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Anti-Israel extremists call for arrests of SA Jews

TALI FEINBERG

The anti-Israel lobby revealed its deeply-entrenched antisemitism last Saturday, 22 February, by printing the names and faces of randomly-selected South African Jews onto "wanted" posters, demanding that these individuals be arrested or deported.

The SA Jewish Report has been in contact with some of the people in question, who have committed no crime according to South African or international law, have never lived or worked in Israel, and are South African citizens and residents. According to posters held aloft by the baying mob of protesters, which included Reverend Frank Chikane and members of Gift of the

Givers, "South Africa is not a home" for these Jews.

The protest was held on the Sea Point Promenade in spite of opposition from a swathe of Cape Town residents, who criticised the aggressive behaviour of the anti-Israel lobby during its frequent events in Sea Point. This includes breaking laws and verbal and physical assault.

In the past 16 months, "we have seen an alarming escalation in aggression, including the use of swastikas and rhetoric inciting violence against anyone who supports Israel", says Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch. "This past Saturday, a group of 15 protesters physically assaulted a pedestrian, beating the individual with

flag poles whilst verbally abusing him. There's video evidence of this assault. We will be investigating this further and ensure action is taken against this clearly violent group."

While insisting that their protest was "peaceful", many called for violence, holding posters saying, "Peace isn't the answer, liberation is the answer"; "Next 7 October, Palestine will be free"; "We trust the resistance"; "You can't hide, we are coming for you"; and "Resistance until Palestine's liberation." Many signs had images of Palestinian terrorists with keffiyehs and rifles, and inverted red triangles, which symbolise Hamas terrorist attacks like the 7 October massacre. Protestors also made inverted triangle signs with their fingers. They shouted, "We don't want no Zionists here," and "Long live the *intifada* [violent uprising]."

"This isn't protest, this is targeted harassment," says Cape SAJBD Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson. "These protests are thinly-disguised antisemitism and intimidation. The protestors' adoration of Hamas is even more concerning, particularly after the confirmed brutal murder of the Bibas children. Groups calling for another 7 October is further evidence of incitement to violence."

Wrapped in a keffiyeh, struggle icon Chikane told the crowd, "You can't be a Zionist and not be a racist. A Zionist is, by definition, racist. A Zionist does not recognise Palestinians as human beings. Zionism is equivalent to genocide."

Continued on page 3>>

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Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Lighting the orange flame

Rabbi Leo Dee, on a visit to SA, lights a candle in memory of Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir Bibas and all the Israelis killed and held hostage since 7 October 2023

See stories on pages 4, 6, 9 and 11.



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US, Israel vote against UN resolution condemning Russia

Israel and the United States were among a slim minority of countries that voted against a United Nations resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Also voting "no" were Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Hungary, and about a dozen other countries.

The resolution passed by a wide margin on Monday, 24 February, the third anniversary of the war, but the American "no" vote reflected the about-face in US policy toward Ukraine since President Donald Trump took office. Bucking three years of American support for Ukraine's efforts to repel Russian forces, Trump has renewed relations with Russia, called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator", and demanding half of Ukraine's mineral-resource revenues.

Israel has long sought to maintain relations with both sides in the war. For the past three years, Israel has tried to avoid antagonising Russia because, until the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in December, Russian forces were active in Syria and Israel conducted repeated airstrikes on Hezbollah weapons shipments there.

In the past, however, Israel has supported Ukraine at the UN. In March 2022, shortly after the invasion began, it joined nearly all countries in endorsing a resolution calling on Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine. And as recently as July, it voted in favour of a resolution demanding that Russia withdraw from a Ukrainian power plant.

Israel's UN mission declined to comment on the vote. But Israel has sought to maintain close ties to the Trump administration, especially as it charts its course of action regarding the ceasefire in Gaza, the future of its war against Hamas, and the effort to release Israeli hostages held by the terror group.

Berlin stabbing suspect sought to kill Jews

German authorities have arrested a 19-year-old suspect in a stabbing attack at Berlin's Holocaust memorial on Friday, 21 February.

The arrest of the suspect, a Syrian citizen who, according to police, said he wanted to kill Jews, came shortly after the Thursday, 20 February, arrest of another teenager, a Russian citizen accused of plotting an attack on the Israeli embassy in Berlin.

Both arrests occurred shortly before the German elections on Sunday, 23 February. The centre-right Christian Democratic Union won the election, while Alternative for Germany, a far-right anti-immigrant party with a history of minimising the Holocaust, came in second.

The stabbing incident at the Holocaust memorial seriously injured one victim, a 30-year-old Spanish tourist who was put into an artificial coma but whose life no longer appears to be in danger, according to news reports.

Three hours after the attack, the suspect reportedly approached

officers with blood on his hands and was arrested.

The suspect is a formerly unaccompanied minor who applied for asylum after arriving in Germany in 2023. In questioning, he told police he had decided in the past few weeks to kill Jews, apparently motivated by Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser called the attack "an abhorrent and brutal crime" and vowed to "deport violent criminals to Syria again".

In its condemnation, the Central Council of Jews in Germany said the attack posed a broader threat to Western society.

"The contempt for the memory of the Shoah and the hatred of Jews go hand in hand with the fundamental rejection of our Western values and are often the ideological core of Islamist-motivated perpetrators," the group said in a statement. The Anti-Defamation League said it agreed with the council's assessment, adding, "We are deeply concerned."



The Holocaust Memorial a day after the stabbing in Berlin, Germany

Meanwhile, the 18-year-old Russian citizen arrested on Thursday in Brandenburg was suspected of plotting to carry out what police said was a politically motivated attack on the Israeli embassy.

The suspect was a native Chechen who reportedly was planning to leave Germany and join the Islamic State terror group. Police who searched an apartment in connection with the case found objects resembling explosives.

Berlin authorities last week also responded to an Israel-related controversy at the globally renowned Berlin Film Festival. At the festival a director from Hong Kong delivered a speech that included the slogan, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." The director, Jun Li, had been reciting a speech written by an Iranian actor who boycotted the festival for its perceived support of Israel, and was heckled by some members of the crowd.

Following the speech, police investigated Jun Li for using the phrase, which the German government classifies as a prohibited slogan.

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The ark of the divine

The ark sits at the very core of Judaism. It's the ultimate symbol of the power and glory of the Torah. It's the crown jewel of the Temple. Covered entirely with gold, the ark is popularly known as "the golden ark".

But that's not how the Torah describes it. In saying, "And they shall make an ark of cedarwood," the ark is referred to not by its golden encasing, but rather by its internal structure made from wood. Why does the Torah describe it as "an ark of cedarwood" when, in fact, not a speck of wood is visible?

Furthermore, if the ark is meant to symbolise the absolute integrity of the Torah and the Torah scholar, his total purity within and without, why is a layer of wood interposed between the two layers of gold? Wouldn't total purity mandate that the ark be solid gold through and through rather than a gold veneer on a wooden base?

The commentators explain that gold and wood represent two distinct aspects of the human personality. Gold represents the sublime and ethereal aspect, spirituality in its purest form. The golden side of the human personality soars above the mundane world and reaches out for the divine. Wood, on the other hand, represents the human connectedness with the earth, the prosaic, and the mundane. Just as a tree is rooted in the soil, so is a person rooted in the physical world.

The ideal Torah scholar, or spiritual giant, is more than just a golden ethereal spirit passing through the world in blissful oblivion of the realities of the human experience. At their core, the Torah scholar must have a heart of wood, rooted in this world, supremely sensitive to the divine resonance in all aspects of creation.

This then is the Jewish paragon, not a monastic recluse nor a sensualist but a person imbued within and without with the true spirit of Torah yet rooted in deep resonant connectivity to their interaction with people,

themselves, and the world around them.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught that the general view of spiritual experience is that the purpose of eating food is to be able to have the strength to study Torah, although the higher spiritual level is that we study Torah to be able to learn how to eat food in a more spiritually connected way.

The Torah doesn't want us to achieve spirituality by withdrawing from the world and isolating ourselves from the lived experience of every moment. On the contrary, the Torah wants us to retain

Rabbi Shmuel Ozhekh - Ohr Somayach Cape Town and the founder of Rejewvinate and The Eden Meditation App



a powerful connection with the world around us and to find spiritual resonance within it. If we can clothe ourselves within and without with the golden garments of the Torah yet retain a deep-rooted vitality in our hearts, we not only experience the divine bliss of the moments of deep remove, but also the divine connection and infinite energy found within all.

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Omer's release leaves SA host sister smiling

LEE TANKLE

When 22-year-old Kayla Lowenstein saw her Israeli host brother, Omer Shem Tov, being released from Hamas captivity on 22 February, she broke down in tears due to relief at seeing him alive and smiling in spite of the conditions he lived under for 505 days.

"It was a dream come true," said Lowenstein, who was paired with the Shem Tov family in Herzliya, when she was finishing her schooling with the Na'ale Elite Academy (a programme that offers scholarships for Jews from around the world to do three to four years at top high schools in Israel) from 2018 to 2021. "I was amazed that in spite of everything he's endured, he is still able to smile. My first thought when I saw him was simply, 'Thank G-d!'"

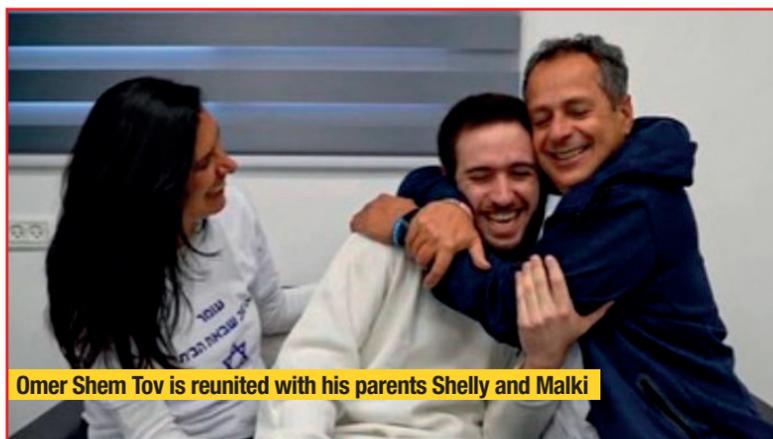
Shem Tov, 22, was released along with Omer Wenkert, 23; Eliya Cohen, 27; Tal Shoham, 40; Hisham al-Sayed, 37; and Avera Mengistu, 38, last Saturday. Mengistu and al-Sayed had been captives for 10 years, while Shem Tov, Wenkert, and Cohen were kidnapped at the Nova Festival on 7 October 2023. Shoham, 40, was kidnapped from Kibbutz Be'eri while visiting his wife's family on Simchat Torah.

