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South African Jewish Report

www.sajr.co.za

SA's protection of Albanese 'profound moral failure'

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) has thrown its weight behind United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese, placing the country in opposition to several European nations that recently called for her dismissal, as well as the United States, which sanctioned her in 2025.

David May, a senior research analyst at US-based think tank, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, says Albanese has grown increasingly bold in her attacks on Israel. "Encouraged by supporters who seek Israel's destruction, Albanese has blurred the line between criticising Israel and promoting antisemitic tropes of power and malice."

Though some Western countries have pushed back against Albanese's inflammatory rhetoric, "the South African government has doubled down in its support of her", he says. "After all, the ANC-led government has played a key role, alongside Albanese, in turning Israel and its supporters – the Jews – into pariahs, thereby justifying anti-Israel and antisemitic violence and discrimination."

He says Albanese's "antisemitic and eliminationist rhetoric against Israel is a symptom of a UN system irredeemably biased against Israel", which should encourage Western countries to "eliminate the special rapporteur position focusing on Israel and the many other manifestations of anti-Israel bias within the UN".

South Africa's Minister of International Relations, Ronald Lamola, said on 23 February that "South Africa is concerned about attacks on special procedures mandate holders in general, and Ms Francesca Albanese in particular. Special procedures mandate holders play a key role promoting and protecting human rights, and they must be protected."

Dirco spokesperson Chrispin Phiri highlighted Lamola's statement about Albanese by posting it on X. Responding to Phiri's tweet, Hillel Neuer, the executive director of UN Watch, asked, "Why is South Africa's ANC government joining the murderous Islamic Republic of

Iran and terrorist Hamas to back the first UN official in history condemned by France, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands, for antisemitism, Holocaust inversion, and violating the UN code of conduct?"

Lamola was giving a national statement at the 61st Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Switzerland. He made the comment about Albanese on the same day that Washington's new envoy to Pretoria, Leo Brent Bozell III, was formally accredited as US ambassador to South Africa. When US Secretary of State Marco Rubio sanctioned Albanese in July 2025, Rubio said that it was because she had "spewed unabashed antisemitism; expressed support for terrorism; and [had] open contempt for the US, Israel, and the West".

Senior research consultant on US foreign policy, Michael Walsh, says Lamola's support of Albanese could damage the relationship between South Africa and the US. "Even though the comment is phrased in moderate terms, I doubt that will matter to the Trump administration. It will take offence."

The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Albanese's own country, Italy, called for Albanese's resignation or dismissal after her comments at the recent *Al-Jazeera* Forum in Doha, where she suggested that Israel was "a common enemy" for all.

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks says Lamola's remarks "signal to South Africa's Jewish community that this government prioritises ideological hostility towards Israel over its constitutional commitment to combat racism and uphold human dignity".

It's a "national disgrace" that a senior minister would publicly intercede on behalf of an individual "whose resignation is being demanded by credible voices globally due to her documented record of antisemitic rhetoric, Hamas apologetics, and the wilful denial of

documented atrocities," Marks said. She called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to "disavow these remarks, and withdraw South Africa's support for Albanese."

The SAZF also called on parties in the Government of National Unity to "state unequivocally that Minister Lamola doesn't speak for them, and that they reject any alignment with those who traffic in antisemitism or apologise for terrorism."

Professor Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, lamented

what his organisation has been saying for some time, namely that Dirco "is no longer pro-South Africa, it no longer speaks for South Africans, it speaks for foreign agendas".

"Iran is burning, and Dirco is silent," Modise says. "It's silent on continental issues. South Africa needs to wake up and realise that our foreign policy is hypocritical, it's inconsistent, and it serves foreign agendas and not South Africans."

Benji Shulman, the director of the Middle East Africa



Powering Purim

Abby Feldman and Sara Berget tucking into their first Purim hamantaschen

See Purim stories on pages 7, 8 and 9

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

that "Albanese, whose role it is to advocate for Palestinian rights, has in no way engaged in helpful ways to address their plight, but rather traffics in antisemitic, hate-filled rhetoric."

Instead of defending her uncritically, "South Africa should be helping her to undertake her role in a way that doesn't propagate hatred," says Milner.

Bafana Modise, spokesperson for the South African Friends of Israel, says Lamola's statement demonstrates

Research Institute, says Lamola's statement is part of a "long line of public demonstrations in favour of Hamas and other actors shielding Palestinian entities from accountability". He says it should be seen as "part of Albanese's current international campaign, where she has done media appearances to shore up support for her office after calls for her resignation."

Continued on page 3 >>

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ROLENE MARKS



Next week, Jews around the world will celebrate Purim. We're all familiar with the timeless story of Mordechai and Esther, and how they saved the lives of Persian Jews from the evil Haman who wanted to exterminate them. For Jews, the resurgence in every generation of those sworn to our

destruction isn't just folklore or accounts from biblical history. It's stark reality.

For Mordechai and Esther, it was the evil Haman. For us today, it's the nefarious Khameini and his nihilistic regime that's dedicated to the elimination of the Jewish state. History doesn't just repeat, it almost rhymes!

Now we wait with bated breath to see if another historical event will repeat. Will Israel and Iran trade blows like we did in June 2025, when Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, aimed at neutralising the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile threat? A United States-led military offensive targeting assets that belong to the tyrannical Iranian regime seems almost guaranteed. It is believed that the US will attack targets in partnership with Israel.

Since 28 December 2025, hundreds of thousands of Iranians have taken to the streets in mass protests, first against rising inflation and then, with the strength of momentum, against the regime itself. Thuggish security forces responded by slaughtering an estimated 32 000 people, but there is growing speculation that the number of dead could be much, much higher.

Despite an internet blackout, the accounts of atrocities committed against Iranians have made their way onto social media, and the scenes are horrific. For the Jewish state, it's not just a reminder of the horrors inflicted on us

on 7 October 2023, it is deeply personal. Iran has sponsored the demonisation of and terror attacks on our country. Iranians and Israelis hope that the US will act by striking regime targets. Israelis know that we will feel the wrath of the regime, which will target us with ballistic missile barrages like it did last June, but we are prepared to deal with it if it means an end to the heinous regime that holds us all hostage to terror.

As the US increases its military build-up in the region and Israel remains on high alert, the question all Israelis have is not if, but when. We feel an ominous sense of *déjà vu*, except this time, we know what to expect and how to prepare. It cannot be stressed enough that ballistic missiles fired from Iran are not the same as the rockets and missiles fired by Hamas or Hezbollah. The former are deadly. During last year's Operation Rising Lion which lasted 12 days, 32 people were killed and 45 730 compensation claims were filed for damage caused.

Israelis are preparing. In our stoic and resilient manner, we have prepared our shelters, our hospitals are on alert, and some have established underground wards. We know how to mobilise into a war footing at a moment's notice. We have our Home Front Command apps downloaded, and check them every now and then for changing guidelines. We have made sure that we

have food in the shelters – we are a Jewish country after all! Every day, I cast a cursory eye at the Iron Dome battery standing sentinel on a hill, protecting my city and surroundings. Its presence is reassuring. Our multilayer air defence array, of which the Iron Dome forms one layer, is tested and ready.

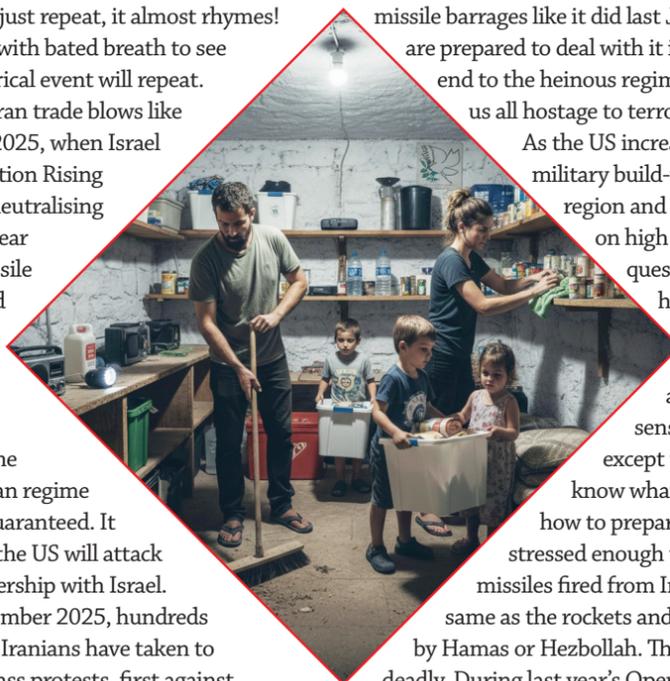
Speculation about when we think US President Donald Trump will give the green light for attack dominates conversation. First responders are on high alert. The tension is palpable. Despite all of this, life carries on. We are a nation of lions.

Some believe that a military operation could happen in a matter of days. Will we spend Purim in shelters instead of in costumes? Quite the Purim *shpiel!*

Israelis are prepared to bear the brunt of this attack. Something has hardened in our DNA since 7 October. We are a nation that stares the threat of annihilation in the face every single day. It has made us tough, and determined to win and survive. We also have a tremendous sense of love, solidarity, and empathy for the people of Iran. They have stood with us during our darkest days, now it is our turn to stand with them. We, the descendants of Abraham and King Cyrus, hold the dream of a resurgence of our sacred and ancient bonds through the Cyrus Accords, which will result in our two nations flourishing and renewing relations. We are prepared to fight for that.

But for now, all we can do is hurry up and wait.

Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.



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Purim's timeless message: faith before diplomacy

Torah Thought

Purim is a time of great celebration and fun for the whole family. Carnivals; hamantaschen; dress up; festival meals; and gifts of food to friends and family. Our sages, however, see the miracle of Purim in a far more meaningful light. They understood Purim to be one of the holiest days of the year.

There is a Mishnah that states, "One who reads the Megillah backwards has not fulfilled his obligation." The simple meaning is that if you hear the Megillah read out of sequence, you haven't done it correctly. If you walk into shul in the middle of the reading, you cannot listen to the second half and then go back and hear the first half. It must be read from the beginning to the end in the correct order.

The Baal Shem Tov has a fascinating interpretation of this Mishnah. The word for "backwards" is "*lemafreh*". *Lemafreh* can also mean "in retrospect". Thus, one who reads the Megillah as a historical event, as a tale of old, hasn't

fulfilled his duty. The lessons of the Megillah Esther, the entire story of the rise and fall of Haman, is something which is relevant to us today. In every time and place where we may find ourselves, we ought to realise that the story is current and ongoing.

