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Jewish Report

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SA Jews fear antisemitism in UK NHS

CLAUDIA GROSS

Many South African Jewish emigrants to the United Kingdom have experienced or are fearful of experiencing antisemitism in the National Health Service (NHS), and they appear to have good reason to feel that way.

Kate*, a South African-born radiographer working in a diagnostic breast-cancer unit outside London, said the period after 7 October 2023 left her "scared and unsafe" at work. "Our department WhatsApp groups filled with angry political posts," she said. "I was told management would deal with it, but I still took off my Hatzolah badge and the Hebrew letters from my car." She later resigned. "I'm so sad to leave like this," she said. Her daughter, who will give birth in January, has arranged for a Jewish doula and midwife.

Kate's story is one of many of South African Jews now living in the UK who describe a growing unease in British healthcare settings. Some work inside the system; others are patients. All report that being identifiably Jewish has become uncomfortable or, at times, frightening.

Gina*, the daughter of a South African expatriate in London and now in her third trimester, said she hides her identity when attending antenatal appointments. "I always take off my chai necklace before scans, and never mention my background," she said. "When I travelled to Israel at 20 weeks, I told staff I was going somewhere in Europe." She hired a Jewish doula "for an extra layer of support and security during birth".

Jewish birth workers confirm that anxiety among Jewish mothers has surged since the Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent war. One London-based Jewish doula, who asked to remain anonymous for safety, said many clients specifically seek Jewish support because they fear bias in NHS hospitals. She described a video consultation that ended abruptly when she mentioned being Jewish. "Their faces just dropped," she said. "Within minutes, the call was over."

She said she has seen midwives wearing Palestinian-flag pins or "watermelon" emblems, symbols associated with solidarity for Gaza, despite NHS guidance forbidding

political displays on uniforms. "Jewish women are terrified they'll be treated badly while in labour," she said. "They just want someone who will make sure nothing negative happens."

A Jewish doula, Jane*, said she witnessed similar displays in London hospitals and now advises clients to report any political symbols and request different staff if necessary. "It's absolutely out of order," she said. "We shouldn't have to worry about who walks into the delivery room."

Jane helped create Shifrah UK, a network founded by Jewish midwives and doulas to connect Jewish families with Jewish birth workers and provide peer support. "Many Jewish doulas have left mainstream forums because of hostility online," she said.

BJ Woodstein, an author and doula who trained through a major UK provider, said Shifrah held its first

session with NHS staff in October 2025, attended by 20 participants. She cited a case in which a Jewish couple were reported to social services after telling a midwife they intended to hold a *bris*. Pointing out that NHS staff often lack understanding of Jewish genetic testing and maternity customs, and that kosher food remains difficult to obtain in hospitals, she said, "I can't recommend any one place as safe."

Three of the South African-connected interviewees said the birth world, known for "progressive" values, has become a particularly fraught environment for Jews. "We've been called 'Zio baby killers' in professional chats," one said. "It's shocking from people whose work is supposed to be about care."

They described an atmosphere in which antisemitism is frequently dismissed as political disagreement over Israel. Online networks that once offered collegial support,

such as Doula UK or the international Physicians Mums Group, have had Jewish members depart after being targeted with anti-Jewish abuse.

A senior NHS doctor who represents the Jewish Medical Association UK (JMA UK) said the trend is widespread. "We've received well over a hundred reports since 7 October, mostly from doctors being abused by colleagues in person or online," she said. "The abuse ranges from coded anti-Zionist comments to explicit antisemitic language. In some cases, doctors post on social media about Britain being run by Jewish supremacists."

JMA UK has referred many cases to the General Medical Council (GMC), but few have reached resolution. "Investigations drag on for years, and only a handful have any restrictions," the representative said.

The association is pressing GMC and NHS regulators to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism to help distinguish political speech from hate speech. "The government supports this in principle, but adoption is voluntary," she said.

The doctor said the problem spans professions. "We hear about nurses, midwives, psychologists, and physiotherapists on both sides of the issue – as victims and as perpetrators," she said. "Two colleagues have received death threats for criticising antisemitic behaviour."

On 16 October 2025, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Wes Streeting told the UK Parliament, "It's unacceptable that many people, including those in the Jewish community, don't feel safe working in or using the NHS." He announced mandatory antisemitism and anti-racism training for all 1.5 million NHS staff, new uniform guidance, and an expectation

Continued on page 3>>

'Israel believes in Africa'



Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema and Israeli President Isaac Herzog being entertained on a historic visit to Zambia this week. Herzog also spent time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. See story on page 3

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Neo-Nazi rally exposes Aussie moral breakdown

OPINION

DR VIC ALHADEFF



Just as Jewish Australians dared to hope that the unprecedented epidemic of antisemitism which has rocked their country since 7 October 2023 might dissipate, neo-Nazis were given free rein to parade their vitriol in the heart of Sydney.

Right outside the state Parliament, no less. Is this the new normal? Is this a new reality for Jewish Australians?

The black-clad group, comprising about 60 men, were members of the hardline National Socialist Network. They displayed a banner which read "Abolish the Jewish lobby", pernicious code for denigrating the Jewish community. According to reports, they said "the Jewish lobby is one of the most powerful lobbies in Australia. They bribe our politicians, they coerce our politicians." And they concluded by chanting the Hitler Youth slogan, "Blood and honour!"

The premier of New South Wales, Chris Minns, condemned the rally as "despicable", saying "We don't want to tolerate - and don't believe we should tolerate - a city where white-power hatred, naked antisemitism, and racism is on Sydney streets." There needs to be a distinct demarcation between free speech and hate speech, Minns stressed.

Opposition leader Mark Speakman, blasted the rally as "a new low when it comes to racism and bigotry", describing the participants as "thugs dressed in black shirts reminiscent of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s". And Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon cited "a breakdown in communication" within the police which led to approval for the rally being granted, and undertook to review the footage to ascertain whether any law had been broken.

Needless to say, the Jewish community is outraged that a brazen antisemitic rally was granted approval, and its leadership responded

accordingly.

The deeply disturbing question is why powers which were introduced three months ago specifically to ban incitement of race hatred weren't enforced. They make it an offence to intentionally incite hatred against a person or group based on race, and the rally clearly met that criterion. A senior police officer said there was no risk to public safety. What about the safety of the Jewish community?

The rally took place the same week that Australia's security chief, Mike Burgess, warned of the threat to social cohesion which is permeating the nation, from universities to the workplace to the street, cautioning that "inflammatory rhetoric and provocative, disruptive actions



Members of the National Socialist Network protesting in Sydney, Australia

have been normalised".

It coincided also with the anniversary of Kristallnacht, which marked the onset of the Holocaust in November 1938, with a poignant, albeit tangential, Australian connection when Aboriginal leader William Cooper led a delegation to the German Consulate in Melbourne to protest the treatment of Jews in Germany.

Cooper's rare moral clarity concerning the plight of people thousands of miles away and at a time when indigenous Australians weren't even regarded as people by their own country is sorely needed now. Before the latest assault on Australia's once-vaunted multicultural ethos becomes the new normal.

• Dr Vic Alhadeff is former chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, and former chairperson of Multicultural NSW in Sydney, Australia.

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Counting the days, and making them count

Torah Thought

How do you build a life where every day is worth remembering? This week's parsha recounts the passing of Sarah and Avraham, the founding couple of the Jewish people. When describing Avraham's later years, the Torah uses an unusual expression: "V'Avraham zaken ba-bayamim" (Avraham became old; he came along in days.)

On the surface, it sounds like a simple description of ageing. But the phrase *ba-bayamim*, that he "came with his days", hints at something deeper. Our sages explain that Avraham brought every one of his days with him. Each day had been used intentionally. Each day counted. He didn't just accumulate years; he accumulated days filled with purpose.

Most of us would love to live that way, yet we often feel pulled in the opposite direction. Daily life can feel like a blur. We run from one task to the next: work deadlines; kids' schedules; errands; emails; and WhatsApp messages. Layer onto that the pressure to succeed, to be appreciated, to meet expectations - our own and that of others. Even when things are going smoothly, our minds drift toward worry:

"What if this doesn't last?"; "Am I doing enough?"; "What if I fall short?"

We are surrounded by noise - financial concerns; social pressures; responsibilities - all tugging for our attention. It's hard to feel the meaning of each day when we're weighed down by yesterday's disappointments or tomorrow's anxieties.

Perhaps this is another lesson we can take from Avraham. His life was anything but simple. He endured displacement, famine, conflict, spiritual opposition, family strain, and uncertainty. Yet the Torah testifies that he came with his days - none were wasted. Each day he treated as an opportunity for meaning and purpose. He didn't let the past define him or the future paralyse him. He showed up fully to the day he was living.

Maybe this is the secret of a life of goodness: not that we achieve perfection, but that we are present on the day in front of us. We can't control tomorrow.

We can't rewrite yesterday. But we can choose how to live today.

There are so many small, yet profound ways we can do this: greeting someone warmly even when we're hurried; carving out five minutes to pray or learn; listening with patience; offering help quietly when no one expects it; acting with integrity even when it's inconvenient. A meaningful life is built from days like these.

Some of the most powerful acts happen quietly: responding with kindness where there could have been irritation; choosing faith where there could have been fear; giving encouragement when someone needed it most. These choices create a life of days worth bringing with us.

Don't worry about what you can't change - yesterday or tomorrow - ask: what good can I bring into the world today?

Rabbi Pini Hecht
Marais Road Shul

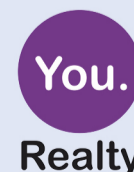


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Israel's Zambia visit leaves SA sidelined

TALI FEINBERG

While South Africa frames itself as the southern African country that should play a role in bringing peace to the Middle East, it was in Zambia this week that Israeli President Isaac Herzog stated, "We want peace. We seek peace. There is nothing we want more than peace with our Palestinian neighbours."

Herzog was on an official state visit to Zambia, where he and Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema discussed expanding collaboration between their two countries in agriculture, energy, health, water, education, research, tourism, and mining. They also discussed the "importance of fostering lasting peace and stability in the Middle East", according to Hichilema, who expressed approval of the ceasefire and Zambia's hope for resolution to the conflict.

The moment showed how South Africa has chosen to be left out in the cold, both in shaping the future of the Middle East and in improving the lives of its citizens.

Herzog also visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and met its president, Félix Tshisekedi, as well as other senior officials. While in Zambia, Herzog said, "We must meet the challenges of the hour, and do all we can to alleviate both man-made and natural humanitarian crises across Africa. This is our common moral duty."

"South Africa's absence from this itinerary is striking," says Rolene Marks, spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation. While African states are strengthening ties with global partners, "Pretoria has chosen an ideological posture that isolates rather than advances national interests. Israel is being welcomed across the continent, while South Africa is increasingly sidelined by its own choices."

That sidelining was "unmistakable" at the Gaza Peace Summit held in Sharm el-Sheikh in October, "a major regional gathering on African soil", notes Marks. "South Africa was excluded, a diplomatic cold shoulder that underscored how far Pretoria's influence has slipped. At a moment when key actors were shaping regional discussions, South Africa had no seat at the table."

