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# Tali Nates awarded Austria’s top honour for Holocaust education

LEE TANKLE

South African Holocaust educator Tali Nates, the founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), received one of Austria's highest civilian honours at the end of October. Nates was awarded the Decoration of Honour for Services to the Republic of Austria, by President Alexander Van der Bellen, in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to Holocaust education, memory, and dialogue.

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The award, which she received at a private ceremony at the JHGC on 26 October, marks significant international acknowledgement of Nates' work, as well as South Africa's role in preserving the lessons of the past for future generations. Nates dedicated the award to the staff who work with her at the JHGC.

"Any award I receive is always a surprise because I certainly don't do this work for that," she said, "I'm not doing it for awards, and I'm not doing it alone. The awards always go to the whole team at the centre. It's teamwork, it's the trustees, it's the volunteers, it's the survivors, it's everyone who is doing the work."

Nates said that getting this honour from Austria meant a lot to her, not only because of the recognition it gave to the work of her and the JHGC team, but also as the granddaughter of victims of the Holocaust. Her grandmother, Eleonora Turner, is from Nowy Targ, which was in Austria when she was born, but is now in Poland. A German speaker, her grandmother was murdered in August 1942 in the Belzec killing centre.

"I have a little family connection to Austria because during the partition of Poland, my father's family was under the Austrian Empire. So, they spoke German at home, and it was a full circle kind of thing, because my grandmother was born in Austria, even though it became Poland," she said. Nates said what lay behind this recognition was the President of Austria's acknowledgement of the work done in fighting antisemitism. It was also to recognise the increasing Holocaust memory, and the role Austria has played in remembering what happened, even when it was difficult with it having been a perpetrator.

Nates told the *SA Jewish Report* that considering



Austrian Ambassador Romana Königsbrun and Tali Nates

the great deal of work she and the JHGC did in collaboration with Holocaust organisations in Austria such as the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Jewish Museum Salzburg Global, this recognition was even more special.

"I work closely with many Austrian colleagues at the Jewish Museum, Salzburg Global, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, so this recognition feels especially significant," she said, "It places the work of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on a new level, not only in Austria but globally. Receiving the Gold Honour Medal, the highest distinction Austria awards, signals that even though we're based in Johannesburg, our work is seen, valued, and respected internationally."

When I was in Europe recently, the medal was immediately mentioned in my introductions at conferences, a reminder of just how meaningful this recognition is."

Nates was first approached in June about getting the award by the Austrian Ambassador to South Africa, Romana Königsbrun, and was informed that President Van der Bellen wished to bestow it on her for the work she had done in Holocaust education. He hoped to do this when he was in South Africa for a state visit in the same month.

However, Nates couldn't receive this honour from the president in June as she was leading a trip to Poland. So, it was decided that the ceremony for this award would be on 26 October, right after Austria's national day.

This award comes after a very difficult year for Nates, personally and for the centre, as Nates' mother, Judith Turner, passed away, as did the JHGC receptionist and administrator, Dowi Bele. This amidst recent protests outside the JHGC.

"This award came at a deeply meaningful time for all of us. It recognises what truly matters: remembering the past; learning from it; and educating others. To have that work acknowledged in this way makes the medal especially significant," said Nates.

## Madiba’s cousin visits Israel, defying SA hostility

>>Continued from page 1

but some that he has spoken to are "also keen to embark on the journey to Israel. I am happy to share with those that show interest in open conversations and meaningful engagements, but with those that are resentful, I will not waste my time," he says.

To fellow South Africans, he says, "Go see it for yourself, and ask as many questions as you want while you're there. That's the whole point – to learn and understand."

Limukani Mathe is a research associate at Unisa, which has a hostile attitude to the Jewish state. Despite this, he decided to visit Israel. "I never thought Israel was so peaceful," he says. "I was really impressed by how people co-exist."

Going to Israel "gives a balanced perspective – not biased, but balanced", he says. "Seeing the sites of the [7 October] attacks showed why Israel had to defend itself."

Dr Shelton T Mota Makore is a senior lecturer at UFS, which has a positive relationship with Israel. "I wanted firsthand information about Israel," he says. "Most of the information I had was hearsay or from social media. The most surprising aspect was the fact that Israel is a multicultural society, including 20% who aren't Jewish."

He has found that most of his colleagues "don't know much about what is occurring in Israel and how its society is constituted. I urge people to go to Israel and find out these things for themselves."

All three are Christian, and found the trip spiritually meaningful.

"As the world moves on from the hyper-politicisation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so too must South African institutions," says Modise. "The academic sector should prioritise integrity, knowledge exchange, and academic freedom above political posturing."

# Abundance versus sufficiency

Torah Thought

I clearly recall one evening some years ago, when we had a very interesting guest for dinner. He was prim and proper, turning down my offer of seconds with the statement, "Thank you, but I have had an abundant sufficiency." We were amused by the phrase. It may have described the food on the table accurately indeed. But on analysis, the expression is evidently an oxymoron. Abundance implies a state of plentifulness, while leaving room for more. Sufficiency, on the other hand, focuses on having just enough, without the need for anything extra.

This contradiction becomes apparent in an exchange cited in this week's parsha, where we find estranged brothers Esav and Yaakov meeting after more than three decades of separation. At the news that his twin was coming to greet him with an army of 400 men, a terrified Yaakov prepares to defend his family, prays, and sends a huge offering of gifts in the hope of appeasing him.

to reciprocate is, however, met with a firm and definite refusal by Yaakov.

In this conversation, the difference between plenty and everything is glaringly obvious. It isn't clear which of the brothers has more possessions than the other. But we do know who is satisfied with his lot – the definition of rich in *Ethics of the Fathers* (4:1).


Saying, "I have plenty" leaves room and appetite for additional accumulation of material goods. It implies, I have a lot, but I will be happier if I have even more. I may, in fact, be unhappy with my current state of affairs. In the words of the sages (Kohélet Rabbah 1):

"One who has 100 wants 200; and he who has 200 wants 400."

We, however, are disciples of Yaakov, who declares, "I have everything." It may not be a lot, but my needs are met, and I'm not obsessing over more. He has inculcated in us the attribute of satisfaction – the blessing of feeling truly wealthy by being content with our lot.

The juxtaposition of Yaakov's and Esav's respective material self-assessment illustrates so beautifully the difference

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin  
The Oxford Synagogue  
Centre



between abundance and sufficiency. We need to make every effort to emulate the example of our noble ancestor.

In return, may Hashem bless us with sufficient abundance.

After the fateful face-off, Esav questions the lavish offerings of livestock that were just delivered to him. He attempts to return the gifts to his brother with the words, "I have plenty." To which Yaakov retorts, "G-d has favoured me, and I have everything." At his insistence, Esav eventually accepts the presents. Esav's attempt

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# ‘People, not buildings, made KDVP special’

LEE TANKLE

“For six decades, this campus has been more than bricks and mortar. It’s been a living, breathing tapestry. Woven into its fabric are the threads of past lives.”

These are the words of King David Primary School Victory Park (KDVP) Principal Kevin Lees at the farewell assembly on 30 November, where past and present students and staff could say goodbye to the school that shaped them.

“First day of school tears; triumphant cheers on the sports field; silent concentration in exams; the joyful noise of the playground,” said Lees. “This campus has been a place where children have learned to read, write, and more importantly, to reason. They learned their *aleph bet* and their times tables. They’ve learned about *tikkun olam* – to repair the world. And they’ve lived that through countless acts of charity and kindness. A fiercely proud community has grown around this campus. A community bound by a shared commitment to excellence, faith, and each other.”

Present and past students and staff members filled the KDVP campus for the school’s last hurrah, to celebrate everything that the school has meant to them. All around campus, there were exhibitions through which alumni, staff members, and students could walk down memory lane and meander the paths they walked when they were younger. They were also shown the theatrical and musical talent that the school has produced. Alumni were particularly excited at the idea of seeking out their old school photographs and buying tuckshop food at bygone prices.

Musical performances from alumni and students in the KDVP band showcased what made KDVP so special to so many.



Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, told those gathered that as much as KDVP was unique, it wasn’t the buildings that made it special. “It’s the people who have given its life, its values, and its meaning. Every single staff member on this campus gives of their all, and has helped make



this campus so special,” he said. Seeff said that as a former principal of KDVP Primary School, this time had been especially difficult for him as KDVP had defined him. “I believe in the power of education and the power of our Jewish community to do great things,” he said.

He said this final assembly, at which students and staff members past and present were able to gather to say goodbye, was a celebration of what the campus meant.

“We have chosen not to mourn, we have chosen to reminisce and celebrate the life of this campus that has been lived through by all of us,” Seeff said. “We will celebrate through memorabilia and memory, nostalgia and connection, and through song, communal reflection, and reconnection, we will be thankful for the blessing that has been King David Victory Park.”

Bev Butkow, a KDVP alumnus and parent, said past pupils would carry the memories of this school with them. “We honour Victory Park by taking its spirit forward. To do that, we need to understand what made Victory Park unique. It was a school where every child had a place – achiever; deep thinker; creative; quirky; even those who didn’t know who they were. Teachers listened, noticed, and nurtured. They knew your story, and they even knew your dog’s name.”

“King David Victory Park’s exit is joyful not because we’re glad it’s over, but because its work here is magnificently, gloriously complete,” said Lees. “It has fulfilled its mission for generations; it has planted its seeds; and now its legacy

must travel, carried in the hearts of every person it has ever touched.”

He said he had experienced the magic of the school both as a principal and a parent, and his two boys had grown into the people they are because of what they learned at the school. “*L’dor v’dor* is a Hebrew phrase meaning ‘from generation to generation’, signifying a responsibility to pass on knowledge, traditions, and values,” Lees said. “It emphasises the importance of community, continuity, and legacy in a cultural, religious, or familial context. The concept is central to Jewish life, encouraging the sharing of history and instilling of character and traditions, from one generation to the next. King David Victory Park has been an embodiment of that principle.”

