resistance isn't terrorism". On 25 March, WUPAC, the Wits PSC and South African Jews for a Free Palestine posted an image calling for intifada.

Says Frankel, "SAUJS views the handing over of the letter of demand as hypocritical and hate-filled. Since the atrocities of 7 October, SAUJS has helped ensure that Wits campus remains one of the safest campuses for Jewish students across the world in spite

of the constant attempts by the PSC, WUPAC and others to inflame tensions and incite conflict. The only possible outcome of their approach is to make the lives of both Jewish students and other students on campus, who are dealing with significant challenges, incrementally more difficult.

"Further, we find their demands, which including the adoption of BDS principles and practices, to be evidence of this hateful agenda," he says. "BDS is regarded as antisemitic in its practices due to its unjust targeting of Jewish business and organisations. A further demand is calling into question an OrCam MyEye device, which was donated by the Israeli ambassador and is used in the Wits Disability Rights Unit to help visually impaired students obtain the higher education to which they are entitled.

"SAUJS remains steadfast in its directive to ensure the safety of all Jewish students on campus and their ability to remain proud of their Judaism," says Frankel. "We uphold the values of tolerance and mutual respect for our fellow students, and would hope that other societies would prioritise the promotion of peace rather than disharmony."

The letter was handed over by Gazan professor Haidar Eid, who is a founding member of International BDS National Committee and Palestine Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI); Saleh Hijazi from the International BDS Committee based in

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Ramallah; and members of the South African Federation of Trade Unions.

During the handover, a small group of protesters gathered for a rally at the Wits Great Hall. Many proudly held signs displaying vulgar language. The Wits Student Representative Council publicly endorsed the letter, and said it would bring the demands to the university's senate.

Says Frankel, "The university responded well. There was a lot of security on the scene, and the dean of students was there to receive the letter, but he didn't really engage with them. So not much happened on the ground during the day. We had a normal day on campus as usual, which is what we strive for."



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn says, "The anti-Israel statements emanating from the PSC and its allies have gained little traction with university students in South Africa. Given that none of the protests or petitions at Wits or UCT refer to the hostages, whose release is the quickest and surest way to end the war in

Gaza, the motivations of those supporting these actions are suspect.

"Attempts to demonise 'Zionists' shows how little these students understand about what it means to be a Zionist, and their attempts to bully universities into abandoning the principles of fairness, protection of minorities, and academic freedom in favour of meaningless gestures must be resisted. All the protests on campuses across the globe have done nothing to ease the suffering of all those affected by this war, and have served only to divide universities, disrupt the academic programme to no effect, and place Jewish students' safety at risk.

"We trust that our students and university leadership will stand up to the attempts to bully by these Hamas apologists, and will ensure that our campuses aren't manipulated for their political objectives."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Chairperson Rowan Polovin said, "Academic freedom is a non-negotiable pillar of world-class education and a fundamental right enshrined in our Constitution. The SAZF vehemently opposes any calls for academic boycotts of Israeli institutions as such discriminatory actions undermine the core principles of academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas essential for intellectual growth and scientific advancement. Boycotting Israeli research partnerships and technologies would deprive universities like Wits of valuable educational and research opportunities, and set a dangerous precedent of political interference in academia.

"We believe universities should foster open dialogue, collaboration, and intellectual diversity," says Polovin. "Indeed, Israeli universities are among the most diverse in the world, with Jewish and Arab students studying alongside each other. Attempts to isolate Israeli institutions based on political ideology are antithetical to these values, and will stifle innovation, hinder progress, and divide the academic community. The widespread use of Israeli technology in devices and platforms integral to modern academic life at Wits and other institutions also highlights the hypocrisy of singling out Israel."

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UCT students' pro-Palestinian encampment attempt – a damp squib

TALI FEINBERG

The anti-Israel lobby at the University of Cape Town (UCT) threatened to create its own pro-Palestinian encampment on campus from Monday night, 6 May, but it didn't materialise.

"Apparently, 30 students arrived [to take part in an encampment] but then left," said a Cape Town source who could not be identified. UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola told the SA Jewish Report that "UCT wasn't formally made aware of any encampment planned to take place on campus on Monday, 6 May 2024."

This follows two anti-Israel motions adopted by the university's senate on 19 April. The first rejected the widely adopted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, among other points. The second maintained that "no University of Cape Town academic may enter into relations, or continue relations with, any research group and/or network whose author affiliations are with the Israel Defense Forces [IDF], and/or the broader Israeli military establishment".

At the time, an observer, who also requested anonymity, said there was "serious intimidation of staff" by protesters outside the UCT senate meeting, with calls for "intifada revolution". The vote was done by a paper ballot at a public gathering. A similar motion was put to the senate of Stellenbosch University, but it was voted down.

The adoption of the two UCT motions, which are now resolutions of the senate, will next be put to the UCT council – the institution's highest decision-making body – for consideration.

On 25 April, four candidates campaigned for by the South African Jewish community were elected to the council. David Ansara, Brian Kantor, Mark Oppenheimer, and Kelly Phelps will serve from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2028.

Erin Dodo, the chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students Western Cape, said that the senate passing a vote didn't mean it was going to go through, and the council still had to approve it.

However, during the UCT senate meeting, those present claimed that "false facts" were presented about Israel, and attendees were forced to take part in a moment of silence for Palestinians. The pro-Palestinian lobby prevented the chairperson from speaking, and "it was a well-coordinated attack, with people feeling they must give [the pro-Palestinian lobbyists] a 'win'. It was like negotiating with terrorists," the observer said.

The extremist UCT Palestine Solidarity Forum (UCT PSF) dedicated the "victory" of the passing of the two motions to "the axis of resistance: the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the Ansarullah [Houthis] of Yemen".

The observer said that at the senate meeting, Palestinian lobbyists wouldn't let anyone speak, and "there seemed to be a real sticking point over which definition of antisemitism to use. Someone asked if the Jewish Studies professor could explain the definitions, and they got shouted down. People said they didn't even know the content of the definitions, and they got shouted down. It was a profoundly anti-intellectual meeting."

Dodo, says her organisation is "working closely with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD], which is in communication with the university, and we are as well."

"However, this once again adds to the growing distress of Jewish students. The thing that really concerned us was the UCT PSF's reaction, which shows just how radical this organisation has become. If you look through the comments [on Instagram] you can see that a lot of Palestinian supporters are beginning to distance themselves from the [radicalism of] the UCT PSF."

"Jewish students are obviously feeling alienated and isolated on campus at the moment, and it's up to council to rectify this," she says.

Jeffrey Bagraim, a professor of organisational psychology who is a member of the senate, says the protests outside the senate

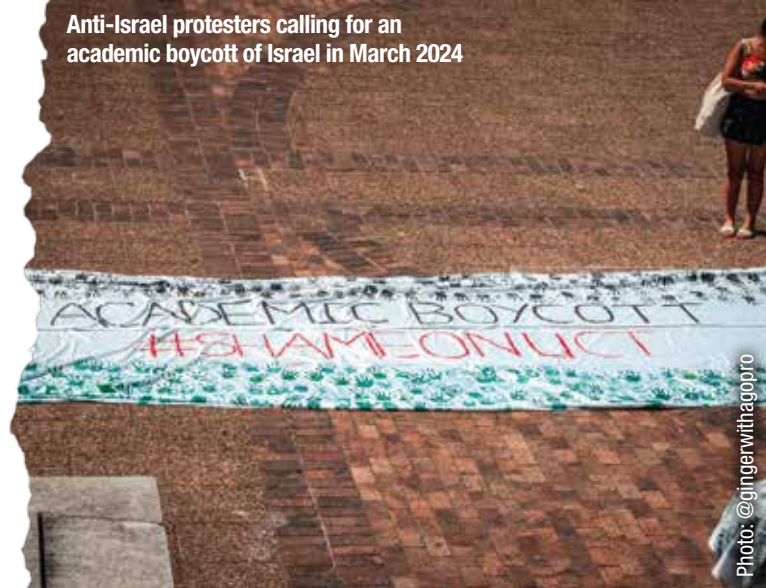
meeting were "orchestrated by dedicated activists with the support of the Economic Freedom Fighters-aligned student representative council".

Council may well decide to reject, accept, or refer the motions back to the senate, Bagraim says, but "even if passed, there will likely be little or no substantive implications. UCT didn't subscribe to the IHRA definition before the meeting. No known UCT research has been conducted with Israeli researchers whose primary affiliation is with the IDF or related military bodies. The primary outcomes of the resolutions may be that they provided an opportunity for virtue-signalling, grandstanding, and the accumulation of 'activist credits' by its proposers."

David Benatar, emeritus professor of philosophy, says, "The latter motion, if endorsed by UCT's council, would require even those UCT academics who want to have academic relations with Israelis, to boycott them. If UCT were to impose such a boycott, it might find itself on the receiving end of a boycott by entities with much more power than UCT has."

"If the council was to pass the motion, the policy might still fall foul of the right to academic freedom enshrined in the South African Constitution," he says. "Of course, enforcing that right would require legal challenge to the policy, and even then, it would remain to be seen whether such a challenge would be fairly adjudicated."

Anti-Israel protesters calling for an academic boycott of Israel in March 2024



Political commentator Sara Gon says the first resolution is "antisemitic and counter-factual" and "the impact on Palestinian education is, frankly, an entirely expected outcome of the war".

Regarding academics working with anyone affiliated to the IDF, she says, "We don't know if the drafters really mean working with most Israeli citizens, because the IDF is a conscript army so most would be 'members of the IDF'."

"The most worrying thing about the success of these two resolutions is that they took place at an in-person meeting," says Gon. "In the appalling atmosphere of the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish protests on campus and within academia including the senate, being in-person may have meant that academics who may have voted against one or both resolutions didn't attend the meeting."

"The shouting down of pro-Israel participants at the vote and the aggressive incivility that represents anti-Israeli debate probably explains the result of the vote more than the content of the resolutions themselves."

Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, who is in regular communication with UCT and Stellenbosch leadership, says, "We'll continue to monitor the situation and engage on behalf of our community."

Says Bagraim, "This is a difficult time for many Jewish students worldwide. The community should remember that UCT is the leading university in Africa, providing a world-class education to its students, and only a tiny minority of students are involved in the protests. The leadership of UCT isn't antisemitic, though it should do more in response to antisemitic acts and speech. Jewish students are safe on campus, and UCT has the best kosher food of any South African university."

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Media misrepresenting ICJ ruling, says retired judge

TALI FEINBERG

Judge Joan Donoghue, who has just retired as president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), has made it clear that the ICJ didn't find that South Africa's claim that Israel was committing genocide was plausible, as so many in the mainstream media have falsely claimed.

Local and international media have generally presented these false claims about the outcome of the South African case against Israel in the ICJ as fact.

Israel was widely accused of genocide, and it was portrayed that South Africa had won the case, that it had brought a ceasefire, and lawsuits charged other countries with abetting Israeli "genocide" or failing to stop the Jewish state from committing genocide.

"The court decided that the Palestinians had a plausible right to be protected from genocide, and that South Africa had the right to present that claim in the court," Donoghue told BBC HARDtalk's Stephen Sackur on 26 April. "It then looked at the facts as well. But it didn't decide – and this is something where I'm correcting what's often said in the media – that the claim of genocide was plausible.

"It did emphasise in the order that there was a risk of irreparable harm to the Palestinian right to be protected from genocide," she said. "But the shorthand that often appears, which is that there's a plausible case of genocide, isn't what the court decided."

Donoghue also said, "We didn't find [a ceasefire] necessary."

"Because the court has jurisdiction only over cases between states, and Hamas isn't a state, the court isn't in a position to order Hamas at all," she said. "The only thing we could do, and we did do at the very end of our reasoning, is to state specifically that we condemned what Hamas had done, and to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages. We felt that was very important. There was no question on our part that we needed to do that."



Judge Joan Donoghue on BBC HARDtalk

Said Advocate Mark Oppenheimer, "The two major pieces of misinformation that were spread by the media about the ICJ case were first, that South Africa had obtained what was tantamount to a ceasefire, and second, that a plausible case of genocide had been found against the state of Israel.

"In her interview on HARDtalk, Judge Donoghue makes it clear that neither of these occurred. First, she makes it abundantly clear that the court declined

to grant a ceasefire," said Oppenheimer. "Second, she said that it was never found that there was a plausible case of genocide, only that it was plausible that the rights invoked by South Africa in the convention plausibly applied to the case at hand. No finding was made about whether there is a genocide or not, but only to state that these are the applicable rights, and South Africa had the right to bring the case. There was some ambiguity about South Africa's right to bring the case, given that it isn't a party

to the conflict.

"One reason why the press ran with the story was to amplify South Africa's case in spite of it being a failure," he said. "South Africa failed on three occasions. It went to court three times to seek a ceasefire, and every time was told no, and the third time was told definitively it would never be granted because South Africa isn't a party to the conflict. That's why we haven't had a fourth barrage of litigation from South Africa."

Rowan Polovin, the chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), said, "The recent BBC HARDtalk interview with Judge Joan Donoghue provides much-needed clarity on the court's provisional measures order in the case brought by South Africa against Israel. Her authoritative explanation makes it clear that contrary to claims by the South African government, media, and some partisan 'experts', the ICJ didn't find the allegation of genocide against Israel to be a plausible claim.

"Judge Donoghue unambiguously stated that the court's test of plausibility applied only to South Africa's right to present its claim, not the substance of the genocide allegation itself," said Polovin. "The court determined that the Palestinians have a plausible right to be protected from genocide, allowing the case to proceed on that basis. However, Donoghue firmly corrected the widespread mischaracterisation, stating that it didn't decide that the claim of genocide was plausible.

"This is a stern rebuke to the South African government's reckless rhetoric falsely equating Israel's defensive actions against Palestinian terrorism with genocide," he said. "It's deeply concerning that such inflammatory and legally baseless allegations have been irresponsibly perpetuated by Minister Naledi Pandor and government officials, as well as amplified in media reports, and lent legitimacy by partisan commentators.

"Judge Donoghue's sober assessment provides much-needed context that the court's provisional order centred on

preventing potential irreparable harm while the merits were examined. It didn't prejudge the substance of South Africa's genocide claim one way or the other," said Polovin. "All parties ought to heed her clarifying remarks and cease the deliberate mischaracterisation of Israel's acts of self-defence against the internationally designated Hamas terrorist organisation."

The SAZF has called on the South African government "to walk back its incendiary accusations against Israel, which do nothing to resolve the situation constructively. Unfounded allegations of genocide only inflame tensions further and disrespect the millions of victims of actual genocides in Africa and around the world."

David Saks, the associate director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said, "In view of the dishonesty of the ANC [African National Congress] government in bringing this scandalous case to the ICJ in the first place, it's hardly surprising that it has gone on flagrantly to misrepresent the court's findings.

"To foster the impression that Israel is guilty as charged, it has cynically twisted what was in actuality a carefully nuanced ruling that didn't – and at this preliminary stage, in fact, couldn't – make any findings as to the substance of the case. It's shameful indeed that in so doing, our government has placed itself at the very forefront of those seeking to hijack the international justice system in order to defame and delegitimise the Jewish state."

The SA Jewish Report called on a number of media houses and personalities to comment, but not one of them were willing to give their opinion.

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It's a critical election, so vote!

As we head toward one of the most essential elections we've ever held in this country, it's time for us to consider who to vote for. This time around, there's no slam dunk as to who will win and who will be the official opposition. There are many parties with potential, and many that are quite frightening for our community because of their stance on Zionists, which has become just another word for Jews.

That is, unless you're an anti-Zionist Jew, which doesn't make sense to me as it simply means being a Jew against your own people. I believe those who have chosen this path will eventually see that to others, they are useful idiots, serving an agenda in proving Israel haters aren't antisemites because there are Jews – like them – who hate Israel. At the end of the day, the Nazis really didn't care who you supported, if you were a Jew, you were a Jew.