Herzog is the first Israeli president to visit Zambia. The strengthening of bilateral ties between the two nations over the past two years included a state visit by Hichilema to Israel in August 2023, and the reopening of the Israeli embassy in Lusaka after 52 years, in August 2025.

Hichilema emphasised that "Zambia and Israel share longstanding diplomatic



Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema

Photo: Maayan Toaf/GPO

relations founded on mutual respect, shared values, and co-operation for the socio-economic advancement of our two nations."

He said the reopening of the Israeli embassy in Zambia, and Herzog's visit "underscore our shared commitment to deepening economic and technological partnerships. This visit also holds profound symbolic significance for many Zambians of the Christian faith, who rightly regard Israel as the land of the Bible."

The two heads of state reaffirmed their commitment to advancing co-operation under a General Framework Agreement of Co-operation, signed in 2023. Zambia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the visit provided "an opportunity to consolidate co-operation that directly contributes to Zambia's transformation agenda."

Describing the collaboration that has already taken place, Hichilema said, "From opening a new trauma and emergency unit in Livingstone Hospital to specialised irrigation training for Zambian farmers in the Negev desert, our two countries have achieved so much together in recent months. I look forward to many more years of development, co-operation, and partnership."

"May G-d bless the Republic of Zambia, the state of Israel, and the enduring friendship between our two nations," said Hichilema. "To the people of Israel, you are most welcome in Zambia. We have some of the finest tourist destinations in the world, and we invite you to come and enjoy them."

Herzog said Israel had "long believed in Africa", and sees great importance in "expanding co-operation in the fields of trade, agriculture, innovation, science, and technology across Africa; addressing the common challenges of climate change, water, and food security; and broadening

the circle of countries committed to working together for the good of all humanity."

Speaking to the SA Jewish Report from the Israeli embassy in Zambia, where she is now based, Israeli Ambassador to Zambia, Ofra Farhi, says Herzog's visit was "historic". It was the first time that Israel's new Wing of Zion aircraft - Israel's "Air Force One" - landed on African soil.

"The presidents of the two countries are in constant contact and have a lot in common," says Farhi. "Zambians know what is good for their country. Their foreign

policy is smart and stable, including good relations with all nations."

Since the embassy opened, there has been constant activity. This includes a thanksgiving service on 8 November celebrating the opening of the embassy, hosted by the Gospel Fellowship Ministries Church on the Copperbelt. Both Farhi and Hichilema addressed the large crowd, with Israeli and Zambian flags prominently displayed.

There, Hichilema said the event was "a celebration of the Zambia-Israel partnership that dates back to our country's independence. We see G-d's hand through what Israel has been doing for many years in critical fields such as education, health, trade, mining, and science, and technology. We will continue to celebrate this mutual partnership."

He also called for peace in the Middle East. Farhi says she often hears him repeat the idea that stability between Israelis and Palestinians would lead to stability for all. She looks forward to seeing the relationship between Israel and Zambia continue to flourish.

Entrepreneur David Akinin, who is based in South Africa, does business in Zambia and was invited to join Hichilema on his state visit to Israel in 2023. He describes how, back then, the president said, "Let's find the country that does the

best security, the best technology, the best agriculture, and learn from them." That state visit "opened a lot of doors in agriculture, healthcare, technology and security", Akinin says.

Then came the opening of the Israeli embassy in Lusaka, "which was a huge step", Akinin says, especially in today's political climate of hostility towards Israel. "It re-centres the conversation to one of progress and peace, and that Israel is here to stay," he says. Herzog's visit is now "cementing the relationship for the long-term".

Benji Shulman, the director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, says, "Africans are some of the most supportive populations of Israel in the world, according to polls. Zambia and the DRC are some of Israel's biggest allies in the region."

The trip is important, he says, because both countries are southern African, and "it shows that Israel can operate in this region regardless of what South Africa thinks of its presence, given that South Africa is the major dominant country".

For Marks, "the contrast is clear. African countries engaging with Israel are pursuing opportunity and progress, while South Africa, through its own decisions, is watching from the sidelines".

SA Jews fear antisemitism in UK NHS

>>Continued from page 1

that every NHS body adopt the IHRA definition. Prime Minister Keir Starmer ordered a system-wide review after "clear cases not dealt with adequately", and allocated £10 million (R225.6 million) to implement the measures. NHS England has since instructed trusts to strengthen zero-tolerance policies and reporting systems.

The announcements follow a series of high-profile disciplinary cases. A surgeon was erased from the medical register for antisemitic abuse on social media. Another doctor received only a formal warning after posting antisemitic messages, prompting condemnation from the British Medical Association and Jewish groups. A third case involved a trainee doctor whose conduct sparked calls for faster suspension procedures for practitioners accused of hate speech.

The JMA UK welcomes the government's steps but questions enforcement. "Training alone won't fix culture," the representative said. "We need transparency about outcomes and protection for whistle-blowers."

For Jewish healthcare professionals, the challenge is to balance visibility with safety. Kate said she was encouraged by an Israeli colleague to "stand her ground", but eventually left her job.

Jane keeps a small Magen David hidden under her uniform. "I'll always be proud to be Jewish," she said, "but I won't risk my clients' safety." Gina said she continues to avoid discussing her religion at appointments, but feels reassured by her Jewish doula.

Woodstein said the anxiety has persisted long after the initial shock of 7 October. "Jewish women still phone just to ask if hospitals

are safe," she said. "They want reassurance before they go in." She said cost limits most families from turning to private care. "They can't simply opt out of the NHS," she said. "That's why public hospitals must feel safe for everyone."

The JMA UK is working with the Health Department to monitor the new training programme and to persuade the GMC to publish regular data on antisemitism complaints. It also calls for explicit inclusion of antisemitism within NHS equality and diversity frameworks.

Parliamentary debate drew cross-party support for tougher oversight. The NHS Race and Health Observatory stated that antisemitism "must be addressed with the same seriousness as all forms of racism". Still, Jewish professionals remain cautious. "The culture has shifted," said the JMA UK representative. "People feel emboldened to be openly antisemitic in ways we haven't seen for years. Policy change has to be matched by accountability."

Kate said she hoped her experience wouldn't deter others. "I want my daughter to feel proud to be Jewish in hospital," she said. "But for now, she'll feel safer surrounded by people who understand her."

As the NHS implements its new measures, South African Jews in the UK, from hospital radiographers to expectant mothers, will watch closely to see whether promises of zero tolerance translate into genuine safety and respect in the wards and clinics where they live and work.

*Some names have been changed to protect professional and personal safety.

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Jewish doctors quit SAMA over anti-Israel boycott

NICOLA MILTZ

At least 80 Jewish doctors and healthcare professionals have resigned from the South African Medical Association (SAMA) after it suspended all ties with the Israel Medical Association (IMA) last month and called for the IMA's expulsion from the World Medical Association (WMA).

The move, which many medical professionals describe as deeply divisive and politically motivated, has intensified concerns over rising anti-Israel sentiment and, increasingly, antisemitism within the global medical fraternity.

For many Jewish doctors in South Africa, SAMA's announcement created discomfort and a sense of alienation. Several have already resigned, while others are withholding decisions as discussions between stakeholders continue. A number of non-Jewish doctors have also voiced disquiet, saying the association's stance risks damaging collegiality and professionalism in the medical field.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), said the Board had been approached on this issue by a number of doctors from different faith backgrounds, many of whom have been members of SAMA for many decades.

"They have expressed concern, not just with the resolutions, but with SAMA's lack of broad consultation," she said.

"We reached out to SAMA chief executive, Dr Mzulungile Nodikida, who agreed to meet us. We felt that he and his colleagues were genuinely concerned by the impact that these resolutions have had on members. We highlighted how this was at variance with the SAMA guiding principle of 'uniting doctors for the health of the nation,'" she said.

Nodikida undertook to take the issue urgently back to the Board with a view to revisiting these decisions, she said. "We have urged members to wait for the outcome of this meeting before considering any further action," Kahn said.

"It's discouraging when medical associations like SAMA openly display unethical behaviour by promoting biased positions relating to Israel," said Dr Martin Strous, the chairperson of the South African Association of Jewish Mental Health and Allied Practitioners (SAJMAP). "SAMA's decision prompted significant backlash from Jewish medical professionals. Several doctors have resigned, while others are seeking reform within SAMA. It's hoped that SAMA will reconsider its position."

Strous said SAJMAP's membership almost doubled following SAMA's 4 October statement, a reflection of health professionals' desire to align themselves with an organisation that rejects bias and advocates for professional integrity.

The repercussions of SAMA's stance come amid growing hostility towards Jewish and Israeli professionals globally. This week, Israeli academic Dr Galia Moran of Ben-Gurion University withdrew from speaking at the 7th Global Mental Health Summit, held in Cape Town from 10 to 12 November, after pressure and threats of protest from anti-Israel activists, including a planned demonstration outside the Cape Town City Hall.

In response, the SAJBD said, "This bullying behaviour does nothing more than silence academic discourse and stifle engagement on critical topics such as mental health. It's regrettable that the conference organisers permitted narrow political grandstanding to obstruct legitimate scholarly exploration."

Strous added: "The deliberate singling out of Dr Moran, not for her ideas but for her Israeli identity, exemplifies precisely the kind of prejudice our association seeks to address."

The episode has been condemned in academic and medical circles as yet another example of how anti-Israel activism increasingly spills into professional and

humanitarian spaces.

In its statement on 4 October, SAMA said it had



resolved to suspend immediately all professional and bilateral relations with the IMA and to call for its suspension from the WMA. It cited grave concern regarding the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and what it described as the IMA's failure to uphold international medical ethics and humanitarian obligations.

The association said the resolution would remain in force until the IMA took verifiable action to demand the release of detained Palestinian medical personnel, condemn the destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, and advocate for the free flow of medical supplies.

Despite SAMA's lobbying, the WMA didn't suspend the IMA. Instead, on 13 October, the WMA adopted a new resolution urging the Israeli government to uphold

humanitarian law and protect healthcare in Gaza, while simultaneously reaffirming its prior call for the immediate and safe release of all hostages.

The WMA emphasised that the protection of healthcare and respect for medical neutrality must remain fundamental, even in times of conflict.

Strous said SAMA's actions appeared to have been influenced by union alliances; advocacy by the British Medical Association; and calls from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

He warned that it aligned with South Africa's broader pattern of political and institutional support for actions against Israel, including its referral of Israel to the

International Court of Justice.

In a detailed position statement issued on 5 October, SAJMAP accused SAMA of procedural irregularities and ideological bias, demanding that it publish full details of its so-called extensive consultation. SAJMAP questioned who was consulted; whether members with opposing views – particularly Jewish members – were invited to participate; and whether votes were recorded or counted.

The organisation also highlighted what it called ideologically skewed editorial gatekeeping within SAMA's structures, citing recent controversies at the *South African Medical Journal*, which declined to publish rebuttals to anti-Israel commentary.

"Recent editorial and policy decisions, together with SAMA's latest move, have created a reasonable perception

of ideological bias within the association's leadership," the statement said. "It's unclear whether this stance reflects the views of the broader SAMA membership."

"Medical boycotts harm patients, slow down innovation, and erode the humanitarian space medicine must protect," said Strous. SAJMAP referenced the Global Jewish Health Alliance's January 2025 letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council opposing medical boycotts, arguing that severing scientific co-operation delays treatment, disrupts research, and ultimately injures patients globally.