"While I wish more than anything that I could have been there in person, having loved ones around me made the moment feel special and meaningful. It was the happiest day I, along with everyone who loves Omer, have had in a long time. Seeing Omer free was [a feeling] beyond words," Lowenstein said.

The Shem Tov family, parents Shelly and Malki and their three children, Amit, Dana, and Omer, had been Lowenstein's home from home for four years when she was paired with them while far from her own family in South Africa.

Lowenstein said that in spite of all that Shem Tov had gone through, his family had told her they were overjoyed and incredibly grateful to have Omer back. "That's all that truly matters right now - having him home," she said.

Shem Tov was kidnapped from the Nova festival along with two of his friends, siblings Maya and Itay Regev. Ori Danino, whom they had just met at the festival, turned back after running from the festival to go search for the Regev siblings and Shem Tov to rescue them. After Danino found them, Hamas kidnapped all four of the youngsters and took them into Gaza. When the terrorists entered the festival, Shem Tov shared his live location with his parents. They watched their cellphones helplessly as his pin entered Gaza and he was declared missing.



Omer Shem Tov is reunited with his parents Shelly and Malki

It was only confirmed days later that he had been taken hostage when his family and friends saw a Telegram video showing Shem Tov lying on the ground with Itay Regev. His parents were able to recognise him from his tattoos.

Shem Tov's family dedicated themselves to bringing him and all of the other hostages home, doing whatever they could to help the cause. "The past few months have been incredibly hard and uneasy, filled with countless questions," said Lowenstein. "But witnessing the resilience of the nation, especially his family and friends who never stopped trying to bring him and everyone else home, was truly inspiring."

The Regev siblings were freed in the hostage deal in November 2023, while Danino was one of six hostages murdered in Hamas tunnels in September 2024.

"For the first 50 days, he was with Itay Regev, and all the rest of the time, he was on his own," Malki Shem Tov, Omer's father, told *Times of Israel*. He spent the last 450-odd days alone in a tunnel.

Channel 12 said Shem Tov was initially held in apartments and later in tunnels, and that he was required to dress as a Muslim woman when moved around by his captors. He was once lowered into a tunnel in a small bucket, the network reported. At first, his hands were bound. He was cursed and spat upon, it said.

Shem Tov has since said that he saw Al Jazeera broadcasts during his captivity, and that reports of the struggle being waged for the hostages strengthened him, according to Channel 12.

Shem Tov suffers from asthma and celiac disease, and Hamas withheld his medical treatment from him. Malki told *Ynet news* that his son lost 17kg whilst in captivity.

In one last moment of psychological torment, Shem Tov was made to kiss Hamas gunmen on the forehead during the propaganda ceremony for his release on Saturday morning, footage that has reportedly gone viral on Arabic-language social media, purporting to show gratitude from the hostage to the terror group.

Malki told *Times of Israel* that Omer had told the family that Hamas had told him to wave and kiss the guard standing next to him.

Upon his release, Shem Tov was airlifted from a military facility near the Gaza border to a hospital in central Israel, and wrote on a whiteboard in Hebrew, "Now everything is OK! Thank you to the dear people of Israel, and all the soldiers!" He also added that he wanted a hamburger.

Lowenstein said she was amazed to see Shem Tov coming out of captivity with a smile on his face, and it immediately reminded her of the brother he had been to her before he was taken hostage.

"Whenever I was at the house, I would always hear him singing from my room, whether he was in the shower, the kitchen, or his room. He loved to be with his friends. He loved to be with his family. He and his family have such an incredible bond. They love him

so much. He's just the light of the family. There's not one bad word that can be said about Omer. He's just like that happiness in the darkness," said Lowenstein.

"There have been so many emotions over the past 16 months," she said, "Many of which are difficult to put into words. However, hope has been a constant thread that has kept us all going, and in the end, that hope was proven right."

"He is so strong and so amazing, and I'm so proud of him for coming out of such an awful situation with a smile on his face," she said.

Now that he is home, Lowenstein is looking forward to seeing Shem Tov reclaim his life to the fullest, "just as he did before his abduction".

Anti-Israel extremists call for arrests of SA Jews

>>Continued from page 1

You can't be a Zionist and not be genocidal."

One supporter wrote on Facebook, "Did you see how much [sic] traffic cops is [sic] in Sea Point today to protect the so-called Jewish area Sea Point . . . today the whole of Cape Town is Hamas." Another said, "The mayor of Cape Town is allowing a Zionist settler colony to grow in Sea Point", calling Jewish residents "white supremacy Jews".

Nazier Paulsen of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) echoed this, saying, "The Atlantic Seaboard is a haven for mostly Zionists who are anti-black, anti-African, [and] Islamophobic. They should never be allowed to feel comfortable in a free, democratic South Africa!"

The African National Congress' Muhammad Khalid Sayed said that political parties not at the rally "don't only stand in support of Israeli Zionism, they stand in support of the very ideology that is linked to Zionism, which is racism. That is why they can publicly oppose the sale of public land for social housing."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks says, "The SAZF unequivocally condemns

Saturday's hate fest as a dangerous display of antisemitism masquerading as political activism. By targeting South African Jewish citizens with "wanted" posters and explicitly declaring that South Africa isn't 'a home' for Jews, the anti-Israel brigade has dropped all pretence that anti-Zionism is separate from antisemitism.

"The protestors' glorification of Hamas terrorists, particularly after the confirmed brutal murder of the Bibas children, is unconscionable," Marks says. "This vile demonstration undermines South Africa's constitutional values and threatens the fabric of our diverse society. We call on all South Africans to reject this dangerous rhetoric that exploits our freedoms to promote hatred and division."

Protesters and organisers seemed confused about the purpose of the event. Hajar Ahjum-Mathee of the Palestine Solidarity Association at the University of the Western Cape said the rally was because "there is a ceasefire, but there's absolutely not a ceasefire", therefore protesting the very demand the anti-Israel lobby has been

making since the war began.

A Johannesburg remedial educator* says she was shocked to see her face on a poster, and was especially disturbed that the extremists chose a photo of her holding a young child.

Having never committed any crime according to South African or international law, she says, "The most important thing is that when I saw it, I felt proud to be Jewish, and I will always fight for Israel's right to exist. Doing this won't change who I am."

A Johannesburg man* was shocked to see his face and name on a poster held by the EFF. He has never committed any crime

according to South African or international law, yet the sign said he wasn't welcome in South Africa.

"These posters make it clear that I'm 'guilty' because I'm a Jew," he says. "It's disturbing to see South Africans holding up posters of fellow South Africans demanding that they be punished because they are Jewish."

Say Jacobson and Bloch, "Our message to the leadership of the Western Cape and South Africa is clear: Hamas is a terrorist organisation. Its violent

agenda has no place in South Africa. Cape Town must not tolerate intimidation and hate. We call on all South Africans to reject this aggression. Protests must be peaceful and lawful. Assaulting people with flagpoles, blocking roads, and harassing individuals is unacceptable. We demand action from the authorities. The mayor, the premier, and South African Police Service must uphold the law and protect civilians."

"We appreciate the increased security presence last weekend, but more needs to be done," Bloch says. "A petition demanding an end to these aggressive protests has already gained more than 2 800 signatures and will be delivered to city leaders."

"South Africa stands for peace, respect, and tolerance, not intimidation and violence. Let's build a city where everyone is safe," says Jacobson. "Join us. Speak up. Take action."

The SA Jewish Report hasn't named the people interviewed for their own safety.



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SA diplomacy with Ukraine 'moving in right direction'

Having just passed the three-year mark since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, we speak to Ukrainian Ambassador to South Africa **Liubov Abravivova** about this unpleasant anniversary.

STAFF REPORTER

How do you feel about the fact that the Russia-Ukraine war is ongoing three years later?

I feel proud. This war was meant to be a three-day war, yet here we are three years later, still fighting the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There has been immense resilience in getting to this point where we're still fighting back.

What has the impact been on Ukrainians?

The civilian population has become a target of Russian invasion. The impact has been diverse because the war has had different phases. There has been much existential tension. Russian forces have targeted Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, including the country's energy system with missile attacks.

Similarly, the damage to heritage is on a scale not been seen since the likes of World War II. Objects of cultural heritage have been destroyed, and we can never rebuild that.

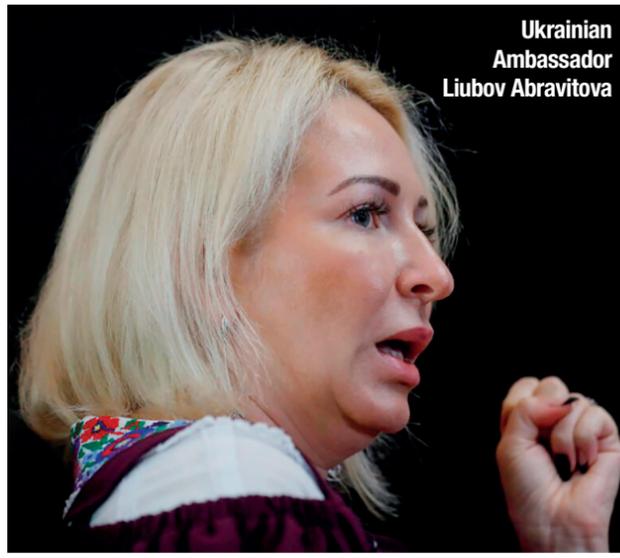
President Zelenskyy said tens of thousands of civilians have been killed in the war and thousands have gone missing. What's the real figure, and what do you believe has happened to those who are missing?

We don't have precise statistics because Ukrainian territory is under occupation of Russian forces, so while we have a rough estimate, we don't know all the exact figures.

