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Meta bans 'Zionists' when used to insult Jews

ASAF ELIA-SHALEV – JTA

Social media giant Meta announced on Tuesday, 9 July, that it would ban derogatory or threatening references to "Zionists" in cases where the term is used to refer to Jews or Israelis rather than supporters of the movement to establish a Jewish polity.

The change means that posts on Facebook and Instagram will now be removed if moderators determine they use "antisemitic stereotypes, or threaten other types of harm through intimidation or violence directed against Jews or Israelis under the guise of attacking Zionists", Meta said in a blog post.

Under Meta's hate-speech policy, users aren't allowed to attack people on the basis of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, disability, and gender identity. Existing rules already prohibited using the word "Zionist" to refer to Jews or Israelis in two narrowly defined situations, including "where Zionists are compared to rats". Meta said those rules didn't account for the broad range of ways that people use the term.

Many Jewish groups have accused people of referring to "Zionists" rather than Jews as a cover for antisemitic speech, and some welcomed the announcement, with



the World Jewish Congress (WJC) referring to it as a "landmark decision".

Ronald Lauder, the WJC's president welcomed Meta's decision as a bold stand against those who seek to mask their hatred, and called on other social media platforms to follow suit.

Nearly 150 advocacy groups and experts provided input that led to Meta's policy update, including CyberWell, a non-profit organisation that has been documenting the swell of online antisemitism and Holocaust denial since the start of the Hamas-Israel war. CyberWell, which is based in Tel Aviv, employs the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working

definition of antisemitism, a popular and controversial document that categorises some criticism of Israel as antisemitism.

In a press release, CyberWell said it provided Meta with data demonstrating the widespread use of "Zionist" as a euphemism for Jews and Israelis, adding that it will track how well the company enforces its new policy.

"The term 'Zionist' to spread antisemitic vitriol while avoiding detection has been used by radicals on the far left and extremists on the far right. Today, Meta has spoken through thoughtful action," said CyberWell Executive Director Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor.

Meta said it was still considering how its policies should address cases where users refer to Zionists as criminals. In some contexts, it said, the use of "Zionists" and "criminals" could be shorthand for actions of the government or military and may represent legitimate speech regarding alleged war crimes.

Meta is waiting for input from its Oversight Board, the independent body tasked with reviewing the company's content-moderation decisions and making recommendations. An Oversight Board spokesperson said its guidance on the matter would be ready in September.

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Who's afraid of big, bad Og?



Rabbi Yossy Goldman
Life Rabbi Emeritus,
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Believe it or not, there was a time when Moses was afraid. Yes, the greatest leader of all time, the man who vanquished Pharaoh, split the sea, brought down the ten commandments, this spiritual colossus was afraid. Who could possibly frighten Moses?

The end of *parshat Chukat* tells us the story. The Israelites were about to go into battle against Og, King of Bashan, a mighty warrior, literally a giant. And Moses was afraid to such an extent that the Almighty had to assuage his fears.

Why did Og inspire such dread in the great prophet? Surely, he had dealt with more formidable threats in his career. According to Rashi, the story goes back many years. Og – or according to some commentaries, the ancestor of the current king – escaped from battle during the days of Abraham. This refugee then came to Abraham and informed him of his nephew Lot's capture in battle. Abraham immediately went into action, fought the kings, and successfully rescued Lot. Moshe was afraid to do battle with Og lest the merit he had acquired when helping Abraham stand him in good stead.

But was it really such a good deed? The same Rashi, in his commentary on Genesis, informs us that Og's motives were not at all altruistic. Apparently, by telling Abraham that Lot had been taken captive, Og was hoping that Abraham would attempt to rescue his nephew and be killed in battle so that Og could then take Abraham's beautiful wife, Sarah, for himself, hardly an act of magnanimous righteousness! Why would Moses be worried about the spiritual

merit of conduct tainted by such ulterior motives?

The answer is that although Og's motives were far from unselfish, the fact is that he had done Abraham a kindness. Abraham was grateful for the information, and was successful in saving Lot. So, although Og's reasons were less than noble, the end result of his deed was good and Abraham considered it a favour.

That's why Moses was afraid of Og lest that spiritual credit protect him. And that's why the Almighty needed to put Moses' mind at ease by reassuring him and saying, "Do not fear him."

It's an incredible lesson in the power of *chesed*, acts of loving kindness. That one good turn, performed so many years back, and *nog* out of sinister motivation, could cause Moses so much anxiety is proof positive of the awesome, long-term positive effects of even one single act of kindness.

Deeds of goodness and kindness have the power to protect us from harm. A single act of compassion, of helping someone in need, has the capacity to shield us. In the end, we're not only helping them but also helping ourselves.

May we be inspired to be a little more considerate to each other, a little more helpful to those around us, and may our benevolence protect us and our families from any harm.

Torah Thought

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*Israel is one hour ahead of South Africa



US teeters on abandoning SA over foreign policy

NICOLA MILTZ

The United States (US) is significantly closer to reviewing its important bilateral relationship with South Africa as strained ties between the superpower and Pretoria have prompted concerns among political insiders.

The US House of Representatives recently passed legislation that would require the Biden administration to conduct a full review of America's relationship with South Africa. The legislation isn't yet law and still needs to pass the senate and be signed off by the president, but has come very far in the process.

The vote follows a host of anti-Western foreign policy moves on the part of South Africa, which have irked US legislators. These are largely to do with South Africa's stance on Israel and its ties with Russia, China, and Iran.

Pretoria's seemingly cosy relationship with Hamas; taking Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on charges of genocide; and many other decisions have angered US legislators. It has threatened to buckle the crucial trade relationship between the two countries, which could ultimately cause serious harm to South Africa, analysts say.

"South Africa is learning that there are consequences for actions," said entrepreneur and political analyst Howard Sackstein. "Allowing former department of international relations and cooperation [Dico] minister, Dr Naledi Pandor, to pursue an anti-Western agenda in support of Iran has dire consequences for South Africa in the long term. Opposing Western interests, supporting Hamas, and promoting jihadist causes doesn't sit well with our largest trading partners. The Americans are angry, and it will be up to new Foreign Affairs Minister Ronald Lamola to try rescue and repair the enormous damage done to South Africa's reputation in the world by Pandor."

South Africa is learning that there are consequences for actions.

International affairs analyst Steven Gruzd agreed. "This Bill is making its way through Congress, and it doesn't spell good news for South Africa," he said.

"It's still a long way from being implemented but the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] is responsible for many jobs in industries like the motor and agricultural sectors, and these may be in jeopardy in a country with the highest unemployment rate in the world, so I would be concerned. If South Africa were to be kicked out of AGOA, it would have serious implications. Our community needs to watch seriously and closely."

Dr Bob Wekesa, the director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "One can understand where the US is coming from as South Africa's non-aligned diplomacy appears to have swung to one side. Of course, we have to be concerned about these developments as they could

have huge trade implications. There have been miscalculations on the part of the South African government and African National Congress (ANC) strategists, and the US is bound to respond."

The legislation makes it obligatory for the administration to report to Congress on whether South Africa "has engaged in activities that undermine US national security or foreign policy interests". The Bill in question accuses South Africa of building ties with countries that undermine US national security.

A review of the relationship may endanger South Africa's place in AGOA, a significant trade pact that grants South Africa and many eligible African countries duty-free access to the US for thousands of goods. South Africa is the largest US trade partner in Africa and the largest beneficiary of AGOA.

According to political analysts, factors such as South Africa's non-aligned stance on Russia and Ukraine and its anti-Israel stance on the war in the Middle East have marked a turning point in the relationship between the two countries.

It extends further, with a string of questionable anti-West incidents which have raised the ire of the US and her allies. Cosying up to Hamas, a designated terrorist organisation; making a visit to Tehran in the wake of the 7 October attack; and hosting trilateral naval exercises with

China and Russia are a few of these.

The Bill, introduced by Republican Representative John James, was approved by the US House's Foreign Affairs Committee in March. It called on the administration to conduct a comprehensive review of US relations with South Africa, including South Africa's continued eligibility for benefits under AGOA.

James is chairperson of the Africa subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He told the House during the debate on the issue in June that they "would simply require the Biden administration to make a determination on whether South Africa's actions are undermining the United States".

"The current uncertainty in South Africa following last month's elections makes the determinations required by this amendment all the more timely," he said. "In order to engage strategically with South Africa, it's necessary to ensure the US government has



a contemporary view of the bilateral relationship."

James said he was proud that the US had cordial relations with South Africa, including more than \$8 billion (R145 trillion) which the US had spent in South Africa since 2003 to help fight HIV/Aids.

He said trade had grown from \$13.9 billion (R252 billion) in 2015 to \$21 billion (R380 billion) in 2021, making South Africa America's largest trade partner in Africa. More than 600 US businesses were invested in South Africa.

"It's clear to me that the ANC of today is no longer the party of Mandela," James said. "The

South Africa and the US, which has been put under strain especially since the start of the Ukraine conflict and, of course, since 7 October, with South Africa's strong backing of the ICJ case against Israel on genocide charges. That hasn't made the US happy, and US taxpayers are asking why they should support funding and trading with a country opposed to their national interests. I think efforts are going to be made to touch up this relationship – President Cyril Ramaphosa has invited US President Joe Biden for a state visit – but it's a relationship that has been under strain."

ANC continuously moves away from its traditional stance of non-alignment in international affairs."

He cited several examples of what he regarded as evidence of this shift, including South Africa's display of "consistent and overt anti-Israel sentiment" since the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 – "our number-one ally in the Middle East".

Said Gruzd, "This is also a sign of the deteriorating relationship between

Cricket SA sued over Teeger demotion

>>Continued from page 1

of the captaincy was probably "the result of political pressure from government on CSA at a time when South Africa signalled its intention to prosecute Israel before the ICJ. CSA couldn't comfortably allow the South African team to be led by a captain who supported Israel."

The affidavit also warns that "CSA introduced a precedent into the South African world of cricket whereby important decisions can be subjected to political influence". In addition, "Teeger continues to play cricket in South Africa. If not reviewed and set aside, the danger exists that CSA may in future exclude him from the captaincy on the same or similar grounds."

A judgment in favour of CFI "will act as a deterrent to other sporting bodies against succumbing to political or public pressure" and encourage them "to uphold the rights of those who fall under their jurisdiction, over whom they exercise enormous power", states the affidavit. "This is even more apparent in a sporting context, where decisions can have major consequences on sporting ambitions."