Former principal Jeffrey Wolf said that since the announcement that KDVP would be shutting its doors, he and his wife, Barbara, had been inundated with messages of sorrow from alumni and past staff around the globe.

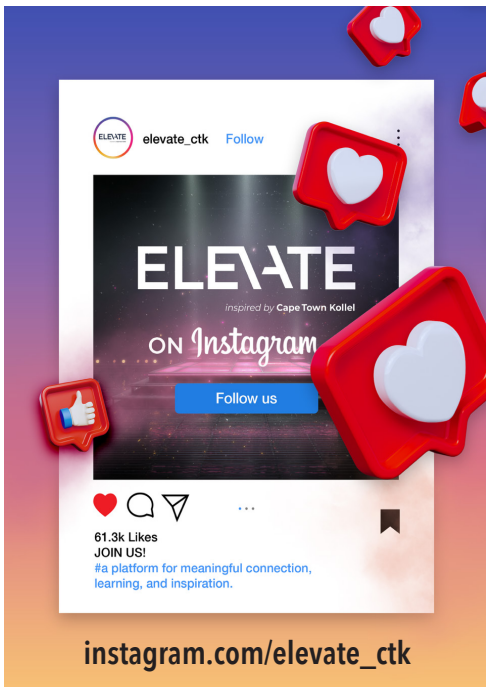
“They speak of its warmth, fun, and laughter, and the strong bonds of friendship which have remained here for decades, to persist. They speak of its dynamism, the unlocking of talent in the



classroom, on the sports field, honest leadership, and the attainment of outstanding results, all made possible in a high-powered Jewish education which ensured the stronger study of our faith and love of Israel,” he said. For Barbara, who spent more than 30 years at KDVP both as a teacher



place to place. “King David Victory Park will always be part of the heart and soul of this community. It has been a destination on our shared journey, and we will carry a piece of it in our hearts as the South African Jewish community continues its path forward.” Said Lees, “We have this echo in the halls of the new schools our students attend, in the boardrooms where our alumni will be, and in the Jewish homes that they will build, where the values learned here will be passed on by us all. The story doesn’t end here. It simply finds a new voice.”



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## Mass interfaith gathering ‘gives hope for SA’s renewal’

LEE TANKLE

The atmosphere was electric at the Motsepe National Day of Prayer on 30 November, a gathering of leaders from across South Africa’s faith communities. Among them, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein urged the country to embrace hope, resilience, and responsibility.

“It was an inspiring experience to be in the stadium on Sunday, to feel the buzz and the energy, the pulsating optimism, and excitement of 100 000 people packed into a stadium,” he said.

“I’ve seen and felt that in a stadium for a major sports match in South Africa,” Goldstein said. “But to be in a stadium where you can feel the energy of such a huge crowd, the energy of people who are excited to pray to G-d, to connect, to express their faith, to come together in a spirit of unity. That for me was moving and powerful.”

Goldstein, who has attended this national day of prayer organised by the Motsepe Foundation on and off for some years, said the warmth he felt on this day, when he was the sole representative of the South African Jewish community, showed that the government wasn’t representative of its people.

He said he was warmly received by everybody present, and when he got on stage to address the more than 100 000 people inside the FNB Stadium, he was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the crowd made up of many denominations including the Zion Christian Church.

“It was truly heartwarming and uplifting,” Goldstein told the *SA Jewish Report*, “the response of the crowd to me, not in my personal capacity, but as a representative of the South African Jewish community. I could feel the warmth, love, and connectivity shown by the crowd. There’s a deep respect and connection with the Jewish community, but even more so with the values that we represent.”

The chief rabbi said he spoke to the crowd about the values that all people should have: faith, memory, and moral responsibility, connecting it to the psalms in the Book of Isaiah.

“The crowd recognised, acknowledged, and supported all of these sentiments,” he said. “The values represented by what the Torah and the prophets have taught the world, the importance of ethics, and calling on the crowd to join me in spreading that message to South Africa.”

He said Isaiah’s rebuke of corruption and injustice speaks directly to South Africa today, with leaders who rebel; officials who take bribes; and a society that neglects the vulnerable. He emphasised Isaiah’s call to “cease to do evil”; “learn to do justice”; protect victims, defend orphans, and care for widows, reminding listeners that moral renewal must translate into action.

He pleaded for the country to fix its hospitals so that they offer dignity, to improve schools, and to empower police to protect communities. These, he said, are the real expressions of justice that South Africa desperately needs.

“The deeply religious crowd knows and



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein speaking at the Motsepe National Day of Prayer

recognises the words. When I say in the speech, ‘If I forget Jerusalem’; ‘We sat by the rivers of Babylon, and we remembered Zion.’ The crowd recognises all of that, and when I quoted the famous verse from Genesis 12:3, that ‘Those who bless you will be blessed, and those who curse you will be cursed.’”

Goldstein said it was important for the South African Jewish community to realise that we aren’t in a silo, we are a part of the spirit of unity and diversity in South Africa, especially in light of the past two years after 7 October 2023. He felt this not only in the crowd, but through mingling with various religious leaders in the guest suites.

“In the two years after 7 October 2023, I delivered several speeches, including last year at this same stadium, in which I proudly articulated our community’s connection to Israel and for the fight for human civilisation that Israel is waging against Hamas, a message I felt strongly about over these past two years. And you

can see in such a gathering that the ANC’s anti-Israel stance is out of sync with the spirit and values of the people of South Africa.”

The chief rabbi said this anti-Israel stance was symptomatic of the party’s alienation from national values, leading to its decline in popularity.

For him, being in the stadium and feeling the warmth of the many people there was reflective of the broader dynamics within South African society in that many values are shared, a fact important for understanding how South Africa will thrive.

“Many national surveys conducted by the Social Research Foundation have shown that the vast majority of South Africans are people who share all of the most important values needed to create a thriving society,” said Goldstein, “Values of moderation, faith, family, tolerance, and community. These values are shared by our South African Jewish community, Israel, America, and the free world.”

## Shutting out Gazans contradicts SA’s stance

NICOLA MILTZ

South Africa has closed its airspace to any further flights carrying Palestinians fleeing Gaza, a dramatic escalation in what has become one of the most politically charged and morally tangled refugee sagas in recent years.

More than 300 Palestinians remain in South Africa after arriving unannounced on two separate chartered planes in October and November, sparking confusion, competing narratives, and a growing standoff between government, civil society actors, and international observers.

The issue has also fuelled a firestorm on social media, where many South Africans protested the arrival of the flights and warned that admitting unvetted Palestinians from a war zone could expose the country to extremist infiltration. The heated online debate has put significant public pressure on the government.

South Africa’s position is further complicated by its status as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which commits states to offering protection to individuals fleeing conflict and persecution. The airspace closure raises questions about how these international obligations align with Pretoria’s current stance.

The latest decision means that no additional evacuees will be allowed in despite South Africa’s own claims at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Palestinians in Gaza are victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement.

Weeks earlier, 153 new arrivals were received by humanitarian organisation Gift of the Givers, and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola said that flight formed part of “a clear agenda to cleanse Palestinians out of Gaza and the West Bank”.

Gift of the Givers insists that Israel orchestrated the refugees’ “uncoordinated entry” into OR Tambo International Airport, labelling it “forced removals” and “ethnic cleansing”.

Its founder, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, has urged the government to block any further flights. “We don’t want them to leave their country; we want them all to go back. I encourage the government not to allow any more planes to come here,” he said, arguing that South Africa should instead help ensure that Gaza is opened so that Palestinians who have left may eventually return home.

Professor Loren Landau, senior researcher with the African Centre for Migration and Society at the University of

the Witwatersrand, said the government’s decision may be legally permissible, but was morally fraught.

“My understanding is that the government is within its legal rights to refuse entry to almost anyone. However, once they are in the country, they may apply for asylum and under most circumstances, should be allowed to stay until that case is decided. The question is what’s morally right and symbolically aligned with South Africa’s position.

“Supporting displaced Palestinians is the ethical thing to do. Showing public solidarity with Palestinians is also a way of burnishing South Africa’s moral credibility overseas. However, I suspect domestic political calculations in a country rife with anti-immigrant sentiment are preventing the government from doing what’s right.”

Landau said this tension lay at the heart of South Africa’s approach.

“All of diplomacy is a two-level game where they must balance domestic and international considerations. When things work out well, domestic and international interests align. In this case, the moral position South Africa has taken on the global stage definitely rubs uncomfortably with the anti-immigration sentiments that characterise domestic politics.”

Independent commentator and Institute of Race Relations fellow Sara Gon said the government and its allies were constructing a narrative that didn’t align with basic facts.



**Supporting displaced Palestinians is the ethical thing to do. Showing public solidarity with Palestinians is also a way of burnishing South Africa’s moral credibility overseas.**



“They appear to be trying to create a calumny about Israel trying to ‘depopulate’ Gaza. The number of Gazans who have tried to come in or pass through South Africa has been tiny. So it seems an inefficient way to depopulate Gaza. If Gazans can find a way to leave a war zone should they choose, then it’s up to them to do so.

“The Israelis have no administrative control over the Gazans. So Gazans have the right to use their own agency to leave Gaza, and they do it by plane if they can afford it, which some clearly can. Because of geography, the only way to fly out from Gaza is by an airport in southern Israel, which is what they’ve been doing,” Gon said.

“Sooliman is definitely trying to create the impression that it’s dastardly Israel to suit his anti-Israel narrative. It also suits the narrative that has been the basis of propaganda

for the past 50 years that the Palestinians are downtrodden, helpless victims of Israeli strength and aggression.