What is the essential lesson of the story of Purim? When the Jewish people came under attack, one would naturally think that the first thing they ought to have done is use their diplomatic connections. They certainly had friends in high places. Esther was the queen who had found favour in the king's eyes. Mordechai was a top advisor of the king who at one point even saved the king's life. It seems like the greatest diplomatic ties we have ever had! Yet, it was specifically when we seemed more secure than ever that the greatest decree came about.

And what was the immediate reaction of Mordechai and Esther? Not to pursue the king through normal means, but first to gather the Jewish people and pray, especially the children. Mordechai and Esther knew that the decree did not come about by natural means and therefore the first step wasn't to annul the decree by natural means, that would come later. Only after the Jewish

people returned to Hashem, did Esther agree to intercede with the king.

This is the eternal lesson of the Megillah: when times are hard and dark clouds hover above, first and foremost, we need to seek to renew our bond with Hashem. Once we have firmly grounded ourselves in our spiritual side, we continue to our efforts to solve any issues by natural means.

Have a happy Purim!

Rabbi Levi Silman
Rabbinical coordinator for Kosher SA



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The 7th of Adar marks both the birth and passing of Moshe. This week's Torah portion is the only one in which his name does not appear, subtly reflecting his humility and his departure. May his teachings and legacy continue to inspire us all. *Spencer*

US ambassador given SA clearance to put America first

STEVEN GRUZD

Many may consider it a snub when the credentials of the new ambassador of a world leader like the United States (US) is accepted by anyone but the country's president. On Monday, 23 February, the new US ambassador to South Africa, Leo Brent Bozell III, had copies of his letters of credence accepted by an official further down the line, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) Deputy Director-General Clayson Monyela, acting chief of state protocol.

While this definitely has less prestige, it does mean Bozell was accepted quickly, although not by President Cyril Ramaphosa, and can now commence his ambassadorial duties. A Dirco spokesperson told the SA Jewish Report that procedures had recently shifted. "In the past, heads of mission were duly accredited only once they presented original letters of credence to the president. The procedure changed to align with what most of the world was doing. The ceremonies with heads of state were taking place once in a while and heads of mission would spend months without accreditation and therefore unable to work officially."

Bozell, the controversial conservative picked by US President Donald Trump, was an outspoken critic of South Africa's liberation struggle in the 1980s. He is unabashedly pro-Israel, and has vowed to try to convince Pretoria to drop its case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza. He's made a career out of criticising the supposed liberal bias of US media. Bozell has the political left baying for his swift expulsion.

"I look forward to advancing US priorities to build a safe, stronger, and more prosperous America, grounded in American exceptionalism and shared opportunity," Bozell posted on Facebook this week. He also said he sought to strengthen the bilateral relationship.

Analyst Terence Corrigan said, "Bozell will support the overall positions of America under Trump – and which predate Trump – particularly on South Africa's foreign policy. South Africa's position on Israel is, of course,

important here, but South Africa has taken a hostile stance vis-à-vis the US and the West in general. Since I don't think that South Africa will shift on this at all, I think the ambassador will be the bearer of a distinctly frigid relationship."

On the ICJ case, Corrigan said there was no polling on whether ordinary citizens supported it. "Those pro the ICJ

drift of South Africa toward China, Iran, and Russia. Those conditions will make it much easier for Bozell to pursue some of his strategic goals between now and the midterm elections [in November]. He will be mindful of that reality."

But Walsh said Bozell must weigh up what and how hard to push. He could advance aims considered to be trying to outcompete other major powers. "Those include," Walsh said, "motivating the government of South Africa to reorient itself back to the West; normalise its relations with Israel; dismantle international terrorist financing networks; and strengthen bilateral commercial, trade, and investment ties with the US on reciprocal terms."

"Alternatively, he could pursue the strategic goals [seeking to change] the political, economic, legal, and social systems that exist within South Africa. Those include countering corruption; enhancing border security; sidelining anti-Western political parties; reducing dependency on development funding; stopping wasteful government programmes at

all levels; dismantling international narcotics trafficking networks; and repealing laws and ending programmes that are discriminatory in nature."

Pursuing the second set could complicate achievement of the first set, Walsh said. Both seem extremely unlikely to be achieved.

Corrigan said the past two ambassadors, Reuben Brigety and Lana Marks – known as "the Bag Lady" for selling high-end handbags – followed the policy set in Washington at the time. "Marks – for all the scorn and ridicule directed at her when she came – was a standard, quite uncontroversial ambassador," he said. "On Brigety, I suspect he'd been sent as someone with expertise to keep an eye on a relationship that wasn't particularly healthy. When South Africa showed its diplomatic colours over the Russia-Ukraine War, he came out guns blazing. Bozell will be entering a situation in which the relationship has deteriorated badly, pre-dating Trump."

Martha Bridgman, an American academic and editor living in South Africa, raised concerns about Bozell's experience and political nous. "Bozell appears far less familiar with South Africa's history, its position on the continent, and its current societal dynamics than either Brigety, who focused after his debacle over the Lady R on the shared histories of the US and South Africa in 'fighting oppression' invoking the spirit of Martin Luther King, and Marks, who was originally

from Port Elizabeth." Dr Bob Wekesa, the director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States at Wits, somewhat disagrees. "Unlike Brigety, who disappeared from the scene when things got tough, he will not relent in pushing for US political interests. Unlike Marks, he will likely have more depth of understanding of South Africa's ideological bent."

Imperative to repairing the relationship is for South Africa to appoint its ambassador to Washington. "This would communicate a reciprocal willingness to keep lines of communication open," Bridgman said.

"By focusing on points where there is some convergence in interests between the US and South Africa" – overcoming business barriers, critical minerals, peace-making in Africa – "Bozell is much more likely to develop some new bridges in what is otherwise a very strained relationship between Pretoria and DC."

Former US diplomat and writer J Brooks Spector said, "I believe Bozell's most important task will be to listen to as broad a range of South Africans as can be arranged. His advocacy of Trump administration positions on South Africa is a given, but he should try to appeal to those things, ideas, and values that both nations and their peoples share."

"Moving quickly to conclude this accreditation," Spector said, "could possibly be read as a tentative first step towards better relations. We shall see what the future holds."



New US Ambassador to SA Brent Bozell III presenting his accreditation to Clayson Monyela, Dirco deputy director-general for public diplomacy

case are loud and public. They are also, I would venture, on balance inclined towards hostility towards the US. So expect a lot of vocal hostility. Since this is an issue that the South African government will not step away from, I can only see ongoing deterioration of the relationship."

John Stremmler, honorary professor of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), said, "I don't expect much from Brent Bozell III. He lacks diplomatic experience and with the expulsion of [South Africa's former ambassador to the US Ebrahim] Rasool, and Trump's executive order back in February [2025], Trump declared that he didn't like South Africa's DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) policies and would halt all aid and welcome Afrikaners as refugees, betraying once again his well-known racism! Bozell conflates anti-Zionism and antisemitism as too many in South Africa do."

Michael Walsh, a non-resident senior fellow at the US-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, noted that Bozell's tenure began at an interesting juncture, with Republicans controlling the White House and Congress. "Within Congress, there is still bipartisan support for taking coercive policy interventions that are designed to reverse the geostrategic

SA's protection of Albanese 'profound moral failure'

>>Continued from page 1

Political researcher Samuel Hyde says South Africa's diplomatic posture appears "increasingly comfortable with undermining its own standing on the international stage".

From "repeatedly shielding Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine at the UN, to conducting joint military drills with the Iranian regime while it was brutally murdering its own citizens, South Africa has charted a troubling course that only worsens by the day".

Add to this its "expansive lawfare campaign against Israel built around the genocide libel", and the pattern becomes "difficult to ignore", says Hyde. "It therefore comes as little surprise that, in what seems little more than a reflexive declaration of opposition to the West, its representatives would find it within themselves to defend an antisemite before the international community."

In his speech, Lamola repeated South Africa's stance that Israel's war on Hamas was a genocide, stating, "We call on all member states to recognise Palestinian statehood and act in solidarity with its people. We continue to appeal for an end to Israel's unlawful occupation, an end to the ongoing genocide, together with efforts to permanently displace the Palestinian people in Gaza and the

West Bank." But columnist William Saunderson-Meyer, who writes critically about the ANC, says, "Lamola's statement comes from an ANC leadership that has long since squandered any credibility it had in opining on human rights matters. It's the usual scrambled egg verbiage about the virtuous Palestinians, the iniquitous Israelis, and, on this occasion, with a seasoning of 'concern' over long-overdue moves to dump Albanese."

For Saunderson-Meyer, "the only significance of the statement – for it will have little or no influence in international forums – is that it shows that South Africa's Government of National Unity unfortunately remains totally committed to its damaging anti-Western, anti-Israeli policies."

Marks concludes that Lamola's support of Albanese is a "profound moral failure".

"Dirco has chosen, with disturbing enthusiasm, to align South Africa with distortion, hatred, and the whitewashing of terrorism," she says. "The minister owes this country and its Jewish community an immediate retraction and apology."

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Rare pro-Israel breach spotlights broader media bias

CLAUDIA GROSS

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) last week reprimanded the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) for failing to include a Palestinian perspective in three Gaza flotilla interviews. This highlights the imbalance which exists in reporting on the Israeli-Gaza war in which the Israeli side has been almost non-existent, experts say.

The rare interviews took place in October 2025 with former deputy Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Ariel Seidman – who the government recently kicked out of South Africa – speaking of the flotilla to Gaza being marketed as humanitarian aid, but actually “ Hamas operations”.

The commission reprimanded the SABC for not achieving balance within a reasonable period and in a comparable programme slot. It didn't order a right of reply, the removal of content, or additional airtime.

Director of Digital Communications at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and recent visiting ambassador to South Africa, David

Saranga, said the embassy was seldom approached for comment. “The number of cases in which they approach the embassy in order to get our official line is limited, if at all,” he said.

He also couldn't recall interviews with Israelis who had survived the 7 October 2023 attacks or with the families of those who had been kidnapped or killed. “The last thing you can say about the South African media in general is that they are balanced,” Saranga said.

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer said the specific ruling, however, was limited to a technical balance requirement and didn't amount to a finding of bias. “The Broadcasting Complaints Commission's judgement makes a very narrow finding. It doesn't hold that the SABC was biased, nor does it order a right of reply or the removal of any content,” he said.

“The only breach identified was that, in relation to three specific broadcasts about the flotilla incident, the SABC could have included an opposing Palestinian voice within a similar time frame and slot.”

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) monitors balance in local coverage, engaging with the media on an ongoing basis and approaching editors for a right of reply when coverage crosses into antisemitism or excludes opposing perspectives.