For the first six months, there was much international and South African media

around the war, but this has subsided substantially over time. Why do you believe that happened, and how do you feel about it?

The world quickly saw the effects of Russian aggression. Some of the strongest economies in the world criticised Russia for what it has been doing. The world cannot handle Russian aggression anymore, so I believe that we need to continue to halt the impact of Russian aggression.



Ukrainian Ambassador Liubov Abravivova

What's your relationship like with the South African government? How often do you meet its ministers or representatives?

Due to Russian aggression, we have been able to increase dialogue with the South African government. South Africa's history has been based on dialogue since the end of apartheid. South Africa opened the process of dialogue, and we have regular political consultation. Diplomatic action is moving in

the right direction.

The South African government is always going on about Israel's war on Hamas but not paying much attention to the Russian-Ukraine war. Why do you think that is, and how do you feel about it?

Ukraine has just recently become the focus of many African countries because of Russian aggression. I don't feel like we weren't given priority by South Africa. Traditionally, Africa is very African-centric. Ukraine was somewhat unknown until the collapse of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). From then, South Africans had to become more educated about Eastern Europe and the role of Ukraine in the struggle against apartheid. So, it's no surprise that Ukraine wasn't really on South Africa's radar.

People compare the two wars (as in question 6). Do you believe them to be comparable?

I don't believe any war is comparable. It doesn't bring us anywhere.

How do you think the South African



government could better help Ukraine?

There are practical ways while the invasion continues. Ukraine has thousands of kilometres contaminated with landmines and other explosive remnants of war

because of the Russian invasion. We need to remove these contaminants so that there isn't a threat to civilians and then we can restart the agricultural sector.

We also need support to bring Ukrainian children back. More than 19 000 children were kidnapped and taken into Russian territory and haven't been with their families for such a long time.

There is also the issue of prisoners of war. We need facilitation to bring our heroes back home.

When all is done and we can start the process of the reconstruction of Ukraine, we will need foreign intervention. I believe South African businesses should be given equal opportunity to help rebuild Ukraine.

What can South African Jewry do to help Ukraine?

The most important thing is to be loud and protective of the values we have and share - humanity, equality, and solidarity to protect the rules of civil society that all of us are bound to.

We need to build dialogue between the South African Jewish community and Ukrainian civil society. We must also build platforms to uphold the voice of Ukrainians who have been impacted by this war and are far from Ukraine.

What do you make of United States President Donald Trump's recent vicious verbal attack on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy?

Trump is trying to deliver on his promises made during the US election campaign to end the war with Russia in Ukraine by any means. For Ukrainians, this war cannot end by any means. We must rely on the rules of the United Nations Charter. There cannot be discussions of peace without those core values. Trump's effort to make Russia withdraw from territory should reach its goal only when there's a guarantee of Ukrainian sovereignty.

What do you believe will bring this war to an end?

The only way this war will end is when the Russian Federation moves out of Ukrainian territory. If Ukraine stops fighting back, it won't exist.

What will it take to get Ukraine back on its feet after the war?

A lot of solidarity and unity. Ukrainian society already has that inside Ukraine. We would also need the support of those who fled Ukraine because of the Russian invasion, and we need them to come back. We need the solidarity of our partners who have stuck with us throughout the war. Similarly, we need the support of the world, which will guarantee our protection to ensure that there isn't another violent attack like there was three years ago at the start of the war.

Bibas's family mourned with orange and bleak tears

LEE TANKLE

"For Kfir and Ariel, live with all of your might. We wear the orange they could never see, so be young, be wild, and be wildly free. For the boys with bright orange hair dreamed too, and now, through our lives, their dreams will come true."

The words of this poem, written by 23-year-old Johannesburg woman Yakira Shalpid, played over the loudspeaker in the background at a vigil held in honour of the hostages murdered in captivity. Many in the community shed tears of grief for Shiri, Ariel and Kfir Bibas, Oded Lifshitz, and the many others still to return from Gaza. The vigil was organised by South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the South African Zionist Federation at Beyachad in Johannesburg on 20 February.

Shalpid wrote the poem at the end of last year as a message to her Bnei Akiva *channichim*, who were in their final year of machaneh.

In it, she wrote of Kfir Bibas, "I dreamed of a boy with bright orange hair, so young and innocent, his future right there. A little boy from Nir Oz, in our homeland so dear, playing, learning, growing, not a care, not a fear. His *ima* and *abba*, Shiri and Yarden, raised him humbly with his brother, Ariel. On a kibbutz where the family learned to thrive and flourish, is the same place the monsters came, the same place they were punished into the depths of silence where no laughter rings."

The loss of the Bibas children hit a raw nerve among Jews across the world, with many other communities gathering to commemorate the murders of the youngest person to be taken hostage, along with his four-year-old brother.

Members of the Johannesburg Jewish community braved the cold and rainy weather to light *yahrzeit* candles; stand in silence; place a pebble; write a note to a hostage family; let children draw pictures in honour of Ariel and Kfir; say *tehillim*; donate toys in memory of the Bibas children; and bear witness to the atrocities committed by Hamas on the south of Israel on 7 October 2023.

As people walked into Beyachad, they were met by two miniature ceramic dolls with orange hair, depicting

the innocence of the Bibas babies, a teddy bear wearing a shirt with the image of Kfir, orange roses and orange candles.

For most Jews, this was the hardest day of the past 16 months, but they left the vigil with a sense of hope as one message on the board put it, "They can kill our bodies, but they can never kill our souls."

The colour orange was unavoidable. Not only was the room filled with orange, but many members of the community chose to wear orange in honour of the ginger-haired Bibas boys. Many were heard saying that they would never be able to see the colour orange without thinking of these two babies who had gone too soon.

The middle of the room was dedicated to lighting *yahrzeit* candles, with the images of Lifshitz, Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir front and centre.

Amongst the more than 100 candles, there were yellow ribbons and messages of hope written on rocks. Alongside that, there were orange balloons, orange roses, and teddy bears as well as the Hebrew version of the popular children's book *Goodnight Moon*.

Whilst walking around the room, people were reminded of the more than 60 hostages still held in Gaza and the fact that their future hangs in the balance. This was showcased not only through the images of those still left in captivity, but images of the horror and destruction Hamas caused on 7 October.

Many of those who came to the vigil were women, many with children of their own, who came to commemorate the life of Shiri Bibas. Upon entering the



Tandi Ohayon and Nicole Katz lighting candles for Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir Bibas as well as for Oded Lifshitz at Beyachad

Photo: Ilan Ossendywer

space, many burst into tears as they saw themselves in Shiri, and the fierce way that she tried to protect her two boys from the terrorists taking them hostage.

The vigil connected attendees with the Israeli community not only through mourning the four hostages who returned in coffins, but by conveying what was happening in Israel through news footage and scenes of Hostages Square in Tel Aviv shown on huge screens.

At the time of the footage, Israeli news channel Mako II was informing the world that the body of Lifshitz had been positively identified, but authorities were unsure of the fate of the Bibas family.

As we left the space, the words of Shalpid's poem rang through our ears with the words, "Yet still, the orange burns a fire in the night. It calls out to you now to hold up its light. For while their laughter fades and their childhoods undone, your whole life before you bathed in the sun."

War and perseverance in Ukraine

TALI FEINBERG

Three years after South African filmmaker Ronnie Apteker fled Ukraine as Russia invaded on 24 February 2022, he is back in his beloved city of Kyiv, making a documentary about ordinary people living in the shadow of war. While he remains positive and defiant, it's the fleeting moments of living in this horrific limbo that affect him the most.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meeting with rabbanim from Ukraine

In a blog post on 19 October 2024, Apteker wrote about seeing a little boy say goodbye to his father who was heading off to fight on the frontline. This horrific image, plucked from history, affected him deeply. "Last week Monday, I was at the train station in Kyiv, and I saw something that made me cry," wrote Apteker. "There was a little boy saying goodbye to his dad on the platform. The boy's mom had her arms around her son, and they were all crouched down, and I saw tears rolling down the boy's cheeks. That little boy knew something was not right. When will he see his dad again?"



The Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine handing out humanitarian aid to Jewish families

"It's all so hard on the soul," Apteker wrote. "What kind of a world are we living in? The Russian war on Ukraine is pure evil. The world just watches. Life goes on, but the pain and trauma are everywhere. The war is tearing families apart, and so many people are exhausted and traumatised." Meanwhile in Kharkiv, Sora Levinson, whose brother, Rabbi Levi Silman, lives in Cape Town, has also returned to the city after fleeing in the early days of the war. "There are a lot of mixed feelings," she says. "On the one hand, looking back three years ago, we didn't know if we'd ever be back, we didn't know the future, we didn't know what would be left of our community, what would be left of our home." She's thankful to be back and able to help the community. "Thank G-d there is a community," she says, "but it's painful to look back and say three years have gone, and this hasn't ended, and there are many people who have suffered losses. This is on top of the war in Israel, which is extremely painful for us. We're praying for peace and for Moshiach now."

Rebbetzin Rochi Levitansky was born and raised in Johannesburg and lives with her family in Sumy, near the Russian border. "When we left Ukraine at the beginning of the war, we were sure we would be back for Purim a few weeks later, and now we are at three years," she says in her South African accent. "People are so tired of the war and there's just so much tragedy, hurt, and pain," she says. "Kids aren't growing up as kids should. It's been three years of Corona [the COVID-19 pandemic] and three years of war. So, for any child, it's been a long time since they had regular classes and playdates."

However, Jewish life in Sumy remains strong. "We have full weekly classes, big Shabbos dinners, high shul attendance daily, weekly kids' programmes, and Batmitzvah clubs," Levitansky says. "The community is continuing. Everyone helps each other. We're grateful for the support from South Africa and around the world."

Oksana Nelina has remained in her hometown of Odesa throughout the war. "Living in Odesa as well as in any other Ukrainian city during the war is a surreal experience," she says. "Odesa, once a sanctuary for internally displaced Ukrainians, now faces regular Russian bombardments. Each air-raid alert sends me, my family, and Odesa's Jewish community scrambling for safety. Curfews and restrictions are part of daily life, but commercial and social activities persist. It's about resilience. We just do what we need to do to live another day and save our land."