The association also noted SAMA's silence on Hamas's use of hospitals as military bases and its failure to call for the release of hostages held in Gaza, saying that this selective activism raises serious concerns about discrimination.

"If SAMA's objective is genuinely to protect patients and uphold humanitarian law," SAJMAP said, "there are constructive, non-boycott approaches fully consistent with medical ethics. Constructive engagement grounded in dialogue rather than disengagement would strengthen ethical accountability and promote tangible health benefits across divides."

SAMA's move follows similar initiatives in parts of Europe, North America, and the United Kingdom, where medical bodies and journals have issued statements harshly critical of Israel, often with little or no reference to the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks that triggered the ongoing war.

SAMA had not responded to questions by the time of publication.

Increased transparency versus lower taxes: *olim* weigh options

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSORFF



"In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes," Benjamin Franklin famously observed. Yet for those contemplating aliya, taxes have now become a matter of choice.

Israel's new tax incentives, announced last week in the state Budget, offer *olim* and returning residents who move to Israel in 2026 unprecedented relief, not only on their foreign income, but also on their Israeli income. However, there is a sting in the tail: those arriving after 31 December 2025 will be required to make full financial disclosure of all their worldwide assets. The new tax incentives still need to be passed by the Knesset, and the details could be subject to change and internal negotiation.

In a single policy shift, Israel has transformed the fiscal calculus of aliya. The difference of just a few months could define one's financial reality for the next 10 years.

Those who make aliya in 2025 will retain the existing framework – a 10-year exemption from Israeli tax on all foreign income such as overseas dividends, interest, and rental income. Crucially, they will also preserve the right not to report offshore assets to the Israel Tax Authority for 10 years. Under this model, foreign investments; trusts; bank accounts; properties; and business interests remain private. No forms. No filings. No questions asked.

From 1 January 2026, that world ends. New immigrants and returning residents will, in addition to the 10-year exemption on foreign income, enjoy an extraordinary two-year exemption on Israeli-source earnings. Thereafter, they will benefit from a reduced tax rate – 10% in 2028; 20% in 2029; and 30% in 2030 – on Israeli income up to NIS 1 million (R5.3 million).

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich calls this a "revolution" in immigration policy. For professionals earning substantial Israeli income, the savings could indeed be transformative. A new immigrant earning NIS 600 000 in 2026 would save more than NIS 150 000 in tax in the first year alone.

Yet this revolutionary benefit comes with a revolutionary cost. For decades, Israel uniquely allowed new immigrants to avoid reporting overseas holdings. Under pressure from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to comply with

global transparency standards, that exemption will now end.

All new immigrants and returning residents arriving after 31 December 2025 will be required to file annual Israeli tax returns disclosing their global income and assets, including foreign companies, trusts, and cryptocurrencies. The Israel Tax Authority will gain unprecedented visibility into structures previously beyond its reach.

This isn't merely bureaucratic. Under the OECD's Common Reporting Standard, Israel can now automatically exchange such information with other jurisdictions. The tax authority will also

be able to question where income is truly generated, and whether foreign entities are effectively managed from Israel, and thus taxable there.

For individuals with substantial foreign wealth or complex offshore structures, making aliya before year-end preserves 10 years of

financial privacy while retaining the foreign-income exemption.

As Sartre observed, we are our choices. The choice to move to Israel in the months ahead will define the financial dimension of your aliya for a decade. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Expert advice tailored to your personal circumstances, financial complexity, earning potential, and values around transparency and privacy is essential.

One thing is certain: if you are considering making aliya, you must act quickly. The window for financial privacy closes on 31 December 2025. What begins on 1 January 2026 is an entirely new paradigm – of transparency and disclosure, balanced against unprecedented tax benefits.

• Michael Kransdorff is an international tax practitioner writing on behalf of the Institute of International Tax and Finance. Visit: <https://www.intltax.org/>



Israelis flock to SA despite government's sentiment

CLAUDIA GROSS

The number of Israeli visitors to South Africa has more than doubled since before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 2025 marking the highest level recorded in seven years, according to Statistics South Africa.

In 2018, about 5 000 Israeli tourists visited the country. That figure dropped to just more than 200 in 2020 during COVID-19 lockdowns. It has since rebounded sharply, reaching more than 10 000 this year. Israel is now among the fastest-growing overseas tourism markets for South Africa.

The recovery comes despite heightened political tensions between the South African and Israeli governments, including the former's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Yet industry sources and tour operators say the political divide hasn't stopped ordinary South Africans and Israelis from engaging warmly on the ground.

Johannesburg-based guide and photojournalist Ilan Ossendryver, who runs Tour Soweto, said he had witnessed a steady return of Israeli visitors to his township journeys over the past two years.

"Before COVID-19, I had Israelis almost every day," he said. "Then it stopped completely. When the ICJ case happened, there was another dip. But over the past two years, it's been picking up again. Israelis are adventurous; they come out no matter what."

An Israeli tourist being entertained in Kliptown, Soweto



Ossendryver said Israelis were motivated by a mix of family connections and a desire for authentic experiences. "Many come for weddings or to visit relatives. Others come because they've heard South Africa is beautiful and welcoming. When they arrive, they see the difference between what they hear about the government's position and how ordinary South Africans treat them."

He believes South Africa's interpersonal relationships remain strong. "There's a clear separation between government policy and public sentiment. The majority of people I meet are supportive of Israel. Visitors are always amazed by how much warmth there is, especially in communities like Soweto."



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

Ossendryver said he preferred to describe his offerings as journeys rather than tours. His trips combine cultural history, photography, and social engagement. "My camera is my activism," he said. "It's not just about sightseeing, it's about connecting with people and giving back."

During the pandemic, Ossendryver and his partners, Howard Sackstein and The Angel Network, distributed 175 000 meals in Kliptown, Soweto. He continues to raise funds to build a classroom and kitchen for street children who cannot access formal schooling.

"I work with local guides, kindergartens, and the elderly," he said. "Visitors get involved. They see what we do, and they want to help. The Israeli guests I've hosted are incredibly generous. They go home and spread the word. That's the best kind of marketing there is."

He said his experiences show how travel can build bridges even during political friction. "When people meet each other face to face, it changes perceptions. You realise that what connects us is much greater than what divides us."

Ossendryver uses his journeys to explain South Africa's past to foreign visitors. "Israeli tourists always ask about apartheid," he said. "I tell them it was a legal system that separated people, but it didn't stop personal friendships. It's not comparable to Israel. In Israel, you don't have 'whites only' signs or forced separation like we had here. When they see the history for themselves, they understand the difference."

He often draws parallels between South Africa's past and Israel's challenges. "When Israelis visit, they see how South Africa came through something incredibly difficult, and they leave with respect for what reconciliation can look like."

Ossendryver said Johannesburg remained his preferred canvas. "Cape Town is stunning, but

Johannesburg is real," he said. "It's got grit, character, and layers. It's the true melting pot of Africa, and that's what Israelis love. They feel the energy and humanity here."

In Cape Town, visiting Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon, born and raised in the United States who later made aliya, served as the high holy day rabbi for Temple Israel this year. It was her first visit to South Africa, and she described the experience as profoundly moving.

"I was impressed by how welcoming everyone was," she said. "From the first day, I felt at home. The warmth of the community was magnificent. I can say I was 'smitten by a mountain.'"

She said she arrived conscious of the country's political climate, but chose not to hide her identity. "My Uber profile still had my name written in Hebrew," she said. "I thought about changing it, but decided not to. Jewish identity isn't always easy in the diaspora, but the response here was wonderful."

Shiryon's sermons during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur centred on hope and moral renewal. "The Israeli government doesn't represent the founding values of Israel," she said. "Those values are about honouring life. We must hold on to hope, and believe we can change that."

Her Yom Kippur sermon reflected her belief that transformation begins with compassion. "There's no change without hope," she said. "We need to make space for other voices, and create safe spaces to listen to each other."

She also drew inspiration from South Africa's journey. "Israel needs a truth and reconciliation process," she said. "We need to confront pain honestly, and find a way forward. There's no space in my body to hold hate."

During her stay, she visited Langa township, and met a former Robben Island prisoner who spoke about forgiveness. "I asked him how he managed not to hate after what he went through," she said. "He told me, 'There's no room in this body to hold hate.' That answer has stayed with me. It's something I'll always remember."

Shiryon said that being away from Israel during wartime was emotionally difficult. "My husband and I have been supporting the families of hostages and demonstrating for nearly two years," she said. "Being here was both painful and healing, a break from tension, and a chance to connect with another community."

She said her experience of leading the Progressive congregation offered insight into Jewish identity outside Israel. "In Israel, we breathe Judaism daily, here, people actively seek it. They're building community, and that's moving."

Both Ossendryver and Shiryon said their experiences reflect enduring bonds between South Africans and Israelis. The rabbi described the community's hospitality as "life-affirming". Ossendryver said the encounters on his journeys continue to prove that human connection outweigh political division.

"We lose tourism because of government policy," Ossendryver said. "But when Israelis come, they see that the people are friendly, respectful, and open. That's the South Africa I know."

Despite tensions at the diplomatic level, tourism data and personal accounts suggest that Israeli visitors are returning in growing numbers, finding in South Africa not just adventure and beauty, but warmth, understanding, and hope.



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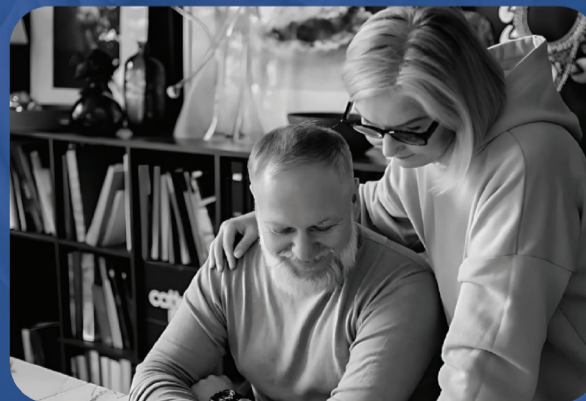
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South African Jewish Report

Truly funny, truly uncomfortable

A friend showed me a short video this week, to see whether I found it amusing. I did initially, but it left a sense of lingering discomfort because of how true it was.

It was a piece by Eretz Nehederet, a very popular long-running Israeli prime time satirical sketch comedy programme. It portrayed two old friends bumping into each other at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. Both are Jewish. Eli is Israeli, and Jennifer is American.

Excited to see each other, he says, "I can't believe this is where we meet." She says, "You know us Jews, if history has taught us anything ..." and he completes her sentence with "it's knowing when it's time to leave."

She told him she had tried to stay as long as she could, and he agrees saying, "One morning, you wake up and realise ..." and they both go on to say, "it's not the same country you grew up in." He goes on to say, "It's no longer safe for us to live here." At which point, they realise that she is talking about having just left New York to live in Israel; and he is leaving Israel to live in New York. He is astonished that she would consider living in Israel now, and she can't believe that he would move to New York now.

She asks, "Did you see who just won the election?" And he says, "At least you still have elections." She says, "Trust me, it's just not safe for Jews there anymore." And he says, "You literally came to the most dangerous place for Jews on the planet."

