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Jewish Repor ■ Volume 28 - Number 13 ■ 10 April 2025 Chag Sameach! Our next edition will be out on 24 April.

# News24 opinionista attacks local 'Zionists'

**TALI FEINBERG** 

ocal academic, Oscar van Heerden, has made it clear in his regular opinion pieces on News24 that he wants Israel and its population to be obliterated, he doesn't want peace in the Middle East, and he supports terrorism. News24 is South Africa's most popular online

South Africa, according to his most recent piece on 24 March, isn't "fighting the Americans here [in South Africa's declining relationship with the United States]. No, we are, in fact, fighting the Zionists both abroad and United States Congress, some local political parties, the [South African] Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) through their chief rabbi [in fact the two are separate entities], among many others."

Regardless, News24 continues to publish his extremist pieces on a regular basis. Van Heerden is a senior research fellow for African diplomacy and leadership at the University of Johannesburg.

He regularly employs classic antisemitic tropes that Israel, Zionists, and Jews are controlling the world, have global proxies, and act against the well-being of society.

attacking the representative Jewish leadership in such

inflammatory and defamatory terms, Van Heerden engages in clear-cut incitement to hatred against the broader Jewish community. His articles are replete with toxic antisemitic stereotypes, including that Jews are disloyal to their host countries, and that in pursuit of their own 'selfish' and 'immoral' ends, they use excessive power behind the scenes to undermine the common good."

Van Heerden says "the Zionists" have "decided it is time to teach South Africa a lesson they will never forget. Sanctions, executive orders, removal from preferential trade agreements, and so much more to come. According to Trump and the Zionists, South

fair game. Our collective brains trust is needed to outsmart this Zionist fox." He also calls Israel a "regional ogre".

Saks says that "typical of Jew haters through

the ages, Van Heerden portrays Jews as an unwelcome element in society, people who everyone else needs to distrust and shun. His 'us' and 'them' language serves to further 'other' the community, portraying it as not being part of the broader South African population, and as being alien, hostile, and harmful. This is most notable in the comment, that 'we are fighting the Zionists both abroad and domestically."

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks says Van Heerden's "intellectually bankrupt" articles on News24 are "propaganda".

In addition, she says, "His characterisation of the US-Israel relationship as merely 'transactional' cynically echoes age-old antisemitic tropes about Jewish financial influence controlling political power. By suggesting that Israel simply 'purchases' American support rather than earning it through shared values and strategic alignment, he weaponises dangerous stereotypes about Jewish money manipulating governments, a centuries-old canard used to fuel hatred and violence against Jewish communities."

This superficial analysis "masquerading as scholarly insight reveals a profound intellectual dishonesty, ignoring seven decades of deep-rooted co-operation across Republican and Democratic administrations founded on shared democratic principles, intelligence co-operation, and technological innovation," says Marks.

In September 2024, News24 fired local columnist Howard Feldman after he tweeted about Israel's "pager operation" because, according to editor Adriaan Basson, "News24 can in no way be associated with writers who

glorify violence." However, Van Heerden has made it clear that he supports terrorism, describing terrorist entities like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran as legitimate "resistance movements".

He writes that Hamas's 7 October attacks were done "in pursuit of their liberation". In a 31 March piece for News24 titled, "Israel's actions are shaping a new world order," he gleefully reports that "Zionism has entered its last phase. Hamas is still alive and well and continues their resistance campaign. Hostages remain in captivity. Iran continues with its nuclear weapons programme. As for wanting to show that Israel is on top in the region by breaking all the resistance movements such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran, well, I think we can comfortably say just because you kill their leaders, does not result in crushing these resistance movements."

Van Heerden clearly supports Hamas's objectives of 7 October 2023, writing that "Hamas's objectives at the start of the war were twofold. One, make the war as expensive for Israel as possible, and two, isolate Israel regionally and internationally. It's safe to say that both these objectives have been attained." He says it's unfair that when discussing the Middle East, that "we're told we must first condemn the atrocities of Hamas and what they did on 7 October 2023".

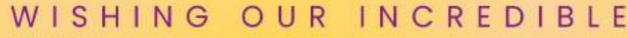
He sees the murder and wounding of Israelis as a success, writing, "Since this war started, more than 1 139 Israelis have been killed, and of these, 891, at last count, were soldiers, and 8 730 were wounded. The Israeli economy has taken a hit. This is the beginning of the end for the state of Israel."

In response to questions from the SA Jewish Report, Basson referred the matter to News24's public editor, Professor George Claassen, who says that Van Heerden's columns are "protected comment as set out by Section 7 of the South African Press Code. The two columns are definitely not propagating violence."

Not only does Van Heerden want to see Israel and its citizens obliterated, he wants an end to peace prospects in the Middle East, writing that "the Abraham Accords also now lie in ruin".

Continued on page 4>>







Chag Pesach Kasher

Ve'Sameach



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www.sajewishreport.co.za sajewishreport Osa\_jewishreport Asked if he plans to drop 17% tariff on Israeli goods, Trump says, 'Maybe not'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu finished his visit to Washington, DC, without any public commitment by President Donald Trump to roll back the 17% tariff he is imposing on Israeli goods.

Asked during a press conference with Netanyahu on Monday, 7 April, whether he planned to adjust the tariff, Trump demurred.

"Maybe not," Trump said. He then brought up

America's military aid to Israel.

"Don't forget, we help Israel a lot," he said. 'You know, we give Israel \$4 billion [R78.2 billion] a year - and congratulations, by the way, that's pretty good - but

we give Israel billions of dollars a year. Billions. It's one of the highest."

The comment was a reflection of Trump's belief that other countries take advantage of the United States

(US). It was also a blow to Netanyahu, who had made the tariff a

**US President Donald Trump annour** 

reciprocal tariffs on 2 April 2025

top goal of his trip. Israeli media emphasised that, unlike during his previous White House visit in February, Netanyahu had returned to Israel without a victory to declare.

When his office announced late on

Saturday that Netanyahu was returning to Washington for a second meeting with Trump, "the tariff issue" came first on the list of topics on the anticipated agenda. Trump's tariff on Israeli goods was higher than what

> Trump imposed on some countries with which the US has had cooler relations, and came after Israeli officials abolished all tariffs on US imports in a bid to stave Trump off.

But after meeting Treasury Secretary Howard Lutnick; Vice-President JD Vance; Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff; and Trump, Netanyahu exacted no public concessions. Instead, he said in public comments before his Trump meeting that he had

Cover photograph: In Cape Town this week, former hostages Eliya Cohen (left) and Almog Meir Jan (right) and Nova festival

survivor Ziv Abud (centre), called on the world to ensure that Hamas releases the remaining 59 hostages.

promised to make additional changes in a bid to remove the tariffs.

"We will eliminate the trade deficit with the United States. We intend to do it quickly," he said. "We're also going to eliminate a variety of trade barriers that have been put up unnecessarily. Israel can serve as a model for many countries who ought to do the same."

Swedish teens who attacked Israeli embassy caught in Iranian terrorism plot, **CNN finds** 

Two Swedish teens tried to attack the Israeli embassy in Stockholm last year at the direction of Iran, Swedish police determined.

A 15-year-old who was directed to travel to the embassy with a gun last May was arrested before he arrived, but the next day, a 14-year-old fired shots near the embassy before being apprehended, according to a new investigation by CNN.

The incidents startled Swedish Jews on edge because of a spike in antisemitism tied to the Israel-Hamas war, and came amid a broad uptick in gun violence.

The Swedish Security Service soon tied the incidents to Iran, which has a long track record of sowing violence against Jewish and Israeli targets abroad. The service issued a warning that Iran had been using organised crime networks in the country to carry out terror plots.

The Iranian embassy in Sweden called the accusations "fake and propagandistic".

Last month, following yet another attempted attack on the Israeli embassy in Sweden in January, the US Treasury sanctioned one of the Swedish gangs allegedly behind the plots, a crime ring called Foxtrot, as well as its leader, Rawa Majid, over its collusion with Iran.

Majid collaborated with the Iranian ministry of intelligence and security, according to the treasury's press release, which also referenced the gang's manipulation of teenagers to carry out its attacks on Israelis and Jews. • All briefs supplied by JTA.

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The ability to ask questions

recent study revealed something unsurprising: children are more likely to ask Google a question than to ask a parent. Conducted by Birmingham Science City, the study prompted Dr Pam Waddell, its director, to remark, "This isn't necessarily a bad thing. It shows just how commonplace digital technology is for children today and how comfortable they are with using it."

Most would agree that there's nothing wrong with looking up a word in an online dictionary instead of a physical one. The concern, however, is when technology becomes the sole authority for all types of information, replacing the role of a parent or teacher. It's often difficult to distinguish real information from misleading content, and this challenge is even greater for children.

Beyond the reliability of information, another significant concern is the loss of interpersonal learning. Education, especially in Torah, isn't just about acquiring knowledge. The discussion between teacher and student or between parent and child, adds depth to learning. Google cannot clarify ideas, ensure understanding, or make information personal. It doesn't contribute to relationships the way meaningful

This is especially relevant during Pesach. The many aspects of this *chag* revolve around discussion, where questions and answers are integral to the seder. Nowhere is this more evident than in the dialogue of the four sons.

In parshat Bo, the Torah states, "And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' You shall say to him, 'With a strong hand Hashem brought us out of Egypt." (Shemot 13:14). Rashi attributes this question to the she'eino yode'a lish'ol, the son who does

not know how **Rabbi Alon Friedman** to ask. Yet in the Yeshiva Mizrachi haggadah, this

very answer is directed at the wicked son. Why does the haggadah assign the same question to two vastly different personalities?

There must be a connection between one who does not ask and one who is wicked. The Torah teaches that education is non-negotiable. A child who isn't given the right education is, in essence, receiving no education at all. One who lacks Torah may eventually be satisfied with misleading ideas, making one susceptible to falsehoods.

The essence of learning is the ability to ask questions. Inquiry is a fundamental human trait. One must seek to understand, delving deeper into the wisdom of the Torah. But questions must be asked wisely - knowing what to ask, when to ask, and whom to ask. The nature of one's question reflects their character and sincerity.

Some people ask only those who will give them the answers they want to hear. Others avoid asking because they fear the truth. Refusal to question - or worse, refusal to accept an answer - stunts intellectual and spiritual growth. True inquiry requires humility: the ability to listen and accept knowledge from others.

The seder is built on the power of questions. It teaches us that seeking truth requires genuine curiosity and an open heart. As we gather with our families this Pesach, let's embrace the importance of asking, listening, and engaging in meaningful dialogue.

Wishing you and your families a chaq kasher vesameach.

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The three matzot on the seder table are symbolic of the Kohanim, Levites, and Israelites. They also represent our patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

On a practical level, we need three so that when we break the middle matzah, two whole ones remain for the hamotzi blessing.

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10 – 24 April 2025 SA JEWISH REPORT **3** 

### Endangered GNU the tip of the iceberg

OPINION

igmund Freud created the psychoanalytic theory of a "screen memory". By this he meant a seemingly innocuous childhood memory that unconsciously serves to mask or hide a more significant, even traumatic, memory from view.

The current Budget standoff which threatens the end of the African National Congress/Democratic Alliance coalition at the heart of the Government of National Unity (GNU) has been presented by some commentators, either lazily or maliciously, as consequent to either DA overreach in its demands – "arrogance" is the preferred put down here – or about a squabble over a 0.5% hike in the VAT rate and other indirect tax increases. It's also seen as a bust up between the two major parties in the coalition.

There are some realities in all the above, though on closer examination, these are more Freudian "screen reasons" which hide more fundamental and harsher truths

Before headlining some key takeaways here, there's no resolution of this impasse at the time of writing.

Since I was one of the political midwives involved last year in the messy birth of the GNU, I'm not a dispassionate bystander as we watch its possible end, just nine months into its life, or more optimistically, its reformation

Whatever the immediate outcome, though, the editor of the *Sunday Times* revealed an important truth behind current ructions

On Sunday, Makhudu Sefara wrote, "[The ANC NEC meeting to decide the fate of DA in government] is not about whether the DA keeps its positions within the GNU, it's about how much grip Ramaphosa has lost within the ANC"

On his accurate telling, the DA/ANC spat is the screen memory; the real fight is within the ANC as to who emerges as Ramaphosa's successor. The vultures and state looters are lined up behind his deputy, Paul Mashatile, who on past form might render the Zuma state capture years a fond memory.

Then there was the insightful article by Tim Cohen, writing in *Currency*. He notes "an uncomfortable



truth" at the heart of current crisis, describing as false that somehow, the DA was demanding a list of non-obtainable concessions in exchange for its vote on the Budget. Rather, it was the ANC which "does not want its boondoggles [massive wasteful spending on cadres and state agencies] by DA demand for a review of state spending and a say in policy and actions relating to the

The ANC treats its governing partners with contempt. It's chaotic, bad faith, and self (or party) serving style of doing things will, if unchecked, also kill off any prospects for economic growth and denting the mountain of unemployment which disfigures our national landscape. It threatens to tip over into an avalanche of future discord and destruction.

It wasn't serious, for example, for Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana to present two – thus far – versions of the 2025/2026 Budget absent any agreement, let alone engaged negotiations, with his partners in the GNU.

It wasn't serious, at least in terms of honouring the commitments signed into an agreement embedded in the 14 June 2024 statement of intent, to bypass the signatories to that agreement, i.e. members of the current government. And then go shopping around Parliament for support from parties outside the agreement. This being the precise route followed by the ANC since its first, failed attempt to introduce the Budget on 19 February.

Never mind treating the country of South Africa like an unruly ANC branch, this manoeuvre of going outside

government and its partners to shore up support from parties in opposition to the GNU was a spectacular and egregious double-cross. In and of itself, it renders the GNU's viability in the gravest doubt.

The ANC considered it even less serious in terms of Cabinet management, though it was very serious for the economy, to reintroduce a slightly amended Budget on 12 March, again absent buy-in from key coalition partners.

The DA proposals themselves include sharing in the economic direction and policy of government, spending reviews, devolution of ports and rail, co-chairing of Operation Vulindlela, tweaks on VAT, and so on. These are hardly ideological demands. The DA didn't call for an end to Black Economic Empowerment or a reconfigured foreign policy or other items which are anathema to the ANC, which would, however, provide a genuine growth spurt for the country.

Had the ANC honoured the provisions of the June 2024 statement of intent which it signed, it would have avoided entirely the fiasco of the last-minute wrangling which has played out in recent weeks.

For example, clause 13 of that agreement bound parties following the formation of the GNU to convene a "lekgotla [strategy session] to develop an agreed policy agenda, which shall include policy priorities for the GNU".

No such *lekgotla* has ever been held. Presumably if it had been, the parties might have achieved common agreement on this Budget and its implications.

Still, if you do a *vox populi*, it's likely that most people will favour the DA's continuance in the GNU, especially if its departure heralds the entrance, directly or indirectly, of the Economic Freedom Fighters into governing arrangements.

We don't at this writing know the outcome of this wrangle and who will be left standing inside or outside government when the Budget finally passes.

There are hard deadlines for the passage, in stages, of the 2025/2026 Budget. The Budget saga isn't over, and despite the lack of good faith, probably a GNU absent the DA could be a whole lot worse.

 $Simultaneously, there \'s\ Donald\ Trump\'s\ liberation\ day.$ 

otectionist tariffs on

He unleashed protectionist tariffs on the world and a 30% surcharge on South African exports to the United States (bar minerals), effectively overriding any protection offered by the African Growth and Opportunity Act. And that's just for starters.

Even if it crashes our local industries.

When South Africa was hit by Trump tariffs, it wasn't because we were being singled out for attention. Tariffs were levied on all countries running trade surpluses with the United States.

However, there's another set of punishments which Trump could line up against South Africa as he targets us for exemplary attention. We got a foretaste of this with his 7 February executive order addressing "egregious actions" of the South African government.

Right or wrong, things could soon get a whole lot worse. Some useful thoughts on how matters could spiral was spelt out last week by historian and writer, Jonny Steinberg. He wrote, "Could Trump threaten to destroy [SA] with a couple of executive orders and then invite its president to talk? The answer is yes. Trump could impose trade sanctions on SA; he could prohibit US institutions from buying SA's sovereign debt. He doesn't need legislation to do this. He could do unthinkable damage to SA by signing his name."

Saving the current GNU, which means maintaining the partnership with the DA, might, beyond salvaging the Budget and maintaining stability, have the add-on effect of saving SA from further punishing measures from a vengeful Trump. That's not certain, but it offers at least a measure of hope.

The entrance into the GNU of the "Kill the Boer" red berets, either as a formal member or outside the GNU but with a veto on Budgets and legislation, will extinguish this

The ball, as the cliché has it, is in the ANC's court.

 Tony Leon is the founding leader of the Democratic Alliance, the longest serving leader of the official opposition in Parliament since the advent of democracy, and a former ambassador. He is chairperson of a communications company.





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# US bill puts SA under the microscope

**NICOLA MILTZ** 

iplomatic relations between Washington and Pretoria have slid further following a new bill introduced in the United States House of Representatives last week by two Republican legislators.

The bill calls for a sweeping review of the US-South Africa bilateral relationship and for the possible imposition of sanctions on senior African National Congress leaders. It also demands a hardline reassessment of South Africa's ties to regimes considered adversarial to the US.

The legislation, tabled by Texas Congressman Ronny Jackson and Michigan Congressman John James, directly accuses South Africa of aligning with global powers hostile to American interests, namely China, Russia, Iran, and with Hamas, and abandoning its long-claimed policy of non-alignment. James brought forward a similar bill

The proposed US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act of 2025 identifies multiple concerns, including Pretoria's deepening engagement with authoritarian regimes; its increasingly antagonistic stance toward Israel and its case at the International Cout of Justice (ICJ); and its alleged support for Hamas, which is designated a foreign terrorist organisation by the US

The bill states that South Africa's foreign policy trajectory "undermines US national security and foreign policy interests", and demands consequences for what it deems betrayal by a supposed ally.

"Trump's America has become a cold and forbidding place for Pretoria," said Professor Hussein Solomon at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State. "The ANC [African National Congress] is effectively persona non grata in Washington. Importantly, however, this doesn't mean that South Africa has been targeted, as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and others like AfriForum have been in and about in the US of late."

While some commentators say the move could have serious consequences for South Africa's global standing and economic interests, others hold a more cautious or

Former US diplomat and political commentator, Brooks Spector, told the SA Jewish Report that the bill was introduced by "fringe" Republican congressmen, not senior figures, and was unlikely to progress.

"Any congressman can introduce legislation, but getting it scheduled for a committee hearing, let alone a full House vote, is a different matter," said Spector. "My crystal ball is misty, but I don't see this going far. Congress is overwhelmed right now, and South Africa isn't top of

mind, it's well down the playlist. It may not seem like that from here, but this is the reality."

Spector said the bill had "more of a domestic appeal" than a foreign policy impact, particularly coming from these congressmen, who didn't come from urban cities but rather from rural or peri-urban districts where concerns about issues like "replacement

Spector advised that rather than getting agitated about the bill, the ANC should prepare itself to respond effectively when such issues arise. "They [South African government] need to have a solid, well-argued brief and work on building better connections with House and Senate members, even without an ambassador in

In response to mounting pressure, International Relations and Cooperation Minister Ronald Lamola reaffirmed the government's position, saying that South Africa wouldn't back down from its ICJ case against Israel.

Lamola defended the ICJ case in response to a parliamentary question, saying it aimed to "preserve the existence of the Palestinian people as a group and to end all acts of apartheid and genocide against them".

He emphasised that the government had acted "in accordance with its international obligations", and that US aid cuts wouldn't influence Pretoria's legal or diplomatic

"The government doesn't intend to reconsider South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice following the withdrawal of all the United States of America's aid," Lamola stated firmly.

Political commentator Daniel Silke said South Africa was already under review given the latest stiff 30% tariff hike on selected goods, which effectively nullified the AGOA (Africa Growth and Opportunity Act). "A further review of relations could be extremely uncomfortable for the ANC, but it is all speculative," he said.

"It is compounded by the country's own problems within the Government of National Unity [GNU]. The dissatisfaction within the GNU will play into the broader view in Washington that there is political instability in SA,"

DA MP Michael Bagraim said employment was already affected by the latest US review of South Africa.

"As a labour lawyer and someone focused on job creation, I can say this latest development has been disastrous for employment," Bagraim said. "The government's handling of foreign affairs has been deeply damaging, possibly the worst in five years when it comes to job losses. We need to rethink our entire approach, starting with a complete overhaul of Dirco [the department of international relations and cooperation].



For years, the US has supported South Africa financially with little in return, and now that those subsidies are at risk, the government is playing the blame game. The ANC simply doesn't understand how to act in the national interest."

This is the second time in little more than a year that US legislators have introduced such legislation. In June last year, the House approved a bipartisan bill with an amendment calling for a review of South Africa's

national security risks to the US, but didn't proceed further under former US President Joe Biden's administration.

In February, four US Republican congressmen wrote to President Donald Trump urging him to take action against South Africa specifically, asking Trump to scrap AGOA. They accused the ANC of running an "ethno-nationalist gangster regime" and among other complaints, accused the country of being "Hamas propagandists".

The bill empowers the US president to impose sanctions on individuals deemed responsible for human rights violations or corruption under the Global Magnitsky Act. It directs the secretary of state and secretary of defence to determine whether South Africa's activities have undermined American interests, with a report to be submitted to Congress within 30 days of

Whether the bill gains momentum in the US Congress remains to be seen, but its introduction is the clearest sign yet that Washington's patience with the ANC-led government may be wearing thin.

### News24 opinionista attacks local 'Zionists'

>>Continued from page 1

Van Heerden repeats the antisemitic trope that Jews are separate from society, saying that the Jewish state "tells us time and time again that they are the chosen people and therefore answerable only to G-d".

Van Heerden writes that Israel's very existence is the problem, and that it has engaged in "ethnic cleansing" since 1948. He criticises Netanyahu for continuing the war during Ramadan, ignoring that Hamas brutally attacked Israel on Shabbat and Simchat Torah.

Marks condemns Van Heerden's "deliberate mischaracterisation of Israel's existential struggle for survival as imperial aggression. This completely erases Hamas's documented strategy of maximising civilian casualties, its charter explicitly calling for Israel's destruction, and Israel's numerous peace proposals that Palestinian leadership has rejected outright."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, says, "Van Heerden's crude and simplistic understanding of US foreign policy needs to be called out. The Zionist lobby doesn't drive US foreign policy, as he suggests. This argument was put to bed many years ago by Christopher Hitchens and Noam Chomsky, both hostile to Zionism, when they savaged The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy, by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Hitchens went so far as to detect the smell of antisemitism in the Mearsheimer and Walt account.

"Sadly, one also detects an unpleasant smell in Van Heerden's ravings," says Shain. "Allusions to 'the chosen' are problematic, as are suggestions that South African Zionists are a disloyal 'fifth column'. I'm shocked that News24 can publish such unadulterated

Marks notes that "Van Heerden's libellous accusation that Israel's self-defence measures amount to 'state-sponsored terrorism' constitutes dangerous incitement that flies in the face of established international law. Article 51 of the United Nations Charter explicitly recognises every sovereign nation's inherent right to self-defence against armed attacks. His deliberate omission of Hamas's extensively documented war crimes reveals his true agenda of demonising the Jewish state rather than pursuing

Claassen says that "News24 has consistently given a right of reply to opinion articles that are critical of Israel's actions in Gaza, and to columnists who defended Israel vigorously. None of the opinion articles criticising Israel contravened the press code. To refer to Israel as a 'Zionist fox' is also protected comment."