She said it may be that the South African government is supporting that narrative to bolster its pro-Palestinian credentials.

“It also may be that it’s just trying to avoid criticism from local groups about the laxness of its border controls in general, and the charge of large amounts of illegal immigration from Africa. It may not want, therefore, to seem like it’s positively encouraging asylum for Palestinians with this background in mind. Seeming to lay the blame on Israel therefore suits its needs.

“Whether SA is reluctant to admit Gazans for any other reason is unknown, but it’s certainly assisting people like Imtiaz Sooliman to perpetuate another trope.”

For Dr Reuven Ziegler, associate professor in international refugee law at the University of Reading and senior researcher at the University of Johannesburg’s Faculty of Law, the airspace closure exposes an unavoidable contradiction in South Africa’s argument at the ICJ.

“Ultimately there is a protection obligation that follows from the belief that a genocide is being committed, and so in a way, one has to square one’s own circle,” he said. If the South African government truly believes its own claim that Israel is committing genocide, “then it’s inconsistent to be returning people to it”.

Ziegler calls the move “surprising”, noting that South Africa isn’t at risk of being “inundated with plane-loads of people from Gaza”. Allowing “a plane

or two”, he argues, would symbolically strengthen South Africa’s stance while fulfilling its humanitarian obligations rather than undermining them.

“Closing one’s airspace is just an awkward framing,” he said. “In essence, it means Gazans are no longer going to enjoy the 90-day visa exemption – that arrangement is being suspended.”

With sharp disagreements between government, humanitarian actors, and legal experts, the Gaza refugee saga remains unresolved. What’s clear is that South Africa’s moral case against Israel grows increasingly difficult to reconcile with its refusal to admit the very people it insists are victims of genocide. The conundrum deepens: South Africa is taking an uncompromising stand on the world stage while closing its doors at home.



# Protest against The Kiffness blots Kirstenbosch’s summer landscape

CLAUDIA GROSS

South African musician The Kiffness, whose real name is David Scott, is being targeted by the anti-Israel lobby in Cape Town as it attempts to coerce Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens to drop him from its popular Summer Sunset Concert line-up.

Two protests have been held in the past two weeks, the latest on 2 December, demanding that The Kiffness be removed from its summer concerts line-up.

The repeated demonstrations, held two weeks apart, have reiterated the bullying tactics used by the anti-Israel lobby to prevent people from performing who don't push the popular "Israel is committing genocide" narrative.

Protest organisers point to a number of the musician's public social media posts as the trigger for their campaign. On 13 October 2025, Scott tweeted, "From the river to the sea, the hostages are free." On 28 November 2024, he posted, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. Dr Sooliman is a radical Islamist under the guise of a humanitarian & Gift of the Givers is the front for a far more sinister agenda." Critics say these statements and others amount to support for far-right narratives, genocide denial in Gaza, and Islamophobic rhetoric, and that giving him a stage at a major public heritage site is therefore unacceptable.

Protesters have accused the musician of racism, white supremacy, and Islamophobia, and said allowing him to perform would undermine the values of the public space. Palestinian Solidarity Campaign spokesperson Professor Usuf Chikte said the booking "normalises racism, supremacy, Islamophobia, and the attacks that have been directed at South Africa". He said the artist "belongs to a growing movement in South Africa, the MAGA movement – Make Apartheid Great Again", and referred to previous remarks by the musician as "horrible comments about the reintroduction of separation, about hatred amongst the people of South Africa, causing dissension". He told the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), "Please, don't allow such a person to perform at Kirstenbosch."

Scott responded briefly, saying, "I hope they remember to wear sunscreen and drink plenty of water, and I wish them well." In response to public criticism over earlier social media commentary he stated, "I have never denied apartheid. I have always said it was a terrible system."

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) released a strong statement defending the musician. SAZF National Spokesperson Rolene Marks said the campaign was "an organised attempt to intimidate an artist out of working". She said the hostility towards him went "far beyond criticism", and that "trying to block

a musician from performing because he supports the only Jewish state crosses a clear constitutional line. It is an attack on core democratic rights, not just on one artist."

Marks said the demand to remove him came from "a small, vocal group" attempting to "punish and silence" those with differing views. She said these groups were even willing "to cause financial damage to a local musician in order to enforce ideological conformity", describing the behaviour as corrosive to the country's democratic culture. She said audiences were free to make their own decisions. "The Kiffness is a gifted, proudly South African artist with a loyal, diverse audience. People are free to disagree with him. They are free not to support his music. The choice is straightforward. Don't buy a ticket."

She warned of the implications of allowing activists to decide who may take the stage.

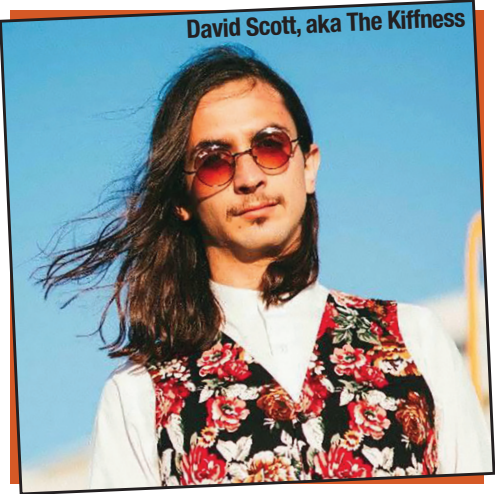
"What crosses the line is targeting venues, threatening organisers, and trying to shut down his career because his views don't match theirs," she said. Marks described such tactics as "bullying", and warned that they were becoming more common in cultural spaces. "Once we allow a mob to decide which artists may take the stage, everyone loses," she said.

Singer and television personality Heinz Winckler also voiced support for Scott. He described him as "a fellow South African, a Christian, a husband and father, and a very successful internationally acclaimed musician." He said Scott was "under attack by some narrow minded people who hate his views on current issues in our nation", and that these individuals were "now discriminating against him by calling for the boycott of his show at Kirstenbosch". "He is literally under attack for writing words," Winckler said.

He said the campaign threatened constitutional rights. "In a nation that supposedly has the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion, this is a serious blow to our Constitution and a very sad state of affairs. The Kiffness's human rights are under blatant attack. And if one South African's rights are in jeopardy, so are all of ours."

He encouraged South Africans to support the musician. "Go watch his show at Kirstenbosch; go listen to his music; follow him on socials; and give him a shout out." Winckler said the musician receives death threats and faces regular scrutiny. He appealed to the public to "stand for a united and truly free South Africa".

The Summer Sunset Concerts remain a major feature of Cape Town's cultural calendar, with local and international artists performing across a range of genres. SANBI has advertised the 2025/26 line-up as a celebration of connection and diversity, with the concerts held against the backdrop of Table Mountain. Scott remains on the official programme.



David Scott, aka The Kiffness

With two protests now behind it and national attention growing, the dispute has moved beyond a single performance. It now reflects wider questions about freedom of expression, protest, public institutions, and the balance between political accountability and artistic independence.

SANBI hasn't announced any changes to the schedule. The 28 December concert remains in place. Both protests have called for SANBI to remove

The Kiffness from this season's line-up. SANBI has acknowledged correspondence about the matter, but hasn't publicised a decision.

The coming weeks will determine whether public pressure results in changes to the Summer Sunset Concerts or whether the performance goes ahead as planned. The outcome is likely to influence how future cultural events navigate political division and expectations in South Africa.

## Over 300 rabbis and Jewish leaders call for removal of UN official who denied Oct. 7 rapes

GRACE GILSON – JTA

More than 300 Jewish leaders, including women's rights advocates and rabbis, urged the United Nations on Tuesday, 2 December, to remove Reem Alsalem, the United Nations rapporteur on violence against women and girls, for denying that rape occurred during Hamas's 7 October 2023, attack on Israel.

The letter, which was addressed to UN secretary-general António Guterres, came two weeks after Alsalem claimed in a post on X that "No independent investigation found that rape took place on the 7th of October."

In the letter, its signatories express their "horror and outrage" at Alsalem's rhetoric, and cite two UN reports from March 2024 and July 2025 that concluded that there was "reasonable grounds" to believe that sexual violence had taken place during the attacks "in multiple locations, including rape and gang rape".

The petition was organised by Amy Elman, a professor at Kalamazoo College, Michigan, who has authored books on antisemitism and state responses to sexual violence, and Rafael Medoff, the director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies. It was shared with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency soon after being sent to Guterres.

"The targeted sexual abuse of Israelis by Hamas and its supporters is one weapon in the arsenal of those seeking Israel's obliteration," Elman said. "It's outrageous that deniers such as Reem Alsalem are aiding and abetting the sexual violence by claiming it never happened. These apologists should be ashamed of themselves."

The letter's signatories include Deborah Lipstadt, the former antisemitism envoy; Judith Rosenbaum, the head of the Jewish Women's Archives; Rabbi Irving Greenberg, the former chairperson of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum; Rabbi Deborah Waxman, the president of Reconstructing Judaism; and Hebrew College president Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld.

Dispute over whether sexual violence took place as Hamas murdered about 1 200 people in Israel on



UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Reem Alsalem

7 October has solidified as a point of sustained interest for some of Israel's staunchest critics who allege that Israel and its supporters are using claims of rape as propaganda. Even the UN, frequently maligned by Israel and its supporters over its record toward Israel, has drawn allegations of complicity in the propaganda campaign from pro-Palestinian voices, though UN Rapporteur on Palestinian rights Francesca Albanese has also publicly questioned the claims. Albanese has faced her own calls for dismissal from the Trump administration.

In addition to the UN reports, independent reporting and research by an Israeli non-profit organisation have validated claims of sexual violence on 7 October.

In the X exchange that spurred the new letter, Alsalem was arguing with another user about the Israeli government's prosecution of soldiers accused of abusing a Palestinian detainee.