I do understand that there are Jews who are afraid to voice their opinions because it will have an impact on how people see them. They may well find that when those people they were trying to impress turn on them, they realise that they might have been better served in standing up and being counted when they could.

That aside, the *SA Jewish Report* went to all the relevant political parties to ask them questions that pertain specifically to our community. We wanted to know where they stood on issues that really matter to us. For the rest, we could find answers in the national media.

It was an interesting endeavour, which I hope will help you make up your minds. I guess, the bottom line is who do we trust to take us forward in this country we love and call home?

While the African National Congress (ANC) had perfectly well written answers, which I believe many within the party stand by, I couldn't vote for the ruling party because it has let us down on every level. I drive through Johannesburg dodging potholes. I have this year had to deal with water outages and believe that though there's no loadshedding now, it will resume as soon as the elections are over. I say this because we also had no loadshedding when the BRICS conference was being held in Sandton and over the December holidays. But when the sun went down on the holidays and the conference, loadshedding was back with a vengeance. So, what's changed? Nothing!

The ANC had everything it could to make this country work, but somehow, it couldn't or just didn't. So many of us looked to Cyril Ramaphosa as the man who would turn things around after the mess of corruption that his predecessor Jacob Zuma left. So much for that! Not only did he do nothing of the sort, he also stabbed the Jewish community in the back. I now think of him as "Brutus Ramaphosa", who stabbed his best friend – as in the story of Julius Caesar – in the back. *Et tu, Brute?*

What was particularly interesting about this exercise of asking political parties questions that relate to us was that it's clear that we have friends and people who do want our support in this country. The Patriotic Alliance, Freedom Front Plus, and African Christian Democratic Party were just some of those who made such an effort for us. Perhaps they aren't the parties we may ordinarily vote for, however this is no ordinary election!

In the run-up to this week, I was sure that the one party that would make an effort to reiterate its long-established support of the Jewish community was the Democratic Alliance (DA). I have no idea about the numbers, but a large percentage of Jewish people have voted with this party for so long.

So, when I sent the questions to the person I was told to submit them to, I didn't question that I would need space for the party's responses. However, none were forthcoming. I badgered the guy, who told me that he had sent them to the national director of communications who was going to respond. The deadline came and went, and I heard nothing. Eventually, a week after deadline, I made contact with the communications director himself, who initially told me that I could find answers to all of my questions in the speeches that DA leader John Steenhuisen had given over time. I explained that the structure of this particular feature was for the parties to respond themselves in a question-and-answer format. He eventually WhatsApped me the answers contained in our pullout. I went back to him – the only party I made a real effort with because of our historical alliance – and he made it clear that he, and I take it the DA, wasn't willing to show favouritism to our community. They couldn't talk about rising antisemitism because they were against all racism. Our discussion was tense, and I eventually realised that I was going to get nothing more than I already had no matter how much I asked. I have to say, I was very disappointed.

Having said that, I'm not sure we can tar a political party by the behaviour of one person, albeit its national communications director. However, it has made me rethink who I'll be voting for, that's for sure.

The biggest deal isn't who you choose to vote for, but that you vote. If you believe that Songezo Zibi and Rise Mzansi have the same values as you, in spite of a couple of antisemitic people on their list, rather vote for them than not vote at all.

When people say they don't think they'll vote because their vote doesn't count, or there's no party they feel will serve them, that is unacceptable. Suffice to say that South Africans died and went through hell in order to have the right to vote. So it's incumbent on us all to vote.

And voting for a small party, which might just get one seat in Parliament is better than nothing. We need to remember that from 1961 to 1974, Helen Suzman was the lone anti-apartheid voice in Parliament. And what a voice it was! That solitary voice did so much brilliant work in those years within Parliament. So, don't dismiss voting for small parties. Having said that, do your homework, and vote wisely. You have less than three weeks

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Israel versus Iran round one – who's the winner?

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



Iran launched a major missile attack on Israel on 13 April, which included more than 300 suicide drones, cruise, as well as ballistic missiles. This was in retaliation for an Israeli air strike on 1 April that killed seven Iranian officers, including a top general, at a building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Damascus. Israel's response has been shrouded in secrecy, but according to *The Economist*, Israeli jets are thought to have fired several air-launched ballistic missiles towards an air base near the Natanz nuclear complex south of Tehran. The exact details of damage caused aren't clear, as neither side is talking, but it seems clear that Israel did some damage to a radar system at the air base, while Iran did some damage to an Israeli air base, Nevatim, in southern Israel. So, the question is, who came out on top after this little bit of sparring?

The preliminary question is what Iran was trying to achieve with its barrage. It did give the United States (US) [and therefore indirectly Israel] a 72-hour notice of the attack, so it clearly wanted to avoid mass casualties which would have led to a regional war. However, this was far more than a "fireworks display", as some commentators have called it, as shooting about 350 missiles at a country is a serious escalation. So, the correct answer is more nuanced. While wanting to avoid mass casualties, Iran wanted to send a serious message to Israel that assassinating its top generals is a red line, and crossing it will invite direct retaliation. It clearly wanted to cause some damage to a military site to send this message, hence the amount of missiles shot and in particular at the airforce base in the south. The real question, then, is whether Iran achieved strategic and tactical success with its military operation.



The first issue to stress is that in shooting about 350 missiles at Israel and causing minimal damage, Iran didn't look strong as it had hoped to. Although the size of its attack took the US and its allies by surprise, the fact that they were, in conjunction with Israel, able to deal efficiently with the onslaught, clearly gave the military initiative to Israel.

Secondly, and more importantly, the massive barrage helped to end Israel's growing isolation, and countries that a week before were condemning the death of the seven World Central Kitchen aid workers were now suddenly all acting together in support of Israel. It seems that even France, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, to a lesser or greater extent, were involved in assisting, and suddenly, the Israel-Sunni alliance came out into the open for the first time. Iran helped to formalise an alliance which hitherto had been in the shadows.

Thirdly, the attack actually did a disservice

to the Palestinian cause. The humanitarian problems in Gaza were crowded out of the news and replaced by a far greater concern among Western nations of avoiding a major regional war. Countries that had been calling for an arms embargo, including Israel's closest allies, were now far more concerned about protecting Israel against further Iranian attacks and sanctioning Iran instead. The arms embargo calls have suddenly gone quiet. As *The Economist* said, "Its mass drone and missile attacks triggered renewed sympathy for Israel, and crossed a Rubicon that has already drawn widespread condemnation." The World Central Kitchen issue has now been forgotten, and the organisation has restarted operations in Gaza. Even the European Union has agreed to expand sanctions on Iranian producers of drones and missiles following the attack on Israel, and moved away from talks of sanctioning Israel.

Israel's response

With this background in mind, Israel's response became very tricky. Having 350 drones and rockets shot at it meant it had to respond somehow, but it had to avoid losing the new-found diplomatic support it had gained and also avoid setting off a regional war. To this end, it seemed to have found the right balance. The exact details of Israel's response are still not well known, but, as discussed above, it seems that several ballistic missiles were fired at an Iranian air base near a nuclear complex south of Teheran. *The Economist* reports that the missiles scored a direct hit on a radar system at the base, which was designed to track incoming air and missile threats, and, again according to the publication, the radar system was left non-operational.

This response was small enough not to start a regional war, but strategic enough for Israel to make the point that it could strike Iranian air-defence systems and the sites they are meant to protect without ever entering Iranian air space. This must be causing concern for the Iranian leadership.

Who is ahead on points?

It's really not clear how much damage each side did to the other militarily. The details are sketchy and not much has been revealed. There's no doubt that Israel won the diplomatic battle, and probably the strategic one given what was discussed above. However, the question is, why did Iran go "so big" and shoot 350 missiles and rockets at Israel? Surely, it could have got its message across by shooting fewer missiles, which would have created less of a diplomatic incident? The answer

seems to be that it wanted to "dramatically change the strategic equation" and, as discussed above, show Israel that killing Iranian generals is a red line that would invoke a severe military response. Remember, when the US assassinated Qasem Soleimani, another senior Iranian general, in a targeted drone strike on 3 January 2020 in Baghdad, Iran similarly launched missiles against US military bases in Iraq, wounding many American troops.

The key discussion point, therefore, to determine who ultimately won this round, is whether the Iranian response will in fact deter future Israeli strikes on its generals and military in Syria. Of course, it's too early to tell at this stage, and therefore we'll have to wait to see how this plays out before it's possible to determine a winner in round one of this battle.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

Being at the Kotel on Pesach – a priestly blessing



RAFI MIDZUK

PERSONAL STORY

Since the days of Moshe and Aharon, the kohanim have recited Birkat Kohanim, the holy priestly blessing conferred by the Temple priests on the Jewish people. During the Amidah, the central prayer in the Jewish daily prayer services, the kohanim walk up to the front of the shul wearing their tallit, take off their shoes, place their hands together, and bless the community.

Birkat Kohanim is one of the most spiritually uplifting rituals in Jewish life as the entire congregation is embraced in a “divine hug”.

This year, I was privileged to be at the Kotel on Pesach. Along with Sukkot, this is the occasion each year when thousands of people come from all over Israel to the Kotel for a special nationally broadcast Birkat Kohanim, something I had seen before only in photos or videos.

Understanding the sanctity of Birkat Kohanim requires an appreciation of the role the kohanim play in Jewish spiritual identity and purpose. The command from Hashem to the Jewish people to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6) emphasises the collective responsibility of *am Yisrael* (the Jewish people) to serve as vessels for divine blessings. That the kohanim may bless the

congregation only after being asked to do so, demonstrates the active role of *am Yisrael* in inviting and responding to the blessing.

As I closed my eyes and concentrated on the words being chanted over the speakers, I remembered being called into shul during the *chaggim* when I was younger. All the children would gather in the middle of my shul, a tallit would be held over us all, and we weren’t allowed to look at the kohanim as though Hashem was blessing us. It felt austere yet comforting.

In that moment, the importance of the land I was standing on hit me. I couldn’t help but feel a strong sense of belonging and connection to my fellow Jews, past and present. I was standing where

our ancestors have prayed for thousands of years; where our ancestors had been blessed at the foot of the Beit Hamikdash since the days of Shlomo *hamelech* (King Solomon). I felt an overwhelming sense of appreciation and awe.

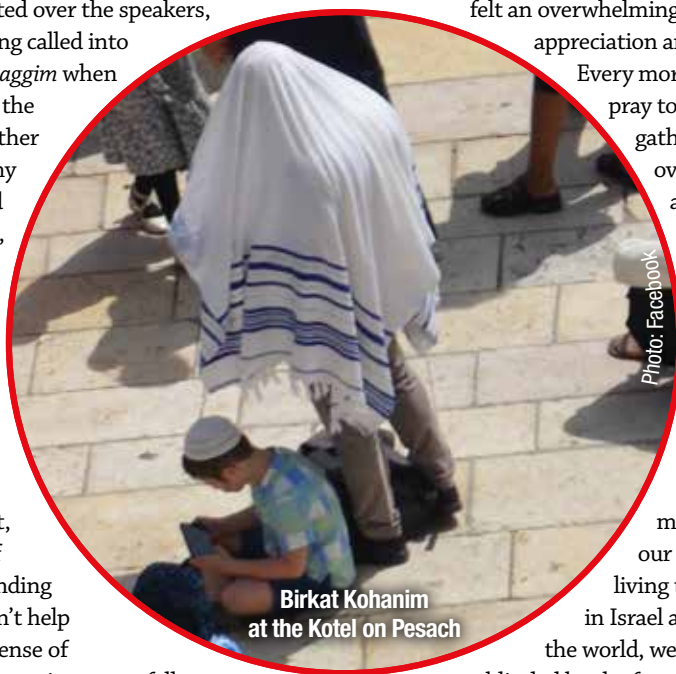
Every morning, we pray to Hashem to gather us from all over the world and to rebuild Jerusalem. In many aspects, it seems that our prayers are slowly being answered. In difficult moments like our people are living through now in Israel and around the world, we can become blinded by the fear instilled in us by our enemies and jaded by the pervasive

hate around us. And it’s in moments of spiritual beauty, like I experienced at the Kotel over Pesach, when you feel the unity of *am Yisrael* and experience the blessing of being on the very land where our Temple once stood. It’s in these moments that we understand why we, the people of Israel, are fighting for the survival of Israel and the Jewish people. This is our home, our history, and the blood that pumps through our veins.

In those moments, as we stood shoulder to shoulder, united in prayer, the divisions that often separate us melted away. It was replaced by a shared sense of purpose and resilience. It was a reminder that even in the darkest of times, we’re not alone. We’re part of a larger nation that spans generations and continents.

Whatever challenges face us, the priestly blessing of the kohanim shows us that, with G-d’s blessing, we’ll endure.

Rafi Midzuk is a former head boy of Yeshiva College in Johannesburg, and is in Israel on MTA (a Bnei Akiva youth movement gap-year programme).



Birkat Kohanim at the Kotel on Pesach

Photo: Facebook

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To Jewish students in the US – we get it!

To fellow Jewish students in the United States,

As a South African student navigating the complexities of maintaining a proud Jewish identity in a landscape so charged with hate, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding, I find myself compelled to reach out to you and let you know that I feel your hurt, I understand your confusion and disillusion. I feel your horror at the apathy of your university executives while the actions of their students go so desperately against their codes of conduct, it couldn't be more obvious if it were written in neon lights across the campus skyline.

I know – and more than anything I wish – I could help you to make your universities see your hurt and pain.

At the beginning of this year, I had the privilege of sitting around a table with students across the United States, including Columbia, Yale, George Washington University, and more. We were speaking about our experiences as Jewish students, and I explained to them what BDS [the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition] was, because at this point, though it existed on American campuses, its true potential to cause damage hadn't yet truly exposed itself, and I explained what Israeli Apartheid Week looked like on South African university campuses.

They looked at me in horror as I explained what happens on my campus every year, and with sincere concern when I explained the attempts that were being made to bring about a full academic boycott of Israel at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Not even two months later, these same students find themselves all too familiar with the situation that South African students have been navigating for years – a silent, or simply disinterested – university body, unmoved by the blatantly obvious fear of Jewish students, more concerned about public relations than the safety of students.

Here's the thing about being Jewish: my pain is yours, and yours is mine. There exists something so incredibly rare in the Jewish community, and that's a closeness that has arisen out of generations of survival and endurance. This means that while I watch the events unfolding on campuses across America, I cannot help but imagine myself in your shoes. Having said that, there are also experiences you are having to encounter that I have never had to, such as being barred from entering lectures or even entering campus grounds, and I truly cannot imagine how that must feel, how hurtful and unbelievably painful that must be.

In the past two months, Jewish students at UCT have come face-to-face with blatant antisemitism and glaring, unavoidable prejudice. Our university lecturers have isolated us and belittled us into case studies and examples, our fellow students have avoided our eyes as if they'd turn into stone if they looked at us for too long.



Erin Dodo



Columbia University anti-Israel student protesters camping on campus

Photo: Phillissa Cramer

Regardless of how antisemitism has presented itself across campuses worldwide, there's not a shadow of doubt that picking on Jewish students has become the trend of the year, creating a reality for Jewish students so perverse, it's almost impossible to believe.

While I'm by no means an authority on the matter – not that there should ever have to be a world where there has to be an authority on proving that Jews have the right to exist – let me give you some pieces of advice that have been given to me over the years that have got me

through:

First, never let their shrilling silence your song. Our strength has always come from our ability to maintain our faith and conviction in the face of ugly brutality;

Second, your sensitivity is a strength, not a weakness. Your ability

to see humanity when everything around you is suggesting animosity is your reminder to not let this hate make you into the monster they want to believe you are;

Third, your trust in what's right is a better guide than anything. Lean into it. We have something that they'll never have. We have faith. Let it lead you.

More than anything, I want you to know that I'm proud of you for having the strength to continue. You belong on your campuses as much as anyone, don't let anyone convince you otherwise.