"We will be guided by Professor Claassen's response," says Basson.





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Wishing you and your family a happy and healthy Passover.

**6** SA JEWISH REPORT 10 – 24 April 2025

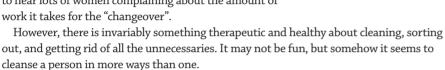
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### Spring-cleaning and future proofing

s we count down to Pesach this weekend, many of us are furiously clearing out our homes of *chometz* to put in place this annual eight-day alternate existence. Essentially, we're spring-cleaning our homes, cleaning out all the nooks and crannies to ensure no tiny bits of *shmutz* are stuck there.

Turns out spring-cleaning has roots in Judaism and preparation for Pesach. It's not surprising, considering it's spring in Israel now, and there's lots of cleaning happening there for Pesach.

I guess, the more years you do Pesach prep, the more organised you become and the easier it gets. Only, I have it on good authority, it never becomes a simple, fun task. It's around this time of year that wherever I go, I seem to hear lots of women complaining about the amount of work it takes for the "changeover"



When you have that empty shelf, you start afresh with what you put on it. When your cupboards are bare, you make new and potentially wise decisions about what to fill them with.

So, this time of year is a wonderful time of renewal, changing focus, and upgrading what we do because of all the cleaning and changing.

And so it is with the *SA Jewish Report*. As you know, at the beginning of this year, we found ourselves in a precarious financial situation. We called on our community to help, and people have been incredibly generous.

Having said that, we realised that we couldn't escape what has been happening to media around the world, namely the need to ultimately move online only. We must future proof our SA Jewish Report media platform no matter what!

We do understand that our newspaper is a "Shabbos read" for many, and others just love reading the hard copy version of the newspaper. I get it.

However, the costs of printing and distribution are exorbitant, and make this newspaper an extraordinarily expensive venture. These expenses will only increase as time goes by.

So, we have started a gradual process of future proofing our newspaper. This week, you will be able to download and print your own edition of the newspaper on your home printer. For those who have tried printing the pdf version before and found it impossible to read because the print is so small, we have changed that for you.

We have made it A4 compatible, so if you print out the A4 version on your home printer, it will be easy to read. You can even staple the pages together so you can easily page through the newspaper as you always have.

This is an excellent alternative to reading the newspaper online.

Don't get me wrong, for now and the foreseeable future, we will still print the *SA Jewish Report*, and it will be available at the regular outlets. However, we aren't printing as many as we used to so you might find it easier to print your own personal copy at home.

Effectively, you have two options for reading the print version. You can also read the newspaper online on your cellphone, laptop, tablet, or a variation of this anywhere in the

You can pick and choose to read whichever stories you want from our weekly newsletter that goes out on a Thursday.

Soon, the newsletter will also be multiplying. By this, I mean we will be putting out a second newsletter during the week, which will go out on a Tuesday. This will focus specifically on international news and some community titbits.

In doing this, we are encouraging you to use our website and offering you more through our online presence.

We do have a clear goal in sight – to be around for as long as there's a Jewish person in South Africa. We're not going anywhere, but to ensure this, we have to look further into the future to see where this newspaper needs to be in it.

So, this week, why not download the A4 print edition and print it out to see for yourself? Can you get used to it? The truth is that reading print newspapers is a habit of all of us over a certain age grew up with. I still love the smell of newsprint. It reminds me of my parents' home when I was a kid. It reminds me of great conversations emanating from what I read, and wonderful articles that inspired, excited, and even angered me.

I remember thinking when I read newspapers as a teenager that they made me smarter. I almost felt my brain getting bigger with the knowledge I gleaned. I know that sounds silly, but I still believe that knowledge is power.

And that's what we do our best to give you – facts, views, insights, great stories. That's what the *SA Jewish Report* is all about, whether you read it online, on an A4 printout at home, or in our print edition. We bring you the stories that we believe are important for you to read. You then have a choice.

We aren't foolproof and there are some weeks, like this one in fact, when we battle to find news to give you. And there are others when we don't have space to fit all the phenomenal and vital news stories.

In our special Pesach edition, however, we have some phenomenal Pesach thought-leadership pieces and many other wonderful stories for you to read over the *chag*.

So, as we at the *SA Jewish Report* renew our vow to you to be the best we can be, I urge you to do the same for yourselves and your families. We often get into ruts, and getting out of them seems particularly difficult. We find ourselves with bad habits, and it's generally easier to stick with them. Don't! Rather look ahead. Futureproof yourself and your family, much like we're trying to do to ensure the *SA Jewish Report's* place for decades to come.

#### Shabbat shalom and chag Pesach sameach!

#### Peta Krost

#### Editor

PS: We won't be publishing next week because of Pesach, but will be back on 24 April.

# Adolescence brings teens' plight to the attention of adults

OPINION

ROZANNE SACK

veryone is talking about Adolescence, the latest
Netflix miniseries created by Jack Thorne and
Stephen Graham. And so they should be. This
gripping four-part drama has sparked a widespread
wake-up call by confronting an uncomfortable truth:
do we really know what our children are being
exposed to online? Are they really safely tucked up
in their beds at night, or are they inviting in virtual
guests who are dangerously shaping their identities,
belief systems, and moral code?

The series opens with a shocking scene: on a quiet morning in West Yorkshire, 13-year-old Jamie Miller, played by Owen Cooper, is arrested for the murder of his classmate, Katie. The series turns the classic crime drama structure on its head by revealing the perpetrator in the first scene, forcing us to confront the unsettling question why. What unfolds is a chilling yet deeply human story of a boy failed by society, and a girl whose life is brutally cut short.

child psychiatrist Briony, played by
Erin Doherty, Jamie sheds his bravado and reveals a
boy who just wants to be seen. When he screams, "Do
you even like me?" it's not a demand for affection, but
a deep and sincere cry for validation.

Crucially, Adolescence refuses to excuse Jamie's actions. Katie's life, and the unthinkable grief left in her wake, are never minimised. Her parents, friends, and community are devastated, and the show holds space for their pain, refusing to let Jamie's trauma negate the impact of his violence.

Still, the series highlights a painful truth: abuse is often a cycle. Jamie wasn't born broken, he was shaped by ridicule, rejection, online toxicity, and a society that looked away. The Miller family's heartbreak is clear in Jamie's father's stunned collapse into his son's arms after seeing the video confirming Jamie's guilt – a moment of shattered understanding and enduring love. Jamie's sister, Lisa, offers a quiet

contrast. Emotionally grounded and kind, she shows the family wasn't inherently dysfunctional. It's a stark reminder that violence can't always be reduced to simplistic ideas of "bad homes" or "evil children".

Yet, Adolescence offers glimmers of hope. Jamie begins to open up in therapy. Briony's gentle persistence hints that healing, while slow and painful, is possible. The Miller family evaluate their new reality. They don't abandon Jamie, but they do confront the hard truths of his actions.



Adolescence shines a spotlight on the toxic expectation of masculinity being disseminated through social media. Online misogyny, bullying, and overstretched institutions emerge as the main culprits in a story that portrays abuse as a complex web of personal and systemic failures that entrap victims, perpetrators, their families, and entire communities.

Jamie is portrayed not as a monster, but as a lonely, bullied boy shaped by rejection, ridicule, and the toxic influence of online spaces. Labelled an "incel" (involuntary celibate) and humiliated by peers, his emotional wounds fester into rage. Adolescence exposes how emojis, slang, and private messages conceal a world of cruelty, desperation, and distorted perceptions of masculinity that are being spread in plain sight on our children's social media feeds.

Jamie is also exposed to online misogynistic content and toxic forums that validate his anger. In an agonising scene, after being shoved by Katie during a confrontation, Jamie's inner turmoil reaches boiling point, and he reacts with fatal force, leaving the viewer with no doubt as to his guilt while giving them a glimpse of his inner torment.

The series evokes an unsettling tension throughout, made more disturbing by the fact that Jamie's parents aren't monsters, but ordinary, caring people. This fact denies viewers the comfort of an easy answer, forcing them to sit with the more uncomfortable truth. Even in this caring household, Jamie's silent suffering went unseen. At school, overwhelmed teachers miss the signs, while detectives and psychiatrists slowly realise how adults have misread the coded, emoji-laden world of teen communication, belatedly realising that Katie had been bullying Jamie by publicly insinuating on Instagram that he was an "incel". Katie's bullying, veiled in social media code, goes unrecognised until it's too late. Online, Jamie absorbs toxic, misogynistic ideologies that equate respect with fear, turning a lonely, ignored boy into a killer.

The series brilliantly captures the storm of adolescence: the fluctuation between rage and vulnerability, arrogance and fragility. In scenes with

The series has resonated beyond the screen.
Legislators in the United Kingdom have referenced it in debates on online safety and violence against women. Advocacy groups are using it to push for stronger revenge porn legislation, echoing Katie's experience of having a private image shared without consent. Schools are screening the series to start conversations about abuse, misogyny, and the silent suffering many teens endure.

For parents, *Adolescence* offers a sobering reminder that open dialogue isn't optional, it's essential. The message that "nothing is too terrible to tell me" and "no matter what" could be the difference between intervention and tragedy. For educators and policymakers, the series emphasises the need for awareness and intervention to prevent the escalation of online harassment into real-world violence.

As an anti-abuse organisation, this series offers us a springboard to engage our community about recognising early signs of abuse, the need for education on the dangers of the online world, and the addressing of toxic gender attitudes.

Ultimately, *Adolescence* is more than a drama. It's a mirror held up to the failures of society today. It's also a plea for empathy, responsibility, and action. The issues raised in this series are real, they are now, and they are costing us our children.

Unfortunately, *Adolescence* doesn't give us the "sigh" of a happy ending. A child has been lost.

Another has been ruined. And all around them are adults who are finally – too late – paying attention. But maybe, just maybe, someone will listen in time next time

Because *Adolescence* doesn't ask us to choose between victim and perpetrator, it begs us to protect both before it's too late.

 Rozanne Sack is a co-founder of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jewish and wider community. 10 – 24 April 2025 SA JEWISH REPORT **7** 

# Raw and real: Holocaust story gets new lens

OPINION CHAD NATH

've always been a storyteller: someone who picks up a camera to capture what I see to bring experiences to life. Growing up, it was never about words on a page for me or my generation, it was about being there, feeling it, and seeing it.

My job is to record those moments so you can step into them too. I was raised in the Jewish community, steeped in Jewish education, and the Holocaust was always there – a heavy, unshakeable presence in everything we learned. Now, I watch as the survivors fade and it is sinking in: we're losing that direct line to their stories. That chance to connect, to truly understand, is slipping away.

I've stood in Auschwitz four times in my life, and every time has been a unique experience in which I've learned something new. It's never the same, and it's always so hard to go back to Auschwitz. Seeing what our people had to go through is taxing on the soul. The scale of Auschwitz, the silence, the overwhelming evil, it changes you.



I know how rare it is to have visited this place. Most people will never walk that ground, never feel the weight of history's darkest chapter firsthand. I'm also aware that though I was given access to survivors and resources at school, most in South Africa have never had this opportunity.

That's what drove me to this. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies sent me, alongside Professor Karen Milner and Mary Kluk, to Auschwitz for the 80th anniversary of its liberation. Leaders from across the world – King Charles III, the heads of Germany, Ukraine, Poland, and France – gathered to honour the survivors and the millions who were taken.

My role was to document it, to turn it into something real and raw for my generation, something that lets you feel like you're there, hearing the testimony, meeting people, standing where it happened.

I had never had the chance to sit one-on-one with a survivor before and talk to them. It was so unexpected meeting Ruth Cohen, a survivor of Auschwitz. I saw her staring up at the gates of Auschwitz with her daughter,

Barbara. When she turned around, I said, "Hello." She smiled at me and I introduced myself. I asked her, "How does it make you feel being back here?" She said it was her first time back in 80 years. It was a case of instant goosebumps.

I couldn't even imagine how she was feeling being in this evil place. I wanted to find out more of her story, so I asked Barbara for her number and if we could interview Ruth.

I was happy when I got a message from them on our last day. They made the time for us to hear Ruth's

story. A story that hasn't been heard by many. I felt fortunate to hear her experience of how she survived this terrible place. Afterwards, we chatted about life and other things, and it felt like the times I use to catch up with my bobba.

Just before this, I'd run an ultramarathon in the Saudi desert. My body was still aching when I arrived, but that contrast only sharpened the weight of Auschwitz. I've never hidden my Jewishness, even when it cost me, and I couldn't turn away from this.

The videos we made will come out during the week of Yom Hashoah, with the main one shown at the West Park commemoration on 24 April. We're at a tipping point.

Misinformation spreads too easily now, and that includes voices denying the Holocaust, shrinking it down as if it is nothing. As the years stretch on, that noise could grow. Like we say at the Pesach seder, it is our duty to tell the story of Egypt. Here, it's the same. We have to carry the Shoah forward, every one of us, in every way we can.

I'm asking you, please come to a Yom Hashoah event on 24 April, wherever you are. Watch my videos from Auschwitz. Share them. We can't let this fade. It's now up to us to hold this history, to reach the youth, to touch those who've never felt its truth. This is our responsibility, and it starts here.

• Chad Nathan is a videographer and social media personality.

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### 'Kill the Boer' sanction could influence antisemitism cases

South Africa's Constitutional Court refused leave to appeal against the judgment that allowed the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to sing "Kill the Boer", ruling that it wasn't considered hate speech. The SA Jewish Report spoke to advocate **Mark Oppenheimer** about this case that was finalised on 27 March.

### What does the Constitutional Court's ruling mean?

The Equality Court, where I ran the trial proceedings, found that the song didn't constitute hate speech. It interpreted the song as criticism directed at the African National Congress government's failure to reform land. This surprised both AfriForum and the EFF, as neither had argued for this position. Julius Malema testified that when he heard "Boer" he thought of a white person, yet the high court seemed

unclear about the word's meaning despite his

testimony.
In one
incident,
the words,
"Kill the
Boer" were
written in
blood above
the bodies
of a murdered
mother and

daughter who had been so brutalised by broken bottles, it was unclear whether they had also been raped.

When asked if he would be motivated to stop singing the song by evidence of a witness who testified that when he heard it, it brought back the memory of the day his wife was murdered and he was paralysed, Malema replied, "I am not moved. Let me repeat five times, I am not moved by that case you brought here. I am not moved. And if that will make me lose a case, let me lose it. I am not moved."

Malema attributes genocide, wars of dispossession, and the killing of children in 1976 to "white people". He stated that all white people were criminals and ought to be treated as such. The white people of today, he said, were the same as those that arrived in South Africa 350 years ago, and they remained land thieves. He holds white people as a group liable for the sins of their fathers.

When asked what it would mean to get rid of white people, he responded, "So if we go into a conference
and we go into
Parliament
and make a
constitutional
amendment that
all whites must be
driven to the sea and
any white who remains

here is going to be killed. Then we engage in that type of programme to drive all whites to the sea. It's an institutionalised decision and it arises out of a particular collective decision." When asked to pledge that he would never call for the slaughter of white people, he said, "I will not do it."

Aark Oppenheimer

Malema also testified that he wasn't "scared of killing", saying, "A revolutionary is a walking killing machine, not scared of death. If that need arises I will kill"

The Supreme Court of Appeal also ruled that the song wasn't hate speech, stating that no reasonable person would interpret the words literally since Malema is a politician. What's troubling is that the Constitutional Court previously emphasised that context and the speaker's position are crucial in interpreting speech, and powerful politicians bear greater responsibility due to their influence. Yet, in practice, politicians charged with hate speech often get exonerated, whereas individuals like Penny Sparrow and other unknown real

estate agents have faced severe public condemnation from the courts.

The Constitutional Court's decision not to hear this appeal raises serious concerns within the legal community about potential political bias. People generally view the court as the last bastion of protection amid widespread dysfunction in South Africa.

### What's the broader impact of this case on South Africa?

One impact is that Afrikaners are increasingly feeling like second-class citizens, undeserving of equal protection. Jews may also feel vulnerable, recalling that when the old South African flag was deemed hate speech, the Israeli flag was targeted next. Several hate speech cases focusing on anti-Zionist and antisemitic speech are being adjudicated in our court. Some wonder if there will be an unfair double standard applied to these cases.

### How would you define hate speech?

The Equality Act broadly defines hate speech as advocacy of hatred against a protected group, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or religion, coupled with incitement to harm or causing harm itself. "Harmful" is set as a higher standard than "hurtful". "Incitement" means encouraging others to harm the targeted group physically or through discrimination.

#### Is there any scenario where chanting about killing a group based on race, religion, gender, or ethnicity wouldn't be hate speech?

I can't think of any other example. However, there's a danger that our courts are creating different rules for disfavoured minorities like Afrikaners. Substituting other favoured groups into that chant would likely lead to sanction.

### What arguments were used to dismiss this as hate speech?

Initially, the EFF claimed that it sang "Kiss the Boer" not "Kill the Boer", saying it was a provocation against racists unwilling to kiss a black person. This claim became untenable when EFF protesters blockading the court singing "Kill the Boer", captured on video. The EFF then argued the chant was symbolic, yet Malema admitted it was an instruction to soldiers to kill. On the message of the words, "Shoot to kill. Kill a man," he testified, "When we say shoot to kill *nyamazane*, we are commanding *nyamazane* to shoot and kill." He said uMkhonto weSizwe guerrillas were called *nyamazane*. "The message in the chant is very clear. Shoot to kill, kill nyamazane, shoot to kill the enemy forces who are standing between us and our freedom."

#### How might this case affect Jews?

Once certain groups are deemed undeserving of legal protection,

the courts may distort laws for political reasons, making it harder for Jews to defend themselves.

Contextual arguments might portray accusations against Jews as legitimate critiques of Israel or Zionism, paving the way for more tolerance of antisemitic speech.

**Economic Freedom Fighters leader Julius Malema singing "Kill the Boer"** 

### What's the international view of this ruling, particularly in America and Europe?

Americans strongly protect free speech but prohibit incitement to imminent lawless action. Secretary of State Marco Rubio publicly denounced Malema's singing of "Kill the Boer" on Human Rights Day. The Trump administration's executive order relating to South Africa relays concerns about inadequate protections for minority groups. In Europe, regulations on such speech are stricter. Similar statements would likely result in prosecution.

### Is there any further recourse, or is this matter closed?

A complaint could be filed at the International Court of Justice against South Africa by another state for not prohibiting genocidal speech under the Genocide Convention. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination could also be approached. If a similar matter was heard by a different set of judges, it is possible that a different decision would be reached.



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# Netanyahu in crosshairs of Qatargate scandal

sraeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has an uncanny ability to cling to power. From corruption trials to public protests, the man often dubbed "King Bibi" seems to always come out on top. Yet, a new scandal, ominously termed "Qatargate", threatens to unravel his carefully crafted image and potentially his political career.

What began as whispers of illicit ties between Netanyahu's inner circle and Qatar has erupted into a full-blown investigation, with rumours swirling that the prime minister himself may be personally involved. The affair raises profound questions about trust, accountability, and the future of a nation at

Qatargate first emerged in late 2024, when reports started circling that senior aides to Netanyahu had accepted money from Qatar, a key financial backer of Hamas and a mediator in ceasefire negotiations.

The accusations centred on two of Netanyahu's closest confidants: Jonatan Urich, a longtime media advisor, and Eli Feldstein, a former military spokesperson. Both were arrested in March on suspicion of bribery, money laundering, and contact with a foreign agent. The Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, alongside the police, launched a probe into claims that these aides were paid to promote Qatar's image in Israel, allegedly at the expense of Egypt, another critical mediator in the Gaza conflict.

Like Watergate, Qatargate, has the potential to shake the foundations of the Israeli government. But what sets this affair apart is its timing: Israel remains embroiled in a war with Hamas, and Qatar's role as a negotiator for hostage releases has placed it under intense scrutiny.

For many Israelis, the idea that aides to the prime minister might have been on Qatar's payroll while the nation mourned the losses of 7 October, is



nothing short of betrayal.

It's important to note that Netanyahu hasn't yet been named a suspect, but rumours of his personal involvement have fuelled the fire.

In December 2023, the Middle East Media Research Institute published leaked documents claiming that Qatar had transferred millions of dollars to Netanyahu himself between 2012 and 2018, ostensibly to support his election campaigns. These allegations, though unproven, gained traction early this year when former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon claimed that intelligence from the United Arab Emirates corroborated the transfers -\$15 million in 2012 and \$50 million in 2018.

Netanyahu has vehemently denied these accusations, filing a lawsuit against Ya'alon and dismissing the probe as a "political witch hunt" orchestrated by a "leftist deep

The prime minister's defenders argue that no concrete evidence ties him directly to the payments received by Urich and Feldstein. Netanyahu himself has stated that he cleared his schedule to provide testimony to police on 31 March only to meet investigators with "nothing to show". Yet, the proximity of these aides to Netanyahu - Urich has been a fixture in his media team for a decade, and Feldstein served in the prime minister's office during the Gaza war - raises uncomfortable questions.

Could Netanyahu have been unaware of such dealings within his inner circle? And if so, what else could be happening under his nose of which he's unaware? Or, as some speculate, did he tacitly approve a strategy to leverage Qatari influence for political gain?

Adding fuel to the rumours is Netanyahu's own history with Qatar. For years, his government facilitated the transfer of Qatari funds to Gaza, a policy critics say emboldened Hamas ahead of the 7 October attack.

Opposition figures like Yair Lapid have seized on this, arguing that Qatargate is the logical extension of a flawed approach, one that may have enriched Netanyahu's allies while compromising national security. "The reason Likud doesn't deny that people in Netanyahu's office received money from Qatar," Lapid declared in the Knesset, "is because they did."

If proven true, the implications of Netanyahu's personal involvement in Qatargate would be

Legally, it could escalate his existing corruption

trial, where he already faces charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. Politically, it risks

alienating even his staunchest supporters. However, the Likud party has rallied behind him, framing the arrests as a "coup d'état" by the Shin Bet and Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara. But cracks are appearing. Reports of a backlash within Likud over Netanyahu's aborted attempt to appoint a new Shin Bet chief suggest that his grip on the party may be

For Israel's international standing, Qatargate could strain relations with key allies. Egypt, already wary of Qatar's regional ambitions, has expressed outrage over allegations that Netanyahu's aides sought to undermine its mediation role.

The United States, a vital partner to Israel, may also view Qatar's alleged penetration of Israel's government with alarm, given Doha's delicate balancing act as an American ally and Hamas patron.

Historically, Netanyahu has thrived on chaos, turning scandals to his advantage. Yet, this time it feels different. The anger over 7 October, coupled with the war's ongoing toll, has eroded public

Should evidence emerge linking Netanyahu directly to Qatari funds, he might be forced to resign - not out of principle, but survival. Even without proof, the scandal's fallout may distract him from his war leadership and hostage negotiations.

Netanyahu's legacy hangs in the balance. Will Qatargate be the scandal that finally topples "King Bibi"? The whole sorry affair is a sobering reminder of Israel's vulnerability, not just to external threats, but to possible internal rot.

• Paula Slier is the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International, and hosts the afternoon Home Run on ChaiFM.





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### ANC's weak diplomacy made Rasool's expulsion 'inevitable'

**LULA PENCHARZ** 

outh Africa could have avoided having its ambassador disgraced and thrown out of the United States (US) said Sara Gon, the director of the Free Speech Union of South Africa at last week's Taste of Limmud discussion with political analyst Wayne Sussman.