“We have successfully taken matters to the BCCSA and secured rulings in our favour,” said Deputy Director Charisse Zeifert, citing a June 2024 ruling in which a radio host was required to apologise for incorrectly describing the International Court of Justice proceedings as a judgement.

She said the Board's approach was to

engage directly with media before escalating complaints to regulators, and that it also placed opinion pieces in multiple platforms to ensure that its position was heard. “With

regard to the SABC and its various platforms, we have observed a strong resistance to accommodating different voices,” Zeifert said.

She said a recent study analysing guests on SAFM found that the overwhelming majority were anti-Israel, some were neutral, and very few were pro-Israel, and said the Board

was seeking further engagement with the broadcaster on the issue.

Zeifert said the dismissal of SABC anchor Juliet Newell from a programme after she

challenged a comparison between Gaza and a concentration camp illustrated the pressures journalists could face. “While many journalists are fair-minded, there is a perception of intimidation and fear of cancellation within some newsrooms.”

South African organisations involved with former Israeli hostages and Israeli experts on the war in Gaza said they had real difficulty in getting local media to agree to interview them.

Public relations officers Michelle K Blumenau and Simone Lipshitz, told the *SA Jewish Report* that despite extensive media networks and approaching hundreds of contacts, they encountered sustained resistance when trying to secure coverage. “For two seasoned practitioners who are accustomed to placing stories, it's genuinely dispiriting,” they said.

They described an incident in which a radio producer who had hosted a pro-Israel guest said she was required to compile an internal report explaining why a voice that didn't align with the government's position had been given airtime. They also said attempts to secure in-depth human-interest coverage for visiting hostage families were largely unsuccessful, and that some journalists declined to view footage from the 7 October 2023 attacks.

A separate complaint to the BCCSA over the removal of an interview with Oppenheimer from Newzroom Afrika's YouTube channel argued that taking down the clip eliminated a substantive legal perspective while leaving online coverage that was overwhelmingly critical of Israel.

In its response, the BCCSA said decisions about whether to publish or remove online material fell within a broadcaster's editorial independence, and that the code applied to content that had been broadcast not to the availability of videos on digital platforms.

The flotilla ruling acknowledged that the SABC had carried a range of perspectives on the war over time, but found that this didn't remove the obligation to ensure balance when a specific incident was the focus of a particular programme. Clause 13 requires reasonable efforts to present opposing views within a reasonable period and in a comparable format when controversial issues of public importance are discussed.

For the South African Zionist Federation, the decision actually clarified that balance couldn't be achieved by relying on the broader news cycle. For the SAJBD, which says it is frequently approached to give an alternative perspective in broadcast discussions, the issue extends beyond a single programme to the overall distribution of voices across the media landscape.

Zeifert said these challenges weren't unique to South Africa, and pointed to international studies that had identified similar patterns while noting that the local media environment wasn't uniform and that new platforms were emerging with a commitment to fair reporting.

The SABC hasn't been ordered to change its editorial policies. The commission's interpretation of clause 13 is likely to be cited in future complaints involving coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and other contested issues where the question of when and how opposing perspectives must be included remains central.



Former Israeli Deputy Ambassador to South Africa, Ariel Seidman

City consults public on Herzlia sports field access

CLAUDIA GROSS

The now publicly accessible sports field leased by United Herzlia Schools (UHS) may soon be closed to the public either partially or totally, with the outcome awaiting a decision by the City of Cape Town.

“The field serves the United Herzlia Schools network of five schools from pre-primary to matric and about 1 400 pupils,” UHS Executive Director Andries van Renssen told the *SA Jewish Report*. “As lessee, the school carries full responsibility for maintenance, municipal services, operational management, and safeguarding of the facility in accordance with the lease.”

The future of the sports field situated above the City Bowl will be finalised after a formal public participation process now taking place, following a proposal by the City of Cape Town to amend the lease governing the municipal land and regulate general public access.

The fenced field, which lies within Van Riebeeck Park, has for years been used both

participation process has opened for a period of 30 days,” she said, encouraging residents to submit comments and proposals.

Higham said she had also asked the City's property transactions department to explore the possibility of managed public access during times when the field wasn't required for organised sport.

In a statement sent to parents, Van Renssen and Gary Davidson, UHS board chairperson, wrote that Herzlia had invested heavily in the grounds over many years, including more than R2.4 million in maintenance and related costs in 2025, and about R6.6 million over the past three years.

The statement emphasised that the school's obligation was to ensure that the facility remained “safe and appropriate for pupils, staff, and authorised users”, and that organised school sport took place in a supervised environment.

Davidson and Van Renssen also pointed to Herzlia's long history on the site. It leased the land in the 1960s, built the sports fields on what was then a rocky mountainside, and continues to make the facility available for scheduled use by other schools and sporting bodies.

Residents who use the field regularly say consultation will give them an opportunity to put their views on record. Charles Evison, a community member who often walks his dogs on the field, described the space as one of the few fenced and well-lit areas in the neighbourhood where people felt comfortable exercising after dark.

Another regular user said the field brought together families, runners, and informal sports groups and that most users respected the grounds and cleaned up after their pets.

She regularly walks her dogs there, and said the field offered a rare combination of safety and open space in the City Bowl. “I've always enjoyed taking my dogs to the field because they get great exercise there, and it's safe and clean,” she said.

“Green spaces are so precious and so good for all of us, and it would be a real pity to prevent people from accessing such an enriching space,” she said. She said most users cared about the condition of the grounds and that many even picked up after other people's pets because they knew schoolchildren used the field.

Some have questioned whether public access formed part of the original understanding of the lease, and have suggested that the community would be willing to help address maintenance challenges if a shared model were adopted.

Van Renssen said UHS had engaged with members of the surrounding community over time and installed signage, at the City's request, asking dog owners to keep pets on a leash, clean up after them, and respect the playing surface.

He said damage to the turf and irrigation infrastructure and safety incidents involving maintenance staff were documented and submitted to the City as part of the lease review.

Van Renssen said the school remained “committed to constructive engagement”, and supported participation through the City's formal channels.

For Herzlia families, the field is central to school life, hosting daily practices, matches, and co-curricular sport across age groups. For many residents, it's a valued green space in an increasingly dense urban area.

The public participation process, now open, is intended to weigh these competing needs before any changes are finalised. With submissions still to be received and assessed, the future of the field remains undecided.

Herzlia sports field at the foot of Table Mountain



for Herzlia's organised school sport and informally by residents for walking, running, and exercising their dogs.

A recent notice about proposed access changes sparked strong reactions from some regular users, while the school has stressed its legal and safeguarding responsibilities as the lessee responsible for maintaining the facility. The City has opened a 30-day window for written submissions, and as yet, no final decision has been taken.

Van Renssen said the land remained municipal property, and that the discussions related only to the leased sports ground, not to Van Riebeeck Park itself, which remained open to the public.

Herzlia approached the City for clarity on the lease after identifying what it described as contradictory provisions requiring the school both to secure the premises when not in use, and to allow unrestricted public access. The City's review of the lease led to the current consultation.

Ward 77 councillor Francine Higham said the agreement was a standard social lease in which the City charged a nominal rental while the lessee took on the costs and responsibilities of maintaining the facility. She said increased public use during sports activities had created “operational and safety considerations”, but stressed that the outcome hadn't been predetermined.

“To ensure that community views directly inform the outcome, a formal public

After four war years, Ukraine's Jews adapt to sirens, shortages, and uncertainty

THEIA CHATELLE – JTA

Viktoria Maksimovich's students at the Sha'alavim Jewish Day School no longer run for shelters when air raid sirens sound.

"They don't want to hear the alarms. They don't care about the shots and bombs. This is the biggest problem right now, as they won't look for a shelter," she said in a virtual interview from her school in Kharkiv, Ukraine. "It's like usual life for them, and a lot of them grew up like this during the war and don't remember normal life."

Indeed, the Russian invasion, which marked its fourth anniversary on Tuesday, 24 February, has reshaped everything in the lives of Ukrainian Jews, from big choices about whether to stay or flee to the seemingly mundane decision about whether to take the elevator or the stairs when visiting high-rise buildings.

With Russian strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure a near-daily occurrence, taking the elevator means risking being trapped for hours if the power goes out. Recognising that the dilemma has trapped elderly Jews in their homes, Maksimovich and her colleagues recently organised a service day for their students, who baked challahs and hiked up many flights of stairs to deliver them to Kharkiv's elderly Jews.

"They managed it, and were so happy about it because they met those old people and saw in their eyes, 'You are here, and brought us challahs and candles for Shabbat,'" Maksimovich recalled. "It was amazing."

The fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion arrives in grim fashion for Ukrainians, with the Russian and Ukrainian armies locked in a bloody stalemate and support from the United States and Europe increasingly uncertain. Ukrainian cities are regularly barraged with drones and missiles, not only exacting a devastating tally of civilian deaths and injuries, but making it increasingly challenging for Ukrainian civilians to carry out the basic functioning of their lives.

The past four months have been particularly challenging due to power and water cuts that have left Ukrainians frigid and in the dark. Whereas during the first three years of war, especially in the metropolitan centre of Kyiv, life went on largely as normal, albeit punctuated by attacks. Now, mobile "resilience hubs" offering warming and charging dot the landscape, and the sound of generators is overpowering.

For Ukraine's Jews, the situation means that children are gathering in bomb shelters to light Shabbat candles; the elderly rely on intermittent aid

deliveries; and everyone is hunkered down for the worst winter since the war began.

"When the full-scale invasion began, I didn't think it would last two weeks, but here we are," said Julia Goldenberg, the founder of the Ukrainian Charitable Funds and partner of World Jewish Relief. "And I don't think the war will be over even this year."

Before the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, according to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, there was a core Jewish population of 40 000 living in Ukraine. Since then, however, thousands have fled to Israel and Europe, reshaping hubs of Jewish life in the country. Now, with conditions worsening even far from the front lines, Goldenberg expects even more to leave.

Many will be seeking security for their children, whose schooling and

been sleeping.

Inna Federova, 55, the head of Ukraine's oldest Jewish school, Lyceum No. 299 or Orach Chaim, said missiles were only one challenge of many.

"It fractured our community," she said about the war. "I'm a Jewish mother first, and I wanted to be there for the kids, but I couldn't be once they were scattered all over Europe."

At least one of the school's alumni, Igor Tish, was gravely injured while fighting on the frontline, while Israeli teachers who taught Hebrew and other subjects haven't returned since being evacuated in the days before the Russian invasion. Instruction is more rudimentary now, Federova said.

