

ChevrahKadisha

Will other countries follow Colombia's withdrawal from SA's ICJ case?

CLAUDIA GROSS

Colombia's decision to withdraw from South Africa's "genocide" case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has reignited debate over the future of Pretoria's legal challenge, with analysts divided over whether the move is an isolated political shift or the start of a wider international realignment.

The announcement came days after Colombian president-elect Abelardo de la Espriella said his incoming government would restore diplomatic relations with Israel, reopen its embassy in Jerusalem, and withdraw Colombia's intervention in South Africa's case before the ICJ. Colombia had joined the proceedings under former President Gustavo Petro, one of Israel's fiercest critics in Latin America.

South Africa launched proceedings against Israel in December 2023, alleging violations of the Genocide Convention during the war in Gaza. Israel has rejected the allegations, describing the case as unfounded and

arguing that its military campaign has been conducted in self-defence following the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October.

A number of countries have intervened in support of South Africa's position, while others have backed Israel. Colombia's withdrawal marks the first intervention to be reversed following a change in government.

Political analyst Terence Corrigan believes the development is primarily about domestic politics in Colombia rather than a broader rejection of South Africa's case. "Right now, it's probably most accurately seen as something specific to Colombia," he said. "The change of government was in an ideological sense quite dramatic."

He said De la Espriella wanted to fundamentally reposition Colombia internationally. "Re-establishing ties with Israel and dropping the ICJ case are just elements of this agenda," Corrigan said. He said that the incoming leader had also indicated a desire for Colombia to withdraw from institutions including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and even the United Nations.

Corrigan said the decision reflected broader political changes across Latin America. "Twenty years ago, the talk was of a Pink Tide, as left-leaning governments were ascendant. Today, it's the other way. Leftists are a declining group."

However, he cautioned against reading too much into Colombia's decision. "I would say that Colombia's change is indicative less of a broader move regarding Israel and the ICJ than a reminder that commitment to this case is embedded in the politics of each country."

Although losing any participant was politically significant, Corrigan said the ICJ case remained supported by influential countries including Brazil, China, Spain, and Ireland. "I don't think it materially weakens the



Omar Bula (incoming Minister of Foreign Affairs in Colombia) and Gideon Sa'ar (Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs) in Washington July 2026

could encourage other countries to follow suit. "Colombia's withdrawal sends a clear signal to the other countries that have intervened in support of South Africa's case: they are backing the wrong horse."

He suggested governments seeking closer ties with the United States might review their involvement in the proceedings. But he didn't expect South Africa to follow Colombia's example because the ICJ case had become "an expression of the government's ideological foreign policy rather than a sober assessment of South Africa's national interests".

Michael Bagraim, speaking in his capacity as a lawyer, said, "It's good news that we see people pulling out of the case. I think it's reflecting a general trend."

Bagraim said South Africa's recent request for an additional 18 months to file its reply at the ICJ had undermined the urgency the government had attached to its claims. "If you believe your allegations, you would deal with the papers as quickly as possible."

He argued that the lengthy procedural timetable suggested the matter wouldn't be resolved for years. "We're now in 2026. We'll hear the case in 2030, if they're lucky. It may even be 2031," he said.

Discussion of the ICJ case had largely disappeared from parliamentary debate, said Bagraim, who is also a member of Parliament. "I haven't heard anything about this ICJ case in Parliament since February. It was literally the discussion point every day before that."

He believes Colombia may have set a precedent. "I think this is the first country. We're going to see others jumping forward and saying, 'Leave us out of it.'" Asked whether the withdrawal weakened South Africa's international position, Bagraim said it did.

The South African Zionist Federation national chairperson, Craig Pantanowitz, described Colombia's decision as an example of a government reassessing whether an inherited foreign policy continued to serve its national interests. He contrasted that with South Africa's

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Comforting the mourning

Many of us breathe a communal sigh of relief as we emerge from the gloom of the Three Weeks of Mourning. The restrictions are lifted, we begin the seven Haftarah of consolation, and just six days after Tisha B'Av we celebrate Tu B'Av, which the Talmud describes as one of the happiest days of the year.