"It could have been avoided if the African National Congress [ANC] hadn't been the party with the power for the past 30 years," she said. "One of the problems with the South African diplomatic corps is that it's really a place of assigning those people who have retired or disgraced themselves in a number of ways. Our diplomatic corps has been really unprofessional."

Sussman and Gon were discussing whether the US needed South Africa or the other way around on Wednesday, 2 April.

Gon said the ANC was headstrong in its policies, often to its detriment. The ANC lacked strategy when it came to improving relations with the world power, and needed to change its tactics if it wished to make strides with the Trump administration.

Though Gon believes the ambassador's expulsion could have been avoided overall, she doesn't believe the ANC could actually have prevented Ebrahim Rasool from being expelled because of its poor analytical foresight in choosing a mediocre ambassador with a

problematic profile, not least of all in his support for Hamas. She believes the ANC has never appointed an ambassador with the necessary gravitas for the world's biggest power.

Gon went on to say that the ANC thought that it, or Rasool, would be working with the Biden administration and didn't take into account that President Donald Trump might actually win the election. Rasool was a "red flag to the [Trump] administration", she said.

Gon and others at the event suggested that perhaps Rasool sabotaged himself to get out of the US as he couldn't get near the US administration to participate in any forms of diplomacy. She said the South African government's diplomacy revolved too much around "taking without offering something in return".

Though there's speculation about who the next ambassador will be, Gon said whoever it was needed to be diplomatic and have some understanding of how the US functions. She said it would be problematic if the ANC did find someone from within its ranks, but it also would be difficult for someone more suited to the task to defend the policies that the ANC is so tightly hanging onto.

Sussman agreed, saying, "I understand from diplomacy that a country wants to receive an ambassador who is likely to be taken seriously by the president of that

country and the headquarters of the ruling party. What we are seeing with the negotiations over the Budget, is that President Cyril Ramaphosa and Fikile Mbalula aren't going to take the Democratic Alliance, Patriotic Alliance, or Freedom Front that seriously."

He suggested the next ambassador be someone on the National Executive Committee of the ANC who was pragmatic about foreign policy and respected. "The challenge is finding someone who ticks all three of those boxes," Sussman said.

Sussman asked Gon about South Africa's role in punting BRICS (the forum for co-operation among leading emerging economies) and its recent addition of tyrannical countries, particularly Iran, and whether it was another negative for the US.

South Africa appears to believe that its role in BRICS will give it some authority, both moral and in stature, as a competitor to the US's hegemony, Gon said. The problem is that Russia's economy is weak, and so too is Iran's. Though Saudi Arabia is in BRICS now, the changing balance of power in the Middle East away from Iran and its proxies runs the risk of reducing BRICS's stature as a real competitor to the US. China's economy is also not as robust as it once was, Gon said.

Gon said every response South Africa made to the actions of the Trump administration was reactive. The ANC presented itself as occupying the moral high ground by supporting entities who took part in some or other form of "liberation struggle", she said, and by holding onto dated socialist policies. The US isn't concerned about India, which has relations with Russia and China



as well as the US, but is diplomatically sophisticated enough to have relationships with both sides without alienating either.

If South Africa was an ally of the US, its position at the bottom of Africa could have some real strategic value to the US in its dealings with

China, Gon said. However, because of its unrepentant support of all things Chinese, South Africa under the ANC just cannot be trusted.

The Limmud audience sought answers from Gon and Sussman about future relations between the US and South Africa while Trump is in power. One Limmudnik commented on the unpredictability of Trump, which she said would make any attempt at reconciliation with the

> Trump administration futile as he could chop and change his mind the next day.

"Why would any rational approach be accepted by Trump?" she asked. Gon responded by referring to Trump's "enormous ego" as a tool that could be used to the government's benefit. "You expect it to be more professional than that, but sometimes it's not," Gon said, alluding to the political chess match being played. "Look at the way the [Kier] Starmer government, a government on the complete opposite

side of the ideological spectrum, has responded to him showing a sense of real political power. It's about adjusting to the world you actually face," Gon said.

She said it was time the ANC let go of policies from 60 years ago, and was proactive in adjusting its politics to the world of today.





















### Hostages show us what true freedom is

hen Agam Berger finally boarded an Israel Defense Forces helicopter to her freedom after 482 days of Hamas hell, the first words she wrote on the whiteboard, for the world to see, paraphrased Psalm 119: "I chose the path of faith, and I returned in the path of faith."

Berger will be my inspiration this

As we celebrate this festival of freedom, we cannot help but ponder the meaning of liberty at a time when exile feels darker and deeper than ever in our lifetimes. Can we sit and recline, in a display of independence, celebrating by enjoying four cups

of wine and copious food, knowing

brothers and sisters who will be in

Hamas dungeons for the chag? Can

we rejoice here in South Africa while

we fear that seders across Israel may

be disrupted by red-alert sirens and

relocated to shelters? Can we really

mark freedom as we think of the

overt antisemitism that's rearing

actual blood libels?

its ugly head and of a resurgence of

This vexing question has troubled

generation after generation of Jews,

expulsions, and forced conversions.

celebrate freedom. Jews celebrated

Pesach hiding in cellars during the

Inquisition. Stories abound of seders

in the ghettos during World War II,

the death camps. When the children

with true puzzlement and incredulity

and even of Pesach gatherings in

asked, "Ma Nishtana", it was often

at what they were experiencing, a

deep suffering.

festival of liberation in the midst of

The Maharal (Judah Loew ben

Bezalel, 1525-1609) was the chief

rabbi of Prague. He himself suffered

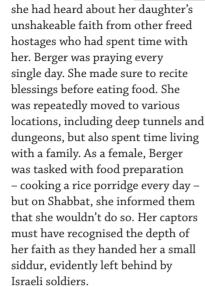
as we were put through pogroms,

Even in our darkest moments,

we did everything we could to

that there are still dozens of our

Agam Berger





Amazingly, though other hostage releases happened on Shabbat, Berger was somehow freed on a Thursday, allowing her to preserve her cherished Shabbat - though she would have been permitted by the halacha to travel to freedom to save her life.

Berger will inspire me this

Pesach with her indomitable spirit and faith, a perfect illustration of the Maharal's concept of our freedom. As will Keith Siegel, Eli Sharabi, and Omer Shem Tov.

Siegel was released after 484 days in captivity in Gaza. He shared that he started making *hamotzi* every day before ingesting the measly piece of pita that was his daily bread. This was the only bracha for food that he knew, until one day, he managed to watch a food programme on Israeli TV. They were reviewing good places to eat in Tel Aviv, and he heard one of the presenters saying "Borei minei mezonot" before eating. He now had two blessings for food in his repertoire.

Sharabi was held in horrific conditions for 491 days. From the day he was captured, he started saying "Shema Yisrael" every morning. Every Friday night, he sang "Eshet chayil" to his mother, then made kiddush on water, for lack of grape juice or wine.

Shem Tov. released after 505 days. used to rub salt off pretzels and kept this for Shabbat. After reciting kiddush - somehow, he had procured a bit of grape juice, which he rationed - he dipped his pita in the salt that he had hoarded.

In the past few months, these stories of inspiration helped me understand Maharal and what true freedom is. Berger, Siegel, Sharabi, and Shem Tov's faith and spirit, along with that of many other heroes, both contemporary and throughout our history, will make the message of the true liberation of our souls come alive for me this Pesach.

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

### We raise four cups of wine to you with gratitude and thanks

rald Leisner was one of the great towering figures of South African Jewry. He raised money to build almost every major Jewish institution in the country, including the Holocaust & Genocide Centre in Johannesburg. It was a worthy life's work of

I once told Gerald that he had "the worst job in the world". Of course, just like Gerald, all of our community "jobs", including mine, are "unpaid" and occasionally unappreciated. Gerald grinned widely, and softly told me that his was "the best job in the world". He had never asked for any money for himself, and he had built institutions for our community that would last generations.

I wish I was as good a human as Gerald. I have spent much of this year asking people for money and advertising to keep the SA Jewish Report alive and flourishing.

Mendel Kaplan, who contributed unfathomable amounts of his own wealth to support our community, taught me two lessons. He told me that when you have a good cause, don't insult people by not asking them to be part of it and don't insult them by asking for too little money. "Phew", that's easier said than done.

I've hated every moment of asking people for money to support the SA Jewish Report, but at the same time, I realised how valued and appreciated the publication is in all of its forms - its newspaper; newsletter; website; JRLive webinars; and WhatsApp groups.

To the thousands of people who gave us some of their hard-earned cash because they appreciate what we do for the community, I'm both enormously grateful and immensely inspired.

Some people gave us R18, and some gave us hundreds of thousands. I consider the R18 as meaningful as the sizeable donations because it shows that even people with limited resources genuinely care and appreciate what we do. And that's part of the magic of the SA Jewish Report. We've built a community that really values and cares about each other, about South Africa, and about Jewish life in this country.

As part of our campaign, we also conducted a survey asking people how they felt about the work we did. Over the next few weeks, we will publish the results but as a sneak preview, more than 92% of our readers rate our content as good or excellent, while more than 91% rate us above eight on a scale from zero to 10. On how we cover events in South Africa, Israel, and the Jewish world, 4% of readers think we don't understand the community, while more than 90% believe that we do. A total of 5.4% think we are too left leaning, and 8.8% think we are too right leaning.

The vast majority consider us centrist and a platform for all credible voices.

Over the past few months, a few people have tried to use the SA Jewish Report as an instrument to attack others with whom they disagree. We have always told them to attack ideas and offer alternatives, but we won't tolerate our platform being used for divisive vitriolic personal attacks. We aren't

that sort of publication, and we're very proud of

The one message that has been repeatedly given to me by donors is that South African media is in crisis. It's subject to a specific narrative, and G-d help you if you stray from the woke, politically correct, pro jihadist, Hamas supporting agenda. We've seen some of the largest media houses in South Africa deliberately de-platform Jewish journalists because they are "Zionist"; refuse to allow a right of reply to ridiculously biased articles; and deliberately manipulate stories either by covering only one side or excluding positive stories completely. Peta Krost, the editor of the SA Jewish Report, hates it when I say it, but in South Africa, the Fourth Estate has been

Last week, the SA Jewish Report broke the news that the South African consul general in Los Angeles, Thandile Sunduza, had been expelled by the Trump administration after receiving an award from the Los Angeles branch of the vehemently anti-Israel Council on American-Islamic Relations and the LA branch of Jewish Voice for Peace to celebrate South Africa's genocide campaign against Israel at the International Court of Justice. Needless to say, the story was picked up by international media but not in South Africa. South African media is broken.

It is abundantly clear that the SA Jewish *Report* is the only source for unbiased, credible journalism about Israel, the South African Jewish community, and the Jewish world in our country. It needs to be supported and nourished. We believe that's why so many stood up to support us to ensure that our voice isn't silenced. We're not cowards about standing up against antisemitism, racism, bigotry, and anti-Zionism in our land. And our readers and donors are brave and bold in ensuring that our community has a credible voice.

We approach Pesach this year with enormous gratitude, grateful that we were freed from bondage in Egypt, grateful that we live freely in a free land, grateful that we have a community that inspires us every day, and grateful for the enormous support we have received from so many of you.

We have the most vibrant Jewish community in the world, and we hope that the SA Jewish Report is both a product of and reflects the diverse tapestry that constitutes Jewish life in South Africa.

As we close our fundraising campaign for 2025, please remember that we can always do with your advertising and support. I blush a little when I

slip that in and think of the immortal words made popular by the movie Glengarry Glen Ross, "Always be closing."

I hope in some way I've done Mendel Kaplan and Gerald Leisner

Wishing you a chag Pesach sameach.

**Howard Sackstein** Non-executive chairperson: **SA Jewish Report** 

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greatly at the hands of the Christian authorities. In his composition known as Gevurot Hashem (chapter 16), he raises this very question. How does it make sense to observe Pesach during times of persecution? He explains that the exodus from Egypt wasn't a once-off historical event. It was a spiritual revolution which created an inherent change, an existential mutation in the Jewish people. Ever since, we have been a free people. Our bodies can be

About a year before her release, Berger's mother, Meirav, shared that

subjugated and enslaved, but our

souls will forever remain free.

# Exodus narrative still relevant 3 300 years on

OPINION

RABBI YUVAL CHERLO

s we gather with our families around the seder table this year, we might reflect on a few questions that extend beyond those traditionally found in the haggadah.

What is it that an ancient nation, once enslaved for hundreds of years, is supposed to remember so long after it has been freed? How does the Pesach seder and the celebration of the exodus shape our historical consciousness? And what impact should this event have, commemorated after more than 3 300 years?

At the Passover seder, when we read the texts of the Torah as part of the haggadah, we remind ourselves of the history of our Jewish nation, going all the way back to creation. But far beyond any traditional "history lesson", the seder has a far deeper meaning. Its design and messages teach that G-d created not only the physical world in which we live, but also instilled in us values, morals, and ethics.

During the seder, we acknowledge that the presence of G-d today is just as relevant as it was thousands of years ago. That G-d is the one who governs the world, just as it appears at the beginning of the ten commandments: "I am the Lord your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The very specific use of those words instils in us the need to remember that the exodus from Egypt happened not by chance or solely as some sort of political or historical development.

Rather we must recognise that our faith is inextricably related to the truth of G-d's sovereignty and His relevance and influence over every aspect of our lives as believing Jews, with perhaps the penultimate reflection of this truth being the story of leaving Egypt.

This idea is expressed not only during the seder night but also in many commandments which are observed throughout the year that have their roots in the exodus narrative: the redemption of the firstborn, wrapping tefillin, and the various holidays, all of which also serve as remembrances of the exodus from Egypt

and that critical linkage between faith and the exodus.

There's also a deeper meaning to our analysis of the exodus from Egypt. This, too, is reflected in commandments, as every great idea in Judaism isn't confined to the realm of philosophy but actualised through actions. There are therefore many social commandments that stem from the Egyptian exile and journey to freedom that can also be found in the wording of the ten commandments in the Book of Deuteronomy.

In other words, since we were slaves and we personally experienced the pain and exhaustion of work without rest, without fair conditions, we must provide these things for those who work for us. At a time when slavery was common, this represented a tremendous step forward in societal morality and a profound recognition of our solidarity with others.

This idea is also expressed in the commandments concerning the treatment of the stranger: we, ourselves, were strangers in the land of Egypt, and therefore, we understand the feelings of the foreigner. It is therefore our obligation to behave differently, more ethically, to those who aren't from our community.

Which brings us back to the questions we asked earlier – what are we remembering and why is it still relevant after all these years?

The lesson is that the Pesach seder cannot be in any way limited to a historical commemoration of the events of our freedom from Egypt, but serves as a reminder of two essential values in Jewish life: our belief in G-d as the creator of the world, and our moral duty to stand in solidarity with the weakest in society.

Each year, at our Passover seder, we renew our covenant with these values – values that are central to leading a meaningful, ethical Jewish life.

 Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is one of the founders of the Tzohar Rabbinical Organisation and the director of the Tzohar Center for Jewish Ethics. He will participate this year in Limmud in South Africa.

### How have we survived?

The survival of

Jews relies on

children

passing down the

Pesach story to our

OPINION

RABBI JONATHAN FOX

ing Louis XIV of France asked Blaise Pascal, the great French philosopher, to give him proof of the supernatural. Pascal answered, "Why, the Jews, your majesty, the Jews."

The survival of the Jewish people has confounded many great rational minds. From enslavement in Egypt to the recent bombardment from Iran, we have faced innumerable threats to our existence, and yet we have survived and thrived.

Is our survival as a nation indeed in the realm of the

supernatural or divine, or is there perhaps a more rational explanation?

Thanks to Yaakov Shwekey, "Vehi she'amda" has become one of the most famous passages in the haggadah. Millions of Jews sing the words on Pesach and throughout the year.

The words of the passage literally mean, "And this is what has stood for our forefathers and for us, because in each generation, they rise up against us and G-d saves us from their hands."

In this passage, we have the answer to the question how the Jews have survived every generation. The answer is "this". "This" is what stood for us. But what exactly is "this"?

There are a number of opinions as to what "this" is. I suspect that the author of the haggadah was deliberately vague as there really isn't one answer to the question how the Jews have survived.

There is a strong opinion that "this" refers to the preceding passage in the haggadah, the promise that G-d made to Abraham that he would redeem the Israelites from Egypt. Although this promise began with the redemption from Egypt, it has continued throughout history. G-d promised never to let the nation of Israel perish. Several centuries later, Jeremiah stated, "Thus said G-d . . . If these [natural] laws should ever be annulled by me, only then would the offspring of Israel cease to be a nation before me for all time."

Without G-d's protection, the Jewish nation should have and would have perished long ago.

Another opinion says that "this" refers to the Pesach story itself. Relaying the story to our children year after year has strengthened our common belief that we have a divine destiny in this world. This Jewish destiny is worth fighting for with all our might and energy and has ensured our survival

Yet another opinion says that "this" refers to the Torah.

The Torah has kept us alive as a nation. The Torah has always connected Jews no matter where we are. The Torah is what we have fought for, and it has provided a deep-rooted sense of unity and purpose.

In December 2016, Vladimir Putin met Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar. Putin told Lazar, "There have been many nations who have come and gone. But the Jewish nation continues to exist, generation after generation,

for thousands of years. I'm sure that this is only because of its strict adherence to the Torah and its commandments. It passes on these traditions throughout the generations, no matter what the circumstances."

Even Putin understood the centrality of the Torah to the Jews and the crucial role it has played in ensuring our survival.

I have mentioned only several opinions as to what "this" refers to, and it is definitely not exhaustive.

One thing is for sure. As we sit around the Pesach seder, we literally contribute to Jewish survival. By recalling G-d's eternal promise, by immersing ourselves in our rich tradition, and by feeling the togetherness and unity of all Jews, we internalise our resolve to survive and thrive and to fulfil our divine destiny in history.

• Rabbi Jonathan Fox is group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha.



he year is 70 CE, the Temple in
Jerusalem has been destroyed, and
Pesach can no longer be celebrated
with a sacrificial lamb as the Torah requires.
The Jewish people have been exiled across
the Roman Empire. What could we do?

With the Jewish reoccupation of our homeland forbidden, we needed a ceremony and a text to commemorate Pesach, but what should its message be? How could we get it past the Roman censors?

What about compiling a text, written as if it were referring to a historical redemption, with a message of freedom? What if it were possible to encode into that text the real message of a future redemption, a return to Israel, that



could be understood only by those in the know? That's how the haggadah came to be. The code words yetziat Mitzrayim" (leaving Egypt) were selected as the trigger phrase. To Jews sitting around the seder table in the diaspora, it meant "future return". There were clear hints embedded in the text: only four cups of wine representing the five expressions of redemption used in Exodus 6:6-7 – "I will take out"; "I will save"; "I will redeem"; and "I will take." The obvious missing one is "heveiti", meaning "I will bring [you home to Israel]."

Why does the haggadah tell a story about Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Akiva meeting to discuss "yetziat Mitzrayim" all night long and having to be told that it was time to say the morning Shema. Couldn't they see the sun rise? No, because they were hiding in a cave during the time of the Bar Kochba revolt, and they were clearly

not discussing history, but
planning the reconquest of the

Jewish state from their Roman oppressors! This is
obvious to us because we know that Rabbi Eliezer

ruled that one should spend the festivals with one's family, so he must have had a good reason to spend seder night with his colleagues in a dark cave in Bnei Brak.

What was chosen as the main text of the

haggadah? Not verses from the book of Exodus that described the leaving of Egypt, but the declaration made by pilgrim farmers when bringing their first fruits to Jerusalem. "Arami oved avi" was the text to be said by the first Israelites living in their homeland. In case the true theme of

Continued on page 24>>



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### The four heroines who saved Jews from slavery

OPINION

ne of the most striking features of Exodus is the presence of so many heroic women. This emerges clearly from a simple reading of the text at the beginning of the book of *Shemot*.

Four remarkable heroines are presented as playing a pivotal role in the unlikely liberation from slavery. Each one stands as a woman of courage, heroism, and defiance against the evils of the Egyptian empire.

The first two we meet are midwives Shifra and Puah. This is the only time they are mentioned by name, and we have no idea from the simple reading of the text who they are. They are presented to us in an ambiguous way,

which can be interpreted in ways that totally change their identity.

In the verse, they are called "hameyaldot ha'ivriyot", which could either mean Hebrew midwives or the midwives of the Hebrews. If they are Jewish midwives, then they are identified by our sages as the mother-daughter combination of Yocheved and Miriam or perhaps the daughter

and mother-in-law combination of Yocheved and Elisheva.

The verse could also mean that they are the midwives of the Hebrews, suggesting that they were Egyptian midwives who were designated to attend to the birth of the Hebrews. This is the opinion of Abarbanel and Rav Shmuel David Luzzatto (Shadal). The latter makes a strong argument that it's unlikely that Pharaoh would demand that Jewish midwives kill the children of their own people. Even at pain of death, it doesn't seem feasible that they would murder their own kind.

In short, it's not clear whether they are Jews or gentiles, Hebrews or Egyptians. What's crystal clear, though, is their astonishing steadfastness and moral courage to stand up against the empire of evil. They refuse to expedite the death and murder of innocent children because, as the Torah highlights, "they feared G-d". Their values and morality gave them the courage and heroism to stand up for what they believe in, and not kill innocent people, no matter the consequences. They are the incredible heroines of chapter one. It's through their heroism and their heroism alone that the decree to kill every Jewish male didn't succeed during the time of slavery and persecution.

If Shifra and Puah are the heroines who saved young Jewish male babies, then the survival and birth of one Jewish baby in particular, the future redeemer of Israel, was dependent on three other women. This is the focus of chapter two. Strangely, none are mentioned by name, but all played a decisive role in the life of the one individual mentioned by name in this saga – Moshe.

During the terrible time when Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew male babies be killed, it was completely understandable why many Jewish couples would choose not to have children. The future seemed hopeless:

newborn sons would be murdered at birth, while daughters would face a life of slavery under Egyptian masters in a community depleted of Jewish men.

Yet despite this grim reality, the Torah tells us of a courageous act: a man from the house of Levi married a woman also from the house of Levi, and they conceived a child. Our sages interpret this as a profound act of defiance and hope, bringing new Jewish life into the world even in the darkest of times, refusing to surrender to despair despite the horrific circumstances surrounding them.

These are the parents of Moshe: Yocheved and

Amram. Our sages identify the real heroine as the young Miriam, the older sister of the yet-tobe-born Moshe. Her parents had separated during the decree to avoid having children, and it was Miriam who confronted and admonished them for not wanting to bring children into the world,

thereby hastening the demise of the Jewish people. By singlemindedly cajoling her parents, they were reunited, and Moshe was born.

Our sages likely identified Miriam as playing this pivotal role because the Torah explicitly mentions her heroism soon after the birth of her baby brother. When he was hidden among the bulrushes, Miriam actively protected her brother. Showing remarkable courage, she approached Pharaoh's daughter, who had discovered him and cleverly suggested a Hebrew nurse, creating the perfect opportunity to connect Yocheved, their mother, with her son while he remained under royal protection.

The other remarkable heroine is, of course, Pharaoh's daughter. She commits the most blatant act of defiance against her father not only by saving but adopting Moshe to the palace while secretly allowing his mother to feed him. She daringly brings up a Jewish child literally in the very palace of the king who single-mindedly decreed the death of every Jewish male child. As we know, this very baby spared by Pharaoh's daughter will defeat Pharaoh himself and liberate his entire people.