In addition, Nelina says she's thinking about friends and colleagues in Israel. "It's essential to show support for each other, especially if you are part of the global Jewish peoplehood. Every Jewish Ukrainian is living 'two wars', and it's much harder to overcome the news from both and the world's acceptance of the cruelty of Russian and Hamas terrorists."

As Ukraine marks three years since the full-scale war began, "it's crucial for the world to understand that Ukrainians continue to adapt and resist", Nelina says. "The international community's support remains vital. The war enters its fourth year with increased hostilities targeting civilian infrastructure and significant displacement. It's an ongoing war in the middle of Europe, and the world should do more to stop it. Because tomorrow, the war could knock at your door, and the entire world would be silent."

Rabbi Meir Stambler, the head of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine (FJCU), told the SA Jewish Report from Dnipro that the biggest challenge was seeing families torn apart. In addition, people are struggling financially, with businesses "crushed".

"Who would think it would take so long [for the war to end]?" he asks. "Almost every second night, we are being bombed. The positive side is that Jews who never practiced before are now coming to shul, to the community centre, to Chabad House, to the schools."

With Israel also at war, "there are two wars that we're involved in. On a practical level, it's hard to raise money because Jews around the world care about Israel, which we understand. Even we donate [to Israel] in spite of the fact that we need a lot over here as well. We want the world to know that the war is going on and it's tough. The aggressor must be stopped."

Apteker resists Russia's attempt to obliterate Ukraine by living a full life in Kyiv, raising his son with his Ukrainian wife at his side, and making a film that will bring Ukraine to the world. Titled *We Are Ukraine: The Dream, The Nightmare, The Change*, it's a story about ordinary people in an extraordinary time. "It's about people who have chosen to continue to work, get married, have babies, to continue to live and laugh against all odds," writes Apteker. "It's not a war story. It's not a story about death and demise. It's a story about life, a story that will make you laugh, cry, and realise that, in the end, we all want the same things: love; security; and freedom."



The Federation of Jewish Communities of Ukraine handing out aid to Jewish soldiers

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Surely our lives matter too?

Oded Lifshitz was a journalist. He was a dedicated father and grandfather. He was a kibbutznik through and through, having helped to start Nir Oz 70 years ago. He was a man who dedicated his life to helping others.

He spent much of his time taking sick Gazans to Israeli hospitals to get good medical treatment.

He believed in peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and intrinsically saw the possibilities of this in his lifetime.

This isn't the picture of a man who could ever be considered a threat to the Palestinian people. To the contrary, he was someone who believed in the good in everyone and finding a peaceful solution.

But when Hamas and its terrorist cronies destroyed Kibbutz Nir Oz and killed or kidnapped 117 of its 400 residents, they didn't stop to ask what Oded, 83, and his wife, Yocheved, 85, thought of Palestinians or how they had helped Gazans.

They simply saw an elderly Jewish couple whose home they could burn down and destroy, and who they could use as cannon fodder by taking them hostage. They shot Oded in the hand, and took them both separately. They dragged Yocheved off without her shoes or glasses, and threw her on the back of a motorbike and beat her as they took her through to Gaza.

Oded's body was returned last week along with the bodies of the two Bibas boys and a woman who was said to be their mother, Shiri, but turned out to be a Gazan woman. Oded was believed to have been murdered before the end of 2023.

"My father spent his life in the peace movement and he fought for the possibility of both nations [Israelis and Palestinians] living peacefully side by side," Sharone Lifshitz, Oded's daughter told the media after her mother was released 17 days after being taken hostage. "He believed that you do peace with your enemies."

Why, while the world is concentrating on the Bibas family, am I focusing on this elderly man killed by Hamas when there were so many other victims?

Quite simply because those who hate us would have you believe that the people whom Hamas took hostage or killed were their enemies. Hamas – and those who see the terrorist organisation as the side of good – want you to believe that someone like Oded was a threat to them and so they murdered him in captivity. They want you to believe that someone like Oded can be compared to convicted terrorists in Israeli prisons who killed many as they tried to destroy the people of Israel. They want you to believe that Oded, whose dream was Israelis living in peace with Palestinians, was similar to those with whom his body was to be swapped in the ceasefire agreement's hostage-prisoner exchange.

How can anyone in their right mind compare them? Those coming from the prisons are convicted of murdering numbers of people in their attempt to obliterate Israel. Those aren't people who are ever likely even to consider peace or to find a way to live side by side with Israelis. What are the chances that those released will try to return to do more damage?

And yet, our haters want you to believe that Oded was a threat that needed eradicating, so they killed him. As his wife said at his funeral this week, "We fought all through the years for social justice, for peace. To my sorrow, we were hit by a terrible blow by those we helped on the other side."

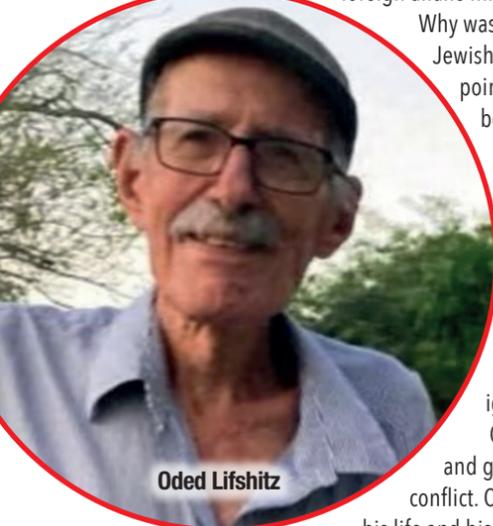
His grandson, Daniel, said at his graveside on Tuesday, 25 February, that Oded was the one who taught him that people were essentially "good".

Oded was a left-wing journalist who led the fight for the Bedouins to remain on their lands. In fact, he defended Bedouin residents of Rafah when the Israeli army attempted to evacuate the Sinai Peninsula, and was an on-the-ground reporter covering the 1982 refugee camp massacre in Beirut.

Yes, and this is a man who was murdered by his captors as a hostage in Gaza. A threat, they say?

But then they also claim that the Bibas family was a threat. Clearly, they felt it was necessary to strangle a four year old and a nine-month-old baby and their young mother. They were a threat, really? Yet the many in the world who are against us will believe that, no matter how obvious it is to the contrary. Or perhaps they will simply ignore it because it doesn't fit what they want to believe.

I imagine that's the situation with President Cyril Ramaphosa, who so conveniently ignored the plight of the Bibas family and Oded this week when he spoke about the ceasefire in his statement at the G20 meeting with foreign affairs ministers.



Oded Lifshitz

Why was it necessary for the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Professor Karen Milner, to have to point out to him that it's not just Palestinians who have been affected in this war? Surely, our lives matter too!

On the very day that Oded and the bodies of the Bibas children were brought back to Israel, Ramaphosa spoke about the ceasefire and the "downtrodden" Palestinians, but made no mention of the horror of what happened to the hostages.

Surely when innocent children are brutalised, it doesn't take much to inspire a human being to speak out against it. But our president didn't. He simply ignored it.

Oded stood for all that the South African president and government pay lip service to in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Oded could potentially have been their champion, but his life and his death aren't even a blip on their radar.

Having read as much as I could about Oded and his life, I realise that no matter how awful this situation is, he wouldn't be baying for blood and vengeance. He would still want to find some way for Israel to live in peace.

As it stands, the idea of peace is for most of us something to dream about but something that unfortunately, isn't around the corner.

I have no idea how and when it will be possible, but like most of us I do still dream of Israel turning "swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles", call me an idealist. I dream of a day that Israel doesn't have to send its sons to war or be in a situation where it has to make no-win agreements. It would also be great if our government here, especially Ramaphosa, acknowledged the damage it did every time it takes one side against us.

One has to have hope and dreams!

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Budget crisis – a wake-up call

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSORFF



Last week, on 19 February, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana was scheduled to deliver South Africa's annual Budget speech. Instead, for the first time in democratic history, the Budget was postponed due to political revolt within the Government of National Unity (GNU).

South Africa on a fiscal cliff

South Africa is running out of financial options. Years of low growth, persistent budget deficits, and high taxation have put the economy on an unsustainable path. Public debt is projected to peak at 76.1% of gross domestic product, more than triple its 2008 level and far beyond the International Monetary Fund's recommended 60% to 70% range of emerging market peers.

Yet, in spite of these challenges, rampant corruption and government inefficiency ensure that higher taxes don't translate into better services or economic growth.

Alliance (DA) and smaller coalition partners refused to rubber-stamp the VAT hike, proving they aren't merely political window dressing for ANC policies.

However, the chaotic manner of this crisis – last-minute breakdowns, lack of consultation, and public embarrassment – raises serious doubts about the GNU's ability to function.

Can this coalition survive? And if it collapses, what comes next?

Culture of waste must end

It's difficult to justify a VAT hike when the government wastes billions.

A partial review last year of 2022/2023 spending by the DA identified at least R40bn in wasteful expenditure by the national government and state-owned enterprises. Municipalities are even worse, with R60bn in unauthorised, fruitless, and irregular expenditure in 2021/2022,

according to the auditor-general's latest report. And these figures capture only the waste we know about!

It doesn't even include disgraceful misuse of public funds such as the R95m spent so far to fund South Africa's International Court of Justice



Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana

To make matters worse, South Africa faces a brewing diplomatic crisis with Washington. The potential loss of AGOA (the African Growth and Opportunity Act), which grants tariff-free access to the United States market, threatens key export industries. Meanwhile, US aid cuts of up to R8bn annually will further strain public finances.

Instead of addressing these fundamental problems, the African National Congress (ANC) has doubled down on its failed policies.

A catastrophic budget that never happened

Had it been delivered, the 2025 Budget would have been one of the worst in modern history – a blatant tax grab rather than a plan for growth.

According to leaked budget documents, the most egregious proposal was a 2% VAT hike – from 15% to 17% – the largest increase in democratic South Africa. VAT is a regressive tax that disproportionately affects the poor and middle class.

