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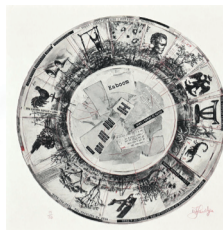


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South African Jewish Report

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Fear and belonging at the Cape Town Marathon

CLAUDIA GROSS

British fitness coach and endurance athlete Yoel Levy was all but consumed by fear as he prepared to run the Cape Town Marathon.

Levy, known to his 267 000 Instagram followers as @thejewishfitnesscoach, had flown to South Africa to run the marathon dressed as Batman, in memory of murdered Israeli brothers Ariel and Kfir Bibas, and to bring awareness to the targeting of Israel and the rest of the Jewish world. He has run in 10 countries to do the same thing without a hitch or problem.

He runs as Batman because Ariel Bibas loved the superhero before he and his baby brother were kidnapped with their mother from Kibbutz Nir Oz on 7 October and later murdered in Gaza.

However excited Levy was to be in South Africa, he received threatening messages, protest videos, and online intimidation flooding his phone for days before the race. He said that he was unable to sleep because of it. He pulled back from social media and stayed largely out of public view because he didn't feel safe.

"The last few days, I've never experienced anything like this in my life," Levy said in an emotional Instagram video after completing the race. "I never thought I would experience anything like this."

The Manchester-based runner and Jewish content creator told the SA Jewish Report the threats were frightening because they felt real and immediate. "For this race, this was the first time I received threats connected to somewhere I was actually running. I've received threats online before, but they were always from the other side of the world.

"There were a lot of threats, intimidation,

and attempts to get the race cancelled. It wasn't direct death threats saying, 'Let's kill him.' It was more intimidation, threats to disrupt things, and trying to make me feel uncomfortable and unsafe."

At one point, he genuinely feared for his life. "I'm so happy I finished the race safely," he said. "That's all I wanted to do, finish the race alive."

The experience shook him deeply because he insists his mission has never been political. "All I ever wanted to do was try and be positive. I've never ever said one thing negative about any other culture or religion. I've just tried to be a proud Jew and to run for two boys who deserve to be remembered."

After the fear leading up to the race, everything changed once he stepped onto the course and saw the Jewish community waiting for him. Thousands of supporters gathered at cheering stations organised by the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council. Many wore orange, the colour associated with the Bibas family because of the boys' red hair.

Children waved Batman signs. Orange

balloons lined sections of the route. Israeli flags flew along the promenade, while supporters formed long guards of honour cheering Levy forward at different points along the route.

"It really helped seeing the thousands of

silencing us. It was electrifying."

For many supporters, the marathon became something bigger than sport. Rabbi Sam Thurgood from United Herzlia Schools said it was the first time since 7 October that he had publicly celebrated his Judaism and Zionism without fear.

"It felt amazing to be able to do that and to feel safe doing that," he said. "People brought giant Israeli flags. It was overwhelmingly positive."

Experienced runner Larry Mallach, who accompanied Levy during the marathon after seeing how nervous he was at the start, said the emotional support along the route transformed the atmosphere.

"We had guards of honour more than 100 metres long in places," Mallach said. "The love and support drowned out the hate."

Still, there were moments during the race that reminded Levy why he had been afraid. Near the finish in Sea Point, spectators shouted "Free Palestine", "baby killer", and antisemitic abuse from the sidelines.

"The most hateful and antisemitic comments I heard were in the last two kilometres," Mallach said. "The words were horrific."

Yet Levy said the support from Cape Town's Jewish community ultimately overpowered the hatred. "Every bit of nerves was worth it so that we could celebrate that together," he said. "And to remember a family that deserves to be remembered."

Continued on page 2>>



Yoel Levy with supporters in Sea Point

Jews, all the friends of the Jews there in orange, with their Batman signs, with the orange balloons, and making me feel safe and comfortable," Levy said.

"It was just a sea of orange everywhere," said supporter Merle Rakusin. "There was no

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Australian Jews harassed after testifying

The head of the Australian government commission looking into the Bondi Beach terror attack has reported that witnesses who testified before the commission have faced an onslaught of online harassment and intimidation.

Virgina Bell, head of the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, warned that those who engage in such behaviour could face prosecution.

"We've received reports from a number of witnesses concerning a dramatic increase in online hate messages," she said, adding that at least one of the instances was referred to the Australian Federal Police, Australia's ABC News reported.

"I want to make it unequivocally clear," Bell said, "the intimidation of witnesses assisting a Royal Commission is an extraordinarily serious matter."

She said that the commission is monitoring, recording, and archiving the posts. "We will not tolerate attempts to subvert this inquiry or silence those who have been brave enough to speak."

On Monday, 25 May, a New South Wales police officer told the commission that no threat assessment was prepared for last year's Chanukah

celebration in Sydney, where two attackers killed 15 people and wounded dozens, despite warnings from a local Jewish security group of the risks.

Australia's spy chief, Mike Burgess, told the inquiry on Monday that antisemitism in the country had been "left unchecked" following 7 October.

Natalie Levy, a volunteer with a local Jewish security group, was among those who testified during the first hearings. She told the commission, "My daughter sees [s]wastikas etched all around the school; children saying 'Heil Hitler' and putting up their arm in a salute," *The Guardian* reported.



A sign outside Bondi Pavilion in Sydney on 18 December 2025 to honour victims of the Bondi Beach shooting

"I can't believe that in 2026, in this beautiful country, antisemitism has become so normalised and people are unashamedly being antisemitic and saying the most vile things about Jewish people, Jewish children," she said.

Speaking about her own experiences, Levy said, "I've been called a 'kike,' a 'dirty Jew,' a 'dirty Jewish pig,' a 'baby killer,' a 'baby eater,' and 'genocidal'."



Ukraine reburies Nazi collaborator with state honours

Israel has criticised Ukraine after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy gave full state honours to a Ukrainian nationalist leader who was part of a movement that collaborated with the Nazis during World War II.

During a reburial ceremony on Sunday, 24 May, Zelenskyy described Andriy Melnyk and his wife, Sofia Fedak-Melnyk, as "iconic Ukrainians of the 20th century who are deeply respected", according to *The New York Times*.

Melnyk led one of the factions of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists during its collaboration with Nazi Germany. Though the organisation shared a mutual opposition to Soviet rule with the Nazis, it also promoted antisemitic rhetoric, and some of its members participated in the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. Melnyk initially sought cooperation with Nazi Germany but was later detained by the Nazis as relations with Ukrainian nationalist groups deteriorated.

The remains of Melnyk and his wife were exhumed from Luxembourg last week and transported to Ukraine for reburial at Kyiv's National Military Memorial.

"Glory to every Ukrainian hero! Glory to all our Ukrainian warriors! Glory to our people!" Zelenskyy, who is Jewish, wrote in a post on X marking the ceremony.

The reburial was quickly decried by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial. It posted on X that it was "deeply troubled by such national commemorations, which come at the expense of historical truth and the memory of Holocaust victims".

"Honouring the leader of a movement that supported and collaborated with Nazi Germany during the persecution and murder of millions of Jews undermines the moral integrity essential to Holocaust remembrance," the post read.

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Fear and belonging at the Cape Town Marathon

>> Continued from page 1

A supporter, Demi Cassell, described the atmosphere as "warm" and "wholesome". "When Yoel came past dressed as Batman, all the children were screaming with excitement," she said.

Another supporter, Wendy Davis, recalled how Levy stopped to shake the hands of two young boys standing along the route. "Afterwards they told their parents they weren't washing their hands again because

Batman had touched them," she said.

Dvir Geva, who helped organise music at one of the supporter stations, said Levy inspired the community to come together publicly in a way he had never seen before. "It created safe spaces," Geva said. "People felt proud to participate."

Supporter Chad Silver said the marathon felt different from previous Jewish gatherings in Cape Town. "Usually it feels like you are

reacting to hate," Silver said. "This time it came from a place of love and belonging."

By the end of the marathon, Levy said, his fear had been replaced by something else entirely. "If anything, I feel so proud to be Jewish.

"I hope this race brought people together. The South African Jewish community, from the children to the grandmas, you made this experience worth it."

Holding our heads high: From Naso to Eurovision

Torah Thought

Last week, as Jews around the world watched Israel stand proudly on the Eurovision stage despite boos, hostility, and protests, I couldn't help but think of our South African Jewish community.

Small in number. Sometimes feeling isolated. Yet constantly refusing to lower our heads.

Whether it's volunteers delivering meals to seniors, communities rallying for Israel, young people putting on tefillin, or ordinary Jews performing extraordinary acts of kindness, our community continues to stand tall with dignity, faith, and pride.

The opening words of this week's parshah feel incredibly relevant, "*Naso es rosh* [Lift the heads of the Jewish people]."

Parshah Naso begins with a seemingly simple instruction to take a census of the Jewish people. Yet the Torah doesn't use the usual Hebrew word for counting, *lispor*. Instead, it says "*Naso es rosh* [Elevate their heads]."

Why describe a census as an elevation?

Because when we look only at our numbers, it can feel discouraging. We are one of the oldest nations on earth, yet among the very smallest. Moses already told

us in the Torah, "You will be fewest among the nations." How does such a tiny people survive? How do we continue influencing the world, building communities, defending values, and carrying the torch of morality and faith?

The Torah answers: don't merely count Jews, elevate them. Let everyone know that they

matter infinitely; you are indispensable. Judaism was never just about how many Jews there are. It's about the strength of our soul and the impact each person can make.

I see this constantly as director of Chabad Seniors programmes. Every week our dedicated volunteers visit dozens of elderly members of our community who may feel forgotten by society. A warm meal, a birthday celebration, a hospital visit, a Shabbos food parcel, or simply sitting and listening to someone's story becomes an act of *naso es rosh*, lifting another person's head.

Sometimes the greatest achievement is simply reminding one person that they matter.

Last week, Israel's representative at Eurovision, Noam Bettan, stood before millions under enormous pressure and hostility, yet performed with poise, pride, and strength. In the face of boos and protests, Israel still sang.

That is the Jewish story. The Jewish people have learned that we cannot always control the noise around us, but we can choose what song we sing.

Before stepping onto the stage, Bettan put on tefillin and recited *Shema*. Before the finals, he celebrated Shabbos proudly with the Israeli delegation. And after his performance, his message of *Am Yisrael Chai* rang

Rabbi Ari Kievman
 Chabad House
 Sandton Central

out clearly. In the face of rising antisemitism, Jews continue to sing, to dance, to build, and to bring light into the world.

Perhaps that is the deeper meaning of *naso es rosh*. Hold your head high.

Not arrogantly, but proudly. Proud to be a Jew. Proud of our Torah. Proud of our values. Proud to care for one another. Because when you lift another's head, you discover that, in truth, you have elevated your own.

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Loss of innocence: Hostel abuse survivors speak out

TALI FEINBERG

Two men who say they faced almost daily sexual abuse while at the King David High School hostel in the 1980s have come forward to share their stories. Both buried their secret for decades. Now, they say they are in a more secure place and no longer want this unhealed wound to fester.

They hope that by sharing their stories they will encourage others to come forward, which will lead to healing for victims and the community.

Their alleged abusers were two former staff members at the school in the 1980s, neither of whom are Jewish. The names of the alleged perpetrators are known to the *SA Jewish Report*, but cannot be published because the men haven't yet been officially charged. They have long since left the employ of King David Schools.

One survivor, Trevor Appleson (58), was recently flown to South Africa by the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) to formally lay criminal charges against both men at a police station.