"We have a physical education teacher who does exercises with the children in the shelter, because it's hard for them to sit still for so long without moving," she said, pointing out, "They've lived through bombings, evacuations, constant anxiety. Our teachers received special training from psychologists, including Israeli specialists, on how to support children emotionally during wartime."

Other support for Jews in Ukraine has come from the Joint Distribution Committee, which leads disaster response for Jewish communities living in conflict zones around the world; Chabad, the global Jewish network whose emissaries are at the front line of Jewish life in many smaller communities; and Goldenberg's group, which works to preserve Jewish life and welfare in Ukraine.

Sustained by a network of global donors, the Ukrainian Charitable Funds has helped elderly Jewish Ukrainians repair their homes after Russian airstrikes. Goldenberg recalled one woman she worked with, saying, "She had no windows. She lost all of them in a Russian strike, but didn't have the funds to fix them."

While the advent of war in Israel in 2023 spurred concerns about whether Jewish donors would continue to send support to Ukraine, Gritsevskaya said aid from both inside and outside had made a difference.

"In the Jewish community, there's a huge sense of being hugged," she said. "Ukraine is an amazing example of the ability of Jews to unite and to help others in unbelievable situations. In general, people who are connected to Jewish communities are more capable of going through the difficult things they go through because they have the wider Jewish world."

Even as she gears up for a potential war in Israel, Gritsevskaya is planning on heading back to Ukraine this summer for another session of Ramah Ukraine, a camp that has already filled with Ukrainian Jewish teens eager for a respite from the challenges of war.

"I would rather not think of the fears I have," she said. "They are so overwhelming, we have to focus on what must be done."



Photo: I Van Dobronosov and Global Images Ukraine via Getty Images

People charge their devices, eat, and warm themselves at a mobile resilience hub set up in a residential district amid electricity and heating interruptions in Kyiv, Ukraine

experiences have been peppered with trauma and interruption since even before the war. In-person schools had resumed after a year-long COVID-19-pandemic closure for only one semester before war broke out.

"Parents tell us of children who can't sleep at night, children who react to all kinds of different sounds. It's challenging to work with them," said Rabbi Irina Gritsevskaya, who is based in Tel Aviv and travels to Ukraine regularly to lead Masorti Kyiv, one of the country's only Conservative congregations.

Jewish schools have borne a wide range of effects. Ariel Markovitch, director of the JCC (Jewish Community Centre) in Kyiv, recounted how a Russian missile struck the Perlina school and kindergarten in Kyiv in October 2024, where refugees fleeing fighting on the front lines in Ukraine's east had

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South African Jewish Report

Keeping it real



When I walk into a room with other people in it, I do it with confidence. Sometimes I may not feel so self-assured, but those in the room would be none the wiser. Sometimes I may be hiding a myriad of feelings, but there's no reason for strangers to know this.

Am I wearing a mask and not telling the truth? Am I conning people or am I being real? Or am I just getting on with my life – business as usual?

In Israel this week, as Rolene Marks so aptly describes it, people are worried about an impending war, but they continue as normal. Are they being genuine but wearing helpful, happy “masks” to get them through the day? Or are they faking it? Perhaps a bit of both, but what are their choices? To implode with fear?

If a person is having a bad day, falling apart at the seams and expecting the world to drop everything to save them isn't realistic or fair. It also doesn't really work that way. Though I absolutely advocate for people to get help when they need it – it's vital for all of us – having a bad day cannot be everyone else's problem.

On Purim, this coming Monday, people will dress up as someone they aren't to celebrate the *chag*. It's wonderful because it enables people to be whatever they feel like being. Perhaps I have always wanted to be a princess or a Playboy Bunny. Perhaps this is my and our annual chance to live a dream.

On social media, most people live their dreams. Rarely do you see people telling you of their awful days. Instead, you see them living their best lives, with perfect sunsets and numerous beautiful moments with loved ones abound. If you believed everything you saw on social media about people's lives, we would be living in a Purim world always.

If someone does share their darkest moments – and you rarely see it on social media – people panic. What do you do when someone does that? Reach out? Worry? I don't know the rules. Suffice to say, however, if it was someone I knew well, I would undoubtedly reach out. They are clearly crying out for help.

Unfortunately, these days, most people get a lot of the information they consume, factual or not, from the fake world of social media.

What with the Roedean and King David School saga, while I would hope and believe that by now both schools have moved on, social media doesn't seem to have.

Instead, you find the most outrageous allegations against King David and South African Jews. Though I do see people challenging this, so many buy it hook, line and sinker, because it fits the narrative they want to believe.

In one of the allegations against King David, there were supposedly Israel Defense Forces (IDF) recruitment posters on the walls of the school when Roedean pupils visited a few years ago. Really? Anyone who knows King David and anything about the IDF, will know that's totally absurd.

The IDF doesn't go out to recruit soldiers because Israelis are conscripted into the army. It's part of life in Israel. Girls and boys reach a certain age and go into the army. They don't get to question it. They are conscripted whether they love the idea or not.

Anyone who immigrates to Israel below a certain age, again, has no choice but to join the IDF. For a country facing the constant threat of war, this is the way of life and generally, Israelis and *olim* accept it.

So, the idea of a poster pushing the IDF at King David is ridiculous, but you will believe anything if it fits your narrative, no matter how crazy.

On 24 February, Independent Online (IOL) had a young reporter speaking on social media into what looked to me like a shaving brush, discussing the issue between the schools. Or at least I thought that was the idea, but what she said had little to do with fact and a lot to do with anti-Israel rhetoric.

Why now, 10 days after the apology from Roedean, and close on a month after the match was meant to happen between the schools? It seems like jumping on the bandwagon long after the storm has passed.

At this point, there's enough factual information in terms of the apology and the various taped conversations between headmasters to be able to glean the facts. And, as a fellow journalist, I expect nothing less. However, this reporter maintains that the Roedean principal told King David that the girls couldn't play because of a time clash, which wasn't true. The facts are out there.

“King David accused Roedean of antisemitism because Jewish learners (I'm sure she meant scholars, which is the correct English term) would be representing their school,” she said. Again, not true. And she went on.

The point is, there's much misinformation and fake news out there when there's no need for it. The facts are there, but there are those who don't want to believe them.

I would like to wish away antisemitism. I would like it to disappear. But I won't stand by and watch people misrepresent us and spew fake news stories about us to fit their narrative, and say nothing.

The convenient mask so many antisemites hide behind, bringing us back to Purim, is anti-Israel or anti-Zionist rhetoric. They swear that they aren't antisemites but anti-Zionists. So, they aren't against the three or four Jews that – for some absurd reason – don't believe there's a need for a Jewish State and would like it not to exist.

Time to take off your masks. You aren't kidding anyone.

This Purim, we're all welcome to wear masks, but let's be real about what's fact and fiction. Let's reach out and help those in need, but be cautious about allowing people to spew lies about us.

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor

Jews no longer feel safe in 'multicultural' Australia



OPINION

DR VIC ALHADEFF

Though the nightmare of Australia's Bondi Beach was over by nightfall on 14 December 2025, the cloud which preceded it and the massive trauma that it generated continue to darken that country.

I was the editor of the *The Australian Jewish News* when 9/11 happened. I editorialised that for a nanosecond – but only a nanosecond – the world would have a sense of the existential threat which marks the Jewish condition. So it was. So it has been since Bondi.

For a moment after Bondi, all Australia was seemingly embarked on an outpouring of compassion. Until it wasn't.

Until 653 items of hate appeared online, glorifying or denying the massacre, one even claiming that the identity of the younger shooter was a Jew named David Cohen. With an AI-generated image of him wearing a kippa. Until allegations surfaced that race-hate legislation was purely to appease the Jews. Until a cartoon depicted the Royal Commission as the work of a cabal of influencers. All this within a month of the shooting.

The events of 14 December 2025 didn't come out of nowhere. During a United States presidential campaign, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer claimed erroneously that Donald Trump had attracted the largest audience to witness an inauguration. When Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway was questioned about the claim, she said Spicer presented “alternative facts”.

When Pennsylvania University President Elizabeth Magill was asked if calling for genocide would constitute bullying or harassment, she replied that it would be a “context-dependent decision”.

These bewildering exchanges illustrate the perverse reality which has characterised global realpolitik – and the Australian Jewish experience – since 7 October 2023. A reality manifested in vilification and incitement; university encampments; synagogue fire bombings; schools, cars, homes, and MPs' offices vandalised; artists cancelled; and graffiti shouting “Exterminate the Jews.”



Bondi Beach Massacre memorial

Anti-Jewish hatred became ingrained in the ecosystem. It found a home in mainstream Australia. Five times the average number of incidents in the decade prior to 7 October. The number of online incidents multiplying eight-fold. It metastasised. Shape-shifted from the margins, where white Australian antisemitism once kept Jews out of social and sports clubs, to NSW Parliament House, where neo-Nazis shouted “Blood and honour” – the motto of the Hitler Youth.

According to a report, the perpetrators of Bondi were lone wolves, notwithstanding their ideological connection to ISIS (Islamic State). The flaw in that finding was that it disavowed the fertile soil which enabled antisemitism to mushroom in this country. A study by

Victoria University Social Science Professor Ramon Spaaij of 88 incidents found that so-called lone actors rarely function in ideological isolation. While they may not belong to a cell, they invariably subscribe to a worldview that reinforces race hatred and its logical successor – racist violence.

Compounding that reality is that whereas immigrants of a generation ago communicated with their home country via handwritten letters and occasional calls, today's migrants are in constant communication with their native language, culture, and values. Which means though some are here physically, psychologically and politically they may not absorb, or even might reject, values most of us take for granted.

According to the Scanlon Foundation's 2025 Social Cohesion report, only 34% of Australians take “great pride in the Australian way of life and culture”, while 46% have “a sense of belonging in Australia to a great extent”.

Is multiculturalism failing? Or is there a critical mass of voices across Australian civil society with the courage to call out casual anti-Jewish racism – at the dinner table; in the office; on the sports field, and not only after 15 innocents have been slaughtered?

Australians inhabit a different country to that of 13 December 2025. There is an imperative to repair. To rebuild interfaith dialogue so that it's meaningful, as opposed to proffering lazy “we are with you” platitudes which do nothing to move the dial of social cohesion.

The test of leadership isn't if it's demonstrated in the aftermath of a crisis, but whether it's manifest when social harmony shows signs of fracturing. When it's not popular to speak out. Or to separate from the crowd.