A day later, Alsalem posted a link to a Substack podcast from October, in which she criticised the credibility of the March 2024 UN report and said she had sought contact with the Israeli government to confirm its findings but had not received a response.

"The media, certain organisations, and the world basically fell into the trap that Israel set up, which is to project that there was barbaric sexual violence being committed by these barbarian Palestinian men, and it was spun around and disseminated and very much used in order to then justify the genocide," said Alsalem on the podcast.

Medoff said in a statement that Alsalem's continued employment reflected inconsistent standards when it comes to Israel and antisemitism.

"If a UN official made such a remark concerning rape victims from any other ethnic or religious group, there would be an international uproar," he said. "The same standard should apply to Israeli Jewish women who were sexually assaulted by Hamas terrorists."

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# Jewish Report

## The best gift we give our kids

Saying farewell to your children as they fly out to *machaneh* at the end of the year is bittersweet.

As a mother, it’s never easy for me – no matter how old my children are – to hand over the responsibility of their well-being to anyone else.

Quite simply, if it made any sense to roll my children up in cottonwool to ensure they were always protected, I would. Only, that is unreasonable and frankly unfair because children, like adults, learn from their mistakes. And those bumps and bruises, however painful, are important for their growth.

We would be doing a disservice to our children by not giving them any autonomy or independence. We all learn how to look after ourselves only by having that. Unfortunately, you can’t learn how from a book.

Parenthood is a bit like that too. No matter how many Dr Spock and the *What to Expect* books you have read and possibly studied, we learn daily about what it takes to parent. We also learn that each child is different, and so are their needs. So often, being a parent is learnt through trial and error. In truth, my sense is that every child needs love, attention, and freedom to grow. The rest is negotiable, but then I am no Dr Spock and I have certainly made plenty of my own mistakes.

Back to sending my children off to *machaneh* 2025. The one thing I’m certain of when I wave them goodbye with a tear in my eye, and as I watch them rush off with their friends with no backwards glance at me, is that I have done the right thing.

I am a product of many *machanot*. Some of the best times in my youth were at one or other camp. I went to both Bnei Akiva and Habonim, and I got so much from both.

The point is, Jewish youth movement camps are literally the best gift our community gives to our children. I say this with absolute conviction. It doesn’t matter which Jewish youth movement you or they choose. Most youngsters, I hope, gravitate to the one youth movement that best suits them. The point is, spending three glorious weeks being led by young adults who grew up in the movement is a phenomenal experience.

Let’s make a comparison. Those who don’t go to camp will generally head out with their parents, family, or friends to some seaside town or city, be it Cape Town, Plett, or Ballito to name a few. They will wake up in the morning, perhaps head to the beach, perhaps eat out, perhaps hang out with friends, but they will relax. There will be times they go out, find a club (depending on their age) and perhaps drink alcohol, or not. They might go shopping. They might run out of things to do. They might get bored. They might spend time moaning and getting on their siblings’ or parents’ nerves. Anything is possible.

However, with children at *machaneh*, getting bored is never on the agenda. Neither is alcohol or clubbing. They are also safe from outside influences and engage in good, healthy, clean fun.

They also learn a whole lot of useful, educational tools. They learn about how to deal with antisemitism. They learn about what it is to be Jewish. They do this surrounded by other Jewish kids.

When you send your children to a Jewish school, they learn these vital things in the confines of a classroom, invariably with exams and tests involved. This is important, but it’s not quite the same as how they learn at *machaneh*, where learning itself is fun.

Our Jewish youth movements have truly learnt the best ways of getting through to young people about who we are. There is discussion. There is debate. There is eating kosher food. Our children get used to washing their own clothes and (hopefully) keeping their tents neat.

They learn how to interact and work with other young people because they literally can’t escape them. They learn songs, traditions, and for the most part, they have the best time.

My son told me recently, after three *machanot* and many mini *machanot*, that he had learnt to be confident and hold his own through his youth movement experiences. He learnt that he was okay, and that there were many kids who held similar views to him who wanted to hear what he had to say. When he told me this, I knew I had done right by him.

Now, I know that some parents opt not to send their children to *machaneh* because of negative stories they hear or out of fear that their children might not be having fun every minute of the three weeks. It’s true, they might not. *Machaneh* may not be for everyone. And some children may try it out and not want to go back. Fair enough. But they are such a minority.

Also, there may be an hour or even a day that your child doesn’t have a good time. But one out of 21 is not a bad innings, especially when they have the best time the rest of the time.

I look around me at the Jewish leaders in the community and most of them are products of Jewish youth movements. For so many of us, we cut our teeth in leadership and strategy at *machaneh*.

As I drop my children off, I recognise the excitement I see on those *channichim*’s faces. It’s indescribable. I guess three weeks without parents telling them what to do is pretty awesome. Seriously though, those faces remind me of that same feeling of elation I had heading out to camp all those moons ago.

I recognise that there’s competition between youth movements as to which is better, and all that nonsense. The reality is, to use the well-worn cliché, there are different strokes for different folks, and variety is the spice of life. We need different Jewish youth movements to fit different kids and their needs. The competition is healthy to a point.

What isn’t healthy is trying to destroy the reputation of the other Jewish youth movement to make yours the strongest. They all need to survive and thrive so that children have choices and different offerings to suit who they are and what they need.

For those kids who are on their way to *machaneh*, I have no doubt you will have the best time. For those missing out this year, consider that there are only so many years where you can get this incredible experience that only children get to have.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**

**Editor**



# Battles won, hearts lost: Israel’s diaspora dilemma



OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ

In the aftermath of the most recent – and seemingly enduring – Gaza ceasefire, Israel finds itself in an invidious and deeply uncomfortable position.

On the battlefield, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) achieved a series of tactical and operational successes unprecedented in modern warfare. It dismantled an encircling “ring of fire” that had, for years, threatened Israel’s national survival. A ring comprising Hamas entrenched in Gaza; Hezbollah in southern Lebanon; Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria, supported by Hezbollah, Russia, and Iran; the Houthi missile threat emanating from Yemen; the Shiites in Iraq; and Iran itself, with its looming nuclear capability and formidable missile arsenal.

Israel shattered that encirclement over two years, taking on each threat in turn, across several domains and theatres that stretched for thousands of kilometres. Yet, although magnificently victorious at the tactical and operational levels, the strategic picture remains ambiguous. Israel now confronts an existential strategic challenge, particularly in the realms of global narrative, perception, diplomacy, and the lived realities of Jews in the diaspora.

The military achievement is extraordinary, and shouldn’t be understated. In Gaza, the IDF faced what is arguably the most challenging operational environment on earth. A densely populated urban battlespace built on a vast network of fortified tunnels prepared over decades.

Hamas designed this subterranean world to control the tempo of warfare, protect its command structure, hide missile stockpiles, move fighters invisibly, and store hostages, all while placing civilians above these tunnels as human shields. In this extraordinarily complex environment, Israel executed combined-arms warfare in a manner never before seen. It developed new doctrinal approaches to urban combat, integrating armour, infantry, engineers, UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles), precision fires, intelligence, and subterranean operations in a tightly co-ordinated system that will now become the subject of study for global militaries for decades. Military analysts, planners, and generals from across the world have already travelled to Israel to understand how the IDF managed to conduct successful combined-arms manoeuvres in an environment deliberately designed to neutralise exactly those strengths.

Beyond Gaza, the operational achievements continued. Israeli intelligence, humiliated and caught off guard on 7 October 2023, rebounded with astonishing speed and precision. Its infamous “pager operation”, in which it neutralised Hezbollah’s top echelon in a single devastating stroke, will enter the annals of intelligence history as one of the most audacious decapitation operations ever conducted. In Syria, Israel supported opposition groups, executed a series of pinpoint strikes, and contributed directly to the collapse of Assad-aligned Hezbollah infrastructure, effectively uprooting Hezbollah’s forward base in Syrian territory. Israel shrugged off the Iranian-Houthi threat using superior missile defence technology and electronic warfare capability. In a bold demonstration of reach and intelligence superiority, Israel executed a strike on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure deep inside Iranian territory with near impunity. Taken together, these achievements amount to what most analysts would classify as a resounding operational victory.

Yet, military victories don’t automatically translate into strategic success. Almost immediately after the initial shock of the Hamas atrocities faded, Israel found itself losing the narrative war with startling speed. For perhaps two days after the 7 October attacks, the world saw Israel as the victim of an unprecedented massacre. Sympathy proved fleeting. Within days, global discourse reframed Israel not as a nation responding to mass murder but as an aggressor waging a “genocidal” and “disproportionate” war. This discursive shift occurred despite Israel’s military conduct being, by historical standards, restrained, given the magnitude of the provocation and the complexity of the battlespace.

Part of the strategic erosion stems from the transformation of global information ecosystems. Israel today faces a hostile combination involving mainstream media scepticism; social media ecosystems dominated by influencers hostile to Israel; and a new, disturbing alliance between elements of the woke left and woke right. Personalities with massive followings, some previously considered mainstream, now promote fringe narratives without challenge. Ancient conspiracy theories have resurfaced with renewed intensity, including claims of Jewish control of global finance; secret cabals directing world events; and Israel as an unseen

puppet-master. Influencers such as Kanye West, Dave Smith, Nick Fuentes, Tucker Carlson, and Candace Owens now articulate ideas that echo themes last seen in Europe during the darkest decades of the twentieth century. Their audiences number in the tens of millions. Zionists and Israelis – a code word for Jews – are held responsible for assassinating Charlie Kirk and manipulating the commanding heights of Western governments.