"I was the victim of two paedophiles," says Appleson, who now lives in England. "I was groomed by them. The one, a teacher in the hostel, roamed freely, molesting boys in their beds. We were totally at his mercy."

Survivors have engaged a Johannesburg lawyer and are vigorously pursuing a criminal case. "We want to see the perpetrators arrested," says Appleson.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Canada, Howard Levy (58) says he arrived at the King David hostel traumatised by the death of his father, and the same sexual predator preyed on that vulnerability.

"As a kid, I loved fishing," says Levy, who grew up in Potchefstroom. He eventually convinced his father to take up fishing too. Their shared love of the hobby grew, until Levy's father drowned in a fishing accident when

Levy was 12. "Because I convinced my dad to try fishing, I felt like I had killed my father," he says.

It was in this state that Levy arrived at King David Linksfield's Sachs House Hostel in 1982. There, the perpetrator took advantage of his need for a father figure and his guilt, abusing him almost nightly.

The abuse continued even after Levy's mother came to Johannesburg and Levy moved back home. Knowing the family was struggling financially and emotionally, the predator would bring them food, then abuse Levy in his bedroom. This continued until the boy matriculated.

"In some ways, I saw his abuse as 'punishment' because in my mind I had 'killed my father,'" says Levy. This

Both men say that instead of healing with time, this wound grew and festered, leading them to finally speak up. They emphasise that sexual abuse victims often take years to "come out" because they don't have the strength to face the abuse. Levy says he might have taken his own life had he had not "buried" what happened to him.

Both men say that seeing their children reach the same age they were when they were abused has also pushed forward the pain. They are clear they don't want the trauma to continue to affect their lives or the next generation. They emphasise that just because time has passed, it doesn't mean what happened is any less horrific, and it still needs to be faced.

The SABJE, which has supported the two men in laying criminal complaints, released a statement acknowledging the allegations on 18 May.

"This isn't something that can ever be minimised," wrote Rabbi Ricky Seeff, General Director of the SABJE. "If these alleged perpetrators are guilty, they must be prosecuted. Abuse cannot and will not be tolerated."

The SABJE has ensured that the alleged perpetrators aren't currently part of the education sector in any way.

Both Appleson and Levy are children of single mothers, and both say the abuse deeply affected that relationship. Both were unable to tell their parent what had happened to them, but at the same time felt angry with their mothers for unwittingly putting them in harm's way.

This devastation is captured in a letter Levy's mother, Marjorie Levy, wrote to the SABJE last week. Now in her 80s, she didn't know what had happened to her son until he finally told her recently. The ripple effect of the abuse impacts their family to this day, she says.

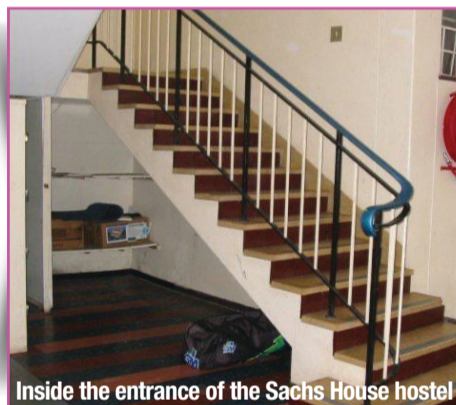
"I am struggling to find words to describe the anger, devastation, betrayal, and grief I now live with, after learning what was done to my son," she wrote. "What makes this unbearable is not only the abuse, but the knowledge

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Outside the Sachs House hostel



Inside the entrance of the Sachs House hostel

week, he signed an affidavit in Canada, and is willing to come to South Africa to submit a formal complaint to the police, if needed.

Appleson says he also experienced "horrific abuse" by a male geography teacher, who took him into the back room of his classroom to sexually assault him.

Both survivors were 13 at the time, but Appleson says he knows of victims who were abused at an even younger age. Three other people have reported abuse to the school. Those who have come forward say there are many others, because the hostel teacher molested multiple boys in multiple dormitories.

What was particularly insidious was that "as a boarder, these adults were our parent figures", says Appleson. "Sexual abuse is a murder of the self. You live with an open wound."

that I did everything to ensure the school understood how vulnerable Howard was after the death of his father."

When her son had become withdrawn and isolated, she had put it down to his dad's passing. "I now live with the devastating knowledge that while I was trying to help my son heal, another adult was abusing him," she wrote. "That betrayal is something I don't know how to forgive."

Seeff says that "Marjorie's email was very hard to read. For a mother to find [this] out for the first time in 40 years must be indescribably traumatic."

Levy's mother is calling for "a genuinely independent investigation into historical safeguarding failures; full transparency regarding prior complaints; accountability for those who failed to act, if any; and meaningful support for survivors and their families". Survivors are calling for the same.

"Her concerns are entirely understandable and we take them seriously," says Seeff. The SABJE is "committed to ensuring that this is handled thoroughly, sensitively, and responsibly".

The SABJE is engaging with abuse experts and intends on investigating fully. "We are committed to being as transparent as possible, consistent with our moral, ethical, legal, and safeguarding obligations," says Seeff.

He says survivors' stories are "tragic" and he has responded to everyone who has approached the SABJE. The organisation is open to setting up processes to offer psycho-social support to victims.

Appleson emphasises that this "isn't about hurting the community". Rather, it's about ensuring there is a process in which what happened is acknowledged. Both men say the abuse led them to distance themselves from Jewish

life, but emphasise that "victims are part of the community".

They say that most hostel boarders knew about the abuse, either because they were also being molested, or because they saw it happen in their dormitories. They believe some adults may have known, especially about the hostel teacher.

"While the current leadership played no part then, they now have the opportunity to do what they can to remedy it," says Appleson.

The SABJE has engaged lawyers and the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa to ensure the accusations are properly investigated. The SABJE now has extensive safeguarding measures for employment, including police clearance checks and sexual offender vetting.

Seeff extends "a sincere apology" to victims, and asks anyone who experienced or witnessed abuse to come forward confidentially so appropriate action can be taken.

Even though the abuse took place 40 years ago, for Appleson, "the wound itself is continual abuse, and it's cathartic to seek justice. I'm doing this to save myself and my family, and hopefully we will help other survivors and their families too."

For many years, Levy remained silent "due to fear, shame, trauma, and concern about my vulnerable family situation". But now, "I'm proud to testify in my name", he says. "It's time to tell our stories. I'm done with hiding away."

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Jewish South Africans not immune as unemployment deepens

CLAUDIA GROSS

The unemployment crisis is no longer a distant national statistic for Jewish families. It is now being felt in homes, schools, and communal spaces across the country.

Statistics South Africa announced last week that the official unemployment rate rose to 32.7% in the first quarter of 2026. The expanded unemployment rate, which includes discouraged work seekers who have stopped searching for jobs, climbed to 43.1%. That means 8.1 million people are officially out of work, and another nearly four million South Africans have reportedly given up looking for work altogether.

Economists warn that the figures reflect deep structural problems in the economy, with sluggish growth, rising living costs, and limited job creation continuing to squeeze households. Young people remain the hardest hit, with graduates increasingly competing for scarce entry-level positions.

Within the Jewish community, young graduates, retrenched professionals, parents returning to work, and older workers seeking flexible employment all say that job hunting is exhausting and emotionally draining.

"I graduated just over a year ago and apart from a short internship, I haven't been able to secure permanent employment yet," said 24-year-old Leah*.

She said many entry-level jobs require

years of experience, trapping graduates in a cycle where they aren't hired and cannot gain experience. "A lot of applications also just disappear into a void."

She said unemployment created emotional pressure for young adults at a time when they are trying to establish their independence. "It's stressful because you start comparing yourself with friends who seem to be moving ahead in their careers. Some days I feel optimistic, and other days I wonder whether I chose the wrong field entirely."

Forty-seven-year-old David* said he had expected to find work quickly after being retrenched from a marketing position. Instead, he has spent eight months searching in a highly competitive market.

"I've spent hours tailoring CVs and cover letters, applied for dozens of jobs, and often never hear back," David said. "Interviews are also incredibly competitive because so many qualified people are applying for the same positions."

The uncertainty affects more than

finances. "It's affected my confidence more than I expected," he said. "There's definitely anxiety that comes with not knowing when your next opportunity will come."

David said support from friends and networking contacts in the Jewish community had helped him cope with the isolation that often accompanies being out of work.

Beth*, who was unemployed for five months before recently finding work, said it had been gruelling and dehumanising. "You become

just a number in a million other CVs.

"You become dependent on everyone around you and you start to feel useless."

Tracy*, a mother and former banker, said she had been unemployed since February 2024 after losing a long-term job. She described the process as "frustrating and tedious", saying she had often received no response after interviews that had initially appeared positive.

She has received emotional support from family, friends, and therapy, but financial pressure remained constant.

At the same time, she said, unemployment had pushed her to start a small business that gave her more flexibility and personal freedom. "From day one after losing my job, I got up and started my own little business, which I am proud of," she said. "I have been fortunate to get odd projects now and then."

Thirty-eight-year-old Rachel* said re-entering the workforce after taking time off to raise children had been especially difficult. "Even though I have experience, I sometimes feel employers see the career break before they see my skills."

"You want to contribute financially again and regain a sense of professional identity, but the process can chip away at your confidence," she said. But encouragement from other Jewish mothers and community members had helped her remain hopeful while job hunting.

Jewish employment organisations say these experiences reflect broader trends in the community. Ariella Rosenberg of ORT SA said it had seen growing demand from both businesses and unemployed people looking for support and direction. "Unemployment doesn't look the same for everyone," Rosenberg said.

She said ORT SA focused on three main areas: career guidance, entrepreneurship development, and future-focused skills training. "Our goal is to help people understand their options, build confidence,

develop relevant skills, and take meaningful steps towards employment or self-employment."

Rosenberg said ORT SA was also developing a career guidance programme to prepare young people for changing workplace demands shaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and new technologies. "Career guidance cannot only focus on the jobs that exist today. It must also help people understand where the world is going and how they can prepare themselves for it."

Liat Beinart of Staffwise said the Cape Town-based organisation had been approached by more than 790 job seekers since 2019. Between January 2021 and December 2025, it made about 425 placements. So far this year, it has placed 28 people in jobs.

Beinart said the community needed stronger partnerships. "Through brokering relationships with Jewish-owned and Jewish-run businesses, as well as partnership with all Cape Town Jewish community organisations, we are able to bring opportunities closer to job seekers," she said.

Staffwise also works with Jewish Community Services in Cape Town on the Switch Programme, which helps people who have been unemployed for long periods re-enter the workplace through supported internships. Seven of the 12 participants have secured permanent employment.

Beinart said organisations including Young Jewish Cape Town, ORT Jet, the Entrepreneurs Network, the Eliot Osrin Leadership Institute, the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, and Elevate were collaborating to improve graduate development and youth employment opportunities. The aim was not only to place people in jobs, but to build long-term economic sustainability within the community.

Rosenberg said many unemployed people were increasingly exploring entrepreneurship and freelance work as formal employment opportunities became harder to secure. Through ORT Jet, a division of ORT SA, community members are offered mentorship, business training, workshops, and networking opportunities aimed at helping small businesses become sustainable.

"Not everyone's path to income will come through formal employment," Rosenberg said. "For some, the opportunity lies in creating something of their own."

ORT SA has also launched Jet Flix, a YouTube platform featuring webinars and discussions about career development, entrepreneurship, and navigating the modern workplace.

Benji Shulman, the administrator of a Facebook employment group for Jewish South Africans, said the online community had grown steadily over the past decade as more people searched for work or side income opportunities.