The affidavit explains that on 9 January, Teeger's father, James Teeger, learned that the South African Police Service (SAPS) was concerned about radical elements protesting at the U19 CWC. He was asked whether Teeger would consider stepping down as captain voluntarily. The elder Teeger advised that unless

there was evidence of a security threat, there was no legitimate basis to consider it.

James Teeger then reached out to Rory Steyn, CSA's security advisor overseeing security for the U19 CWC. Steyn responded that SAPS and private security services were prepared for protests and that there was no physical security threat to David Teeger, the rest of his team, any other team, or the tournament itself. Steyn wasn't aware of any report highlighting security threats. Steyn said that this view was shared by the International Cricket Council's head of security. James Teeger shared all this with Naidoo, but his son was still stripped of the captaincy.

"CSA's decision not only humiliated Teeger, infringing on his rights and affecting his career, it violated the rights of all South Africans," said Witz. "Lawson Naidoo and CSA must be held accountable for their actions."

"While reinstating Teeger to his former captaincy in a concluded tournament isn't possible, we hope this case will result in a court declaration confirming that CSA acted irrationally and unlawfully," said Witz. "This would underscore the imperative to protect all rights and the freedom of speech."

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to CSA and Naidoo for comment, but didn't receive a response by print deadline.

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Africans and Jews form kinship against terrorism

TALI FEINBERG

Terrorist attacks like the 7 October massacre in Israel are committed every few days in Africa against innocent Christians and moderate Muslims, according to the African-Jewish Alliance (AJA), a new organisation formed to highlight the extent of the global jihadist movement on this continent.

AJA, headquartered in Washington, D.C. was formed to raise awareness that “the slaughter and kidnapping of Israelis on 7 October is but one arm of a global jihadist movement that extends to Africa and beyond”, according to the organisation’s founder, Dr Charles Jacobs, speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Washington, D.C.

The AJA was formed to highlight the shared origin of these crimes against humanity: Islamist supremacist ideology. “The same ideas motivate Hamas in Gaza; Boko Haram in Nigeria; the Janjaweed and its derivatives in Darfur; and many other actors throughout Africa. All operate in the same manner: raids, murder, torture, burning, rape, and abduction of innocents for ransom or use as slaves,” says Jacobs.

A speaker at the AJA’s recent inaugural conference was Simon Deng, who witnessed the pillaging of his village and was abducted into slavery as a boy in Sudan, eventually escaping. “On 7 October

2023, I watched the news and felt sick,” he wrote recently in *Tablet* magazine. “I knew exactly how those terrified hostages were going to suffer. Israelis had been raped, tortured, mutilated, and burned alive just like my people had been for centuries. I’ll never forget the fires and burned bodies. They looked exactly like what I saw the day my village was destroyed.

“The Jewish people were slaves in Egypt, just down the Nile from where I was a slave. Later, they were slaves in Auschwitz. Now, they are slaves in Gaza. Our people have both survived slavery, and we will continue to survive it. We will triumph over the murderers who do their best to enslave and exterminate us,” says Deng.

AJA hosted its groundbreaking summit at the end of June. There, representatives from the African and Jewish communities joined United States (US) officials and journalists to expose the ideological connections between the “free Palestine” movement in the US and Islamic terrorism in Africa and Israel. “The goal of this terrorism isn’t ‘liberation’ for anyone, nor is it a response to US or Israeli policy; it’s simply Islamic conquest of all non-Muslim nations and people,” says Jacobs.

Attendees at the conference included Olga Meshoe Washington of the Institute for Black Solidarity with Israel and the daughter of South African politician Dr

Kenneth Meshoe; Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center; as well as many other important voices in the human rights space.

In his article, titled “First they came for my people, then they came for the Jews: a South Sudanese former slave recognised the Palestinian pogrom on October 7”, Deng writes, “What Hamas did was precisely like what Arab Sudan’s genocidal government did to my people.” Deng recently went to Israel to “show my solidarity with my Jewish brothers and sisters and with the enslaved hostages. I walked twice from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and back along the highway to show that we Africans love and care about Israel.”

Living in New York, he witnessed protests against Israel. “These manifestations of sympathy for evil should disgust all decent people,” he writes. “They disgust me

because Hamas is made up of the same people, acting on the same colonising and imperial motivations, who enslaved me and murdered four million of my black brothers and sisters.”

Jacob says such atrocities in Africa have been called a “silent genocide” because they have been “shockingly ignored and under-reported” in the West. He has long fought for the rights of the voiceless in Africa, helping Christian abolitionists

hostages of global jihad.”

The scourge is closer to home than one might think, and Jacobs hopes the South African Jewish community will highlight this. He says most Christians murdered for their faith in 2023 were killed in Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, on South Africa’s border, ISIS-Mozambique, also called Ansar al-Sunna, is a jihadist group that seeks the overthrow of the Mozambiquan government and the establishment of a strict Islamic state. The Mozambiquans have experienced mass killings, kidnappings, and burning down of churches and houses.

During the organisation’s recent conference, “we visited several Congressional offices, explained that we wanted Congress to pass a resolution condemning the jihad currently taking place in nine African countries, including the killing, burning, raping, and kidnapping of innocent Africans. We got some good press from both days,” says Jacobs.

“Olga Washington, who is one of our most eloquent speakers and attended the conference, is from South Africa and knows about African Zionism and its foes,” he says. “The South African Christian community mirrors so many other communities in Africa, many of whom are siding with Israel and are experiencing Islamist assaults.”

At this point, the organisation is “in start-up mode, raising funds, gaining supporters from across the political spectrum; building our social media; and connecting with news sources in Africa so we can report on the ongoing assaults to inform Americans,” says Jacobs. “We have just published a fundamental critique of ‘intersectionality’, where ‘Islamophobia’ is the shield that protects Arab and Muslim human rights violators from criticism. It functions as a rhetorical sword to shame any who dare acknowledge the plight of the victims of jihad, even when those victims are Muslims.”

The organisation wants to pair Jews and Africans in different cities, so they can work together. “And, of course, we need to broadcast the horrors constantly taking place in Africa that the media won’t report, due to ‘Islamophobia’,” says Jacobs.

He recalls that “years ago, I had the privilege of speaking to leaders of the Jewish community in Cape Town. Given the current situation and the fire storm of antisemitism around the world, I worry for the community. I hope you can form an alliance with African Christians, and I’d love it if you became part of our movement.”

“True survivors aren’t victims,” says Deng. “Both Africans and Israelis stand tall and won’t rest until all of our people are free. Our Jewish brothers can count on us to be there for them.”



Dr Charles Jacobs speaking at the African-Jewish Alliance Summit

Orthodox Jews rubbed raw by enforced enlistment

ELKA COHEN

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant confirmed on Tuesday, 9 July, that the military would urgently embark on drafting the ultra-Orthodox. The decision to bolster the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) ranks over coming months with ultra-Orthodox was finalised in a meeting with IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi and endorsed by Gallant.

The statement came just nine days after tens of thousands of ultra-Orthodox protesters crammed the streets of Jerusalem in anger at the Supreme Court ruling of mandatory military conscription.

Gallant’s approval marks a historical shift that reflects the necessity for defence. Young haredi men now have a legal obligation to join their secular peers and serve in the Israeli army. In navigating the intricate social complexities, the IDF ensures that “haredi soldiers can preserve their lifestyle amidst their service”.

The haredi community is close to a million-strong, making up 12% of the population. More than 60 000 of these young men are registered as yeshiva students, which not only granted them exemption from military service, but also made them eligible for significant government benefits.

Draft exemption has been a long-standing point of contention that has caused massive political and societal friction. While the strained IDF faces ongoing war in Gaza and a possible second war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, hundreds of thousands of reservists are being called up for duty, bringing this issue to a head.

“Israel’s IDF soldiers are the greatest heroes of the Jewish people,” says Rabbi Yehuda Stern of Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg. He

knows many young men who serve as reservists as part of the Hesder Yeshiva programme.

Hesder is “A five-year programme that includes military service, where you study for 18 months before and after an 18-month army service,” Stern says.

Due to the mass number of students on this programme, yeshiva leadership together with the IDF have managed to put higher standards of halacha in place in the army for these students.

“However, a five-year commitment to the programme isn’t something everyone is keen to sign up for,” says Stern.

“Catering to the religious community has always been – and still is – a challenge for the IDF,” he says. “Yeshiva students require a higher level of standard with regards to *kashrus*, davening times, as well as the separation of genders, both in bases and at posts. This isn’t something that the army is always equipped for.”

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the government recognised and even subsidised yeshiva and Torah learning institutions. According to Stern, “These students have been given exemptions from serving in the army, as it’s common belief that Torah, too, brings protection to Israel and to the Jewish people worldwide. Both IDF soldiers on the frontline and Torah students are integral for the continued success of the country and its safety.

“Israel is a miraculous country,” Stern says, “that has thrived in spite of the most compromising and challenging circumstances due to both physical and spiritual protection, ensuring its continued safety.

“The Jewish people have always been diverse; this is what makes us

unique. These are challenging times for our people, but we must remind ourselves that Jewish unity is the greatest strength we have.”

He believes the only way for the country to thrive is the government’s continued recognition of the different communities living there.

Says Rabbi Dovid Hazdan of Great Park Shul, “This historical issue runs deep in the hearts and minds of the people of Israel. But after decades of debate, it’s sad to be divided amidst a

Hazdan. “The concern now is the impact of this issue on the morale of the people as a whole.”

A rabbi working at a yeshiva in Israel, who prefers to remain anonymous, has many students serving in the army. His children, too, are serving in the IDF, so it hits home on a personal level.

“If I had a magic wand that would make every haredi Jew serve in the army, I’m not sure I’d wave it,” he says.



Haredi Orthodox men protesting against being drafted into the Israel Defense Forces

war when everyone should be pulling together.”

Unfortunately, many ultra-Orthodox students take advantage of their military leniency or deferment, using it to get out of military service altogether.

“Many in the haredi community who balance study of Torah with army service make it more palatable to society that they’re using their time for study along with military service, or at least community service,” he says.

“Every person has a responsibility to defend Israel, and no Israeli should be walking away from that responsibility completely,” says

“As someone who deeply believes in Torah learning, I’m torn myself. I live in a world that’s very nationalistic and religiously Zionist, and in this emotionally charged time, absolutist statements can become divisive and painful.”

It’s tough to try to put such complex issues into perspective, he says. He aims to highlight the subtleties in a balanced way, without clobbering people with ideological stances in a way that’s polarising or sectarian.

“Feelings are raw for thousands of Israelis,” he says. Indeed, we’re living through painful and trying times.