As the strategic consequences for world Jewry compound, Jewish life in the diaspora is more precarious than at any time since the 1930s and 1940s. Frothing protesters drive off Jews from university campuses. Synagogues require fortified security. Jewish students hide their identity for fear of intimidation. Zionism, a core expression of Jewish self-determination, is now treated as a form of racism and, increasingly, as justification for harassment. In major cities across the Western world, anti-Israeli sentiment has mutated into unambiguous anti-Jewish animus. Paradoxically, Israel’s defanging of the “ring of fire” has caused consternation in previously thriving Jewish communities worldwide.

To understand how this happened, one must also recognise that Israel entered the war from a position of strategic weakness. Before 7 October, Israel was already a deeply divided society, mirroring global left-right splits. The internal conflict between political camps, secular and religious communities, and competing visions of the state had reached levels of acrimony unseen in decades. Weekly protests, constitutional battles, and social fragmentation dominated national life. These divisions distracted the country and contributed directly to its unpreparedness. The grounds for strategic failure existed long before the first shots of the war rang out. A divided Israel isn’t strategically resilient, regardless of its battlefield excellence.



Offer Winter, IDF Givati commander, in a Hamas terror tunnel at the border of the Gaza Strip

The question that now arises is whether Israel can regain strategic ground. The answer is complex but not without hope. Israel must pursue a multi-pronged approach. It requires a renewed diplomatic offensive that re-engages moderate states regionally and globally, rebuilding partnerships, and restoring trust. Israel must modernise its information strategy and treat the information space with the same seriousness it treats conventional warfare. It must address internal cohesion. A society in internal conflict cannot sustain long-term strategic credibility. Israel must also confront the global resurgence of antisemitism by partnering with allies, civil society organisations, and technological platforms to expose, counter, and delegitimise extremist rhetoric.

Israel has won undeniable tactical and operational victories. Alas, at a steep strategic price. The IDF may have dismantled the “ring of fire” surrounding Israel, but the broader battle for security, narrative sovereignty, and Jewish security worldwide remains unresolved. A coherent plan regarding the future of the West Bank and Gaza isn’t apparent. Battlefield success alone cannot secure long-term stability. Only a combination of unity at home, diplomatic initiatives abroad, and mastery of the information domain can restore Israel’s strategic standing in a world where perception now shapes power as much as firepower itself.

• Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.



# Too soon, too painful? Why we watch 7 October films

OPINION ADAM THAL



People often ask why filmmakers are already creating movies about 7 October 2023. They ask why anyone would want to relive something so devastating. Within the Jewish community, this question carries real pain. The trauma of that day still sits just beneath the skin, and for many of us watching it unfold on a screen feels almost unbearable, like reopening a wound that never truly healed.



Yet we make these films. And people continue to watch them. To understand why, we need to look at how humanity has always processed its darkest moments. After World War I destroyed an entire generation, filmmakers used storytelling to make sense of the chaos. Holocaust films were created not to entertain, but to preserve truth and confront the attempt to erase an entire people. Global tragedies like the Rwandan genocide, apartheid, and even natural disasters such as the Thailand tsunami have all been explored through cinema. Storytelling is how societies process trauma. It's how we turn grief into memory and meaning. 7 October is no different. For filmmakers, creating these narratives is a way to face what feels impossible to comprehend. It allows us to study the moment closely and ask the world to truly see what happened. When done with integrity, the purpose isn't to exploit, it's to tell the truth. So who are these films made for? They are made for a global audience which wants to understand more than what the headlines reveal. They are made for history, so that the emotional reality of the moment isn't

lost. They are made for future generations who one day will ask what it meant, and how it changed us. Cinema becomes a vessel that carries memory forward. Most importantly, these films are made for us as a Jewish people. Even when they hurt to watch. Even when they feel overwhelmingly close. Even when they take our breath away. 7 October enters a long line of moments in which others tried to silence or erase us. From ancient expulsions to Russian pogroms; from the Holocaust to modern terrorism, our story has always included attempts to break us. Yet we're still here. Telling these stories is part of our survival. We tell them to educate the world, but also to teach our children and their children. We tell them to protect truth in an age where truth is constantly challenged. We tell them because every generation of Jews has faced those who wished us gone, and every generation has risen again.

These films aren't easy to watch and they aren't meant to be. When trauma is portrayed with respect, it unsettles us, but it can also strengthen us. It reminds us that Jewish survival isn't an idea. It's a lived reality filled with courage and resilience. Movies about 7 October may feel too soon and too painful, but they ensure that this moment becomes part of the moral record of our time. They help us honour those we lost; and they help our children understand both the pain and the pride of being Jewish. If telling these stories ensures that the world never forgets, then perhaps that's reason enough for filmmakers like me to keep making them. • Adam Thal is a multi-award winning South African filmmaker and executive producer, who is known for bringing powerful human stories to global audiences.

# October 7 TV series – a Red Alert for Jewish nervous system

OPINION DANA COHEN



Before I pressed play on *Red Alert*, an Israeli television miniseries based on the 7 October 2023 attacks, my whole body paused. Not dramatically, but in that instinctive way the body freezes when it expects to be overwhelmed. The breath catches, the chest tightens, and the mind prepares for impact before a single image appears. I have heard versions of that same pause from Jewish moms, clients, colleagues, and friends all over the world: I want to know the truth, but I don't know if my body can handle knowing it. As both a therapist and a Jewish mother, I felt that tension deeply. The part of me that longs to bear witness, and the part that's afraid of what witnessing it will stir. Watching anything about 7 October isn't like watching a documentary. It doesn't stay intellectual or distant, and it doesn't feel like "history". We aren't just viewers. Our bodies respond as though the story belongs to us, because in many ways, it does. It's embodied. It's inherited. It's ours, living inside a nervous system shaped long before we were born. The four-episode series moves through the day in real time: 06:29; 07:32; 10:14; 12:15. In Israel, 7 October fell on Simchat Torah and Shabbat, turning a day of joy and rest into a day of horror. These were the moments when joy collapsed into terror and alarm, when a peaceful holiday morning broke open without warning. Trauma researcher Dr Rachel Yehuda teaches that we don't inherit trauma itself. We inherit the adaptations to trauma, the survival instructions carried in our biology. That's why an image, a timestamp, or a single detail about 7 October can feel like an alarm inside the body. Our nervous systems carry echoes of the past, even when our minds insist that we are safe in the present. Torah scholar Avivah Zornberg writes that in Jewish memory, yesterday and today are neighbours. Watching *Red Alert* awakens not only the present moment, but the layers beneath it, the ones we never chose but still carry. We inherit our ancestors' blue eyes, brown eyes, curly hair, and trauma they never got to process. As psychoanalyst Galit Atlas writes, it becomes part of our "emotional DNA". And it wakes up when we witness stories like this. But it's not only pain that gets passed down. We inherit resilience. We inherit intuition, vigilance, and courage, the strengths that helped our ancestors survive. It is not only what hurt them that lives in us, it's also what saved them. When someone tells me, "I cannot watch it," I don't hear indifference. I hear wisdom. Avoidance is a nervous-system strategy, an attempt to stay functional when we are already overwhelmed. For many Jews today, our baseline is high. Our stress response has been active for too long. Avoidance says, "I need to stay present for my children. I cannot absorb more pain. My body is already at capacity." This isn't weakness. It's the body trying to protect us. And yet, many of us still feel pulled to witness. We feel responsible to truth, to memory, to our people. This creates the impossible in between: I cannot watch. I cannot not watch. Both are human. Both come from care. If you choose to watch, grounding yourself before and after makes a real difference. Before you begin, put both feet on

the floor, and let your body feel supported. Inhale for four counts, hold for one, and exhale for six. Press your fingertips together. Look around the room, and name five objects you can see. Place your hand on your heart and your belly, and say quietly, "I can watch this without abandoning my own body. I'm safe in this moment." You can pause the documentary at any time, and return to your breath. Grounding isn't weakness, it's resilience. When you finish watching, give your body a soft landing. Feel your feet on the floor. Take one slow exhale. Name five things you can see. Place your hand on your heart and say, "I'm safe in this moment. My feet are on the ground. I can come back to myself." This brings the nervous system back to the present, and reminds the body it's safe enough to settle. Elie Wiesel wrote, "To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time." For many Jews, watching *Red Alert* isn't about curiosity or shock. It's about responsibility. We watch because truth matters. Memory matters. Our people matter. Our children will ask. History must be documented. Silence is dangerous. We watch because this didn't happen to strangers. It happened to us. But watching doesn't mean sacrificing our well-being. It means showing up with compassion for our own bodies and respect for the truth. For Jewish mothers, this is especially complicated. We hold our children's questions and our own heartbreak. We carry the past and the future at the same time. Watching *Red Alert* feels like opening a door we want to keep shut for our kids. Yet the pull to witness remains, because motherhood is memory, responsibility, and love.

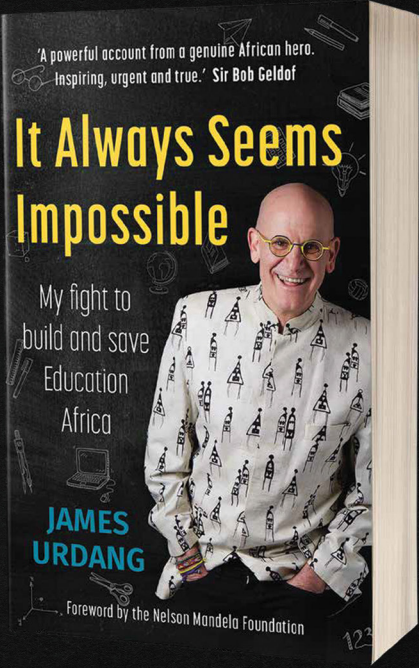


Holocaust survivor, psychologist, and author Dr Edith Eger writes, "We can face the truth without letting it imprison us." That's the work Jewish mothers do every day, holding truth with tenderness, fear with strength, and grief with so much love. We don't watch because we're unbreakable. We watch because we're connected. Because these are our people. Because memory is sacred. Because hope is an act of resistance. Whether you watch or choose not to, you're still part of this story and part of this people, held by the same collective heart. Hope is in the way we tuck our children in at night; in the way we teach them who they are; in the way we hold fear and love at the same time. May that hope carry us forward with strength. • Dana Cohen is a therapist, speaker, and Jewish advocate specialising in trauma, identity, and eating disorder recovery.