The date 20 January 2026 was a poignant day in the Australian Parliament, featuring motions about Bondi. Julian Leeser MP, a sixth-generation Jewish Australian, said this, “There is much I grieve for. The innocents lost

at Bondi. The survivors of Bondi, and the things they cannot unsee. The synagogues torched. The Jewish artists frozen out. The university students harassed. All this pains me. But it's the loss of the truth that Australia is good to Jewish people

that crushes me.”

In Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch says, “You never really understand a person until you climb inside his skin and walk around in it.” In other words, understanding that when Jewish Australians call out the surge of antisemitism, it stems from generations of historical trauma and learned experience.

Jewish Australians no longer feel safe. That is our truth. Our new normal. If we don't change for the better as a nation, 14 December will have changed nothing.

• Dr Vic Alhadeff is a former South African newspaper editor, former chairperson of Multicultural NSW, and former chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

Masks change, script rarely does

OPINION

MIKE ABEL



Hello, dear reader.

It has been a year since we last gathered beneath the vaulted ceilings of Queen Esther's court, where velvet concealed daggers and smiles concealed decrees. The Festival of Queen Esther, Purim, approaches once more. Children will wear crowns and eat hamantaschen. Adults will raise their glasses. An ancient royal drama will be read aloud with theatrical flair.

But this isn't a children's story. It's a study in political intrigue. Especially in 2026.

In the Persian court – Iran today, not incidentally either – villainy didn't roar. It leaned in close. It spoke persuasively. It drafted whispered language. "There is a certain people," began the argument. Different. Separate. Disagreeable. Not violent. Not rebellious. Simply inconvenient.

Haman didn't accuse with hysteria. He advised with sinister calculation. He understood something timeless. Isolate a small minority and repeat the accusation often enough, and the court grows comfortable with the idea of their removal. It is presented as administrative necessity, never as hatred.

The king, for his part, wasn't bloodthirsty. He was simply inattentive. Preoccupied. Willing to trust the confident voice at his elbow. And so, a decree was signed. Not in fury, but in formality.

Now the story turns.

Esther didn't storm the throne room. She didn't shout. She waited. She understood timing. She approached power with composure, not panic. And when the moment came, she revealed the plot calmly and precisely. The mask slipped. The intrigue collapsed. The decree reversed.

History doesn't remember Haman as a strategist. It remembers him as a cautionary tale. An evil intent that lurks within an unsuspecting society.

It's difficult not to notice how modern this feels.

Today's Hamans don't carry scrolls. They carry microphones. They speak not of annihilation, but equity. Not of exclusion, but policy. Not of prejudice, but principle. The phrases are always measured. "There's a certain community." "There are concerns." "There must be a review."

All terribly reasonable. All impeccably procedural.

One sees it in curious hesitations. In tennis matches reconsidered. In Holocaust museum visits quietly withdrawn. In narratives revised under the guise of sensitivity. No raised voices. No burning torches. Just the soft reshaping of permission. Of quiet othering.

It's remarkable how easily a people comprising barely a fraction of humanity – 0.2% as it happens – can be discussed as though they were a global menace. Remarkable how often the smallest minority, or country, is framed as the largest threat. One might expect such imbalance to inspire humility. Instead, it often breeds confidence in the crowd.

And here is where Queen Esther's story speaks most clearly.

The king today isn't a monarch on a throne. It's the ordinary person. The decent but sadly silent majority. The citizen who grows weary of selective outrage. The parent who senses that fairness has become fashionable rather than principled. The observer who notices that the rules bend curiously in one particular direction.

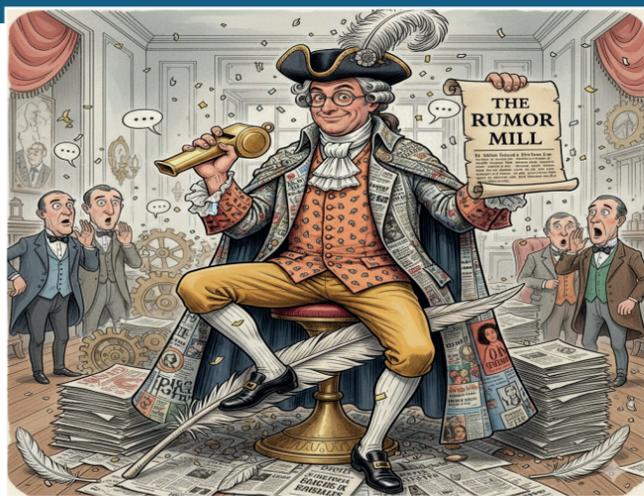
Esther's courage wasn't fury. It was revelation. She trusted that once the truth was spoken plainly, ordinary judgement would prevail. And it did. The intrigue dissolved under scrutiny. Power recoiled from manipulation once it saw it clearly.

That's the enduring lesson of the Festival of Queen Esther.

Plots rely on concealment. Bias thrives in ambiguity. When exposed calmly and confidently, they lose their theatre.

Jewish history didn't begin in exile. It began in sovereignty. Kings Saul, David, Solomon, and queens like Esther, long before the fashionable empires of Europe.

Law before law schools. Ethics before think tanks. Commandments before Constitutions. The idea that such a people can be casually reduced to caricature



would be laughable were it not so persistent. So well-rewarded by hate-fuelled and well-paid podcasters, surfing the algorithmic wave of faux outrage.

Persistence, however, is something Jews understand rather well. We have endured every court, every decree, every whispered campaign dressed as prudence. The masks change. The script rarely does.

So this Purim, as we recount Queen Esther's poise and Haman's overreach, let's resist both panic and naivety. Let's observe carefully. Speak precisely. Trust that when intrigue is revealed for what it is, most people,

the true kings of our time, prefer fairness to fanaticism.

Empires pass. Court fashions fade. The Jewish story continues. Troubled, deeply painful, but always enduring.

Hopefully, when I pen my missive this time next year, this unfortunate period of court cunning and viral intrigue will have burnt itself out.

Yours observantly,
Lord Whistle-Blower

• Lord Whistle-Blower is Mike Abel's Purim costume for this year.

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Who are you when no-one is watching?

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



A man once wrote a long anniversary tribute to his wife. It was moving, poetic, full of gratitude and admiration. Friends commented with heart emojis. Someone described it as a relationship goal. There was only one small detail. His wife wasn't on social media. She never saw it.

The message wasn't written for her. It was written for everyone else.

Most of us recognise some version of this because we have done some version of it. We share report cards, family photos, milestones, moments of carefully curated pride. None of this is dishonest, and much of it is genuinely beautiful. The shift happens quietly, almost politely. Without announcing it, we begin adjusting not only what we show but how we live, shaping moments so they will look right from the outside. The mask doesn't arrive dramatically. It settles in gently, like a role we never formally accepted but keep playing anyway.

The Chassidic masters taught that on Purim, the inner world becomes the outer one. Most of the year, the face we present is partly constructed, maintained by habit, expectation, and the understandable desire to be seen well. Then Purim arrives and interrupts all

of that. Not by stripping the mask away, but by making it visible. The moment we knowingly put on a costume, the performance loses its grip. We become aware of the disguise, and that awareness is precisely what frees us from it.

This is what makes Purim so psychologically brilliant. It's the one day of the year when we put on masks on purpose. Costumes, disguises,



Without the subtle pressure to appear impressive or composed or enviably content, what parts of us might finally have room to breathe?

exaggerated identities, playful performances. At first glance, it looks like the least authentic day on the calendar. Yet anyone who has watched people closely on Purim knows that it is often the most honest day of the year.

Around a Purim table, one hears things that have sometimes waited months to be spoken. Words that felt awkward all year suddenly feel natural. A little *l'chaim*, taken the way it was

meant to be taken, softens the tight grip we usually keep on ourselves, and something unpolished but unmistakably real begins to appear. Not the curated self, but the actual one.

We underestimate how heavy a mask becomes when worn for long enough. At first, it seems useful. It streamlines social life, shields us from scrutiny, and helps us fit in. But over time, the mask does something unanticipated. It not only hides us from others. It begins to hide us from ourselves. We start relating to our own lives the way a publicist relates to a client, shaping perception, polishing narrative, quietly managing impressions. A person cannot be nourished by an image, even a beautiful one. A soul needs honesty the way lungs need air.

There's a question worth sitting with even if we never answer it out loud. If we stopped narrating ourselves for a while, what might we notice? Without the subtle pressure to appear impressive or composed or enviably content, what parts of us might finally have room to breathe? Most of us already know the answer, because we have felt it. Usually at a Shabbos table where the phone has been left in the other room, and the meal stretches

long past dessert, and somewhere between the singing and the cold leftovers, someone says something true, and it lands differently than words usually do. Or in the kind of conversation that goes on so long, we forget to monitor how we are coming across.

Purim returns each year like a gentle interruption. It reminds us that identity isn't a brand we maintain, but a self we inhabit, given to us as both gift and responsibility. It doesn't demand that we disappear from the modern world or abandon the tools we use. It simply invites us, quietly, to loosen the grip we keep on the story we are telling about ourselves.

There is a Purim challenge worth trying, even if only for the day. Say what you actually feel to the person who is actually there. Not for the post. Not for the caption. Don't tell us how much you love your husband. Say it to him. Because the heaviest mask isn't the one worn for a night. It's the one worn while smiling for the family photo 10 seconds after screaming at them.

Chag Purim sameach.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

From royal letter to restored Jewish identity

OPINION

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN



In the final chapter of Megillat Esther, the book itself is described as an *iggeret*, a letter. This is an unusual term for a work that ultimately became part of Tanach. Rather than being presented as a formal *sefer* or scroll, the Megillah is cast in the form of correspondence.

Because Megillat Esther is framed as an *iggeret*, halacha treats it with greater flexibility. The requirements governing how it is written and how it is read aloud are less rigid than those that apply to other books of Tanach. These leniencies reflect its origins as a letter sent to a dispersed nation to establish the observance of Purim and give it lasting form.

Roughly 500 years before the Purim story, history entered a new phase. For the first time, large multiregional empires emerged. In the late tenth and ninth centuries BCE, Assyria rose to power and gradually conquered the Levant and much of the Near East. In the late seventh century BCE, Assyria collapsed and was replaced by the Neo-Babylonian Empire, which ruled the region for several decades. In the mid-sixth century BCE, Babylonia itself fell to Persia. The Persian Empire then established a vast realm of "127 provinces", stretching across much of the ancient world. Governing such an empire required systems of communication that could project authority across great distances.

Previously, empires such as Egypt were largely confined to a single region. In that setting, a monarch could dispatch messengers who carried decrees personally. In multiregional empires, that model no longer worked. Authority had to be transmitted through letters, documents capable of moving from province to province and hand to hand.