It is therefore no coincidence that the first Shabbat after Tisha B'Av is Shabbat Nachamu, named after the Haftarah in which G-d tells Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort My people". Rashi explains that from this point onward Isaiah's prophecies are words of consolation, whereas those preceding them were largely rebuke. The repetition of "comfort" conveys the immense effort required to console a nation that has endured such suffering. The prophet is like a sensitive visitor to a house of mourning, knowing what to say, what not to say, and when silence is more comforting than words.

Paying a *shiva* call is never easy. We often feel awkward and may say something trivial or even hurtful in an attempt to comfort. Sometimes the mourner feels obliged to provide refreshments. Our sages, with great sensitivity, therefore established guidelines for visiting a *shiva* house.

Perhaps the most important principle appears in Psalms (91:15), "He will call upon Me and I will answer him; I am with him in distress." G-d does not merely observe our suffering; He shares it. This idea is reflected in Moshe's encounter with the burning bush. "An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a

blaze of fire from amid the bush ... the bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed". The Midrash explains that G-d revealed Himself in a thorn bush rather than a majestic tree to demonstrate that, just as Israel suffered in Egyptian bondage, He too was, as it were, suffering with them. Likewise, simply being present with a mourner, even without speaking, is itself a profound source of comfort.

The Talmud teaches that "consolers may not begin the conversation until the mourner begins ... when he nods his head, that is an indication that the consolers should leave ... a mourner is not required to stand up for anyone, even a prince". These laws emphasise that visitors are there solely to comfort the bereaved. If the mourner remains silent, we should respect that silence. If he speaks, we should listen attentively, avoiding superficial remarks. We should also recognise when the mourner is exhausted and graciously leave, offering the traditional blessing "May the Almighty comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem", without expecting to be escorted.

Sadly, many assume that the bereaved family should provide refreshments, turning the *shiva* house into a social gathering. The Torah teaches the opposite: friends should provide the mourner's first meal after

Torah Thought

Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg
Claremont Wynberg Shul

the funeral.

King Solomon concludes, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all man, and the living should take it to heart". Rashi explains that visiting mourners is kindness to both the living and the dead, supporting the bereaved while honouring the deceased. Since death is "the end of all man", we should prioritise comforting mourners, remembering that one day we too may need the consolation we now offer others.

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Undetonated Cape Town bomb ‘100% a terrorist attack’

TALI FEINBERG

An Israeli anti-terrorism organisation has confirmed that the attempted attack on the Cape Town Jewish community office building in December 2024 was undoubtedly an act of terror conducted by “Islamic extremists”. The Israel Law Centre, known as Shurat HaDin, conducted an independent forensic investigation into the attempted bombing that took place a year and a half ago. Shurat HaDin is at the forefront of fighting terrorism and safeguarding Jewish rights worldwide, using the law. The organisation’s president, Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, told the *SA Jewish Report*

community location,” she says. “They wanted to kill individuals and destroy Jewish property. It was an attempted act of mass murder. Fortunately, it failed.” Shurat HaDin investigators were able to trace the movement of a small group of perpetrators, says Darshan-Leitner. “They documented their movements and surveillance, their placing of the explosive device, and their fleeing the scene of the crime.” The findings were based upon “advanced technological mapping”. She says the individuals involved are “Islamic extremists, radicalised against the Jewish community and Israel”. “They decided that they will personally take ‘revenge’ and try to kill South African

worship, schools, and community centres. The *SA Jewish Report* asked the chief rabbi if the Shurat HaDin report was part of the task force’s findings, but he chose not to respond. There have been no public updates from this task force. Darshan-Leitner says the South African Police Service (SAPS) acknowledged receiving the report initially, but has not responded since. “They are ghosting us, and from our vantage point, they are ignoring the evidence and information provided to them,” says Darshan-Leitner. “They are on notice about who carried out this terrorist attack.” She says Shurat HaDin is actively trying to follow up and ensure the SAPS doesn’t ignore the report. “We will not allow this to be buried because it’s not politically convenient to investigate, ascertain

in South Africa, Jewish and not Jewish, “to demand that the terrorists be arrested and imprisoned”. “Today they are targeting Jews, but tomorrow these Islamic extremists will carry out attacks on churches and schools,” says Darshan-Leitner. “It always starts with violence against the Jewish community and then spreads. We are seeing this in Europe, Scandinavia, and South America. We cannot let an attempted bombing like this be officially ignored.” At the time of the attack, the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) said it was “working