As they part, thinking each other a bit loony, they bid farewell, both ironically saying, "Am Yisrael Chai!"

Yes, this skit is amusing, but so deeply true about what is happening in our world. So many Israelis have gone through the hell of two years at war, where the impact of the stress and distress has at least touched – and in some cases damaged – everyone. It's clear from having been there recently that Israelis are tired of fighting, the horror of war, and its fallout. Now that there is a ceasefire, no-one is celebrating. They wish for peace, but believe it to be a prospect way in the future, if ever.

When I was in Greece recently, I met several Israelis who had moved there, at least temporarily, because to them, it made sense. None of them were committed to remaining in Greece forever because ultimately, Israel would always be home. However, they felt a lightness and an ease in living in Greece, and weren't rushing to go home permanently. They saw Greece as an easier life.

I must say that it's only in the past few years that I have heard Israelis speaking openly about emigration. As far as I knew, it was just not something Israelis did. Interestingly, despite the conflict, Israel remains in the top 10 of happiest countries in the world. It is the 8th happiest now, having fallen three places since 2024. I understand this phenomenon because I see how people really living life to the full in Israel. Whereas here in South Africa, it often feels more like we live to work to make a living to pay the bills to keep going. There isn't too much of really living life to the full, like I witnessed in Israel.

Much like the woman in the skit who is making aliya, I imagine that's what she sees in Israel. Living there looks good, perhaps not easy, but good. There is such camaraderie in neighbourhoods, and people look out for one another, or so it appears. As a woman, you can walk around safely at any time of night. Children there also have a freedom our children in South Africa don't know.

And in the diaspora, we are experiencing rising antisemitism, which is making the world a far scarier place. In our lead story (page 1) this week, patients and medical practitioners talk about how they are being threatened because they are Jews. Even the idea that a patient going for medical care, or to give birth, isn't safe from the person treating them, seems absurd. That's in England.

Then just this week in Australia, police allowed a protest against the "Jewish lobby" to go ahead just outside the New South Wales Parliament. About 70 white nationalist men stood there shouting about how revolting the "Jewish lobby" is. They accused the Jewish lobby of not just bribing and coercing Australian politicians, but "owning" them. They made it clear that they would prefer Australia without Jews. Nobody even came near to stop them spewing their hatred and denying any antisemitic activity in Australia.

I'm not sure this got much publicity in Australia. Why would it when antisemitism has reached unprecedented levels in that country? It's almost commonplace there. See the opinion piece by Jewish communal leader Dr Vic Alhadeff, a former South African journalist/editor, on page 2.

So, it's easy to understand why those living in the diaspora are concerned about the safety of Jews outside Israel, and may and do consider making aliya. But then, those of us living in the diaspora don't wake up in the middle of the night to sirens and have to run to shelters. We don't live under the constant threat of war and missiles. Our countries aren't surrounded by national enemies wanting to obliterate them.

Having said that, we are cognisant that in some countries in the diaspora, more and more people would prefer not to have Jews near them. These days, it mostly starts as an animosity towards Israel because they find every reason to find fault with the Jewish state. But it moves quite swiftly, as in the United Kingdom with the NHS issue and Australia with the recent antisemitic protest, to antisemitism and wanting to rid their country of Jews or, as the Australians said, the "Jewish lobby".

So, the skit is funny only in that we are able to laugh at ourselves and our predicament. *Am Yisrael Chai!*

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Hopes and fears: what will become of New York City

OPINION

FRANÇOIS BAIRD



New York City's Kampala-born mayor-elect, 34-year-old Zohran Mamdani, raises fears and hopes among its workers and business owners; property owners and tenants; American progressives and conservatives; and interest from Jews and Muslims worldwide; as well as curiosity among Africans, particularly Ugandans and South Africans.

It would be a mistake to view Mamdani purely on identity grounds as a Muslim. He is also young, although not the youngest ever New York City mayor, a progressive, and a socialist. He is an immigrant too, who became an American citizen in 2018.

Right now, nobody really knows what to expect from the community activist and state legislator with a Bowdoin College Bachelor of Arts in African Studies and flimsy record of achievement, but there should be little doubt that he plans to change New York City. Having won 50.4% of the vote, he can dictate the direction of change in the short term, but over the medium and longer term, his power will depend on how successfully he solves the problems of New Yorkers.

Mamdani swept all opponents before him, including the current mayor and a former New York governor, in a winning campaign that ignited the highest voter turnout in decades. He promised a lower cost of living and improved affordability for working-class New Yorkers; rent controls; city-owned grocery stores; free buses; higher minimum pay and benefits; expansion of childcare and other social supports; and progressive policies for schools and policing.

As mayor, he will be confronted by the realities of actually governing the most complicated – and arguably most diverse and difficult to manage – city in the world.

Mamdani's election attracts Muslims to the Big Apple, Muslim population growth might emulate that of London during the tenure of London Mayor Sadiq Khan, where Muslims now comprise 15% of London's population. While different to Paris and London, Jewish life in New York City is likely to change as Muslim power grows in population and financial power, attracted and supported by its Muslim mayor.

Israel should expect to be regarded as an enemy in New York's City Hall in future, but Muslim leaders, including South Africans and Ugandans, will have a sympathetic reception at Gracie Mansion and are likely to reciprocate. The precedent is the sympathetic relationship of South Africa's African National Congress with City Hall during the Dinkins administration. If Jewish money and power retreat, Muslim money and influence will probably be keen to replace it.

However, Mayor Mamdani is unlikely to be able to govern as expected of campaigner Mamdani because there are simply too many contradictions, too little money – New York is financially strained – and too many promises to keep, not to mention many competing constituencies. His current popularity and power are likely to wane under the assault of reality over time.

The question is what the Mamdani period will become? The youngest New York mayor ever, Hugh John Grant, served two terms during which his major achievements were in infrastructure, like burying electrical cables to prevent power outages due to storms; and establishing the Rapid Transit Commission in 1890 to plan New York City's subway system. Re-election rewarded him for infrastructure improvements despite his administration facing corruption allegations tied to Tammany Hall.

The second youngest New York City mayor, John Purroy Mitchel, known as the "Boy Mayor", served one term, from 1914 to 1917. He was a reformist, focused on efficiency and modernisation. He cut government waste; reformed the police department; and improved public-health services. He also advocated for better urban planning and expanding the subway system. Neither dabbled in identity politics or geopolitics.

Much will depend on whether Mamdani is re-elected, and if he wants to remain mayor, presiding over the "gorgeous mosaic" as Mayor Dinkins referred to New York's diverse populations. New York mayors have been limited to two terms since 2010.

If higher taxes, rising crime, and urban decay follow the implementation of Mamdani policies, as it did in

the time of Dinkins, he will find re-election more difficult. If in addition, identity politics stir violent confrontation in New York City, the worm will have turned for the Big Apple. Success will require of Mamdani to step back from progressive policy excesses; steer clear of geo-politics; embrace business and avoid corporate flight due to high taxes; exercise financial discipline; protect Jews; reject identity politics; and crack down on crime to keep all New Yorkers safe and prosperous.

Mamdani may yet have to execute an unprecedented policy and political U-turn to retain power and avoid his term becoming known as the time when New York City became, or nearly became, Mamdanistan.

• François Baird is the South African-born founder and chairperson of Baird's CMC, Baird's US, and Calbridge Investments. He is also co-chairperson of Africa for Taylor Advisory, as well as the founder of the FairPlay anti-dumping trade movement. He is a distinguished fellow at the Energy Policy Research Foundation think tank in Washington, DC.



During the campaign, he played the game of combining pro-Palestinian activism and strong – sometimes extreme – criticism of Israel, while recognising Israel's right to exist as a state; and condemned antisemitism while highlighting Islamophobia. This allowed him to connect with some Jewish community leaders and visit synagogues, while also drawing support from and speaking at pro-Palestinian events.

However, digging into what he actually said should trouble people more, because his statement that Israel could exist, but not as a Jewish state, is sinister. There's no state religion in Israel and all religions, including Islam, are protected. There are 22 countries that are called Islamic, many of whom expelled their Jewish population, and with that he has expressed no problem. Add to it that he is determined to boycott Israel and arrest its prime minister, but is willing to pose for pictures with major antisemites, and the picture is deeply troublesome.

New York has the largest Jewish population outside Israel, and therefore the Jewish lobby is significant, but if

Israel Centre director reflects on leaving SA ‘family’

LEE TANKLE

When Israel Centre Director Dafi Forer Kremer went through with her decision to come to South Africa on *shlichut* two years ago following the 7 October 2023 massacre, she did so out of commitment to Israel. Now that she's going home at the end of her two-year tenure, she has mixed feelings about leaving this community that has become “family”.

Throughout her tenure, Kremer felt like she was living between two worlds: the work she was doing in South Africa; and always thinking of her family in Israel, particularly with four out of her five children being in the Israel Defense Forces during a war.

“When I was allocated the position, the war had just started. Some of my friends in the same situation decided not to come, but I decided to do so,” she said. “It’s not a coincidence, I was meant to be here. My partner and I made a joint decision to stick to our original plan and come. It became complicated with the war, to leave behind four kids in the army.

“I felt like a lone soldier, alone without my family to support me in South Africa,” she said.

Kremer believes her arrival in South Africa was part of a larger mission. About three years ago, she attended a Jewish Agency meeting where she met Doron Almog, a former *shaliach* (emissary) to South Africa. Realising that they had both been *shlichim* to South Africa, she told him of her love for the South African Jewish community. Almog encouraged her to apply to replace the outgoing *shaliach*, Liat Amar Arran. After discussing it with her husband who fully supported the idea, they decided to take on the role.

Kremer and her husband served 20 years ago as *shlichim* for three years, with her leading Emunah’s Beit Midrash, and her husband serving as Bnei Akiva’s national *shaliach*. Their first daughter, after three sons, was born in South Africa.

This time, her *shlichut* was complicated by war.

“When I started here, war had already broken out, and the South African embassy had closed down in Israel.

It became complicated. We couldn’t apply for visas in the normal way, which had an impact on my husband and my youngest daughter who was supposed to be with us,” she said. They were able to come initially for “a holiday”, but then had to go back. “So I stayed in South Africa for two years by myself.”

Now that she is returning to Israel in December, she said she was feeling intense mixed emotions. “On the one hand, I’m happy to be back with my family, children, and grandchildren. I lost my mom a month ago, so it’s still fresh and I’m very sensitive [about it]. Being in South Africa, far from her, added to the complexity, especially knowing in her final years that she might not survive. The South African Jewish community deeply values family, and I’ve seen how central that is. I feel that I’ve done my part for this community,” she said.



Dafi Forer Kremer

“On the other hand, the South African community has become like family to me. After losing my mother, I invited the community to hear her remarkable story of surviving the Holocaust as a four-year-old rescued by the Jewish Agency. Working for the agency now feels like closing the circle. It’s a meaningful sense of closure.”

Kremer, an avid runner, decided in 2023, because of having run several half marathons, that she would donate a kidney altruistically to a stranger without discriminating on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or gender. She ultimately donated a kidney to a Bedouin resident of Rahat, with whose family she maintains close ties to this day.