# NOW AVAILABLE

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# Jeryko hits world tour with huge SA following

GILANA LAB

When the lights dimmed and the spotlight hit international Jewish singer Jeryko at The Base on Tuesday, 2 December, this time he wasn't surprised that hundreds of people of all ages had braved the rain to come watch him.

His surprise came back in 2019, when he performed at Bnei Akiva machaneh and discovered that he had a huge loyal audience in this country that he never knew about.

"I didn't really know that I had listeners here," he told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "Back then, I was shocked at how everybody knew the music and felt connected." Since then, South Africa has become one of his strongest bases. "On Spotify analytics, South Africa is one of my top five," he said proudly. "It's literally like New York, Tel Aviv, Miami, Jerusalem ... South Africa."

This show forms part of Jeryko's Sunrise world tour, which includes a performance in Cape Town, Bnei Akiva camp, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Miami, New York, and Philadelphia.

While he has a huge following, he says of the momentum behind his music, "We haven't even started yet." He attributes his popularity to a mix of personal evolution, spiritual grounding, and the surge of global Jewish creativity he feels proud to be part of.

Long before he became one of the most recognisable young Jewish voices on the international scene, music was simply woven into his life. "I was always in bands throughout high school," he said. "Pretty much always playing music. Not really singing, but playing guitar."

After high school, he headed into the industry from a different angle, studying the business of music in the

United States. He immersed himself in management, label work, and building other artists' careers, convinced that his path was behind the scenes.

That changed in a single backstage moment. While managing another act on tour, he watched everyone step onto the stage and felt something shift. "I realised I was just missing playing, missing performing, and connecting with an audience," he said. That feeling pushed him to start creating again. "I started working on my own music, started putting it out slowly. I didn't have any plans for what it was going to become."

Even when things began to take off, he kept his expectations in check. "Did I expect to blow up? No," he said, "but once I set my mind to it, I was like, all right, we're doing this. If I'm doing it, we've got to go all the way."

South Africa became an unexpected but meaningful part of that journey. His original connection back at machaneh is part of why he's back for the Sunrise world tour. The tour is named for his new album *Now the Sunrise*, a project shaped by the emotional landscape of the past two years.

"It really feels like now is the time to rise together, and the sun is coming out. We're able to start healing and start really celebrating and building again," he said.

He doesn't frame 7 October 2023 as "inspiration", but rather the beginning of a collective journey. "It's the pain

we've been through and the resilience we've shown ... and now it's like, all right, let's move together."

His music continues to reflect his Jewish identity, something longtime fans recognise instantly. "Totally," he says when asked whether he still weaves Jewish themes and *nigunim* into his songs. For him, it's inseparable from the energy he wants to share. "Music, for me, is a vessel for carrying energy and a message. It's a blessing, and I'm grateful that people resonate with it."

He said that for him, a tour is "about momentum, and the message we're holding for this tour, about the sunrise, is that it needs that momentum to take us into the next stage." If Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and the first South African shows are any indication, he's getting that energy back in full force. "It's been super lit. Fun, good times everywhere."

He credits a broader wave of Jewish creativity for pushing him forward as well. "We're definitely in a renaissance for Jewish music," he said, pointing out that two Israeli artists sold out Madison Square Garden in just the past year. "This is just the beginning."

And in that space, he feels completely at home. "People struggle, people are lonely, people have a hard time," he said. "When you get together and listen to music you resonate with and realise a lot of other people resonate with the same things, you realise that maybe you're not as alone as you thought. And you can just dance it out."



## War above, Hamas below: Gazan activist speaks out

GILANA LAB

"I want a future without Hamas. Not for Israel, but for my people. For Palestinian children who deserve a life shaped by dreams rather than fear." These are the words of Hamza Howidy, a Gazan peace activist who spoke at a *SA Jewish Report* webinar this week.

Howidy told how his life had been shaped by the realities of growing up under Hamas rule and by a personal journey that led him far from the beliefs he was raised with. "Recognising someone else's pain doesn't erase mine. And recognising my pain doesn't erase theirs," he said.

He described his childhood in the Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City as one defined by control long before he understood the word. "In Gaza, you don't choose politics. Politics chooses you," he said. His family had no political involvement, but that meant little in a society where every institution, from the classroom to the mosque to the university, fed into a single ideology.

His first school was Dar al-Arqam, run by Hamas. "Every morning began with jihadi songs," Howidy said. "Indoctrination wasn't something we noticed. It was simply the air we breathed." By the age of 10, he had memorised a third of the Quran. Later, at the Islamic University of Gaza, ideological instruction became part of every degree. "No matter what you study, you must study Sharia. You must study every Hamas leader. They try to shape you into the perfect ideological soldier."

Behind the façade, he was quietly questioning everything. "I was an agnostic in a society where that cannot exist. So you learn how to pretend. You learn how to survive."

In 2019, Howidy joined a civil protest movement called We Want to Live, made up mostly of young people demanding economic reform and free elections. "We had no weapons. We had no foreign support. We just wanted the chance to live normally," he said. Hamas responded by arresting hundreds. Hamza was taken with them. "For three weeks, they tortured me in what we call the slaughterhouses," he said. "They accused me of everything. Israel, America, the Palestinian Authority. I was just a student demanding dignity." His family secured his release with a \$3 000 bribe.

He tried to keep his head down, but in 2023, he joined protests again. This time, the consequences were even worse. "The second arrest was worse. They took my dignity, my health and my hope, and then demanded another bribe. Five thousand dollars," he said. That experience left him convinced he wouldn't survive if he stayed. "I realised

they would kill me eventually. Not because I was political, but because I refused to be their puppet."

He fled through Egypt and Turkey, eventually boarding what he described as "an immigration or death boat" to Greece. "When I stepped onto European soil, I felt relief for the first time in my life."

One month later, the 7 October 2023 massacre occurred.

He was in a refugee camp when the news broke. "I thought it was propaganda," he said. "Even after 19 years under Hamas, I couldn't imagine something so horrific." As videos emerged, he realised the scale of the attack. "I still cannot comprehend how a human being can do what I saw that day," he said.

His immediate fear was for Gaza. He called his family, who told him their neighbourhood was already collapsing. "My father said, 'They destroyed Gaza. We have to run.'" Howidy begged them to head south. "I told them, 'If you stay, you will die. Not because of Israel, but because Hamas will use you as shields.'"

They fled, but their safety didn't last long. Hamas members arrived at their tent in southern Gaza, threatening them because Howidy had published an article urging Gazans to demand the release of Israeli hostages. "My family had the war above them, and Hamas beneath them. There was nothing left to stay for." With help from donors, they managed to cross into Egypt. "It cost everything they ever saved, but they survived," he said.

Earlier this year, Howidy took part in a Holocaust education programme in Poland. Some questioned why a Palestinian from Gaza would take such a trip, especially during a war. Howidy dismissed the criticism. "Recognising the pain of another group doesn't take anything away from your own," he said. At Auschwitz, he found himself staring at piles of belongings, "I asked why they would bring pots to a death camp. It made no sense to me." The guide explained that Jewish families believed that they were being resettled. "That sentence

broke something inside me. The idea that you can murder people and, before that, give them false hope."

His account of daily life in Gaza before the war challenges some common assumptions. When asked how much ordinary Gazans knew about Hamas's military tunnels, he said, "We didn't know the tunnels were under our homes." Residents suspected Hamas used hospitals or schools, but not the sheer scale of the underground network. He described a bombing in 2021 that left a crater in his street. "Later, I realised that I had been sitting above a tunnel days before. If we had known, we would have left. We know Israel targets tunnels," he said.

According to Howidy, support for Hamas has all but disappeared. "The idea of armed resistance is broken," he said. "Gazans saw Hamas steal aid, execute critics, and hide underground while children starved above them. Hamas betrayed us."

Conditions inside Gaza today are devastating. "Eighty percent of civilian infrastructure is destroyed. Two million people are displaced. People have forgotten what privacy is. They have forgotten what a toilet is. Children have infections everywhere," he said. Online videos of well-stocked shops, he said, aren't representative. "Those shops exist, yes. But only corrupt officials and wealthy

people can buy from them. Ordinary people rely on aid." With no functioning police or civil order, "Gaza is no longer a functioning society. It's a survival zone ruled by gangs, criminals, and armed men."

He described corruption among Gaza's leadership in stark terms. "Yahya Sinwar left prison with nothing. Within four years, he owned a villa, a hotel, restaurants, and a money exchange. Gaza drowned while the leaders became millionaires," he said. "People think corruption in Gaza is political. It's personal. Your life or their power."

When asked about Western protests, Howidy said, "Some people truly want peace. Some are anti-Israel for ideological reasons. And some glorify Hamas without understanding what Hamas actually is." On Queers for Palestine, he said, "In Gaza, Hamas would execute them. But I appreciate anyone who supports Palestinian civilians as long as they don't support Hamas."

"Recognising Jewish pain doesn't erase Palestinian pain. Recognising Palestinian pain doesn't erase Jewish pain," Howidy said. It's a principle that has shaped his journey and his way forward.