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UK and France turn left, Jews at crossroads

OPINION **STEVEN GRUZZ**

This year, about 90 countries are holding – or have held – an election. That’s almost half the states in the world going to the polls. Longtime ruling parties have been dislodged from outright majorities in South Africa and India, forcing them into coalitions.

The United States (US) will pit an incumbent octogenarian against a septuagenarian in November, unless President Joe Biden is somehow forced out of the race due to his age and health.

In the past week, there was a sea-change votes in the United Kingdom (UK) and France, both of which have sizeable Jewish populations. Let’s consider how these two recent elections and their results affect their respective Jewish communities, some of which appear to have short memories.

After 14 years of rule by the Conservative Party – from 2010 to 2015 in coalition with the Liberal Democrats – British voters emphatically swept Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party into power on 4 July. The Conservatives were decimated. Labour gained 211 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons, for a total of 411 seats, while the Tories under Rishi Sunak went from 365 seats to just 121. King Charles III has already appointed Starmer as prime minister.

The Jewish community, numbering 287 360 people in the 2021 census, barely 0.5% of the population, had previously flocked to the Tories, but many have swung back to Starmer’s Labour.

It’s not too long ago that the unapologetically anti-Israel Jeremy Corbyn was leading the Labour Party – from 2015 to 2020. Many left-leaning Jews felt extremely uncomfortable in the party, with some high-profile walkouts, resignations, and defections. They accused Corbyn and his acolytes of systemic antisemitism, supporting Islamist terrorists, and making life intolerable for Jews within Labour’s ranks. Starmer has made concerted efforts to combat antisemitism in making Labour electable. I’m sure few in the Jewish community celebrated when Corbyn won as an independent in Islington in London, infamously saying, “Palestine is on the ballot”.

The Conservatives remained steadfast supporters of Israel in spite of coming under considerable popular pressure as the war against Hamas has progressed since October 2023. We should, however, now expect a different approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In its 2024 election manifesto, Labour said, “Long-term peace and security in the Middle East will be an immediate focus. Labour will continue to push for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, the upholding of international law, and a rapid increase of aid into Gaza. Palestinian statehood is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people. It’s not in the gift of any neighbour, and is also essential to the long-term security of Israel. We are committed to recognising a Palestinian state as a contribution to a renewed peace process which results in a two-state solution with a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state.” Notice, once again, that it doesn’t say that Israel should be a Jewish state.

The Jewish community may take some comfort in the fact that Starmer’s wife, Lady Victoria, is Jewish. The family has a regular

Shabbat dinner on Friday nights. They belong to the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in St Johns Wood, London. Starmer has said he will continue to carve out this time for rest and family connection, something Sunak belittled him for in the election campaign.

Turning to France, it has between 480 000 and 550 000 Jews, depending on your definitions. This is 0.4% of the population, mostly Mizrachi and Sephardi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East expelled after 1948 from Arab countries.



New British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer

After a drubbing from the right-wing National Rally (RN) party in European parliamentary elections in June, French President Emmanuel Macron gambled on calling a snap election. France’s electoral system mandates two rounds of voting a week apart for parliamentarians. Before the second round on 7 July, many candidates from either Macron’s Renaissance Party or the left-wing New Popular Front bloc pulled out of the elections to increase the chances of an anti-RN candidate winning in each constituency. This is a tradition in French politics, to thwart the right.

It backfired on Macron. His centrists were beaten into second place by the leftists, with perennial challenger Marine Le Pen’s RN coming in an unexpected third, having won in the first round. France thus has a hung Parliament with no clear solution to form a ruling coalition, and the Paris Olympic Games are just three weeks away.

For the Jews in this election, it was an agonising choice. It led, somewhat bizarrely, to Jews being urged to vote for RN, with Le Pen coming out as a staunch Israel supporter, and stoking fears of Islamism. Many simply couldn’t stomach voting for the RN, with its roots in the antisemitism and Holocaust denialism of Le Pen’s father Jean-Marie. But for many Jews, the left-wing New Popular Front coalition, led by the communist Jean-Luc Mélenchon, is worse. It has been extreme in its antagonism to Israel and its antisemitism, making life very uncomfortable for the Jewish community. Israel is bracing for a new wave of French *olim*; more than 50 000 have moved to Israel in the past decade as antisemitism has soared.

Of course, Jews are small minorities in all these countries – India, South Africa, the US, the UK, and France. Their votes, while not insignificant, don’t matter much. Isn’t it ironic that in the only country with a Jewish majority – Israel – there are no elections in sight for a wounded population demanding accountability after 7 October?

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

The hidden front: Israel’s struggle in the north

OPINION **ROWAN POLOVIN**

Since 7 October, the dominant focus of the international community and global Jewry has been on the unfolding Gaza situation. The events of that day and Israel’s response have been at the forefront of political discussion, mainstream and social media, academia, and various other forums. Consequently, it’s not widely understood that for the past nine months, Israel has been engaged not in a single conflict but in a three-front war – against Hamas and other militant elements in the West Bank, and much more significantly, against Hezbollah along its northern border.

While mercifully not resulting in the kind of carnage experienced by the communities of southern Israel last October, the near-continuous missile attacks from Lebanon have had an extremely disruptive and destructive impact on Israeli society. Since the war began, they have displaced about 100 000 Israelis from the Mediterranean all the way to the Golan Heights, with no prospect of returning to their homes and resuming their lives any time soon. This is in addition to the mounting casualties and infrastructural damage resulting from these almost daily attacks. Post-7/10, Israel and world Jewry have been rightly preoccupied with the plight of the Gaza hostages in the clutches of Hamas terrorists and the urgent need to free them. What also needs critical attention and focus right now is the worrisome situation up north.

remains in a state of continual low-level war. Moreover, the nature of these salvos has become more deadly, including rockets with heavy warheads and, for the first time, explosive drones and surface-to-

Hezbollah has an arsenal of about 150 000 rockets and long-range missiles able to strike deep within Israel. To put that in perspective, that’s more missiles than most countries possess.

air missiles. Hezbollah is believed to have about 100 000 trained fighters. It has built an extensive network of tunnels, bunkers, and other fortified installations and has a large intelligence apparatus. While its status is that of a non-state actor, it’s considered by experts to be the most heavily armed non-state in the world. Then, there is the Iran factor. As a proxy of Iran, a regional power that openly seeks to destroy Israel, Hezbollah is being extensively funded and continually resupplied.

Clearly, this is an untenable situation for Israel, one that cannot be allowed to continue for much longer. No sovereign state can be expected to tolerate continual lethal attacks against its citizenry. To date, it has been possible, with the involvement of the international community, to prevent the situation from escalating into an all-out

regional war involving a major Israeli ground incursion into Lebanon. However, the missile attacks haven’t ceased; on the contrary, they have been significantly stepped up over the past several weeks.

It’s striking, if sadly predictable, how little this has been reported in the mainstream media. With all the attention focused on



Photo: Anwar Amro

Hezbollah has a well stocked arsenal of rockets and long-range missiles

In stark contrast to Hamas and Hezbollah, which strategically place their own civilians directly in harm’s way both to use them as human shields and to exploit any deaths or injuries among them for propaganda purposes, Israel has sought to protect its citizens as much as possible by evacuating them from the war zone. This, however, has come at a heavy price. Jobs have been lost, businesses crippled, whole communities rendered dysfunctional, and many thousands forced to live as refugees within their own country.

Another aspect perhaps not fully appreciated is that Hezbollah poses a far graver existential threat to the Jewish state than Hamas in spite of the horrors the latter has perpetrated. According to the latest assessments, Hezbollah has an arsenal of about 150 000 rockets and long-range missiles able to strike deep within Israel. To put that in perspective, that’s more missiles than most countries possess. Many thousands of these have already been fired in the current conflict, ensuring that Israel’s northern region

• Rowan Polovin is the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation.

Johannesburg’s high and low road – a critical juncture

OPINION

DANIEL SCHAY



The recent national and provincial elections in May 2024 have irrevocably altered South Africa’s political landscape, ushering in an era of a Government of National Unity. This coalition, while a testament to our nation’s democratic resilience, brings with it profound implications for the future governance of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni, particularly considering the African National Congress (ANC) Gauteng’s recent manoeuvres.

Post-election, Gauteng finds itself at a political crossroads, with Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni teetering on the edge of significant change. The reluctance of ANC Gauteng, led by Panyaza Lesufi, to share power in a manner reflective of the proportional votes, raises critical questions about its motives and strategies. Observers suggest Lesufi might be comfortable operating a minority government, possibly relying on clandestine agreements with the Economic Freedom Fighters. Such a pact likely involves promises of increased power in metro councils or lucrative contracts funnelled towards allies, a pattern all too familiar and detrimental.



In Johannesburg, the presence – or lack thereof – of a mayor, installed as a puppet figurehead, further exacerbates the city’s governance crisis. This mayor has served as a smokescreen for corruption and mismanagement, undermining the city’s capacity to deliver basic services and manage its resources effectively. Such leadership is unacceptable, and highlights the urgent need for a re-evaluation of our city’s governance structures.

This path, should it solidify, threatens to exacerbate the existing malaise: rampant corruption, dwindling city revenue, plummeting service delivery, and ineffectual leadership, culminating in a governance crisis that could stifle Johannesburg’s potential. However, another path might be emerging, albeit tentatively. Lesufi has hinted at possible collaboration with the Democratic Alliance (DA) at provincial level, which could open the door for discussions at local government level, paving the way for a more balanced municipal government – a real government of local unity.

A coalition involving the ANC and DA, including the Inkatha Freedom Party, could reshape the administrative framework of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. This model promises greater stability than the current setup, and could usher in an era of governance reflective of our collective electoral voice. Such a government wouldn’t only help curb the excesses of corruption, but also position Johannesburg as a fertile ground for local and international investment.

Johannesburg, historically the engine room of South Africa, is in dire need of robust, transparent governance. The city must reclaim its role as a major hub for business and innovation. To revitalise its economic landscape, Johannesburg must actively work towards creating an environment conducive to business growth and investment. This involves streamlining regulatory processes, enhancing infrastructure, and providing incentives for businesses to establish and expand their operations here.

The potential benefits of a DA-involved government are manifold. Historically, regions under DA leadership have shown better financial management and service delivery. Integrating these strengths into Johannesburg’s governance could enhance operational efficiencies, attract investment, and improve public services, laying a solid foundation for economic revival.

Furthermore, by attracting businesses, Johannesburg can drive employment, thereby

increasing the city’s revenue base. This economic upliftment is essential not only for enhancing living standards but also for funding social outreach programmes that address healthcare and housing disparities among others.