One of Kremer’s main goals when she came two years ago was to show “the beauty, the strength, and the spirit of the state of Israel” and highlight its bright side beyond war.

“Israel isn’t just another country,” she said. “It’s the only homeland of the Jewish people. Our connection to it isn’t merely political or historical, it’s sacred and rooted in the Bible itself, so I believe we must never take for granted the privilege of having a state of our own.”

“Especially at a time of intense war and a period when we had the hostages in Gaza, I still had the mission of bringing the bright side of Israel to the community.”

Kremer has spent her tenure showing that Israel is more than a conflict. “Sharing stories of success builds community resilience,” she says. Her initiatives have brought Israeli icons to South Africa, including Beatie Deutsch, a Haredi Orthodox mother of five and four-time marathon champion; Ami Dadaon, a multi-gold Paralympian; and former hostage Agam Berger.

“That was about showing kids the spirit of Israel and giving perspective,” Kremer said. Berger’s presence, playing her violin on stage, became a moment of healing, reminding the community of resilience and hope.

Early in her role, Kremer launched the Aliyah Expo, and discovered that many elderly South Africans longed to join their children in Israel but couldn’t afford to do so. “With the rand so weak against the dollar and shekel, aliya was out of reach for many,” she said. Working with the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption, she helped launch a public-housing project in Netanya. Forty-four units in a new 30-story building, near the beach, city centre, and transport now allow elderly families to reunite, and plans are underway to expand the programme.

Kremer also brought creativity and fun through the Zionist Caravan, inspired by South Africa’s “Big Five”. The “Big Four” of Zionism – Theodor Herzl; David Ben-Gurion; Golda Meir; and Menachem Begin – come alive in interactive escape-room challenges, with youth unlocking archives and meeting mascots.

“We travelled from Bloemfontein to Cape Town, Hermanus, Port Elizabeth, and Durban, reaching hundreds in small communities,” Kremer said. “Now I’m heading to Bnei Akiva and Habonim camps, which is the perfect finale of my time here.”

Time to end *faribles* with Habonim

OPINION

BRAD GOTTSCHALK



“Where’s the milk? Where’s the honey?!” exclaimed Moshe Rabbeinu upon seeing *eretz Yisrael* for the first time.

One might experience the same phenomenon when entering the gorgeous Habonim campsite in Onrus. “Where’s the burning Israeli flag? Where are the condoms sold at the tuckshop?!”

I’m quite happy to report that Habonim isn’t the bogeyman painted by Shabbat table gossip. In my year as head of the organisation, I have heard it all. And although I’m coming at this with humour, in all honesty, it hurts me to see a robust



Having fun at Habonim machaneh

organisation which has had tens of thousands of Jewish South Africans go through its gates hurt by nasty rumour spreading.

Habonim is the first place that I fell in love with being Jewish. Onrus is where I became invested in Israel. What if I hadn’t gone to camp? This question fills me with dread. My confidence and Jewish identity would be non-existent. Going on camp felt like an explosion in my life.

For the first time, I was having meaningful conversations with *madrichim* about topics I never knew other people were also thinking about. Camp gave me the opportunity to get off my phone and make real connections with my friends and my age group. It was the perfect mix of meaning, fun, and humour like no other. Each child who doesn’t come on machaneh feels like the death of 1 000 worlds.

And so, to address the elephant glaring at you from this newspaper: Habonim has shrunk. We are certainly growing every year, and will reach pre-COVID-19 numbers. But it’s time for the *farible* with Habonim to end. We need to be responsible community members.

In the post-7 October world, Habonim has come under attack from Al Jamah-ah

and Willem Petzer over its connection to Israel. There are public calls to shut down “the Zionist camp in Onrus”. Habonim needs support from our Jewish community. Instead, the narrative from within is that we “aren’t Jewish enough”.

Besides the fact that we are fully kosher and *shomer* Shabbat on machaneh, Habonim’s *madrichim* take great pride in its Jewish expression. From Martin Buber to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, regarding Jewish culture and history, our Jewish education is well-founded. It’s enough to experience attacks from the outside; it’s difficult when they come from home.

We cannot be a community with only one youth movement. Our kids need healthy options for their December holidays. Without choice, we take away a foundation of connection, and we lose future committed and impassioned community leaders.

Among our *channichim* and *madrichim* are the children of top community leaders; the heads of the South African

Union of Jewish Students and the head boys and girls of our Jewish schools. We aren’t the woke vegans with blue hair; we are the people who have passed the torch down at *Mifkad Eish* (the closing ceremony): top chief executives; creatives and storytellers; effective activists; and of course, the builders of four proudly Habonim kibbutzim in Israel.

I’m not a religious Jew, but I want to end on the lesson we draw from Tisha B’Av. We are taught that *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) led to the destruction of the Second Temple and our two thousand-year exile. The times in which we are living feel biblical.

In Israel, the divide between Kaplan Street protesters and religious nationalists is starker than ever. In the diaspora, families are broken up across ideological lines. How did we fall into the trap of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) so easily?

In only a matter of a few years, the internal health of the Jewish world is suffering. Will we rise above the noise?

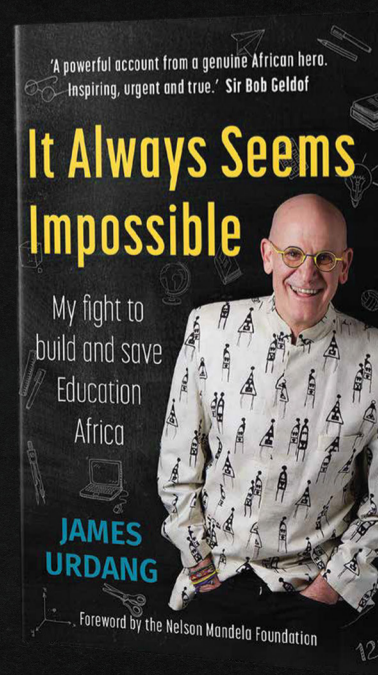
• Brad Gottschalk is secretary general of Habonim Dror and chairperson of the Zionist Youth Council. Raised at King David Linksfield, he has sat on the boards of the South African Union of Jewish Students and Limmud.

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EXCLUSIVE BOOKS



From Kristallnacht flames to community revival in Krefeld

LEE TANKLE

It was Rabbi Yitzchak Wagner's shul in Krefeld, Germany, that was one of the first buildings to be torched on Kristallnacht – the Nazi government-sponsored pogrom on 9 November 1938. Now, 87 years later, that same shul stands as a symbol of Jewish resistance, according to Wagner, who is the first Krefeld-born rabbi serving that community in the past 70 years.

Wagner, one of the first German-born rabbis ordained in Germany after the Holocaust, spoke at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 6 November to commemorate Kristallnacht. He said that on the day the old synagogue burned down, a businessman was walking past the shul with his son and told his son to "open his eyes because this is history. Never forget what you see tonight. They burned down the Jewish community."

That same son many years later helped the Krefeld community raise 15 million euros to buy and renovate the shul as a community centre, which opened on 14 September 2008. He had heard that the Jewish community in Krefeld was going through a process of rebuilding from a non-existent community to one that needed the shul renovated to accommodate everyone.

"When he gave the money, he had two conditions," said Wagner. "The walls of the synagogue must be metal so that they would never burn again. And there shouldn't be any space below the synagogue so that nobody could, G-d forbid, plant a bomb there. So, just imagine, at the moment the old synagogue was burning, the seed was laid which grew into everything we have today."

After the war, Wagner said, there were no Jews left in Krefeld. By 1981, there were only 130 Jews in Krefeld, and they decided to open a new shul. But even though more than 100 Jewish people were living in the city, only 30 people came to services, and that number continued to diminish so that one year, only nine people attended Yom Kippur services.

The community decided to keep the shul going even when logic said otherwise. "One board member said that if Jews and the laws of logic went together, we wouldn't be here," Rabbi Wagner recalled. "There wouldn't be a state of Israel. By the laws of nature, it's impossible to survive the



Rabbi Yitzchak Wagner

Holocaust and then emerge stronger, building a Jewish state. But that's Jewish history: after every catastrophe comes renewal. When Jews behind the Iron Curtain were freed, many went to Israel, but many also came to Germany. Suddenly, our tiny community of nine on Yom Kippur grew by more than a thousand. We needed a bigger building."

Wagner said that the date 9 November 1938, now known as Kristallnacht, was a holiday in Germany. It was St Martins Day, similar to Halloween, when children roam the streets and the city is packed with people, but Nazis, not dressed in Nazi uniform, broke open the gates to the Jewish community in Krefeld, and started to burn down the old synagogue.

"They called the fire department and the police. The fire department came. They entered the Jewish community, but didn't bother to put out the flames. They were looking for the wine cellar. They broke open the door and stole the wine. Then they had a party together with the police on the other side of the street, seeing the whole synagogue go up in flames," he said.

"For the Nazis, 9 November 1938 was a test. They wanted to see how the world would react if they burned down a thousand synagogues and destroyed so many Jewish shops. Would there be a protest in America? Would there be pressure from Russia? What would the king say? What would the pope say? And they saw the response. On 9, 10, and

11 November, the world was quiet.

"The world is quiet. We can burn Jewish books in the city centre downtown. The world is quiet. We can burn all the shuls. The world is quiet. We can burn the Jews.

"Yes, in the end, the Allies came and stopped the war, but they came because they were pulled into the war against Nazi Germany. Nobody sent even one aeroplane to drop one bomb on the train tracks going to the concentration camps, which might have made a difference. Nobody was interested. In the end, when they had to fight Hitler, Nazi Germany, they liberated the concentration camps, but this wasn't the main task. It was to fight Hitler. This was part of it. And the Nazis understood this very well."

Wagner said that as the shul was burning, a priest from across the road saw the flames and ran in to save the Torah, which was a dangerous thing for him to do as if he was caught with it, he would immediately have been sent to his death. However, he managed to keep it safe, and when Jews started to return to Krefeld after the war, the priest returned the Torah to the shul, where it is on display as it cannot be used as it is no longer kosher due to being damaged.

"We made the decision not to bury it, but to tell the story that even in the worst times of the Jewish people, there were always good non-Jews who stood up and tried to make a difference. This Torah isn't kosher anymore, but it's very holy because it's still a Torah and somebody risked his life in order to save it," he said.

Eighty-seven years after the events of Kristallnacht, although the original location of the old synagogue is a memorial with six stones symbolising the six million Jews killed, Wagner regularly hosts services in the synagogue in Krefeld with more than 200 people coming every week.

Every year on 9 November, the city of Krefeld gathers to remember one of its darkest nights, when its synagogue was among the first in Germany burned during Kristallnacht. "Hundreds come – the mayor, politicians, schoolchildren – to speak out against racism and antisemitism, to remember what happened here," said Wagner.

Gal Gadot wins Genesis Prize for supporting Israel

SHIRA LI BARTOV – JTA

Actor Gal Gadot has won the Genesis Prize, sometimes called the "Jewish Nobel", for supporting Israel even as backlash against the country's actions in Gaza rocked Hollywood.

Since 7 October 2023, Gadot has been an outspoken advocate for Israelis taken captive by Hamas. Calling herself "a proud Jew and a proud Israeli", she said she would dedicate the \$1 million (R17.1 million) award to "organisations who will help Israel heal".