of the Mayor regarding the incident and broader security concerns affecting the community.” Bloch says the Cape SAJBD welcomes any new evidence or investigative leads that may assist law-enforcement authorities in “identifying specific suspects and establishing accountability”. He says several international organisations have offered investigative support and assistance to South African law-enforcement authorities, including the Hawks, in relation to the matter. The property into which the IED was thrown contains offices for most Jewish community organisations in Cape Town, including a women’s group, a youth movement, a fundraising organisation, and a Jewish newspaper. An antizionist protest



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Jews and destroy Jewish property to express their hate and anger over the events in the Middle East. They are extremely dangerous, fanatical, and determined,” she says. Darshan-Leitner says individuals in the Israeli government informed Shurat HaDin about the attempted bombing. Shurat HaDin conducted its work on the matter after “a Jewish businessman said he wanted to carry out a private investigation”. Based in Tel Aviv, Shurat HaDin works with Western intelligence agencies, law-enforcement branches, and a network of volunteer lawyers to combat antisemitism, extremist hate, and delegitimation, as well as to defend the diaspora Jewish community from violence. Back in South Africa, the investigation was handed over to the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks) soon after the attack, but there have

this week that the 2kg improvised explosive device (IED) thrown into the Jewish centre contained “very real and very powerful explosives”. While the device failed to detonate, Darshan-Leitner confirms it was an attempted terrorist attack. “One hundred percent, the intent was to bomb this Jewish

been no public updates on the Hawks’s investigation. About six weeks after the attempted attack, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein announced that he was inviting a counter-terrorism task force to assist with the investigation, and to make recommendations to protect places of

the information provided, and make arrests.” Shurat HaDin is also asking organisations and officials in South Africa and abroad to inquire about the status of the investigation in Cape Town. “We contend that there are dangerous Islamic terrorists still pursuing attacks on the Jewish community, and no one is acting.” Darshan-Leitner is calling on everyone

together with all sectors of the security cluster to secure the safety of the Jewish community in Cape Town”. Cape SAJBD executive director Daniel Bloch told the *SA Jewish Report*, “Over the past year and a half, the Cape SAJBD has remained in constant communication with the relevant security clusters, law-enforcement authorities, and the Office

all communities in South Africa, has the right to live, worship, and conduct its affairs free from threats of violence and intimidation”. The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to the SAPS and the Hawks regarding the Shurat HaDin report and its investigation, but did not receive a response by the time of going to print.



Nitsana Darshan-Leitner



Police vehicles parked outside the Jewish community office building the day after the attack



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SA boosts energy ties with Israel

TALI FEINBERG

South Africa is the world’s biggest exporter of coal to Israel, and it may now allow a large Israeli company, Navitas Petroleum, to become an operator of oil and gas exploration in the Orange Basin, off the country’s West Coast.

This means that while South Africa has taken Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), it continues to engage with the Jewish State in the energy sphere. “Even government ministers who are connected to the African National Congress have said that they don’t wish to interfere with the trade relations between the two countries,” says executive director at the Middle East Africa Research Institute, Benji Shulman.

On 17 July, President Cyril Ramaphosa described the West Coast’s Orange Basin as “one of the world’s most promising new energy frontiers”. He was speaking at the Fourth Session of the South Africa–Namibia Bi-National Commission in Pretoria.

The Orange Basin is a major offshore geological basin located along the coast of Namibia and western South Africa. It gained global prominence in early 2022. Navitas could acquire a 37.5% interest in the offshore block.

Ramaphosa said the basin’s development “presents us with an opportunity not simply to extract oil and gas, but to establish an integrated regional energy economy encompassing exploration, engineering, refining, petrochemicals, logistics, maritime services, and advanced manufacturing”.

He said this has “rightly attracted global attention”.

In May, the website Offshore Energy reported that Navitas Petroleum had signed on the dotted line to get a stake in a block off the coast of South Africa by exercising an option to farm into the block with Eco (Atlantic) Oil & Gas.