Shulman said the group included younger people looking for opportunities, older professionals seeking part-time work, recruiters offering remote positions, and small businesses advertising vacancies. "We've got a lot of recruiters that do remote work that people can join."

For many Jewish South Africans, unemployment is being experienced in deeply personal ways. "At the same time, I'm trying to stay hopeful and remind myself that unemployment doesn't define my worth," David said.

* Interviewees have requested anonymity



A matter of life and death: The baby saver case

OPINION

SUE KRAWITZ



Across South Africa, baby savers, facilities where mothers can safely relinquish their babies, are at risk of closure and criminalisation. For desperate mothers who feel unable to care for their child, these facilities offer an alternative to unsafe abandonment, where babies are often left at serious risk of injury or death.

The ongoing high court battle over baby saver boxes is more than a legal dispute. It is a profound moral issue about how society responds to desperation, poverty, gender-based violence, and ultimately, the right of vulnerable children to survive.

The Department of Social Development argues that baby saver boxes promote abandonment, violate the Children's Act, and should criminalise both the mothers who use them and the organisations that operate them. Advocates argue the opposite, that these facilities save lives.

The reality is that babies are already being abandoned in South Africa.

Hundreds of infants are found every year in drains, rubbish dumps, pit latrines, toilets, and open fields. Many do not survive. The real issue before the courts is whether the law should recognise the critical difference between abandoning a child to die and leaving a child in a safe place where they are likely to live.

Baby savers have already saved hundreds of babies by providing desperate mothers with a viable and safe alternative. While these relinquishments are anonymous, they offer something that unsafe abandonment does not, the possibility of survival.

There are legitimate concerns surrounding anonymous relinquishment. Every child has the right to identity, family connections, and information about their origins. Medical histories and genetic information may also be lost, potentially affecting the child later in life. Abandonment creates significant legal and emotional challenges for children who may one day seek answers about where they come from.

There is also concern that anonymous relinquishment may deny fathers and extended family members the opportunity to care for the child. Yet the reality is that absent fathers and fathers who deny paternity are common challenges mothers already face.

We cannot discuss this issue honestly without acknowledging the realities of many South African women and girls.

South Africa remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. Rates of gender-based violence and teenage pregnancy are a national crisis. Many pregnancies result from rape, incest, coercion, or abusive relationships. Young mothers are often rejected by their

families, unsupported by partners, and unable to access meaningful support systems. Many are minors themselves.

Imagine a frightened 16-year-old girl living in poverty, isolated and desperate, with no family support and nowhere to turn. Faced with impossible circumstances, we would hope she has access to a baby saver rather than leaving her newborn in a plastic bag in the veld.

A mother who leaves her baby in a safe place is not necessarily rejecting motherhood carelessly. In many cases, she is making an agonising decision shaped by fear, trauma, poverty, abuse, or desperation. It may well be an act of compassion in impossible circumstances.

The courts are guardians of constitutional rights, particularly when legislation fails to respond adequately to social realities.

We must also ask what options currently exist for women experiencing unplanned pregnancies. South Africa faces a critical shortage of shelters where vulnerable mothers can seek refuge, counselling, and support during pregnancy. Many women report judgemental treatment from healthcare workers and social service providers, leaving them feeling ashamed, alone, and overwhelmed.

Abandonment is a criminal offence, and mothers know they risk prosecution. Yet many still resort to unsafe abandonment because they feel they have no alternatives.

Until South Africa can provide accessible crisis pregnancy counselling, emergency shelter, responsive social workers, and compassionate support systems, outlawing baby savers risks pushing desperate mothers further underground.

Baby saver boxes are not an ideal solution. They are a symptom of deeper societal failures, poverty, inequality, broken family systems, inadequate maternal healthcare, and insufficient support services. Pretending these realities don't exist won't prevent abandonment or infant deaths.

At the same time, South Africa should strengthen adoption systems, improve maternal mental health services, expand access to reproductive healthcare, and invest in prevention and support programmes for vulnerable mothers. Safe relinquishment should be viewed as a carefully regulated last resort, but one that remains lawful and accessible.

Punishing desperate mothers, or the organisations attempting to assist them, isn't a solution. Protecting the survival of the most vulnerable members of our society must remain our priority.

Our constitutional democracy is founded on dignity, life, and the best interests of the child. We cannot ignore our harsh social realities in favour of rigid legal formalism. Have we lost our compassion?

If even one child survives because a frightened mother had access to a safe alternative instead of a drain, then surely the law must make room for mercy.

The courts now have an opportunity to shape a more compassionate and humane response to one of the country's most painful social crises.

One hopes they choose life.

• Sue Krawitz is the founder and director of Impilo Child Protection and Adoption Services. She is also involved with the National Adoption Coalition and Gauteng Crisis in Care Committee.



Photo: Facebook

Betrayed in our beloved Australia

OPINION

I was born in Zimbabwe, grew up in South Africa, moved to New Zealand shortly after marrying, and migrated to Australia with my family in 1998.

I was one of the fortunate generations. My father lost his entire family, apart from his father, in the Holocaust. My mother and her family left Lithuania for South Africa in the 1930s after she was attacked as a young child for being Jewish.

But I belonged to one of the more fortunate generations, growing up with a strong yet untroubled sense of my Jewish identity. I did encounter mild antisemitism in the neighbourhood where I was raised and later in the South African Defence Force, amid the charged atmosphere of apartheid South Africa. But even when I felt targeted because of the *kippah* on my head, I didn't feel threatened.

When we moved to Australia, we felt fortunate to join a large, vibrant, and thriving Jewish community. We believed it was one of the best places outside Israel to live openly as Jews. We were warmly welcomed into a proud and engaged community, embraced our Australian citizenship, and became deeply involved in wider Australian society. We encountered very little antisemitism and, when it did arise, it was usually subtle – unsettling and uncomfortable but far removed from the anti-Jewish hostility seen in some United Nations forums and resolutions at the time, including the disgraceful 2001 Durban conference, which equated Zionism with racism.

It all changed on 7 October, when the State of Israel faced genocidal enemies in Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. It changed again for us in Australia just days later at the Sydney Opera House, where unchecked and virulent hatred, not only of Israel but of Jews, was openly expressed and allowed to go largely unchallenged by government and police. Jews across Australia, like Jews around the world, were and remain traumatised by the attempts to destroy Israel and by the hatred of Jews that the subsequent war helped normalise.

I AM A HUMANIST. I BELIEVE IN THE VALUE, EQUALITY, AND DIGNITY OF EVERY HUMAN BEING. I BELIEVE THAT WHAT UNITES US IS STRONGER THAN WHAT DIVIDES US.

We didn't expect the genie of antisemitism to be released, and even welcomed, in our beloved Australia. While working at Jewish Care at the time, I led our staff in reassuring our elders, especially Holocaust survivors, that Australia in 2023 wasn't Berlin in 1936, despite the naked antisemitism being expressed on our streets. I also reassured non-Jewish staff who were afraid of being identified as Jewish when they left work.

And then there was Bondi.

It was the day we had long feared. It was the nightmare we had relentlessly tried to avert.

The Royal Commission into Antisemitism, established in the wake of the Bondi massacre, has heard how antisemitism has run wild since 7 October, how it has affected every Jew in Australia, and how it continues to frighten and haunt us, leaving us fearful for the next generation of Jews growing up in this country. My heart breaks for



Rabbi Ralph Genende speaking at an interfaith gathering in Sydney after the Bondi massacre

my grandchildren and for what they now have to face. I grieve with my fellow Jewish Aussies that we have to be so vigilant or, as one individual said to the commission, feel like we are in a kind of open hiding.

I am a humanist. I believe in the value, equality, and dignity of every human being. I believe that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. For more than 30 years, I have worked passionately to bring people of different faiths and cultures together. I have attended countless interfaith conferences and sessions, worked to uplift and recognise the First Peoples of Australia, and written, spoken, and acted in support of harmony in our country.

I feel personally betrayed by many of the people with whom I had worked in interfaith over the years. I was disappointed by many Christian colleagues, dismayed by Buddhist and other faith colleagues, and devastated by the response of some Muslim associates. I had travelled together with Christians and Muslims and spent a week in Jerusalem. I thought we were friends; instead, I discovered that we were now seen as antagonists, especially by some Muslim colleagues, whose vile comments appeared on social media. There were important exceptions, and I did receive strong and heartfelt messages from some interfaith leaders and colleagues. But the overall lack of understanding, and the failure to recognise my pain and the trauma of my community, still cuts deeply.

For the first time in my years in Australia, I felt unsafe.

Although many Muslim organisations condemned Bondi and some Muslim colleagues reached out personally, difficult questions remain unresolved. I worry that antisemitism and the demonisation of Zionist Jews are becoming entrenched within parts of Australian society, including some schools, homes, and religious environments like mosques. Equally, I recognise the need for honest reflection within Jewish communities as well.

I am tired of feeling obliged to acknowledge Palestinian suffering, which is awful, and Islamophobia, which is reprehensible, in order to be seen as legitimate when defending Israel and my own people. I don't see that acknowledgement being consistently reciprocated by Palestinian protesters or most of Muslim leadership.

After 7 October there was confusion and hesitancy in many interfaith interactions. Many well-meaning faith leaders – especially in the mainstream churches – found it hard to disentangle their sympathies for the suffering of citizens in Gaza and their compassion for the suffering of Israeli citizens and Jewish people across the world.

There was a failure to recognise that the antizionism of the professional protesters was so very often a camouflage for

anti-Judaism. There was also an undercurrent, even among friends, that we Jews were paranoid – or even worse, exploitative – of our suffering to gain public sympathy and support. They didn't

seem to see our loneliness or appreciate our feelings of abandonment. They didn't seem to recognise our deep fears or the existential trauma of our people.

It feels different now. If something has emerged from the blood-stained beach at Bondi on 14 December 2025, it is hopefully a sea change among the Australian people.

The prodigious outpouring of grief and support from ordinary Australians suggests this, although we are aware that for many and possibly most Australians antisemitism isn't even on their radar. They are more concerned about the budget, housing prices, the cost of living, or the footie finals.

I do think there's a different spirit among our politicians and government. They were initially slow to respond but there have been many encouraging signs, for example, in changes to the legal system regarding hate and antisemitic crimes. There may even be an attempt by our Australian Broadcasting

Corporation to temper its anti-Israel bias. And a different understanding and empathy among some and possibly many of our interfaith interlocutors except for the Muslims.

The critical question is how deep and wide is this spirit and will it endure as the months pass; will it outlast whatever will emerge from the Royal Commission? I personally have moved from a cautious optimism to a kind of hopeful pessimism!

The Koran calls Jews and Christians "People of the Book" and a good part of the answer, as many have suggested, lies in education, adult education, school and university education, and grassroots education.

Jonathan Sacks, in his wise book *The Home We Build Together* – well aware of current social breakdown and threats to liberal democracies – reminded us that "Society is the home we build together, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, and secular humanists. To do this we need a shared language. The democratic conversation must include all of us. We must be prepared to explain ourselves to one another, and to listen to one another."

• Rabbi Ralph Genende OAM is interfaith and community liaison for AIJAC (the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council) and senior rabbi in the Australian Defence Force. He is in South Africa this week and will be speaking at Sydenham Shul on Friday night, 29 May, at The Base on Saturday, 30 May, and at Glenhazel Shul after mincha on Saturday.



RABBI RALPH GENENDE



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South African Jewish Report

Shame on the haters

A young idealistic man travels the world, running marathons in memory of two little ginger-haired Israeli boys who were brutally murdered in Gaza after being taken hostage by Hamas terrorists on 7 October.