Recipients of the prize, first awarded in 2014, customarily donate it to causes they choose, which have included advancing women's equality, racial and economic justice, and combating antisemitism and "efforts to delegitimise the state of Israel", according to a release from The Genesis Prize Foundation, which is based in Israel.

Stan Polovets, the co-founder and chief executive of The Genesis Prize Foundation, praised Gadot's "moral clarity".

"The award recognises her bravery and moral courage: her steadfast defence of Israel at great personal and professional risk; her advocacy for the hostages; her compassion for victims of terror; and her empathy for all innocent victims of this terrible war unleashed by Hamas," he said.

Gadot, who served two years in the Israel Defense Forces as part of Israel's compulsory service before being cast in the title role in the 2017 superhero film *Wonder Woman*, has repeatedly used her platform to campaign for the release of Israeli hostages. On 12 October 2023, she was among 700 celebrities and entertainment leaders, including Jerry Seinfeld, Jamie Lee Curtis, and Chris Pine, who signed a letter condemning Hamas for "evil" and "barbaric acts of terrorism".

That same day, Gadot posted an Instagram story that said, "Killing innocent Palestinians is horrific. Killing innocent Israelis is horrific. If you don't feel the same, I think you should ask yourself why that is." The post sparked outrage from some Israelis over her comparison of Palestinian and Israeli

deaths.

Gadot deleted the story and apologised. Since then, she hasn't used the words "Palestinians" or "Gaza" on social media.

Gadot also helped organise a screening of graphic 7 October footage in Los Angeles in November 2023, prompting a demonstration by pro-Palestinian activists who said the film was "Gal Gadot military propaganda" used to justify Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

Though Israel garnered sympathy in some parts of Hollywood after 7 October, its devastating war in Gaza over the next two years roiled the entertainment industry. Israel and Hamas agreed to a fragile ceasefire last month.

More than 3 000 celebrities, including Emma Stone; Bowen Yang; and Jewish creatives such as Jonathan Glazer; Andrew Garfield; and Hannah Einbinder, signed onto a boycott of Israeli film institutions in September.

Another letter from celebrities opposing the boycott amassed 1 200 signatures.

Gal Gadot at the Jerusalem Film Festival on 17 June 2025

Photo: Hazem Bader & AFP



The Genesis Prize was most recently awarded to Argentinian President Javier Milei for "his steadfast commitment to the state of Israel during one of the most difficult years in the history of the Jewish state", according to the prize committee. Milei went to Jerusalem in June to accept the prize.

Israeli-American actor Natalie Portman was awarded the Genesis Prize in 2018, but declined to attend the Jerusalem ceremony because Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to speak there. At the time, Israeli forces had killed dozens of Palestinians in response

to protests on the Gaza border.

Gadot, who recently starred as the evil queen in a live-action adaptation of *Snow White*, is set to play a Holocaust survivor in an upcoming film, *Ruin*.

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Facebook message leads man to long-lost Jewish family

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It may sound like the plot of Netflix's latest binge watch, but for Danny Edwards, finding out at the age of 48, that he had been adopted was a life-altering reality. In tracing his ancestry, not only did Edwards discover that his biological mother was Jewish and deceased, but also that he had brothers halfway across the world.

When Edwards' cousin, who had changed her surname after marrying, called Edwards "cuz" on Facebook, his aunt on the other side of the family made an assumption that would change his life. Mistakenly thinking Edwards had discovered a new biological

cousin, his aunt sent him a private message and inadvertently revealed a long-held family secret.

"I'm so glad to see that your family have finally told you after all these years that your mom and dad are not your mom and dad, that they're your grandparents," she wrote. "And that your oldest brother is actually your dad." Edwards was shocked.

He immediately revisited a moment 15 years prior, when an ex-girlfriend had suggested that his sister was his mother. While he'd considered the possibility at the time as he was much younger than his sister and two brothers, he'd dismissed it, and never questioned his parents. Now he confronted the idea that his now-late brother, Michael, was his biological father. With his parents both deceased too, Edward turned to his other siblings and their spouses and found that they'd all known about the

adoption.

"The people I thought were my parents had sworn everyone to secrecy," says Edwards. "The whole family knew about it, except me." He decided to contact Michael's daughter, who lives in Scotland with her mother. "She discovered who I was in 2014, a year after her father passed away. I had seen her in London at the time, and she said she'd planned to tell me then, but just didn't know how to."

After the truth came out, she travelled to Cape Town to spend time



Brothers reunite in the UK – Barry Halstead, Danny Edwards, and David Glickman

with Edwards. "She brought a DNA kit from a genealogy company, ancestry.com, because we thought that we were half siblings," Edwards says. "Yet, the results revealed that she and I weren't a DNA match at all, which meant that her father was no relation to me."

So, Edwards began to construct a timeline around his birth in Johannesburg on 13 April 1976. "My mother, Michelle Wolk, had either convinced my brother that I was his, or she told him that she was pregnant. Since they were dating, and likely due to family pressure, he married her. They both lived with my grandparents while she was pregnant. Six to eight months after my birth, they approached my grandparents and said they couldn't look after me and wanted to divorce. They asked if my grandparents would consider adopting me."

The adoption took about 18 months, and once it was finalised, Wolk and Michael

divorced and went their separate ways. "I grew up in a Catholic household and was none the wiser until last May, when I discovered the truth," says Edwards.

In subsequent investigations, Edwards consulted genealogist Jonathan Perkes, as well as Michelle Lurie, who runs a Facebook group called Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy. They used ancestry.com to help compile his family tree, which now includes about 2 640 people. "Through this, I've found many Jewish relatives, many of whom I've connected with," Edwards says.

While Edwards suspects he has found his father through the site too, he has been unable to confirm this.

Nevertheless, with additional help from a Jewish friend, Janine Waltman, who consulted Edwards' newly discovered family members, public records, and social media, he found his two younger half-brothers, Barry Halstead and David Glickman. "When Janine saw photos of Barry, she immediately sent them to Diana, [his girlfriend, Diana Brogneri], who sent them to me," Edwards recalls. "I asked, 'Why are you sending me photos of myself? And she said, 'This isn't you. This is your brother!'"

Wolk had married Halstead and Glickman's father in 1980. "It was a very unsettled family, and [Wolk] was declared an unfit mother. The boys were taken away from her when Barry was three years old and David was about six months. They were adopted by different families."

Shortly before Wolk passed away in 1988, she requested that the adoption agencies bring her two sons to her so she could say goodbye. "That's the last time that they were together until they found each other in 2014," Edwards says. "Barry's wife was going through his adoption records and found the link to David and they were reunited." Halstead grew up in London and Glickman, who was adopted by a Jewish family in Johannesburg, subsequently

immigrated there.

After Edwards discovered his brothers, the three started a WhatsApp group. "A year later, I flew to London to meet them. Being in each other's presence was something else. You've got all this family out there – new siblings, nieces, and nephews."

Growing up, Edwards says Judaism was largely foreign to him, but during the past 10 years, he had met many of Brogneri's Jewish friends in Cape Town. "Judaism is something I want to explore, but I'm just taking it one step at a time."

He and his brothers are also aware of another sibling, possibly named Ian or Wayne and born in 1978 or 1979. Edwards

remains determined to track down this last brother.

Edwards says he remains confident about his identity. "While there's a massive new side to me, I've been quite calm about it." He's grateful to have had a good upbringing and holds no resentment. Yet he admits disappointment that his adopted family didn't tell him the truth sooner.

"Had that happened, maybe I could have found Barry and David 10 years earlier. I sometimes feel I've been robbed of time, but everything happens for a reason. I look forward to growing these newfound relationships and embracing whatever lies ahead."

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Pandor continues anti-Israel campaign

OPINION

KENNETH KGWADI



During Dr Naledi Pandor's tenure as South Africa's foreign minister, the country faced a lack of trade and economic opportunities; neglected valuable and strategic alliances over outdated alliances; and continued to pursue ideological inconsistencies. And, Pandor has come to see herself as the main tenet of the country's foreign policy ecosystem even outside the government forum.

As chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, she used her influence to bring United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese to deliver the 23rd Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture last month. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) played a vital role in Albanese's visit. It was a calculated political strategy to strengthen the lawfare campaign against Israel. But it went a bit further than that; it was a move by South Africa to pursue its anti-Western agenda.

The foundation and Dirco well understood that the United States Treasury had previously sanctioned Albanese for "directly engaging with the International Criminal Court to investigate, arrest, or prosecute nationals of the United States or Israel". It's against this backdrop that the US has taken the posture that South Africa has been undermining the national security of the US and that of its allies in recent years. This political backdrop between the US and South Africa continues to generate severe economic, trade, political, and diplomatic repercussions.

It's short-sighted for our government to align itself with – or befriend – any state simply because it's opposed to Western nations. Countries within the Global South that choose to challenge Western powers are free to do so, but South Africa shouldn't be drawn into these confrontations.

South Africa, through Dirco, must manage its international relations responsibly and impartially, engaging all nations without hostility or favouritism driven by narrow political interests or the agendas of specific

groups. Our diplomacy should be grounded in principle, not ideology.

We carry a sacred duty to build the nation envisioned by Nelson Mandela: one that eradicates poverty; confronts inequality; addresses landlessness; strengthens good governance; and restores dignity by improving the lives of all its citizens. These urgent priorities must not be overshadowed by unnecessary geopolitical battles that do little to advance the well-being of South Africans.

What's clear is that South Africa is obsessed with the US and Israel as it hasn't had a principled approach to dealing with global conflicts. The African National Congress's hard stance against the US and Israel has been absent in regard to the Russian government attacking Ukraine over the years, and its silence can still be heard loudly. While children and women continue to be killed and abducted for ransom in Sudan, our government has said nothing. The tyrannical ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front) in Zimbabwe, our neighbour, continues to abuse its own citizens, whose human rights are non-existent. Christians in Nigeria are being slaughtered daily without our government condemning or acting against such heinous crimes against humanity.

South Africa must adopt a principled, objective, and impartial approach when pursuing global peace. Consistency is essential. The stance we take in one conflict should be mirrored in our response to others of a similar nature.

However, South Africa's involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict doesn't appear to be driven by a genuine search for a lasting and balanced resolution. Instead, it seems to advance an anti-Western agenda and reinforce alignment with countries such as China, Russia, and Iran, nations widely regarded as adversaries of Western political ideals.

• Kenneth Kgwadi is a research fellow at the Middle East Africa Research Institute and holds a Master of Arts in African Studies from Ben Gurion University of the Negev (BGU).



Dr Naledi Pandor

Levick catapults to stardom with *Cats* casting

LEE TANKLE

Under the moonlight in Andrew Lloyd Webber's production of *Cats*, when the Jellicle cats come out to dance, Tannah Levick will be among them.