The extra R60bn in revenue from this hike was intended to plug a hole largely caused by above-inflation social spending increases. As Winston Churchill famously quipped, "For a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

The budget offered no serious structural reform, just recycled promises of cutting red tape and restructuring Eskom. Even the Congress of South African Trade Unions, usually a loyal ANC ally, condemned the VAT increase as a betrayal of workers.

GNU: government of national uncertainty

The budget's postponement exposed deep fractures within the GNU. The Democratic

case against Israel, covering legal fees, business-class flights, and luxury hotels for accompanying politicians.

A bulldozer for reform

Instead of raising taxes, South Africa needs a radical restructuring of government.

Inspired by Trump's war on bureaucracy, we need our own Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), not with a chainsaw, but a bulldozer to smash the patronage networks that have crippled our public finances.

At the same time, the private sector must be empowered to drive economic recovery.

Securing property rights; providing policy certainty; and allowing competent businesses, not failing states, to run and maintain crucial infrastructure, like power stations, ports, and railways is the only way to stimulate fixed investment and attract much needed foreign capital.

A defining moment

The 2025 budget crisis is more than a political blunder, it's a wake-up call.

It has exposed the weaknesses of the GNU, shaken confidence in the ANC's economic leadership, and highlighted the urgent need for fiscal and foreign policy reform. South Africa stands at a crossroads: continue down this road of decline or make the tough choices needed to turn things around. One thing is certain, when the revised Budget is promulgated on 12 March, we cannot afford another fiasco like this.

• Michael Kransdorff is chief executive of the Institute for International Tax and Finance and a Harvard trained economist

Board slams Ramaphosa's 'shameful' G20 address

STAFF REPORTER

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has called President Cyril Ramaphosa's "callous disregard for Jewish life" in his address at the G20 gathering of foreign ministers on 20 February "reprehensible and shameful".

The SAJBD said the president and the African National Congress had lost their "moral compass" and could no longer claim to be a "beacon of human rights".

SAJBD national chairperson Professor Karen Milner spoke of the president's "trite comments" about the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, making mention only of the "suffering of Palestinians" without "a word of compassion nor condemnation of brutal treatment meted out by Hamas to the innocent hostages taken on 7 October 2023".

What made this so much worse, Milner said, was that Ramaphosa's statement was made on the very day that the bodies of murdered 84-year-old grandfather and journalist Oded Lifshitz and babies Ariel and Kfir Bibas were returned to Israel.

Milner and SAJBD President Zev Krengel this week sent an open

letter to Ramaphosa expressing their disgust at his behaviour.

Ramaphosa had said to those at the G20 meeting, "South Africa welcomes the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas as a crucial first step toward ending the severe humanitarian crisis faced by Palestinians in Gaza."



President Cyril Ramaphosa speaking at the G20 gathering of foreign ministers on 20 February

On that day, "Hamas paraded four coffins of Israeli civilian hostages in a macabre ceremony that violated basic human rights and every standard of basic human decency,"

according to the letter.

The autopsies that followed showed that nine-month-old Kfir and four-year-old Ariel hadn't been killed in the fog of war, but were deliberately murdered, strangled to death by their captors and their bodies mutilated by the Hamas-aligned terrorists to cover up the atrocity. Their mother's body was

exchanged for another woman, a fact discovered only when the body reached Israeli authorities.

Shiri Bibas's body was later returned under cover of darkness with the shame [of Hamas] that the exchange deserved, said Milner.

"It's reprehensible that on the very day that these deprived acts that so shocked the world, once again exposing the brutality of Hamas, you chose to omit any mention of this in your comments regarding Palestine in your speech at the G20," said Milner.

She pointed out that had these babies and the other 242 hostages

abducted on the day of the massacre on 7 October 2023 been returned the next day, "this horrific war could have been averted".

Milner questioned why former Minister of International Relations and Co-operation Naledi Pandor didn't "demand that these babies be released" in her phone call to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on 17 October 2023.

"How can we accept that when the ANC hosted Hamas at its headquarters, only two months after the hostages were taken, it did nothing to secure their release?" she asked.

In the letter, Krengel and Milner maintained that had the president and his ANC ministers used their influence to call for the babies and other hostages to be released, the Bibas mother and children and all the hostages could have been returned alive.

Milner said that even after Ramaphosa's remarks at the G20, the government allowed a Cape Town rally to offer a clear message of support for Hamas. "In the face of the Jewish community mourning our dead; swastikas and Hamas flags showed proud allegiance to the murderers of these babies," she said. "How is it that in 2025, in a democratic post-apartheid South Africa, swastikas are displayed proudly on the streets of Cape Town? This isn't just a matter of choosing sides in a

complex war, and it doesn't negate the compassion we feel for every civilian death in war, especially of children."

The leadership of the SAJBD, in their letter, told the president, "Your complete lack of any form of sympathy for this elderly man, these babies and their mother, and your failure to call out Hamas for this atrocity shows how far your government has deviated from the moral compass we were recognised as having in 1994.

"When the brutal murder of babies is ignored, we know that we are no longer a beacon of human rights."

Krengel and Milner wrote that the South African president, who has often paid lip service to wanting to be part of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, did nothing to end the war in Gaza over the past 16 months.

"Instead, you and your government went about further polarising the sides while other nations worked to bring about a ceasefire," they wrote. "We feel ashamed as South Africans that our leadership has failed the Bibas babies and other hostages, whose return could have ended the war to the benefit of both the Gazan and Israeli people.

"We wonder if South Africa has lost its credibility to lead such an important organisation as the G20 during these critical times."

The world's most impossible villains

OPEN LETTER

What if, for thousands of years, a remarkably small group of people, less than 0.1% of the global population, were blamed for everything?

Imagine if, despite their tiny numbers, they were painted as the masterminds behind wars, financial collapses, and political conspiracies, while simultaneously being exiled, persecuted, massacred, and made stateless?

How can one be both the puppet master and the marionette, dangling from the noose of history? You'd have to be really stupid to believe it.

What if, in a vast region dominated by a single faith, a minuscule sliver of land, barely visible on a world map, was called a coloniser? A country where people of all races, religions, and sexualities live and participate fully in society, while its far larger neighbours, who have expelled nearly every religious minority, claim it is they who are intolerant?

A people who have been chased from nearly every country they've ever called home, who found a place to exist, only to be told that their very existence is unacceptable? You'd have to be really stupid to believe it.

What if, for thousands of years, this group was denied entry into clubs, businesses, and entire nations, not because of anything they ever did, but because of who they were?

And yet, when they created their own communities, institutions and businesses, they were suddenly accused of being insular, secretive, and controlling?

What if they were called both dirty and elite, both impoverished leeches and greedy capitalists, both weak parasites and powerful overlords?

Too rich, too poor. Too successful, too unworthy. Too separate, too influential. You'd have to be really stupid to believe it.

What if, after surviving mass genocide, over and over again, the survivors weren't mourned but vilified? What if the people who had been rounded up, starved, tortured and gassed were told they were the real oppressors?

What if the world looked at the murdered and decided they had it coming? You'd have to be really evil to believe it.

What if the people who have contributed more to medicine, science, literature and the arts than any other group per capita, were dismissed as having no value to the world? If their musicians wrote the songs you sing, their designers created the clothes you wear, their scientists developed the medicine that saved your family, but still, they were treated as a global affliction?

What if one in five Nobel Prizes were awarded to members of this tiny group, yet they were painted as useless? You'd have to be really stupid to believe it.

What if the very faith that shaped much of Western civilization, whose principles formed the foundation of law, morality and justice, was considered foreign, unwelcome and alien? What if the same people who scoff at them still kneel before a deity from their lineage, pray from a book written by their ancestors, and follow commandments they introduced to the world?

What if those who excluded them from their country clubs didn't realise that their own G-d wouldn't have been allowed in? You'd have to be really blind to believe it.

And yet, for millennia, this has been the reality. And still is. A lie so preposterous that no rational mind should accept it.

A narrative so contradictory, no logical person should repeat it. A hatred so ancient and enduring that no modern society should tolerate it.

So unless you are really stupid enough to believe it, you need to stand against it. Forcefully. Unapologetically. Relentlessly.

With fervent concern,
A wandering and wondering Jew
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LAST CHANCE TO COMPLETE

The SA Jewish Report Thank you for participating in the SA Jewish Report Reader's Survey Since 7 October, being the voice of our community and speaking up has become tougher, the pressure to stay silent is real, especially in South Africa amidst a sea of media hostility and toxic propaganda. We want to know your honest opinion on how we've done. This survey should take you less than 10 minutes to complete. Switch account. Indicates required question Email* 1. How do you consume the SA Jewish Report? (more than 1 answer is permissible) I read the hard copy paper edition of the newspaper I read the e-mail newsletter I visit the website I read it on social media Facebook Twitter Instagram TikTok I watch the JR Live Webinars Other: 2. How often do you interact with the SA Jewish Report through one of its channels? 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Your Age and Gender (more than 1 answer is permissible) <20 In my 20s In my 30s In my 40s In my 50s In my 60s In my 70s In my 80s Option 9 In my 90s or older I identify as a man I identify as a woman I identify as something Donald Trump wouldn't approve of 15. Where do you currently live? South Africa In a different

Blind ideology normalises monsters



LIORA BEN TZUR

OPINION

I'm not writing this text for my people - the people of Israel, the Jewish people. I'm writing it for those who have chosen to ignore reality.

On 6 October 2023, we celebrated the birth of my third daughter, Asif. After a long and complicated pregnancy, her birth was a miracle. The joy was immense, and my beloved mother, Marcelle, came to visit me in the hospital, along with my husband and our two children. These were moments of pure happiness before reality turned into an indescribable nightmare.

I live in Kibbutz Ein HaShlosa, just 2km from the Gaza border. I knew the cycles of conflict, the endless sirens, the rush to shelters. But nothing prepared us for 7 October.

That morning, my mother, a 65-year-old woman, a wonderful grandmother who used to peel too many oranges for the kids which would fill their shirts with sweet juice, left the guesthouse in the kibbutz to come to us, just 200m from my home. She didn't want the children to be alone and afraid when the sirens wailed.

Hamas terrorists - six or seven of them, armed with Kalashnikov rifles - saw her walking along the path. An elderly woman, barefoot, in pajamas. They decided to murder her in cold blood.