The young man, Yoel Levy, is a British Jew who is focused on building awareness against hate, creating bonds over barriers, and uplifting communities. However, having travelled all over the world, including to countries like Australia and Britain where antisemitic attacks are rife, it was in South Africa that his life was threatened. It was here that Levy felt real fear.

This is the welcome he got from our haters. Instead of showing a guest our national hospitality, they threatened his life and bombarded him with hate.

“Every time I speak up, whether it’s about Israel, antisemitism, or simply showing Jewish joy, someone is there to try and knock it down,” he writes in a post about his experience in South Africa. He came here to show his pride in his heritage and his passion for his people, certainly not to fight or get involved in politics.

I am disgusted at my fellow South Africans. While I appreciate that Jews and supporters of Israel came out in their droves to run with and ensure the safety and security of Levy, it unfortunately didn’t absolve or take away the hurt of the hate.

Levy is a proud Jew, as are most of us. He doesn’t stand up and say he supports war, the present Israeli government, or even the army. He does nothing like that. He runs in a Batman outfit in the name of two toddlers who were murdered with their mother. His posts are always uplifting and kind.

He doesn’t shout about hating anyone because what he is about is love.

For that, the haters came out in full force against him. They did all they could to make him scared and try and frighten him off. Those who claim this is not antisemitism aren’t fooling anyone. This is clear unadulterated Jew-hatred, even if a handful of those at the helm of this hatred happen to have been born Jewish. Anyone who hates Jews is an antisemite, even if they claim the title of “I’m-a-Jew-but”. In my mind, such people are simply a disgrace to our community and to our country.

The haters were so proud of unsettling Levy and making him afraid. Really! Is that what they call human rights activism? So what is Levy? Not human?

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign proudly posted, “The public pressure was so intense it stripped him [Levy] of his disguise – he was spotted running maskless and isolated at almost every point.”

Of this they were proud. Of making a young man, whose only commitment is to do good, feel scared and isolated. What heroes our haters are! Really! They are disgusting!

While Levy leaves South Africa with a sense of massive support from our community, he also leaves with the sickening taste of true hatred and blatant antisemitism. How does it happen that it is in our country – where we believe that antisemitism isn’t as bad as in most other countries – that he felt this for the first time? Shame on all of them!

Bravery of survivors

On the flip side, I so admire the two men who came forward and spoke openly to us about being sexually abused as boys at the King David hostel back in the early 1980s.

For 40 years they lived with and hid these horrific experiences, unable to share their pain. For 40 years, the rest of us were oblivious of the horror they experienced. They had a choice to let it lie so many years later.

It takes great courage to reignite this pain and be open about what happened to them. One of the worst things about sexual abuse is that the survivors are made to feel shame about what happened to them. Except the shame is not theirs. The shame belongs 100% to the perpetrators of the abuse.

These brave men were triggered by seeing their own children at the age they were when they were abused. This gave them momentum to speak up about it.

I was at King David High School Linksfield around the time of their abuse and, in all honesty, I had no inkling of this happening. I asked a few people who were at school with me, but they too weren’t aware. I wasn’t at the hostel though.

While I don’t know what the management of King David did back then, or if it had any knowledge of the abuse, I salute Rabbi Ricky Seeff and the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) for standing by these men and encouraging them to lay charges. More than that, the SABJE actually brought the one man out to lay charges.

Rabbi Seeff himself wasn’t even born at the time of these crimes, and those on the board now were, at most, just children when this all happened. However, they have stepped up to the plate and are showing a true willingness and commitment to see this through the legal system with the survivors. They have asked for other survivors to come forward and I commend that.

It shows just how real their commitment is to ensuring this criminal behaviour cannot and will not be allowed anywhere near the King David schools, now or ever. They have shown commitment to ensuring this is the case. *Kol hakavod!*

To Rabbi Seeff, the SABJE and, more than anything, the survivors, we support you in this mission. May there be no place in our community, country, or our world for sexual abusers!

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



There’s a hole in your bucket, dear Dada

OPINION

DANIEL SCHAY



When I was growing up, we had an old vinyl record that I used to play on repeat. Somewhere between the usual kids’ songs was “There’s a Hole in My Bucket”.

If you don’t know it, it’s basically a lesson in going nowhere. Henry has a leaking bucket. Liza tells him to fix it with straw. To cut the straw, he needs an axe. To sharpen the axe, he needs a stone. To wet the stone, he needs water. To fetch the water ... well, he needs the bucket.

And of course, the bucket has a hole.

It’s a song that could have been written about Mayor Dada Morero’s Johannesburg.

Service delivery collapses. The response? A Bomb Squad. Leading it? Snuki Zikalala, African National Congress (ANC) veteran, former South African Broadcast Corporation chief executive. Not an engineer. Not a turnaround specialist. A cadre.

When that doesn’t work? Walk faster. Morero and Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi launch what they call “accelerated service delivery”. Walkabouts. Reclaim the city campaigns. Cameras rolling. Clipboards out.

New names. Same loop. Henry never leaves the yard. He just keeps trying to fix the same broken bucket with the same broken tools.

Meanwhile, the city’s debt to Eskom sits at R6.8 billion and growing by the day.

Pointing doesn’t fix anything. None of it touches the structural problem. It isn’t allowed to. The playbook only has ANC pages. And so, the cycle continues – fetch the water, find the hole, start again.

As a councillor in Johannesburg, I deal with the consequences of that loop every day.

That R6.8 billion Eskom debt forces every paying resident to ask the most frustrating question in local government, “Where does our money actually go?”

They solve the problem themselves.

In the Johannesburg Jewish community, that instinct runs deep.

In 1888, with no safety net, the Chevrah Kadisha was formed to care for the vulnerable and bury the dead with dignity. When public schools couldn’t meet our needs, we built our own. When policing struggled, CSO and CAP stepped in. When emergency services fell short, Hatzolah filled the gap.

For more than a century, the response to state failure has not been resignation. It has been action.

Not to isolate ourselves, but to ensure that life continues with dignity, while taking pressure off a system already under strain.

The solar panels on our rooftops are simply the latest expression of that instinct. The state couldn’t keep the lights on. So, we kept them on ourselves. Quietly, and at significant personal cost, hundreds of millions of rands went onto rooftops across the northern suburbs. Panels, inverters, batteries, all funded by households, not the municipality.

The city didn’t plan it. It didn’t support it. In many cases, it tried to stop it. And yet it happened anyway. Because this is what this community does.

And in doing so, we’ve already solved half the problem. The infrastructure exists. The investment has been made. The generation capacity is there, producing power every day.

Now comes the second half, and this is where the city’s failure becomes unfixable.

City Power wants residents to register their solar systems. But residents have a simple answer: fix your bucket first.

Tell us how you plan to use our water before you ask for it.

Because right now, the terms don’t make sense. No long-term tariff clarity. Registration uncertainty. The real risk of being pushed onto more expensive billing structures. Solar users treated as targets, not partners.

So, residents adapt. They don’t fight the system. They go around it. Private energy solutions. Subscription models. Full or partial grid independence.

And every household that disconnects fully is one the city has lost, not just as a contributor to the grid, but as a ratepayer, a participant, a stabilising force.

Here’s what the city is throwing away: when excess solar feeds into the grid, it doesn’t travel across the city to a distant substation. It goes to the nearest demand, usually your neighbour.

A street of solar-equipped homes becomes a micro-network. It stabilises supply. Reduces dependence on Eskom. Brings costs down for everyone, including those who can’t afford panels.

That’s the Cape Town model. Not magic. Policy. Bidirectional meters. Feed-in tariffs. Clear rules. A framework that treats residents as partners, not revenue targets.

Johannesburg’s residents have already done the hard part. The panels are on the roofs. The capacity exists. We’re not asking the city to build anything. We’re asking it to get out of the way.

Instead, we get Snuki Zikalala and a walkabout.

On 4 November, Johannesburg gets the chance to replace our Henry.

A community that has spent more than a century building where the state wouldn’t know the difference between systems that work and systems that collapse under their own contradictions.

We’ve built enough of it ourselves. We know what needs to be done. We’ve already done the hard part.

Now we just need a city, and leadership, willing to meet us halfway.

It’s time to fix the bucket.

• Daniel Schay is a member of the City Council of Johannesburg, serving as the Democratic Alliance spokesperson on Development Planning and councillor for Ward 72.



A few years ago, when I asked for billing data in Ward 72, the payment ratio was more than 100%. That’s what a functioning community looks like, people paying, often ahead of consumption through prepaid systems.

Yes, things are tighter now. The cost of living is up. The economy is flat. But by and large, my residents are still paying. They are doing their part. And yet they are the ones being told they may sit in the dark.

Here’s the uncomfortable truth. When you pay City Power, that money isn’t ring-fenced to pay Eskom. It disappears into the city’s general revenue pool, spread across ballooning wage bills, legacy debt, and a system riddled with inefficiencies.

At the same time, the city continues pushing bulk electricity into areas where there is little to no payment, absorbing massive technical and commercial losses, with virtually no enforcement, not even against government departments.

So, what happens when revenue falls?

We don’t fix the system. We go back into the loop.

Tariffs rise above inflation. New charges appear. Fixed network fees climb to the point where some households are now paying more than R1 700 a month before they’ve used a single unit of electricity.

That’s not sustainability. That’s a slow bleed.

We are watching a municipal death spiral in real time, with a shrinking base of compliant, paying residents expected to carry the cost of dysfunction the city refuses to confront.

So, what do people do when the system stops working?

Herzog stands up for what Israel could be

OPINION

PROFESSOR MENACHEM Z ROSENSAFT



Countries, like individuals, have consciences. For those of us who reject the extremism, bigotry, and intolerance of Benjamin Netanyahu's government, Israelis and liberal Zionists around the world alike, President Isaac Herzog personifies both Israel's conscience and its soul.

Herzog admirably didn't mince his words on Sunday 24 May in condemning extremist Israeli (read Jewish) West Bank settlers as an "anarchist mob" whose

all-too-frequent violent attacks against Palestinian civilians

"defile our home and depart from every basic norm – moral, legal or Jewish." In sharp contrast to Netanyahu, who callously dismisses such settler violence as the acts of "a handful of kids", Herzog declared, "We must not tolerate this brutishness that comes from the margins of society and threatens us all."

In the same speech, delivered at his official residence during the presentation of the annual Jerusalem Unity Prize, Herzog also implicitly denounced last week's physical and psychological abuse of detained flotilla activists at the hands of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, albeit without mentioning him by name.

Emphasising that it is "forbidden to abuse prisoners" regardless of any crimes they may have committed, Herzog said unequivocally that "we are exposed to

barbaric acts by a handful of people who think that detainees, those under investigation, or suspects have no human rights whatsoever."

Here again, Herzog's words were diametrically opposite to Netanyahu's. In an effort to distance himself from the shameful incident, but not too much, Netanyahu said "the way that Minister Ben-Gvir dealt with the flotilla activists is not in line with Israel's values and norms".

Perhaps most importantly, Herzog reminded not just his audience but the public at large that Israel's non-Jewish minorities must be respected and that the country must not be allowed to descend into lawlessness.

"We are exposed to degrading and ugly behaviour by extremists against Christians and Muslims living among us," he said, adding, "We must not take the law into our own hands. We must not harm members of other religions and their symbols."

Herzog clearly touched a nerve. A member of Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit party stormed out of the event in protest and Ben-Gvir himself brayed on X, "A president who calls hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens brutes is not fit to be president."