It's remarkable how many women, Jewish and gentile alike, were defiant, heroic, and courageous, bringing about the salvation of the Jewish people in the birth of the heroic saviour. Shifra, Puah, Miriam, Yocheved, and Pharaoh's daughter.

Two remarkable things stand out. First, the spirit of human and Jewish heroism in the face of impossible circumstances – heroic Jewish women doing all they can for the survival of their people, and heroic Egyptian women living by their conscience and internal moral compass. That right should triumph over might, and conscience over power.

There's an unmistakable spirit of female courage and heroism which uniquely brings about the salvation of the Jewish people. It's their daring defiance and courage for the sake of either love for their people or the pursuit of truth and justice that saves the day.

It's therefore not surprising that our sages make a powerful comment about the spirit of the women of that time: "In the merit of righteous women our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt." (Sotah 11b).

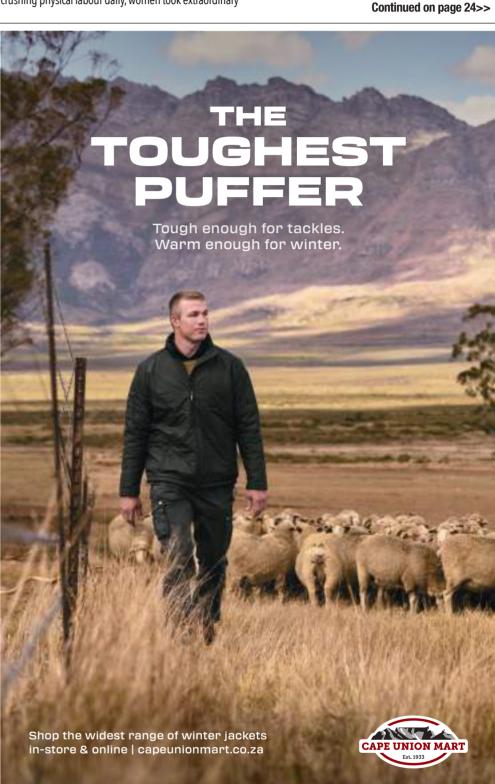
Our sages teach that this righteousness extended beyond just the named heroines, embodying the remarkable courage and life-affirming spirit of all women of that generation. While Jewish men endured crushing physical labour daily, women took extraordinary measures to sustain their people's future.

The sages describe how these women, seeing their husbands exhausted from brutal work, would make themselves attractive and visit the fields where their husbands rested. There, they would create moments of intimacy to conceive children, ensuring Jewish continuity. Through these acts of defiance, these women uplifted an entire generation, enabling the Jewish people to survive and eventually rise from the darkness of Egyptian oppression.

In our own generation, we witness this same remarkable heroism. For a year-and-a-half, Israel has

Continued on page 24.





Pesach whines (phrase)

**Pesach whines** *n*. – Complaints about minor Pesach inconveniences, like not enough jam, contrasted with real hardships.

750 families in our community have *Pesach whines* no one should face – hunger. **Let's replace it with expressions of freedom and joy.** 



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# Pesach - from the pens of teens



What with Israel at war with Hamas, the horror of 7 October, and rising antisemitism, what does Pesach 2025 mean for Jewish teenagers? Here's a selection of responses from Jewish schools. As there was insufficient space in the print edition, please find additional teen stories on the **sajr.co.za** website.

### The power of prayer

ELISHEVA B. CANNON, GRADE 8, CAPE TOWN TORAH HIGH

he biggest threat *Am Yisroel* faced in my lifetime was on 7 October 2023, but it wasn't the first. There was the 2014 Gaza War and the Yom Kippur War. The Six-Day War, the Holocaust, and the Crusades. But the first ever affliction we experienced as a nation was our enslavement in Egypt.

The Egyptians feared that the Jews were becoming too numerous and powerful, but the Jews were actually helping to grow the Egyptian economy. Yoseph made Egypt the most powerful empire in the world. That's the nature of antisemitism. It isn't rational. It's pure hatred and jealousy.

Only Hashem can get rid of it, but we always have the power of prayer, especially Jewish women. We have one of the strongest

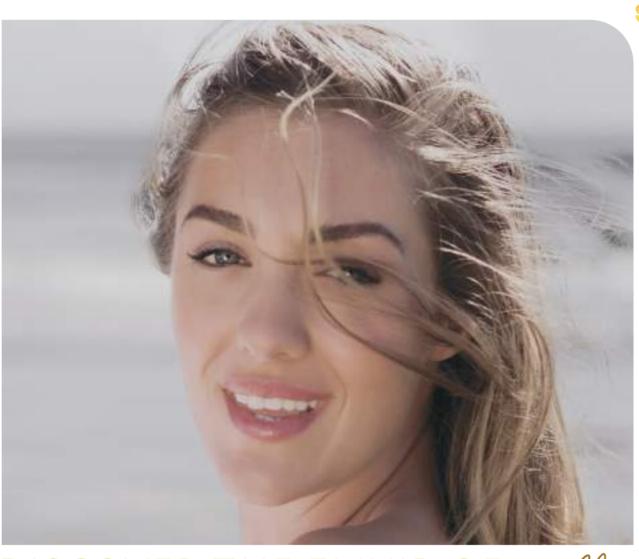
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armies in the world. We have incredible intelligence and high-tech equipment, but our strongest weapon is prayer. Hashem's help comes in the blink of an eye. He wants us to reach out and talk to Him. Just as Hashem took the Jews out of Egypt, so too will He bring home all the hostages. He will end all our suffering. He will end antisemitism. He will bring Moshiach, bimhera v'yameinu.





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# The Jewish spirit: from Egypt to today



BINI SEEFF, GRADE 11, YESHIVA COLLEGE

f the past few years have shown me anything, it's that the Jewish people are stronger than any of the trials and tribulations thrown at us.

In our modern world, it's hard for me to conceptualise *yetziat Mitzrayim* (leaving Egypt) when open miracles were performed. Hashem stretched out his hand, performed ten *makot* (plagues), and led the Jews through the sea and the desert all the way to Mount Sinai. We were made into a nation, one chosen by G-d.

Then came 7 October. A time when our enemies emerged from the shadows to destroy us and take away hope. But instead, like the Jews in Egypt, we grew stronger. We became closer than we have been over the past century. I felt closer to my fellow Jews, and a deep yearning to be in my homeland, Israel. For the first time in years, I could feel my own "leaving of Egypt".

Suddenly the miracles of *yetziat*Mitzrayim became no longer that hard for me to conceptualise.

We were led into gruesome battle, and from all the stories and encounters of soldiers, it's impossible to deny that the hand of G-d is ever present, guiding them and answering our prayers.

Pesach is a time when we reflect on our nation's past and the miracles that happened to us. In Pesach 5785, we can look at the state of our beautiful nation and really feel like our father in heaven is looking out for us. Just like our exodus from Egypt, may we continue to have the strength to get through the troubles the world is throwing at us. Our own *yetzia* is coming, and one day, we will be restored to our former glory in our land of Israel. May it be soon.

### Persecution past and present



ELIH JOFFE, GRADE 11, KING DAVID LINKSFIELD

esach has always been about remembering – remembering slavery, remembering freedom, remembering our responsibility to tell the story of how the Jews became an incredibly powerful nation. But just like last year, as we gather around the seder tables across the world, we now have a constant thought in our mind that will forever change the dynamic of Pesach – when will our hostages next be able to feel the sense of freedom that we observe and feel on Pesach?

During Pesach we remember and share

stories about the hardships that our nation has been through as we celebrate the freedom and liberation of the Jewish people. It's important to remember that even though we went through 430 years of torture and brutality, we made it out because of trust in Hashem. In the present day, we must remember the hostages and the ongoing war, but we can never lose the faith that Hashem showed in us by granting independence to our nation on Pesach.

The events of 7 October brought unimaginable pain to our people, yet these events have resulted in me discovering an unexpected and intense pride and acknowledgement of my Jewish identity. When

I walk outside wearing my yarmulke and tzitzit, I often feel apprehensive about the antisemitism and hate I may encounter. Yet despite this, I still feel like my most authentic self when I express my Jewish identity. These visible symbols of faith are essential to me during these challenging times. In the past two years, I have witnessed every Jew from diverse backgrounds coming together and uniting for the sole reason of getting our hostages back and removing the evil and hate from our world. While this Pesach we celebrate the freedom of Jews many years ago, I look forward to celebrating our hostages' freedom soon.

# Storytelling: Judaism's greatest gift

JOSHUA WOOLF, GRADE 11, KING DAVID VICTORY PARK

"Remember those days of old; reflect upon the years of other generations. Ask your father, and your elders, they will tell you." Devarim, Parshat Ha'azinu:7

Eighteen months have passed since the horrific scenes of Simchat Torah 5784, yet as I tune into the countless stories being told by witnesses and victims, I recall the gut-wrenching headlines as if the words, feelings, and thoughts were in front of me.

One item of extreme significance regarding Pesach is the haggadah. It is a compilation of precise procedures and particular processes and a core part of the seder. On a basic level it is a means to dwell on the tale of our exodus from Egypt. We go through the exact physical acts and feelings which our ancestors experienced via the unique form of storytelling in the haggadah. Whether it be maror or matzah, the story is one of struggle, hardship, and redemption.

The Jewish people's ongoing struggle for freedom is more visible now than ever before in our lifetime. Destruction of homes and countless families. Settlements left desolate with death-ridden streets. Today, we're subject to a new form of antisemitism by those who are masters at "retelling" the Jewish tale of persecution. They whirl propaganda to the masses via the media and distort the truth of our narrative. Between fickle ceasefires and the parading of hostages' dead bodies, Hamas continues its brutality to this day. They are holding innocent people hostage.

We call for their immediate release.

Despite all the hardship we have



incurred, we continue to grow through suffering. Telling our story and passing the terror and triumph to the next generation is a tradition deeply rooted within the Jewish religion. It's important to listen to and remember the brutal stories of hostages and victims of 7 October. We won't be silent, and we will never forget. We'll tell and retell these stories just as we have for thousands of years.

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



# Maror than enough (phrase)

Maror than enough adj. — More hardship and financial stress than anyone should have to endure.

750 families in our community have tasted *maror than enough*. This Pesach let them taste redemption and joy.



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### From exodus to endurance: a story still being written

assover has always been a story of defiance and deliverance. A saga of struggle, confrontation, bravery, identity, and ultimately freedom. It's a story of a people who, through fire and flood, slavery and salvation, found not just escape but meaning. Who understood that survival isn't merely about getting through, it's about what you build in the aftermath.

This year, as we sit around our seder tables, we find ourselves not just recalling history but staring directly into

its repetition. Once again, we're pleading, not "Let my people go!" but "Let our hostages go!" Once again, we find ourselves cast as the eternal antagonist in a world that should know better. And once again, we wrestle with what it means to be Jewish in a time of darkness.

But Judaism has never been a faith of despair. We don't dwell just in lamentation; we live in transformation. Every symbol on our seder plate is an act of defiant optimism. The salt water of our tears becomes the vessel in which we dip our greens, representing renewal.

The mortar of our oppression, our forced



labour under Pharaoh, is repurposed into *charoset* – sweet, rich, spiced with cinnamon and wine, a reminder that we will take what has broken us and turn it into something that sustains us.

And then, of course, there's matzah. The bread of affliction. The simplest of foods, born out of urgency, yet celebrated as the centrepiece of our Passover meal. A stark reminder that freedom rarely comes in comfort. It comes in haste. It comes in hardship. It comes when there's no time to let the bread rise. And still, we make it a feast.

This is the Jewish way. We don't just survive. We build.

#### Echoes of then and now

But this year, as we ask, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" perhaps the more pressing question is, "Why is this time no different from all other times?"

Because we've been here before.

The attacks against our people – whether in ancient Egypt, medieval Europe, pogrom-ridden Russia, Nazi Germany, or on the streets or university campuses of today's world – aren't new. The accusations may change slightly, the logos on the banners may differ, the excuses evolve, but the underlying hatred remains constant.

And yet, so does something else.

The unwelcome resilience of the Jewish spirit.

We're here because we endured. Because when the world cast us out, we created. When our temples were destroyed, we built synagogues. When we were expelled, we carried our traditions in our suitcases, only to lay down new roots wherever we landed. We took the world's attempts to erase us and turned them into stories of renewal, of learning, of triumph.

But it's not just endurance that defines us. It's vision. It's action. The exodus wasn't just a tale of miraculous escape; it was the foundation of a people who, in the depths of the barren wilderness, received the ten commandments, a moral code as powerful today as it was then. It wasn't just about leaving Egypt; it was about what came next. About who we would become.

And today, in an era when the Jewish people once again find themselves besieged, maligned, and fighting for the simple right to exist in peace, this question remains: who will we become?

#### The afikomen and the inner search

When I was a child, one of the highlights of our seder was the great afikomen hunt. I hardly ever found it first, but that never stopped me from trying. The real joy wasn't just in winning, it was in the search itself. The excitement of discovery. The possibility that it could be hidden anywhere. The thrill of looking under cushions, behind bookshelves, inside the folds of a napkin.

This year, as the children at our tables dash around in pursuit of the afikomen, pause for a moment and ask yourself: what's the afikomen I need to find?

Not the one wrapped in a napkin, but the one buried within myself.

What part of me have I lost in the chaos of today's world? What do I need to rediscover, not just for survival, but for growth, for acceptance, for gratitude, for joy?

Maybe it's hope; maybe it's faith; maybe it's a sense of belonging; maybe it's the simple ability to laugh freely again.

MIKE ABEI
The afikomen isn't just

a game. It's a metaphor.

For what has been hidden.

For what must be found. For y

For what must be found. For what we as a people must reclaim, not just from others, but from within ourselves.

#### The burden and blessing of being

There's a weight to being Jewish. A doubleedged sword that comes with being part of a people who have survived empires, crusades, genocides, and exiles, only to thrive time and time again. Our existence is both a blessing and a burden.

The burden is that we must constantly defend ourselves, explain ourselves, justify our right to security, to nationhood, to life. We're asked to hold ourselves to moral standards no other people are required to meet, while those who demonise us refuse to hold themselves to any.

The blessing, however, is far greater. It's that we've endured. That we have taken the pain of every era and turned it into wisdom. That we continue to teach our children not just how to fight, but how to heal. And how to live and love.

That in a world that so often chooses destruction, we choose creation. That in times of darkness, we light candles. That we are a people of doctors, engineers, artists, and thinkers. A people who take broken tools and broken times and build.

That's why, in spite of everything, we don't give up.

#### Hope is a Jewish imperative

The Torah tells us that when the Israelites were trapped between Pharaoh's advancing army and the sea, Moses lifted his staff, and the waters didn't part immediately. Instead, it was Nachshon ben Aminadav, a prince from the tribe of Judah, who stepped forward first, walking into the waves, deeper and deeper, until the sea reached his mouth. Only then did the waters split.

This is what it means to be Jewish. To walk into the unknown. To step forward in faith. To understand that miracles come, but first, we must act.

So this year, at our seders, we don't sit in despair. We sit in defiance, in remembrance, in faith, and in action.

We will not stop fighting for our hostages.

We will not stop standing up for Israel, for Jewish life, for our right to be a people free from persecution.

We will not be silent when we see injustice – not just against Jews, but against anyone suffering under oppression, because we know that pain.

And we will not give in to hatred. Because that isn't our way. Because our legacy isn't destruction, it's creation.

So, as we dip our bitter herbs and ask our four questions, let us ask a fifth:

What will we do with this moment? The answer, as always, is to build; to

educate; to protect; to create; to continue. Because this is our exodus, but it's also

Because this is our exodus, but it's also our becoming.

A final thought

The afikomen is always hidden, but never lost.

Neither are we.

This Passover, may we find what we're searching for.

wiser, and ready to build again.

Chag Pesach sameach. Am Yisrael Chai.

And may we, as always, emerge stronger,

 Mike Abel is the founding partner and executive chairman of M&C Saatchi Abel and The Up&Up Group, South Africa.



### The antidote to antisemitism: loving the different

ara Horn's new graphic novel imagines the seder as a Harry Potter style portal which opens up centuries of Jewish history for us. It imagines seders taking place all the way back - from Sydney and Johannesburg to Riga and Warsaw and Beirut and Tehran and before that to seders in the Roman and Babylonian empires, all the way to the ancient land of Israel and beyond that, extending to the very first seder – when we killed a lamb, a god of the ancient Egyptians, roasted it whole, and ate it on the night of our freedom.

excess". Quite literally, Pharaoh feels that our numbers might lead us to join with his enemies and defeat his army. But the word "rav" gives us a clue as to the deeper hatred Pharaoh harbours for the people of Israel. On a symbolic level, to be called "rav" (too much), is simply to be different! The common thread of all forms of antisemitism is simply that Jews aren't the same as the dominant culture in which we find ourselves. Historically, some cultures sought to address our difference by making us the same as everyone - think conversion or assimilation.

of sameness. As we walked, our educator asked us, "What is the opposite of Auschwitz?" At the end of the day, one of our teachers, Sidney Melamdowitz, said, "The opposite of Auschwitz is our students putting on their uniforms every morning, walking into the school gates, and showing hillside/little boxes made of tickyup for a Jewish education." In reflecting on her words which gave me goosebumps at the time, we are all created in the image of I feel that every time we assert our "ravness", our difference as Jews, we respond to all forms of antisemitism and discrimination by saying, "Here we are ... as we are!"

We asserted our difference on the first seder night ever by slaughtering a lamb as we left Egypt. We weren't necessarily seeking to disrespect an Egyptian god. Rather, our first night of freedom was signalled by asserting our unique beliefs: "We are rav. We are different." As we approach Pesach this year, I wish to add to my colleague's words and say the opposite of Auschwitz is the leil seder in all its proliferations: with or without *kitniyot*, with or without gebrochts, longer seders and shorter seders, intellectual discussions or dramatic re-enactments, talking or singing. On seder night, let us remember that once upon a time, a Pharaoh sought to oppress us because he was threatened by our difference. With the help of G-d, we decided we would embrace our difference and offer the very concept of uniqueness as a gift to humankind.

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks reminds us that being different is the Jewish people's gift to humanity. No-one should be told that their feelings, politics, sexual orientation, progressive or conservative values are too much. We are all encouraged to embrace our uniqueness. Our difference needs to be a vehicle not for separation but for deep connection. If we try to connect with each other through simple commonalities and truisms such as, "We are all human and we

all want the same thing", we're in danger of creating a shallow culture, relying on sentimental notions of, "We are all the same, man!" If we rely on sameness as a unifying force, we devolve to smallness. As Malvina Reynolds sang, "Little boxes on the tacky/Little boxes on the hillside/ Little boxes all the same." That G-d means we have a capacity of infinite otherness and largesse. We need to create community and

a sense of humanity by playing large, not small!

We are reminded repeatedly in the Torah that "we should love the stranger for we were strangers in the land of Egypt". If I may play Hassidic reader, I'm going to shift this to say that we should love and embrace strangeness for we were regarded as strange in the land of Egypt. This is the deep and true antidote to antisemitism. When we can love what is deemed strange in each other and ourselves, our cultural

and individual idiosyncrasies, we have

the opportunity to re-discover freedom. We are far from this ideal. But the Pesach seder reminds us that we haven't finished seeking, finding, and celebrating our differences.

Chag Pesach kasher ve'sameach

• Adina Roth is a South African rabba and the director of Jewish Life at Emanuel School in Australia.



On that same night, we turned to our kids and began telling them a story, "We used to be slaves in Egypt but we're being liberated tonight." What does this freedom mean for us today, in 2025? These days, this thing called antisemitism has reared its head, online and in our world. As we sit for our seders this year and recall our ancient story of oppression, let us remind ourselves that the arc of history is long and it bends towards freedom.

In the opening lines of the book of Shemot, Pharaoh looks out at the Israelites who live in Egypt and notices our easy proliferation, the way in which we are reproducing. And Pharaoh utters a word which functions for him as both insult and justification. The Israelites, he says are "rav" and should therefore be oppressed and enslaved. "Rav" is described as "too much" or "in

In other instances, tyrants sought to oppress us through slavery or eradicate our difference through genocide! "Rav" isn't the purview of antisemitism alone. Being accused of "rav" or difference is at the root of many forms of prejudice: racism, homophobia, and misogyny. It rests on the assumption that all people should conform to a particular idea of

A few months ago, I had the privilege of taking a group of Grade 12 students to Poland. As we walked the paths of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the first thing I noticed was how the totalitarian Nazi regime despised difference. Jews, Roma-Sinti, homosexuals, Catholics, communists. Anyone who dared to think differently or who was deemed different was punished. The philosophy of Aryanism was a demagogy



# Bitter verbs (phrase)

Bitter verbs n. – Words spoken with promise, but not always followed by action. USAGE

Thanks to our donors 750 families in our community won't have to endure bitter verbs. This Pesach let's give them celebration and joy.



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### Israel a democracy, but seder shows we're family

OPINION

he seder isn't merely a retelling of history, but a re-experiencing of *yetziat Mitzrayim*, a journey best undertaken through active dialogue. This question-and-answer format, generally characteristic of Talmud Torah, unfolds not in a *Beit Midrash* but around the seder table, woven into the fabric of family life. For thousands of years, across countless lands and cultures, we have transmitted our common story around the family seder table.

The very first seder marked the emergence of our identity not just as a nation, but as a family. On the night of *yetziat Mitzrayim*, we were commanded to offer the korban Pesach. The time frame for eating this

korban is the most limited of any korban; it had to be consumed by midnight.

Additionally, the meat couldn't be removed beyond its original building. Hence, the most natural and logical arrangement for korban Pesach was for each household to bring its own korban offering, thereby assuring that the meat would remain at home and that it would be finished on time. As the Torah writes, "A lamb for each household, a lamb for each family." Korban Pesach was an intimate, family-centred experience.

Centuries of slavery threatened to eradicate Jewish family life. Slaves, crammed into squalid quarters, rarely sustain stable family structures. They have little control over their children, who can be sold or bartered like mere possessions.

Worse Pharaoh, who couldn't bear the sight of a Jew, unleashed his fury upon our infants, decreeing that they be cast into the Nile. Tragically, history has repeated itself, and this gruesome crime continues to be inflicted upon our people.

That we still managed to preserve our families and gather for the seder, even under the crushing weight

of slavery, was a testament to our resilient spirit and unbreakable faith.

Additionally, that first Pesach night, we coalesced into one family by realising that we shared a common father. We are all familiar with Moshe's famous demand to Pharaoh: "Let my people go!" But this phrase, so often quoted, isn't entirely accurate. The actual first message Hashem commanded Moshe to deliver was far more personal: "Let my firstborn child go, or I will take your firstborn."

On the night of the first seder, as we gathered around our family korban and heard *makkat bechorot* (the plague of the firstborn) strike, we realised that

One of the central themes of Pesach is the korban Pesach (lamb) offering

Hashem wasn't only our creator and redeemer, he was our father. If we all shared a common father who defended his children, then we weren't merely a people, we were a family.

Family identity as the backbone of Jewish identity didn't begin on the night of *yetziat Mitzrayim*. The entire story of *Bereishit* is the story of a family, one

that wrestled with the classic struggles of family life: tensions between spouses and siblings; disputes over inheritance and legacy; the challenge of preserving unity; and the responsibility to protect one another. Our national history, long before slavery and redemption in Egypt, began not with a kingdom or a formal structure, but with a family taking shape.

Every year, the seder rebuilds our family identity. We gather with our families, ask our children questions, and pass down our story, reminding ourselves that the Jewish nation is, at its heart, a Jewish family.