Hamza Howidy

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*Mike Abel, the founder and executive chairman of The Up&UpGroup, was this week awarded the Financial Mail AdFocus Lifetime Achiever Award and the AAA Alumnus Luminary Award. The SA Jewish Report spoke to Abel, Jewish Achiever Business Award winner in 2018, about it.*

south african

# Jewish Report

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**Our last print edition of the newspaper for 2025 will be on  
11 December 2025 and will be back on 15 January 2026**



# Maron returns home to ready Western Province for T20

LEE TANKLE

After years of developing talent across the globe, Cape Town-born Cricket South Africa (CSA) Level 3 certified coach Ryan Maron has come home to Western Province to help steer the provincial side through the high-stakes T20 Challenge.

Maron just completed his nearly 10-year coaching journey with the Afghanistan national cricket team in 2024, serving as Afghanistan’s fielding coach at the 2015 50-over World Cup in Australia and New Zealand and the T20 World Cup in Australia in 2022.

Guided by his father’s love for the game, Maron quickly rose through Western Province sport, making the U13 cricket and football teams after moving to Rondebosch Boys’ Preparatory School. He later focused fully on cricket, earning full colours, representing Western Province U19 and completing his Level II coaching qualification.

From 1998 to 2005, he held a provincial contract, moving between the A and B squads, and spent several seasons overseas in the Netherlands, Lancashire, and Warwickshire, where he played alongside Proteas legend Allan Donald.

Alongside a professional career, he established his Cricket School of Excellence in 1999 as his passion wasn’t just for playing the game, but sharing the joy of the sport with others through coaching. “My passion has led to my livelihood,” he said.

Since 2019, Maron has collaborated with Proteas great Jonty Rhodes, delivering high-performance coaching across six countries before heading back to Afghanistan in 2022.

He has also coached at the University of Cape Town and Wynberg Boys’ High School and worked as a fielding consultant for the Dolphins.

In the Pakistan Super League, he assisted the Quetta Gladiators to a top-four finish and briefly stepped in as head coach. His biggest success came with Zimbabwe’s SOGO Rangers, winning the 2024 National Premier League and earning the title of Coach of the Tournament. He repeated both achievements the following season, worked with the Lagos Strikers in the Zim Afro T10, and joined the Lions during their Cape Town tour. He has also been coaching at his school of excellence in Cape Town.

It was after this success that head coach of the Western Province Men’s team, Rory Kleinveldt, approached Maron and asked if he would be interested in coaching the team that he once played for in the CSA T20 Challenge.

“I’m honoured to work with Western Province again,” said Maron, “For many years, I wasn’t involved with them after I retired. So it’s amazing being back, wearing the Western Province badge on my chest and training at Newlands. With Western Province having so much history and heritage and being a former player, I love being involved with them.”

Coaching for Western Province is a nice change of pace as he doesn’t have to be away from his wife and two children for such extended periods of time, Maron said.

“I’m in a good space being home. My family were incredibly supportive – my wife, my parents, and my in-laws. The hardest part was leaving the kids for long trips, sometimes for two or three months. It was emotionally

tough, but I had to get on with my job because it’s our livelihood. Their support made it possible.”

Since starting to coach the Western Province team, Maron has helped them win

department where the team needs support.”

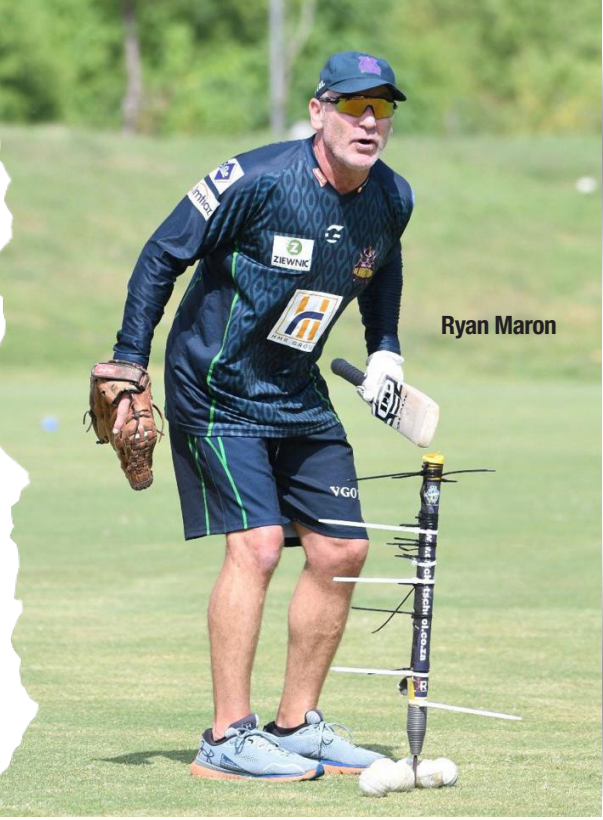
Maron is a part of a four-person coaching team, with Kleinveldt serving as head coach; assistant coach Qaasim Adams; and Proteas white-ball batting coach JP Duminy.

For Maron, though all parts of the squad need to work together, as a fielding coach, he knows fielding is an important area of the game.

“Games can be won or lost with fielding,” he said. “It’s really important that players put emphasis on it, and I work on it with a lot of statistics. I track all the fielding they do during matches, and give the players honest feedback. If players are slacking, dropping catches, or missing fielding, the statistics don’t lie. Fielding is important now with the modern game.”

Maron said that although he hadn’t coached domestic cricket in a long time, about 30% of the players in the Western Province team were former international players who had played at the highest level.

“It’s great to see how former internationals are helping younger cricketers. The only difference is



Ryan Maron

three out of five games. “The boys have really taken to my coaching style,” he said. “I like to get stuck in and contribute across all areas of the game. If I can offer advice or guidance from my experience, I’m always willing to help, with the head coach’s permission, in any

that obviously it’s not the international scene, where there are big crowds and hype around the games. Domestic cricket in South Africa is different. But it’s nice to work with these cricketers, younger and older, and give them care.”

# Cardiovascular link to sudden death during exercise

LEE TANKLE

It seems unthinkable for someone who is fit, active, and healthy to collapse mid-run or during a sports game.

Yet each year, this nightmare strikes a small number of people.

However, experts warn that exercise isn’t the cause, and people shouldn’t become hysterical because it happens to a very small number of people.

“If you’re looking at the entire population that exercises; the amount of life gained through practice and exercise; and the quality of life, if you look at the gain in those terms, and then you look at the small number of people that die during exercise, the pros far outweigh the cons,” said Wayne Derman, specialist sports medicine and exercise physician.

“Every time somebody dies during or after exercise, it’s a catastrophic thing, and it triggers an emotional response, but that doesn’t mean that exercise isn’t good for you,” said David Jankelow, clinical cardiologist and president of the South African Heart Association.

“Exercise is protective, but the point is that when people die from exercise who are below the age of 35, it’s usually due to a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy where there’s inappropriate thickening of the heart muscle. There may be other congenital inherited or acquired issues with respect to the electrical system of the heart, which is difficult to elucidate.”

For those above the age of 35, it’s usually due to coronary artery disease – a narrowing of the heart arteries. “But exercise is still protective, and if you look at the death rate of marathons, it’s low. But unfortunately, from time to time, it happens,” Jankelow said.

Derman reiterated that this phenomenon, called “sudden death during exercise”, is rare and no cause for alarm.

“Most of the causes of sudden death associated with exercise are related to cardiovascular conditions. And when we look at cardiovascular conditions, there’s a very clear demarcation in age,” he said.

For those under the age of 35, death in these circumstances is mostly as a result of structural cardiac conditions, Derman said. These are congenital abnormalities that one has had since birth or has

inherited, and are often unavoidable. “So, for example, there would be something called hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy. These are conditions where the heart muscle itself is abnormal,” said Derman “There are also groups of conditions where there are abnormalities in coronary arteries, where they run abnormally in the wall of the heart rather than on the outside of the wall. And there are conditions where there are abnormalities

with the iron channels in the heart that cause electrical problems. It would be those groups of conditions that cause a sudden cardiac death.”

Derman said that for those over 35, sudden death during exercise is mostly attributed to coronary artery disease, in

which the arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle – the coronary arteries – become narrowed or blocked. This reduces blood flow to the heart.

Similarly, Jankelow said symptoms such as chest pain with exercise would be of concern. “That’s angina, which is due to blocked arteries,” he said.

Jankelow suggests that those older than 35 should be screened to ensure that they are healthy. “How far you go is difficult. It depends on symptoms, history, and family history,” he said. “A family history of sudden cardiac death, particularly at a young age, is worrying. Those individuals might need extensive investigation. But a middle-aged athlete should be screened, have a basic examination, and at least an electrocardiogram (ECG).”

Hatzolah paramedic Avigdor Hack said the Hatzolah ECG project, in which the organisation takes ECGs of every high school child at Jewish schools to look for abnormalities that could lead to sudden cardiac death in adolescence, has led to more than 2 000 ECGs and found three children with abnormalities that needed intervention.

Derman said a point of concern for those under the age of 35 is viral myocarditis, inflammation of the heart muscle (myocardium) caused by a viral infection such as influenza. It can affect the heart’s ability to pump blood, and sometimes leads to serious complications, including heart failure, arrhythmias, or sudden death.

To prevent these kinds of issues, Hack said, the most important thing is that people avoid exercising when they are sick. “There are so many different things that could cause your heart to stop when you’re doing exercise. The best way to prevent it is not to exercise when you’re sick,” he said.

Derman said the most important thing was not to ignore symptoms. “People who have either abnormal heart rate during exercise or palpitations, or have any form of chest pain, dizziness, or breathing abnormalities, should get that checked out to see if there are any of these underlying causes that can be determined,” he said.

“It depends on the patient’s history,” Jankelow said. “First, how are they feeling? Any shortness of breath, chest pain with exertion, or dizziness is concerning. Risk factors like smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes can indicate a higher chance of blocked vessels. Family history is also crucial. Sudden death in a first-degree relative may suggest a genetic issue, and warrants further investigation.”