Letter-based communication became so central to imperial rule. For this reason, toward the end of the story, when Esther and Mordechai ask Achashverosh to rescind his letter, he refuses. Cancelling a royal decree would undermine the

authority of all royal correspondence. A monarch had to protect the integrity of his letters so that, when they were read aloud in the public square of a distant province, they would command obedience. Achashverosh was willing to issue a second letter, but to repeal an earlier one would have weakened the integrity of the system on which his rule depended.

Erosion of identity and language

There is a second drama unfolding in the background. About 70 years earlier, we had been exiled from *Yerushalayim*. With the loss of the *Mikdash* came the loss of Jewish sovereignty, and with it a deep rupture in Jewish identity. With no clear future and no visible return on the horizon, that identity began, slowly and quietly, to erode.

Central to this erosion was the decline of language. Language sits at the heart of identity, shaping how a people understands itself. As Jewish identity weakened, Hebrew itself came under threat. This tension is reflected in the books that chronicle the first exile. Daniel and Ezra are written partly in Aramaic. The sections that describe exile and imperial life appear in Aramaic; while the passages that trace return and rebuilding revert to Hebrew.

The story of Esther unfolds roughly 70 years after the exile from *Yerushalayim*. A few years earlier, we had returned to *Yerushalayim* with the authorisation of Cyrus, and laid the foundations of the *Mikdash*. Those efforts, however, were quickly obstructed. Opponents of renewed Jewish settlement lodged complaints with the Persian court, and the rebuilding was halted. With the stalling of the return and the suspension of construction in *Yerushalayim*, Jewish identity and the language that sustained it were further weakened.

Persian names

The names of the heroes of the Purim story reflect this struggle over Jewish identity and language. Mordechai,

whose Hebrew name was Petachyah, and Esther, known in Hebrew as Hadassah, are identified throughout the Megillah by their Persian names rather than their Hebrew ones. Mordechai's name echoes the Persian deity Marduk, while Esther's recalls Ishtar, a Persian star-goddess. The Megillah's choice of names places its heroes within the linguistic world of Persia, highlighting the tension between Jewish identity and the culture in which they lived.

Hebrew disappeared and returned

The first two letters in the Purim story are translated into every language

and every script, except Hebrew. No-one imagined translating royal decrees into Hebrew, a language already viewed as fading along with Jewish identity itself.

Imagine the terror of Jews in distant provinces receiving word of an impending war to be fought in the coming month of Adar. Unable to read the decree in their own language, they were forced to turn to a non-Jewish neighbour to interpret it for them. In that moment, they discovered that the letter was their own death sentence, translated by their future executioners.

But as the Purim story turned and redemption began to stir, the final letter changed everything. The decree granting Jews the right to defend themselves was translated into every language, and this time, into Hebrew. Hebrew returned because the people it spoke for had returned.

Within a few short years, the return to *Yerushalayim* would resume and the Second Mikdash would begin to be built. In the Megillah, the rise and fall of letters and language track the shifting

fortunes of the Jewish future. For this reason, the book of Esther is canonised as a letter.

Our community has excelled in building rich religious experiences, expanding Torah study, and strengthening halachic observance. Jewish religious life and Torah learning are at historic highs. But have we invested with equal seriousness in building strong Jewish identity?

For the first time in centuries, there are deeply religious people who don't speak a Jewish language. Without



language, our access to Torah texts is often second-hand, filtered through translation. Without a Jewish language, we limit our ability to connect with Jews across the world beyond our immediate cultural setting. More importantly, without language, Jewish identity itself cannot reach the depth or resilience we seek.

Have we, in some measure, compromised aspects of Jewish identity-building in our focus on Torah and *mitzvot*? Perhaps this was a necessary price to pay, but is there a way to advance both

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

Space pioneer sets sights on bridging earthly divides

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

An aeronautical engineer turned humanitarian, South African-born Israeli Alice Miller has broken barriers all her life. From successfully suing the Israeli Air Force (IAF) in 1995 to allow female fighter pilots to overseeing medical and psychosocial health assistance in Gaza, she sees past divides to the humanity beneath.

Miller, now chief executive of Israeli non-profit organisation (NPO) Natan Worldwide Disaster Relief, says her simple view of the world means she's not afraid to fight for what she believes in. We all have the same bodily functions and navigate relationships with people each day, she says, regardless of our position in life. "We all suckled from our mother's breast. I recognise me in you. I could see myself as that mother in Gaza."

It's that inherent empathy that guides her along an often-challenging path. "I don't see great separation between my child in Israel and that mother's child in Gaza; the same way I saw irrelevant separation between men and women in the case I fought 30 years ago. It had nothing to do with women's capabilities or incapacibilities."

Yet Miller's professional journey hasn't always been as clearcut as her worldview. Having left South Africa at the age of six, she returned to the country at 19 to train as a private pilot on a Cessna in Germiston. Years later, she won the right to become a

fighter pilot in Israel. Having served for a decade as an air force aerospace engineer and officer in the IAF after her landmark court battle, she then worked in aerospace and technology.

As vice-president of space at Israeli start-up Helios, she attended the biggest space conference on earth in Azerbaijan. "I stood there with NASA [the National Aeronautics and Space Administration] and displayed a system we were going to build on the moon," she says. "Then I came back to my hotel room and just burst out

7 October that year, the world shifted. "I live in the north of Israel," Miller says. "While this massacre was going on in the south, we were sure that the Arabs are going to come down the mountains around us and slaughter us as well." She and her neighbours prepared to handle mass casualties but thankfully, their fears didn't materialise.

"Yet the more the resulting war advanced, the more my friends' hearts closed towards anything different or other," she says. "It's a natural process – when your life is threatened, you don't care about anything except protecting your own. I felt my heart also just closing up like a clam. And I said to myself, 'I don't want this. I'm not interested in leading a life like this.'"

So, already looking to serve others, Miller was finally pushed to her new path after 7 October. "I want to do something where I can help people on earth and spread the word that all people deserve to fill basic

humanitarian needs. It took many years to understand that this was what I wanted to do and once I did, there was no going back."

So, when the opportunity arose to serve as chief executive of Natan Worldwide Disaster Relief, Miller knew she'd found her purpose. Named after famous Israeli humanitarian leader Abie Nathan, the organisation has been around for 20 years, with medical volunteers and social workers going on global disaster-relief missions.

Following 7 October, Natan needed a more professional structure, and so Miller became chief executive. "We had the capability to put up clinics in the Dead Sea in Eilat to support thousands of evacuees that ran away from their homes. We run many other projects within Israel, including free dental clinics serving

refugee women at risk. We also have a beautiful project supporting children with disabilities in war zones in Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza."

Miller admits that even for her, it was difficult to work in Gaza in the beginning of the war. "You're running at all hours of the morning with your kids to the safe room, with missiles falling all over. It's a complicated notion being able to serve someone who's bashing at you while they're bashing at you. Yet as the ceasefire was agreed and we felt safer in Israel, we could continue serving people in Gaza with an easier heart."

While Israeli organisations cannot enter Gaza physically, Natan works through its United States partner, a NPO called Gaza Children's Village run by David Hasan. "He has put up these academies in Gaza where 9 000 children are studying," Miller says. "They get a hate-free curriculum, a hot meal from NPO World Central Kitchen, and medical attention through Natan. We're also supplying reusable period pads through these academies to teenagers and the mothers of these children."

Natan will also put up a clinic at these academies with its Arabic speaking volunteers in Israel already supporting staff in the clinic in Gaza, mainly via WhatsApp texts. "We have specialists who help with cases that the doctors there can't deal with."

Miller has experienced significant backlash for assisting in Gaza, but says she's realised that although it's extremely loud, support is more subtle. "I choose what I listen to. Obviously, there are those who are too hurt to be able to see the needs of other people. I really wish these people would find a way to lessen the pain in their hearts so that they're able to see that supporting a 14-year-old child in Gaza the first time she receives a period and has nothing to use isn't threatening to them."

"On the contrary, it's for our own benefit in Israel. We're all connected. We're all human beings. Gaza isn't far away, literally and figuratively. It's something that's so strange to say these days because people don't really look at life in this way, but I feel strongly that we're one family."

Distributing 'dignity kits' with reusable sanitary pads in Gaza



Alice Miller

crying. I said, 'What the hell am I doing with my life? Why am I putting all my love, energy, smartness, and history into the moon? What for?' I felt a deep desire to do something that served people in a more meaningful way. It was like a moving of the heart."

Ironically, this occurred in September 2023. On

Rabbinical students plan marathon Joburg Megillah readings

GILANA LAB

Rabbinical College of South Africa (RCSA) students are preparing for what has become one of the most ambitious outreach efforts of their year – Purim.

They have already selected more than 40 locations across Johannesburg for Megillah readings, including old-age homes, hospitals, corporate offices, and private residences. Their aim is simple: to ensure that those who might otherwise miss out on the festival are able to participate fully in its *mitzvot* and message.

Tzvi Gordon, one of the senior students coordinating the initiative, said the scale of the operation reflected the demand and students' commitment. "We've had many people reach out who wouldn't have the opportunity to hear the Megillah otherwise," he said. "So we're going out to them. As of now, we have more than 40 places we're going to."

Though hearing the Megillah is central to Purim, Gordon stresses that the initiative is designed to help people fulfil all four of the day's *mitzvot*: hearing the Megillah; giving *zedakah*; exchanging *mishloach manot*; and partaking in a festive meal.

"On Purim, there are four specific *mitzvot*," he said. "Hearing the Megillah is one of them, but we try to help people do all four."

For many individuals, especially the elderly, hospital patients, or those tied up at work, attending a full Megillah reading can be difficult. The reading takes about 20 minutes, and every word must be heard. The students, therefore, bring the Megillah directly to them.

They also carry charity boxes and coins so that recipients can immediately perform the *mitzvah* of giving *zedakah*. Ready-made *mishloach manot* packs are distributed so people can exchange gifts of food, and refreshments brought along contribute to the festive *seudah*. "In that way," Gordon said, "even

if someone can't get to shul or doesn't have family around, they're still able to take part in all four *mitzvot*."

The students will spend the entire day of Purim travelling from one location to the next, carefully coordinating time slots to accommodate as many requests as possible. "We'll be running around the whole day," Gordon said. "That's the name of the game."

For him, Purim isn't just about celebration, it carries a deeper and enduring message. "Purim is the epitome of antisemitism, a decree to wipe out every last Jew," he said. "The way we came out of it was by celebrating who we are and strengthening our Judaism."

He believes that message is particularly relevant. "It wasn't about negotiating or blending in," he said. "It was about being openly Jewish, learning, doing *mitzvot*, and standing strong in who you are. That's what the four *mitzvot* represent."