Herzog's is a rare voice of decency and tolerance in

a governmental arena far too often epitomised by the jingoism and narrow-minded illiberality embodied by Ben-Gvir and others in the Netanyahu coalition, such as Treasury Minister Bezalel Smotrich, Justice Minister Yariv Levin, Diaspora Minister Amichai Chikli, Likud Knesset member Tally Gotliv, and, except on the rare occasions when he is trying to curry favour outside his far-right base, Netanyahu himself.

Throughout his presidency, but especially as a counterweight to Netanyahu, Herzog has personified the values and principles on which Israel was created. As made clear in its 1948 declaration of independence, Israel is meant to be a Jewish and democratic state. Herzog is committed to these values. Netanyahu and the members of his government are not.

I have known Isaac Herzog for more than 30 years and was also privileged to know his father, the late President Chaim Herzog, who was a friend of my parents from when he came to the newly liberated Nazi concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen in Germany in the spring of 1945 as Captain Vivian Herzog, a British army officer.

Chaim Herzog went on to become a major-general in the Israel Defense Forces, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, a founding member of one of Israel's most prominent law firms, and Israel's sixth president. When my mother turned 80, he sent her a heartfelt letter of congratulations in which he recalled how they had met at Bergen-Belsen 47 years earlier.

In 1984, after the far-right Rabbi Meir Kahane was elected to the Knesset on a platform calling for the expulsion of Arabs from Israel, Chaim Herzog emphasised that Israel's declaration of independence guarantees "social and political rights for all its citizens, without distinction of creed, race, or sex".

Clearly referring to Kahane and the phenomenon of Kahanism, Herzog went on to warn against any "obstruction and twisting of that will and its diversion into anti-democratic channels".

In early September 2022, I accompanied President Isaac Herzog on his visit to the mass-graves of Bergen-Belsen. We were both keenly aware that we stood where our fathers had stood and he told me how profoundly his father's visit to Belsen had shaped his worldview, a worldview he passed on to his son.

To be sure, other Israeli politicians espouse ideologies similar to or at least not inconsistent with Herzog's. Naftali Bennett, Gadi Eisenkot, Yair Golan, Yair Lapid, and Gilad Kariv come readily to mind. So do former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, and former Knesset members Colette Avital and Dan Meridor. But they are all part of the opposition and seek to oust the Netanyahu cohort from power in the coming elections, may it happen speedily and in our days.

Herzog, as president, is the remaining non-fascist, non-extremist official face of Israel who has just reminded Israelis and Israel's supporters across the globe of what a pre-Netanyahu, pre-Ben-Gvir Israel looked and sounded like, and foreshadowed what it may yet be again.

• Menachem Z Rosensaft is Adjunct Professor of Law at Cornell Law School, Lecturer-in-law at Columbia Law School, and General Counsel Emeritus of the World Jewish Congress. His most recent book is Burning Psalms: Confronting Adonai after Auschwitz.



President Isaac Herzog speaking at the Jerusalem Unity Prize ceremony on 24 May

Bellville bakery held a dark secret

PERSONAL STORY

GAIL LUSTIG



Growing up in South Africa, the Holocaust was always a subject just outside the door, waiting to step in. There were stories of survivors, books that slowly filled library shelves, horrific images hidden in many homes for fear of traumatising the children.

Growing up in Bellville, about 20km outside Cape Town, in a Jewish community of about 100 families, was mainly comfortable and predictable. Most of the children attended local government schools, learned a smattering of Hebrew in cheder, and usually joined a Jewish youth movement, which enhanced the feeling of connecting to our history. Who would have thought that the Holocaust was much closer to home than we realised?

C'est Si Bon, a pastry shop, might have been one of the only reasons to put Bellville on the map in the 1960s. The custard slices, chocolate brandy balls, cream cakes with strawberries or other fruit, chocolate eclairs and petit fours, marzipan, German cheesecake, apple doughnuts, Swiss roll, sausage rolls, and breads became favourites of not only the locals, but also crossed the gap of the national road to the city and served as a terrific destination for Sunday drives.

The couple who ran the bakery had come from Europe in 1960. Andre Pouliart and his wife, Wanda.

He was Belgian and she German. Andre's father had been a pastry chef in Brussels and it was from him that his son filled Voortrekker Road in Bellville, a town of 40 000 residents, with the delightful aromas that tempted so many.

One particular rainy Sunday in winter, at about mid-morning, a

customer in his late 40s walked into the shop with his wife. It was their first visit. Within minutes of entering the konditorei, Issy felt the ground shaking under his feet. His head throbbed with the sudden realisation of what he saw behind the counter. He let out an agonised scream, instantly stifling the chatter of the other customers.

but besides this symbolic action, there were no inquiries or investigations regarding the background of the owner.

Apartheid South Africa protected anyone with secrets such as these.

Decades later, with the advent of social media, and Facebook in particular, I joined a group of Bellville nostalgia, where the topic of the bakery was mentioned several times.

Besides the posts on the legendary pastries, I corresponded privately with someone who knew the Pouliarts well.

He confirmed that Andre, by his own admission, had been an SS officer.

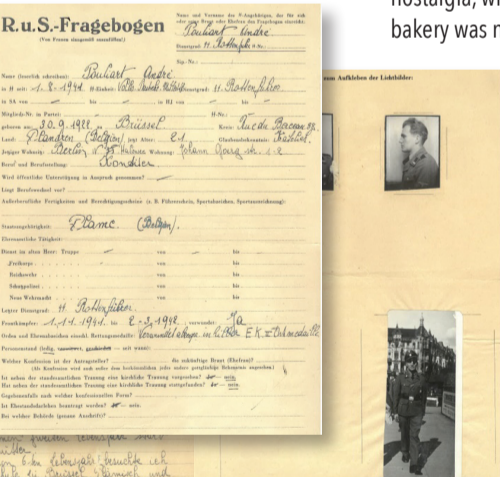
It took me time and the lonely COVID-19 epidemic to write to the German Archives (Bundesarchiv) inquiring about

Pouliart. I was truly bowled over to learn that in a file on record were documents and photos of no other than the Waffen SS officer!

In 1941, he had volunteered for the Waffen SS. After training, he was deployed to the Eastern Front with the German army. Wounded in 1943, he was transferred to Berlin. In 1960, he and his wife travelled to South Africa, setting up home in Cape Town.

A thorough search of the internet revealed that Nazi criminals had made their way out of Germany and fled to havens using the "ratlines" created to assist them in their escape. They were supported by the Catholic Church. South America was a popular destination, as were the United States, Australia, Switzerland, and Spain.

South Africa was not reported as one of the havens and yet we know today



Documents and photos of the Waffen SS officer from the German Archives

Pointing his shaking finger at the owner and almost choking, he shouted in a thick European accent, "You, you killed my family, you Nazi! It's you! I remember you from the camps!" There was silence in the bakery. The owner's face revealed nothing. He continued cashing money at the till.

The Holocaust survivor left the bakery immediately, barely making it to the door, his wife supporting his arm as they turned towards the car.

Within a short while, the story passed through the community. There were those who boycotted the bakery,

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The pitfalls of pumping peptides

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

"There's a new religion sweeping through the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. It's not CrossFit, cold plunging, or intermittent fasting. It's peptides. And if you're not on at least three of them, are you even trying?" These words, written by filmmaker and producer Adam Thal in a recent tongue-in-cheek social media post, encapsulate the growing preoccupation with peptides.

Ozempic, Mounjaro, and other GLP-1 receptor agonists may be household names when it comes to the growing obsession with weight loss injectables, but they're just one aspect of the peptide craze. Aside from weight loss, peptides offer anti-ageing benefits and muscle growth. But to be effective – and safe – their use needs to be monitored by medical professionals.

There are many well-known, registered prescription medicines that contain peptides, including insulin, somatotropin (the human growth hormone), and more recently, the GLP-1 group of medications, says aesthetic and anti-ageing doctor Dr Talia Notelovitz. Yet a growing number of peptides being used are not approved

for clinical use by governing bodies like the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States.

While some community members we approached work in the industry, or say they've benefitted from peptide use, they refused to go on record due to the absence of FDA and SAHPRA approval.

But what exactly are peptides? "Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins and when they are connected in short chains they are called peptides," explains Notelovitz. "In the body, these occur naturally and act as signals to modulate cellular processes like collagen synthesis, the formation of new blood vessels, the activation of healing pathways, or the release of hormones." They can also be found naturally in protein-containing foods and supplements.

"Synthetically manufactured peptides modulate the effects of naturally occurring peptides and have an incredible potential in both wellness and medical spheres," she says. "There is evidence in laboratory and animal studies that various peptides can have multiple benefits, including weight

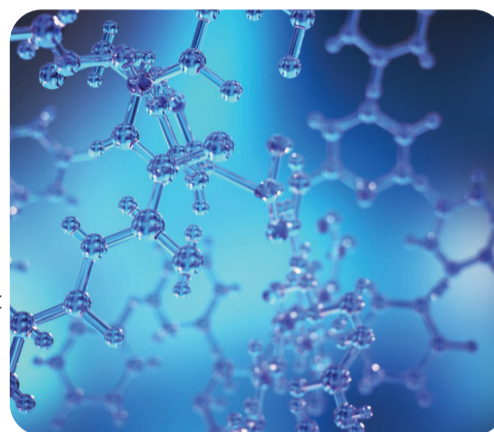
loss, improved tissue healing, skin quality, body composition, memory, and immune function." Largely injectable, these peptides are becoming more widely available.

"Yet, many years of research are required before a medicine is registered for a therapeutic goal and released for use by the general public," Notelovitz says. This includes laboratory studies, animal and human studies, and then larger clinical trials. "The purpose of the studies is to determine the efficacy, safety, potential side effects, contraindications, and correct dosing."

In examining peptide prevalence, registered clinical dietitian and founder of wellness hub, Sunrise by HMDietetics, Hilit Milner points out that today, nutritional and medical information and products are readily available. "Social media and technology have created a culture where health information gets spread very quickly, often without enough context, regulation, or medical oversight," she says. "The lines between trends and true nutritional or medical relevance have started becoming blurred."

While peptides have been around

for many years, their use and intensive research around them have dramatically increased in the last few years, including in South Africa, Milner says. "This, together with the fact that we live in a world where we want results and solutions, has pushed peptides into the spotlight."



Milner stresses the efficacy of peptides when used under professional guidance. "I see, both in research and in practice, many benefits to peptide usage, and they truly are compounds that, if used correctly, can have many physiological benefits. However, they need to be approved by a

medical board, backed by clinical trials, and given under close medical or dietetic supervision."

So, how are peptides available in advance of clinical trials and approval by governing bodies? Compounding pharmacies provide medication that is still in the research phase to patients who need them for specific medical indications, broadening access, Notelovitz says.

"With the current focus on wellness, longevity, and beauty, these products were rapidly adopted and promoted by social media influencers as a must-have for beauty, fitness, and longevity," she says.

This has given rise to a trend of "obtaining peptide preparations from unverified and unregulated

sources via the internet, a gym instructor, or beautician", which is unsafe and potentially dangerous. It is fuelled by the harmful misconception that because they occur naturally in the body, peptides are automatically safe. "Without regulation, the vial could be contaminated by bacteria or other substances, contain an incorrect dose or even a totally different substance." Only peptides manufactured from a registered compounding pharmacy – and given under medical supervision – should be considered, Notelovitz says.

Milner says she has observed increasing numbers of people using peptides without understanding their bodies. "Many people aren't being properly assessed nutritionally, medically, or metabolically beforehand, and are often not monitored appropriately during treatment, even when peptides are prescribed by their doctor. In some cases, individuals are using products of uncertain quality or sourcing, which can carry significant risks."