We've always seen ourselves as a family, even

when we lived far apart. When we lost the outward signs of nationhood – sovereignty, land, an army, a flag – we held fast to a shared family identity that bridged the continents that divided us.

Though we've lived as a family for centuries, something about life in Israel makes us feel even more like a family. We hear it often: one of the joys of living in Israel is the sense of being part of a family and treating one another as such. We feel more willing to step out of our comfort zones for each other, whether it means offering help to "strangers", opening our homes, or simply engaging in heartfelt conversations with people we hardly know but with

whom we share so much.

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly why living in Israel strengthens our family identity, but part of it may be that most Israelis are relatively recent immigrants. Very few can trace their presence in Israel beyond three or four generations. In place of the natural family history we left behind, we found ourselves

forming a new, collective family identity in this land.

The war has intensified the already tangible sense of family in Israel, forcing us to live, grieve, and stand together as one extended household. We've operated beyond the usual boundaries of nationhood, helping one another and ensuring that families survive under the crushing strain of war.

Two years have passed, and even after a war for survival, we still haven't found the recipe for national unity. Much of the strife revolves around the question of how democracy should be wielded. Can a slim majority impose its will upon the rest of society? How do we navigate opposing policies without descending into toxic discourse and corrosive dialogue? Ironically, democracy is pulling us apart from within.

Perhaps the path to unity begins with redefining our terminology. Perhaps we shouldn't define Israeli society as a democracy. Democracy is merely the political system through which we conduct government and decide common policies. As the fairest form of governance, democracy should guide Israel, but our deeper identity must be that of a family, not merely a political system.

Family members have greater tolerance for one another and don't focus solely on their own needs. They don't impose solutions upon each other but instead seek to build consensus. Democracy is a contest; family is a compromise. The Pesach seder should instil in us a more acute sense of family, guiding us toward a softer discourse and a more tolerant and understanding vision of what it means to be a family living jointly in Israel.

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

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EACH NAME, AN ENTIRE WORLD.





# Carefree isn't free: the case for real freedom

PINION RABBI LEVI A'

fellow who had done well in business and was feeling quite proud of himself once stopped by for a visit to his rabbi who had known him since his youth and taught him in school. "So, how is your Torah learning and growth in Judaism doing?" the rabbi enquired.

The self-assured fellow responded, "Rabbi, don't worry about my world to come and heavenly reward. I'm sorted. I'm a good person. Thank you for your concern."

His mentor sighed saying, "You misunderstand me, my dear student. I'm not worried about your quality of life in heaven after 120 years. I'm concerned about your quality of life in this world, right now, today. A life devoid of growth and

spiritual congruence is a sad life, lacking direction and purpose.



eternal life; it's the path to a quality life in this world of the physical and the

Let's consider what this really means, considering that Pesach is here, the season of freedom in the Jewish calendar. To be honest, with 59 hostages and their families still awaiting their freedom, these past 18 months feel like one very long season focused on the dream of freedom. So let's chat about it.

We often think of freedom as the absence of obligations, responsibilities, and rules. Try searching Google Images for "freedom", and chances are it will show a photo of someone atop a mountain with their hands spread out and a gorgeous sunset ahead of them. Or an eagle with their wings spread out, surfing across a blue sky.

Freedom in that context means relief from obligation and from the hectic responsibilities of jobs, family, and domestic life. The ability to choose what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and with whom to do it is the secular version of freedom. "No right, no wrong, no rules for me, I'm free."

In this understanding of freedom, marriage, parenting, a job, communal responsibilities, and religious observance are viewed as the bottlenecks of freedom. The free life is one of no alarm clocks, no schedules, no accountability, no consequences, no obligations, no wisdom, and no belonging. Carefree is free.

Parents will often advise their kids to put off marriage and childbearing because "you deserve to be free for a while". Implying that living a life devoid of responsibility is a human right and a worthy aspiration; and marriage and children get in the way of freedom.

Torah couldn't disagree more with both of those assumptions. Marriage, children, and being a

contributing member of society are the primary pathways to a fulfilling life. T

are the primary pathways to a fulfilling life. They activate within us the ability to be the people we were designed to be without falling into the traps of silly ideas and behaviours that might distance us from our destiny and our inner yearning to be free to be who we are called upon to be.

Carefree, unlike true freedom, means that there's no-one to care for, which implies an empty life that often leads to angst, manifesting as existential anxiety.

Here's a little story. My paternal grandfather was a poor man in terms of physical possessions. He had nothing by the standards of most people. And yet, whenever there was a family simcha, he would take the microphone and declare in the proudest voice in Yiddish, "Ich bin a billionaire!" (I am a billionaire.) Why? Because he was blessed with 15 children and more than 120 grandchildren, all of whom are proud Jews. Plus, countless greatgrandchildren, growing by the day. He had never earned a good living, had been through Stalin's gulags, lost his family behind the Iron Curtain, and endured unbelievable challenges, but he

was an actual billionaire. Could you disagree?

A truly free life is packed with responsibilities and full of meaningful actions where you give of yourself wholeheartedly and lessen your ego by extending your heart to the plethora of responsibilities you've taken on.

A good life is a full life. It's not an easy life, but it's an incredible and heroic life. Avoiding responsibilities and being afraid to walk out of our comfort zone might lead to momentary pleasure, but it is the surest road to regret.

For example, no-one regrets having an additional child. People often regret the child they didn't have. Why didn't they have that child? For good reasons. Money. The house was too small. Babies get in the way of shopping and holidays. Too stressful. "What about my dreams?" Your bestie thought it was a bad idea. And many other seemingly significant reasons that, 20 years down the road, ring hollow and regrettable.

A person who makes decisions based on timeless Torah values is guaranteed to make decisions that they will be proud of later in life. Torah values are G-d's values. And G-d, who created you and I, knows what's best for us. He created a manual of living called the Torah, which isn't only the road to a good spiritual life, but also the road to a beautiful physical life. Why? Because it leads to wise decisions that will stand the test of time.

Unlike decisions made by whim and current secular values, which might feel right for the moment but aren't in line with what's truly good for us in the long term, the holiday of Pesach calls upon us to walk the long – but surest – walk to freedom, by embracing timeless values.

This Pesach, let us pursue the liberty that can be achieved only when we embrace a life of responsibility, the self-confidence that comes from competence. Rather than the false self-esteem that has no justification other than the meaningless repetition of the mantra that "I am amazing, even though I sleep until 15:00 and spend my few waking hours binge eating and binge-watching rubbish. Then scream at my mom who's begging me to leave my room for 20 minutes so that she can clean the room of the mountain of rubbish and stench of the aimless soul-destroying 'carefree' life."

The more meaningful responsibilities we willingly accept, the greater the freedom, not only for the next world, but much more importantly and vividly, for our best version of life, right here, right now.

Wishing you and yours a kosher and happy Pesach and the wisdom and courage to make the decisions that will lead to your best life.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

# Insulated, not isolated. Power of interfaith dialogue

ON RABBI GILAD FRIEDMAN

few months ago, I boarded an Air Ethiopia flight. At first glance, this may seem like just another trip, but in reality, the destination was far from typical. It wasn't Tel Aviv, as many might have assumed. The final destination was Addis Ababa.

As I sat at OR Tambo International Airport, I couldn't help but notice that at least half of the passengers were wearing kippot and sheitels. The flight was just the beginning of an extraordinary experience, one that reinforced a vital lesson about Jewish identity and interfaith engagement.

I had been invited by the Ethiopian government's ministry of peace to attend a ground-breaking international interfaith conference held in Addis Ababa in conjunction with Mohamed bin Zayed

University in Abu Dhabi. Themed "Tolerance, Citizenship and Peace", this three-day summit gathered religious leaders from all over the world, and I had the honour of leading the South African delegation.

For more than a decade, I have immersed myself in interfaith dialogue in KwaZulu-Natal, and this opportunity was a culmination of years of

work. But nothing could have prepared me for what I was about to witness.

What unfolded in Addis Ababa was nothing short of extraordinary. The respect and curiosity people showed me weren't due to my South African roots, but because I was Jewish. Among the delegates from all over the world there were Muslims, Christians, Bahá'í, Hindus, and other faith groups, each representing a different facet of the world's rich religious tapestry. And then there was me – the solo, incidental Jew – leading the South African delegation.



One of the most profound moments of the conference came when Ethiopian President Taye Atske Selassie opened the summit. He made it clear that it wasn't about politics. In a powerful move, he handed the floor over to the religious leaders, signalling that this space was reserved for faith, dialogue, and understanding. This type of dialogue was showcased by a panel featuring leaders from both the Ethiopian Muslim community and Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These men had grown up alongside each other, maintaining dialogue since childhood despite the turbulent history of Ethiopia.

I had the opportunity to present on a panel with an imam from Kenya and an academic from Abu Dhabi. My topic was interreligious tolerance from a South African perspective. The interest in how we navigate this space in South Africa was palpable. It was clear that people around the world are fascinated by the way we manage our complex, multifaith

society. The takeaway was undeniable: interfaith engagement is crucial, and relationships are golden.

This brings me to a core message I want to share as we approach Pesach: as a Jewish community, we must be insulated, but not isolated

Throughout 210 years of slavery in Egypt, the Jewish people maintained their distinct identity – names; language; dress code; food; *brit milah*; *chesed*; not speaking *lashon hara*; and the sanctity of the Jewish marriage\*. Our ancestors resisted the pull of assimilation and breakdown of Jewish values. This was nothing short of miraculous, and these values merited our redemption from generations of slavery in Egypt.

The Talmud is filled with interfaith dialogue between Jewish sages and leaders



of surrounding nations, demonstrating how the Jewish communities not only understood the customs of their neighbours, but actively engaged with them at leadership level. These discussions weren't just about survival during times of danger, but about maintaining our Jewish values while interacting with the broader world.

At the interfaith summit in Addis Ababa, I witnessed firsthand the importance of interreligious tolerance. People from all corners of the globe were eager to engage with the Jewish community, to understand our traditions, and see how we live by the Torah. But here's the critical point: before we can engage outwardly, we must first ensure that we are grounded in our own Judaism. We must invest in Judaism, preserve our traditions, and uphold our commitment to Torah study and *mitzvot*. Only then can we engage meaningfully with communities outside of our own faith. People are respectful of others who respect their own faith.

Since 7 October 2023, the interfaith space has become increasingly challenging. Initially everyone took a step back and focused on their own narrative. Even today, some members of the community aren't ready for dialogue or understanding, but the leadership is.

Nevertheless, when I'm approached by someone on the street, it's almost always with good wishes for the Jewish community and support for Israel.

As we gather around our seder tables, Pesach is a holy time for our community to reflect on the experiences of our ancestors and view ourselves as if we ourselves had left Egypt. Certainly, our generation has suffered and faced many challenges.

May we see the swift return of those being held captive by Hamas, and may we merit the arrival of *Mashiach* in our time. *L'shana haba'a Birushalayim*.

\*The ideas reflected here are a combination of a number of *midrashim* and don't in fact appear together in one text. There is, however, an overlap. The most popularly cited Jewish values kept by *Bnei Yisrael* are: names, language, and dress code.

 Rabbi Gilad Friedman is the director of the Umhlanga Jewish Centre, KwaZulu-Natal.

### Family stories worth documenting before it's too late

I FF TANKI F

o many regret never having documented their parents' or grandparents' life stories so that they have a record of their family history. As we sit down to our Pesach seders this week when we read part of our history, we see how vital it is to know our past to work towards our future.

"Family history is your blueprint," said Cassidy Haefner, a social media manager, who is grateful she had the foresight to record her grandparents' stories. "So many of us have done genetic and ancestry tests that show us where we come from, but not who we come from. Recording family history more qualitatively adds dimension, explanation, and soul to who you are as a person and what it took for our ancestors to give us our

But many realise what they have lost only when those who hold the key to their history are already gone.

"We don't know a lot about our grandparents," said Tracy Friedman, who ran the Life Story Project biography service with her husband. "Most of the time, we know only snippets. The thing is that our grandparents are around at a time that younger people aren't especially interested [in their history], but when people do become interested, often those people are too old or have passed away."

Though the people whose stories are being captured feel honoured

and valued because their stories are documented, Friedman said that it was also a gift to future generations because that information would often get lost to the sands of time. she was inspired to create a journal to document both her grandparents' lives.

"There are so many essential lessons and heartwarming moments that I



Friedman started the service years ago when she wanted to record the life story of her grandfather. She wished she had a book about her grandfather written in a coherent narrative. So, she and her husband teamed up to run the Life Story Project in which they would interview and write the story of different people in one cohesive narrative that not only contained the facts, but elements of the person's personality.

"This information becomes more and more precious as time passes and people pass away," she said.

Haefner said that after spending time with her grandmother, whom she describes as her favourite person, gained from those stories," she said, "and they are experiences that I want to be able to touch on when it comes to understanding myself, my life going forward, and to be able to share with my future family straight from my gran's memory. Their legacy is my legacy."

She said that in listening to her grandmother's stories, she realised there were probably others who wished to document their family history. So, she created Who You Were, Are, and Forever Will Be, a keepsake journal filled with thoughtful prompts that guide people through their life story, from ancestry to adulthood and beyond.

"There's no better gift than having the story of your loved one's life in your hands, where you can gain inspiration from their stories and learn about their mistakes while being able to pass it forward. It also sends a message of love and appreciation to your family members," said Haefner.

Thirty years ago, Marta Mazo at Beit Hatfutsot in Tel Aviv, now known as ANU: The Museum of the Jewish People, created the My Family Story project because she wanted to know the history of her own family and pass it down to her children.

Since then, 100 000 scholars from 30 countries have participated in this project.

It includes a nine-lesson journey where students learn to define their identity, conduct interviews, and ask meaningful questions. They explore their family's migration paths in the context of global Jewish movements; interpret photographs; create and interpret family trees; analyse family heirlooms or historical objects; discover how food tells stories and acts to connect families; and design a creative family logo. It culminates in the creation of a personal, artistic representation of their family story, which is entered into an international competition celebrating creativity and heritage.

When attorney Sue Blou's children were in Grade 8 and had to do a project detailing their family history, she put her crafting hands to work and helped create a digital scrapbook for them. "It was so interesting to

collect the information from our parents and to learn more about their lives and their parents and grandparents. It was fascinating to hear where previous generations came from," she said.

In gathering information about her and her husband's family, she accumulated photos, newspaper clippings, and stories from various family members that otherwise would never have been linked and recorded.

Once the scrapbook was completed, as she and the family went through its pages together, they were able to learn about their heritage, their families' stories, and some fascinating historical events that their family members had been involved in.

"They learned that their grandmother had been at a Pesach seder with David Ben-Gurion on kibbutz Sde Boker. Their grandmother's aunt and her husband founded the kibbutz in 1952," said Blou

Sharon Hayat, the head of the Global Educators Network at Koret International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies, ANU: The Museum of the Jewish People, said, "In societies where family narratives may have been silenced, fragmented, or lost, whether due to migration, conflict, or cultural shifts, this project provides a powerful opportunity to recover, reconstruct, and pass on those stories to future generations, preserving family and cultural legacies."



# JEWISH Chag Pesach Sameach

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בס"ד

### Why chaos is part of the seder

e emerged just a few weeks ago from the chaos of Purim. Purim is the quintessential holiday of chaos. As Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin explains, unlike all other holidays on the Jewish calendar, Purim is picked randomly by a goral (a lottery) (Resisei Layla, 18).

And how chaotic and disordered our lives have been since just before Purim and over the past 18 months! And, now, as Pesach

comes, I'm seeking some order. Pesach is the quintessential holiday of

order. Seder means order, and the meal is a compilation of rituals that have precise measurements, timing, and ways in which we perform them. Even the structure of the seder is ordered – there are four sections, each made up of a question, story, thanks, and praise. From kiddush, right The Pesach seder brings much needed order to our lives down to Chad Gadya,

the story of seeing that G-d is the ultimate source in a seemingly chaotic world, there's order. And yet, with all the attempted order, if

your seder is anything like ours has been in past years, you know how disordered it can be. Little kids may be running around; someone inevitably spills wine or grape juice everywhere; someone falls asleep before the end; and in my house, little toy frogs get launched around the table at random

And, in fact, many of the rituals, on deeper inspection, don't fit the framework of "order". One of these disordered moments is the often overlooked ritual of yachatz, that moment when we break the middle matzah, half to be eaten after making motzi-matzah, and half to become the afikomen. The truth is, breaking the matzah at that moment makes no sense. The entire section related to matzah comes after the Maggid section shouldn't we break the matzah right before we wash and eat? In fact, this was the minhag of many, including even Rambam.

So, why break matzah early on in the

seder? There are many answers to this question. But for me, the point is that as soon as we settle into the seder, we interrupt the logical order and introduce brokenness and chaos. It seems that the authors of the haggadah knew all too well what we have come to inherently understand this year. Chaos is inevitable.

And so the task ahead is to embrace both ethics: striving for seder, finding order when possible and equally leaning into the

chaos, represented by the brokenness

of *yachatz*. In the midst of ordered,

organised rituals, we must recognise that there is much loss in the world and give space to acknowledge that brokenness. We must also embrace the unknown, that which we cannot control. We cannot control world trauma and tragedy or how others choose to react to this new reality.

And I work on

accepting this, allowing disorder to wash over me, all the while seeking ways that I can bring order into our lives. How we can control finding small ways to bring joy to our Pesach celebration. How we

can practice radical empathy for those in need, and be kind to ourselves.

One final thought. The Gemara in Pesachim (115b) explains that yachatz is associated with lechem oni (poor man's bread). We break the matzah right before we recite: "Ha lachma anya (This is the poor man's bread)." The Gemara says, "Ma darko shel ani beprusa. (Just as a poor person eats a broken piece of a loaf, so too matzah must be eaten as a broken piece.)"

Our world is broken. Many of us are broken. This year, may we have the humility to scoop up the crumbs, and pray that we are able to withstand the disorder and chaos. And, at the same time, may we seek ways to find order, joy, and empathy in the days ahead.

Chag kasher v'sameach!

· Rabba Sara Hurwitz is the founder and president of Yeshivat Maharat in New York, which educates Orthodox women in Torah and spiritual leadership.

### Two seders or one? It's a diaspora question

LULA PENCHARZ

hen Israelis come to South Africa for Pesach, they often don't celebrate two nights of seders, but some seem to do so. As Pesach is the best time for questions, the SA Jewish Report reached out for answers.

Dafi Forer Kremer, the director of the Israel Centre in South Africa and the head of the organisation's aliya department, has been in South Africa for just over a year. She observes only one seder night in South Africa, like in Israel, although she will still be located here for a few more years.

"I can't keep the two days because I'm only living here temporarily," she said. "I can't break my

She said that her rabbi advised her that since she's Israeli, no matter where she celebrates the chag, she must observe it according to Israeli traditions and keep only one day of yom tov, but still be aware and respectful of the community around her observing a second night and day.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Life Rabbi Emeritus of Sydenham Shul and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association, said this issue dates back to when we didn't have a fixed calendar.

"Ours is a lunar calendar, and Rosh Chodesh, the first day of the Hebrew month, is when the new moon appears," Goldman said. "The moon waxes and wanes, so the Jewish people are likened to the lunar calendar, not because we are lunatics, but because we too have had our ups and downs in history."

He said that before the days of fixed calendars, the Jewish calendar was fixed by the testimony of two credible witnesses, who would come to the high court in Jerusalem and testify that they had seen the first sighting of the new moon.

The news would spread with messengers riding around Israel to advise people when "the first of Nissan, the Hebrew month which we are in now, was declared so they would know when the 15th of Nissan was to observe Pesach. But the messengers could travel only within Israel."

Diaspora communities, he said, were too far for the messengers to convey the news of the new month. In the diaspora, Jews could still observe the movements of the moon, but there was still doubt about the accuracy of counting the months because the lunar calendar could have either 29 or 30 days

"It was basically a question of today or tomorrow. Ever since then, diaspora communities have been keeping a second day of yom tov. This way, they could be sure that they observed the mitzvah to have matzah on the first night of Pesach and to tell children the story in the haggadah. One day for sure was correct," Goldman said.

Today, although there's no longer doubt about the date and there hasn't been since one of the great

scholars, Hillel, fixed the calendar, the second day is still kept in the diaspora for two reasons, according to Goldman.

First, he said, "a principle in Jewish law states that once something is established then only a greater Beth Din in wisdom and numbers can revoke it. We don't have rabbis today who would be so presumptuous to say they are wiser than rabbis of ancient times."

Goldman's other argument was more anecdotal. He drew parallels to something sacred becoming "worn out". "For example, a tallis torn and worn out would require you to buy a new one. You can't chuck the old one in the rubbish; it would be inappropriate. You would treat it respectfully. In the same vein, this second day of yom tov for Pesach and Sukkot has been sanctified and consecrated by centuries of Jewish life and tradition, and has been observed as a holy day by diaspora Jewish communities for millennia. Now that we don't need it, we can't just chuck it out. This day has become holy through Jewish people, if not by the Torah itself, and therefore the holiness lasts forever."

Forer Kremer shared a funny experience from her time in South Africa to show the difference in Israeli



and diaspora customs around chaggim. "In Israel, we celebrate one day for Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret. On this day, we shouldn't eat in the sukkah." However, in the diaspora, Jews traditionally still sit in their sukkot on Shemini Atzeret.

"We invited people for the first yom tov, and only when they arrived for dinner did we realise they had to sit in the sukkah," Kremer said. As the gracious hosts they are, "we served them their food in the sukkah, and we ate inside", she said.

She said she liked the idea of observing two seder nights because "on the first night, you're so exhausted from all the cleaning and preparations, you might fall asleep on the haggadah. But on the second night, you have all the time and energy to explore it and inquire as you should."

### The four heroines who saved Jews from slavery

#### >>Continued from page 13

endured the suffering of war Women were among those who lost their lives on that tragic day of Simchat Torah, with many subjected to barbaric torture, while others were taken captive and endured inhumane treatment. Meanwhile, primarily male combat soldiers have been killed and injured by the thousands.

Throughout this ordeal, it's the mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers who have demonstrated extraordinary courage, sustaining the spirit of the entire Jewish people. They have preserved their households while separated from spouses, children, and parents, often performing the roles of two people to maintain family stability.

The wives of reservists have

carried on for months without Haman and Pharaoh's evil decrees their husbands. More than 300 women now raise families alone after losing their husbands. Among the hostage families, mothers have become the public face of endurance, bearing tremendous suffering with remarkable fortitude. Across society, women lead numerous initiatives supporting the war effort and civilian needs.

In Jewish law, women are generally exempt from time-bound *mitzvot*. Yet, curiously, women are obligated in the time-bound mitzvot of Purim and Pesach. Why? Our sages explain that "they, too, were involved in the miracle of the day".

Some interpret this to mean that women suffered equally under

Others suggest a deeper meaning: women weren't merely victims, they were active agents of salvation who defied these antisemitic oppressors. It was Esther who courageously confronted Haman, and the heroic women of Egypt who helped reverse Pharaoh's deadly decree. Their participation wasn't passive but pivotal to the redemption itself.

Like then, today, it's the heroic women of our generation who play a pivotal part in lifting the spirit of our people and fulfilling their critical role in the ongoing redemption of our nation.

• Rabbi Doron Perez is the executive chairperson of World Mizrachi

### Haggadah's coded message: bring them home now!

>>Continued from page 12

the seder became less obvious to generations born after the fall of the Roman Empire, the rabbis made it crystal clear by adding the final wish, "Next year in

As with most Jewish festivals, creating a coded text to engage the intellect wasn't enough. The emotions have to be ignited as well, and how better than with food? Just as Purim and Shavuot combine the reading of a Megillah with customs of feasting, Pesach channels the emotions of leaving exile and heading back home through the food customs described in the Torah.