A genuinely cooperative local government could restore faith in Johannesburg’s administration, both domestically and internationally. The city could once again assert itself as a premier African metropolis, capable of attracting global businesses and tourists, thereby revitalising its international standing.

However, the route to such an outcome is fraught with challenges. Negotiations between the ANC and DA will require substantial compromises and a shared commitment to transparency and public accountability. The DA wouldn’t just play a participatory role but one of vigilant oversight, ensuring that the coalition remains committed to its reformative agenda.

Engagement with the broader community will also be vital. As a city, Johannesburg is incredibly diverse, with a myriad social and economic needs that must be addressed comprehensively. Public participation in shaping the city’s future cannot be overstated; it ensures that the policies

enacted are truly reflective of the collective will of the people. This means regular dialogue with community leaders, business owners, and the general public to gain insight and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility towards communal resources and

development projects.

Economically, Johannesburg must capitalise on emerging industries and technologies. Involving the DA in the governance framework could accelerate initiatives around digital infrastructure, green energy, and sustainable urban development. These sectors not only promise economic growth but also position Johannesburg as a leader in innovation and sustainability in Africa.

The importance of maintaining robust checks and balances cannot be understated. A shared governance approach will require constant vigilance to prevent the lapses into mismanagement and corruption that have plagued our city’s administration in the past. The DA’s commitment to accountability and rule of law will be crucial in instituting a governance culture based on ethical leadership and transparent operations.

In conclusion, Johannesburg stands at a pivotal juncture. The decisions made in coming months will determine the

city’s trajectory for decades. As stakeholders in this great city’s future, we must advocate for a governance model that prioritises integrity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Let’s choose the path of collaborative governance, where every vote and voice is respected, and where the prosperity of Johannesburg is the collective goal. This isn’t merely a choice but a responsibility – to our city, our constituents, and to the generations that will inherit this metropolis. It’s

time for a renewed commitment to the city’s future, one that embraces collaboration, transparency, and proactive governance to foster a thriving Johannesburg.

• Daniel Schay is a member of the City Council of Johannesburg, serving as the DA Shadow MMC of Development Planning and Ward Councillor for Ward 72

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France’s left-wing alliance disappoints Jews

SHIRA LI BARTOV – JTA

In a surprise outcome, French voters rejected a far-right party with antisemitic roots, but elevated a left-wing alliance that has faced antisemitism allegations of its own.

The country's most prominent far-left politician, meanwhile, vowed in his victory speech to push to recognise a Palestinian state.

No party won a majority in the second round of France’s parliamentary elections on Sunday, 7 July, in which all 577 seats of the National Assembly were in play. According to *Le Monde*, the left-wing New Popular Front alliance won 182 seats while the centrist Ensemble, backed by President Emmanuel Macron, won 168.

“We will have a prime minister from the New Popular Front,” Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the French far-left leader, posted on X on Sunday night. “We will be able to decide many things by decree. On the international level, we will have to agree to recognise the state of Palestine.”

The far-right National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen, won 143 seats, an underwhelming result for the party after it led the first round of voting a week ago and appeared to be in striking distance of an outright majority. Instead, centrist and left-wing candidates worked together to defeat National Rally by having their candidates drop out of races where the other party had a better chance of winning.

The result is a setback for Le Pen’s party and a relief to the many Jews who consider it radioactive. The party’s founders include Le Pen’s father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has been repeatedly convicted of hate speech and Holocaust denial, and Pierre Bousequet, who served in the Nazi Party’s Waffen-SS. Candidates in this election had also been accused of antisemitism.

But Sunday marked a triumph for Mélenchon,

the leader of the far-left France Unbowed party, who has been accused of dog whistling, echoing antisemitic stereotypes, and dismissing the threat of antisemitism. Even as the French government has reported a surge in attacks on Jews – including more than 360 incidents in the first three months of 2024, a 300% increase from 2023 – Mélenchon called antisemitism in France “residual”, and also repeatedly criticised those demonstrating against antisemitism.

The vote, and result, put many French Jews in an uncomfortable position. Political scientist Jean-Yves Camus said before the vote that he felt “trapped” by the far-left, especially as the more moderate Socialists entered into a coalition with Mélenchon’s party. The leader of France’s centre-right party had likewise made waves by endorsing National Rally.

“We’re quite angry and disappointed,” Camus told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). “As Jews, we feel betrayed, and we think it would have been much better if the Socialist party hadn’t entered into this kind of alliance with the far-left.”

Many French Jews say that rhetoric from the far-left has opened a door to antisemitism. According



to a poll from the American Jewish Committee in Europe, 92% of French Jews believe that France Unbowed has “contributed” to rising antisemitism.

Now, deadlock appears to be in France’s future. Following the race, centrist Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who has Jewish roots, said he planned to step down.

The country’s Jewish community of 500 000 has been shaken since Hamas’s 7 October attack on Israel and Israel’s ensuing military campaign in Gaza, which has destroyed large swaths of the enclave. France has also experienced a spike in antisemitism since 7 October. In a recent incident that rocked the country, two teenage boys were charged with raping a 12-year-old Jewish girl and hurling antisemitic epithets at her.

“Many Jews are very shocked by the events since October, but not everybody is shocked by the same thing,” sociologist Martine Cohen told JTA. “You have people who are shocked by the ongoing war in Gaza, not only by the trauma of the October massacres.”

A shock for some French Jews came in the immediate aftermath of 7 October, when several far-left politicians refused to condemn Hamas’s attack on Israel explicitly. Le Pen, meanwhile, has sought to detoxify her party’s image, renouncing antisemitism, denouncing the Hamas attack, and pushing a pro-Israel position. The party now emphasises anti-immigration and Eurosceptic stances.

CRIF, an umbrella organisation of French Jews, has urged the community to reject both the far-right and far-left. But ahead of Sunday’s vote, faced with the rise of France Unbowed, some prominent Jewish voices called for the community to vote for Le Pen’s party instead. One striking expression of support for National Rally came from Serge Klarsfeld, a French Holocaust survivor famed for hunting down Nazi criminals and pressing for their prosecution.

“The National Rally supports Jews, supports the state of Israel,” Klarsfeld, 88, said in a nationally televised interview last month. “When there’s an anti-Jewish party and a pro-Jewish party, I’ll vote for the pro-Jewish party.”

Alain Finkielkraut, a prominent French philosopher, also said in the magazine *Le Point* that he would “consider the nightmare of having to vote for the National Rally to block antisemitism”. Meanwhile, a group of French Jewish community leaders met Le Pen on Monday.

But elements of National Rally’s antisemitic history resurfaced during the election. Ludivine Daoudi, a National Rally candidate in Normandy, was forced to withdraw from the second round of voting when a photo surfaced of her wearing a Nazi cap emblazoned with a swastika after she won nearly 20% of votes in the first round. Other candidates circulated antisemitic and racist posts on social media.

It’s difficult to ascertain how Jews voted nationally since France bans collecting data on the religion and ethnicity of its citizens. But some areas with large Jewish communities showcased the dilemma Jews faced in this election.

The Parisian suburb of Sarcelles, for example, has both a Jewish neighbourhood that has traditionally voted right-wing, and an immigrant neighbourhood that usually votes for the left. Many of the residents, both Jewish and Muslim, are immigrants from North Africa. Sarcelles handed 27% of its votes to National Rally in the election’s first round – less than the party’s vote share nationwide, but nearly double its support in the district two years ago. In the second round, however, a far-left candidate won the area with more than 60% of the vote.

The candidate, who himself has a Jewish father, chose to campaign in Sarcelles even though his centrist predecessor believed it would go for the right, according to a report in *La Vie*, a French news magazine. He was heckled at a synagogue and told by a Jewish voter, “You are associated with evil. I voted for you two years ago, but now I won’t be able to,” according to the report.

“What if you are in a constituency where there’s no moderate candidate, and you have a choice between Mélenchon’s party and the National Rally?” said Camus ahead of the vote. “What do you do? Do you stay at home? Just say, ‘It’s none of my business?’”

Trudeau appoints Jewish advisor on Canadian Jewish community

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

A Jewish member of Canada’s Parliament was tapped as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s new advisor on the Jewish community and combating antisemitism following a series of violent attacks on synagogues and Jewish schools.

Anthony Housefather’s appointment on Friday, 5 July, came as Canada has experienced a spike in violent antisemitism. Two synagogues in Toronto were attacked last weekend, with windows smashed, and in May, shots were fired at Jewish schools in separate incidents, one in Montreal and one in Toronto. There was a suspected arson at a Vancouver synagogue.

The announcement also came just two weeks after Trudeau’s Liberal Party lost an election in a Toronto-area Liberal stronghold with a substantial Jewish population. The loss was depicted in Canadian media as a message from Jewish Canadians unhappy with the reports of increasing antisemitism and government policies seen as unfriendly to Israel.

Housefather told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that he would seek an all-of-government approach to addressing rising antisemitism, cutting through bureaucracy either through legislation or through moral suasion.

“We say, ‘This is federal, this is municipal’. People are being redirected all over the place and they’re just frustrated,” he said. “We need co-ordination between different levels of government.”

He alluded to reports of harassment of Jewish and pro-Israel students on campuses. “While we cannot make antisemitism disappear, all levels of government, universities, and police can take concrete steps to make Jewish Canadians feel safer in this country,” he said.

Born in Montreal, Housefather attended Herzliah High School, and got law and business degrees. He served as a mayor before entering Parliament in 2015, where he represents a substantially

Jewish riding, or district, in Montreal, Mount Royal. He’s prominent in the Interparliamentary Antisemitism Task Force, and is an outspoken advocate for Israel and Jewish issues.

Housefather has been targeted with antisemitic flyers in the Montreal area he represents, accusing him of being a “neo-Nazi” for his support for Israel, and calling on him to “get out of Canada”.

One of Housefather’s immediate goals in his new position is legislation making blocking entry to a Jewish institution a crime, replicating pandemic-era laws aimed at protesters who sought to keep people from entering hospitals and other medical establishments to get vaccines.

“One criminal offense that I am strongly pushing for in terms of legislation would be what we call bubble legislation, that there’s a protective zone to enter or exit a place of worship, a school, or a community centre,” he said. “If you’re blocking the building, you’re stopping me from exercising my freedom of speech.”

In March, pro-Palestinian protesters sought to block people from attending a presentation at a Toronto synagogue at which realtors pitched the sale of properties in Israel and the West Bank, the latter of which is considered occupied under Canadian law.

Housefather will remain in Parliament and work in parallel with Canada’s special envoy on Holocaust remembrance and combating antisemitism, Deborah Lyons.