Notelovitz stresses that peptides aren't miracle cures and cannot replace standard medical treatments. Milner agrees. "In fact, some patients are non-responders to certain peptides due to genetics, histamine overload, or high cortisol levels," she says. They also cannot rely on the peptides alone for the desired effect; healthy habits are still vital. For example, she says, with GLP-1s, if you're not on top of your dietary intake, you may be doing more harm than good. "A medication cannot replace the role of proper nourishment."

Milner says peptide use should never be considered in isolation. "Peptides should rather be viewed as one possible tool within a much broader health strategy that includes nutrition, lifestyle, behavioural support, and understanding the individual as a whole. Two people can follow the same diet or use the same medication and experience very different outcomes, depending on genetics, lifestyle, stress levels, sleep quality, and gut and metabolic health."

The fact that many peptides are still in their research phase compounds possible risks, says Notelovitz. "We don't as yet have sufficient evidence from studies on humans to exclude the possibility that negative effects could emerge, particularly in the long term. Both doctor and patient need to be aware of benefit versus potential risk due to the lack of clinical trials."

"As more data regarding effectiveness and safety emerges and regulations change – which we expect in the near future – we may be able to utilise peptides without the ethical dilemmas we face at this stage."

While an exciting advance, the use of peptides should never be taken lightly or used without a full medical assessment and supervision, she says.

Jewish singles ditch apps for group events

CLAUDIA GROSS

Endless swiping, ghosting, and awkward small talk have left many Jewish singles exhausted. They are increasingly turning away from dating apps and searching for something more human. They want spaces where they can meet naturally, build friendships, and feel part of a community instead of another online marketplace.

That shift has sparked growing interest in creative singles initiatives, community-based events, matchmaking networks, and values-driven social spaces.

good people. I can breathe here."

The organisation has hosted more than 500 events in Johannesburg over four years. It has also begun pilot programmes in Israel.

Bacher believes dating apps often reduce people to products. "On an app, you're often reduced to a few photos, a few lines, your age, your location, and a swipe," he says.

"There is also the paradox of too much choice. When there are endless profiles, people can struggle to commit to exploring one real person properly.

"A person you may not have chosen from a photograph can become very attractive once you see how they speak, how they

collaborations with the Chief Rabbi's Matchmakers Network. One of its first major events featured international Jewish matchmaker Aleexa Ben Shalom and drew 400 attendees, most of them under 40.

Goldman says several friendships and at least one *shidduch* [match] emerged from the early events. At a YJC networking event called Jews in Tech, participants connected professionally and socially. "Until this day, the participants are constantly sharing job opportunities with each other," he says.

The move towards more intentional Jewish matchmaking has also become increasingly mainstream. In 2024,

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein launched the Matchmakers Network, encouraging community members to make at least five introductions a year.

The initiative aimed to revive the older Jewish tradition of community matchmaking in a modern format. The Matchmakers Network has encouraged ordinary people, not only professional matchmakers, to think actively about helping singles meet.

Internationally, Jewish communities are also grappling with changing dating patterns. A recent survey by Jewish Women International in the United States found that many Jewish women experienced anxiety around dating following rising antisemitism after 7 October. Some respondents said they felt safer dating within the Jewish community because of shared values and understanding.

At the same time, technology-driven matchmaking continues evolving. Met@Chabad, an international initiative linked to Chabad, combines rabbinically verified profiles with artificial intelligence-based matching. Goldman describes it as "values-based dating".

The platform hosts speed-dating events and uses algorithms to connect Jewish singles worldwide according to shared priorities and values.

Yet despite new technology, many organisers believe the strongest connections still happen offline.

Bacher says activities help remove the stiffness of traditional singles functions. "A hike must be a beautiful hike," he says. "A dinner must be a lovely dinner. A music evening must be enjoyable." The event itself needs value, regardless of whether anyone

meets a romantic partner. "The night stands on its own," he says.

Goldman takes an equally direct approach. "I will personally go over to a guy and a girl and introduce them to each other, tell each one something about the other, and walk away," he says. "Now that they don't have to approach the other, half the work is done."

Bacher says one of the biggest lessons he's learned is that many people want connection but fear vulnerability. "People want connection, but many people are also scared of connection." He says attending a first event often requires courage. "There is something very brave about showing up."

While several weddings and relationships have emerged through Wholesome Spaces, Bacher says the quieter successes often matter just as much. "Someone who had not gone out socially for months comes to one event and then slowly becomes part of a circle," he says.

"Someone who felt invisible starts to feel that they have a place." He believes many singles feel defined by their relationship status within communal life. "My hope is that we stop seeing singles as a 'problem to be solved' and start seeing them as whole, valuable, beautiful members of the community who deserve warmth, dignity, friendship, and belonging right now," he says.

Goldman shares similar sentiments. "A single person is just as much a person with just as much of a worthy life, married or not." At the same time, he says, Jewish marriage and family remain central communal values. "I wish those who actively choose to stay single learn to appreciate the divine intent of the magic of marriage and building a family," he says.

Bacher believes the Jewish community is uniquely positioned to respond to growing loneliness because of its strong communal traditions. "The loneliness epidemic is real," he says. "But I believe the Jewish community has a unique ability to respond to it, because community is in our DNA."

For exhausted singles, that sense of community may be exactly what they are searching for. As more Jewish South Africans seek authentic interaction over carefully curated profiles, organisers believe the future of dating may look less like an app and more like a Shabbat table, a hike, or a shared conversation.



Singles making connections at a Wholesome Spaces Event

For many singles, the issue isn't simply finding dates. It's loneliness.

Paul Bacher, founder of Wholesome Spaces in Johannesburg, says the initiative was born from recognising how isolated many Jewish singles felt. "After going through divorce, I became much more aware of how lonely the journey can be for so many Jewish singles."

Bacher says many older singles no longer fit into traditional young adult frameworks, yet still long for friendship, belonging, and meaningful connection. "There are dating apps, there are *shadchanim* [matchmakers], there are introductions, and all of those have their place," he says. "But what I felt was missing was something softer, more human, and more natural."

Wholesome Spaces hosts between three and five events a week, ranging from hikes and theatre outings to Shabbat meals, padel games, meditation evenings, dinners, and weekends away. Bacher says the events are designed to remove pressure. "We don't want people walking in and feeling like they are being assessed. We want them to walk in and feel, 'This is a nice evening. These are

listen, how they treat others, how they laugh, and how they carry themselves," Bacher says.

The desire for more meaningful connection comes as many young Jewish adults struggle with shrinking social circles. An earlier *SA Jewish Report* article highlighted how many Jewish people in their 20s feel increasingly isolated once they leave school structures, youth movements, and university behind.

Rabbi Nissan Goldman says this gap was one of the reasons behind the creation of Young Jewish Cape Town (YJC). "Our Chabad on Campus students, graduates, and alumni were too old for our programmes and wanted something for their age group, which was clearly lacking," he says.

YJC caters largely for people aged 24 to 39. The initiative combines professional networking, social gatherings, and opportunities for people to meet organically. Goldman says one of the goals was to help retain young Jews in Cape Town. "One of the most important reasons people leave is for love and for work."

YJC has hosted networking evenings, Chanukah parties, Purim events, and

World War II parachutists knew they weren't coming back

LEE TANKLE

How does a failed military mission become a national myth? And how do people who seem to have few military accomplishments become great national heroes?

These are the questions Canadian Israeli author and journalist Matti Friedman sought to answer when writing his most recent book, *Out of the Sky: Heroism and Rebirth in Nazi Europe*.

The book tells the true story of Jewish Allied paratroopers led by MI9, a secret department of the British War Office, during World War II. Friedman focuses in particular on four young volunteers from the then British Mandate of Palestine – Hannah Senesh, Haviva Reik, Enzo Sereni, and Haim Hermesh – who parachuted into Nazi-occupied Europe to rescue Jews, gather intelligence, and support resistance movements.

"The memory of this mission lives on to some extent in the memory of Israel. And if you drive around Israel, whether you know it or not, you're going to meet the story of this mission from 1944," Friedman explained in a webinar hosted by the Ghetto Fighters' House on 17 May.

For example, if you drive past the area of Rehovot, you pass a kibbutz called Netzer Sereni, named after Enzo Sereni, one of the mission's commanders. Similarly, there's a kibbutz called Lahavot Haviva, named after Haviva Reik, one of the heroines of the mission.

"The mission is encoded in the Israeli landscape. But if you ask people what actually happened, very few people know," said Friedman.

This was exactly the impetus for him to write *Out of the Sky*. Friedman started writing the book in 2022, but 7 October and the subsequent war changed the meaning of the book for him. He said it shows what Zionists were fighting for some 80 years ago, and that perhaps today we have lost that.

"Originally, I was thinking of this as an attempt to explain to myself why we have this obviously very important legend, which shaped the landscape of Israel. You understand that these were important characters that are very close to the soul of the

country. But what did they actually do? And that struck me as an interesting question because I honestly didn't know," he said.

The legend, as told most simply by Friedman, is that these were people who set out at the darkest moment of Jewish history to save Jews and to fight the Nazis. "If you look into this a bit more deeply, you find that they seem not to have saved Jews exactly or to have killed any Nazis, and yet this mission is one of Israel's founding myths, and these are some of our greatest heroes."

Friedman said that many of these volunteers were young Jewish refugees who had already escaped Europe and then chose to return, despite knowing the danger. By 1942, people in Palestine understood the scale of the Holocaust, creating a desperate atmosphere in which Zionism increasingly felt less like a national movement and more like a final refuge for surviving Jews.

"These people weren't soldiers; they were storytellers. They were telling a different Jewish story. They were trying to set an example that we would remember, not because they wanted to be famous, not because they were looking for glory, but because they needed to set an example for Jews facing catastrophe," he said.

Friedman didn't set out to focus the story on Hannah Senesh as she is one of the most well-

known people from the mission. But he changed direction after realising why she is of symbolic value.

"Hannah is the symbol not because she's the most successful commando, not because her military accomplishments are so great. She has basically no military accomplishments. But if the mission is storytelling, Hannah Senesh is the best writer. She's the most effective symbol for a mission whose function wasn't actually military. Its function was literary," he said.

"Her story, and the mission as a whole, is meant to set an example, to create a story that will inspire people to action, to move the Jews from passivity to

action, and tell a new story about the Holocaust."

Friedman tells us that Senesh, born in Budapest in 1921, grew up in an educated and literary family, becoming increasingly disturbed by antisemitism in Hungary. As a teenager, she embraced Zionism and immigrated to what was then called Palestine in 1939. There, she studied agriculture and joined Kibbutz Sdot Yam, where she worked while continuing to write poetry and diary entries. During World War II, after learning about the persecution of European Jews, she volunteered for the dangerous British military mission.

In 1944, she trained as a paratrooper and parachuted into Yugoslavia to help rescue Hungarian Jews and aid anti-Nazi resistance efforts. By June 1944, Senesh had been in Yugoslavia for some time, and she was dying to get into Hungary because, among other reasons, her mother was trapped in Budapest by herself. Another person in Budapest at that moment was Nazi Adolf Eichmann, who was engineering the murder of all the Jews of Hungary.

"The Jews of rural Hungary had basically been killed by that time. And the Jews of Budapest are still alive, including Hannah's mother, and she's desperate to get there. And her comrades in Yugoslavia are telling her not to cross the border because they realise that if she crosses the border, she's not coming back," Friedman said.

One of her comrades, Reuven Dafni, recalled

their final moment together as they approached the Hungarian border during World War II. Before parting, Senesh dramatically handed him a folded note, which Friedman described as almost like

a scene from a play or film that reflected her literary upbringing as the daughter of a playwright. Dafni initially found the gesture overly theatrical and threw the note away, but later regretted it and went back to recover it. Inside was what would later become Senesh's second most famous poem, *Ashrei HaGafur* (Blessed is the Match), which opens, "Blessed is the match that flared and lit the flames."