Imagine being told you could catch a plane home after weeks or years living in temporary accommodation as you are evacuated for your safety to your homeland. In the minutes before the taxi arrives, there are three prominent emotions in your household: stress - will we be ready?; excitement - we're going home!; and tension - change is always a challenge. The Torah replicates these feelings with the three symbols that must appear on every seder table: matzah, the

Pesach lamb, and maror.

Matzah represents that feeling of time pressure – it must be made in just 18 minutes. The shank bone, representing the sacrificial lamb, is our symbol of hope and excitement for the rebuilding of the third Temple, while the maror represents the bittersweet feelings associated with change, with the fear of past oppressions and concerns about what fate awaits us. Eaten together, as Hillel suggests, they arouse the perfect combination of emotions to get us into geulah mode, for redemption, for the return home.

May this year be the year that we heed the coded redemption message of the haggadah. May we soon enact the slogan of the past 18 months: "Bring them home now!" - from Gaza, from New York, from London, and from all over the world. Amen!

• Rabbi Leo Dee is an educator living in Israel whose wife Lucy and two daughters, Maia and Rina, were murdered in a Hamas terror attack in April 2023.

# Pesach, politics, and palpitations

he story of Pesach has been the freedom movements around the world, from nuns in El Salvador and Nelson Mandela to the American civil rights campaigners and Rastafarian-infused reggae. The call to speak truth to power, to free the oppressed and "Let my people go" has resonated through the centuries with those who were impoverished, enslaved, or downtrodden.

The journey from slavery to freedom, the crossing of the parted Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds or Red Sea),

and the receiving of the ten commandments on Mount Sinai are all powerful symbols of liberation and hope.

So, it is with horror that we see the rise the world over of new Pharaohs - populist leaders, claiming increasing power and control for themselves on the basis that they, and only they, will protect their countries from the threat of the - here you insert the word of choice - immigrants, Jews, Arabs, foreigners, the named or unnamed "other" that is most feared.

Now, as the world becomes an increasingly divided and hostile place to be, can the wisdom of our ancient story guide us through the rocky terrain ahead? I'm sure that it can.



Let's begin with Pharaoh himself, or more specifically with his heart. I'm not talking about his blood pressure or iron levels, I'm talking about the hardening of his heart. Throughout the story of the ten plagues, we're told that Pharaoh hardens his heart, leaving him unmoved by Moses and Aaron's repeated requests or even the suffering of his own people, unwilling and unable to release the slaves under his domination.

This hardened heart becomes a symbol of a person's inability to listen empathically, to be open to negotiation, or even to acknowledge pain. In our most intimate and precious relationships, having a hardened heart is a recipe for disaster, the opposite of the person

that we would most want to be. Pharaoh's hardened heart not only doesn't allow the words of Moses and Aaron to penetrate, but becomes symbolic of his refusal to recognise G-d. Eventually G-d hardens Pharaoh's heart, leaving him no option to free the Israelites even if he would have chosen to do that.

The Chassidic master, the Sefat Emet, taught that "the human heart is the tablet upon which G-d writes". The Psalmist calls out to G-d to "create a pure heart in me" (Psalms 51:12). Our ability to open our heart is our ability to connect to the divine spirit, to feel the will of the eternal move us.

Rabbi Shefa Gold tells the story about some jealous angels who are asked to hide the spark

of the divine in the world.

"Let's put it atop the highest mountain," offers one.

"No," says another, "The human is very ambitious; he will find it there."

"Well then, let's bury it beneath the deepest

"That won't work either," another chimes in. "The human is very resourceful. She will even find it there."

After a moment's thought, the wisest angel says, "I know. Put it inside the human heart. They will never look there.

The human heart is the tablet upon which G-d writes.

When did you last look into your heart? I cannot alter the heart of world leaders. I cannot play the role that Moses or Aaron played in speaking to Pharaoh. But I can be sovereign over my own heart. And as we prepare for Pesach, we can add to our cleaning the cleaning of our heart space, the opening of ourselves to see the person opposite and near us, the calling of their heart as we open ours.

Chag sameach!

• Rabbi Greg Alexander is a part of the rabbinic team at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation.



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### The mom-nishtanah of the school seder

OPINION

ever mind the four sons, let's discuss the four moms at the school Pesach seder.

### 1. The over eager, I've got it all together mom

She diarised the date and time of this seder at the beginning of the school year, and wrote it on that nifty calendar she has on the fridge to keep her kids up to date and well prepared for anything and everything the school term has to offer. She has a frontrow seat at the perfect angle to capture the exact shot of her little one dipping their egg in saltwater and beaming with a squeakyclean face and immaculately combed hair.

She claps in time to each tune, videos all the right moments, and is basically beaming with pride and joy throughout the more than an hour-long production. She's so immensely grateful, and aware that time passes so quickly, that her heart is almost bursting from all the feeling.

### 2. The underachieving, I'll sit in the back of the class mom

She's the one rushing in a little dishevelled and using her spit to wipe off the remnants of



brekkie from her offspring's face. She wasn't sure if the seder was today or if parents were actually invited but the 78 messages on the class WhatsApp group this morning kinda gave it away. Of course, she loves watching that sweet face light up when they spot her

in the audience and of course, her heart melts when they sing *Ma Nishtanah*. She just doesn't think that singing all six verses of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* are necessary when she has a 09:00 meeting to rush off to.

### 3. The no nonsense, let's keep things simple mom

She knows what needs to be done, and she knows the quickest, most efficient way to do it. She doesn't quite know why this is taking so long or why the kids couldn't just go home straight afterwards to save another lift. Although she's impressed by the beautifully set tables and creative choice of songs, she wonders if the décor will be recycled or repurposed tomorrow, and questions the necessity of all these personalised little bottled waters.

#### 4. The mom who doesn't know how to ask

This shy, uncomplicated mom delights in the beauty and grace that this morning brings. She's thrilled to be there, and feels blessed to experience this occasion and enjoy being entertained so beautifully by teachers and kids alike. She marvels at the hours that

have been spent teaching these songs and learning

these songs and learning
these actions. She listens to each word of the
principal's speech and feels inspired to have
her kids attend a school which carries such
an important ethos and message. She smiles
throughout the production, appreciates all
that's before her, and demands nothing in
return. She could sit there forever and never get
bored. She simply relishes in being present, and
hasn't reached into her bag for her phone even
once.

Unfortunately, this mom wasn't at the school seder this week. Alas, she probably doesn't exist. But, just like the four sons, we all have little bits of each of these moms within us. My prayer for this year is that I manage to magnify and grow all my mom strengths and that next year, I'll sing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika with far more gusto!

Chag sameach to my beautiful tribe! May we merit the ultimate redemption, may Hashem uplift our nation and our land in the most miraculous and beautiful way.

• Casey Shevel, otherwise known as #momofboys, is a mom, author, speaker, matchmaker, dating coach, and lover of all things heart-shaped.

### Solutions for mid-week Pesach hunger pangs

Need some chol hamoed cooking inspiration? Look no further, we have you covered with two delicious mid-week Pesach recipes.



#### **LAUREN BOOLKIN**

#### **PESACH BURGERS**

These are my go-to burgers. They are super juicy and best eaten with your hands. Don't use lean mince but rather a three quarter bolo, one quarter brisket mix. This makes eight burgers. Be careful not to squash the meat when forming the "towers" and don't forget the 15 minutes in the freezer before cooking. I've included the Pesach roll recipe, but they are also delicious on a cos lettuce leaf – and I'm a carboholic. If you can't find kosher-for-Pesach mustard, then leave it out.

#### Ingredients

- The burgers are made from meat only. You will need 1kg for eight burgers.
- 2 Tbsp oil to grease the griddle pan or skillet

#### Sauce

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 3 tsp tomato sauce
- 3 tsp pickle juice (from the pickle tin)
- 2 tsp mustard
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp onion powder
- Onions: Finely slice 4 onions and cook on a low heat in 4 Tbsp sunflower oil for 20-30 minutes.

#### Method

Divide the meat into eight portions. Shape into polony style sausages 6.5cm high (fat towers). Place on a wax wrap on a tray. Store in the fridge, and freeze 15 minutes before cooking.

Cook the onions and mix the sauce ingredients.

Heat the griddle and add the oil. When it's hot, place one burger on the griddle and immediately smash to ½ cm thick. Season with salt and pepper. Flip when the underneath is browned. Serve on a roll with lettuce, tomato, fried onions, and a pickle.

#### PESACH ROLLS

#### Ingredients

- 2 cups matzo meal
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp sugar
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup sunflower oil
- 4 eggs

#### Method

Heat the oven to 180 degrees, and line a baking sheet with baking paper.

Combine matzo meal, salt, and sugar in a large bowl, and mix well.

Bring the water and oil to the boil, and add to the matzo meal mixture. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition.

Leave to stand for 15 minutes. With lightly oiled hands, shape into rolls. Bake for 50 minutes.



#### **ROMI RABINOWITZ**

#### **CHOL HAMOED CHICKEN**

This is a great chicken recipe with just a few simple ingredients. It can be served during the week with a side of baked potatoes and a green salad, or even at your Shabbos or *yom tov* table.

#### Ingredients

- 1 packet chicken cut up into portions
- 1 onion chopped
- 1 Tbsp oil
- Juice of one lemon
- ¾ cup vinegar

- ¾ cup water
- 2 tbs sugar
- ½ cup tomato sauce
- 2 tsp paprika

#### Method

Fry the onion in oil until slightly brown.

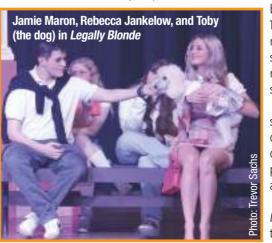
Add the rest of the sauce ingredients, and simmer for about 15 minutes.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Pour over the sauce, and bake covered for an hour, then uncover and bake until browned and ready.

### King David's Legally Blonde dazzles audiences

ing David High School Victory Park's production of *Legally Blonde* came to a close on Tuesday, 8 April, after a highly successful run that captivated audiences from start to finish.

The show ran from Thursday, 3 April, and then from



6 to 8 April with a matinee on Wednesday, 2 April, for guests from Sandringham Gardens, Selwyn Segal, and all Grade 7s from the King David primary schools.

Under the expert direction of Renos Spanoudes, the talented cast delivered outstanding performances, bringing humour, heart, and energy to every scene. The professionalism and passion on stage were matched by the dedication of the backstage crew, set designers, costume and makeup teams, and the musicians who provided the vibrant soundtrack to the show.

This production was a true team effort, with students, staff, and volunteers coming together to create a memorable theatrical experience. Their countless hours of hard work and commitment paid off in a show that dazzled, entertained, and left audiences cheering for more.

Congratulations to everyone involved in making Legally Blonde an overwhelming success, a production that will be fondly remembered for years to come.



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**28** SA JEWISH REPORT 10 – 24 April 2025

# The tricky art of parenting 'screenagers'

**GILLIAN KLAWANSKY** 

f the last bargaining tool you have left with your children is how much screen time they get, you're not alone. With no blueprint for the increasingly complex online world we are navigating, parents need to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills needed to protect their children from the often-detrimental effects of screens.

By the age of seven, a Generation
Alpha child – those born between 2010
and 2024 – will have spent an entire year
watching screen media. Leading child
development and protection specialist,
Luke Lamprecht, shared these and
other alarming insights at a recent King
David Primary School Linksfield talk on
navigating online health and wellness for

"I spend most of my time sitting with children with challenging behaviours and emotions, and all they want to know is why they don't get more time on their machines," he said.

Parents are having to learn how to deal with these "screenagers" on the job, as tackling this issue is completely unprecedented, Lamprecht said.

Addressing the resulting challenges

begins with parents examining their own behaviour. If you're constantly looking at your phone or smartwatch notifications, you're telling your children that this behaviour is acceptable, moreover, that the screen is more important than they are.

About 80% of the children he works with also think they spend too much time online, Lamprecht said. "They know something's wrong; they just don't want to do anything about it." Worryingly, all of the children he asked thought

that their parents spent too much time online. "There's an interface between these two things," he said. Children learn through play, and parents should be one of their bigger playmates.

Parents need to understand the dangers of devices alongside the realworld threats facing children.

"I'm seeing more emotional and behavioural harm caused to children online than I am in the real world,"



Lamprecht said. "We've overprotected our children in the world, and we've underprotected them online because of this fallacy of protecting their privacy. Your child's privacy is never more important than your duty to protect them when they're children."

Social threats are the most worrying, as there seems to be an inordinate amount of online cruelty at the moment. Interestingly, our children have become

increasingly fragile in the face of this cruelty.

"There's a weird mix of children who are easily offended but who think that they can say anything to anybody about anything. This is because they've confused freedom of speech with a compulsion to have an [uninformed] opinion about everything. So, it's a hard world that they find themselves in." Ironically, the most connected generation is the loneliest one.

Parents are competing with online entities when it comes to forging attachments with their children. In the modern world, algorithms feed users' stories, suggested friends, and content that reinforces their online preferences. This has become the "attention economy", Lamprecht said. "It's competing with our children for intimacy. It's talking to our children, and our children talking back."

Yet, how we measure success in an online age has nothing to do with what we have to offer the world, it's all external, he said. "We live in this world of constant comparison where we have forgotten to honour the huge value of a completely ordinary life."

We no longer have tweens and teens, we have "screenagers", who are socialised differently, Lamprecht said. "We have side-to-side socialisation, as opposed to face-to-face socialisation, mediated by a screen. They're literally sitting next to each other, talking to other people on a screen and not interacting with their friend sitting next to them. The problem with that is they start losing some very important human skills." This includes being able to read other people's moods and emotions and reacting accordingly.

There has, however, been a big push back from parents, Lamprecht said. He suggests using Common Sense Media as a resource. Recognising that those who design gaming and social media platforms have no interest in protecting or verifying children's ages, Common Sense Media recommends not giving smartphones to children until they reach Grade 8.

"Ultimately the solution to technology-related problems is your relationship with your child," Lamprecht said. "The biggest problem in the development of children is what we call the 'opportunity cost'. It's about what you aren't doing while you are online, the things kids are missing out on like being in the sun, running around, talking, learning to cook, reading, and interacting with others." Not getting these opportunities stunts their development.

He advocated the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) recommendation to be intentional online. The APA encourages kids to be mindful of their media consumption and its effects on their mood, sleep, and relationships. Choose your content, don't let content be fed to you, it suggests. "Choose positive content because the human brain has an inherent negativity bias – don't feed it more negativity," Lamprecht said. Setting a balance between screentime and other important activities is also key.

Parents must encourage open communication about online experiences. If you get an alert from a parental control like Bark, don't panic, Lamprecht said. Often children get content that they don't consent to. "That alert is for you to have a conversation with your child, not lose your mind," he said.

Parents need to approach screentime with the same caution as they would other harmful behaviour. You wouldn't give children a credit card and let them get as many Big Macs as they like, Lamprecht said. "Then why do you let your child sit in front of the screen for six hours playing Roblox? It's exactly the same thing in terms of development. It's junk food for the brain.

"We can't abandon our children in front of screens and believe that it's a good play," he said. "If these children are going to keep alive any inborn sense of wonder about the world and see it as a magical, joyous place, they need a guide, and that's you."

### Pine Street Shul relocating to improved premises

SAUL KAMIONSKY

here are few shuls in the world whose histories include housing national leaders. The Pine Street Shul, once the home of Mahatma Gandhi who became the leader of India, has an interesting past, and an even more interesting future in a new location.

The shul, which opened on 11 June 1961, will be moving out of its present Pine Street address into The Avenue, also in Orchards, at the end of this year. This will be the third move since the shul, officially called North Eastern Hebrew Congregation, was originally launched in 1948.

It has been at its present premises for more than 60 years, since just after South Africa was declared a republic.

"We're not just building a shul, we're building a community centre, a spiritual home for every person," said Pine Street Shul Rabbi Motti Hadar. "We're working to ensure that our new shul will be ready as soon as possible. There might be an interim period when we will be in a temporary space."

decided the latter made more sense.

The move will make the shul more central to its community. Pine Street Shul was in the centre of the community, but today, most congregants live further away from Louis Botha Avenue.

In the early years of the last century, Gandhi lived on the premises that houses the shul today. "The property and adjoining thatched building, now the Satyagraha House Museum, was owned by Gandhi's close friend and fellow political activist, Hermann Kallenbach," according to Charisse Zeifert in her article on the shul's history. Kallenbach was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, and became one of Johannesburg's leading architects and property developers.

From his early days of attending the shul, community member Gaby Lazarus, who is in his 90s, remembers it being combined with a nursery school in the double-storey building at the previous premises on the corner of Louis Road and Pine Street.

"I was present when the committee decided to raise the funds to buy the stand to build the new shul across the road," Lazarus said. "Funds were

raised to get the best sculptor, Edoardo Villa, to do the façade on the shul's outer walls." Villa, described as South Africa's most prolific and famous sculptor, came to South Africa in the 1940s as an Italian prisoner of war.

According to Zeifert, "The then new building was swish, the architecture grand, and it had a particularly meaningful feature on its eastern façade: stone friezes depicting the 12 tribes of Israel by Villa. It could seat about 700 people."

Hadar has followed in the footsteps of many prestigious rabbis who have served at the shul, the first being Rabbi Dr Solomon Rappaport, whom Lazarus describes as a "marvellous orator". Before Hadar, Rabbi Anthony Gerson served the shul from 1995 to 2022.

Hadar said he was grateful to each of the rabbis who have served this community

before him. "The community is what it is today because of them," he said. "My wife and I joined the shul only two and a half years ago, so our tenure has been briefer than those before us, but it has been an incredible journey."

He said many congregants were the third generation of their family to attend the shul. "Their grandfather, father, and son have all had their Barmitzvah or bris at the shul."

Hadar said the highlight of his time at the shul was its youth participation. "The energy, particularly among young adults, is incredible, and we regularly have Shabbat dinners at our home with more than 30 young adults."

He is also so grateful for the monthly Sunday morning community outreach work. "Community members come together to pack sandwiches for the non-Jewish community. Shul members come from young to old. The youngest one was probably two years old. The oldest person was in their 80s at least. Everyone comes and gives of their time."



Hadar said that the shul had experienced tremendous rejuvenation, with an incredible energy, positivity, and level of engagement over the past few years. "There has been a significant increase in daily shul attendance as well as on Shabbos, *yom tovs*, events, and *shiurim*, especially from the younger families in the community," he said.

However, the rabbi said that the present building was no longer suitable for the community. "The sanctuary of the shul is too big for us, with more than 700 seats, while about 500 members attended these past high holy day services. Our small shul, the *shtiebel*, which we use daily, is too small, with only 25 seats, and we regularly have more men than that because Pine Street is renowned for having a reliable *minyan* 365 days of the year."

The shul's social hall is too small, and the community needs a better space for children's services and other events.

The rabbi said that in considering the community's needs, they recognised that either they had to do a significant renovation or relocate, and they





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# Documentary takes new look at oldest hatred

Filmmaker **Wayne Kopping** created the documentary *Tragic Awakening – A New Look at the Oldest Hatred* which tackles antisemitism since 7 October. The *SA Jewish Report* speaks to him about this project.

### What inspired you to tackle this project?

After 7 October, everyone felt a deep need to do something. Rabbi Shalom Schwartz approached me with the opportunity to make a film about antisemitism, and when I learned it would be based on Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Jew by Rabbi Raphael Shore, I knew it was something I had to do. Shore, a longtime collaborator and producer of this film, has explored these ideas for years and his work formed the foundation of our message.

It was a chance to give something meaningful to the Jewish people at a time of immense pain.

#### What's the core message?

Antisemitism isn't about the antisemites, it's about us. *Tragic Awakening* is based on *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Jew*, in which Rabbi Shore explores why antisemitism exists and what it means for the Jewish people today. The film dismantles common explanations: scapegoating; jealousy; conspiracy theories, and focuses on the real issue: the Jewish people have a unique purpose, and that demands a response.

#### Why is this message urgent?

Jewish history repeats itself because we either misinterpret what we're going through or make the same mistakes again and again. This film is about breaking that cycle. It challenges misconceptions about Jewish history, who we are, and our role in the world. Understanding what's really happening is the first step to change.

### How did you make this documentary?

I wasn't just the director of this film, I was the editor. That meant sifting through hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of material. Early on, I realised that antisemitism is such a deeply personal and controversial topic that the way we framed it would be just as important as the message itself. I had more than one audience in mind.

On the one hand, this film had to speak to the greater non-Jewish world. But just as critically, it had to resonate with the Jewish world. It meant telling the story in a way that

any Jewish person,

regardless of

background,





### Why structure the film around two rabbis and a Muslim woman?

We had to tell the story in a way that wouldn't overwhelm or alienate the audience. At the same time, the film needed to resonate with Jews across all backgrounds and levels of observance while providing non-Jews with an accessible framework for understanding antisemitism.

Rawan Osman, a Syrian-Lebanese Arab, became the perfect lens through which to explore these questions. She wasn't just a guide, she was the audience's proxy. Her journey allowed viewers to engage with the subject in a way that felt personal, organic, and deeply human.

To complement this, I persuaded the rabbis to appear in the film because I felt they could provide the most authentic Jewish and historical perspective. Their years of experience and research in this area brought depth and clarity.

Why is it important for you to tell

### Why is it important for you to tell Jewish stories?

Growing up, my Jewish identity was peripheral. In my 20s, I made a decision to learn about my heritage and what it means to be a Jew, and it's a journey that has deepened over the past 30 years.

Today, the Jewish story isn't just central to who I am, it's central to what is happening in the world.

### Who is the intended audience for *Tragic Awakening*?

From the start, I had two audiences in mind. One was the greater non-Jewish world, and the other the Jewish world. For the non-Jewish audience, the goal was to provide clarity, to explain antisemitism in a way that goes beyond the usual surface-level narratives. For the Jewish audience, I needed to tell this story in a way that any Jewish person, regardless of background, country, or level of observance, could connect with. From the overwhelming feedback we've received, it's clear the film has resonated across the spectrum.

Why do you believe
antisemitism is on the

We're at a stage
of history where
everything is rising –
tension, polarisation,
intensity. This is a
time when every
human being
is being forced
to confront
fundamental
questions: what's
right? What's
wrong? What's

good? What's evil?

Historically, when societies reach moments of upheaval, the Jewish people become the focal point. What we're seeing today isn't new, it's history repeating itself, but in a world that's more connected, reactive, and volatile than ever before.

### How do you believe we should deal with it?

For decades, perhaps even more than a century, people have approached the Israel-Arab conflict as if it were a political or territorial dispute. And then they're left bewildered when there's no political or territorial

solution. But what if this isn't a political or territorial war at all? What if this is a spiritual war, which, incidentally, is exactly what the Islamic world has called it – a "jihad" (religious war)?

And if it's a spiritual war, then surely what is needed is a spiritual response.

### Do you believe antisemitism will subside once this war in Israel is over?

This war isn't about radical Islam, Hamas, the United Nations, or Neo-Nazis. Our enemies have changed names a hundred times – Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Nazis, Hamas. But the one constant? We're still here. History shows that when Jews embrace their identity, their enemies fade.