Photo: Gustavo Rodrigues



# Mistletoe and peanut muffins: it's lucky we're Jewish

Anyone who says they aren't a fan of Hallmark Christmas movies is either a liar or a jilted fiancé. You remember him? He's the finance bro, always named Jayce or Tyler, who watches helplessly as his hard-working city girlfriend is forced to take an urgent pre-Christmas business trip to Sweet Daisy Hills, where she will inevitably bump into a flannel-clad lumberjack-adjacent man named Chuck.

Stella, exhausted and over-caffeinated, intends the visit to be quick and corporate. She's there to finalise a strategy to take over the last organic peanut-butter cup production plant in North America. Efficiency is everything, which is why the comical collision with Chuck outside "The Muffin Cup" catches her so completely off guard. One spilled Cortado later, and instead of being irritated, Chuck apologises to her coffee for what his boots have endured. And with that line, millions of viewers melt.

Less than one musical montage later, Stella discovers herself helping with the frantic run-up to the Peanut-Muffin Christmas Market while falling, inevitably, for Chuck, the man who lives more simply, more wholesomely, more in touch with festive magic than she ever thought possible. The problem? Well, apart from her hostile peanut-butter plant takeover, there's also her fiancé back in New York, whose calls she's been dodging with impressive agility.

The market succeeds; the romance teeters. Jayce arrives to reclaim Stella, beans are spilled – organic, locally roasted beans, naturally – Chuck is wounded in that silent, stoic Chuck way, and Stella stands alone, muffin in hand, metaphor complete.

But all Hallmark narratives resolve with twinkle lights and a suspiciously well-timed mistletoe. Chuck's nephew, named Chill, engineers a reunion, bygones become bygones, and Stella abandons her corporate identity in favour of running the last organic peanut-butter production line in the United States. Because, of course she does.

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



And yet, as much as many of us love these movies, Jews will never be the sexy lead.

Yaakov is no Chuck. Yossi is not Jayce. And Stella would die before being called Brocha-Gittel. There will never be a "Bean Cholent in Sweet Daisy Hills" on Hallmark Channel. We know this.

And that's perfectly fine. In fact, it's important. Because this time of year, as Christmas music fills the malls and inflatable reindeer colonise suburban gardens, our children absorb a powerful lesson: we can enjoy something fully, affectionately, enthusiastically, and still know that it doesn't belong to us.

That's a deeply Jewish message. We know who we are. We know our stories, our calendar, our rituals, our obligations. We don't need December to pretend to include us in its mythology in order for us to feel complete. And we certainly don't need to appropriate a festival that isn't ours in order to give our children joy.

It's an expression of Jewish confidence. Perhaps, in a world that increasingly insists that everything must be for everyone, learning that some things aren't ours and that this is okay, is an act of cultural maturity. It teaches boundaries. It teaches respect. It teaches pride in our own, without needing a Christmas tree in the corner to validate us.

So by all means, watch the movies. Enjoy the lights. Laugh at Chuck and roll eyes at poor Jayce. See how other people celebrate something meaningful to them.

And then switch off the TV knowing this: some stories are lovely to watch, and even lovelier not to borrow.

The bottom line is that we don't need a Hallmark script to feel whole. We've got our own plotline, our own miracles, our own ending. And unlike Stella, we don't need to abandon who we are to get there.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Ties that bind across faiths

There are weeks when the soul of our country feels a little lighter, when the ties that bind us across faith and tradition grow visibly stronger. Last week was one such week. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) was privileged to take part in two significant interfaith gatherings: a conference co-hosted by the Institute for Global Engagement and the South African Council of Faith Based Fraternals; and a session of the Gauteng Ethics and Anti-Corruption Council.

At the first event, Rabbi David Shaw, representing the SAJBD, spoke movingly about how interfaith dialogue has forged deep and inspiring friendships between him and religious leaders from diverse traditions. He expressed the quiet hope we all carry: that these personal connections might ripple outward, modelling the possibility of understanding in a society that too often feels fractured.

At the second event, Gabi Farber-Cohen joined a panel alongside leaders from the Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Rastafarian, and KhoiSan communities. Together, they explored how faith can strengthen integrity, uplift society, and inspire real, positive change.

The interfaith space is a crucial platform for our community. In a South Africa where public discourse can sometimes feel closed and hostile, interfaith spaces remain one of the few open doors. Here, leaders can meet as equals and engage with the areas in which there is common interest. We are always so pleased to learn that many of the pressing issues for other faith groups are the same challenges with which we grapple: education; safety; religious rights. This is also a rare space in which deep set differences can be placed to the side in favour of rigorous and

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



honest engagement. What strikes me every time is how readily religious leaders lean into compromise and cooperation. One might imagine that those most anchored in sacred tradition would be the least flexible, yet the opposite proves true. Because they serve something far larger than personal ego or narrow interest, they create room for the other. Their commitment to the holy makes space for the human.

There is also so much we can learn from one another's outreach initiatives, from the way different communities care for the vulnerable and mobilise for the common good, and how other religious groups are benefiting South African society. These aren't abstract lessons, they are practical ideas that we can carry back into our own work.

Over the weekend, representatives of the Board from across the country met in Johannesburg to discuss the work of the Board, debate the situation for our communities, and look forward to the coming years. This provided a crucial opportunity for our regional leadership to work through the various challenges that affect each of us, and to attempt to formulate a strategy that will address these issues proactively. Our community is heterogenous, and our challenges are varied. These conversations are vital in ensuring that our unity isn't uniformity, but the hard-won harmony of diverse voices determined to move forward together.

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

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





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# Herzlia prodigy wins world ballet title at 15

LEE TANKLE

At just 15 years old, Herzlia student Leah Grace Roytowski this week achieved a dream many dancers only fantasise about, becoming world champion at the International Dance Open Ballet Championships in Belgium.

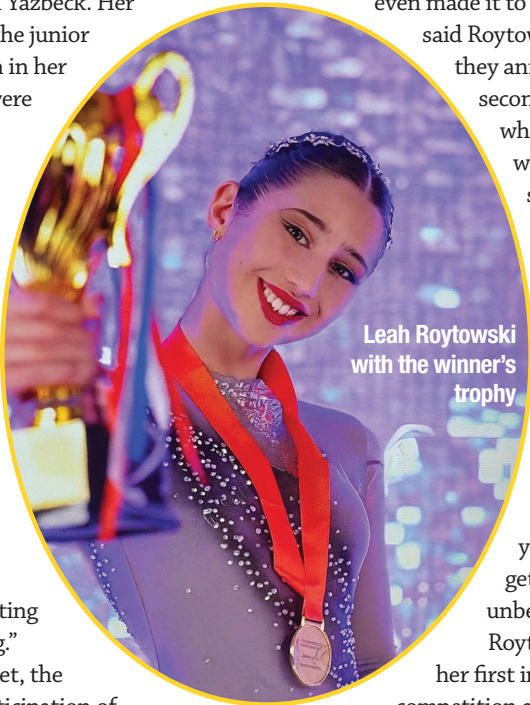
Dancing since the age of three, Roytowski has dedicated her entire life to ballet. This year, she was allowed to perform at the South African Body of Dance competition in Cape Town in June, where she got her Western Province Colours, and then performed at the South African International Ballet Competition in Johannesburg in July, where she would eventually be given her Protea Colours in Dance on 27 October. She and her duet partner, Zara Yazbeck, were invited to the International Dance Organisation Jazz and Ballet competition in De Panne, Belgium, from 28 to 29 November.

“It was surreal. I’ve never been to a different country to compete against other countries before, which was an amazing experience overall. It was great to get Western Province Colours and then get South African Protea Colours. I feel so proud of myself,” Roytowski said.

Roytowski performed two dances at the competition in De Panne, a repertoire which is a solo piece, and a duet with Yazbeck. Her repertoire placed fourth in the junior division, while her duet won in her division, and the two girls were named world champions.

“One of the stages was in a massive theatre with a huge audience and about 10 judges, so it was nerve-wracking,” said Roytowski, “but on the big stage, I performed with my ballet duet partner, so we kind of just calmed each other’s nerves and said, you know, we’re just gonna enjoy it, and it was amazing seeing everybody in the audience clapping and my mom shouting in the audience with the flag.”

After completing their duet, the two girls were waiting in anticipation of their scores, and the numbers just kept going up. When it came to announcing the top three, the girls were filled with excitement.



Leah Roytowski with the winner's trophy

“My duet partner and I were holding each other’s hands so tightly. We couldn’t believe we even made it to the top three,” said Roytowski, “And when they announced the second-place winner, which wasn’t us, we just got up, screamed, and hugged each other. We couldn’t believe that it was all worth it. We worked so hard, and we’ve been dancing together since we were about six years old, and to get this far, it was unbelievable.”

Roytowski described her first international competition as the experience of a lifetime.

“The vibe was incredible. We had a huge country ceremony and South Africa was front

and centre,” she said. “Everyone was kind and supportive, people even came up to Zara and me to say, ‘Wow, you’re amazing!’ Even though it’s a competition, no-one tried to bring you down; everyone made you feel included and uplifted.”

Roytowski said maintaining a balance between ballet and school was often difficult, leaving little time for herself as she spends her days in school and her evenings at ballet, often until 20:00.

But, no matter how difficult it is, Roytowski’s passion for ballet keeps her going as it’s a way for her to express herself, and she loves being on stage.

“My favourite part is getting on stage and performing, showing all the hard work you’ve put in and making people feel something in their chest and stomach. Ballet has been an art for decades, and being able to carry on that gift is truly amazing,” she said.

“Ballet is my way of expressing myself, and being a character in a ballet is almost like turning into somebody else. It’s just a way of expressing your feelings. Not only in ballet, in contemporary and modern dance, you can express so much feeling. To me, it’s about showing emotion, and showing the audience how passionate you are about it.”

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