“The fight against antisemitism is all hands on deck. Grateful to continue working with [Housefather] – in this new capacity – to take on the immense challenge facing Canada and Canadians,” Lyons posted on X. “Anthony’s dedication to fighting this epidemic of normalised and systemic antisemitism, while also lifting up the Jewish community and its contributions, make him an ideal partner in this work.”

Top Canadian Jewish and pro-Israel bodies, including the Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B’nai B’rith Canada, welcomed the

appointment, as did the Israeli ambassador to Canada. So did Trudeau.

“In recent months, we’ve experienced a disturbing rise in antisemitism across the world, including right here in Canada. This must not continue,” Trudeau said in a statement. “Mr Housefather’s role will be to advise the prime minister and ministers on the development and co-ordination of the government of Canada’s work to combat antisemitism and ensure that Jewish Canadians are able to live with vibrancy, security, and dignity.”

Trudeau, whose centre-left party is plummeting in the polls, is navigating an Israel policy that aims to straddle the support Liberals have for decades enjoyed among the Canadian Jewish community and increasing criticism from the Canadian left for the country’s support of Israel.

“Over the past number of months, the Jewish community has become very unhappy with how all governments have handled antisemitism,” Housefather said in the interview. “It’s a significant step by the prime minister to address the community’s concerns.”

That criticism has come from Housefather as well. He publicly considered ditching the Liberals because most of the party’s members of Parliament voted for a non-binding motion put forward by a party to the Liberals’ left, called the NDP, that would recognise Palestinian statehood. Israel and its allies see the burgeoning movement among left-leaning governments in the West to recognise Palestinian statehood as a reward to Hamas for launching the war against Israel on 7 October. Trudeau’s minority government is propped up by an agreement with the NDP.

Housefather walked back his decision in part because of conversations with Trudeau, who promised to involve him more in policy about antisemitism and Israel.

“I had very, very painful discussions, where we talked about what I felt was not enough action by the government,” Housefather told the CBC at the time. And he said, ‘Come work with me, come work with Deborah Lyons, play a leadership role on this file, and we will fix it.’”

The CBC reported that Housefather’s appointment was delayed because some Liberal Party legislators believed he was too divisive and others wondered what the distinction would be between his work and that of Lyons.

Housefather said his dual role, as a legislator and an advisor, would complement Lyons’ role. “I’ll be able to talk to members of the house and the senate. I’ll be able to deal with our [government] ministers,” he said.



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Abuse and denial: Sandberg screams at world’s silence

LEE TANKLE

Facebook’s former chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, says she was determined to make it clear that “rape isn’t resistance” in her documentary *Screams Before Silence*.

It’s the one thing Sandberg, who made the film focusing on the mass sexual violence perpetrated in the south of Israel by Hamas on 7 October, wants people to take home from watching it.

“This is a film that shouldn’t have needed to be made, because 7 October should never have happened,” said Sandberg in a webinar hosted by the United States Union of Reform Judaism about the film.

“Simultaneously, the denialism that happened on 8 October and the days that followed really shouldn’t have happened,” Sandberg said. “I was shocked by what happened on 7 October, but was even more shocked by what happened afterwards and the world’s reaction. This film is us as a community standing in solidarity for what we know to be true, which is that we should never tolerate sexual violence as part of any situation – in wartime or peacetime – anywhere in

the world.” Sandberg said the idea behind the documentary was that even though people may have seen reports about the sexual violence committed by Hamas on 7 October, it would give them a chance to hear and experience the devastation that Hamas caused that day. It was critical, she said, because “sadly, most of the victims of these crimes have died, most of the victims of these crimes aren’t with us. Our goal was to give the first-hand witnesses, the eyewitnesses, a chance to tell their story.” She included the incredibly brave Amit Soussana, who is to date the only survivor who was sexually assaulted and has spoken out about the sexual abuse.

Sandberg said the film was merely a starting point in the process of bearing witness to the atrocities. “If we can see the denial of these atrocities now, can you imagine what it will be in 80 years, in 100 years’ time? Can you see how important this moment is, not just for the survival of the Jewish people, but for the survival of democracy? People seeing the devastation shows the world what we’re up against. Right now, the world thinks this is Israel’s fight and a Jewish fight, but it’s a

fight for democracy around the world.

“We know that the hostages being held in Gaza are facing sexual violence. Silence on this issue isn’t acceptable. Sexual violence violates a nation. There’s something so primal about the violation sexually of women. It terrorises nations. It breaks communities apart. When people are left alive, they’re pregnant, sometimes their husbands walk away from them, destroying communities. But what’s worse is that it’s free. You don’t have to buy a rocket, you don’t have to buy a missile. You don’t have to buy a gun. This is a free weapon, and it’s happening right now to our hostages in Gaza.”

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, the founder and president of Shurat HaDin – Israel Law Center, said in a *SA Jewish Report* webinar on Sunday, 7 July, “Rape as a weapon of war is something you find in every armed conflict. You’ll find it when they took over villages in Iraq and Syria, and you’ll find it in



Amit Soussana in *Screams Before Silence*

the Ukraine and Russia war. “But there was nothing like 7 October, because they didn’t just rape the women, they nailed them to trees and raped them, they butchered them while they were raping them, they beheaded them after they raped them, and then they burned their bodies. This wasn’t just to humiliate

or to show that you are an enemy, this was abuse that we have never seen before.” As a self-proclaimed progressive feminist herself, Sandberg is extremely disappointed in the feminist movement since 7 October. “The movement that taught us that we believe women, the movement that taught us that we need to pay attention to micro biases. I believe the same movement needs to look at this and say screaming ‘From the river to the sea’ and advocating for genocide of the Jewish people is unacceptable.”

Koleinu SA, a non-profit group that assists victims of abuse, has been faced with a similar situation of South African feminist organisations not wanting to speak out against the sexual violence committed by Hamas on 7 October. Co-founders Rozanne Sack and Wendy Hendler said on the *SA Jewish Report* webinar, “Women’s organisations in South Africa have been shockingly silent, horrendously and unacceptably and just heartbreakingly silent.

“How dare organisations that claim to stand up for women’s rights keep silent! How dare they justify it! How dare they not condemn it!” said Sack. “We aren’t interested in your politics and what countries you like or dislike. We’re interested in the facts. We want to hear that rape, sexual torture, and violation is unacceptable in any context, no matter what.”

Sandberg said she found it most hurtful when movements which boast progressive values ask where the victims of these crimes are, and why they aren’t speaking out. Then, they claim these atrocities never happened because no victims are talking about it. It’s because “the victims are dead. Hamas killed 1 200 people. Almost all the victims of 7 October have died or are in captivity.”

She believes the reason feminist organisations and governments have been silent about the sexual violence is because of “antisemitism, pure and simple”. “This film gives people the best chance we can give to bear witness themselves. The silence of the world is truly deafening. Some things I know are complicated, but it shouldn’t be so complicated to condemn sexual violence wherever and whenever it takes place. The truth is that Hamas used rape, assault, and mutilation in a brutal rampage of sexual violence.”

Judaica found in Gaza a conundrum for soldiers

DEBORAH DANAN – JTA

The commander of a small Israeli military drone unit in Gaza was on a routine reconnaissance mission with his team in an apartment in Rafah when one of his soldiers came across an object that looked strikingly out of place: a wood laminate challah board framed with the biblical injunction to “remember the Shabbat” in gold lettering, in Hebrew and English.

The commander knew that he was allowed to take property only if he needed to use it to fight the war, which didn’t apply here. But he wasn’t sure what to do. “We’re definitely not allowed to take them as souvenirs or anything like that,” said the soldier, named Yoya. Military regulations prohibit soldiers from giving their full names to the press. “Stealing is forbidden, and it’s also immoral. But in this case, when I saw that this was a Jewish item, I said, ‘This can’t be theirs.’”

So he tried to locate the owner of the challah board by posting a photo of it on Facebook. While the post garnered 1 400 reactions and nearly 250 comments, nobody claimed the ritual object.

Similar posts have cropped up in the more than eight months since Israel began its ground invasion of Gaza at the end of October 2023. Two weeks before Passover, another post made the rounds on social media, and was published in an Israeli news outlet, calling for the owners of a seder plate found in a home in Khan Younis to claim their lost property.

In December, Yoya’s brother, Elisha, also a soldier with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), found a Chanukah menorah in the shape of a *hamsa*, a hand-shaped symbol, in a home in Khan Younis. The post said, without elaborating, that the menorah had “probably been taken on 7 October” amid looting during the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel.

Other troops who have encountered Judaica in Gaza have made the same assumption. Major (reserves) Maor Lavi likewise found a menorah in what he described as the home of a terrorist in Gaza City’s Shejaiya neighbourhood, alongside weapons, military uniforms, and equipment. Lavi told Israel’s public broadcaster, Kan, that he had a “gut feeling” it was stolen on 7 October.

“Next to the bed, we just saw the menorah sticking out on top of one of the dressers. We took it,” Lavi said. “I would really want to return it to its owner and find the person, the family it belongs to.”

His unit lit the menorah on the seventh and eighth nights of Chanukah. Shortly after the incident, Lavi, a father of four, was killed.

In response to inquiries, the IDF detailed its regulations regarding seizing property, though it didn’t specifically address the issue of Judaica. More broadly, Israeli military looting has been an issue during the war.

In February, IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi called on soldiers “not to take anything that isn’t ours – be it a souvenir or a piece of military equipment”. Three months later, Israel’s military advocate general, Major-General Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, announced that the IDF was investigating 70 incidents of suspected violations of the laws of war by IDF soldiers, including looting. Several soldiers have been indicted for alleged

looting from Palestinians in recent years, including during operations in Gaza.

“As part of the fighting and subject to the military protocols, it’s possible to use enemy property for military necessity, as well as take property that belongs to the terrorist organisations subject to the protocols regarding booty of war,” the spokesperson said. “Taking property in ways that are not in accordance with army protocols is prohibited by law. Incidents in which forces didn’t behave in accordance with protocols and the law will be examined.”

Lieutenant Colonel (reserves) Maurice Hirsch, the former director of the IDF’s Military Prosecution in the West Bank, noted that though there was no way to fully ascertain whether the menorah and objects like it were stolen, nor whether they were taken on 7 October or beforehand, there’s evidence of looting of Israeli homes and businesses by Palestinians on 7 October. Prior to the attack, more than 18 000 Gaza Palestinians worked legally in Israel, so it’s possible they acquired the items then.

According to its author, Asa Kasher, violations like looting fly in the face of the IDF’s code of ethics, which stresses the “purity of arms”.

“It means that you use your military force only for certain purposes, for the purposes of fighting a war which is justified,” he said. “And looting is using your force in a wrong way, and therefore it’s absolutely forbidden.”