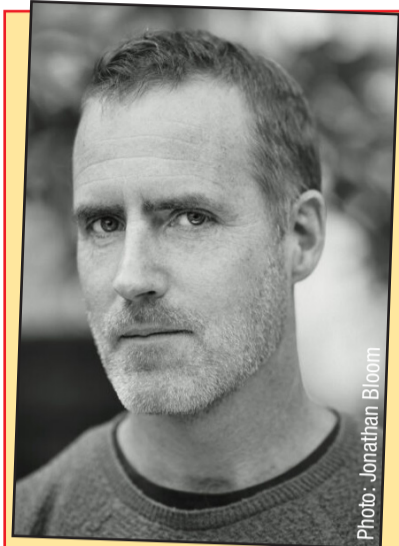
For Friedman, they make it clear that Senesh is saying that she and the match are going to be burned and that the act of being burned is going to light the flames, which is ultimately symbolic of the mission.

"The story of the mission is, in my opinion, expressed beautifully by Hannah in that line she gave to Dafni. She understands that she's not going to save the Jews. And she's not going to defeat the Wehrmacht, and she probably can't even save her mother. What she can do is enact an act of heroism so dramatic that it will inspire other people. And other people will hear what she did. And they will know that someone tried to rescue the Jews.

"And when people face catastrophe in the future, they will have this story of this match that flared. And something about her flame will be preserved, but she's not coming back. It's almost a suicide note, or it's a last will and testament. And it explains something really incredible about how these characters understood what they were doing," Friedman said.



Hannah Senesh, an acclaimed Jewish Allied paratrooper



Matti Friedman, a Canadian Israeli author and journalist

Photo: Jonathan Bloom

Letters

LITHUANIAN AGENCY IN THE MURDER OF KREKENAVA'S JEWS

I am writing regarding the article "Immortalising the Jews of Krakenowa" (*SA Jewish Report*, 21 May 2026) and specifically this sentence: "Just before the Holocaust, there were about 500 to 700 Jews in the town, but most of them were killed in mass executions in August 1941 by Nazi supporters and local collaborators."

"Nazi supporters and local collaborators" does not name the perpetrators. It alludes to them while removing their agency. In Krekenava, the murderers were not anonymous abstractions. They were Lithuanian perpetrators, including local Lithuanian white armbanders. The Center for Jewish Art's entry on the Krekenava Holocaust memorial states that in July and August 1941, "the white armbanders of Krekenava shot the Jewish residents of the town".

"Killed in mass executions" is sanitised language. These were not clean administrative "executions". Lithuanian Jews were humiliated, robbed, beaten, tortured, raped, marched, shot, and buried alive in pits. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum states plainly that Lithuanians carried out violent riots against Jews before and immediately after German

forces arrived, and that German killing units together with Lithuanian auxiliaries began murdering Lithuanian Jews in June and July 1941.

A Jewish publication should not reproduce the evasive vocabulary that has allowed Lithuania to launder its Holocaust record for decades. "Local collaborators" may be common phrasing, but in this context it is inadequate. It turns Lithuanian perpetrators into shadows beside the Nazis. In many Lithuanian towns, including Krekenava, Lithuanians did not merely "support" or "collaborate". They instigated, organised, guarded, robbed, brutalised, and murdered their Jewish neighbours.

A more accurate sentence would read: "Just before the Holocaust, there were about 500 to 700 Jews in the town; in July and August 1941, most were murdered by Lithuanian perpetrators, including local Lithuanian white armbanders, in the destruction of the town's Jewish community."

The Jews of Krekenava deserve remembrance without euphemism. Their murderers should be named. – **Grant Gochin, United States**

PLAQUE FOR THE KRAKENOWA JEWS

I would like to thank you for the lovely write-up of my recent visit to Lithuania, and for highlighting the unveiling of a plaque on the wall of the old Krakenowa Synagogue. After the article was published, several people asked me what was written on the plaque, which was inscribed in Lithuanian, Hebrew, and English.

The English version reads as follows: "In memory of

the Krakenowa Jews, who lived and worked for decades in harmony with their neighbours in this town and became victims of the Holocaust in 1941. Never to be forgotten by their families and friends from South Africa. May their memories be a blessing and a reminder that the spirit of the Jews can never be eradicated."

– **Bernard Seeff, Johannesburg**

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Social media activist Bellucci is unapologetically Jewish

LEE TANKLE

Despite growing up in a Christian family, and being told to beware of Jews, Bellamy Bellucci has become one of the most prominent South African Jewish voices on social media, promoting Zionism and Judaism. “STOP THE LIES! Israel isn’t at fault for the @unitednations having failed to bring in the Aid for Gazan Civilians! I saw it with my own eyes ... in Gaza #amisraelchai #bringthemhomenow #idf #Israel” is an example of her posts.

In another, she says, “How is it in this day and age that you can go into someone’s house. Not just threaten their lives. Take their lives in such a barbaric way. And then take a step back and say I am the victim. You pushed Jews to go back home. Now that they are home, you are trying to eradicate Jews.”

Bellucci doesn’t mince words. No matter what the response. She

has more than 122 000 followers on Instagram and 16 500 on TikTok. She is also a dancer and model.

She had long been active on social media, sharing her daily life, never intending to become outspoken about antisemitism. But her Jewish identity naturally became more visible, whether she was preparing for Shabbat or a Jewish holiday, learning customs, or documenting her conversion. As her connection to

Judaism became a larger part of her public presence, conversations around antisemitism increasingly followed.

“It became very revealing. People hated the fact that I was a black South African who identifies as a Jew and was going through the whole conversion process and posting about the fact that I just left the mikvah and I’m having a bagel. They said, ‘You’re really trying to be white’, which is something I’ve heard my whole life,” she says.

She explained that this accusation was levelled at her because she went to a private school and did ballet throughout her youth.

Bellucci’s activism intensified in 2023.

“After 7 October, literally the following day, I said everything that was on my mind. My agent said, ‘No one’s going to book you. You’re not going to get anywhere.’ And I remember it was New Year’s Eve. I made a post, thinking ‘I’ve already lost everything. I’ve already lost work. I’ve already been cancelled. So I don’t care anymore. If you want to hate me for being a Jew, go

ahead. That’s just who I am. And I’m a very proud Zionist. And I love Israel.’ And I just went off. I said everything I felt.”

Bellucci says social media has taught her that Jews are damned if we do, and damned if we don’t. Instead, we should be concentrating on Judaism.

“We should be focusing more on what it means to be Jewish. Whether you’re outside of Israel or in Israel, it’s very important to take a step back from assimilation and realise that you can assimilate as much as you want, but they will always remind you that you’re a Jew. So why not just be a proud Jew?”

“What I want to make clear, both within the Jewish world and outside it, is that the Jewish people are not going anywhere,” she says. “After centuries of persecution, exile, and suffering, Jewish survival is itself a story of resilience. Instead of hatred, that resilience should inspire admiration. More people should learn not only Jewish history, but also the ways Jewish communities support one another, build connections, and preserve continuity. For generations, Jews have had to rely on each other for protection and survival, and there is something powerful in that sense of community that other cultures and communities could learn from.”

Bellucci found her way to Judaism through ballet. It was at a boarding school in Randburg, Johannesburg that she discovered her love for dance. This led to her attending the National School of the Arts. Through her plethora of Jewish dancing friends, she experienced and fell in love with the religion.

“It was around that time that I really began connecting with Judaism. Something ignited within my *neshama*. I came from a deeply Christian Methodist family, heavily involved in the church, but something never fully clicked for me,” she says.

Bellucci began questioning why her religious practice felt more like duty than meaning and eventually distanced herself from her birth religion altogether. All the while, she was increasingly drawn to Judaism. It felt strangely familiar and deeply resonant.

What particularly attracted her was the sense of community and ritual.

“The sense of community that I had from my community didn’t feel real. It didn’t feel grounded. It didn’t feel steeped in the tradition and culture of what people truly wanted to adhere to and be a part of. It was just ‘We’re family because we’re blood.’”

Through ballet, Bellucci was able to move to the United States in 2008, but it wasn’t until she visited Israel for the first time in 2011 that she decided to convert to Judaism. Sitting at the Kotel in Jerusalem sobbing, she had the overwhelming feeling that she was destined to be Jewish.

“It was very spiritual, and it sounds very silly to people who don’t understand it, but I was just crying so much. There’s a very intense feeling that I have of belonging, and I feel like myself. And then I remembered I was questioning Judaism when I was a kid. I guess it wasn’t really something that was going to go away, but it was the right time,” she says.

She spent the next two and a half years converting to conservative Judaism with Rabbi Charles Simon. Once her family knew that her conversion was not, in fact, a phase, they ended their relationship with her.

“I swam against the current. My parents used to say to me, ‘How can you be like this?’ And I said, ‘You’re the ones who sent me to school. If you didn’t send me to school so I can think for myself then what was the point of it? You don’t get to dictate to me who I am. I will tell you who I am. You don’t get to impose your views, your religion, or anything else on me.’”

She says it became intolerable that she had to defend herself. “I had to start defending my choices as a Jew, but also as a human being. That’s what it really came down to, and saying, ‘How dare you dehumanise me just because you hate Jews?’”



Bellamy Bellucci

Melanie Phillips urges a new strategy against hate

CLAUDIA GROSS

Melanie Phillips says Jews must stop “playing defence” and become proactive in fighting antisemitism. When Phillips, a British journalist, author, and commentator, travelled through Jewish communities in Britain, Australia, and the United States after 7 October, she encountered fear, confusion, and exhaustion.

People told her about verbal abuse, broken friendships, threats outside synagogues, and growing hostility online and in public spaces. Many asked the same question: How should Jews respond? That question became the foundation of her new book, *Fighting the Hate: A Handbook for Jews Under Siege*.

“What struck me was that people didn’t know what to say,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. “They were being accused of things that were completely false, and they didn’t have the knowledge or confidence to answer back.”

So she wrote the book as a practical guide rather than a political analysis. “I wanted to give people tools,” she said. “Not abstract ideas, but ways of dealing with this in everyday life.”

Phillips said many Jews who weren’t politically active had suddenly found themselves confronting hostility at work, at university, online, and even socially. “They needed some kind of verbal armoury.”

One of the central themes of her book is that emotional reactions often worsen difficult conversations. Phillips encourages Jews to prepare calm, factual responses in advance rather than reacting with anger or distress. “You have to park your rage,” she said. “Rage may be understandable, but it’s not effective.”

She believes people should decide carefully whether to engage in arguments about Israel or antisemitism. “There are situations where your safety matters more than winning a debate,” she said. “If somebody shouts abuse at you in the street, the correct response may simply be to walk away.”

However, there are other situations where thoughtful engagement could make a difference. Phillips argues that trying to “win” arguments is often less important than introducing doubt into false narratives. “If you can create even a small crack in somebody’s certainty, that’s already an achievement,” she said. She gave the example of asking why Hamas invested heavily in weapons and tunnels but not civilian bomb shelters in Gaza. “It forces people to confront facts they may not have considered,” she said.

Phillips also warns against relying too heavily on accusations of antisemitism during debates as it often makes people defensive or dismissive. “If you immediately accuse somebody of antisemitism, they stop listening. You need to focus on facts and truth.”