### How do you believe we should respond to the way Israel is portrayed in the media?

We all know that "Jews is news" and that there's a disproportionate, and dare I say, demented, obsession with us. But honestly, we waste way too much time and energy following the news and screaming at our phones. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what is said about us, it's all just noise. Worse, it's a distraction.

What truly matters is what we do. That we spend our time on things that are meaningful and connecting.

I work in media. I'm in the business of trying to change minds and shape perceptions. And I can confidently say that it's not the noise that moves the needle. Ultimately what really counts is what we do and how we live our lives.

What has been the response to *Tragic Awakening*? This film is touching something deep in the hearts and souls of those who watch it. It's been incredibly gratifying to see how *Tragic Awakening* speaks to Jews and non-Jews alike

#### Where can we see it now?

The only way to see *Tragic Awakening* is by attending or organising a screening, or by joining one of our online screening and discussion forums.

across all backgrounds and levels of observance.

We're encouraging people to reach out to us to set up screenings in their shuls, communities, businesses, schools, and beyond. We're also ramping up our online screenings, at which we not only show the film but take the time to engage in meaningful discussion about its deeper themes.

For more information or to set up a screening, contact us at TAscreenings@gmail.com or visit TragicAwakening.com

# Oversized risks of using Ozempic for weight loss

**LULA PENCHARZ** 

any see Ozempic, a medication specifically for Type 2 diabetes, as the new magic weight-loss drug, but experts warn it could be dangerous.

"The drug is unfortunately being prescribed freely for weight loss without any nutritional guidance. Therefore, people are losing weight but not in a healthy way," said registered dietician Gaby Sidelsky.

"The suppression of appetite can cause under-eating, which can then lead to muscle loss, bone problems, and other issues occurring from under nutrition. If used safely and with nutritional counselling by a qualified dietitian, it's an effective weight-loss aid," Sidelsky said.

Ozempic is feeding into the 21st century trend of "instant gratification", said specialist psychiatrist Felicity Marcus.

"Patients don't realise that these aren't quick-fix medications," said Dr Charlene Wolberg, who has a Master's degree in nutritional science and practices as a general practitioner and dietician. "You can abuse Ozempic. You can abuse any weight-loss medication. You can eat shockingly and still lose weight, and that's actually the unfortunate side to it," she said.

Marcus and Wolberg say that Ozempic has become somewhat of a trend in Hollywood among celebrities trying to attain the beauty standard of being skinny.

"It really does push an agenda of skinny is right," Marcus said, stressing the detrimental effects on celebrities as well as adults in the South African Jewish community. As role models who people look to for advice, celebrities who are able to access Ozempic are conforming to society's thin-is-beautiful stereotype without considering the true purpose of these medications. Celebrities are "tarnishing the weight loss industry," Marcus said. "They are minimising what these drugs are designed to do as well as the benefits," Wolberg said.

Though the ideal of being skinny is promoted in the media and Ozempic is abused as a quick fix, "we should rather be promoting body positivity and acceptance", Marcus said. "The impression that this is what you need to do to look a certain way and be accepted as beautiful is creating unrealistic, unhealthy beauty standards."

Though Ozempic is registered as a drug for lowering blood sugar levels in people with Type 2 diabetes, it's being prescribed to patients classified as chronically obese to help control their weight and prevent other comorbidities caused by being overweight. Wolberg said that in cases of obesity, defined by a BMI (body mass index) "greater than 30", Ozempic, along with a healthy eating and

exercise plan, is a "chronic medication" that is beneficial.

"These drugs offer long-term protective effects," Wolberg says. "Weight-loss drugs reduce the risk of heart attack and cardiac failure by 20%. They reduce the risk of strokes by 39%. But when patients don't understand that this is a proper scheduled medication that needs to be monitored by a professional who understands the field, whether it's for diabetes or obesity, and implements the medication along with lifestyle modification, this is where the abuse of the medication comes into play.

"These drugs are registered for chronic use. If used without supervision, when you stop using them after six months, you will regain all the weight plus a bit more. And if you have done nothing in terms of modifying your lifestyle, you land up doing more of a disservice to your body by using the medication," Wolberg said.

Wolberg said humans have a natural hormone in their body, GLP1, released from the intestines after we eat which goes to the part of brain that controls feelings of hunger and satiety. Ozempic is an "analogue" of this natural hormone, and "increases patients' feelings of satiety". Ozempic shouldn't stop one from eating or

giving the body the nutrients it needs, rather "if patients are eating a balanced meal, it helps to control the portion size of that balanced meal".

Said Sidelsky, "Most of the weight loss we have seen has been due to loss of muscle mass. It's therefore imperative that you exercise – using strength/resistance training – and eat enough calories and protein to minimise muscle loss."

According to Wolberg, "it dampens down that emotional need for eating and using food as a source of emotional comfort".

Marcus acknowledged the psychological benefits of Ozempic's weight loss on "self-esteem and confidence" and "anxiety around being in a bigger body or not being able to manage your eating". However, she contrasted this benefit with Ozempic's abuse on our psychological state.

"If you're not getting enough nutrients in your body, it can result in mood changes or low mood," Marcus said. "Your body relies on food to have enough energy to get through the day. Anxiety around being able to maintain the weight loss or discomfort with the change in appetite," have adverse effects on mental health.

Ozempic is a "two-sided coin" when it comes to weight loss. It may be a quick and easy tool to lose weight, but it's dangerous when it becomes a crutch.



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### Child actors shine in wacky Wimpy Kid musical

he young talent starring in Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Musical at Theatre on the Square in Sandton makes it clear that they are anything but wimpy. And what could be more fun than starring in the theatre adaptation of the bestselling book series by Jeff Kinney?

Thirteen-year-old Jayden Fittinghoff, who plays the titular

wimpy kid, Greg Heffley, told the SA Jewish Report that when he saw that a production was being made of his favourite book series, he knew he had to be a part of it and spent a lot of time practicing so he could get the part.

"I couldn't believe that I could audition to play the part of a character I love so much," he said. Even his teachers sent his mother information about the production because they knew that he would be such a good fit.

Fittinghoff is one of two Gregs who have been prepped to perform in the two casts so as not to overburden the child actors in the many performances from 3 April to 4 May. The production is directed by Vicky Friedman, who co-produced the show with Daphne Kuhn, the owner of

Theatre on the Square. In the show, Greg interacts with a whole host of funky characters that populate his family and middle school. "It's about a kid who thinks popularity is everything, but then figures out that it's just middle school, and friends are more

Spira, who plays Fregley, one of Greg's more colourful classmates.

important," said

"Fregley is a weird kid, and he feels completely free and likes boogers," said Spira, "I can do so many things, and none of it

is classified as overacting because Fregley is just over the top, which is such fun."

Tatum Murray-Smith, 12, who plays Greg's rival, Patty Farrel, said that though she had been in one other production before, being able to be in a cast full of kids her age was exciting. It kept her going through

Eli Kureca and Jayden Fittinghoff Sechaba Ramphele, Khensani Manganyi, Jaxon Cohen, Jayden Fittinghoff, and Sarah Richard

the long afternoon rehearsals.

"The rehearsals were very long, from 15:00 to 19:00 most days," said nine-year-old Ciana Leon, who plays nerdy girl Christine Hosey. "And we moved boxes and did lots of exercise."

Nine-year-old Livia Lurie, who plays Greg's little sister, Manny, said that they were always laughing during rehearsals and the backstage crew helped make the atmosphere more fun for the children. "There's a song called The Cheese Touch, and at some point during rehearsals our stage manager told us not to touch the cheesecake, and we all burst out laughing," she said.

Fittinghoff said learning the material for the

show was a cool experience. "I reread my favourite books in the series to help me prepare, which made it extra fun," he said. However, some of the child actors, like Rebecca Damelin, 11, who plays Claire, a goth girl who goes to school with Greg, said Diary of a Wimpy Kid hadn't



before becoming part of the show. Now, however, that has all changed, and she's keen to explore the whole universe of Diary of a Wimpy Kid books

Similarly, Lurie hadn't read the books before starting the production. Now that she knows and likes the characters, she has

begun reading the series.

Moriah Tucker, 11, who plays Pauline, one of Patty's minions, said she had been nervous when she first auditioned for the show. However, when she went on stage for the debut performance, her nerves disappeared because of all the preparation. "When we were rehearsing, we always had the other cast watching, so it wasn't too scary when we performed properly for the first time because we had always performed for an audience."

Murray-Smith said that when the curtain came up for the first time, "I was so nervous, but when I got on

stage, everything just came to me because I love being on stage."

Fittinghoff said he had also been nervous before his first performance, but "when I saw the audience, I asked myself if I was living in a dream".

As one of the older cast members, Jaxon Cohen, 16, has a lot more schoolwork to catch up on compared to the rest of the cast. "Grade 11 is a hectic year," he said. "I'm missing a lot of school and work, but it's all worth it for the show. In the downtime at rehearsals and at shows, I've been doing a lot of catching up on work and my school has been supportive of me being in this musical."

the trickiest element of being part of the production was that they were missing school or school work to pursue their dream of being on stage.

"I've missed quite a bit of school between rehearsals and the show," said Fittinghoff. "My teachers are there to help me catch up, so it's not

There are also some members of the cast who keep Shabbat, so when there were rehearsals on a Saturday, they would walk to the rehearsal space, and wouldn't write any notes. Said Lurie, "I quite liked walking to rehearsals, it was fun."

Murray-Smith said that the hardest part about doing the production was constantly trying to keep things fun and exciting. "We have to try and keep every performance genuine and put as much energy into it as we did before," Murray-Smith said.

Her favourite scene is the one where Greg goes to Fregley's house for the first time. "That scene is just so funny, and everyone laughs," she

"My favourite part of this show is the music," said Fittinghoff. "All the songs are so catchy, and they get you in such a good mood. You'll be singing them the whole of the next day."

### The Passover seder is a model for healing democracies in peril

RABBI MEESH HAMMER-KOSSOY - JTA

evolutionaries throughout the ages have drawn strength from the story of Passover. As Michael Walzer brilliantly documents in his book, *Exodus and Revolution*, the Israelites leaving Egypt inspired liberation movements and thinkers throughout history, from the French Revolution to the Puritans, even

The African-American spiritual, Go Down Moses and the inscription on the Liberty Bell: "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," quoting Leviticus, are just two well-known invocations of the Exodus as a call to freedom.

Moses and the Israelites steadfastly stood up to their oppressors. Prevailing against the odds, they trudged through the desert for 40 years in order to get to the Promised Land. Determined humans that join together with vision and strategy can bend the arc of history towards justice and make redemption possible.

But with freedom comes tremendous responsibility. For this reason, the Torah could imagine that a slave, afraid of what freedom might entail, would choose to say, "I love my master. I do not wish to go free." (Exodus 21:5). The Torah understood that the weight, insecurity, and uncertainty of self-determination could sometimes feel unbearable.

Perhaps Erich Fromm said it best in his 1941 book. Escape from Freedom: "Is there not also, perhaps, besides an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? If there is not, how can we account for the attraction which submission to a leader has for so

Fromm's warnings seem all too relevant today with the election of governments worldwide that seem ready and willing to trample on cherished civil protections. The celebration of freedom and human rights – which once seemed to be the norm in democratic regimes across the world - turns out to have been premature.

Long ago, the Torah warned against the dangers of rulers with excessive power. A ruler with too much money and too large an army will become haughty and oppressive. A king must carry the sacred law with him at all times to remind him that he is not above it (Deuteronomy 17). The rabbis further expanded on the importance of the separation of powers and checks and balances, legislating "three crowns" dividing power among rabbis, priests, and a king. The demand that the Sanhedrin, the pre-exilic supreme court, include 70 members reflected a commitment to the idea that Torah itself has multiple interpretations and that justice is served by pluralism of opinions.

What are we to do as narrowly elected governments

break longstanding democratic norms, disregard ethics and accountability, and push agendas that impinge on the delicate balance of freedom long held to be unshakeable? Protesting is essential, as I have personally witnessed. Israelis have been turning out weekly and even daily in the tens of thousands for years on end, demonstrating tremendous resilience in their fight for government accountability, independent courts, and minority protections.



But even as I hope that these protests can be a source of inspiration for others facing their own national crises, we must recognise the potentially negative impacts of this fraught discourse. The hatred and delegitimisation of government may feel justified, but we must guard against a cycle of demonisation and polarisation that contracts common ground even further. The heated, often personal, rhetoric and imagery that characterises today's civil discourse feeds a vicious cycle that undermines our social fabric and stymies compromise and understanding.

The Passover seder provides another model, that of embracing and amplifying our shared national narrative. We have journeyed all this way from Egypt together. Moses' brother, Aaron, made peace by shuttling between two conflicting parties, exposing common values and shared narratives and reducing the perceived gaps between sides. The seder is an opportunity to come together as one family across social and political divides without an intermediary, to celebrate the shared history, purpose, and good intentions of all. Sharing in this way can be a true act of freedom, and one that continues to perpetuate our collective freedom.

• The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and don't necessarily reflect the views of JTA or its parent company, 70 Faces Media.

10 – 24 April 2025 SA JEWISH REPORT **33** 

# Levi speeds to top with SA ice hockey

SAUL KAMIONSKY

t will be a dream come true for Yuval Levi, 20, when he takes to the ice as part of the South African senior men's team at the 2025 International Ice Hockey Federation Ice Hockey World Championship later this month.

"It's an absolute privilege to play for the men's team, something I've dreamed about since I started playing at the age of seven, so it was a huge achievement to be selected for the team," says the Johannesburg-based Levi, who recently captained the South African Under-20 team.

The championship, for Division III nations, is taking place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 21 to 27 April. South Africa will come up against the host nation, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Turkmenistan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This will be Levi's first time competing in an international tournament for the men's team, having previously done so with the Under-20 and Under-18 teams.

He earned his spot for the senior team after shining with 24 points, each point being for a goal or an assist, in 19 games for the Under-18 and Under-20 teams. He was selected out of a group of about 40 players who were invited to a training camp.

The training camp was similar to the ones they usually have every few weeks, Levi says. "The Cape Town players fly up to Johannesburg, and we have a camp in Forest Hill Ice Rink in Centurion from Friday morning to Sunday, consisting of sessions on the ice, a video session, a fitness test, and teambuilding activity like padel." Levi sits out during Shabbos.

Going into the championship, "We have always gold in mind," Levi says. "This year, we actually have quite a young team with a few new players, including myself. We're hoping to achieve as high a placing as we possibly can with the end goal being gold."

Levi captained the SA Under-20 team in Thailand a few months ago in what was "a really fun, well-organised tournament. In the past few years, I was assistant captain, and then I was also captain of the Under-18 national team."

He has been playing for the Kempton Park Wildcats in the Super League for a few years. "In the first division, I play for the Kempton Park Sabres. The rest is with the Rhinos," as the Under-18, Under-20, and men's national teams are called.

Levi has always been sporty, and found his niche when he and his family went to a skating academy. He enrolled in a skating course, which could have led him to become a figure skater, but that didn't interest him. "My coach also happened to be a hockey player. He told me that I should come and give ice hockey a try that Sunday. I did and I loved the session, so I just carried on playing from then on."

Levi loves the speed, physicality, and teamwork of ice hockey. "You need always to be aware of what's happening because if you turn your head and you get the puck, any second you can be on the floor. Also, because the game is so fast, you need to see a few moves ahead in order to make a play."

Levi is doing a BCom at Varsity College, and working at King David Linksfield, mainly for the DIJE (Division of Informal Jewish Education). "I also give a shiur on Gemara at Yeshiva College, and am learning in Rabbi Moffson's kollel," he said.

Levi always makes a plan to balance his Judaism with ice hockey. "For the tournament this year, the team is flying during Pesach, so unfortunately I can't fly with them," he says. "I had to get an early



flight. I'm going to have to spend the last two days of Pesach alone because my father can't come with me.

"Finding a balance is sometimes difficult, but I know my morals, I have my values, and I know that Hashem comes first. When selecting me for the team, the coaches are aware that I don't play on Shabbos and I'm going to be davening every morning and afternoon. I can't eat the same food as the team, so I bring my own kosher food."

Ice hockey has been around in South Africa since as early as the mid-1900s. South Africa is ranked 47th out of 58 teams in the latest men's ice hockey world rankings.



### From Guesswork to Insight: Leveraging Feuerstein's LPAD to Understand and Address Learning Difficulties

What if you could know the cause and extent of a child's learning struggles and find out how to intervene effectively? It is never too late to help a child, but it is close to impossible to do so without the right information. Schools and parents need to know and not guess the answer to the question, "Why does this child struggle?" Children struggle to read and learn for a reason. Until you get a better understanding of what the reason is, you will play 'hit and miss' with the solutions and interventions, costing the school and parents time, money and emotional energy. Will it be a new tutor? A different school placement? Accommodations or concessions? The introduction of an assistive device? An alternative way of doing school? Therapy? A reading programme? Further medical investigation? Until educators and parents know WHY, they can't know WHAT to do and how best to find the right help.

### Feuerstein's LPAD - Learning Propensity Assessment Device - can identify positive learning potential.

Feuerstein's LPAD (Learning Propensity Assessment Device) is a cognitive assessment used in a dynamic fashion to determine how an individual thinks and learns. This assessment differs from static assessments, such as IQ tests, in that the assessment seeks to understand an individual's learning process, rather than measure their current knowledge against that of their peers. The LPAD uses a test – mediate – retest model, which incorporates learning throughout the process in order to understand the learner's cognitive functions. Learning is the most important part of the procedure and growth is continually measured against previous performance.

During the administration of fourteen varied tasks in the LPAD, an assessor presents the learner with a variety of tasks to solve. The assessor observes the learner's progress, taking special note of difficulties and errors.

Thereafter, the assessor mediates to the learner, asking questions and teaching different ways to solve the problem. Mediation could be five minutes or as long as an hour, depending on the learner's degree of difficulty with the material. The learner is then re-tested as the assessor observes which of the introduced strategies the learner uses, and how much learning has been retained across new and more challenging tasks.

#### Who is the LPAD for?

Educators, parents or clinicians wishing to understand the cognitive makeup of their children, learners and clients.

Bellavista S.E.E.K. uses the latest test editions, cognitive, speech-language, occupational and scholastic assessments to create a rich profile of a learner and to guide practitioners, educational or otherwise, towards relevant and effective interventions. The LPAD assessment is just one of a comprehensive toolkit.

To be guided through the process of application for assessment, give us a call: 011 788 5454, or e-mail: seek@bellavista.org.za.

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### Sephardi cliffhangers built my career, says Zimler

Bestselling international novelist **Richard Zimler**, whose most popular work is a series of novels about a Portuguese-Jewish family, will be attending the Jewish Literary Festival on 28 April. The SA Jewish Report speaks to him.

### How would you describe your

Mostly literary and historical fiction. I have a series of independent novels about different generations of a Portuguese-Jewish family, the Zarcos. The books aren't in any order, but I love having nearly invisible links between them. The narratives take place in different places and time periods. The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon takes place in Portugal in the early 16th century during an antisemitic riot. My latest novel, The Incandescent Threads, explores the lives of two descendants of the narrator of The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon.

#### What inspired you to write books about the Sephardi Jews of Portugal?

When I first moved to Portugal in 1990, I discovered the Lisbon Massacre of 1506, in which 2 000 forcibly converted Jews were murdered and burnt in the city's main square. When I asked my Portuguese friends what they knew about it, all of them replied, "What massacre? There was never any massacre!" It had been eliminated from official history books and school manuals! I felt obliged to force people to recognise the devastation it caused and give a voice to people who were forcibly silenced.

#### How close are your books to the facts of Jewish life in those days?

Very close. I research my books thoroughly to get the details right. For instance, when I was preparing to write Guardian of the Dawn, which is

set in Goa (in India) in the early 17th century, I researched daily life in that Portuguese colony over many months.

#### When you wrote your first of this series of books on Sephardi Jews, you battled to find a publisher. What happened?

When I finished The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon, my agent in New York started submitting it to publishers in America. At the end of two years, they had all turned it down - 24 publishers in all. They all said virtually the same thing, it's a wonderful novel, exciting and well-written, but it will never sell. I became depressed, of course. The book took me a year to research and two years to write. A crazy idea saved me: why not show it to a Portuguese publisher? The first publisher to whom I sent it said it was the best novel she'd read in years. In many ways, I owe my career to that Portuguese publisher.

#### The book became a number-one bestseller in Portugal. Why?

Portuguese Jewish history and

culture were largely taboo in Portugal from 1497, when all the Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity, until the democratic revolution of 1974. That's almost five centuries of silence, misinformation, and persecution. So when my book was published in 1996, for the first time in several centuries, people felt free to learn about a hidden aspect of their country's history. About 18 years ago, a monument to the forcibly converted Jews who were murdered in April of

1506 was commissioned and erected in the city's main square. People at the Lisbon City Hall have told me that without The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon, that monument would never have

### What do you believe their appeal

A great many readers agree with me that it's important to read about people who have had their voices stolen and who have been eliminated from official histories. I also try to tell a captivating, realistic, and impassioned story, one that will engage readers on different levels and stir deep emotions. I often get emails from people telling me how they cried at certain points in my books. And at other points, they grew enraged. Deep emotions mean that a novel is connecting strongly with a person and maybe even changing his or her life.

#### Can you describe the Portuguese Jewish community of today.

There are three communities: in Lisbon, Porto, and a small town in the northeast mountains called Belmonte. They've grown quite a lot in recent years because of a government programme that has allowed people who can prove Portuguese-Jewish ancestry to obtain Portuguese nationality.

#### How do they compare to the communities in your novels?

In my novels such as Hunting Midnight and Guardian of the Dawn, the Jews have already been forced to **Richard ZImler** 

convert to Christianity. They could be arrested and imprisoned for something as simple as whispering a Hebrew prayer in public or washing their bedsheets on Friday before the Sabbath.

#### How did you put these books together?

While I'm doing my research, ideas about the book's characters and story come up. When I start writing, I usually know what's going to happen in the first chapter, but after that, I have no idea. That leaves room for surprises, improvisation, and moments of revelation. In my experience, authors who plan their whole novel from the beginning tend to write narratives that are contrived and obvious, and I want to avoid that. I write for two or three years or more until I'm happy with the book. Then I go back to the beginning and do a careful re-write.

#### Why do you believe writing this series is so important?

Most readers realise that it's a terrible injustice for minorities and others to be excluded from official histories. For instance, in the country where I grew up, the United States, Native Americans were generally excluded from our studies in American history.

#### Why are you keen to participate in the Jewish Literary Festival?

It's such a blessing to be able to have my books read by people in different countries and for them to tell me about their reactions to my books. On a personal note, my husband, who was from Mozambique, did all his university studies, including his PhD, at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. He has many fond memories, and has told me hundreds of stories about his life there.

### Bilchik goes by the book on personal presentation

South African-born television presenter and author, Nadia Bilchik, is also heading to Cape Town for the Jewish Literary Festival at the end of April. The SA Jewish Report speaks to her before she heads out.

Tell us about your life in South Africa before you emigrated. We moved to Atlanta in 1997, but I will always be grateful to have witnessed South Africa's first democratic election. At the time, I was a presenter for M-Net and had founded On Cue, a presentation and media skills training school. I had two young children, and what I often describe as a magical, "organic" network friends and colleagues I had known all my life. As the Joni Mitchell song goes, "You don't know what you've got till it's

#### deep fondness and nostalgia. Why did you emigrate?

gone." I look back on those years with

My husband, Steve, had applied for green cards and we ended up winning them through the lottery. There was a deadline to relocate if we wanted to keep them. We chose Atlanta because Steve had a job offer there and, importantly for me, CNN was headquartered in the city. I was fortunate to arrive in August, and began anchoring for the CNN Airport Network by December.