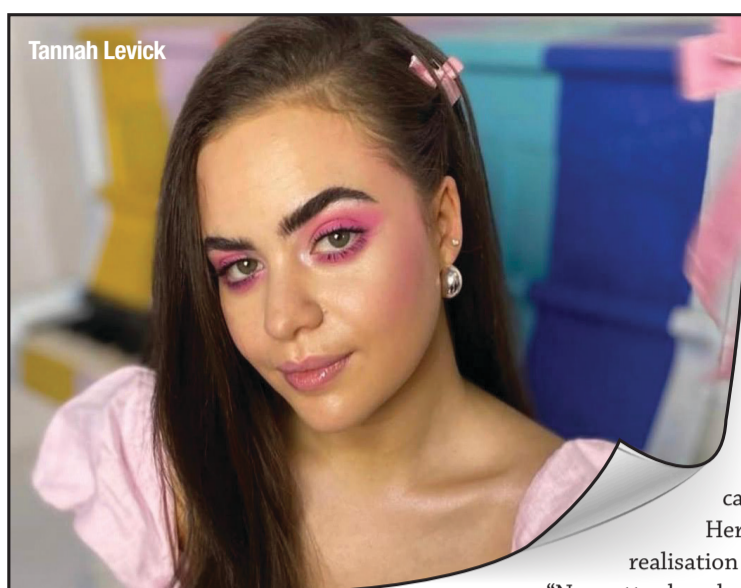
Cast in *Cats*, she joins a storied tradition of performers bringing the mysterious, magical world of the Jellicles to life that will begin performances in Cape Town in December before moving to Johannesburg in January.

Levick takes on the mischievous role of Rumpoleteazer, one half of the cheeky cat-burglar duo known for their playful antics and lively dance numbers.

Levick, 25, grew up performing, but it wasn't until she performed in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* in the King David Linksfield school production when she was in Grade 11 that she knew that being on stage singing, dancing, and acting was what she wanted to do for the rest of her life.

After matriculating, Levick studied at the Luitingh Alexander Musical Theatre Academy (LAMTA) in Cape Town, where she was able to hone her craft and become a true triple threat. Since graduating in 2021, Levick has been involved in numerous musical theatre productions in South Africa and internationally, including *Mamma Mia*, Disney's *The Magic Box Musical*, and *We Will Rock You*.

Levick auditioned for the show in October last year, and was waiting on tenterhooks until she got the offer in April this year, while



Tannah Levick

have to become a cat – it's a weird feeling. And obviously, you don't know how to do it right because you're human," she said. "The show is very physically demanding and vocally challenging. I stand by this: it's the hardest musical. I think anyone can do anything after being cast."

Her casting is the realisation of a dream, she said.

touring with *The Magic Box Musical*, to play the effervescent and naughty Rumpoleteazer, a role she has always wanted.

"Being in *Cats* means I've truly made my youthful dreams come true. As a young girl, I always wanted to be in musical theatre, and I believe Hashem said, 'I'm going to send you the hardest musical in the world and make you feature in it.' After this, I feel unstoppable," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Levick said that though she has been in major productions before, such as *Mamma Mia* and *The Magic Box Musical*, this has been unlike anything else. Once a performer has done *Cats*, they can do anything, she says.

"At first, it was weird because you literally

"No matter how hard this is, and as a kid you don't know how hard it's going to be, and how many events you're going to miss, and how many nights you're going to have to say, listen, I can't, I have to rest my body, I have to rest my voice, but I feel like I set out to conquer a dream, and I've achieved it."

Levick has been immersed in rehearsals, practising not only song and dance numbers, but how to be a cat.

"A large part of rehearsal is almost cat school," Levick said. "It sounds ridiculous, but you have to learn how to be a cat because you can't be a cringy cat, you actually have to learn how a cat walks, how a cat functions, and how they hear because they hear from their back."

"What's been amazing about it is that as an actor, when you become a character, you sometimes explore more parts of yourself," she said. "Because you're not yourself. It takes it further when you're a cat because you're already doing something silly. So you can go as far as you want. And you really challenge yourself and push your boundaries as an actor, a dancer, and a singer."

The hardest part of the rehearsal process has been building up stamina, she said.

"It doesn't stop. It's not a show where you can sit back for a second," she said. "It's highly energetic. We're athletes, and this show has proven to me that we have to treat ourselves like athletes. So, your stamina has to be good, singing and dancing at the same time. In most musical theatre, you sing and dance at the same time, but not like this, this is insane."

Being a part of the company reinforced why *Cats* is so iconic, Levick said.

"The choreography and music speak for themselves. You don't get pieces like this anymore. It's different to any other musical because you step into an entirely new world," said Levick, "You'll watch it and recognise the movements, and it's such a joy to see all those details come together. I love the world we get to explore, and how the choreography really transforms us into cats. Everything has a purpose, every song, every dance move, and that's what makes *Cats* so special. There's truly nothing else like it."

Sandringham High alumni reviving school

LEE TANKLE

A group of Jewish Sandringham High School alumni have joined forces with former schoolmates in an ambitious project to rejuvenate their alma mater, breathing new life into it.

Many Johannesburg Jews attended Sandringham High School, much like Greenside, Northview, and other top government schools, from the 1950s to the 1990s. So much so, that there were times when the school would literally close for the high holy days because either there wouldn't be teachers or there wouldn't be pupils in the class to teach. At Sandringham in those days, you could even opt to do Jewish Studies twice a week.

Though far from a Jewish school, Sandringham High maintained strong ties to the Jewish community, with about 10% to 20% of students being Jewish by the 2000s. "There were certainly many Jews who went there in the 1980s and 1990s. By the time I got there, it was probably still about 20%," said Benji Shulman, a 2004 graduate and active alumni member.

Said Shulman, "In the year that I was there, the school was at this really unique moment in South African history. I used to walk down the corridors, and you would hear five, six, or seven languages being spoken. There were a variety of religions. There was also a variety of people from different [social] classes. You had poor kids coming by taxi every day, and you had kids rocking up in fancy cars that were given to them by their dads.

"It was a place of diversity in the real sense of the word. So, you developed an understanding of South Africa, Johannesburg, and the rest of the world around you. People really appreciated that they could have that experience in the school. And they understand that, while the school isn't what it was, there's still an opportunity to continue that legacy in some way."

At the time that Caryn Conidar, the cofounder of The Human Resource Practice, attended Sandringham High in the late 1970s, it was the third largest feeder to the University of the Witwatersrand, and she hopes that through work being done by the alumni association, the school can return to that

place.

"I grew up with such privilege as a result of attending Sandringham. I still have many close friends from my school days. We want to create a school of which we can all be proud," she said.

So, as the Sandringham High School Alumni Association and school executive launched an initiative to restore infrastructure, boost academics, and revive the school's reputation, Jewish alumni joined the drive. The organisations are working with the Gauteng Department of Education to revamp the school.

Daniel Schay, Democratic Alliance councillor for the area, said, "Four years ago, when I started as councillor, if I could've cut Sandringham High School out of the ward and set it off as an island, I would have. It was a disaster in the heart of our ward.

"I'll never forget two years ago, driving past Sandringham High School, and I saw a mongoose running around because the grass was so out of control, literally wild animals were living there. Now it's being maintained," said Schay.

The chairperson of the alumni association, Frankie Coda, said that even today, Sandringham alumni live by the school's motto, *Factum Non Verbum* (actions not words), which is evident in how many people have come forward to help.

"There's an immense love for the school, and though everyone in the community may have written it off, the alumni believe that it's important to restore the school to its former glory."

Sandrigham High Principal Pascal Rekhoto and his executive, along with the governing body and the alumni association, have recruited the assistance of the CAP Edusafe Project, a volunteer-driven initiative aimed at rejuvenating public schools sustainably.

The project bases its work on the lessons learned from the successful rejuvenation of Jeppe High School for Boys, with CAP and the education department as partners.

"The combination of our roadmap with the credibility of the CAP brand and operating successes was a convincing proposition, and the department was supportive of the pilot at Sandringham," said Rob Katzen, who worked on the CAP Edusafe Project at Jeppe and is now working on Sandringham High.

The CAP Edusafe team began work at Sandringham High in June 2025, taking over security and helping to clear maintenance backlogs. Since then, corporate supporters have invested in major upgrades, including renovating the bathrooms.

At the launch of the revamp by the alumni association on 6 November, 120 alumni from many different backgrounds came together to show their support for a school where they spent their formative years.

"That school was important in my life, and taught me a lot of things, so it's a good opportunity to give back," said Shulman.

Coda said it was vital for the community to see the school as a safe, positive space rather than a centre of crime. Beyond that, Sandringham High carries a strong legacy as one of the top-performing schools of its time, holding deep heritage value for many in the area. Reviving it, he said, wouldn't just restore pride, it would uplift the surrounding community and its pupils.

After hearing Coda speak on ChaiFM about the upliftment projects at the school, 1986 Sandringham High School alumnus Darryl Brainin, one of the partners of Burgess Plumbing, was inspired to step in and help improve the state of the school bathrooms, a project that has now been completed.

Brainin wanted to help out so that others could experience the same joy that he had attending the school. "I have good memories of the sense of belonging at Sandringham High, it was a happy school, and what really brought pupils together was the energy and camaraderie, especially with the rugby games played every week."

Burgess Plumbing took on four bathrooms as a complete turnkey project, which included stripping and cleaning; doing necessary building work; redoing all plumbing, water, and drainage supplies; re-tiling; replacing glass and mirrors; installing new doors, toilet roll holders, soap and paper towel dispensers, and feminine hygiene bins; and upgrading the lighting.

One of the priorities was to install water-conscious solutions. The team installed Arumloo toilets, which flush on two litres of water per flush, waterless urinals, and demand taps fitted onto stainless steel basin troughs to minimise water wastage.

Said Schay, "Many people think that Johannesburg is a lost cause too. I vehemently disagree. If a few dedicated people can have the impact we're seeing at Sandringham High School in such a short time, we can replicate it in Johannesburg."



Rob Katzen speaking at the opening of the Sandringham High School Alumni Association



In class at Sandringham High School

Darker Shade of Pale debunks Jewish migration myths

CLAUDIA GROSS

When Cape Town Jewish sociologist Deborah Posel began digging through her late father's papers, she wasn't looking for a book. She was simply sorting through "chaotically jumbled piles", she says. What she found stopped her cold, a yellowing Union-Castle Line ticket dated 1902. Five names appeared: Mrs B. Posel, age 44, and four children.

Tucked with it was a British colonial permit issued in Libau on the Baltic coast (now known as Liepāja), allowing her to enter South Africa "on the grounds that her husband was already living in Longmarket Street, Cape Town". That single discovery became the thread that pulled a hidden family history, and, ultimately, a larger communal one, into view.



"I grew up knowing almost nothing about my father's father," Posel recalls. "He was a Russian man from somewhere in Eastern Europe. He wasn't a terribly nice man: embattled, difficult, not someone I enjoyed being around." The family never spoke of him. "He and his family were kind of erased from our lives," she says. "He was a blank."

Posel realised she had stumbled upon a portal into a vanished world. Still, it would be a decade before she was ready to enter it. "I found it in 2012, but I was working on other things," she says.

By the time lockdown came, Posel was back in Cape Town, frustrated with another writing project. "Lockdown was this strange interregnum where the rules didn't apply," she laughs. "I decided I felt like writing this book."

"I knew it was going to be a massive challenge. I had no diaries, no letters, no memoirs. Just a handful of photographs, and most of the people who could have helped me were dead. So, it became a kind of historical detective work."