My brothers, who arrived to rescue our family and other kibbutz residents, found her lying in her own blood, her body riddled with bullets. When they lifted her, they saw she was still clutching candies for my children, pressed against her heart.

One of the terrorists, later captured by the Israel Defense Forces, said in his interrogation, "I saw an old Jewish woman



Marcelle Taljah with her granddaughter Asif on 6 October 2023

with a *jalabiya* [head scarf] on her head walking on the path. It was funny. We all shot her." Then he returned to Gaza to celebrate - to eat baklava and rest. It was a day of joy for them.

And this is just one story. One out of 1 200 stories of horror.

While we pick up the shattered pieces and while I try to move forward with a newborn baby without my mother, without a home, our neighbours in Gaza and the West Bank celebrated. They danced in the blood, handed out sweets and glorified the murderers.

And then I heard the claim in the Western media: "This is part of the struggle against occupation."

Those who chose to praise Hamas and

Palestinian Islamic Jihad for murdering women and children, for raping young women and men, for carrying out indiscriminate massacres - they have normalised monsters.

They have turned the word "occupation" into an excuse for every atrocity. In the name of blind ideology, they have legitimised the slaughter of babies, the rape of women, the mutilation of corpses.

They have killed morality.

They see images of charred bodies, butchered infants, dismembered women, and find a way to justify it. They have normalised monsters.

Such people around the world sit in cafés, chatting with friends, reading the newspaper, voicing their opinions with conviction, and at the end of the day, they return home, surrounded by a sense of security. Some of them even take to the streets to protest, convinced that they are fighting for justice.

So here's my message to those people:

The beast you are nurturing will not stop here. Today, it is in Israel, tomorrow, it will be with you. Because when morality dies, when there are no more red lines, there will be no one left to protect you either.

You have turned 'anti-occupation' into a blind ideology, where any act - no matter how horrific - is justified.

We are facing these monsters today. You will meet them tomorrow.

• *Liora Ben Tzur's South African-born mother, Marcelle Taljah, was murdered on 7 October 2023. Ben Tzur was scheduled to come to South Africa to speak to the community on 7 October 2024 but her flight was cancelled.*

Refugee Shabbat re-engages us with displacement



ALANA PUGH-JONES BARANOV

OPINION

Today, 120 million people are displaced. More people have been forced to flee their homes than ever before.

South Africa isn't immune to the impact of this escalating global crisis. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that South Africa has about 250 000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the country, with most originating from countries such as Burundi; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Rwanda; South Sudan; Somalia; and Zimbabwe. Activists and academics working in the refugee sector, however, believe the number of displaced people seeking safety and a better life within our borders is in fact much higher.

Foreign nationals face complex challenges in South Africa, from difficulties accessing legal protection and documentation, healthcare, and educational services, to socio-economic hardships, and entrenched and violent xenophobia and Afrophobia. Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in South Africa are particularly vulnerable to rampant corruption, and are often victims of extortion. South African society's continuing struggles with deep structural inequality, unemployment and poverty, as well as the scapegoating of foreign nationals by political and community leaders, which exacerbates tensions between communities.

In light of the adversities facing displaced people across the globe, HIAS launched its first annual Refugee Shabbat seven years ago as an opportunity for Jewish congregations, organisations, and individuals to express solidarity with the global Jewish movement for refugee protection and welcome. HIAS, originally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, is a Jewish nonprofit organization

that provides humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees.

This year, HIAS South Africa, in partnership with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), will be marking Refugee Shabbat across South Africa on 28 February and 1 March.

HIAS opened its first office in South Africa in October 2023. Drawing on our Jewish values and history, and working with host communities, HIAS provides vital services to refugees, asylum seekers,

and other forcibly displaced and stateless persons around the world, and advocates for their fundamental rights

so they can rebuild their lives. HIAS South Africa works through key local partner organisations in the legal, mental health and psychosocial support, and advocacy sectors.

The Refugee Shabbat is a moment to reflect on the work our communities are doing to pursue justice and support refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced people around

the world. We use this time to explore the themes of welcoming and protecting the stranger in our ancient Jewish texts and traditions, and to find ways of putting these values and ideas into practice.

The SAJBD has a long history of supporting and advocating for the refugee and asylum seeker community, from mobilising the Jewish community to assist with the humanitarian crisis that unfolded in wake of the 2008 xenophobic riots which spread across the country, to being a part of government and civil society policy discussions about the root causes and long-term solutions to xenophobia and immigration issues. Together, we believe that taking a moment to educate

and mobilise our local Jewish community is essential during these challenging times. Resilience and hope have carried our own people throughout the generations.

Even in moments of despair and oppression, our people have found a sense of purpose and joy to sustain us. I hope that this year's Refugee Shabbat will be an opportunity for our community to affirm who we want to be as Jews in the world, continuing the important work we do on behalf of forcibly displaced people across the globe and recommitting ourselves to the creation of a more just, welcoming and compassionate world.

Refugee Shabbat can be marked by sharing our educational resources on your organisation's social media pages and in your organisation's newsletter; sharing words of Torah in the weekly *parsha* that highlight the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and protecting the refugee; and committing to learn more about the plight of displaced people.

In this time of increased political, economic and social uncertainty around the globe, Refugee Shabbat 2025 is needed more than ever. In a world increasingly marked by division and the closing down of spaces for those fleeing danger, we raise our voices together as a Jewish community to say that we will stand by those seeking safety from violence and persecution.

The path ahead to building more inclusive and welcoming societies will be long and tough. In this historic moment, we recognise the sanctity of Shabbat and our Jewish values of *tzedeq* (justice) and *tikkun olam* (healing the world) and reflect on the work we are doing to assist refugees, asylum seekers, and Jewish communities worldwide. *Hineni*. We are here. We stand alongside refugees. We won't be swayed from making the world a better place for all.

• *Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov is country director of HIAS South Africa. For more information and access to resources for Refugee Shabbat, visit our webpage [hias.org/refugee-shabbat](https://www.hias.org/refugee-shabbat) and see the resource library for ideas on how to mark Refugee Shabbat 2025 ([hias.org/refugee-shabbat-resources](https://www.hias.org/refugee-shabbat-resources)).*

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It's personal: Why Bibas murders rock us to our core

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Two little redheaded brothers and their terrified mother is an image ingrained on our minds since 7 October 2023. Amid the devastating return of the bodies of Ariel, Kfir and Shiri Bibas and the news of their brutal murders, we're mourning a family we didn't know but embraced as our own.

As the Bibas family bury a baby, a four-year-old and their loving mother, we examine why we've been so deeply affected by their story.

"Until the forensics came through, the Bibas family asked the world not to declare Shiri, Kfir and Ariel as dead," wrote Rabba Adina Roth. In her parsha reflection, written as the Bibas boys' bodies were identified on 21 February, she contemplated the impact of this request.

"By refusing to allow for the possibility of death, the Bibas family gave us a great gift. We all held onto their life. We got to know Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir. We fell in love with them. Strangely, in refusing to allow for the possibility of their death, the family extended their lives in our collective imagination and allowed us to resist the murderous Hamas impulse. Hamas wanted us to despair. But we wore orange, we drew beautiful images of the family, we spread their message around the world. Their extended life helped us voice outrage, demand justice and feel love."

Yet with this love came devastation. The powerful bond that exists within our Jewish community makes another family's sorrow feel personal, says South African psychologist Dr Hanan Bushkin. Confirmation of the Bibas deaths shattered hope and left many grappling with a heightened sense of grief and vulnerability.

"Our hearts naturally react," he says. "We picture ourselves in their place, sharing the same hopes and fears, which triggers a real wave of distress. In this way, the sadness becomes communal, reflecting our collective concern and urge to stand together in the face of sorrow."

"The profound emotional response is a striking example of vicarious trauma, or secondary traumatic



Ariel Bibas



Kfir Bibas

stress," says specialist wellness counsellor Jody Eiser. "When we engage deeply with [the Bibas family's] suffering, whether through news reports, social media or personal connection, we don't just acknowledge their pain, we begin to feel it. Human empathy allows us to internalise others' experiences even when we haven't personally endured them."

"Our brains process these stories in ways similar to direct trauma. The more we expose ourselves to distressing details such as prolonged captivity, the suffering of the children and the family's devastating loss, the more deeply these narratives imprint on us," Eiser says.

The sometimes-overwhelming sense of powerlessness that vicarious trauma brings can lead to frustration, despair and existential questioning, she says. "This is why self-care and community support are essential for those who engage with traumatic stories. It's crucial to balance engagement with moments of rest and connection."

"Seeking out supportive conversations, setting limits on exposure to distressing content and finding ways to contribute meaningfully, whether through awareness, action or solidarity, can help process these emotions in a healthy way." Both Bushkin and Eiser suggest seeking professional support if the sadness becomes too heavy or you're having trouble navigating complex emotions.

The Bibas story has resonated particularly strongly with Sivan Lapidus, a Johannesburg-based mother of two. "From the moment I heard the story, it shook me," she says. As a Jew, she says, part of the shock was realising that the Bibas family's only crime was being Jewish, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Being the mother of two boys similar in age, I couldn't unsee myself and my boys in the photos and videos of them," says Lapidus. "For 15 months, I've looked at my own boys and seen flashes of the Bibas boys. I've found myself holding my boys a little tighter, a little longer, and being a little more patient."

"My youngest even has curly red hair, similar to Ariel. Every time I watched my son running away, his uncut red hair flowing behind him, I would see that video of Ariel running in his Batman cape."

"Day to day life has to go on," Lapidus says. "But I carry around a deep sense of sadness and pain that I can't seem to shake. It manifests itself in a sort of feeling of heaviness and exhaustion."

She protects herself where possible. "I chose not to watch the release of the bodies. I saw photos after the fact, which was more than enough." Expressing herself on social media is also effective in lightening the load, Lapidus says.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), recalls regularly wearing an Ariel Bibas shirt as she raised awareness of the children impacted by the massacre of 7 October. "In February 2024, I visited the Bibas home in Nir Oz, and saw the toys outside their burned home," she says.