As we reflect on 79 years since the Shoah, let the memories of our ancestors be your guiding light.

Mir veln zey iberlebn (We will outlive them).

Erin

• Erin Dodo is the chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students in the Western Cape.

Chatting for change in 2024

OPINION

BENJI FALKSON



As we approach 29 May, it's hard to not feel a sense of anticipation and excitement for possible change lurking around the corner. Is 2024 our 1994?

It's been 30 years of democracy, and for millennials like myself, South Africa in a declining state is all we've ever known. However, since entering the workforce and beginning to build families of our own, many of us have come to realise that we don't want or accept the status quo. We love South Africa, and we want to see it flourish for our children in the same way that it did for us.

In conversation recently with a teacher from one of the Johannesburg day schools about the upcoming elections, I asked her, "Will you be voting?" She said no, because she's disappointed with the ruling party, and would rather not give it her support. She's not alone. There are millions of registered voters that choose not to vote for the same reason. This isn't democracy, it's engineered ignorance.

In 1994, the IEC (Electoral Commission of South Africa) ran a big voter education programme to educate the oppressed, black majority about the importance of voting. Since then, the IEC's budget has been cut and no equivalent campaign has been run. I can hardly remember what happened to me last week, so how can we possibly expect the citizens of this country to remember what they learnt 30 years ago?

We obviously cannot force anyone to vote for a party that they don't want to vote for. However, what we can do is have simple conversations with the people that we have daily interactions with.

Domestic workers, gardeners, employees, employers, and so on. Just ask them, are you voting? And if not, why not? If they aren't registered, tell them how important it is to register for the next election. If they are registered, engage further in a kind and respectful way. Explain that there's no such thing as party loyalty in democracy. Whichever party resonates with you now is who you should vote for. Candidates must earn your vote, and those that have failed to represent the people or have abused their position of power must be removed from office by being replaced by the people's new choice.

Whether you have a staff complement of 1 000 employees or you're an employee with a single employer, you have a sphere of influence. We all have contacts on our phones and know somebody who knows somebody else that can make a difference, which means that you, too, can make a difference. Let's talk about freedom. Let's talk about change. Let's talk our way confidently into the future, creating the world we want to live in using our words and emulating our creator.

For more information and

resources, visit www.understandyourvote.co.za

• Benji Falkson is the founder of #UnderstandYourVote and is an owner of Glennies.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Former SA hostage tormented by husband's captivity

>>Continued from page 1

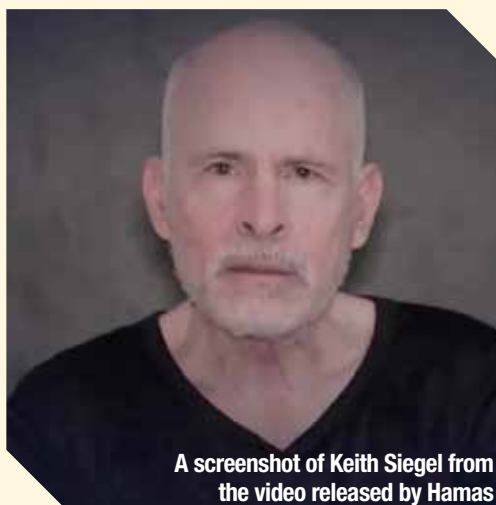
believes Hamas still holds 133 people captive in Gaza, including the bodies of 33 people. It's unclear how many others are still alive.

On Monday, 6 May, the family met legislators again at the Knesset to plead with them to do everything possible to secure the hostages' release.

"They knew we were coming, and hadn't bothered to watch the video. My daughter was furious. All they spoke about was war and politics. I cried and pleaded, and told them all I witnessed in Gaza, about the cruel conditions," she said.

"I've been a kindergarten teacher my whole life, and all I see and hear is men acting like four-year-olds."

For Aviva and many of the hostages' families, the focus is on getting them out of Gaza now. They continue to advocate



A screenshot of Keith Siegel from the video released by Hamas

for Israel to do whatever it takes, including ceasing hostilities, to secure their release.

Aviva has been staying with her daughter, Elan Tiv, 33, on Kibbutz Gazit in northern Israel since her release. She has no intention of returning to Kfar Aza.

It's a close-knit family. Lee and his wife, Sheli, also from South Africa, have joined the fight.

Sheli said they had no idea there was going to be a video. They found out as they were on the way to Hostages Square for havdalah, a ritual since the start of the war.

"People started calling us to say that Keith was on Channel 13. We stopped on the highway, did a U-turn, and went home to watch. It was traumatic. Lee felt enormous relief that his brother was alive. But he remains worried as the hostages' lives are in peril," said Sheli.



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The questions you need answered to vote

With the national elections three weeks away, the *SA Jewish Report* has asked the questions our readership want answered to help them decide who to vote for. We had respectful responses from most of the parties within our ambit, and their answers are within this four-page pullout. We sent questions to the Economic Freedom Fighters, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, and Congress of the People, but they didn't respond. Colleen Makhubele, the leader of the South African Rainbow Alliance, acknowledged receipt of the questions, and responded with a press release about her party's reaction to the antisemitic harassment of cricketer David Teeger and photographs and videos of her party at events.

African Christian Democratic Party – Rev. Kenneth Meshoe, president

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) is the most outspoken defender of the right of Israel to exist within safe and secure borders in South Africa.

More than that, the ACDP loves the Jewish people.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in South Africa. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the Jewish community?

The ACDP and the broader Christian community also feel let down by an African National Congress (ANC) government that has embraced Hamas. I will continue to tell South Africans that the country needs Israel's technology, particularly water technology, to help resolve our challenges.

What's your stance

on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

That was a foolish and serious blunder. South Africa should stand with Israel and not with Hamas, Iran, or any other jihadist group or country threatening to annihilate Israel.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What would you do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

I strongly condemn hatred for Israel and antisemitism in all its forms anywhere in society and government departments. I will continue to expose the foolishness of rejecting true friends while embracing



Steven Swart (centre) with ACDP members showing support for Israel

people who are killing Christians in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa and in Islamic states.

What's your position on the relationship between Israel and South Africa? What would you want it to be like?

The relationship between Israel and South Africa isn't healthy, and will therefore improve after the ANC has lost power. I want South Africa to have an excellent relationship with Israel so that it can reap the economic benefits from such a relationship.



Should South Africa open its embassy in

Israel and return its ambassador to the country? If so, why? If not, why not?

South Africa must open its embassy in Israel to facilitate economic ties and to make it easier for the Christian community to visit the holy land more frequently.

You have forward-thinking views on women's rights, but don't approve of abortion. Can you explain this?

We believe that life begins at conception, and should therefore be protected while the baby is still in the mother's womb. Abortion denies unborn babies the right to live. The ACDP believes everyone should be given the right to live regardless of their age and where they live.

ActionSA – Lerato Ngobeni, national spokesperson

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

ActionSA is one of the country's most diverse and fastest growing political parties, with support from all communities of faith. We believe this is essential to help us weaken or remove the governing party and restore South Africa to a path of prosperity. We believe in the richness of the diversity of our people, which includes religion.

We've adopted a set of pragmatic policies that we believe will fundamentally improve South Africa by unlocking economic growth, creating millions of sustainable jobs, ending corruption, securing our borders, ensuring that people are safe in our communities, and restoring necessary social harmony wherein every group, regardless of their religious affiliation, will have a stronger sense of belonging. This includes the South African Jewish community.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in South Africa. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the Jewish community?

ActionSA's core values include non-racism and the principle of non-sectarianism. We believe we're stronger in our diversity. This is non-negotiable if we're to keep our nation together with each group enjoying an enhanced sense of belonging. An ActionSA-led government will reverse policies which have turned South African communities against one another. We intend to foster a culture of understanding, mutual respect, and patriotism. No group will be singled out. We regard the broad South African Jewish community as integral to who we are as a diverse nation, and we intend to ensure that it, too, feels appreciated for the contribution it has made to our country. We believe all South Africans, regardless of their heritage, want to work together to make our country the success it can be. No-one will be excluded on the basis of their identity.

What's your stance on South Africa's taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

As ActionSA, we pray for peace in the Middle East, and condemn all attacks on civilian communities, irrespective of who is behind such attacks and who is targeted. We believe that peace won't be achieved unless a ceasefire is implemented immediately so that a settlement can be reached for the people of Israel and Palestine to live in peace with or alongside one another.

Considering the worsening relations between Israel and the Palestinian people, leading to the horrific Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and Israel's counterattack, the South African government saw it fit to appeal to an international court. As a party, we have respect for the rule of law. This includes respect for international law. We therefore believe the process must be allowed to play out in a fair and impartial manner. ActionSA will respect the outcome.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What would you do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

As indicated above, ActionSA believes that South Africa's strength lies in its diversity. We would therefore work to protect all communities living in the country, especially those who feel marginalised. We believe all forms of discrimination should be condemned, including antisemitism, and will therefore implement policies in our education system and government which foster understanding and mutual respect. We'll ensure that wherever someone's life is threatened, irrespective of their identity and rank, there are lawful consequences for the perpetrators.

What's your position on the relationship between Israel and South Africa? What would you want it to be like?

ActionSA's foreign policy is anchored on four principles: the advancement of human rights on the global stage; the importance of using diplomatic relations to advance trade

beneficial to our national interest; respect for the rule of law; and the importance of advancing the interests of the southern African region, Africa, and developing countries on the international stage.

We therefore don't support an international relations policy by the ruling party which hurts the South African economy and costs the country jobs at a time when our people are struggling. We believe our relationships with our international partners, including Israel, should be underpinned by mutual respect, respect for human rights, and democracy.

Under ActionSA, South Africa won't remain silent about human rights abuses, regardless of who commits such abuses.

Should South Africa open its embassy in Israel, and return its ambassador to the country? If so, why? If not, why not?

ActionSA believes in the importance of maintaining diplomatic relations to promote global collaboration toward a peaceful and stable global order. South Africa cannot be a positive player in the Middle East while it distances itself from key players in the region, including Israel. We believe that the security of Israel is linked to the security of the Palestinians, and we intend to contribute meaningfully to the resolution of tensions in that part of the world. For that to be possible, a permanent, non-partisan, diplomatic presence will be needed.



ActionSA Leader Herman Mashaba

People say ActionSA is xenophobic. How do you respond to that?

Since its inception, ActionSA has been clear that South Africa is a country built on the backs of immigrants, and we condemn all forms of xenophobia in the strongest terms. We want the people of the world to come to South Africa to invest and help us to grow the country, but we want people to come here legally and when they do so, they should obey our laws once here.

No country in the world has an open border policy. South Africa cannot be an exception. We remain concerned about the effect of our porous borders on the safety of South Africans and the integrity of our economy. An ActionSA government would secure our borders while ensuring that it becomes easier to enter the country for people who want to come here legally and contribute.

Some people also say that Herman Mashaba has been tainted by his time in the Democratic Alliance, much like Mmusi Maimane. How do you react to that?

ActionSA President Herman Mashaba joined his former political home when he believed it was a credible vehicle to unseat the ruling party. However, he soon became disillusioned and realised that to remove the ruling party and fix South Africa, support from diverse communities was required which couldn't be achieved through existing political parties. South Africa is a democratic country in which support for different political parties should be encouraged to keep parties accountable. Mashaba's move from voting for the ruling party in 1994 to his former political home and now ActionSA should be celebrated as part of the normal process in a functioning democracy. Instead of weakening his resolve to be part of saving South Africa from the abuse of the African National Congress (ANC), these changes have strengthened it, hence his determination and that of ActionSA not to partner with the ANC, which presents an obstacle to building the country we all aspire to.



African National Congress – Mahlengi Bhengu-Motsiri, national spokesperson

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

The Jewish community should vote for the African National Congress (ANC) for the same reason that all South Africans should vote for the ANC. Among all the parties contesting the election, it's only the ANC that has demonstrated the commitment, the capacity, and the experience, to grow an inclusive economy and transform the country.

We learn from the past, from mistakes and setbacks, as much as from achievements.

We'll focus on six priorities critical to speeding up transformation and improving the lives of the people: our jobs plan; building industries to include an inclusive economy; tackling the high cost of living; investing in people; defending democracy and advancing freedom; and building a better Africa and world.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in South Africa. What are you doing or have done to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for it?

The Jewish community has always been an integral and valued part of democratic South Africa. Jewish South Africans are prominent in nearly every area of public life, from politics to business, from the judiciary to sports. Many have been celebrated and honoured for their achievements and contribution.

Jewish South Africans enjoy the same rights, freedoms, and responsibilities as every other person in the country. Under democracy, the constitutional right to freedom of religion, culture, language, and opinion has been upheld and protected.

There's no basis for the claim that the local Jewish community is unwelcome or should feel isolated.

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ)?

South Africa is a signatory to the Genocide Convention. The country gained its freedom thanks in large measure to the international movement to end the discrimination, oppression, and repression of the majority of its people.

We therefore have a responsibility to take whatever action we can to prevent acts of genocide committed against others.

South Africa took Israel to the ICJ because, in its view, the atrocities that were being committed against the civilian population of Gaza included actions prohibited under the convention. In bringing this case, South Africa also reiterated its condemnation of the atrocities committed by Hamas against civilians in Israel on 7 October 2023, which it said should be investigated as war crimes.

The decision to take the case to the ICJ was vindicated when the court ruled that it was plausible that Israel had committed acts in violation of the Genocide Convention, and ordered that it take immediate measures to prevent such acts.

The ANC has always maintained that criticism of the illegal actions of the Israeli government and military doesn't and cannot be equated with an attack on the existence of the state of Israel.

The ANC has always recognised the right of the state of Israel to exist in line with international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. It has, at the same time, recognised the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and nationhood.

By the same measure, it's absurd to suggest that the condemnation of illegal acts committed by the government of Israel is antisemitic.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What do you plan to do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

The ANC has been consistent in condemning all forms of racial, religious, or cultural intolerance. It has never allowed such practices within its ranks, nor by any of its leaders or members.

ANC leaders, including President Cyril Ramaphosa, have been vocal in their condemnation of antisemitism, just as they have stood opposed to racism, tribalism, Islamophobia, and ethnic chauvinism.

South Africa has several mechanisms ranging from the Human Rights Commission to the Equality Court to combat unfair discrimination, hate speech, and harassment. The ANC urges any person subject to such abuse to make use of the laws and institutions that we have established precisely for this purpose.

You undertook to defeat corruption. However, corruption under the present government is worse than ever. None of the cabinet ministers named in the Zondo Commission have been arrested or prosecuted. Why do you think the country should take you seriously on this issue?

It's blatantly untrue that corruption is worse under the present administration. In fact, this administration has taken decisive measures to end state capture, rebuild law enforcement agencies, curb corruption, and put in place measures to improve the prevention of corruption.

In the wake of state capture, a critical task was to rebuild the credibility and capacity of law enforcement agencies. New leadership was appointed at the

Hawks, which has led to greater action against corruption. A new national director of public prosecutions was appointed on the recommendation of an independent panel following a transparent public process.

New leadership was appointed at the South African Revenue Service, leading to the rebuilding of the institution following state capture and to improvements in revenue collection, compliance, and the facilitation of trade.



Photo: Guy Lerner

President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Gardens Shul in Cape Town in 2018

Another task was to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of corruption. An investigating directorate was established within the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to prosecute state capture and other significant corruption. To date, the directorate has taken 34 state capture and corruption cases to court, involving 203 accused persons and 65 accused entities.

The NPA has also secured the conviction of more than 500 government officials and nearly 800 in the private sector on offences related to corruption since 2019.

Significant progress has been made in recovering stolen funds. A Special Investigating Unit special tribunal was

appointed to expedite civil claims against corrupt individuals and the recovery of stolen funds. Since its establishment, it has recovered more than R8.6 billion.