But Kasher said that given the sheer scale of the current war – in which 300 000 reservists were called up in addition to regular soldiers – isolated incidents of looting, even if they number in the dozens, are statistically negligible and not indicative of the military’s broader conduct.

“It’s not the IDF. It’s the criminal margins that are expected if you have that quantity of people participating,” he said.

In the case of Jewish ritual artifacts, there is “cause to believe that they have been stolen and so soldiers would be entitled to seize those items and attempt to return them to their lawful owners”, Hirsch said. He added that as they attempt to return the items, the soldiers need to provide detailed documentation of where the objects were discovered, so that if the original owners aren’t identified, the artifacts could potentially be returned to the place from which they were taken.

However, he said the IDF may harbour concerns over making exceptions for Judaica and ritual items, which “could give rise to a lapse of judgement by the soldiers where they would be taking property which isn’t even reasonably thought to be stolen – and that’s looting.”

Kasher asserts that a formal procedure should be in place for handling such items, where soldiers report them up the chain of command rather than taking them to their homes. “If taking the item is justified, it must be done by the state, not the soldier,” he said.

To date, the seder plate and menorahs all lie unclaimed. Still, that hasn’t dampened Yoya’s hope to find the owner of the challah board.

“I really hope we find who it belongs to, because it definitely doesn’t belong in Rafah,” he said.



A seder plate found in Gaza

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Cowan does a lot for Egoli Youth Empowerment, "but my love is being at the grassroots, coaching the girls every Saturday morning", she says. Up to 30 girls train under her tutelage at the University of Johannesburg's

"She told one of the girls a few weeks later that I was the first person who never gave up on her. She came to

The "sports crazy" Cowan has never shied away from trying any sport, and gave squash a go at a time when it was becoming popular, with squash centres being built everywhere. "The reason I've made this my lifelong sport is that it offers so much in a short period. Forty-five minutes of hard squash is worth hours of any other sport."

"Egoli has an unbelievable management team who either work for no remuneration or just a small stipend," Cowan says. "The founder of the programme, Glenn Lazarus, is the force behind the drive to expand our reach to empower more disempowered youth. We've grown so much in the short time we have been in existence, so we need to keep on growing, thereby empowering more people who in turn empower others."

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Hermanus not just for holidays as community grows

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Leaders in Hermanus are praising the community’s revival, saying that its numbers, spirit, and communal involvement are much improved compared to 10 years ago.

A constant concern for South Africa’s Jewish community is the number of people leaving the country in pursuit of greener pastures. But that’s not the only story to be told. In the wake of the 2022 Western Cape “semigration project” spearheaded by the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, hundreds of Johannesburg residents have moved to Cape Town and its surrounds.

Among those is a couple who moved to Hermanus after meeting Dave Rade and Victor Fish, a duo dedicated to growing the Hermanus Hebrew Congregation (HHC), at a semigration expo. Others have followed suit. “Since the COVID-19 pandemic, five families have also come from KwaZulu-Natal and various couples have come to live in Hermanus, most of whom have become part of the shul,” says Fish.

Rade says the community’s average age has decreased to about 68, where it was 75 a decade ago. Though young Jewish families with kids aren’t part of the area’s permanent demographic owing to the lack of Jewish schools, many visit over the holidays.

Offering everything from whale watching to mountain biking to golfing, Hermanus is no longer just for holidaymakers. It’s steadily becoming a popular retirement hub for high-net-worth individuals of various faiths. Relatively speaking, the town’s Jewish community may still be small in number – with 55 shul members and about 30 other Jewish residents – but there’s a definite sense of growth. What’s more, those who move to the quaint, safe, and breathtaking coastal town rarely leave its shores, say Rade and Fish.

That has much to do with the welcoming nature of the congregation, which has undergone multiple changes since its beginnings in 1906. It faced a number of challenges including being shut down for 19 years until its doors were reopened in 1997. In 2008, a new shul was consecrated. Today the HHC comprises a shul and Jewish centre including a fully functional kosher kitchen as well as a three-bedroom house for a visiting rabbi.

Hermanus also has a fully functional Jewish cemetery. Last year, the community invested in a project to lay stones flat due to vandalism across the Jewish and non-Jewish sections.

Ultimately, the community’s true value lies in its welcoming nature. This was the case for Louise and Rob Sinclair who moved from La Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal, to Hermanus in 2022. “Hermanus has always held a special place in our hearts as we met in Onrus on Habonim camp about 50 years ago,” Louise says. “I was a *channie*,



Victor Fish standing in front of the Hermanus Hebrew Congregation

Rob was a life guard, and the rest is history. When we decided to relocate from KwaZulu-Natal, this was where we decided to put down roots.”

Once the couple had made their decision, they contacted the HHC and were welcomed from the moment they arrived in spite of Rob’s Reform background. “We both know that we could never have settled this easily and well if not for the support of the Jewish community here,” Louise says.

“We arrived erev Pesach 2022, went to shul on Friday night, and had invitations to seders the next day. I think that says it all. We’ve witnessed many other new arrivals in Hermanus, and the warmth and welcoming spirit of this community is truly something special.”

Originally from Johannesburg, Rodal lived in Cape Town for 20 years before moving to Hermanus in 2002. He immediately became involved with the shul, and remains integral to its operations.

“I’ve been a holiday member for the past 23 years,” says Fish, who now serves as the shul’s vice-chairperson. “We moved down here four and a half years ago, and I’ve been actively involved ever since.”

Fish, who regularly attended Great Park Shul in Johannesburg, says that although they had a holiday home in Hermanus, he and his wife never planned to live there. “We came down just before COVID-19, and we landed up staying here forever,” he laughs. “It’s an incredible town. I’ve just gained in my quality of life here.”

“Together, David and I helped grow Friday night services every week, Wednesday Shacharit services and *yom tavim*, and it’s been wonderful. We’re trying to attract more and more people to come to shul and to put on *tefillin*. We work hard at bringing people into the community.” There’s no permanent rabbi, with services conducted by the members themselves.

A visiting rabbi from Israel takes services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Over the December and January summer holidays, local and international visitors ensure a packed house, with attendees raving about services. The shul also hosts regular functions including Lag B’Omer braais and communal *chaggim* celebrations.

“We all know each other, and we’re supportive of one another,” say

Rodal and Fish. When community members lose loved ones or are going through trying times, everyone rallies around them and provides assistance, they say. People

also step up when it comes to giving back to those less fortunate in Hermanus, with a recent blanket drive yielding over more than 100 blankets for the poor.

The community has also been embraced by the broader Hermanus population. “A number of years ago we had one of our regular mountain fires. This one came very close to the shul,” Rodal says. “People stopped and helped. They ran inside the shul, and helped us carry out *chumashim* and Torahs and so on. There were coloured people, Christian people, people from many backgrounds. They were just happy that they could help.”

In the wake of the 7 October massacre in Israel, the community was also heartened by the support it received from members of the Evangelical church. “We planned a candle lighting on the following Friday night, and they came in and brought us flowers and messages,” says Fish. “They have remained supportive and kept in contact with us. It’s special.”

single together.

“Mbuzeni is Zulu, and doesn’t speak that much English, but he’s a brilliant musician, and it has been amazing working together,” says Klawansky. “We’re taking the Hebrew texts, he’s singing in Zulu, and Matt’s producing it, and we just we see how it moves. Mbuzeni will play an instrumental, I’ll hear a melody, and he’ll sing over the melody.”

Klawansky says one of the interesting things about the South African music scene is that white artists are increasingly collaborating with black artists. The SAMA nomination and induction into the Recording Academy allows her to increase her artistic collaboration.

“Collaborating in general is an interesting process. You don’t just collaborate with anyone, you find someone who you connect with, resonate with, who you’re inspired by, and who is a good musician. This can take your music to a more global level, which is what Matt and I are doing with Mbuzeni,” she says.

“Since being inducted into the Recording Academy, I’ve also been able to network with music artists from around the world, and I’ve been connecting with other Jewish musicians from around the world.”

Klawansky says many Jewish artists in the Recording Academy are trying to introduce a Jewish music category to the Grammy’s because “it’s hard for it to be considered for awards because it doesn’t fit into a particular category, it has to be considered something else. Hebrew music is considered in the European global category, for example.”

“It’s cool to be a Jewish South African musician and to be able to talk to these other Jewish artists because it almost feels like it’s hipper and more relevant to be in South Africa than in New York,” she says.

Being inducted into the Recording Academy has motivated Klawansky to work on making music while continuing to run her music school for children and teach the magic of music to future generations.

Grammy induction music to Breindy’s ears

LEE TANKLE

Breindy Klawansky, a Johannesburg-based musician who sings songs she composes in biblical Hebrew, was inducted into the Recording Academy or Grammy’s class of 2024 at the end of June.

“It’s exciting,” Klawansky told the *SA Jewish Report*. Not only does she get to submit her music for consideration at the Grammy Awards, she can also submit music on behalf of other people.

But it hasn’t changed how she sees her music, Klawansky says, rather “it changes the way other people see my music. It can make them think.”

She’s proud, she says, because she’s not only representing South African music, but Jewish music. Klawansky sings her compositions only in biblical Hebrew because “I resonate with the words. The words have so much weight and beauty to them. Composing the melody to these words just makes the most sense.

“My music is steeped in Jewish culture, and since I sing in biblical Hebrew, it’s hard to separate it from that,” says Klawansky, “But I also believe that music can and should be seen for what it is. If someone isn’t Jewish or doesn’t understand the words and meanings of the lyrics, they can still appreciate the music.”

The process of getting inducted into the Recording Academy was quite lengthy. Klawansky had to get recommendations from two peers in the music industry and provide the academy with information about her music career, her social media personae, and her live performances.

Klawansky found out about it on 26 June from composer Professor Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph, a mentor of hers and one of the people who gave her a recommendation to the Recording Academy.

“I was sitting at home doing homework with my children, and I opened my email to see a message from the Recording Academy saying that I was going to be inducted,” said Klawansky.

Klawansky has been working on her music since 2011 with her husband, Matt, after studying music at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The pair have released two albums and several singles together. They adhere to the halachic principle of *Kol Isha*, meaning that the music is primarily meant to be heard by and performed by women.

In 2019, they were nominated for Best Alternative Album at the South African Music Awards (SAMA) for their 2018 album *Ruth Ave*.