Kahn was also in Israel, at Hostages Square, when the bodies were released. "We all felt that the Bibas family were part of our family," she said in a video recorded as the mourner's *Kaddish* was recited at the square. "This is everybody's *Kaddish*."

Danny Mofsowitz, a mother and the chairperson of the SAJBD's Gauteng Council, reflects how Shiri wrapped her babies in a protective embrace when they were taken by gun-wielding terrorists. "As mothers, we all recognised that instinctive, lioness-like protection of a mother for her babies."

Not only are we devastated by their loss, but South African Jews have the added pain of feeling betrayed by our government, she says. "Yet, we've also had enormous support from South Africans who have recognised our pain and comforted us."

With tragedy comes renewed faith, Mofsowitz says. "There's enormous strength that has been built from generations of Jews' surviving those who want to destroy us. Our generation has been reminded of this."



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School's 'worst athlete' turns cross-country champion

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Sixty-four-year-old Caron Meyerowitz was told she would never be able run due to a health condition when she was only 17, but this month alone, she won two races.

Having started running only six years ago, she won the 10km Jeppe Race for the 60-and-over age category, and won gold with her team at the South African Cross-Country Championships.

Meyerowitz, who turned 64 this week and lives in Edenvale, was part of a team of four selected by Central Gauteng Athletics to do the cross-country through Rand Road Warriors, the running club she joined last year.

Meyerowitz had never run in her life, excluding what she calls her days as "the worst" athlete at school, until she was introduced to parkrun, a community event where you can walk, jog, run, volunteer or spectate, at the age of 58.

"Because I have a condition called Gaucher's Disease, they told my mother I would die by

the time I was 19," she says. "Then they said I would only be able to walk and swim, not run."

Her son, Neil, who ran the parkrun religiously every week, first convinced her to join him at a New Year's Day parkrun. She wasn't particularly excited about it, but in 2018, he convinced her to start the Bezuidenhout (Bez) parkrun in Observatory in Johannesburg. She began doing it by walking before trying a bit of jogging in 2019.

Two weeks ago, she completed her 200th parkrun and 100th session of volunteering at parkrun. The Bezuidenhout parkrun Facebook page dubbed her a "living legend". Her family were there to support her at her 50th and 100th parkruns.

Her personal best is 27:43 at Bez parkrun, and she once came ninth overall.

Meyerowitz is now a pacer at Bez parkrun, and takes pride in having led runners to the finish within 30 minutes. Her husband, Colin, meanwhile, volunteers as a marshal and photographer at the parkruns.

She does most of her parkruns at Bezuidenhout Park, Observatory. "I like Bez.

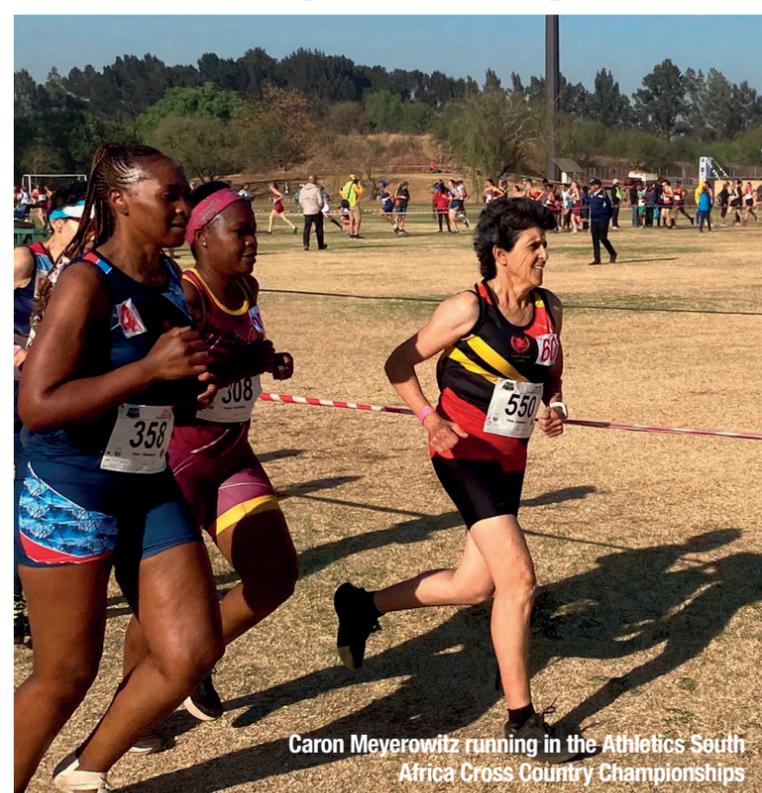
There's a nice spirit. I always tell everybody there, 'What goes down has to come up. When you go down, just remember you're going to find horrible hills on your way back up.' There's such a vibe. Everybody now knows who I am.

"Sometimes I find somebody running slightly behind me and they're not coming past. I turn around and say, 'Are you following me? What time do you want?' If they say 30 minutes, I respond, 'Okay, let's get you to the finish in 30 minutes.' I've got a whole bunch of people to their personal bests by following me. That, to me, is unbelievable. I love it."

Meyerowitz runs because, she says, "I feel fantastic afterwards. I don't think I'll ever need an anti-depressant."

She also feels great while running. "I don't want to run with music in my ears. It's just me running," she says.

On a few occasions when Meyerowitz finished in the top three at competitive races, she didn't know about her achievement until she got home. "The first time I came first was in the Gerald Fox race at the zoo one year. My son, who lives in Israel, registered me to run it.



Caron Meyerowitz running in the Athletics South Africa Cross Country Championships

Frum and stylish – creating your own trends

LULA PENCHARZ

Frum South African women say that just because they choose to dress modestly doesn't mean that their dress sense can't be "creative," "quirky," "trendy," and "personal" while still adhering to *halachic* guidelines.

While Western trends don't target the *tznius* market, South African Jewish women are on top of their game when it comes to following trends and finding their own personal style.



Dani Sack

The SA Jewish Report spoke to seven trendy *frum* women who enjoy being stylish and curating their own aesthetic.

"Dressing modestly doesn't have to be something that isn't cool or trendy," said Amira Cohen, a young jewellery designer and modest fashion influencer.

Gym owner Ronit Garber agrees. "It's normal to want to go out and feel sexy, feminine, and beautiful," she said.

Garber attended an all-girl religious school where, from a young age, "certain parameters of modesty" were prescribed. Even though she wasn't taught to express herself through style at school, she now dresses to feel her most confident and beautiful when she leaves the house. If a popular trend sparks her interest, she makes it comply with *tznius*. She also enjoys experimenting with style.

Cohen also grew up in an observant home, but her journey from a young age was to figure out the possibility of merging Western popular trends with *tznius*. Halacha, for Cohen, is "a bubble which I must follow, and I choose to do so. But the bubble is endless.

"Instead of being stuck in a mindset of Western trends being unachievable, I wanted to mesh what was cool and trendy with the particular standard I was following," she said.

Dani Sack, a student at the University of the

Witwatersrand, said that as a teenager, "I remember feeling as though I couldn't have fun with my outfits if I was religious, because I had to comply with certain guidelines." However now a colourful clothes enthusiast, she has found a way of making modest dressing work with her personality.

"Long skirts and dresses made me feel frumpy and mature," Sack said. So, she began playing around with her style to make it feel authentic. "That was when I discovered how much I loved using colour in my outfits." She started

incorporating a pop of bright colour in her accessories, nails, or shoes and it's rare that she wears "black, grey, or just one solid colour".

"My cupboard is a sea of pinks, blues, reds, greens, and purples," Sack said.

Cohen has no rules when styling herself. "I love mixing patterns if they're part of the same family. You can mix and match animal prints!" When it comes to colour, her trick is to "colour block on the colour wheel". While it might be too whacky for some to mix colours and patterns that don't usually go together, the concept of matching the mismatched excites

Cohen.

A tip she shares for creating your own funky closet is to "start with the basics". After you have the "classic white T-shirt and quality black skirt" everything else is "fluff and glitter". Elevate any look with bags, jewellery, and accessories without visiting the fanciest shops. There are so many copies of luxury brands, she said, women don't need to waste money on a label to make themselves feel beautiful. Said Garber, "I want to walk out of the house every single day feeling like a boss, because I believe that you wear influences how you hold yourself in the world."

Though she "experiments with brands and styles", she swears by wearing "what I feel good in and what makes me feel confident. It's not necessarily what's trending at the time." She's carried this policy into her business.

Garber has designed *tznius* gym-wear so that observant women can feel beautiful, comfortable, and confident while exercising. She's created a range of gym skirts that vary from a pencil skirt to a skater skirt just above the knee. One even has built-in shorts underneath.

Shayna Levitt, a young fashion lover who is on a gap year in Israel, said, "Long denim skirts are essentials in a wardrobe, especially in different shades of blue, white, and black." She enthuses about their versatility and re-wearability. Levitt advises using the "sandwich method" to tie outfits together by matching

the colour of your shoes with the colour of your top. She "stacks necklaces, adds bags, and collects denim and leather jackets" to make outfits a bit more to her taste.

She suggests investing in "long, flowy skirts with different patterns" and says "stripes are very in". Her go-to items of clothing are "long linen skirts" and "oversized button up shirts" with a few "bows" here and there to create a funky look.



Amira Cohen

Levitt encourages "branching out to find different statement pieces that are interesting to curate a look around". Another tip she offers is to wear a fitted skirt with a loose top, and vice versa. "Neutrals are essential," she said. "You can never go wrong with a beige skirt or linen look."

Yakira Shalpid, a student who works part-time for the Jewish National Fund of South Africa, said she "colours outside the lines" while still complying with Judaism's modesty prescriptions. She takes pride in still being perceived as *tznius* even though she adds her own "twist and flair" to her outfits.

"Sometimes trends require you to show more skin, but I always find there's a modest way around it," Shalpid said. She relies on her trusted "staple pieces" to accessorise beyond standard jewellery. Whether Shalpid layers a cardigan, pops a pair of sunglasses from her collection on her head, or dons her favourite chunky shoes, she ensures she is expressing her "edgy" but "timeless" aesthetic.

"I get inspiration from Pinterest," she says. "I'll try to copy the styles and just lengthen the skirt." Her trick is to find a skirt she likes at the shops, buy it in a bigger size so the length suits halacha, and have it tailored to fit her.