Freezing orders of R14 billion in relation to state capture-related cases were granted to the NPA's Asset Forfeiture Unit. To date, about R5.4 billion has been recovered and returned to the state.

Nine new laws have been introduced to reduce corruption in areas such as public procurement; the involvement of politicians in administrative matters; the conduct of public servants; the intelligence services; money laundering; and electoral reforms.

Details of all COVID-19 pandemic-related and flood-disaster procurement contracts have been published online, setting a precedent for transparency in public procurement.

The ANC has consistently said that the law must take its course, and that law enforcement agencies must act independently, impartially, and without fear or favour.

Neither the ANC nor the president can tell the Hawks or the NPA who to investigate or prosecute. But we can and have provided them with the powers and the resources to fulfil their mandate.

The South African economy is failing by every measure; unemployment is increasing; growth is almost stagnant; and the country is slipping further into debt. The rand has depreciated more than 50% under the leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa. Why do you believe the ANC should be entrusted with the growth of the economy?

At the advent of democracy, the ANC government had to turn around an economy that was in severe decline and was structurally damaged as a result of decades of apartheid mismanagement.

Our economy has tripled in size since 1994, and the rate of poverty reduced. While unemployment has remained high, the number of people in employment has more than doubled from eight million in 1994 to 16.7 million today.

However, the pace of our economic progress was severely curtailed by the 2008 global financial crisis and a decade of state capture and low growth.

As we worked to rebuild our economy, our country experienced a number of unprecedented shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened a situation of deep unemployment, as the country lost two million jobs, many businesses had to close their doors, and poverty deepened.

In July 2021, we experienced the worst public violence and destruction in the history of our democracy, causing more than 300 deaths, serious economic damage, and denting investor confidence. More recently, persistent loadshedding has impeded our recovery from the effects of these events.

While these challenges have held back our economic progress, they haven't stopped us.

Over the past two years, the number of jobs created has been increasing every quarter, and we now have more people in employment than before the pandemic.

We have laid a foundation for growth through far-reaching economic reforms, an ambitious investment drive, and an infrastructure programme that's starting to yield results.

We're on track to resolve the most important constraints on economic growth by stabilising our energy supply and fixing our logistics system.

These efforts have resulted in the growth of agricultural exports and a massive increase in international tourist arrivals. Over the past five years, we have held five investment conferences, which have raised more than R1.5 trillion in commitments from investors. Of these commitments, more than R560 billion has already gone into a diverse and growing range of industries.

Build One South Africa – Mmusi Maimane, party leader

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

I know we say this before every election, but these elections on 29 May 2024 really are the most important elections since 1994.

For the first time since the transition to democracy, the African National Congress (ANC) is unlikely to receive a majority in Parliament and the country will need to build a new coalition to govern South Africa and chart a way forward for our nation.

The time has passed for parties who define themselves by race or ethnicity. These parties don't represent our hopes and dreams for a better South Africa.

We can Build One South Africa, where all people, regardless of the colour of their skin or the G-d they worship, can prosper and thrive.

Besides the corruption and ongoing water and electricity crises – not to undermine their importance – there are three big issues we need to address in South Africa.

Jobs

Forty two percent of all South Africans have no work, more than 50% of all youth are unemployed.

This is a ticking time bomb. People cannot survive on just a R350 monthly grant, and the economy cannot grow unless we have a comprehensive growth and job-creation plan.

This needs to be our priority as a nation. We need to incentivise business to create jobs; create special economic zones in the townships; fix our rail, ports, and electricity supply; get rid of the red tape choking economic development in the country; and support entrepreneurs. We've developed a plan to put a job in every home.

Crime

The second pillar of Build One South Africa is to solve crime, which includes effective policing and devolving crime fighting and crime intelligence down to local level. Imagine what we could do if we had proper police leadership, enough police officers, or even if we trained our police properly.

In 2024, 83 South Africans are murdered every single day. That's more than 30 000 people killed each year. People don't sleep safely in their homes at night, women can't walk the streets after dark. No-one seems to care.

We have to lock up criminals.

Ninety seven ANC officials were named in the Zondo Commission report into state capture, and not a single one has been prosecuted. Let's put them all in jail. It's unacceptable that the future of South Africa has been stolen by the very officials we previously elected to Parliament.

Education

At Build One South Africa, we understand the importance of education and the remarkable lessons that the Jewish community can teach us about it. Let's be honest, 30% isn't a pass rate.

Eight out of 10 Grade 4 learners in South Africa can't even read for meaning. Early childhood education is close to non-existent in the country, and hungry mothers give birth to stunted children.

We need to introduce a school voucher system so that parents have a choice where to send their children for the best education. Imagine if we could create a school the quality of King David in one of the townships, and parents could use their vouchers to send their children to the best possible schools?

Effectively, the government has reintroduced a new form of Bantu education, condemning most South Africans to be manual labourers, unemployed, or unemployable. We have to fix this urgently and create a viable future for our children and South Africa.

Thirty years of corruption, incompetence, and maladministration has stolen our future. Let's stop sending the criminals back to Parliament, and let's vote for strong ethical and moral leadership. Let's vote in a government we deserve.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in South Africa. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the community?

The South African Jewish community has been one of the great inspirations of our country. Each year, I attend the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, and I'm blown away by what your tiny community has achieved and contributed to our nation.

Democratic Alliance – Richard Newton, director of communications

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

The Democratic Alliance (DA) is the only party that can unseat the African National Congress (ANC) and keep the Economic Freedom Fighters out of power. The DA has a plan to rescue South Africa.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What do you plan to do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

The DA's plan to rescue South Africa will address the issues of all communities, and will fix what the ANC government has broken.

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ)?

This action in the ICJ is currently underway, and we await the ruling of the court.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What do you plan to do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

The DA will tackle any and all forms of discrimination

We've all watched in horror at the rising tide of antisemitism around the world and in South Africa, with the government's complicity.

To watch the attacks on Jews at the Judicial Services Commission or in Parliament is simply devastating.

But this is your country as much as mine. Your roots lie deep in the dusty soil of this nation. You're full and equal citizens of this land, and you need to join the fight to oust our corrupt government from power. If you do nothing, you'll get the government you deserve.

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

One always has to question the motives of the ANC government as well as the economic motivation for everything it does.

South Africa has so many problems including lack of economic opportunities; jobs; housing; electricity; water; homelessness; one of the highest unemployment rates in the world; and the highest murder rate on earth.

We've also shown a complete lack of respect for the law, failing to arrest former Sudanese Head of State Omar Al-Bashir during his visit to South Africa; failing to prosecute the 97 ANC officials named in the Zondo Commission report into state capture; allowing people like Shabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma to walk free from prison; and allowing Julius Malema to make genocidal racist comments.

Our priority must be to get our house in order in South Africa before we look to grandstanding on the international stage.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What would you do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

Antisemitism is just another form of racism, and the South African Constitution has established a number of institutions to protect citizens from racist attack. The Jewish community needs to use these institutions to protect these rights.

But the Jewish community shouldn't be doing this alone. All of civic society should be rallying to support your community in the same way that Jews have been at the forefront of protecting other people's rights in our beloved country.

The moment we allow any form of racism to flower in our country, we cannot pick and choose who the victims will be. All racism, including antisemitic bigotry, has no place in South African society.

What's your position on the relationship between Israel and South Africa?

What would you like it to be? Should South Africa open its embassy in Israel and return its ambassador. If so, why? If not, why not?

I'm going to answer the above two questions together. The transition to democracy in South Africa was miraculous. It taught us that warring parties can and must be brought together to find peace. You don't make peace by talking to your friends, you make peace by talking to your enemies.

We all know that a two-state solution is the only way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and South Africa has so much to offer in terms of its learned experience during our negotiations process.

But South Africa cannot play this role if it doesn't speak to both parties, and if it doesn't accept the role of honest broker in mediation.

The department of international relations and cooperation and the presidency have done a great disservice to the country by isolating themselves from their peacemaker role and exacerbating rather than mitigating the conflict.

Why did you leave the Democratic Alliance (DA)?

I left the DA five years ago because the party no longer represented the hopes and aspirations of the people of South Africa. I said earlier that parties playing race politics cannot govern this country. For those of us who believe in non-racism, the DA became an increasingly difficult place to describe as home. I wanted to build a party that could Build One South Africa for all of us. That's why I had to start a new party that could house these ideals.

Some say your time as DA leader has coloured how they think of you. How do you react to that?

I think I learned a lot from being leader of the DA, the then official opposition in Parliament, as I learned a lot while I was involved in the ANC. We learn from every experience, good and bad. But I'm a black man with a white wife and mixed-race kids. I speak nine of the 11 official languages and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it – black, white, coloured, Indian, Asian, Jew, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, and atheist.

All we want is a South Africa that works, that feels like home, so join me in Building One South Africa together.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Freedom Front Plus – Corné Mulder, premier candidate, Western Cape; and international relations spokesperson

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

First, the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) stands with the Jewish community and Israel at this difficult time. We've defended the right of Israel to defend itself in the current conflict without hesitation in Parliament on more than one occasion, and will continue to do so.

Second, we're the only political party in this election that clearly and unequivocally fights for the rights of minorities. The Jewish community is such a minority in South Africa, and we'll always stand up for it.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in the country. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the community?

The African National Congress (ANC) government has absolutely let the Jewish community down in South Africa. We hope to replace the ANC government with a multi-party charter coalition that will be positive and constructive towards the Jewish community as well as Israel. We want to be part of a new government that extends a hand of friendship and co-operation towards the Jewish community and Israel. The FF+ will continue to emphasise the extremely important role that the Jewish community has played over many years in South Africa.

To achieve that, we need the vote of everyone in this election of 29 May 2024.

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

This is a cheap political stunt by the ANC government to try and placate its masters in Iran and to try and regain some relevance in the international community. In doing so, the ANC has finally alienated its government from the United States, Israel, and most developed nations.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What do you plan to do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

It's essential and logical that South Africa and Israel should have normal diplomatic relations. Therefore, South Africa should reopen its embassy in Israel, and move it to Jerusalem.

Should South Africa open its embassy in Israel and return its ambassador. If so, why? If not, why not?

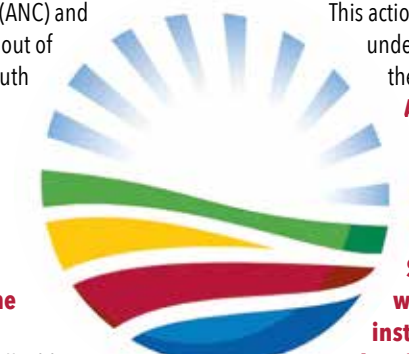
It's essential and logical that South Africa and Israel should have normal diplomatic relations. Therefore, South Africa should reopen its embassy in Israel, and move it to Jerusalem.

Should religion be taught at all schools? If so, why? In a multicultural society, which religion should be taught?

We believe that religion should be taught in schools in South Africa. We also believe that schools should be community based, and that communities should decide the language of instruction as well as the religion taught. It shouldn't be in the hands of the state. Subsidies should go with a child, and if a minority or community wants to have a school, that should be allowed as well as the language of instruction and the specific religion they choose.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



Inkatha Freedom Party – Liezl van der Merwe, director of communications

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) has had a long friendship with the Jewish community, characterised by mutual respect and productive partnerships towards good governance, community development, and service to South Africa.

For years, we called for the de-escalation of tensions between Israel and Palestine, for negotiations, non-violence, and a two-state solution.

We've condemned the acts of terrorism committed by Hamas, and have urged the international community, including the United Nations and relevant stakeholders, to support and facilitate peace efforts, providing the necessary diplomatic, humanitarian, and financial assistance.

The IFP is determined to uphold the democratic rights of all South Africans, and recognises the immense contribution of the Jewish community to South Africa's liberation struggle, economic development, and the pursuit of social justice.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in the country. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the community?

The IFP will continue to stand up for the rights of every South African and to promote social cohesion through cross-cultural exchange. We don't support the isolation or alienation of any group of citizens within South Africa.

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

It's indisputable that the conflict has cost too many civilian lives, and that both sides need to step back, but the IFP is disappointed in the African National Congress (ANC) government's sudden embrace of Iran and Hamas. It's nothing less than risible that the very same lot, who for years have engaged in the systematic plundering of their own people, have suddenly become champions of justice and altruistic fighters for the oppressed.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What do you plan to do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

The IFP is strongly opposed to unfair discrimination of any kind and considers antisemitism reprehensible in the extreme. We seek to entrench the IFP's values of respect, inclusivity, and human dignity in all aspects of society through an IFP-led government.

What's your position on the relationship between Israel and South Africa? What would you like it to be?

The IFP deeply regrets the biased position taken by the South African government, which serves the ANC's interests above the interests of our country and our people. We value the strong partnerships South Africa and Israel have enjoyed for so many years, and don't believe this history should simply be discarded.

Should South Africa open its embassy in Israel and return its ambassador. If so why? If not, why not?

The IFP believes in keeping the door to dialogue open. Breaking diplomatic ties is counter-productive to maintaining constructive dialogue.

Would the IFP go into coalition with the ANC to govern KwaZulu-Natal or the country? If so, why? If not, why not?

The IFP is a signatory to the multi-party charter, which commits a group of opposition parties with similar values to forming a coalition government in order to remove the ANC from power. That's our foremost goal. We recognise, however, that if the multi-party charter fails to achieve the threshold of 50% plus one, which would enable us to form a government, the best way forward in the interests of our country would need to be found, as governance cannot come to a standstill. The IFP believes that in that circumstance, a grand coalition government may be the most viable option.



Rise Mzansi – Songezo Zibi, national leader

Rise Mzansi's Songezo Zibi was asked the same questions as the other parties, but chose to give one response. We asked an additional question about a parliamentarian who made outrageous accusations about Jews harvesting the organs of Palestinians, among other ugly allegations, and asked how he could justify having such a person in the leadership of his party. This was his response:

As the national leader of Rise Mzansi, I urge all South Africans to vote for our party and movement. With a wealth of experience in the private sector, in civil society, and on the ground in communities, we offer new leadership with experience, values, and a plan: to build the safe, prosperous, equal, and united South Africa we deserve in one generation.

Our plans are workable and reasonable, and we aim to give South Africans a sense of hope again by re-establishing trust between people and politicians, and by bringing people together in a common purpose across the old divides. We believe that the policies and attitudes of the old parties only accentuate these divides, and that South Africa needs a new generation of leaders to take us forward.

Rise Mzansi is deeply rooted in the values of the Constitution: freedom; equality; integrity; justice; and solidarity. Our understanding of solidarity has its roots in *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), the Jewish concept I have come to know through my long friendships and professional relationships with Jewish South Africans. Our party is a natural home for all South Africans, Jews included, who subscribe to *tikkun olam* – the principle that we need to take social action to heal the world.

The Constitution states, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity." We champion non-racism, and will work to celebrate and protect all South Africans, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual

orientation. This includes Jewish South Africans, whose constitutional rights we'll protect, as we will all others. This means we don't tolerate antisemitism, inside our party or anywhere else, in line with the Constitutional Court, which has already defined it as hate speech.

That being said, we align ourselves with progressive Jewish organisations the world over that reject the notion that it's antisemitic to offer any criticism of the policies of the state of Israel. We adhere to the Jerusalem Declaration of 2021, drafted by 350 prominent Jewish scholars, which states that it isn't antisemitic to "support the Palestinian demand for justice and the full grant of their political, national, civil, and human rights, as encapsulated in international law".

We condemn outright all acts of violence that are outside of the bounds of international law, including Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, and Israel's actions inside Gaza today. For this reason, we support South Africa's suit to the International Court of Justice, and note this court's finding that there is a prima facie case of genocide against Israel. We call for

an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and for negotiations to proceed as soon as possible that will lead to two states, in which the rights of all people will be fully protected.