The agreement is conditional on receipt of customary regulatory approvals from the Petroleum Agency of South Africa, the TSX Venture Exchange, and receipt of a \$4 million (R65.83 million) cash payment from Navitas to Eco. It also requires the approval of Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, Gwede Mantashe.

Gil Holzman, president and chief executive of Eco Atlantic, told Offshore Energy that this could “propel us towards a promising future in South Africa’s offshore oil and gas landscape and puts us in an active and enhanced exploration mode”.

But local voices are already protesting the move, saying South Africa cannot engage with Israel after taking the Jewish State to the ICJ.

The Green Connection is a local environmental justice organisation, but it focused on South Africa’s anti-Israel stance as the reason to stop the deal with Navitas. Writing to Ramaphosa on 26 June, the organisation said it believes “the

considerations”.

Advocacy head at the Green Connection Lisa Makaula says the organisation “is urging government to provide clear political and policy leadership on commercial engagement

involving Israeli-owned companies while South Africa continues to pursue accountability through international legal processes”. The organisation has not received a response from the Presidency.

Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) member of Parliament Carl Niehaus called to “Stop Navitas Petroleum now” in an opinion piece he wrote in

The Star headlined “Zionist apartheid Israel has no place in our waters or our economy”.

“While we pursue justice at the ICJ, Israeli companies like Navitas Petroleum are allowed to conduct business relations with South Africa. This cannot continue,” Niehaus wrote.

He called for all financial and business relations with “Zionist Israel” to be severed immediately and without exception: “There can be no partial measures or selective engagement. Israeli firms must not be permitted to profit from South African resources or opportunities.”

Niehaus said the ongoing export of South African coal to Israel “remains a shameful reality”. Minister of Trade and Industry Parks Tau recently responded to Niehaus’s written question on the matter in the National Assembly, saying that there are no plans to review or halt these exports.

The EFF “insists that full-scale financial and economic sanctions be implemented against Zionist apartheid Israel without further delay”, said Niehaus.

But Shulman says South Africa and Israel maintain a wide-ranging trade relationship, including South African exports to Israel and Israeli imports to South Africa.

Shulman says Navitas is “an outgrowth of the Israeli oil and gas industry, which has now been looking at other gas fields around the world where it can use its expertise. As such, it has been able to look

at newfound deposits around the South African coast.”

This has led to the option of it “being able to use its resources, knowledge, and expertise to help explore this particular part of the South African coastline”.

He says that although South Africa and Israel have problematic political relations, “investors see the country as an important place to do business, and as such are generally impervious to the kinds of rhetoric that’s coming out of government”.

Research manager and senior research analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies David May specialises in economic warfare and has written extensively about South Africa-Israel relations. He says South Africa’s ties to Israel in the energy sector “demonstrate the boundaries of virtue signalling”. Boycotting Israel may be a popular position in South Africa’s political scene, “but when there are tangible consequences for this posture, it is much less clear”.

May says that “extremists in South Africa would like to cut off their nose to spite their face”, such as when they successfully got Israeli water experts barred from helping to address the local water crisis.

South African Zionist Federation chairperson Craig Pantanowitz believes the Navitas deal should proceed, and “the attempts to politicise it say more about South Africa’s domestic dysfunction than about any principled foreign policy”.

Commercial decisions of this kind are governed by law, technical merit, and national economic interest, says Pantanowitz. “Navitas Petroleum brings investment, operatorship expertise, and employment to a sector South Africa urgently needs to develop.”

He says Block 1 CBK, the area that Navitas would explore, represents a significant national asset. “The question of who is best placed to unlock its value is a regulatory and commercial one”, not a “referendum on the ICJ case”.

The voices calling for rejection, including Niehaus and the EFF, “aren’t advancing South Africa’s interests. They’re advancing an ideological agenda that has consistently prioritised political theatre over economic development,” says Pantanowitz. “South Africa’s coastal communities, energy sector workers, and long-term energy security deserve better than decisions shaped by that agenda.”

He emphasises that commerce is not foreign policy. “Conflating the two does not produce principled governance. Instead, it produces paralysis.”



A Navitas Petroleum operation off the coast of America

‘farm-in’ by Navitas stands in tension with the South African government’s commitment to international human rights”.