Darker Shade of Pale: Shtetl to Colony, published by Wits University Press, is the result of that detective story: a hybrid of family memoir and social history that re-examines the Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to South Africa around the turn of the 20th century.

Very quickly, Posel's search became more than personal. "I realised that I'm not the only one with relatives who came from that part of the world but know almost nothing about that history," she says. What she found was that much of what South African Jews think they know about their origins is clouded by mythology.

The first myth lies in the image of the shtetl itself, the archetypal "Fiddler on the Roof" village where everyone was poor but united, oppressed but spirited. "That's really not what it was like at all," she says. "Even the smallest shtetl was very status-conscious, hierarchical, very inegalitarian."

The second myth is what she calls "the myth of Jewish exceptionalism": the tidy rags-to-riches tale in which penniless immigrants make fortunes within a generation. "Of course, it's not entirely untrue," Posel says. "There were some exceptional individuals. But they were the minority. Most Jews who arrived here had mixed fortunes."

Her grandfather was one of the ordinary ones. "He never made terribly much of his life. He was completely undistinguished, mediocre actually. And he was ashamed of that." That shame, she believes, silenced many similar stories.

In tracing where her family first lived, Posel found another paradox in District Six, the neighbourhood that became home to many Eastern European Jews in early-twentieth-century Cape Town. "I call it a shtetl that wasn't," she says. "In some ways it was familiar, you could speak Yiddish, there were mikvahs and synagogues. But in other ways, it was absolutely alien. It was an extraordinary mix

of people from all over Africa, Europe, and Asia.

"For people used to being a majority in their own shtetl, suddenly finding themselves a small minority in this dense, multiracial community must have been bewildering," she says.

Her own great-grandparents, she discovered, barely assimilated. "My great-grandmother lived in District Six for 26 years, but when her husband died, she couldn't sign her name in English, she marked it with a cross," Posel says. "That's about the most extreme statement of a failure to assimilate." Others adapted more quickly: a great-uncle who moved to Johannesburg learned English, naturalised, did business across ethnic lines, and prospered.

Posel also traces the economy of ambition that shaped the early Jewish community. "Many who achieved wealth began as travelling salesmen," she notes.

"It was lonely, stressful, and dangerous work. Some were killed on the road. Success didn't come easily, and it often came at social and familial cost."

Across generations, she observes a familiar migrant rhythm. "The first generation works its butts off in commerce or any job available so the second generation can be educated and enter the professions." She cites a study by Divane Nzima, a contemporary Zimbabwean

sociologist, showing how modern migrants feel they can't return home without visible success. "That's exactly the same dynamic that shaped early Jewish immigrants."

In colonial South Africa, Jewish newcomers confronted another reality: the ambiguous privilege of whiteness. Jews eventually won legal acceptance as white, but as what officials sometimes called "dark white". "It was a precarious and ambiguous status," Posel says.

That fragile positioning, she argues, shaped how Jewish migrants understood assimilation and how they internalised pride and prejudice.

Darker Shade of Pale began as a historical mystery, it ended as an emotional reckoning. "I started out not liking my grandfather very much," Posel admits. "But the more I learned about him, the more empathy I felt."

By the book's end, that empathy had deepened into grief. "I felt sad for him," she says. "For what he had to go through, and for how little of him I had understood when he was alive."

Posel hopes her book opens two windows.

First, she wants readers to see that "there are many ways of being Jewish". Eastern European immigrants argued fiercely about what Jewish life should look like. "They were always debating identity, observance, aspiration," she says. "Even when communal authorities claim to speak for all Jews, it's really an assertion of power. There's no essential Jew."

Second, she wants to lift the lid on the deeper Eastern European roots of South African Jewry. "Yes, many South African Jews have Holocaust survivors in their lineage," she says, "but a much bigger portion trace their origins to the late nineteenth-century east, long before the war."

Along the way, she even clears up an enduring piece of folklore, the claim that many Jews "meant to go to America but ended up in South Africa by mistake". The Union-Castle Line, run by shipping magnate Sir Donald Currie, actively recruited Eastern European Jews, arranging passage from the Pale of Settlement through Libau and London to Cape Town.

Darker Shade of Pale ends where it began: with the man she once couldn't bear to talk to. The final chapter is written as a series of questions she wishes she could ask her grandfather, the ones that family silence made impossible.

"It's a way of acknowledging that some stories can't be completed," Posel says. "But also that silence itself is part of the inheritance."

• *Darker Shade of Pale: Shtetl to Colony* by Deborah Posel is published by Wits University Press. It is available at Love Books, Exclusive Books, and online.



Deborah Posel's grandfather, Maurice Posel

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Selfless leaders and winners



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

There are moments during the year when the vibrancy of our community is on display for all to see. Past weeks present such a moment.

Starting with the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards on 2 November, which were so robustly supported, filling the Sandton Convention Centre, and highlighting the exceptional contributions of our community to the fabric of South African society. Hot on its heels came the Chevrah Kadisha Pillars event on 9 November, another gathering that drew our community in full force, once more filling the Convention Centre.

The Pretoria Board of Deputies held its annual general meeting (AGM) last week, in yet another display of strength and vibrancy from Jacaranda Jews. The AGM honoured the 40 years of devoted service of Board professional Myra Egdes to the community in Pretoria. Egdes was the editor of the *Pretoria Jewish Chronicle* for 40 years, from its first issue. At the same time, she was the long-serving secretary of the Pretoria Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. She is an exceptional person, and, at 90 years of age, has recently published a book!

This motif of celebrating enduring service resonated deeply at the Chevrah Kadisha, too, where it bestowed a special award on Chief Executive Saul Tomson for his two decades at the helm. Tomson's steady hand has charted the organisation's course through transformation, forging a centralised structure that draws admiration worldwide.

It calls to mind, too, the national Board's heartfelt recognition of Shirley Beagle for her steadfast contributions. Though no longer a full-time employee, Shirley continues to manage the material claims for our Holocaust survivors, a vital and meaningful duty that ensures that survivors can continue to live in dignity.

All too often, the spotlight falls on our communal organisations' lay leaders, those selfless volunteers pouring countless hours into our various causes. Yet it's fitting and essential to shine it also on our professional

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

staff, who labour tirelessly behind the scenes to keep our organisations thriving and attuned to our needs.

In continuing the theme of communal unity among our various bodies, last week, under the leadership of Gauteng Chairperson Danny Mofsowitz, leaders from several key community organisations gathered in Johannesburg to discuss strategy and improve co-ordination when dealing with potential communal crises. The meeting dealt with aspects including security, media, and social media responses.

Our diverse communal bodies have a history of seamless co-operation, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the immediate aftermath of 7 October 2023. That said, it is so important to ensure that best practice is maintained, and that co-ordinated co-operation is as smooth as possible, *dafka* now during relative calm, so that the best protocols remain in place for more complex moments.

December has traditionally been a tricky moment for the Board, and with so many of the Johannesburg community out of the city, it can provide its own challenges. We were reminded of previous crises including the tsunami in 2004; the KwaZulu-Natal riots in 2021, and various other events. It was thus so beneficial to have key leaders around a table working together to ensure that collective interests are safeguarded.

As we head into exam season, allow me to take this opportunity to wish our pupils and students the best of luck over the exam period. The Board remains available to all students in the event of exams clashing with Jewish religious practice. Please don't hesitate to flag any issues to us. Study hard, and good luck!

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

We're excited to invite the community to say farewell to the campus that shaped us, inspired us, and will always be part of us.



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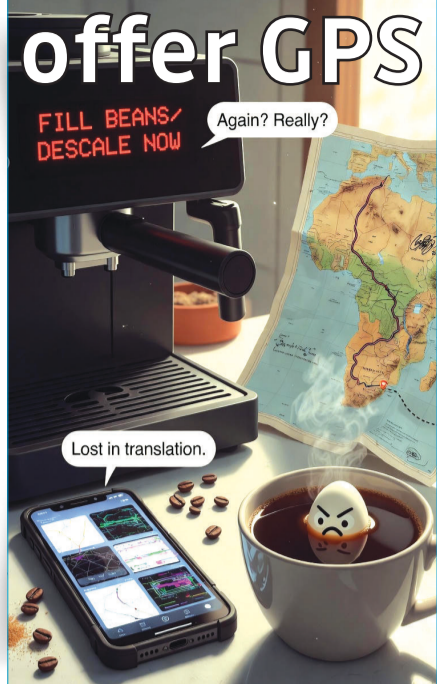


VICTORY PARK CAMPUS

Machines offer GPS into our soul

My relationship with my bean-to-cup coffee machine isn't a particularly good one. And whereas I know that every partnership has its ups and downs, this time I fear our differences might be irreconcilable. The problem? It has become a one-way street. My De'Longhi barks orders at me like a petty bureaucrat on a power trip: "Fill bean counter. Empty tray. Decalcify water." All the instruction, all the attitude, only to reward me with a mediocre brew at best. As I have told her many a time, if I am expected to put up with the high maintenance, the output needs to at least justify the investment.

This week I came across a story that made me feel marginally better about my technological failings. An 85-year-old man in France who set out to drive roughly 20km to a doctor's appointment. A simple trip. Straightforward. Routine. Except that he never arrived. Nor did he make it to another meeting scheduled for later that day. His worried family eventually alerted the authorities, and after a night of searching, they located him. In Croatia. Twenty hours and 1 500km from where he started.



Why? Because, he explained, that's where his GPS guided him. I have no idea if his GPS has a mischievous streak or simply resented being ignored, but I do know this: this octogenarian would never argue with his coffee machine. He would accept its instructions without protest, obediently emptying, filling, rinsing, and descaling as ordered, just as he followed the soothing French voice that led him across a continent.

There really are different types of people. There are the Blind Believers: those who follow Waze or Google Maps straight over a cliff if the arrow points that way. The sort who, if their navigation app told them to turn into a lake, would ask only whether they should indicate first.

Then there are people like me – the Defensive Negotiators. I enter into full confrontation with the voice. I question it. I challenge it. I tell it off when it recalculates my route in a tone that feels unreasonably judgemental. I do not trust it, and it does not trust me. The interaction is so stressful, that I invariably arrive at my destination exhausted, spent, and in need of a little lie-down.

And then there's the third group: the Triple-Check

Worriers. These are the ones who have Google Maps

open, Waze running in the background, and an out-of-print map book balanced on their knees, flipping pages nervously to cross-reference every intersection. They are the cartographical equivalent of people who still reconcile bank statements with a calculator while muttering under their breath. They are the ones who miss their beloved cheque books.

What's interesting is how our relationship with our devices reveals so much about us. Whether we obey without question; fight every instruction; or require three layers of verification, our behaviour says something deeper about our personalities. It speaks to our trust; our anxiety; our need for control; our tolerance for uncertainty; even our willingness to surrender a part of ourselves to the machines that increasingly shape our days.

In the end, our devices are mirrors, showing us who we are when the world isn't looking. They highlight our stubbornness, our dependence, our wish to believe we're still in charge. And sometimes what they reflect is a bleary-eyed man at 05:00, pleading with a coffee machine for a cup that proves the relationship is still salvageable. A small gesture of appreciation. A sign of hope. Or at the very least, something that doesn't taste like revenge.

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman



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