The students aim to translate that message into action by ensuring that no Jew feels isolated from the community or from the joy of the day.

Though the Purim initiative is intensive and highly visible, it's built on a foundation of consistent weekly outreach programmes.

Every Friday, RCSA students head out across Johannesburg to visit offices and old-age homes such as Golden Acres, Elfin Lodge, and Tarental. They help individuals put on tefillin, light Shabbat candles, and connect to *mitzvot* they may not otherwise be able to perform.

"Some people tell us we make their week," Gordon said. "There are people who haven't seen their children in years. They're looking forward to us coming."

This year, the yeshiva has about 40 students, including 10 South Africans alongside others from Australia, Belgium, the United States, and Canada. The group includes younger students as well as senior students in their early 20s who mentor them and help lead initiatives like the Purim outreach.

By the time Purim arrives, the students won't be strangers knocking on doors. They will be familiar faces, returning with the Megillah in hand, bringing not only the reading of an ancient story, but reassurance, connection, and shared identity.

On Purim, that connection becomes celebration.



Reading the Megillah last year at an office in Melrose



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Galliot Park restoration creates green shoots for Joburg

GILANA LAB

When CAP Green upgraded Galliot Park in Glenhazel, Johannesburg, some residents assumed it was simply the adoption of a neglected public space. In a city long familiar with visible decline, another landscaping intervention didn't immediately signal something larger.

But for Amanda Porter, chief executive of CAP Green, the project was never about grass or garden beds. "It was about sentiment," she says. "The real danger in Johannesburg isn't only deterioration. It's declining expectations. When people stop expecting better, decline accelerates."

Porter believes South Africans have gradually grown accustomed to urban decay. Broken pavements, failing lights, and unusable parks have become part of the urban backdrop. Over time, she argues, this normalisation shapes behaviour and belief.

"Our purpose is simple," she says. "We want to inspire people to love where they live. And love requires something visible. It requires evidence that improvement is possible."

Galliot Park wasn't the first site CAP Green considered. It was the first where consent and community support aligned in a meaningful way. Porter describes public-space transformation as a partnership rather than a project.

"It requires courage," she says. "You need residents who believe change is possible. You need people who can look at an overgrown field and see potential, not just for landscaping but psychological renewal." The organisation's strategy

addresses three interconnected challenges: urban decay, crime, and hopelessness.

Porter points to a widely accepted urban planning principle that environmental quality shapes economic and social behaviour. "When public spaces are clean, safe, and activated, people respond differently," she says. "They invest in their homes. They remain in neighbourhoods longer. They participate in local initiatives." In contrast, decay suppresses confidence. "Vibrancy stimulates confidence," Porter says. "And confidence is the foundation of stability."

Crime prevention is another core component of the approach. While acknowledging the necessity of traditional

behaviour just as powerfully as vibrancy does," she says. "If people believe nothing will improve, they disengage."

Visible transformation disrupts that narrative. According to Porter, when residents see meaningful improvement, they are more likely to participate in community structures, support local initiatives, and invest in their own properties. "Hope isn't sentimental," she says. "It's strategic." The emphasis on young people is central to this philosophy. Porter argues that ensuring that young South Africans believe they have a future in the country is critical to long-term stability.

"When young people believe there is a future here, they commit to it," she says. "They strengthen schools and organisations. They build businesses. They plant roots instead of planning exits." The redevelopment of Galliot Park was funded by private donors who believe in Johannesburg's future.

Porter says the project required more than generosity. "It required visionaries who were willing to fund momentum, not just maintenance. People who could see beyond overgrown grass to the catalytic potential of change."

The design brief reflected that ambition. CAP Green asked designers to create a space that conveyed warmth, dignity, and activation. "We didn't ask them to build a park," Porter says. "We asked them to design hope."

For her, design functions as psychological infrastructure. The space had to invite families, runners, and children back into public life and communicate that the neighbourhood matters. Porter believes incremental fixes aren't enough to shift public sentiment. "Small interventions maintain stability," she says. "Bold projects create belief."

The broader ambition extends beyond a single green space. CAP Green envisions visible transformation across Johannesburg, including pavements, lighting, landscaping, and public activation.

Urban renewal, Porter argues, cannot be passive. "It requires participation and partnership. When public space is reclaimed, cities stabilise. When sentiment shifts, investment follows."

Ultimately, she returns to the core idea behind the project. "This was never about grass," she says. "It's about dignity. It's about reclaiming public space physically and psychologically. And it's about inviting an entire city to believe again."



Beth and Nate Levy, Maxine and Leo Harton-Hotinsky, and Gila and Avishai Cohen at Galliot Park

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

security measures such as electric fencing and armed response, Porter describes these elements as reactive.

"We focus on prevention through reclaiming public space," she says. "Research on crime prevention through environmental design shows that well-lit, well used, and well-maintained spaces reduce criminal opportunity."

Increased visibility and consistent public activity create what she calls informal guardianship. "When families use parks, when pavements are walkable, when lighting works, public space becomes protective space," Porter says. Yet she believes the most corrosive issue facing communities isn't crime or decay but hopelessness. "Hopelessness changes

Arise, authentic, yeasted SA hamantaschen!

LEE TANKLE

In much of the Jewish world, Purim means crisp, cookie-like hamantaschen, buttery triangles filled with poppy seed (mohn), jam, or chocolate. But in South Africa, the story is a little different. Here, many families still roll, knead, and patiently wait for their hamantaschen dough to rise, keeping alive a distinctly yeasted tradition that sets the community apart.

It may be hard to believe for those around the world, however, that the "South African hamantaschen" use the original way of preparing the Purim treat, one that existed before the availability of commercial leaveners like baking powder and baking soda.

According to Noa Nisell of the ANU – Museum of the Jewish People, Eastern European Jewry originally prepared hamantaschen with yeast. It was only with the advent of commercial leavening agents such as baking powder and baking soda that preparation time was reduced from days to hours, prompting many Ashkenazi communities in North America and Europe to adopt the quicker, easier method.

The pastry itself dates back to 16th-century Germany, where it was known as *Mohn-Taschen*, "poppy seed pockets" (*mohn* meaning poppy seed and *tash* meaning pocket). German Jews later adapted both the pastry and its name, transforming it into hamantaschen, "Haman's pockets", which were allegedly full of bribe money.

When South African Jews travel overseas during Purim, they are shocked to find that their favourite Purim treat doesn't exist.

When baker Shira Liebe Shar went to Israel for the first time seven years ago, she

was dismayed to find only the biscuit version of hamantaschen, or as they call them in Israel, "*oznay Haman*" (Haman's ears).

"I was excited to sink my teeth into a delectable, soft hamantaschen, and where better to find traditional Jewish treats than Israel, right? Well, I was confused when all I could see on numerous bakery shelves were these triangular-shaped cookie-looking things. With jam centres, they were clearly hamantaschen, but the cookie crust wasn't the kind I had ever seen. I figured that the type of soft hamantaschen I wanted had to be found somewhere, but I had no such luck."

In South Africa, we have opted to keep the yeasted dough that carries a lot of tradition. Bakers and non-bakers alike remember mixing, rolling, and forming the hamantaschen with their mothers and grandmothers, and have got so used to preparing them in this way, a different version isn't even considered.

"The reason why we probably prefer the yeast hamantaschen over the biscuit version that they tend to use overseas is that it's what we're used to," said author and food editor Sharon Lurie. "It's the same in any Jewish household – if your mother made chopped liver coarse, you preferred it that way, hence the favourite saying, 'You need to get my mother's recipe'. Others made it smooth, so today, we get a choice at most delis: smooth or coarse chopped liver."

Said Heidi Feldman from the Family Bakehouse, "Yeasted hamantaschen was what our grandparents made generations ago. Many other countries have dropped the tradition because of the inconvenience of making them fresh and because they have a short shelf life. They have to be made

the night before or on the day itself, which causes a lot of pressure on the bakery."

When baker and *oleh* Les Seidel made aliya about 40 years ago, he was disappointed not to find the hamantaschen that he remembered making with his mother and grandmother back in Johannesburg. So, in 2008, he left his job as a computer programmer and started his dream of owning a bakery in the back of his home in Karnei Shomron. And so, when Purim came around, one of the first things he decided the bakery would do was bake the hamantaschen from his youth, making his bakery the first in Israel to make this kind of hamantaschen.

"After conducting some research into the matter, I discovered that indeed, yeasted hamantaschen wasn't the sole domain of South Africa, but rather originated in Russia and Eastern Europe. Anyone who emigrated from there to other places in the world took with them this family tradition," he said. "Strangely enough though, I couldn't find a single bakery in Israel that made yeasted hamantaschen, even though many in this country are of Eastern European and Russian origin."

Seidel said that in the past two weeks, he has made about 2 000 hamantaschen. The

most popular fillings are the ones he wanted to replicate the taste of home – mohn and cheese.

"People tell me it tastes exactly as they remember from South Africa, which isn't



surprising, because the recipe comes from my *bobba*. She passed it down to my mother, and every Purim morning in Joburg, we'd wake up to the yeasty smell of dough that had risen overnight. At dawn, my mother would shape and bake it. It was never my recipe, it was hers. The same authentic South African recipe, unchanged. People say it's the real McCoy," he said.

Megan Gordon, a Johannesburg home baker, said, "There's absolutely nothing wrong with offering a cookie version. Ultimately, it comes down to tradition, texture, and personal preference. However, I have found that the majority of my customers consistently ask whether I make yeasted [bread-style] hamantaschen. This suggests that their preference is influenced not only by taste, but by familiarity and expectation."

Though there is some discussion about the dough of the hamantaschen, the filling is equally important. Said Gordon, "I honour the tradition my family raised me with – the classic mohn, jam, chocolate, and cheese that feel authentic and rooted in Purim. Those flavours carry memory, nostalgia, and heritage."

Lurie said that with the ever-changing food landscape and availability of more unique flavours like Lotus Biscoff, Nutella, or even halva, there's nothing like the traditional flavours, with her favourite being apple.

"We wouldn't eat mohn because my brother said it was crushed ants, so that was the end of that flavour, and we always melted more apricot jam and suctioned it up into a syringe and squirted it into the jam hamantaschen because bakeries never put enough jam in."

"Hamantaschen are fun as well as significant. We should remember that we defeated Haman. Recognition of hamantaschen being in the shape of his hat is to remind our children that we don't tolerate hatred. That said, we also have fun, and this is a subtle way of reminding them that we have – and always will – survived and thrived to tell the tale," said Feldman.