I respect that many Jews have a special bond – emotional and familial – with Israel. I also note how, historically, Jews have lived and acted fully as South Africans, just as they have in other countries the world over. This has led to a long history of Jewish leaders and activists standing with the oppressed. I note with much pride the role that Jewish South Africans have played in this process, from Helen Suzman to Joe Slovo to today's Jewish South African leaders. I urge you to continue to play this role, together with other South Africans, even if we disagree on what should happen in Israel and Palestine.



Patriotic Alliance – Gayton McKenzie, president

Why should the Jewish community vote for you?

If you can name another prominent political leader who has stood up for Israel; the contribution of the Jewish community to South Africa historically and today; and who wants to turn around the fortunes of this country in a way that there can be a future for children of all faiths and creeds, including Jewish children, then I'd love to know who that is. At this point, I'd be left wondering why the Jewish community would want to vote for anyone other than me because even a party like the Democratic Alliance has shown cowardice in the face of the Hamas bullies, and has been hedging its position.

The South African Jewish community feels let down by the government and isolated in the country. What will you do to make sure that South Africa is a welcoming place for the community?

I hate bullies, and that's what the Hamas lobby has become. It hides behind campaigns like the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition and various forms of religious righteousness, but the bottom line that unites it is the call for the complete removal of anyone who isn't Muslim from Israel.

That's a true call for genocide.

The unfortunate thing is that this antipathy towards Israel has spilled over to South Africa's Jewish community, whether they are Zionists or not. If Jewish people can't even feel safe in Israel, then where should they feel safe? If they are told they have no business being in the holy land, then where should they go? Those who hate Jewish people don't want them to be anywhere, and that's the primary problem with hatred of Israel. They don't want them in Israel, but we make them feel unwelcome and unsafe in supposedly "neutral", "free" places like South Africa too. The Hamas apologists should hang their heads in shame.

We fought long and hard in South Africa for people to express themselves and their views without fear of repression or oppression. I've fought for the rights of minorities, including the Jewish people, with very limited power at my disposal. Can you imagine how much more I would do if I became president?

What's your stance on South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice?

I was opposed to it from day one, and still am. We had no business going there, but we all know it wasn't South Africa who took Israel there, but the African National Congress (ANC) using its last months of unchecked power to please its global masters and funders, especially Iran. It was a slap in the face of the long-suffering people of South Africa, who daily face starvation, joblessness, no service delivery, and a murder rate of 27 000 people a year. If only the ANC could have shown as much concern about the needs of people here as it apparently does for the people of Palestine.

Antisemitism has been on the rise in South Africa, as demonstrated in the Judicial Services Commission, Cricket SA, and Parliament, with attacks on Jewish institutions and schools. What would you do to tackle antisemitism of this nature?

Even if you disagree with Zionism, taking it out on all Jewish people is a simple excuse for antisemitism. I've already made an enormous contribution to fighting antisemitism by using my platforms to pay tribute to the contribution of the Jewish people to this country. Patriotic Alliance (PA) supporters have felt emboldened to show their support for religious freedom and to bless the Jewish nation as a fellow people of faith. We've also demonstrated that just because you're Muslim, it doesn't mean you should automatically hate the Jewish people. We continue to have Muslims in the PA who stand firm against the bullies, and understand that we're promoting peace in the Middle East and a two-state solution to the problems between Israel and Palestine. They understand that we also love Palestine, and want a future where the children of Jews, Muslims, and Christians can thrive in the holy land. Our contribution to fighting antisemitism is already massive.

What's your position on the relationship between Israel and South Africa? What would you want it to be?

My position is clear and unchanged. We need to fix this relationship, because Israel has so much it can offer as a friend to South Africa.

Should South Africa open its embassy in Israel and return its ambassador. If so, why? If not, why not?

South Africa needs to act in the best interests of our people, and we're not doing that. We need to restore full diplomatic relations. However, remember that the legitimacy of this government will be tested in the elections on 29 May 2024, and then we'll see what "South Africa" will do.

Explain your stance on foreign workers and the death penalty.

We believe that if you aren't South African and want to work here, then you need to offer some kind of specialised and rare skill, or make a tangible investment in the country. We can't have foreigners come here to take the jobs of people who live in a place with one of the world's highest unemployment rates. Illegal immigrants need to go home and build their own countries if they are supposedly such hard workers.

We're calling for reinstatement of the death penalty as a line in the sand against runaway violent crime in this country. We've heard all the clever arguments that sell the idea that the death penalty isn't a deterrent against crime. But let's see if the people we hang will rape and kill again.

We supposedly don't have the death penalty in South Africa right now, but tell that to the tens of thousands of innocent people who lose their lives every year to murder. The death penalty is alive and well for them.

Under a PA government, respect for law and order, under G-d, will be restored.



United Democratic Movement – General Bantu Holomisa, president

General Bantu Holomisa, the president of the United Democratic Movement (UDM), was sent the same questions as all the other parties, with the addition of a question about why he believes the UDM is still relevant with its dwindling numbers of supporters.



His only response was:

"I don't campaign for or ask the people of South Africa to vote for the UDM along tribal or ethnic lines. Maybe that's why we're on the decline, as you correctly put it. The work we've done, especially in exposing corruption, knows no colour.

"Also, I'm not interested in taking sides in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. I'm an ardent follower of Nelson Mandela's philosophy when it comes to dispute resolution."

Israel increases scrutiny of offshore assets of *olim*



MICHAEL KRANSDORFF AND VANESSA GRASSLIN

OPINION

South African *olim* can breathe a sigh of relief as the Knesset has agreed to maintain the generous Israeli tax incentives available for aliya. Speculation had been rife that they would be curtailed to help pay for the mounting costs of the ongoing war in Gaza. However, there's a nasty sting in the tail. In the future, *olim* will be subject to scrutiny of their non-Israeli income and financial structures such as foreign trusts and companies.

Understanding the 10-year tax holiday

Since 2008, Israel has successfully leveraged tax incentives for new *olim* and returning residents to strengthen its economy and attract global Jewish talent, fostering a vibrant ecosystem for entrepreneurs, investors, and professionals.

According to research by Andrew Amoils of New World Wealth, over the past decade, Israel has, in spite of its small population, consistently been in the top-10 emigration destinations for global dollar millionaires, with more than 1 100 making aliya in 2022. Since the war in Ukraine, there has been a dramatic increase in wealthy Eastern Europeans – some on the European Union sanctions list – seeking “safe haven” in Israel, with *Forbes* magazine estimating that at least 10% of Russian-born dollar billionaires now have Israeli passports.

At the heart of these aliya incentives is a 10-year tax holiday on income and capital gains made outside of Israel. This means that *olim* don't have to pay taxes on things like rental income from properties they own abroad or income they receive from foreign investments for the first 10 years after moving to Israel. Perhaps even more appealing, beyond simply exempting foreign income, the 10-year tax holiday also waived the requirements to disclose offshore assets to the Israeli Tax Authority (ITA). So, *olim* with foreign trusts or companies – often in tax havens – continue to amass wealth in these structures completely under the radar.

Israel cracks under international pressure

The success of Israel's liberal tax policies towards *olim* has also been its undoing. The secrecy provisions are out of step with the global financial push for increased transparency and sharing of information, and have attracted increased international condemnation.

As a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Israel is subject to peer review by the OECD's Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes. In 2022, it issued a damning draft report rating Israel only partially compliant, and threatening blacklisting if changes weren't made within 12 months. The Financial Action Task Force, which recently greylisted South Africa, also warned Israel that the 10-year tax holiday was being abused to evade international sanctions and facilitate money laundering.

The Israelis didn't take these threats lying down. As Shmuel Abramson, chief economist at the finance ministry, warned a few months ago, blacklisting would be “an unprecedented event for Israel. No developed Western country is blacklisted. If you enter the blacklist, you're a player that no-one wants to play with. There would be an impact on foreign investment. The total at stake may amount to billions of shekels.”

Bye bye secrecy; hello openness

Just before the Pesach recess, the Knesset passed amendment 272 to the Israeli Income Tax Ordinance, bringing Israel's reporting standards for *olim* in line with international requirements.

Olim will now be required to submit tax returns to the ITA disclosing their foreign income and assets. The good news is the amendment is prospective. It applies only to new *olim* and returning Israeli residents who make aliya after 1 January 2026. Those that made aliya before this date will continue to escape scrutiny on their offshore financial activities until their 10-year tax holiday ends.

Foreign trusts and companies associated with Israeli individuals, going forward, will also be under the ITA's microscope. Israel takes an extremely harsh approach towards trusts, and casts a wide tax net around them. Consequently, foreign trusts with even one Israeli beneficiary or one Israeli trustee can have Israeli reporting obligations.

Trustees of these affected foreign trusts will under the new rules be required to submit information regarding all the people, including non-Israelis, who are the final “controlling individuals” of the trust. This would include

the range of information that the ITA can now exchange with other tax authorities. As a result, it's probable that they will not only employ it to identify and pursue tax-avoidance schemes by *olim* exploiting Israel's 10-year tax holiday, but may also share details about the foreign entities and individuals associated with these companies or trusts with their respective countries' tax departments.

Avoid costly mistakes: seek professional tax guidance before emigrating

These recent amendments make pre-aliya tax planning essential. *Olim* no longer have the luxury of a 10-year grace period to organise their financial affairs before disclosure becomes mandatory.

Additionally, these new disclosure requirements will undoubtedly pose additional challenges for new *olim* in their dealings with the Israeli tax man. It's crucial to engage an Israeli accountant with international tax expertise who understands the nuances of what needs to be disclosed, particularly in cases involving foreign trusts and companies.

Though there are still numerous tax advantages to immigrating to Israel, it does introduce complexities into your financial affairs. You may now find yourself with tax reporting obligations in multiple countries, necessitating careful navigation of any international agreements to mitigate potential double taxation.

South African *olim* are strongly urged to seek guidance from experienced tax professionals before making the move. By thoroughly assessing their financial situation and future plans, they can devise a tax strategy that minimises their tax burden while leveraging the benefits provided by Israel's generous 10-year tax holiday.

• Michael Kransdorff is chief executive of the Institute for International Tax and Finance, and Vanessa Grasslin is a senior international tax consultant of the Institute for International Tax and Finance.



the settlors, the trustees, the protectors, as well as the beneficiaries of the trust. If one of them is a company, the “controlling individuals” of that company will need to be submitted.

The new law also gives the ITA enhanced powers to monitor foreign companies which are effectively controlled and managed by Israeli residents. These companies can now be required to provide information on their ultimate owners, including non-Israelis, and their tax residency and may even request the filing of tax returns in Israel. Many South African *olim* retain companies in South Africa after making aliya, and need to be aware of these additional reporting obligations.

So what will the ITA do with all this new information? The recent amendment also significantly broadened

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Babes at war – Johannesburg pupils hear stories of survival

LEE TANKLE

Miriam Lazarus is one of the few remaining Lithuanian Holocaust survivors in South Africa, but she wouldn't have been born if the Nazis had their way.

She told the Johannesburg Yom Hashoah memorial service at West Park Cemetery on Monday, 6 May, how her mother was six months pregnant with her when she was forced into the Kovno (now Kaunas) ghetto.

There, pregnant women were forced to terminate their pregnancies, but Lazarus's mom wore many layers of clothes to hide her pregnancy, and would put her then four-year-old sister, Henya, on her lap to cover her growing belly.

When Nazi soldiers found out that she had been born, they told her father, "We're supposed to be killing Jews not breeding Jews." However, she was saved because she was blonde with blue eyes.

She was kept in a room in the ghetto for the first two years of her life, and no-one knew of her existence. Her father then found a couple who had recently lost a son, and they said they would take the little blonde girl on the condition that her father promised that he would never come looking for her.

Lazarus told how at just two years old, she was put into a potato sack in a lorry and dropped off to be collected by her new parents.

Her father and mother were separated, and her mother and sister taken to the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps. Lazarus later found out that her mother had gently held and sung to her sister and a young boy to calm them just before they perished in a gas chamber.

Lazarus's father, she said, was sent on a death march, miraculously survived, and was found by American soldiers. The only thought going through his mind at the time, she said, was to get back to the ghetto to get information about his daughter's whereabouts.

Lazarus grew up with a gentile family in Lithuania and one day, a "thin, thin man was standing at our front door and he took one look at me and fainted", said Lazarus. After a week-long dispute with the family, who wanted to keep the young girl, Lazarus's father convinced them to let his daughter go. Later, when they were on a train to Vilna, now Vilnius, the "thin, thin" man told her he was her real father, and so she once again became Miriam Lazarus, leaving behind her gentile personae.

Lazarus spoke of how she believed that although they had perished, the lives of her mother and sister still had value, as did that of her "strong-willed father" and her own three sons, three daughters-in-law, and 10 grandchildren.



Miriam Lazarus and Lithuanian Ambassador Rasa Jankauskaitė having just lit the Holocaust memorial flame

"My father taught me to be honest, to be a good Jewess, and a good human being," she told the gathering, pointing out that "Each survivor's tale is a testimony of how their spirit managed to survive."

The memorial also featured a pre-recorded interview by South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn with Polish Holocaust survivor Rena Quint in Israel.

Quint had been no older than five when she and her family of five were interned in the first ghetto in Petrokov, Poland.

Her father was taken to a labour camp to make glass near Petrograd, and the rest of the family stayed in the ghetto. One night, Quint said, her family as well as the 2 000 others in the ghetto were herded into cattle cars to be deported. Quint ran away to escape the fate of her brothers and mother, who perished in the Treblinka concentration camp, and managed to reach her father.

Her father disguised her as a boy, and told the Germans she was 10 years old because 10-year-old boys were considered old enough to be used as slave labour.

In 1944, they were once again rounded up, and she was sent to Bergen-Belsen with one of the infamous death marches. On separation between men and women at the camp, her father asked a teacher to keep an eye on her. That woman became her new "mother". When she was murdered, another woman took her place. Over the next few years, she had several different "mothers". She never saw her father again.

On 15 April 1945, she was liberated by the British. Ill with typhus, she was sent with a group of 6 000 women and children to Sweden. There, she was adopted, and with her new family, she left for America and moved to Israel in 1984 with her husband and children.

Adi Cohen Hazanov, Israel's deputy ambassador to South Africa, told the gathering the story of Holocaust

survivor Moshe Ridler, who was murdered by Hamas terrorists in his home on Kibbutz Holit on 7 October 2023.

Ridler, she said, grew up in Romania and was nine years old when the war started. His father and older sister were sent to a labour camp and two years later, when he was 11 years old, his mother and sister died of typhus. He was able to escape to a nearby Ukrainian village, and hid there until the end of the war.

"Moshe lived for 91 years, during which he made aliya and took part in the establishment of the state of Israel, built a family, and lived his life peacefully. He overcame an attempt to kill him once just for being Jewish, and then eventually was murdered for the same reason," said Cohen Hazanov.

"The Holocaust is still the greatest genocide in history. It was the crime of all crimes, with the intention of exterminating the Jewish people. The Holocaust stands alone in the scope of horror and destruction. Out of respect for the six million Jewish victims, we must avoid comparison to any other conflict. If every war is considered a genocide, the term becomes meaningless," she said.

More than 927 school pupils attended the West Park event, including many from the Deutsche Internationale Schule Johannesburg, Crawford, Brandcliff House, and Randpark High School.

For many of them, it was their first opportunity to hear first-hand survivor testimony, and be exposed to Jewish commemoration of the Shoah.

"A special moment occurred following the ceremony, when a group of pupils from the Deutsche Internationale Schule came on the platform to learn more about the Holocaust monument and the service," said Kahn. "I could engage with them, explain aspects of the programme, and answer questions. They expressed gratitude at being included in the commemoration," she said.

Lucia Capelluto's story highlights the ordeal of Rhodes

LEE TANKLE

On the 80th anniversary of the deportation of 44 000 Jews from Hungary and 1 900 Jews from Rhodes, this year's Yom Hashoah ceremony in Cape Town felt all the more pertinent because 16 Holocaust survivors from Rhodes are buried at Pinelands Cemetery.