Sydenham Shul's Rebbetzin Estee Stern opts for a more "clean look". "Longer dresses and long sleeves are now trending, which is a plus," she said. If she stumbles upon something she likes, she visits a seamstress afterwards to tailor it according to *halachic* requirements.

Nurit Joselowsky, an account manager at Mama Media, opts for a more simple style to feel comfortable and confident. Whether it's Shabbos or just a chilled Sunday, she finds that throwing on a shirt and long skirt is most adaptable to any situation. Her "latest and easiest go-to is a leopard-print skirt and button down top with sandals or sneakers". She dresses it up with a silk shirt for work during the week.

These women hope to inspire other *tznius* women to explore their own aesthetic, creativity, and sense of style, saying that it's worth it to feel confident and beautiful.

I didn't know you had to wear an age badge, so I ran and I went home. He said, 'Do you know that you would have been first if you stayed after the race?'"

When she ran the Jeppe race for Rand Road Warriors last year, "I ran, went home, and my son said, 'Go back, you came first.'" The same thing happened at a Pirates race, she came third but missed out on being on the podium.

Last weekend, Meyerowitz ran the Bez parkrun in orange in honour of the Bibas family. For photos, she put her hands up with two of her fingers down in tribute to recently-freed hostage Emily Damari, whose fingers were shot off.

Before that, Meyerowitz ran with a yellow ribbon as a reminder of the hostages. She was wearing a yellow ribbon when she won gold in the Cross-Country Championships.

Meyerowitz encouraged her husband to be a volunteer at parkrun. "He had a hip replacement a year and a half ago," she says, "but we do walk together." He also wore orange this week in honour of the Bibas boys.

"At school, I was the worst athlete. I always came last in the 100m. I've always walked because the doctors said I could. We've got dogs, so we walk all the time. But then I started doing parkrun and getting personal bests almost every week just before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, I've done about 70 [not] parkruns – the self-recorded 5km races when parkruns weren't possible during the COVID-19 pandemic."

She runs on her own in Edenvale, and then meets up with the Rand Road Warriors on various mornings during the week to run about 10km.

She ran the Jerusalem Marathon in 2022 with her son and came second in her age group for the 10km race. Unfortunately, it wasn't an official result as she didn't register for the race correctly.

Meyerowitz participated in the race as she happened to be in Israel to help care for her son's second son, who was a year old and had a fractured femur following a fall.

Meyerowitz and her husband ran a pharmacy in Rosettenville for 52 years.

She still can't believe her running feats, not only because she basically never ran before, but also in comparison to others with Gaucher's disease. "I must just be lucky. Gaucher's disease is an inherited Ashkenazi condition and it's more prevalent than Tay-Sachs. So, basically, I shouldn't be able to run. Every time I run, I feel like I've achieved something."

A model in one of Ronit Garber's gym skirts

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Grief and grotesque reaction

Last week marked one of the most heartbreaking and grief-filled moments in our collective memory, as the bodies of Oded Lifshitz, Shiri, Kfir, and Ariel Bibas were finally returned to Israel.

The images of Shiri Bibas shielding her children with fierce love and strength are forever etched in our minds, an enduring example of maternal courage and love in the face of unimaginable terror.

In response to these horrific events, we held an impromptu memorial on Thursday night, 20 February, and Friday morning. It was recognised that, in moments of such profound loss, a space for communal gathering was essential and that it was best to host this commemoration on Thursday night and Friday while the need was greatest.

The memorial, held at the space dedicated to the community's 7 October commemoration, was one of the most emotionally powerful gatherings in recent memory. Hundreds of candles were lit as the community answered the call, arriving in droves to pay their respects. A particularly poignant moment unfolded on Friday morning when a community member began playing the guitar and singing, filling the space with a hauntingly beautiful tribute. Once again, we were deeply moved by the way our community came together, and we are profoundly grateful to all who participated.

Meanwhile, our national director, Wendy Kahn, who had just participated in the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations in Israel, spent Thursday at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, the heart of the struggle to bring the hostages home. In fact, Kahn and the delegation met the son of Lifshitz at the Knesset only a day prior to his body being released.

Yet, even amid this tragic moment, we were once again disappointed by the response from our own government. On the same day that the hostages' bodies were returned, President Cyril Ramaphosa, speaking to the G20, welcomed the ceasefire in Gaza but failed to acknowledge the return of the bodies or the horrific cruelty and evil that led to their abduction and murder in the first place.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



In response, we have issued an open letter to the president expressing our deep disappointment at his continued refusal to show any sympathy for Jewish victims. His and his government's ongoing failure to call out Hamas for this atrocity reveals just how far South Africa has strayed from the moral standing it was once recognised for in 1994. A country that ignores the brutal murder of babies can no longer claim to be a beacon of human rights.

Furthermore, at a time when the South African Jewish community is grieving, shocked, and in pain, the complete lack of empathy from our leadership is deeply troubling. We feel ashamed that our government has failed not only the Bibas babies but also the remaining hostages, whose safe return could have ended the war, bringing relief to both Israelis and Gazans alike.

The protest in Cape Town over the weekend was yet another disturbing display of antisemitism and historical distortion, completely tone-deaf to the atrocities committed against innocent Israelis. The sight of swastikas along the Sea Point Promenade was nothing short of an open antagonistic provocation and an assault on our country's values of tolerance and respect for diversity.

This protest forms part of an ongoing attempt by Hamas and its supporters to deny its atrocities. Among the most egregious examples of this was an appalling video shared on Gift of the Givers' social media platforms. The autopsy results are irrefutable - the Bibas babies were strangled, their small bodies mutilated in a grotesque attempt to cover up the crime. Yet, Hamas, true to form, immediately launched a denial campaign, desperately attempting to shift blame onto Israel, and Dr Imtiaz Sooliman shamefully amplified its falsehoods. This is an insidious attempt to erase Jewish suffering and absolve terrorists of their barbarity. Once again, Sooliman has exposed his true colours, emboldened, shameless, and grotesque.

UJW steps in to help families in Gqeberha

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) Port Elizabeth once again played fairy godmother to families in need, paying off the lay-bys for 24 families at Pep Stores in Walmer, Gqeberha.

The UJW has been paying lay-bys for school uniforms at the beginning of each year for the past three years. This gesture is kept secret until the families arrive at the shop to collect and pay the outstanding balance on their items only to find that the balance has already been paid.

The lay-bys paid at the store in Walmer included school uniforms and backpacks, and benefitted about 40 children.

After the festive season, when expenses for school supplies can feel overwhelming, the UJW's kindness helps to ease the financial burden.

In addition, 60 pairs of school shoes were donated to various schools for children whose families were unable to afford new shoes.

Chairlady of the Union of Jewish Women Port Elizabeth, Elaine Racussen, with some of the lay-by payment beneficiaries



Letters

'PANDERING' IS A POLITE WAY TO DESCRIBE NETANYAHU

Samuel J. Hyde's opinion piece, "Netanyahu's pandering undermines Israel's protection" (*SA Jewish Report*, 20 February 2025), was astonishingly generous in its critique. It was published on the same day that we witnessed the grim return of four murdered victims of Hamas' brutality, including the Bibas children, an event grotesquely staged as a "ceremony".

I urge readers to watch the interview Hyde references, available on YouTube, which offers only a glimpse of Netanyahu's conduct. There are far harsher adjectives that better describe the man. One might have expected him to show the slightest decency by standing with the bereaved families as they received their loved ones' remains. But neither he nor his wife bothered to appear, just as they have been conspicuously absent from the return of every hostage in recent weeks. Not that anyone was surprised.

As for the uncrowned queen of the Levant, with aspirations for that dinner invitation at the White House which got lost in the post then added to her disappointment, couldn't even make the "B-listers" shindig at Mar-a-Lago. She deflected her disappointment by showering her motherly love on the crown prince, who lounges in a luxury Miami condo at taxpayers' expense while his peers fight and die on multiple fronts at home. The contrast is obscene.

If Israel's Channel 12's exclusive report on 18 September 2024 is accurate, it paints a damning picture of Netanyahu's leadership at a time when Israel is facing one of its most painful crises. Actively undermining a hostage deal - if these revelations hold - would suggest that Netanyahu prioritised political survival over the urgent moral and strategic imperative of bringing hostages home. - **Allan Wolman, Tel Aviv, Israel**





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INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

It's not complicated, they say. As long as you buy your vegetables from Woolworths using your Discovery card, but receive your salary on your Investec card, then link it to have eBucks on your FNB account, which you convert to miles, then they will actually pay you to fly via Dubai on a business class ticket, provided

"If you don't want to go into a Checkers, then just sign up to eWallet, link your card, and make payments that way!" "Consider it done!" I answer, knowing full well that there is as much chance of me following through on it as remembering to clear the gutters of dead leaves ahead of summer. I know people who claim to have never

They tell me that simply by not smoking, being committed to running a marathon every alternate Sunday, and by making sure that they have the flexibility of a Cirque du Soleil acrobat, they have ensured that they can fly to Cape Town at a discount of 30% if they book in March for December (the year following), if prices don't go up.

confirm their Diamond status before March. Which is why it was a truly wonderful day when I decided to free myself of that burden. Especially when I see friends frantically filling in declarations that they never have and never will touch a cigarette, dashing off to the bio to see how many points they can beg from them, and fastening their Garmin to the dog's collar and then forcing the poor thing to run around the dog park.

While the chase for free flights and elusive gadgets might promise reward, I believe it's the raw, unfiltered chaos of real life that truly liberates us. Passover might be the recognised festival of freedom for Jews. But for me, it was the day I turned my back on the plague of membership incentives. Which is why on the days when those around brag of their benefits, I remind myself that the most valuable ticket isn't the "free" one via Dubai, but rather the freedom to say, "No, I don't have a MySchool card. Whatever that is."



you have booked it on the third Wednesday of a month that has 30 days. "What do you mean you don't pay your electricity on your credit card?" I was asked.

paid for an airline ticket. I know 60-year-olds who claim to have a medical age of a 33-year-old water polo player along with a spare Apple watch in every kitchen drawer.

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