Art of a lifetime: Albie Sachs' rebellious collection

LEE TANKLE

From exile and injury to the drafting of South Africa's Constitution, South African activist, writer, and former Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs' life reads like a chronicle of the nation's turbulent journey to democracy. In *Spring Is Rebellious*, now on show at the Zeitz MOCAA Museum in Cape Town, that journey is explored through art, memory, and reflection, revealing the human spirit behind the public figure.

The year-long exhibition is based on Sachs' experiences in the independent art world in Mozambique; his friendships with South African artists while in exile; and finally, his work in the Constitutional Court as a judge and in building the court's art collection.

Sachs told the *SA Jewish Report* that the title of the exhibition *Spring Is Rebellious* came from a paper he wrote in 1989 while still in exile. "The paper said preparing ourselves for freedom and going to go back home soon, are we ready for freedom? One of the aspects of freedom is that we've got to open our minds to a new country. And when it comes to art and culture and expressions of who we are, we've got to get out of the very narrow framework of simply saying art is a weapon of struggle. We will see art as something much richer, much broader. It's part of the struggle, but it's much more than that."

Sachs said this paper caused much controversy and commentary, and those commentaries were put into a book titled *Spring is Rebellious*, published in 1990. "It was a time of change in South Africa, and exiles were coming back. The curators at the Zeitz MOCAA Museum decided to use that as the title of the exhibition," he said.

As well as being at the Zeitz MOCAA Museum until August 2026, the exhibition was shown at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair on 22 February.

Sachs said that when he visits the Zeitz MOCAA Museum and the exhibition is full of people, he feels a sense of pride. However, when he was at the Investec Cape Town Art Fair, he felt a certain electricity particularly because people were there from the whole of Cape Town, and the booth wasn't a sterile place but full of the energy of his younger years.

"It's a small space. It's not an exhibition space," he said. "They've taken some of the murals that are in the art gallery in the Zeitz MOCAA Museum and replicated them on the walls, very bright, vibrant. And then they've got an old-fashioned gramophone with music from the time when I was younger, with the covers of Hugh Masekela way back, and they play the music. And my son, who is 19, said he loved that music, he loved hearing it, he loved being in that ambience, so they didn't make the booth into a miniature gallery, it wouldn't have worked. They made it evocative of the sounds of the time when I was involved in struggle, and people came away smiling and had their pictures taken inside it. It was lovely to be there."

The exhibition is made up of the art from Sachs' personal collection. "It's art that's been part of my life. And it's art in Mozambique. I was close to the artists. They did extraordinary, very rich art. I've donated what I acquired to the University of the Western Cape," he said. "It's art that influenced me while I was in exile – Dumile Feni's work. And it's art that's in the Constitutional Court Artworks Collection. It's the only top court in the world that has an expansive art collection. Many courts have

pictures of usually dead white male judges. We've got tapestries, sculptures, paintings, art of many different forms that represent the diversity, the variety of people in this country, of emotions and configurations."

Sachs was initially worried when approached to do this exhibition. "I was worried it would



Judge Albie Sachs

be a boring thing about this important man, and abstract stuff about the importance of art in society, and so on. Instead, it's light. It's provocative," he said.

The exhibition has timelines including South Africa from apartheid to democracy; a timeline of Sachs' life, including his practice as an advocate, going to jail, being in exile, being blown up, coming back, and becoming a judge on the Constitutional Court. The last timeline reflects the story of Mozambique from colonial possession of Portugal to an independent country which gave support to the freedom struggle in South Africa.

"These timelines have illustrated sections, and you can see the young me, the older – and I'd like to think wiser – me. It's light, it's attractive. The theme of art comes in because at different phases, different times in different locations, the artwork had a different character. So it's not a long essay about me illustrated with

nice pictures – 'and he was a collector'. I never saw myself as a collector. I acquired art, and gave most of it away. Most of the art I acquired is in the Constitutional Court collection or at the University of the Western Cape."

Sachs said that what he loves about the exhibition is the diversity of the pieces in the collection.

"Resonance comes not only from the

particular work, but how it contrasts with the other work," he said. "But the work I spend the most time with is a carving that was done in Mozambique in 1988 by an artist known as Govane, and it's a long piece. Normally, carvings show that they're made from a trunk, so they show upright figures. This was made from the roots, and it shows bodies lying down during a time of war. An agonised man, very, very weak, is using his last bit of strength to cradle another man who is dying. It's tender, exquisite, beautiful. Dealing with such a harsh situation. If I do a walkabout, I start there."

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Timeless leadership lessons

Monday night marks the beginning of Purim, one of our most iconic and joyous festivals. Like so many of our holidays, Purim carries multiple layers of meaning and instruction. Among its central themes is one that resonates particularly in our current moment: women's leadership, and the varied forms courage can take.

The Purim story presents us with two female protagonists who embody distinct but equally important models of feminist leadership. Vashti is often oversimplified as a quasi-villain, yet her dignified act of defiance, which comes at tremendous personal cost, demonstrates that a woman's dignity and bodily autonomy outweigh even the status of queen. Esther, by contrast, begins the story in what appears to be a passive role but evolves into a courageous, strategic leader who ultimately uses her position and influence to save her people.

The story teaches us that there is no singular path to heroism. Vashti represents direct, uncompromising resistance, while Esther represents strategic, behind-the-scenes navigation. Vashti is immediately strong in her refusal, whereas Esther takes a measured, strategic approach, ultimately risking her life to confront the king at precisely the right moment.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National President Zev Krengel often refers to situations requiring such calculated courage as "Queen Esther moments", instances when we must accept risk but nevertheless stand up for our people. But, in truth, the SAJBD and our community more broadly has faced both Queen Vashti and Queen Esther moments in recent years. There have been incidents demanding swift, uncompromising clarity about our red lines, such as confronting blatant hate speech and antisemitism. And there have been more complex crises requiring careful navigation, broader strategic considerations for community safety, even under intense criticism and considerable personal and institutional risk. It's not lost on me that just as Esther found herself thrust into crisis, so too did we find ourselves navigating a fundamentally altered reality after 7 October 2023, contending with challenges to Jewish safety and dignity worldwide.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



Purim also offers us a third leadership model: Mordechai, who provides the strategic vigilance and support that enables others to act courageously. Esther's power and courage are the direct result of Mordechai's intelligence and steadfast presence. The two are symbiotic, and the people cannot be saved without their cooperation.

This year, the festival, which occurs in ancient Persia, coincides with a moment of great upheaval and bravery from the modern Persian men and women in Iran who continue to risk everything in their fight for dignity and freedom.

It's no secret that the Board today is an organisation with women leaders at the fore who embody both the fearlessness of Vashti and the strategic acumen of Esther. Currently, women chair the Durban, Cape Town, Gauteng, and national councils. Women serve as our national director and deputy national director. But this wasn't always the case. It was the irrepressible Marlene Bethlehem who opened this door in the late 1990s, fundamentally changing the composition of the Board's leadership. Since then, we have been privileged to have a number of formidable women in leadership positions, including current National Vice-President Mary Kluk.

It's a point of profound pride that our women serve in such pivotal roles within our community. This is a genuine point of difference and strength that we must continue to champion and foster. The villain in the Purim story was ultimately thwarted because he failed to foresee the vigilance of Mordechai or the courage of Esther. As we enter Purim, I pray that as a community, we continue to exhibit precisely these qualities – strategic intelligence paired with moral courage – and that we remain steadfast in our commitment to protecting and nurturing our community.

Chag Purim sameach.

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

Left uncool and distinctly unchiselled by hypothermia

Although I swore I never would, I finally gave in and tried the whole "cold plunge" thing. I got behind a trend that chiselled people swear by, and according to their Instagram, it has benefits greater than any other wellness discovery since we started roasting the listeriosis and salmonella right out of our chicken.

In the interest of accuracy, and for full context, I didn't exactly plunge. It was Friday afternoon, the electricity had been off all day – City Power "infrastructure work" the official term for 'Welcome back to the 1800s' – and our geysers weren't connected to the solar system. So, strictly speaking, it was less "cold plunge" and more frantic hopping around a cold shower like a man trying to negotiate with a thunderstorm.

But water is water, and cold is cold. And unpleasant is unpleasant. The only real difference between an ice bath and a freezing shower is that in the shower, you also have the added thrill of being upright when your soul leaves your body.

Still, I went in with an open mind. I expected transformation and spiritual clarity. I expected my mitochondria to write me a thank-you note. I expected my dopamine to dance.

Instead, I emerged with the following results:

- I felt angry, not invigorated;
- I didn't sleep any better;
- I couldn't reduce my ADHD medication;
- I didn't burn fat – that's the Mounjaro, thank you very much; and
- I remain unchiselled.

And here's the problem with modern wellness culture: nothing is allowed to be "just fine". Everything must be life-changing. Cold water can't simply be cold water. It must be a portal to longevity. No longer can we be just be a person who had a cold shower. We need to be part of a movement, preferably one with branded towels and a founder who mouths "discipline equals freedom" sincerely and meaningfully.

It's all so convincing online. You see these serene people lowering themselves into tubs of ice,

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



breathing like Buddhist monks, and smiling the smile of someone who has definitely never tried to do this in Johannesburg.

Because I'm sorry, but in South Africa, we already have a national cold-plunge programme. It's called "loadshedding". It's called "no hot water". It's called "the municipal water pressure dropped again". The idea that we would voluntarily add more suffering to our lives feels ... greedy.

And yet, the trend has spread like it's a new religion. In fact, I heard there's even a cold-plunge facility next to Saunders' Rock Beach in Cape Town, which I have to admire as both brilliant and completely absurd. The Atlantic Ocean isn't just cold. The Atlantic Ocean is the definition of cold. It's a vast, natural, G-d-given plunge that comes free with seagulls and an island to swim from. Building a cold plunge next to it is like opening a "fresh-air studio" on Table Mountain and no different to selling bottled water next to a waterfall. Except the waterfall doesn't induce involuntary swearing.

The truth is, cold plunging is the perfect symbol of our age. We have so much comfort that we now pay money to experience discomfort in a curated setting so that we can feel accomplished, and then return to comfort and tell ourselves that we've done "hard things".

But we South Africans don't need help with hard things. Hard things find us. Hard things come with municipal and political logos and a polite SMS that says "planned maintenance".

Which is probably why my cold shower didn't change my life.

Still, I will say this, I did emerge with one unexpected benefit. Perspective. Because as I stood there, wet, furious, and shivering, I realised something profound: some people do cold plunges to build resilience. I did mine because City Power already built it for me. And that, friends, is the most South African wellness protocol of all.

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