### What was your childhood dream for your

More than anything, I wanted to be an actress. I took every speech and drama class I could find. I was fortunate to learn from incredible teachers such as Doreen Feitelberg, Della Fuchs, and Taubie Kushlick. King David High School was also incredibly supportive, allowing me to perform in numerous school plays. One of my favourite memories is playing Viola in *Twelfth* 

Night opposite my brother, Brian, as Sebastian.

#### **What drew** you to television, training, and writing?

After being nterviewed by Penny Smythe about a film I had acted in, I realised I was more interested in asking the questions

than answering them. Soon afterwards, I heard that M-Net was auditioning for presenters. I auditioned on a Monday, and by Saturday night, I was on air.

**Nadia Bilchik** 

As far as speaking and training goes, I was hosting a business show for M-Net when I noticed that though the participants were great in person, they became nervous once they were on air. I offered to coach them before the next taping, and was excited by the improvement. That was the inspiration to start doing media and presentation skills training, which has evolved into books, workshops, and keynote speeches on a variety of topics.

#### The books you've written aren't leisure reads. They're focused on success. Why this genre?

I wanted to create enduring resources for my workshop and keynote participants. No matter how

long the session, there's always more to explore. The goal of the books is to continue the learning beyond

### How do you go about researching and writing

My first book, Own Your Network: Expert Networking *In-Person and Online*, began as transcriptions of my live seminars. That content became the foundation for the book. We recently published the 2025 edition with the subtitle Building Relationships in a Rapidly Changing World. For this updated version, I collaborated with my editor and aunt, Miriam Lacob Stix. We spent hours in conversation – often recorded – discussing how hybrid work and artificial intelligence are reshaping the way we connect. I speak, Miriam writes, and then we go through it together. For Own Your Space, I had the pleasure of partnering with Johannesburg-based coach and speaker, Lori Milner. We did numerous interviews with remarkable individuals whose life lessons are inspirational. My third book, Small Changes, Big *Impact* is about maximising your presence and leveraging the power of your personal brand. Once again, we taped and transcribed my workshops and keynotes for it.

#### What's the one thing you still want to achieve in your career?

I would love to launch a podcast centred on tribulations versus triumphs. I believe that we learn more from our failures and missteps than we do from success. The podcast would explore the stories behind the setbacks, and how people overcame them. I would also like to expand the current podcast I do with my brother, Anton, who is a cancer surgeon. The title is "Live Long! Live Strong! Live Healthy!" We started it when Princess Catherine was diagnosed with cancer.

We're still planning an episode with my sister, Tanya, who is a neurologist and my brother, Brian, who is a cardiologist. The four of us did several livestreams during the COVID-19 pandemic, and always ended with a warm hello to our mom, Annetta.

#### What does being Jewish mean to you, and what impact does it have on your life?

Judaism is a central part of my life and that of my children, and now my grandchild. We celebrate Shabbat every Friday night, and observe all the Jewish holidays. For my two-year-old grandson, Leo, we want to instil a strong sense of identity and belonging. We're incredibly fortunate to be part of a vibrant, supportive Jewish community.

#### You've lived in the United States far longer than in South Africa. What's your relationship with South Africa today?

I still proudly identify as South African. Both my mother and mother-in-law still live in South Africa, as do many of my friends and extended family. I have deep love, gratitude, and reverence for the country and its people.

What's it like coming back to South Africa? It always feels like home!

#### Why do you believe the festival is important?

It's an inspiring space where people can come together, connect through ideas, and engage in meaningful, enriching conversations. It celebrates the power of storytelling and the value of community.

 Nadia Bilchik will be interviewing acclaimed author David Baddiel at the Jewish Literary Festival in Cape Town. Go to https://jewishliteraryfestival.org.za to book and see the schedule.

10 – 24 April 2025 SA JEWISH REPORT **35** 

# Lions Shul and leopards: sculpting Johannesburg's history

Plastic surgeon, philanthropist, and environmentalist Professor Laurence Chait has had a parallel career as a sculptor for 45 years, with no less than 10 solo exhibitions and five public works displayed in Johannesburg and surrounds. A new book, *High Seas*, written by his daughter, **Carla Chait**, examines his artwork. *The SA Jewish Report* spoke to Carla.

#### Who is the book aimed at?

It started as a project for the two of us. But as we went through the content, it became apparent that the scope of his sculpting career was so broad as to be publicly – even historically – relevant. The obvious audience for *High Seas* is those who appreciate art and sculpture, but because of the many stories behind the artworks, the book would appeal to anyone interested in Johannesburg's cultural history.

### You say your dad started "messing around" with sculpting Plaster of Paris while doing his housemanship. Why sculpture?

My father recalls that his father, a general practitioner, was an anguished painter. Observing this, his fascination with art began at an early age. His standard response to the question, "Why sculpture?" is that he was a bad painter. He needed lessons to paint, whereas he taught himself to sculpt. Sculpture gave him more creative and imaginative freedom.

# He has sculpted portraits of famous people, including Nelson Mandela and paleoanthropologist Phillip Tobias, with whom he had a strong association over many years. Tell us about Tobias.

My father always wanted to do a bust of Tobias, with whom he had formed a kinship since Tobias lectured him in anatomy at medical school at The University of the Witwatersrand. In 2006, he was commissioned by the department to do a portrait of Tobias to be unveiled at the African Genesis mid-conference excursion. My mother took a photo of Tobias sitting in profile with the wax model of the bust my father made looking back at him. Tobias pointed out all the anatomical mistakes my father had made in sculpting his likeness, but agreed to give the artist artistic licence. The following year, the bust was erected with a plaque at the entrance to the Sterkfontein Caves, where Tobias had famously led the paleontological digs.



dad also sculpted animals, including a zebra, which landed up on the desk of former Investec Chief

### Executive Stephen Koseff. How did that come about?

He had made a set of realistic wildebeest with a lone zebra joining the herd, called *Migration*, but a buyer asked for the zebra to be removed, and the sculpture to have the wildebeest alone. Because Investec's logo is a zebra, my father thought it would be a good idea to take this lone zebra to Koseff, who was Investec's chief executive at the time. Apparently, upon seeing the zebra sculpture, Koseff exclaimed, "What's this horse doing on my desk?!"

### He did a sculpture of Max the gorilla, who survived being shot two times by a burglar who entered his cage at Johannesburg Zoo.

Jenny Gray, the former chief executive of the Johannesburg Zoo, commissioned my father to make a life-size sculpture of Max for the zoo, which he made from plaster in his studio. Max's minder, Exon, came to have a look, and he told my father to give Max a six-pack and bulging veins on his chest because Max was a "sterker". The guys from the foundry came to take a mould and the bronze of Max was cast. As they were driving the sculpture of Max in the back of a bakkie from the foundry to the

Tell us about it.

zoo, people in the street pointed and shouted, "Max! Max!" The sculpture that sits at the Johannesburg Zoo

has become a favourite photo opportunity for family and kids

### Tell us about his bronze sculpture of Jock of the Bushveld.

He was commissioned to do the sculpture by the Parktown Heritage Trust to be placed on the lawn outside the then Johannesburg General Hospital, formerly the grounds of Hohenheim, where Sir Percy Fitzpatrick lived. The sculpture was unveiled by Jonathan Rands, who played Fitzpatrick in the movie adaptation of Jock of the Bushveld.

Later, one of Jock's legs was cut off and stolen for the bronze, and the sculpture was moved into the entrance of the hospital to prevent further theft. Then much later, the sculpture was sent back to the foundry to have the leg repaired and it was ultimately moved to the barnyard area of the Johannesburg Zoo. Here, the sculpture of Jock was unveiled by Sally-Ann Fitzpatrick Niven, Percy Fitzpatrick's great-granddaughter.

### Chait also sculpted a black leopard named Spirit. Tell us this story.

The leopard was taken in by Jukani Wildlife Sanctuary in Plettenberg Bay in 2007 from a zoo in Europe, where

he had been abused. He was extremely aggressive, and animal communicator Anna Breytenbach was called in to help. After connecting with "Diablo", the name he was given at the zoo, she said the leopard didn't like his name, which suggested a darkness within, and wanted it changed. The sanctuary changed the leopard's name to "Spirit", and reassured

him, through Anna, that nothing was expected of him there, he was free to be himself, after which his behaviour

improved dramatically.

At the end of 2022, Jukani asked my father to do a memorial sculpture of the leopard as they weren't sure how much longer he was going to live. The sculpture was erected outside Spirit's enclosure in 2023, and shortly afterwards, he passed away.

# He was commissioned by Max Price, then dean of Wits Medical School, to do a sculpture to represent reconciliation and apology for apartheid. What happened with this?

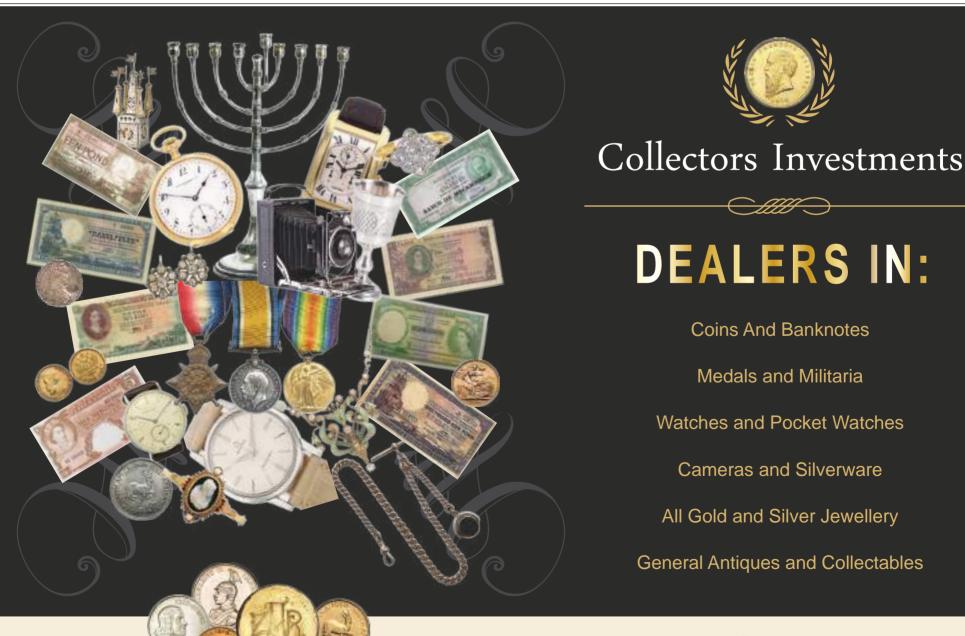
Price approached him at the end of 1999 to do a sculpture to commemorate the school's internal reconciliation. The first maquette he made "didn't have enough angst", they said; the second maquette had "too much angst"; but the third one was "just right".

He made the sculpture a couple of metres tall and the foundry took a fibreglass mould, but the bronze wasn't ready for the unveiling on the big day of reconciliation. The foundry delivered a fibreglass mock-up painted in bronze to the medical school. The sculpture weathered the ceremony, but the next day, it fell over in the wind, and Price phoned my father in distress. The fibreglass mock-up was replaced with the actual bronze sculpture a week later

#### What led to his sculpture of the Lions Shul?

He was asked to make a bronze model of the Lions Shul in Doornfontein for its 100th anniversary in 2006 to auction off in an edition of 40 to raise funds for the maintenance of the shul. The security guards regarded him suspiciously when he went to take photos of the shul from all angles. He modelled the shul in plasticine to resemble the wonky house in *Fiddler on the Roof*, and every now and again, we run into somebody who has one.

 To get a copy of the book, email Carla Chait at carla.e.chait@gmail.com



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10 - 24 April 2025 **36** SA JEWISH REPORT

Orange is the new circle /

here are so many circles, some so large that they take decades to close. In 2005, the colour orange emerged as a potent emblem of resistance against Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Protesters donned orange ribbons and garments to symbolise their opposition to the withdrawal, drawing inspiration from the vibrant orange groves of Gush Katif, which represented the flourishing communities they were compelled to leave behind. This hue encapsulated collective defiance and a deep connection to the land

In a poignant shift of symbolism, orange has recently come to represent profound grief following the tragic fate of the Bibas family. Shiri Bibas and her two young sons, Ariel and Kfir – affectionately known for their distinctive red hair - were abducted and later killed by Hamas terrorists. In their memory, landmarks worldwide were illuminated in orange, and mourners displayed orange ribbons, transforming the colour into an international symbol of mourning and solidarity.

Thus, within two decades, orange has traversed from a symbol of political resistance to one of collective mourning, reflecting the evolving narratives and emotional landscapes of Israeli society.

Then, there are the circles that span less than 18 months.

In September 2023, during Yom Kippur, tensions flared in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Square when secular activists dismantled a makeshift *mechitza* – a divider separating men and women - set up by the Orthodox group Rosh Yehudi for public prayer. This act was in defiance of a municipal ban on gender segregation in public spaces, leading to confrontations that underscored deep societal divisions over religious practice in secular areas.

Fifteen months later, a shift occurred. A freed hostage called upon the residents of Tel Aviv to join her at Hostage Square for the reading of the Megillah on Purim. Thousands



responded without hesitation, gathering in unity to partake in the religious ceremony.

"Yom Hakippurim", easily translated as a day like Purim. A closing of a circle.

Some circles take generations to close. Growing up, first night seder was always at my grandparents. Survivors. It was here where I first grappled with the complexity of free choice as it related to G-d's hardening of Pharaoh's heart. And here where each year, the adults debated who was worse in the battle of evil - Hitler or Pharaoh. Until inevitably, the conversation was ended by my grandfather, who could tolerate it no more. It was at the seder table where I began to see that there were subjects too painful for some.

Fifty years later, both my grandparents and parents no longer have a seat at a seder table, and I will probably be the one to end the conversation about the evil of Hamas. Because we have spent 18 months in pain. And because sometimes it feels like it's too much.

And, at the same seder, I will gaze upon my children and grandchildren, and be reminded of the enduring legacy that binds our family across generations. My son, bearing the name of my opa, now has a daughter who carries my father's name. In their laughter and achievements, I will see reflections of our ancestors' spirits, their dreams and struggles resonating in the present. I will note the continuity that is a testament to the unbroken chain of our heritage.

Though each generation may face adversaries who rise for our downfall, they won't prevail. For our legacy, like the eternal cycles of life, will persist. We endure, we thrive, and we celebrate. Chag sameach!

-----A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

### Tears, bondage, and green shoots

■his weekend, Pesach begins, a festival steeped in symbolism, its messages woven into every ritual. For me, Pesach distils a singular truth: freedom is precious, its absence a profound evil. Slavery doesn't just bind the body; it erases the essence of our humanity, the fundamental equality that defines us.

Yet here we are, marking a second Pesach with hostages still held in Gaza, their freedom stolen. Our hearts ache for them as they face another chag in captivity, stripped of dignity and humanity by Hamas, which wields human lives as bargaining chips.

This isn't abstract theology, it's the story of our emancipation crashing into today's reality, unfolding on a map that edges modern Egypt. But Pesach is also a festival of defiant hope. It's no coincidence that it aligns with Israel's spring, and even on our seder tables, green shoots sit beside the symbolic representations of our tears and bondage. It's the audacity and strength of hope made tangible. We cannot surrender that hope. Green shoots must break through soon, and we must continue to pray for a lasting end to the bloodshed that has come to characterise the past 18 months.

We end the seder with the ultimate affirmation of our nationhood and our hope: "Bshana habana beyurashalayim habnuya." This is a prayer that I echo fiercely, as we continue to demand an immediate release of our hostages so they might stand with us next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Just as we are reminded that it is our responsibility to teach each generation

ABOVE BOARD Karen Milner

about the emancipation from Egypt as if we too were saved, so do we bear the same duty in regard to the Holocaust. This isn't optional, especially now, as the nature of Holocaust memory shifts. Too soon, we'll commemorate without survivors' voices among us. For this reason, it is incumbent on us to ensure that we pass on the history and memory in a manner that's no less visceral and impactful than the way it was passed on to us.

This year, the Board has taken the decision to hold the Yom Hashoah commemoration in Johannesburg in the late afternoon to allow as many people to attend as possible. We've also partnered with Chad Nathan, a social media force, to share content from January's 80th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation, which I witnessed firsthand. In doing this, the Board hopes to create a vehicle to educate and perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. However, it is all of our responsibility to take on this duty, just as we have with Pesach for millennia. I thus encourage everyone to stand together and be counted at the Yom Hashoah ceremony wherever you are in the country.

Until then, I wish you all a happy and blessed chag. Bshana habana beyurashalayim. Bring them home!

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

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

### ORT Jet exposes Sourcefin's secret to success

ORT Jet hosted a special "In The Boardroom" session at Sasfin Holdings on 25 March with the Sourcefin team, whose members shared their journey of building Sourcefin into a leading player in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) funding in South Africa.

Facilitated by David Zidel, the discussion included Avi Mishan, the director at SMD Technologies and founder of MSV Technology; Joshua Kadish, chief executive of Sourcefin; and Jordan Hertz, chief commercial officer at Sourcefin. It was the first time the session has featured three guests, and all three are cum laude graduates.

The team highlighted the importance of execution

adaptability, and a customer-centric approach in their business success. Mishan shared how the company pivoted during the COVID-19 pandemic, transitioning from importing electronics to supplying personal protective equipment, which led to identifying a significant gap in SME funding. The

team emphasised their focus on small-scale beginnings, learning from failures, and prioritising long-term growth over quick gains.

Mishan, Kadish, and Hertz said that Sourcefin wasn't a traditional bank, but a partner that actively engages in deals, offering more than just

> funding. "We understand both sides of the business, and that's key to our success," he said. They discussed their innovative lending model, which focuses on individuals rather than just business financials, and their forward-facing approach, looking beyond traditional banking criteria.

> The leaders also shared insights into the importance of building a strong team and ongoing training. Sourcefin's knowledge hub, with tailored videos and courses, ensures that all new hires are equipped with essential skills within their first three months. Additionally, the company is embracing

artificial intelligence, using it to track data and drive future growth.

The Sourcefin team also offered advice to future entrepreneurs, saying, "Start small, dream big, and focus on execution. Surround yourself with talented people, and keep learning."

#### Yeshiva teachers take strides for a cause

wenty-seven primary school teachers laced up their running shoes for the Jozi Jerusalem Jog on 4 April, a locally inspired initiative born from their dream of participating in the Jerusalem Marathon. While the original vision faced logistical challenges, the team partnered with The DL Link to bring the spirit of the marathon to their community



Undeterred by the rain, the teachers ran or walked 5km, raising significant funds for a meaningful cause while promoting fitness and camaraderie. Yeshiva College celebrated its efforts with an Israeli-themed shuk, a medal ceremony, and a joyful gathering to honour their achievement.

### **Turning 100 with positivity** and gratitude

ne same year as the likes of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and singer Sammy Davis Junior, Capetonian Keile Gross (née Balkin) reached the magical three-figure milestone on 31 March, surrounded by family and friends. Though Gross was born the day before April Fool's in Johannesburg in 1925, her longevity is no joke. The Sea Point resident and great-grandmother attributes her long life to having a positive attitude, always counting life's blessings, and being perpetually thankful. Playing cards also keeps her mind sharp.

A stalwart of the Cape Town Jewish community, Gross gave 70 years

of communal service to organisations such as the Women's International Zionist Organisation and the Marais Road Shul. Her 100th birthday got the royal stamp of approval with a letter from King Charles wishing her warm regards, along with his wife Queen Camilla.



Keile Gross with her great-grandchildren on her 100th birthday

#### Letters

#### CONSTITUTIONAL COURT SHOWS SIGNS OF CAPTURE

The preamble to South Africa's Constitution acknowledges the injustices of the past, honours those who suffered for freedom, and emphasises unity in diversity, with the aim of establishing a democratic society based on justice and human rights, yet our Constitutional Court judges have decided to defy the very Constitution they (supposedly) uphold, and rule that a (black) taxpayer-funded politician, at a political party rally, has the right to call for the killing of other (white)

In legal terms, South African law recognises

incitement or instigation as a crime, meaning that someone who unlawfully communicates with another person with the intention of influencing them to commit a crime is liable for conviction. Further, the Intimidation Act 72 of 1982 prohibits certain forms of intimidation, and inciting someone to commit a crime falls under this category. A person found guilty of inciting someone to commit a crime - such as murder, a capital crime - can be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not exceeding 25 years.

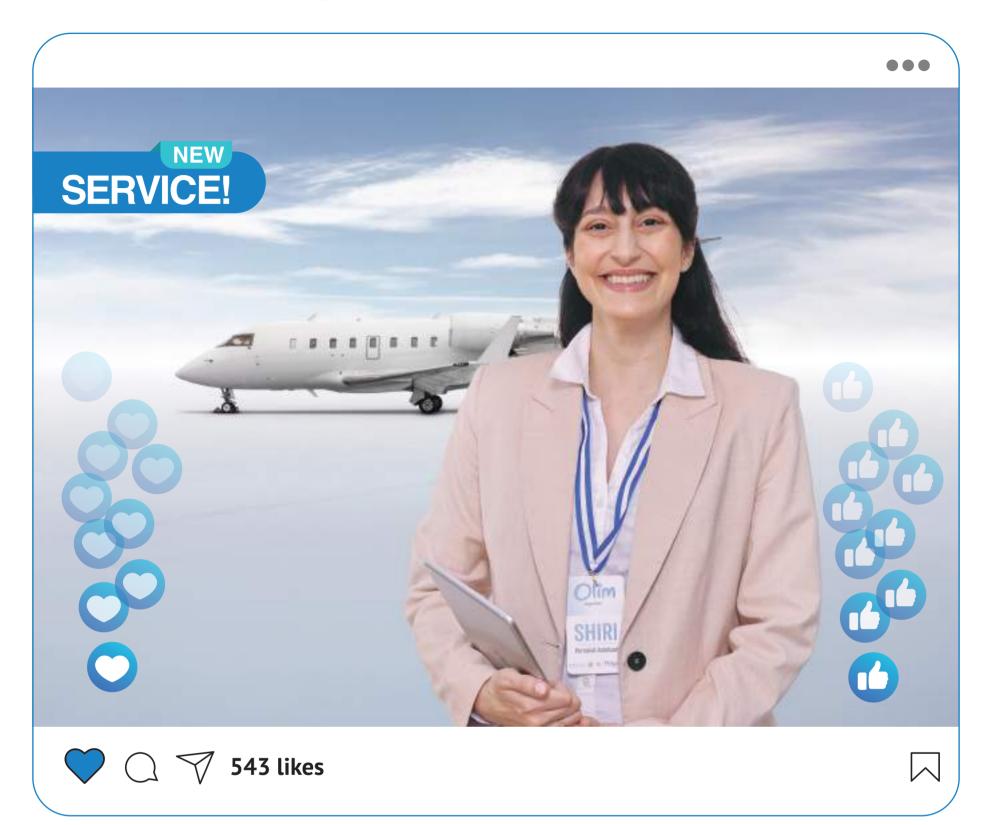
Which begs the question, why has our

Constitutional Court overruled an application to stop a politician from calling for the murder of others - and such calls have included the murder of Jews?

Has our Constitutional Court been "captured" by the African National Congress and doing its bidding? Being employees of government, they may not want to charge, arrest, and prosecute their employers. Or is it that being white and Jewish isn't important enough to be considered of any constitutional relevance?

Mark Wade, Johannesburg

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