Much of the book criticises what Phillips sees as a defensive mindset within diaspora Jewish leadership. She argues that many Jewish organisations have spent decades trying to minimise confrontation and reassure wider society rather than aggressively challenging false claims. “Jews have historically survived by keeping their heads down. But that strategy doesn’t work anymore.”

Phillips believes many diaspora Jews still feel their acceptance in society is conditional. “That creates fear. People become frightened of speaking too loudly or challenging lies too directly.” According to Phillips, this caution has allowed anti-Israel narratives to dominate public discourse in many Western countries.



Melanie Phillips

She said Jewish leaders needed to become more proactive in confronting misinformation. “You cannot fight lies by constantly apologising or retreating,” she said.

Phillips also criticised the tendency among some Jewish organisations to avoid discussing antisemitism in parts of the Muslim world. She argued that fear of being accused of racism or Islamophobia had weakened honest discussion. “If you cannot name the source of hatred, you cannot fight it properly.”

Another major theme in the book is the importance of alliances between Jews and Christians. Phillips believes

Jewish organisations should work more closely with Christian groups, especially those supporting Israel and religious freedom.

She pointed to attacks on Christian communities in countries such as Nigeria as an example of suffering that receives little international attention. “There are Christians being murdered and persecuted on a massive scale,” she said. “Jews and Christians have common interests in defending freedom and human dignity.”

Phillips believes these alliances should be based on shared values rather than symbolic interfaith events. “This has to go beyond polite dialogue. It has to involve standing together against oppression.”

Phillips has paid a personal cost for her public positions. For decades, she has faced criticism from political opponents, former friends, and sections of the media. She said she had been labelled “far-right”, “racist”, “Islamophobic”, and an “extremist” because of her views. “There were publishers who refused to publish me unless I changed what I wrote,” she said.

However, she also receives significant support from people who feel unable to speak openly themselves. “There are many people who know something has gone badly wrong but are too frightened to say so publicly,” she said. She believes this silent support extends beyond the Jewish community.

Phillips argued that many ordinary people reject what she described as the “inversion of morality” following 7 October. “There are millions of people who can still distinguish between truth and lies,” she said.

Despite the hostility she describes, Phillips said she sees reasons for hope, particularly among younger Jews. She said many Jews under 40 were increasingly willing to identify openly as Zionists despite social pressure. “Young Jews today are often much braver than previous generations. They are no longer willing to hide.”

Phillips believes greater visibility from openly pro-Israel Jews could eventually shift public conversations. “If more people speak out, others feel less isolated,” she said. “That changes the atmosphere.”

She acknowledged that many Jews still fear professional or social consequences for expressing support for Israel. Nevertheless, she believes silence is becoming increasingly dangerous. “If lies are repeated often enough without challenge, they become accepted as truth,” she said.

Ultimately, Phillips said her book was written to help Jews during a period of rising hostility and uncertainty. “I wanted people to understand they are not helpless,” she said. “There are ways to respond with dignity, confidence, and truth.”

Dance some more

There comes a moment in every man's life when he realises he's no longer in the middle of the dance circle. I had this realisation over the weekend at the wedding of one of our closest friends.

It was a religious Orthodox Jewish wedding, which means that the dancing was separate. Men on the one side, women on the other, divided by a wall and a moat, and guarded by a few terrifying post-menopausal women in bulletproof stockings. Not really, but it was too good a line not to use.

The reason for this context is this: on the women's side, where I occasionally sneak past without fully averting my eyes, there's a gentle flow of organised melody and movement. The dances are known and appear to have been choreographed by a retired master from the Bolshoi Ballet.

The men's side, meanwhile, could easily be mistaken for the aftermath of a brutal trench war. Guts. Bayonets and Trench Foot. Heads bloodied. But unbowed.

In essence, the men's side reflects a series of concentric circles. Fast and furious on the inside. Fast but not furious in the second and third rows. Then progressively slower the further from the centre one moves. The outer circle is represented by the men who would be chosen last in a friendly "pick a team" soccer game.

The separate dancing is neither here nor there. What is important is the realisation that the journey through the stages of life can be mapped by which circle you occupy.

In your teens, you're in the centre ring. Primarily because you're too stupid to understand the consequences of your actions. You throw yourself into the chaos with the confidence of a man who still believes ligaments are self-repairing. You leap. You scream. You lift people onto shoulders despite possessing neither upper-body strength nor balance.

In your late 20s, early 30s, you're still near the middle, but now with purpose. You begin pacing yourself. There is strategy. You dance hard for one song, then recover during a slower number while pretending to look for someone. You've become aware of concepts like

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



hydration and tomorrow morning.

By your 40s, you migrate outward. Not dramatically. You don't even notice it happening. One day you realise you're dancing while holding a jacket. Your role becomes less "participant" and more "supporting cast". You clap more.

And then comes the outer ring. The ring of wisdom. Of raised cholesterol and diminished muscle mass.

The men there move minimally, conserving precious energy like astronauts on limited oxygen supply. Their dancing consists primarily of gentle side-to-side motion and occasional administrative nodding. Every now and then one will unexpectedly break into a burst of enthusiasm, alarming nearby family members and requiring immediate medical observation.

But here's the thing. The outer ring isn't sad. In fact, it may be the happiest circle of all.

The men there are no longer dancing to impress anybody. They're not trying to prove youth, strength, relevance, or stamina. They dance because they're still here. Because another child is getting married. Because Jewish history once again refused to end. Because despite everything the world has attempted over thousands of years, there are still Jews dancing badly at weddings.

Not the perfect synchronised movement from the women's side, beautiful as it is. But the glorious, sweaty, chaotic, limping persistence of the men's circles. Generation after generation rotating around the same centre. Young men pulling older men inward. Older men pushing younger men forward.

Until eventually you find yourself at the edge of the circle, shuffling along with dignity, a slight lower-back spasm, and the understanding that one day your children will look toward the centre while you happily orbit the outside.

Still part of the dance.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Loud, proud, and visible



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

Every so often, a community does more than simply show up. On Sunday, 24 May, in Cape Town, ours did exactly that.

British fitness coach and marathon runner Yoel Levy ran the Cape Town Marathon in a Batman suit. He has been doing so at some of the world's most prominent races, which now includes Cape Town. Levy was moved by the haunting images of Kfir and Ariel Bibas, the two young brothers murdered in captivity in Gaza. Running in costume, because Ariel loved Batman, became Levy's way of carrying their story forward, of refusing to let the world forget.

When we learned of Levy's intention to run in Cape Town, we were acutely aware of the climate in which he would be doing so. Anti-Israel groups had mounted a social media campaign designed to intimidate him, and had planned protests along the route. Levy himself described the lead-up as one of the most difficult he has experienced. That isn't a minor detail. It speaks to an underlying hostility that we must name clearly and must not minimise.

The response from our Cape Town community was remarkable: orange balloons, blue and white flags, Batman symbols, and hundreds of people who came out loud, visible, and unafraid. Given the ongoing efforts to close spaces for our community and to render any outward expression of Jewish or Zionist identity unwelcome, this show of strength was a clear statement that we will not be bowed.

The fact that our supporters were safe, loud, joyous, and unafraid is clear affirmation that our community is uniquely united, secure, and visible. This is also a fact that shouldn't be minimised and needs to be celebrated.

Levy poignantly posted, "But I'd still rather deal with hate for being proud ... Than hide who I am just to be liked. I've had death threats. Slurs sent to me privately. People telling me to 'go back where I came from'. But the truth is ... The hate only reminds me why being visible

matters."

In Cape Town our community was visible and it mattered.

Levy also wrote a social media post thanking the community and everyone who came out to support him. "But today reminded me of something important. Focus on the people around you who love you, not the hate and the noise. From children to people in their 80s, hundreds came out to support, cheer, wave orange flags, and spread kindness. That is what I'll remember from Cape Town."

As one of our community members put it, "the Cape is on a high tonight".

This week, professional staff of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) attended the national launch of the 2026 Local Government Elections held by the Independent Electoral Commission. As with every national and local government election, the SAJBD will play an active part, which includes voter education, holding debates, and leading an electoral observer team. We will update details of our exciting programmes in the coming weeks.

The SAJBD watches with grave concern the escalating xenophobic tensions in South Africa. Jews have been refugees in foreign lands, we remember our history and we understand precisely where such anti-foreigner sentiments can lead. This makes International Relations and Cooperation Minister Ronald Lamola's budget speech this week more troubling. Minister Lamola attributed the diplomatic pressure being placed on South Africa to address xenophobia as a malicious campaign designed to undermine South Africa's human rights reputation. He suggests that the motive for this campaign is South Africa's "genocide" case against Israel. Such conspiratorial thinking has no place anywhere in South Africa, but certainly not from a minister in our Government of National Unity.

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

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Acrobatic dancer goes national at just 10

GILANA LAB

At just 10 years old, Emily Yakcobi is about to take part in the national acrobatic dance championships in Johannesburg. She has made it there in her very first year competing.

Yakcobi, a pupil at Herzlia Highlands Primary School in Cape Town, began dancing at the age of six. Although she now speaks passionately about acrobatic dance, her journey into the performing arts was not her own idea. "When I was younger, I did ballet. I didn't want to do it, but my mum signed me up for it," she says. "I did enjoy it."

Yakcobi's dancing was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the break from ballet led her to focus more seriously on acrobatics. "That's when I started acrodancing," she says. "And I've been doing this ever since."

Acrobatic dance, often shortened to "acro", combines different dance styles with gymnastics and acrobatic tricks. Yakcobi describes it as "a mix of acrobatics and dance, like modern and some ballet".

Although she has been training for years, this year was her first competing in dance competitions. Before this, she had focused on

examinations to progress through the dance levels.

Yakcobi recently reached another milestone by passing what she calls her "Tan Shield" exam, part of her sixth year of dancing.

"At the start of the year, when you sign up to do Acrobatic Sports South Africa, our coach gave us a dance to learn," Yakcobi says. "There's specific tricks we have to then add into the dance and those are the tricks that they mark."

She said this was a learning experience ahead of the more demanding competition rounds that followed.

From there, Yakcobi progressed to the regional, then the district, and finally interdistrict competitions. At every stage, dancers need to achieve specific scores to move forward. "I had to practise after the club competition to see everything that I got wrong, to fix my mistakes," she says.

At district level, competitors need a mark of 6.8 or higher to qualify for the interdistrict competition. The pressure intensified. "When I reached interdistricts, I had to get a 7.5 to pass," Yakcobi says. "And I got it exactly on the dot to pass to nationals."

The young dancer surprised herself. "I was very surprised and happy because in all the

other competitions I haven't got anything close to 7.5," she says. "It was really a miracle when I got it on the dance and I passed."

Now preparing to travel to Johannesburg later this month, Yakcobi will compete on the national stage representing the Western Province region.

Balancing schoolwork, training, and friendships hasn't been easy, she says. Yakcobi trains after school on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, as well as on most Saturdays. The demanding schedule has meant giving up other sports she enjoys.

"I really love netball, but I can't do that because of my acrobatics this year. I can't really do any other sports outside of school. That's practically the main thing I'm focusing on."

Yakcobi says one of the most rewarding parts of dance is seeing her improvement over time. "I so enjoy when I can see that I have got right what I had been doing wrong," she says.



Emily Yakcobi

Despite her young age, Yakcobi speaks with the discipline and focus of a seasoned competitor. Yet there is still a sense of excitement and disbelief when she talks about qualifying for nationals.

For Yakcobi, the evolution from reluctant ballet student to national acrobatic dance competitor has happened quickly. Her first competitive season has taken her further than she expected, and with years of training still ahead of her, nationals may be just the beginning of what promises to be an exciting acrobatic dance career.

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