The SAMA nomination allowed them to collaborate with Maskandi SAMA-nominated artist Mbuzeni Mkhize on a



Class of 2024 Grammy inductee, Breindy Klawansky

Photo: Paul Shiakallis

Being a ‘mane’ man – beards make a comeback

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

From stubble to a full-blown beard, 86% of singles prefer their men to have facial hair, according to a recent Dating.com survey, but keeping it well-groomed is a must. With a rising number of men seeking beard transplants and a growing prevalence of males frequenting barbershops for beard maintenance, it seems the trend is catching on.

A snap poll of women in the community reinforced these findings. “I like a beard on a man,” said one respondent. “I think if he goes to a barber and has it trimmed and manscaped, then it looks really nice, professional, and quite sexy. If men look after their beards, then the hair is soft and not so scratchy on your face. Obviously, it doesn’t suit every man, but it suits my man!”

Many emphasised the need for neatness. “Short stubble looks nice,” one woman said, “anything longer looks unkempt.” Another respondent even cast doubt on the trustworthiness of men without facial hair. “Beards and any facial hair are more rugged and manly somehow, cleanshaven is too ‘smooth,’” she said. Some respondents, however, did prefer their man’s face to be a hair-free zone.

Regardless of societal preferences, not all men are able to grow a full beard, and some find their efforts are always uneven. Enter the beard transplant. This allows men to design a tailor-made beard and moustache

which is then transplanted under topical anaesthetic. It’s a relatively simple and almost painless procedure that uses their own hair follicles.

“There’s been a surge in the number of patients consulting us for beard transplants, which has become more common particularly in the past two years,” says Dr Kashmal Kalan, the medical director of

who cannot grow a full beard often feel like their masculinity is taken away – almost like a male lion without his mane. As much as make-up is a nice accessory for females, a well-groomed beard is almost ‘make-up’ for a male. A lot of people have patchy beards, especially on the cheek areas and this has become the most common reason for undergoing the procedure.”

Cape Town-based sex coach, Nicki Brivik explains why facial hair is generally considered to be a mark of masculinity. “Beards have always been in vogue because they’re an obvious sign of virility and sexual maturity,” she says. Studies have found that men who have light stubble are the most

attractive, she says, which is less aggressive but still shows your virility.

Interestingly, she says, facial hair seems to be more desirable among single women, with many in long-term relationships indicating that they prefer their partners to be cleanshaven. “Maybe that’s because now that you’ve got them to settle down, you don’t want them to be as attractive to other women,” she laughs. It also may have

something to do with the discomfort of kissing a man with a scratchy beard.

Nonetheless, the rise in the popularity of beards is also about fashion, Brivik says, pointing out that such trends are more nuanced than the results of studies. “People today are enjoying showing their individuality more, and there’s an acceptance of men paying attention to their looks. Whereas it never used to be very masculine to do that, now it’s like a badge of honour to go to increasingly popular barbershops for some grooming, whether it’s for a beard or hair trim or a brow, ear, or nose wax.”

Women today like men to pay attention to what they look like, and it’s almost expected, Brivik says. There’s a perception that if you take care of yourself, you’ll take care of them. “My clients also often say, ‘Why should I look after myself if he doesn’t look after himself?’ which is also why they find men who take care of themselves attractive. Liking what you look like and who you are is sexy to someone else, it gives you confidence and makes you feel good.”

Indeed, says Kalan, beard transplants are intrinsically linked to self-image. “A lot of patients have been bullied and ridiculed for not being able to grow a beard, and this affects their self-confidence and self-esteem,” he says. As Brivik points out, “beard transplants say more about the man’s view of himself than about what women find attractive.”

Regardless, people nowadays are more open to variety, which wasn’t the case before, especially when it came to men, Brivik says. “We were so, ‘this is the way it should be’ and there was only stubble, or a full beard, and you would fit into a certain culture. Now

people don’t necessarily pigeonhole you, there’s an openness to men having any kind of facial hair – or none at all – and allowing change and variety.”

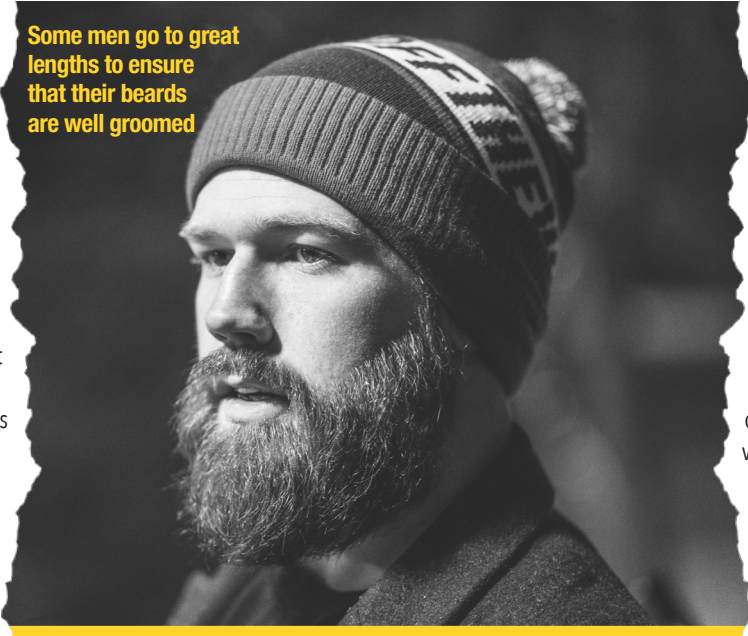
However, one arena where beard trends have remained fairly stable is among Orthodox Jews, particularly rabbis. According to Rabbi Ari Kievman of Chabad Sandton Central, the origin of this can be traced back to the Torah, which forbids “destroying” the edge of our beards.

“Beards are a staple of the hasidic appearance,” says Kievman. “However, there are many who are pious and don’t have a beard.”

While, in Judaism, it’s forbidden to shave with a blade, meaning that a razor is forbidden for men, there are ways around this today. “There’s much halachic discussion on which specific electric shavers are permitted based on their mechanisms,” says Kievman.

The Talmud refers to beards as *hadrat panim* (splendour of the face), suggesting that Judaism perceives beards as attractive, Kievman says. Yet, he acknowledges that such perceptions come down to personal preferences.

Ultimately, the mark of a man is not his physical appearance but rather how he conducts himself. This is reflected in an anecdote Kievman shares about a chassid who once questioned the Satmar Rebbe about the religiosity of another Jew who didn’t have a beard. The Rebbe’s response was telling. “When he comes to heaven they may ask, ‘Jew, Jew, where was your beard?’ But, when you come before the Heavenly throne, they will ask you, ‘Beard, beard, where was your Jew?’”



Some men go to great lengths to ensure that their beards are well groomed

leading hair restoration clinic Alvi Armani South Africa situated in Sandton. “Gents in their late 20s to early 40s are the most common age group consulting us for beard transplants. This is becoming a common trend across all ethnicities, especially in the Caucasian population.”

Kalan says in his experience, the desire for a fuller and thicker beard is rooted in a man’s desire to appear more masculine. “Men

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Three Cape schools unite for international accreditation

LEE TANKLE

Three Cape Town Jewish schools: Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School (PJJDs); Sinai Academy; and Cape Town Torah High (CTTH) have come together to create South Africa's first Jewish internationally accredited school – the Jewish International School.



These Cape schools are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in the United States, offering global accreditation equivalent to the American International School of Cape Town.

"From a practical, educational, and communal point of view, it made good sense to strengthen each of our offerings and work together, pulling resources together to expand the school, rather than working in silos," said Rebbetzin Zeesy Deren, the director of Sinai Academy, on behalf of all three schools.

It wasn't an easy move for the schools to make, said Deren, taking "years of discussion and debate, Zoom meetings over the COVID-19 pandemic, and many meetings afterwards" to come to this leap of faith to proceed and overcome any obstacles.

"Each school had a great product on its own, but we thought it would be even better together as the only Jewish international school in South Africa with the highest level of a dual curriculum in Torah and general studies," said Deren. "We felt it would be better for the

community, the students, the families, the staff, and ultimately the future growth of this school to unify our schools. We also believe that it will also attract many more families to Cape Town."

In 2018, CTTH and Sinai Academy decided to do their accreditation process together. "We felt it would be beneficial for the schools to officially and legally combine as one to gain a communal understanding of Torah education in Cape Town," said Deren.

The accreditors visited PJJDs as well as CTTH and Sinai Academy. That visit sparked the idea for Sinai, CTTH and PJJDs to become one school officially. In 2020, the directors of PJJDs approached Rabbi Dovid Wineberg, the chairperson of the CTTH board and asked if it would consider amalgamating the schools and discussions began. Then, in 2024, the new wider board with representation from all three schools became the board of the Jewish International School of Cape Town, which brings the three schools together under one management system.

Deren said that though the three schools worked together informally for years, the move to unify is already showing great benefits for students, staff members, and parents.

"The families are benefiting from systemic family/children discounts. For example, multiple children on different campuses in primary and high schools are all seen as one family, as opposed to the past when it was a case of each campus on its own," said Deren.

In spite of each school still operating from its respective campus – PJJDs in Camps Bay; Sinai Academy in Blouberg Rise; and CTTH in Gardens, the goal is to have a joint campus with the high school and junior school in one place.

"There's some crossover when it comes to teachers," said Deren, "but generally, each campus needs its staff and there isn't extra capacity for sharing of teachers. Where there is capacity, it will be considered. There may be even more opportunity for this sharing of resources in certain areas, with a shared campus in the future, hopefully."

The school has recently celebrated a family sports day and school-wide staff training afternoon so that all the teachers across the three schools could come together and share ideas and educational practices, find gaps, and possible solutions.

"This school embodies the unique beneficial trait socially and academically of having so many *hashkafot* (outlooks under one roof), and spans the spectrum of all Jewish streams," said Deren.

"Students are welcomed from Mizrahi, Chabad,

haredi, Sephardi, modern Orthodox, or traditional South African homes. Cape Town is a community which works towards working together, not in silos. The leadership of Cape Town is in favour of this amalgamation."

In the case of Jewish Studies, the school accredits courses under its international accreditation. For secular studies, the school offers a high-level international exit matrix, including the SAT – international college entrance exams, with accommodation for a Sunday versus Saturday sitting for Jewish students. "The fact that we're internationally accredited raises our standards, benchmarked with international versus national, standards," said Deren.

"We wanted to create a stronger environment in Cape Town for a Torah community to flourish. This amalgamation will have a positive impact and strengthen the school," she said.

Crafty ways to honour Mandela

This year marks 15 years since the United Nations declared 18 July Nelson Mandela International Day (or Mandela Day). Since then, millions of people have given 67 minutes of their time to make the world a better place in honour of the late great South African president. Here are some ways to give back this year.