Those at the ceremony were able to hear the story of one such survivor buried there, Lucia Capelluto, through her son, Isaac Habib. In recounting his mother's story, he read a letter that his mother sent to her mentor in the years after the war detailing her experiences.

Habib told of his mother's deportation, her time spent at Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps, and how she eventually married and came to South Africa.

The Germans entered Rhodes in September 1944. On 20 July 1944, a German decree ordered Jewish men to present themselves at the office of L'Aeronautica, known for being the building on the island where Jews were rounded up.

Men aged 16 to 60 showed up and were arrested. A few days later, the rest of the Jewish community entered the office of L'Aeronautica. They were arrested, and had to hand over money, jewellery, and other personal effects.

In the mass deportation of Jews from Rhodes, the old and sick were loaded into trucks, the rest had to get to the harbour on foot. Then, as many as 1 900 men, women, and children were crammed into three old open boats for a 10-day journey to mainland Greece.

They were transported to Haidari's detention camp, 15km from Athens, where

they remained for three days, and then taken back to Athens, where they were packed into cattle trains to Auschwitz.

Thirteen days later, on 16 August 1944, the train arrived at Auschwitz. It went right into the middle of the internment camp at Birkenau, and 1 700 people were immediately sent to the gas chambers. Lucia was one of only 200 left to become camp inmates.

Capelluto detailed the daily life and torment she experienced in the camp. "As the days passed, there was less food in the camp. The prisoners dying of hunger and sickness became more numerous every day."

The grand doctor in the camp would select the sick daily and send them away to the hospital and then eventually to the gas chambers.

Lucia's sister, Mattie, she wrote, became weepy and delirious. Her shouting brought blows from the baton. She witnessed her sister die on 4 October 1944, three and a half months after her capture.

Habib recounts how his mother went from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen, which she

described as the point when she knew that the worst was about to start.

"The worst period was from mid-March to the end of April. Typhus and dysentery were raging. I slept between someone who had typhus and my sister, who had dysentery. Yet I caught nothing. The only faint hope I had was that we could feel that we were near the end of the battle," Habib read.

Out of the 100 women and girls deported from Rhodes and taken to Bergen-Belsen at the time of liberation, only 15 survived. Five more women perished in internment after liberation.

Continued on page 17>>



Isaac Habib (son of Lucia Capelluto) telling his mother's Holocaust survival story

Outpouring of grief for slain soldier Ido Aviv

NICOLA MILTZ

The Israeli city of Karmiel is in mourning following the tragic death of Ido Aviv, an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reservist killed in an explosion while serving in Gaza last month.

Ido, 28, whose family comes from Zimbabwe and lived for a time in South Africa before making aliya, was a passionate nature enthusiast and well-loved surfing instructor.

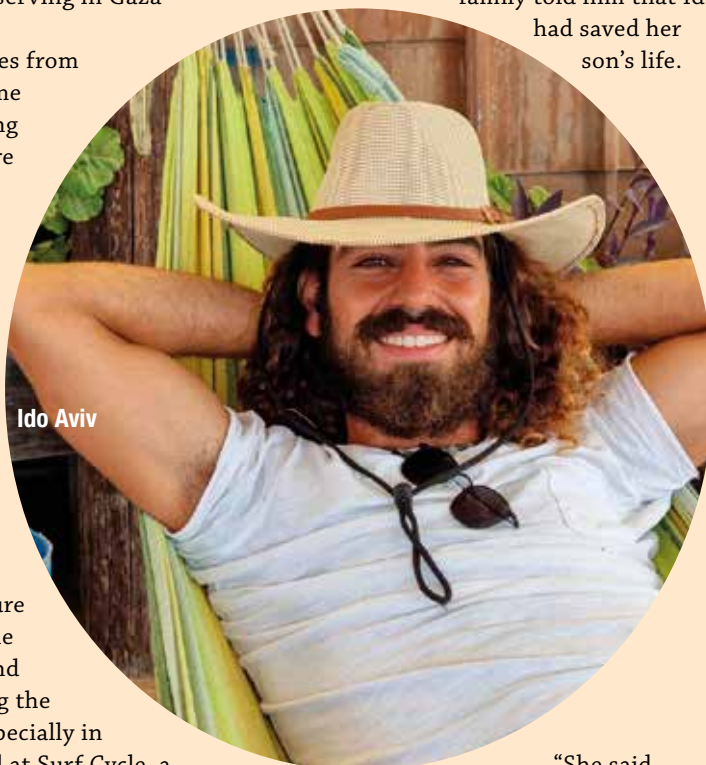
He was born and raised in Israel alongside his two younger brothers, Niv, 23 and Shaked, 18, but maintained a connection to southern Africa, where his family originated.

Ido's life was deeply connected to the natural world, said his family this week. Known among his friends and family as a "nature kid", he particularly loved the sea. He was an avid surfer and windsurfer, often seen riding the waves of Israel's beaches, especially in Kiryat Yam where he worked at Surf Cycle, a popular local surfing school.

His bereaved father, Mark, who grew up in

Zimbabwe, said his oldest son's skills on the water translated into the role of respected instructor, where he shared his passion with many, including children with special needs.

One mom who paid her respects to the family told him that Ido had saved her son's life.



Ido Aviv

"She said Ido taught her son, who suffered from depression and was

contemplating suicide, how to surf which gave him a new lease on life, and led to him going on to graduate with distinction at school. We heard so many stories like this, from people describing him as an extraordinary, kind person."

Ido and his long-term girlfriend envisioned a future together, a future sadly left unfulfilled, said his grandmother, Carol Aviv, who comes from Zimbabwe and has relatives in South Africa.

"Ido's life was the sea, he lived for it," said Carol who was involved with Telfed for many years. "He loved his girlfriend, and they were planning their future. We're heartbroken."

Ido and Niv were called up for duty on 7 October following the brutal Hamas attack. Ido went to defend Israel's northern border, and Niv went to the south.

After spending five months in service, both brothers were released from duty in February. Niv, who lost a close friend at the Nova festival, decided to travel to East Asia to take some time off.

"The family was planning a reunion in Vietnam with Niv. However, Ido felt a strong sense of duty to stay behind should he be recruited again, which he was, to the south,



before the end of Pesach."

On 28 April, his parents, Mark and Amy, drove him to Be'eri, not knowing it would be their last goodbye.

"My wife, Amy, and I drove him to his base and said goodbye with heavy hearts. He told us he felt well trained and was prepared. He went into Gaza that night, and sadly was killed an hour later. Three officers came to our house while we were eating dinner, and gave us the news. We heard a knock on the door and never for a minute thought it was to tell us that Ido had been killed," said Mark.

"Ido was patriotic. He refused to leave Israel because he said there was a chance he would be recruited again. This is the youth of Israel – prepared to sacrifice their life to defend their country. They aren't soldiers, they are people with their own private lives, but they'll drop everything to protect their country," he said.

Ido's funeral was huge, with a convoy stretching from the family's home in Karmiel to the cemetery, reflecting the broad impact of his life. His love for nature, commitment to his country, and care for others left an indelible mark on all who knew him, said his friends.

The IDF announced this week the deaths of four soldiers killed in a Hamas rocket attack near Kerem Shalom on 5 May. Their deaths came as the IDF marked seven months since the war on Hamas began with the terror group's massive October attack on Israel. Their deaths brought the toll of slain troops in the ground offensive against Hamas to 267. Another 10 soldiers were wounded in the attack. Most of the rockets struck an area where troops were gathered on the border, not far from the Kerem Shalom border crossing, which has been used to deliver thousands of truckloads of humanitarian aid to Gaza amid the war.

As the community remembers Ido, it also reflects on the sacrifices made by those who serve. Ido's legacy as a defender of his country and a protector of nature continues to inspire those around him, even in his absence. According to his family, he has donated his organs.

'SA government is sick,' says Prager

STEVEN GRUZD

"The only difference between Hamas and the Nazis is that the Nazis hid what they did – or tried to hide it, and Hamas doesn't try to hide it, and yet Israel is accused of genocide. It's a sick world, a sick United Nations. Your government in South Africa is sick," said American talk-show host Dennis Prager, a guest speaker at the prestigious Zimbali Lodge for Pesach this year.

Prager was one of about 300 Pesach guests at Zimbali. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to him shortly after his return to Los Angeles about the war on Hamas, political developments in the United States, and his experiences in South Africa.

"Israel has offered the Palestinians a state on five occasions, and it was rejected on five occasions," Prager said. "Palestinians don't want a state, they want no Israel. In the current war, if Israel stops fighting, it has lost.

It would be the first war it has lost, and that would create a new generation of Israel haters. They would think, 'We can defeat Israel; we just need to get the world to side with us.' So Israel needs to fight on, just as America and Britain did in World War II, which ended when the Nazis and the Japanese surrendered. Israel should announce this every day.

"The Palestinians don't want peace with Israel. They want peace without an Israel. That's the problem. I don't know why people are so naïve about this. Palestinians don't deny it. The world lives in this make-believe universe of a two-state solution. Even most Israelis on the left don't believe in the two-state solution. The alternative is for Israel to be extremely strong."

Prager studied Russian and was sent to the Soviet Union in 1969 by Israel "to smuggle in Jewish items and smuggle out Jewish names",

with Jewish emigration banned. On his return, he began lecturing, becoming more well known. In Los Angeles, he started a radio show, and the programme became nationally syndicated by 1998. His show is broadcast on South Africa's ChaiFM.

"There's nothing like radio," Prager said. "You interact with the callers, and I always take those who differ with me first. I believe the ear is deeper than the eye, and radio is just ear. Unlike television, where you rarely get more than five or 10 minutes to develop ideas, I had three hours a day."

Commenting on the anti-Israel violence that has gripped American university campuses, Prager said, "I did my graduate work at Columbia. I thought Columbia was a moral wasteland in the 1970s, and it's only deteriorated. The American university is a moral cesspool, and idiotic ideas dominate. I warned parents that sending their children

to college was like playing Russian roulette with their values. The only thing different today to when I said it 40 years ago, is that today, there are five bullets in the chamber, not one.

"To say that your child goes to a prestigious university gives many American Jews meaning in life. So, many American Jews were OK with the left, which has come out as being Jew haters who favour the destruction of Israel. This should be the end of the Jewish love affair with the left. But unfortunately, nothing will end, at least among the non-Orthodox, who will continue to vote for the Democrats."

Prager believes the foment on campuses might favour Donald Trump in the November elections, but this will be offset by female voters on the issue of abortion.

When asked what South African Jews could do with such a pro-Hamas government, Prager

said, "If you cannot speak up, you should leave. You can't live in a place where you can't even verbally defend yourself. At least in America, our government isn't wearing *keffiyehs*."

Prager mentioned the video interview on his Prager U website of South African member of parliament Reverend Kenneth Meshoe, who denounced as a lie the comparison between Israel and apartheid South Africa. "That video should be shown as widely as possible. The apartheid lie is equivalent to the medieval blood libels. Get as many black Christians in South Africa as possible to acknowledge that, and say it publicly. I'm not saying it will end the issue, but it will make a dent. People need to know they're being lied to."

He acknowledged that Palestinians in the West Bank are living under military rule. "I wish Israel could get the hell out of there. But I don't live in a wish world. I live in a real world. If Israel leaves, then the barbarians take over. Look what happened when Israel left Gaza in 2005. It's a genocidal police state.

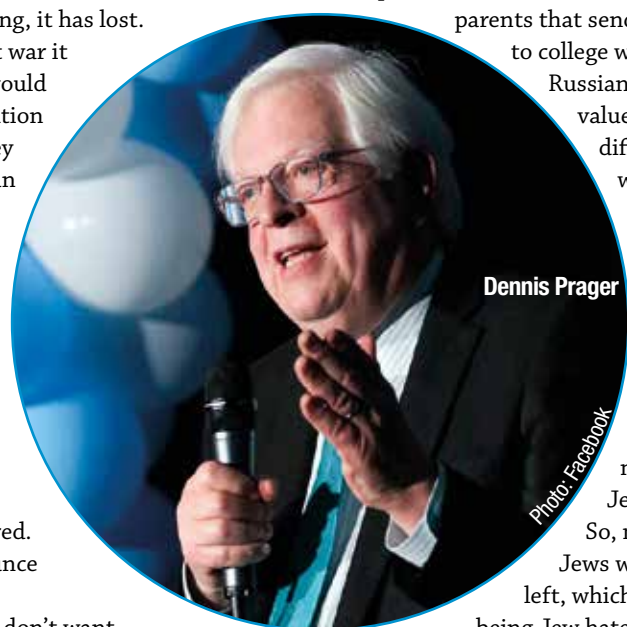
"Douglas Murray, who isn't Jewish and a magnificent defender of Israel, has often stated that 'Gaza could have been the Singapore of the Middle East', but they spent billions of dollars on tunnels and rockets to kill Israelis.

"There's no genocide. There's no apartheid," Prager said. "Yes, if you're under military rule, by definition, you don't have the same rights. That's correct. You don't run your own airport. You don't have your own army. You don't have your own police. There are checkpoints; because if there are no checkpoints, people come in and blow up Israeli buses.

"If we spread the wisdom and values of the Torah, we'll change the world," he said. He has published commentary on the Torah, called *The Rational Bible*, aimed at non-Jews as well as Jews, and the secular as well as the religious. "I use only reason not faith to make the text clear," Prager said.

Prager has been called a right-wing conservative. "I don't really care," he said, "I have no problem with the label. Conserving the best of the past is one of the most noble things any generation can do.

"I've spent my life saying what I believe is true, not trying to win friends," Prager said. "You can't do both."



Dennis Prager

Photo: Facebook



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Distance adds bittersweetness to Mother's Day

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

At a time when emigration has resulted in numerous family members living in different corners of the world, occasions like Mother's Day can be more bitter than sweet. But though the challenges of living far from one's parents or children are considerable, some families still find special ways to make such days memorable.

"Being away from my mom has been one of the toughest challenges of this move," says Channing Haefner, 21. "She's not just my mom; she's my rock and my confidante. Not having her around for simple things like outfit advice, sharing my day, or enjoying dinner together has been difficult. She knows me better than anyone else in the world."

Having always longed to live in Europe, Channing recently took up a post as an au pair for a South African Jewish expat family, using her childcare and psychology background as an opportunity to live abroad. She flew out in March this year, just one day after her brother's wedding. "I quite literally went from hugging my family under the *chuppah* to an airplane waiting lounge in less than 24 hours," she says.

The contrast of immense joy followed by sadness was jarring for the whole family, says her mother, Andy Haefner, especially since her oldest daughter left to explore America a few days later too. "It was an incredibly emotional time for us as a family. Driving out of the driveway when we took Channing to the airport and watching the kids stand there with the cats with everybody crying ripped out my heart. Never again will

our family be completely whole."

With two daughters overseas and their newly married son having moved out, the Haefners now only have their youngest daughter at home. "It was really difficult for me as a mom with a family of four children with an incredibly busy household to literally being left with one," says Andy, who admits that she worries that her family will ultimately be split into different corners of the world and that she'll never get to see her future grandchildren all in one place.

Nevertheless, she has always encouraged her children to travel, and believes in giving her kids the space to find their way, free from guilt. "For me, to travel and to show children different worlds and cultures is just as important as keeping them in school, if not more important," she says. "Channing has always been a free spirit. She has had an innate desire since she was little to learn about the world, to be incredibly independent and stand up for things that she believes in, and to forge her own identity. We've never held her back."

While she's embracing the rich culture and sense of growth, belonging, and safety that her move has provided, Channing is upset at the thought of spending her first Mother's Day without her beloved mom and grandmother – her "second mom".

"They've always been my biggest supporters,

encouraging me to explore the world fearlessly while I'm young," she says. "Not being able to shower them with the love they deserve this Mother's Day feels like a missed opportunity. I cherish memories of past Mother's

Days spent singing, baking, and enjoying breakfast in bed with them, evolving into personalised gifts and well-deserved massages as we grew older." Yet she's determined to make the day special even from afar, and has planned some surprises with her siblings.