Johannesburg

Tuesday 16 July

- Bet David Progressive Synagogue is knitting 67 scarves for people in need, and would love your help in doing so. Contact: 060 527 0461 or admin1@betdavid.org

Thursday 18 July

- Yad Aharon & Michael calls on volunteers to fill packets with lentils and barley which will be used to make soup for those in need in our community. Time: 09:00. Contact: jodye@yadaharon.co.za
- The Harvest Project along with the United Hebrew Institute of Brakpan invites volunteers to help with much needed maintenance at the old Brakpan Shul and Jewish cemetery. Time: 11:00. Contact: 073 080 2133
- The Union of Jewish Women is collecting baby grows, socks, vests, bottles of water, biscuits, and wet wipes to go into Bags for New Beginnings. To drop off these items, contact: info@ujw.co.za or 011 648 1053
- Radio 702 and Primedia are calling on business leaders and corporates to join the Mentorship Boardroom campaign by giving of their time to mentor young leaders for 67 minutes on Mandela Day. Contact: https://mentoring.thementorshipboardroom.com/

Cape Town

Wednesday 17 July

- Cape Jewish Seniors Association invites knitters to join their knitathon, where they will be knitting for various charities. Time: 10:15. Register: admin@cjsa.org.za

Thursday 18 July

- Jewish Community Services calls on volunteers to help cook meals for the less fortunate of the community. Time: 08:00. Register: lee@chaikitchen.org.za
- Bnoth Zion WIZO is running a Donate-A-Can CANpaign for a soup kitchen in Khayelitsha. To donate, contact bnothz@ctjc.co.za

Sunday 21 July

- The Mensch Network invites you to join its Mandela Day Community Cook Up. Meals will be cooked for Early Childhood Development centres in Hout Bay. Cost: R50. Time: 10:00. Register: mensch.org.za/mandeladay2024

Pretoria

Thursday 18 July

- Join the residents of Jaffa Retirement Home who are aiming to knit more than 100 dolls for an orphanage in Sunnyside Pretoria. Time: 10:00. Contact: 012 346 2006



This year is all about the dad!

Honestly, childbirth isn't what it used to be. I'm not talking about the 19th century, when the mortality rate was higher than the Zambian gross domestic product, but rather in comparison to when our children were born a few decades ago. Only now that they are having little people of their own, I realise quite how different the whole experience is.

When our kids were born, dads didn't move into the hospital. We were there for the birth, we did what we were expected to in the delivery room, and then we left.

Whether it was because they were just another mouth for mom to feed, or because no-one had paternity leave, I don't know. But I recall being banished from that room as soon as was practical so that my wife could get on with the very important job of being a mother. It didn't take a relationship expert to see that much like a Praying Mantis, I had outlived my usefulness, and unless I wanted my head bitten off, the office was the smarter place for me to be.

"Why do you want to move into the hospital room?" I asked my son, ahead of their child's birth. "Because it's my child, dad!" was the answer. We were at his home for dinner, and I was starting to experience that familiar and painful prodding in my thigh, courtesy of my wife who was next to me and who wanted me to stop talking. She has powerful thumbs. "Doesn't he know that it's still his child even if he doesn't sleep over at the hospital," I mumbled to her in a stage whisper. Her rolled eyes made it clear I wasn't convincing anyone of anything.

"I guess then no-one should tell him about skin-to-skin bonding" announced my son,



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

now relishing in my discomfort. "What's that" I asked, taking the bait. "It's when the dad lifts his shirt so that his baby can bond with him. Skin to skin." The looks at the table confirmed that he wasn't making this up. "When?" I asked for clarification. Apparently, it can be in the room later. Or even, in the actual delivery room.

I was now well over the edge, imagining my son and his baby performing some kind of shirtless new-age ritual, while his poor wife, who had carried the kid for nine long months and then finally given birth, is left to her own devices. Because in 2024, it's about the dad.

"I want you to know, that as much as you want to, you will never breastfeed," was my final word. After which, for fear of my life, I sat in silence wondering how my late father, who hadn't even been at the birth of his children, would have taken the news of his skin-to-skin grandson moving into the hospital room to fully experience the magnificence of childbirth.

The days of dads smoking a cigar while pacing up and down outside the delivery room are thankfully over. The shared responsibility and the fact that dads are involved in the lives of their children from day one is wonderful. They can do many things. They can love, nurture, and they can connect. But at the end of the day, no amount of skin-to-skin bonding will ever make a dad lactate.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Pointless academic posturing

This week marks nine months since 7 October. Our hearts remain heavy as we think of the hostages and all the innocent lives lost that day and in the months since. Though it often seems as though a hostage deal is imminent, it has been heartbreaking to be disappointed time and again. Nevertheless, we continue to pray for the safe return of our brethren and a successful end to this terrible conflict.

Our misguided universities

It seems to be the season for South African universities to make pointless statements on a conflict in the Middle East. These declarations have no tangible impact on the ground, don't affect the conflict's outcomes, nor ease the suffering of those affected, and, in some cases, contradict the fundamental tenets of academic freedom that should govern a university.

There are at least 15 ongoing conflicts in Africa, of which two – in Burkina Faso and Sudan –deteriorated last month. Altogether, ongoing conflicts on our continent have displaced an estimated 40.4 million people. What a pity then that our South African universities have managed to avert their eyes from 30.4 million kilometres of blood-soaked African soil in their zeal to demonise the sole Jewish state.

Both the University of South Africa and University of Cape Town made the outrageous and deeply offensive claim that Jews have weaponised antisemitism in defence of Israel. As an academic and the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, I reject this assertion with the contempt it deserves. Suggesting that Jews are lying about our own oppression to achieve some propagandist goal reflects how antisemitism is minimised and not taken as seriously as other forms of hate. To quote writer David Baddiel, "Jews don't count."

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



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

The role of a university is to advance knowledge through the pursuit of truth. The statements put out by these universities include half-truths and contested facts. In this sense, they betray their own mission by addressing these issues from an emotional, one-sided position rather than engaging in finding common ground across different perspectives.

How much better it would be to do what universities are best at, namely engaging with different perspectives and finding common ground.

We have friends

In spite of the posturing of some universities, I'm always reassured by the basic decency of almost all the South Africans I come into contact with. Unlike so many countries around the world, South African statistics indicate that antisemitism has fallen to levels before 7 October. It's always important to remember that we have many friends among ordinary South Africans. In fact, our friends can be found across many spheres of society, from politics to academia, and our allied faith groups.

As we enter the week of Mandela Day, this feeling of friendship is ever more pronounced. I'm reminded of the many communities in this country with whom we have such close relationships and who have supported us and have been supported by our community in so many ways. I'm grateful as always to those who have stood by me personally and the South African Jewish community through what has been a very challenging time.

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

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Victor Daitz Foundation celebrates 40 years of philanthropy

LAUREN SHAPIRO

"The late Victor Daitz must rank as one of KwaZulu-Natal's greatest sons and philanthropists," said Sam Abrahams, the chairperson of the Victor Daitz Foundation, at a function on 4 July celebrating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the foundation.

"As I stand here, I'm filled with a contradictory combination of emotions – humility, sadness, and joyousness – which epitomise the 40-year journey which I and others have been privileged to experience in serving this philanthropic foundation," Abrahams, who has been chairperson for 25 years, told the audience.

The foundation has supported society's most vulnerable and needy for 40 years in the name of this "caring man of humble origins". Victor Daitz was born in Johannesburg in 1913 to Jewish immigrants from Lithuania. He studied at Leeds University, before returning to join the family business, Natal Cotton and Woollen Mills, in Durban in the late 1930s. An astute businessman and investor in properties, shares, and other assets, Daitz was always philanthropic, and in 1984, he formed the Victor Daitz Foundation to facilitate his charitable endeavours. But it was only after his death in 1999, when he bequeathed most of his estate to the foundation, that it was discovered just how wealthy he was.

The foundation is now considered to be one of



Sam Abrahams speaking at the 40th anniversary of the Victor Daitz Foundation

the major charitable establishments in South Africa, regularly assisting more than 540 organisations, focusing particularly on education and humanitarian projects benefiting the historically deprived. These include children's homes and orphanages, old-age homes, support for the disabled, and educational institutions. Feeding schemes and medical-research associations also top the list, along with AIDS organisations. The foundation supports a wide range of feeding schemes all over the province, from Feed the Babies to kindergarten programmes, to school feeding schemes. The projects are based in KwaZulu-Natal, in accordance with the late Daitz's wishes and vision, and the foundation also supports the Durban Jewish community.

"The strategy of the foundation is simple," said Abrahams. "Build a strong tree, and distribute its

fruits to deserving recipients." Strict protocols and selection criteria ensure that funding goes to the right organisations, while a board of trustees and professional team ensures that corporate governance is followed. The board, guided by several founding trustees who knew Daitz personally and understood his ideals, safeguards the spirit of the foundation and makes sure that the projects it selects align with Daitz's values.

The function honoured not only Daitz's legacy, but the foundation's recipients, who continue to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are cared for. "You are the true heroes," said Managing Trustee David Simpson, noting the impact these organisations have on the lives of those placed in their care.

"What we do is the easy part – writing the cheque. Making sure that the funds have an impact on the lives of the less fortunate is the hard part, and this is where we rely on you," Simpson told the many beneficiary representatives at the event. "I congratulate you and wish you many years of sustainable operation."

Simpson concluded by commenting on the emblem of the Victor Daitz Foundation – a menorah. Explaining the meaning and significance of the symbol, he said, "I like to think that the foundation should be the light that shows other people and organisations the path of philanthropy and compassion, and be a catalyst which encourages greater involvement by all in the lives of those who need help."

Beautiful Brachot programme inspires students with fun

Shaarei Torah school's Beautiful Brachot programme has taken Sandton Sinai by storm, with students eagerly collecting and learning *brachot* (blessings) over three weeks. The programme, which was shared with Sandton Sinai, aims to promote Jewish heritage and education in a fun and interactive way.

Students collect packs of *bracha* cards, each with individual *brachot* to learn and recite. To earn new cards, they must demonstrate their knowledge to their teachers or submit videos of themselves reciting a *brocha*. A dedicated *brocha* booth has been set up at the school where they can showcase their skills and receive new cards.

The programme has



A Sandton Sinai student with his brachot cards

generated excitement, with students swapping and learning *brachot*. Each week, a new pack of cards is released, keeping the momentum going. Last week, they successfully completed the collection of the first pack of *bracha* cards, and the anticipation for the next pack is palpable.

The Beautiful Brachot programme is a testament to Shaarei Torah's commitment to innovative education and community building.

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