Andy says she's put Mother's Day on the backburner this year. "I think it's going to be a really difficult day not having all of my children around," she says. "Mother's Day has always been sweet. They plan something special and meaningful for me, when normally I'm the planner and doer. It's always been the day that I get to be spoiled and my kids give it a lot of thought. It's not about the gifts, it's about relishing the day together and I'm really going to miss that. Yet, I don't think our bond and closeness can ever be broken with them being far away."

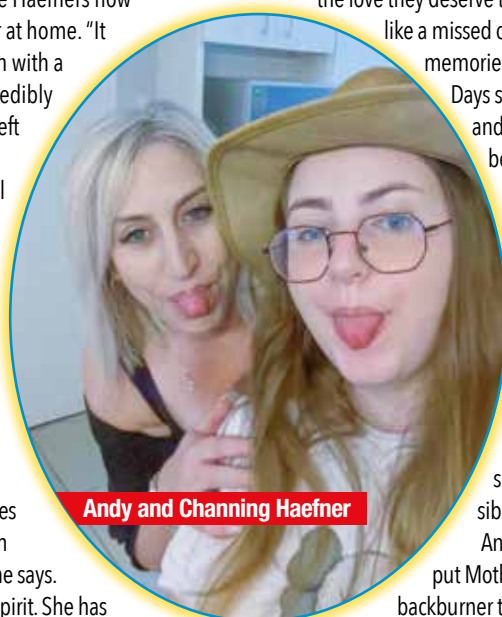
Estelle Donnelly, the mother of two married sons, one

living in Israel and another in Amsterdam, says she finds Mother's Day quite commercial, but the fact that her sons make an effort to spoil her from afar, often ordering gifts through NetFlorist, the Chevrah Kadisha, or Selwyn Segal, makes the day special. She says missing her children isn't specific to a particular occasion, although birthdays and Mother's Day sometimes highlight their absence a bit more.

"Any day when you think of specific things you miss, it can be hard. You have days when you suddenly feel a bit sorry for yourself, but then you have better days." Donnelly says she's not one to fuss. "No-one ever forgets the special occasions, and as long as you know that they love you, it's fine."

Spending Mother's Day with her daughter-in-law's family, which has become a tradition, does help to brighten the day. "We all get together and the kids overseas get involved, contributing in different ways. Then we'll video call them and go around the table chatting, and we make it as nice as we can. This year, we're having a Mexican theme. We get on well, so we get together and still have that sense of family. We're all in the same boat."

This Mother's Day will also be less bittersweet for Donnelly as at the end of May, her entire family will be having an informal reunion in Amsterdam, a trip that falls over her birthday. Her sister from the United Kingdom will join them too, and everyone will be together for the first time in almost six years. "We'll also meet our second grandchild for the first time," she says. "Ultimately, our kids need to do what they have to to create the future they want, especially with the uncertainty here, but we always try and keep as close as possible."



Andy and Channing Haefner

Motherhood not for the fainthearted

PERSONAL STORY

JULIE LEIBOWITZ



About 23:00, on a date I don't remember, my 11-year-old son walked into my bedroom saying, "Mom, mom!" He was bleeding profusely. He'd had nose bleeds before, but as I was half asleep and panicked, I dragged him into the bathroom to stop the bleeding. As he was standing over the basin holding ice to his nose – our preferred technique at the time – I started to feel woozy. It was the last thing I remembered until I heard, "Did you faint?" It was my husband. I had passed out at the sight of blood while sitting on the edge of the bathtub and knocked myself unconscious on the way down. Message to moms: don't faint in the bathroom.

It was hardly my proudest moment as a mother and caregiver, but at least when I came round, my son's nose had stopped bleeding. I had a "shiner" over my eye that led many people to question the state of my marriage, but I was thinking about the state of my motherhood.

The joy and responsibility of being a mother comes with endless anecdotes. It's why they say being a grandparent is a reward for not killing your own children. Not that I'm there yet. But there's always hope.

I'm the mother of two men, 18 and almost 21 years old, but still a "mommy". Nowhere is this more evident than when my 18-year-old son, now at the University of the Witwatersrand and studying something scientific, told me he had a project due the next day making a model of DNA. Of course, he hadn't started it, and he had none of the elements to craft it. All of the craft shops – in fact, any shop – were closed at that hour. Recalling the many previous times I had been in this position – anything from having to build a mini town to crafting a model of a Shabbat table; recreating a mountain; or building a model of planet earth and its many ocean currents – I wondered, "Will this ever end?"

It brought me back to all the times my kids have come to me, usually around 21:00, telling me that they have to go to school in dress up the next day – as an astronaut,

a king; a rockstar; a Mexican Mariachi player. It's at times like this that you want to tell them, "Tough luck. Go as you are, in your school uniform." But you don't, because then they'll stand out in a crowd of Mariachi players. And they'll be sad. So, you spend the next five hours scouring the house for something that represents their idea of a good costume which they'll actually be prepared to wear. Warning: this gets tougher in the teenage years.

I used to ask my late mom in exasperation, "When will they grow up?" She would reply, "They grow up too fast! Enjoy them now." Motherhood is a unique balancing act between thinking, "So sweet!" and "I'm about to kill them!" It was the same mother, by the way, who said, "Your children are so cute when they're little, you could eat them; but when they're teenagers, you wish you had."

I have a friend who told me that as far as her 15-year-old son is concerned, she's just a conduit for buying yoghurt at the supermarket. It brings me to another pain point: feeding – especially when it comes to boys. Motherhood is about going to the supermarket – a lot – and even if you don't have to cook all those meals yourself, you have to arrange for them to be cooked. Then they tell you they're vegetarian – but occasionally eat fish. I should have guessed at the age of three months, while filling many plastic containers with formula, that I had fussy eaters.

I found an ancient chart in one of their rooms the other day which rewards kids for doing things like cleaning their room and doing their homework. As an early adopter, I bought it while they were still toddlers, and wrote another column relevant at the time: "Toilet". On rediscovering it, I marvelled at the fact that they did, indeed, go to the toilet on their own, even if one of them still insists on brushing his teeth in the car on the way to university.

As a mother, sometimes I feel like a sensei – a teacher, with boundless love for my pupils. Often, it's like being a human resources officer, a private secretary, a marketing professional, even the chief executive of a company – though you can't fire your employees! But the greatest reward is seeing the unique individuals they grow up to be and knowing that although I had something to do with it, their essence is a mystery and wonder that has nothing to do with me. It's a huge blessing.

• Julie Leibowitz is the sub-editor of the SA Jewish Report.



Benno Leibowitz, then aged 8, prepares to board the galleys of Kind David Victory Park

Here's to the heroine in our life

DANELLA CASSEL

"My mom is the strongest woman I know. Her kindness knows no bounds. She's absolutely incredible," said Ronelle Silverstone, a Grade 11 pupil who is home schooled, describing her mom in the run-up to Mother's Day.

"No matter what, she'll always have my back, and make me feel better. She always has a solution and knows what to say. It's not only that she genuinely cares about every single person she encounters, she's one of a kind!"

As Mother's Day approaches, families all over the world prepare to honour the maternal figures in their lives. Although Mother's Day isn't a specifically Jewish tradition, it's the perfect opportunity to celebrate our own *eshet chayil* (woman of valour).

The SA Jewish Report asked high school teens three questions: What stands out about your mother? What makes you think about your mom? What makes you giggle about your mom?



Rachel and Simone Kaplan

"My mom's optimism stands out. Whenever I hear her favourite 80s music, especially songs from Wham!, I think of her," said Rachel Kaplan, a Grade 11 student at King David High School Victory Park (KDHSVP). "The inside jokes we have together make me giggle."

"My mom and I went to a planetarium once, and she suddenly couldn't stop laughing. Her laughter was infectious, and soon we were both laughing in public for what felt like ages," Kaplan said.

Eitan Klein, a Grade 11 student at KDHSVP said, "My mom is strong and giving. She's my role model, and inspires me to work towards my goals and take up hobbies. I think about my mom when I'm doing well at sport and academically – how proud she gets. What

makes me giggle is when she gets cheerful, and tells her friends funny stories about me."

Sean Holliday, a Grade 11 pupil at Glenoaks, said that the thing that stands out about his mom is her ability to help people.

"No matter what's going on or what my mom needs, she always helps everyone else. The colour yellow reminds me of her. Whenever I see it, I think about all the happy memories with my mom and all the times she made me smile and laugh. My mom makes me giggle when she can't use technology, and I have to help her with it."

Brett Maunder, a Grade 10 pupil at Redhill, said that his mother's "incredible compassion and resilience" stands out for him. "Whatever's thrown her way, she doesn't falter and faces it head on. And she doesn't waver, but in spite of this, she's always kind and puts others' well-being before herself, especially when it comes to her children. I giggle when my mom forgets a word or name because she will replace it with 'zoodill' or, 'what's his name', but it's always the most vague or general thing and impossible to figure out what she means," he said.

Dani Wes, a Grade 11 pupil at KDHSVP, said: "My mother can talk about almost any topic. She knows everything. My mother loves books, so I always think about her when I read. Our baking disasters make me giggle. We once put green food colouring in cake batter by mistake because we thought it was vanilla essence."

In Judaism, cherishing parents is at the heart of family life. The fifth of the ten commandments tell us to "Honour your father and your mother," which highlights the precious bond between children and parents.

On the far side of the commandment, Judaism also offers numerous teachings that focus on the highly valued role of mothers. The concept of *eshet chayil* from the Book of Proverbs praises the wisdom, strength, and compassion of mothers within the Jewish household.

Mother's Day is a reminder for us to celebrate the incredible women who have sacrificed for us, shaped us, and filled our lives with love, warmth, and boundless strength. It's a special day for us to honour the superheroes in our lives, who effortlessly juggle countless roles with grace and a memorable smile.

Whether it's a heartfelt card, a bouquet of her favourite flowers, or just spending quality time together, Mother's Day is the perfect opportunity to express our love and gratitude and shower these extraordinary individuals with the appreciation they deserve.

So, here's to all the mothers, grandmothers, stepmothers, and guardians who make every day just that bit brighter. Happy Mother's Day!

Shannon Esra bears her soul in *My Left Breast*

Award-winning South African Jewish actress **Shannon Esra** will be appearing in *My Left Breast* at Theatre on the Square in Sandton. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to her before going on stage.

What drew you to acting?

That's like asking me what drew me to draw breath. It has always been the most natural thing in the world to me.

What do you remember of being in your Purim play at nursery school at the age of four?

It's an interesting question, because I have photos of it and I'm not entirely sure the memories of the day aren't a response to the pictures I know so well. I do remember singing songs about Esther and Haman, I remember how happy I felt to see my mom watching me, singing along. I remember my teachers and friends, and the warmth of that day. There were many of these mini concerts at nursery school. So perhaps a lot of the memories may be blurring together. I was very little, but I do know that I loved performing. I loved to sing and dance and make people smile. It made me feel special, I suppose.

What made you want to play this role in *My Left Breast* again?

It's a beautiful thing to embody someone else's experience, to forget yourself in the pursuit of relaying someone else's love, pain, and healing. It's a seductive process to surrender to the intimate interpretation of another's life. It's also a challenge to push myself into spaces I may not be entirely comfortable with to grow, to transform. Every part I play leaves an indelible mark on me.

This role delves into some of the toughest and most poignant issues women deal with. How do you reach into those sometimes-dark places to portray these painful things to an audience?

Through breath, pace, and being present in the words themselves. It's all there in the script, and technically speaking, when you know each word written on that page, when you get so deep into the writing, the story, and the meaning, the familiarity of it allows you to fall into it. It just comes. It's hard to explain.

You're being directed by a former drama teacher. How did this happen? What's your relationship with her like, and what has it been like working with her now?

Janet Baylis, my director, was my high school drama teacher from Grade 9. Over the years since I matriculated, Jan and I have always remained in touch, and she happened to reach out to me last September to ask me what that play was that I did in my first year at the University of the Witwatersrand about "the breast". Jan

had, of course, come to watch the 20-minute, highly-abridged version I was cast in in 2000. I laughed and I said, "Oh, *My Left Breast* by Susan Miller." To which she responded, "I think you're old enough to really give it a go, would you be interested?" I didn't even blink! It was always going to be yes. To be given the opportunity to revisit the full text in its entirety



Shannon Esra

and to work with my mentor was a dream I never knew I had, but one I knew I needed. Jan's presence in my life throughout high school shaped me in many ways. She was a safe space and a beacon of light and hope when I struggled with feeling misunderstood at home or with friends. Jan always believed in me, and I needed that from her. It's been the greatest gift working with her.

You have an extraordinary career. Have you had to give up anything in pursuit of it? If so, what?

Honestly, I've been fortunate that the things I've wanted have almost always been in alignment with my work. My work is my greatest passion and joy. I think that's been more difficult for the relationships I've had throughout my life. My work is one of the very few spaces in my life that I'm unwilling to compromise on. It's so much of who I am, and what sets my soul ablaze. And it's never been about fame or celebrity. I just love being someone else and being able to shift a person's

perspective, inspire someone, or move them. It's my way of giving back, I suppose.

Describe what it takes for you to get into a character and become that person.

It's mostly there, simply in the words. I do, however, have a thing about never wearing my own shoes. I can't be in my own shoes and be the character at the same time – something happens in my feet from the ground up.

You've made your name internationally in roles like *The Queen*, and *The River* on television and screen. What drew you back on stage?

Working with Jan for one! And, theatre is home. It's where I began, and it felt natural to return. Theatre encompasses a whole different set of technical skills and challenges which I needed to sharpen and confront. It also asks you to be brave. I always seek the next challenge.

Do you have a preference for certain platforms, such as stage, film, or television? How does performing differ on these platforms?

Honestly, I love any element of performing. Each medium has its own unique set of risks and challenges. Having spent the majority of my 27-year career in television and film, I'm accustomed to being on set for long, intensive periods, where you become this family which is creating an imaginary world in secret, far away from real life as you know it. On set, it's almost as if you're doing battle together – you're in the trenches, getting muddied and bloodied together to create something of substance for people to watch at a later stage. On set, you have spaces and places to hide and take shelter; if you make a mistake, you get to go for another take – TV and film is a far more forgiving medium for an actor. And it's only months to a year later when audiences get to watch the show from the comfort of their homes or a cinema. And for the most part, as the actor,

you've completely moved on.

Theatre is live, immediate, and all-encompassing. There you are, up on stage, on your own – in a one-woman show – and it truly is one of the most exposed, raw, and vulnerable spaces to be. I have nowhere to hide. If I make a mistake, only I can correct it, and pray no-one notices. Theatre offers a connection with the audience right from the time they walk into the theatre. In this particular production, there's a palpable immediacy and intimacy. On top of that, the adrenaline, the high, the connection – it's potent and almost indescribable.

You were born Shannon Esrechowitz. Why did you change your name?

Legally, my name is still Esrechowitz. Esra is my professional name. There were two reasons: first, Esrechowitz is a mouthful, and people battled to spell and pronounce it correctly. And second, back in the day when phone books existed, my grandmother was at the receiving end of some very unfortunate sexually charged phone calls. It made sense to abbreviate it.

Do you see yourself as a part of the Jewish community? What does it mean for you?

Of course! I went to a Jewish nursery school and Hebrew school every Sunday from the time I was eight until I had my Batmitzvah. Community for me is family, it's a place of belonging. I believe knowing where you belong is a fundamental aspect of a happy life.

What's the message you want people to take home from *My Left Breast*?

It's okay to laugh at hard things – and we must laugh. Life is filled with light and shade. It's okay if healing feels hard – it's not a straight line. Love is love, and we're on this planet to connect, to find a sense of belonging and purpose, and so much of that is experienced by sharing space and vulnerability. Life is dynamic and complex, and it's also simple. We're all more alike than we think we are.

• *My Left Breast* is on at the Theatre on the Square from 7 to 11 May

Hairs to Noma, stylist on everyone's speed dial

LEE TANKLE

When Nomakwazi Ndlovu left her job at Sorbet Drybar Bedfordview four years ago and wanted to start her own business, she had no clue where to begin. She now has a going concern that has thrived through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond with strong support from her Jewish clientele.

After the attacks by Hamas in Israel on 7 October, Ndlovu wanted to express support for Jewish clients after hearing about the devastation.

"I posted on my personal Instagram saying that I supported Israel and all my Jewish clients. I received lots of love from my Jewish clients. I also received threatening messages or texts from my other clients who aren't Jewish. After that, it made me nervous to take on new clients because I wasn't sure if they wanted to book me for my skills or to threaten me."

Amy Tobias, one of her clients, says "Our love for Noma knows no bounds, and we deeply appreciate everything she does for us. She stands proudly alongside the Jewish community and Israel, always wishing my family and me "good Shabbos", and remaining well-versed in all the *chaggim*."

Kim Tobias, one of Ndlovu's beloved clients, and the one who catapulted her business to where it is today, said, "Noma called me and said she would like to give back to the Jewish women who have made her

business thrive."

The two women decided to make a day available to Jewish women who couldn't have their hair done for a *chag*, and she donated her time and expertise to pamper 15 women at Sydenham Highlands North Shul on 21 April before Pesach.

"My job is to make women beautiful," says Ndlovu, "Ever since 7 October, I feel like Jewish women haven't been OK emotionally and mentally. I felt like they needed a little bit of a treat. I couldn't do more, but I believed that if I could do that, it would make me and the women feel good."

She was able to build her thriving business through sheer determination, sharing her talent with the blow dryer with those around her, and one post on Joburg Jewish Mommies singing her praises.

"I put out the first post when she came to me, and we called her a hair magician because she's unbelievable," says Kim. From that post, people were able to see how talented Ndlovu was at her craft.

"She has integrated herself into the Jewish community, grown her Jewish clientele dramatically, and has started doing wedding retinues, brides, Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, sheitels, and private homes," Kim says.

"Our extraordinary Noma goes above and beyond without hesitation," Amy says. "Whether she's tending to 18 bridesmaids for a wedding, ensuring everyone looks their best for Shabbos and *yomtov*, or providing the swiftest Brazilian treatment in the comfort of your home, Noma effortlessly excels at it all."

Another client, Nicky Kramer, says, "Noma genuinely cares for every one of her clients. She has integrity and kindness – a total *mensh* and a brilliant stylist."



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Said goes from sad to super fit for charity

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Over the past two years, Johannesburg marketer Michael Said transformed himself from an overweight and tired 61-year-old to being fit and healthy enough to tackle the demanding David Goggins 4x4x48 Challenge to raise funds to change the lives of kids with cerebral palsy.

"It turned out to be a life-changing experience for me as well," he says.

About two years ago, Said was at his all-time heaviest, weighing almost 90kg, but by January this year, he had lost 16kg and managed to complete the Goggins Challenge, which involves running or walking four miles (6.4km) every four hours for 48 hours.

Starting the challenge on 1 March, Said went on to walk 77km for more than 48 hours along the streets of Bedfordview. "Not for a millimetre was I ever alone," he recalls. Old and new friends and even entire families kept him company at different stages throughout the 6.4km course. "A couple of crazies" woke themselves up, "so that I wouldn't walk the 02:00 shift alone," he says.

Said describes the Goggins Challenge as a test of endurance, resilience, and dedication.

"It reflects the daily struggles of children with cerebral palsy," he says, "and symbolises our commitment to help them."

The date of starting the challenge, 1 March, had deep personal significance. "It fell between what would have been my late mother, Sadie's, birthday on 14 February and the anniversary of her passing on 14 March. My mom was 48 years old when she passed away, and this added significance to the 4x4x48 challenge."

Undertaking the challenge in the memory of his mother, who instilled in him the value of helping those

in need, Said was determined to transform personal loss into a force for positive change. "By supporting children who face daily physical and emotional battles, we not only honour her memory but offer a beacon of hope to those in dire need," he says.



Michael Said with Sharon Davis after completing his 10th four mile (6.4km) course

He raised just more than R12 000 from family and friends, who support many of his initiatives.

On 14 March, 40 years to the day of his mom's passing, Said joined Boikanyo The Dion Herson Foundation volunteers in taking mobility buggies – specialised wheelchairs – to Tshilidzini Hospital in Shayandima, Limpopo. Said witnessed the remarkable courage of children battling cerebral palsy, the unwavering love of their families, the dedication of hospital staff, the generosity of volunteers, and the kindness of donors. "Together, they form an ensemble

of real-life superheroes whose stories of resilience and compassion inspire awe and gratitude," he says.

The initiative was part of Boikanyo The Dion Herson Foundation's Chair'ished Children flagship project which has provided hundreds of buggies for impoverished children born with cerebral palsy in rural South Africa.

Said assists the foundation with media that captures and shares the experiences of the outreach programmes he attends.

"My mother instilled in me a sense of purpose and charity and an understanding that I may not be able to change the whole world, but I can change one person's world," he says. "This is a personal issue for me. I'm not a man of great wealth, but I've always believed that by giving my time, effort, and talents, I can make a real difference in other people's lives."

"Maimonides' Eight Levels of Charity remind us that there are certainly more ways to assist others than financial donations. But I'm eternally grateful to those who can assist financially, as they help programmes like this reach so many people."

At the beginning of 2022, Said was in pretty good shape, but he started indulging in sweets, chocolates, and potato chips. "Coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, my weight shot up, and my health deteriorated," he says.

Halfway through 2022, he started going to gym and doing intermittent fasting before entering the 75 Hard Challenge, which has "simple yet demanding" rules such as sticking to a diet with no cheat meals or alcohol, and exercising twice daily for 45 minutes. "I added a 36-hour water-only fast," he says.

Instead of running, Said focuses on Zone 2, low

intensity training. "I often do eight to 16km hikes with my 10kg ruck vest. I keep my heart rate as close to Zone 2 as possible," he says.

He has committed to doing a short triathlon in summer, no small ask for someone who can't swim, hates open water, seldom rides on the road, and never runs. He's also planning to hike the Amatola Trail, known as South Africa's toughest hike.

Said says he has always benefited from his ability to challenge himself. In addition to achieving his physical transformation, he worked his way up from waiter to the marketing manager of one of South Africa's leading brands, Mugg & Bean.

"I believe that if we put our minds and our hearts to a task, we can accomplish it," he says. "Another thing that has helped me along the way is that I'm not afraid to ask for help. There are people out there with more knowledge, skills, and resources than I have, and I'm not afraid to reach out to them for assistance."

Said believes we live comfortable lives, so comfortable, that they are to our detriment. "Sadly, many are simply unable to cope the moment things don't go according to plan," he says. "We need to challenge ourselves on every level as often as possible, be it physically, emotionally, or intellectually. I'm on a quest to challenge myself continuously and, through that, to improve continuously. With that in mind, I set out to hike the Otter and Tsitsikamma trails back-to-back in April. It was an incredible experience, with breathtaking views, extreme weather, wonderful people, and memories to last a lifetime."

Paarl – proof of Jewish life beyond the 'boerewors belt'

BRYAN OPERT

In the Boland – or across the "boerewors belt," if you will – there's a community that still has regular *minyanim*. The community is Paarl – *die perel* (the pearl).

The majestic Paarl Synagogue is in Breda Street, and cannot be missed.

Founded in 1893, the Paarl Jewish community consisted mostly of pedlars who made Paarl a base. However, it's arguable that the congregation is the oldest in South Africa whose membership will probably double in size in a couple of years.

As opposed to the stories of small communities that continue to diminish, our services have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time in more than 20 years, we held Shabbos morning, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot morning services.

This year, however, brought a resurgence of almost epic proportions. We've been blessed with an influx of families moving into the Paarl environs.

In 2023, we began our monthly Paarl "Power Shabboses". These are usually attended by more than 60 people, about 16 to 20 children, and are accompanied by traditional *heimish* food.

This year, we had a Purim replete with a dress-up pageant, a make-a-gragger – noisemaker for the "Haman special" activity, kids games from jumping castles, giant-Jenga, to a boxing ring with giant gloves – go figure, the kids of today – and it was all rounded off in the way that only Paarl is able to – a Build Your Own Burger braai. I believe it says somewhere in the ancient books of South African Jewry that if you haven't seen a Paarl braai, you haven't seen a braai.



Purim at the Paarl Synagogue

Pesach has so far been the highlight of the year – and we're only in the first month. We ran communal seders both nights of Pesach! They were attended by just more than 30 people each night, comprising Paarlites and Capetonians representing almost every suburb where Jews reside.

You're all invited to join us for a service and *gesels*, stay over at the beautiful bed and breakfast in the area, or to celebrate your *simcha* with us.

Yeshiva College appoints student leaders

Yeshiva College Boys and Girls High Schools announced new student leadership on 19 April.

Da'el Basserabie and Ayala Sifris were selected as head boy and girl respectively, with Elnatan Sosnovik, Yair Weiss, and Abigail

Symanowitz being appointed to vice-head roles.

Student leadership in the Boys High School includes Akiva Bome; Judd Suckerman; Dovi Bricker;

Liv Lewus; Jonathan Price; and Joshua Uria.

In the Girls High School, the leadership includes Ella Trope; Madison Matthews; Emunah Kretzmer; Ashira Rau; Ashira Hirschowitz; and Liat Feigenbaum.

Each leader has a specific portfolio which they oversee, including environment and advocacy; sports; arts and culture; media; *chesed*; Israel; and unity and inspiration.



Yair Weiss, Da'El Basserabie, and Elnatan Sosnovik



Ayala Sifris and Abigail Symanowitz



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Why Carmel School?

Carmel School is the only Jewish Through School in Asia, with over 370 students from 1 to 18 years old. Carmel School is accredited by WASC and IB offering the DP, MYP, and PYP. Our students graduate with impressive academic results and enter top universities around the world.

Carmel School is a cornerstone of Hong Kong's Jewish community with strong interpersonal relationships, an enviable working environment and a high teacher:student ratio. The School offers career progression, professional development to talented candidates.

Interested candidates are invited to apply to hr@carmel.edu.hk

Misbehaviour lands me in the soup

It was just after the soup course this past Friday night that I was sent to my room. This was the first time in some years that this has happened. And it was apparently, according to my wife, as a direct consequence of my poor behaviour. Both she and my daughter had agreed that I was “unplayable”, and that the only viable option was to send me away from the table to reflect on my (appalling) attitude.

The duo claimed that all other remediation methods had been tried and had failed, and that it was clear that I was either unwilling or unable to self-correct. Like the African National Congress, but without the corruption.

As I slowly, sulkily, and sadly mounted the stairs to my room, hoping for a stay of execution, I considered parting with some powerful and devastating words by reminding them that not since the Victorian era and the days of Oliver Twist had we treated orphans this way. But self-preservation prevailed as deep down, I understood that at 55 years old, I was a good 30 years past the “orphan” sell-by date. And that if I was too old for Arcadia, I was probably too old to demand sympathy for no longer having parents. Even if technically I am an orphan.

As Hamas apologists are keen to point out, context is important. Which is why I would ask you consider that the events of Friday night didn't actually begin on Friday night. It was the end of a two-day work week. With Pesach only a few days past, and a public holiday ironically called “Workers Day”, the pressure catch up was a bit overwhelming and immense.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



In addition, our adult children who had been visiting from Israel for the holidays had returned, leaving us once again to our own devices. As anyone honest with grown offspring will tell you, as much as it's too wonderful to have them visit, it's equally magnificent to have them leave. The house can right itself, the kitchen is no longer an industrial production zone, conversations between spouses can resume and, once again, we become entitled to hold our own opinions on numerous subjects.

Slowly we can rebuild our confidence, knowing that our children have left, shaking their all-knowing heads wondering how we managed to raise them, let alone tie our own shoelaces without them in the country to manage the process.

A visit by adult children also requires the elders to behave with an additional maturity. And whereas this might be absolutely appropriate for this stage of life, it's also exhausting. And, in my case, completely unsustainable.

Which is probably the reason that not only did I behave so poorly, but then found myself after having been sent to my room, lying in the dark, arms folded, thinking how much they would miss me if I ran away. And, if there had been vanilla ice cream and chocolate sauce for dessert.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Yom Hashoah in the shadow of war

On Monday, Yom Hashoah ceremonies were held under the auspices of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Durban. For the first time, the event took place at a time when the Jewish people are again at war, this time against an enemy bent on eradicating their presence from their ancestral homeland. The people of Israel aren't the only ones under continual attack since 7 October, Jewish communities around the world are experiencing levels of antisemitism not seen in decades. In the wake of the ongoing Gaza tragedy, those wishing us harm are showing less and less compunction in engaging in the most vitriolic rhetoric, not just against Israel but against the great majority of Jews everywhere for supporting it.

An especially vicious aspect of these attacks has been what has come to be termed Holocaust inversion, whereby Jews are charged with committing the same monstrous crimes against Palestinians that their forebears were subjected to in the last generation. Though we mourn the death and suffering on both sides, to level such accusations not only defames the Jewish state in our own day but minimises and even makes a mockery of the real genocide carried out against European Jewry. In light of these distortions, it's all the more important that we continue to invest in Holocaust education and commemoration. In this regard, a positive aspect of this year's ceremonies in Gauteng and Cape Town was the exceptionally high turnout, which in Johannesburg included more than 900 pupils from 11 schools in Gauteng. We thank our special speakers Miriam Lazarus and Rena Quint, who gave a video message, whose survivor testimony infused so much meaning into the proceedings.

As SAJBD Gauteng Chairperson Harold Jacobs stressed in his opening address, Yom Hashoah brings all Jews together regardless of where they might stand on the religious, ideological, or political spectrum. In recent

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



times, it took the horrific events of 7 October to remind us that at the end of the day, we're one people, and that if we're to prevail against those who wish us harm, solidarity among Jews, whoever they are and wherever they may be, is critical.

National director's visit to the United States

Shortly before Pesach, National Director Wendy Kahn travelled to Washington, D.C., where she participated with the World Jewish Congress in a series of high-level meetings with senior government officials. The purpose of her trip was to draw attention to the challenges South African Jewry has faced after 7 October, including the steep upsurge in antisemitic attacks and the hostility displayed by many government and civil society leaders. Among the key figures and bodies she engaged with were the United States National Security Council; the state department, including Deborah Lipstadt, the special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism; and the House of Representatives Africa Subcommittee. Our counterparts are well aware of the unusually difficult situation we find ourselves in following the South African government's application to the International Court of Justice to issue charges of genocide against Israel.

Next week's column will be about our pre-election activities. We're excited about our special election indaba on 19 May, from 15:00 to 17:00, where you'll have the opportunity to engage with representatives of some of the main competing parties and put your questions to them. Please diarise and book your seats as space is limited.

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

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

Afrika Tikkun celebrates 30 Years of Service, Impact and Excellence

This year, Afrika Tikkun turns 30! Our founders' fundamental vision and values have remained unchanged from our humble roots as a philanthropic organisation to our current status as a social impact giant. Inspiring hope, transformative impact and sustainability, breaking generational poverty and bridging the inequality gap in South Africa; all sum up what we do and have been doing for 30 years. Through our award-winning Cradle-to-Career 360° model, we celebrate changing the lives of **315,780 children and young people over the last three decades and serving 25 million meals**, for instance. However, we did not achieve this accomplishment alone. Our strategic partnerships and collaborations have allowed us to expand our programmes and activities and immerse ourselves in diverse communities. We are indeed grateful to all our sponsors, contributors and supporters for walking this journey with us. Here's to 30 years and beyond!

Go to: 30yearsoftikkun.co.za to join the celebrations.



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