It said the government had taken a “courageous stance” with the ICJ case, but “despite this strong political and diplomatic posture, South Africa has taken no steps to ban or suspend business dealings



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with Israel and Israeli-owned companies”.

The Green Connection called upon “His Excellency [Ramaphosa] to provide political and policy leadership on this matter”. He should “direct the government, through Cabinet, to develop and articulate a clear and lawful policy position on commercial dealings with Israeli-owned entities that is consistent with South Africa’s obligations under international law, including the Genocide Convention and the provisional measures and findings of the ICJ”.

It asked the president to “commend to the Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, for his independent consideration, that transparent weight be given to South Africa’s international-law obligations and the ICJ proceedings, as relevant

Will other countries follow Colombia’s withdrawal from SA’s ICJ case?

>>Continued from page 2

approach, saying, “Pretoria has no such excuse. It chose this course, it has defended it for two and a half years, and it alone can change it.”

He also pointed to what he described as growing costs associated with South Africa’s foreign policy, referring to uncertainty around the African Growth and Opportunity Act, proposed United States tariffs on South African goods, and South Africa’s exclusion from the next G20 summit. “And every one of those is a line item in someone’s job security,” he said.

He also questioned South Africa’s request for an 18-month extension before filing its reply at the ICJ. “The urgency was for the podium. The timetable is for the record.”

Pantanowitz said Colombia’s decision showed governments could revise their positions when circumstances changed. “Course corrections are

always available, but they get more expensive the longer they are deferred,” he said.

Corrigan said South Africa was unlikely to change course regardless of what other countries did. He said support for the Palestinian cause occupied a unique place in the country’s foreign policy and had been pursued with unusual consistency. “I don’t believe it will abandon this case even if every other participant does, irrespective of what it costs the country and however long it takes,” he said.

For now, Colombia’s withdrawal appears unlikely to alter the legal trajectory of the case before the ICJ. However, it has intensified debate about the political calculations behind international support for the proceedings and whether future changes in government elsewhere could produce similar reversals.



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Sister raises funds to get to bottom of sudden death

CLAUDIA GROSS

Justine Isaacson-Connelly is hellbent on finding out how her older brother, Marc Isaacson, died suddenly in Johannesburg in February. She is convinced that crucial forensic evidence will give answers, but that means exhuming his body.

Isaacson-Connelly, who is based in London, is appealing to the public to help raise R250 000 through a GoFundMe campaign she launched earlier this month. This would cover the legal and forensic costs to exhume her 41-year-old brother’s body. The family has raised around R50 000 so far.

Although Isaacson-Connelly has suspicions about what happened, she stressed repeatedly that she wasn’t accusing anyone of wrongdoing. “We’re not presuming guilt,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. “We just want to have facts of what exactly happened.”

According to Isaacson-Connelly, her brother was living in a shared flat when he died. She received the news after only recently having returned to London from attending a *shiva* period in South Africa. She immediately flew back for his funeral.

The speed with which the burial was arranged, together with the family’s shock, meant that an autopsy wasn’t carried out. There were no toxicology tests or other forensic examinations.

“We were in shock and we went with what we trusted and believed. I’m an Orthodox Jew and I wanted to do what I thought was right,” she said.

Jewish law places great importance on burying the deceased as soon as possible and discourages unnecessary disturbance of the body. However, many rabbinic authorities permit post-mortem examinations or exhumations when they may help establish the cause of death or contribute to justice.

Isaacson-Connelly said that after the funeral, questions about the circumstances surrounding her brother’s death continued to trouble the family. There were several irregularities, she said.

“There was no toxicology report, no autopsy, no forensics,” she said. “So, we had to investigate ourselves.”

CAP had assisted the family with its private investigation, before it approached criminal advocates Daniel and Mannie Witz to pursue an urgent court application for an exhumation.

“We can’t actually start the court case until we have an exhumation because we need the facts,” she said.

There is a sense of urgency because the

passage of time could reduce the likelihood of obtaining evidence. “We’re running out of time. We’ve been trying for nearly five months to get answers.”

Despite her determination, Isaacson-Connelly said making the family’s story public had been one of the hardest decisions she’d ever made. “It was either now or never. We’re either going to get answers and pull together as a community, or we’re going to bury it forever and never find answers.”

The campaign wasn’t driven only by her family’s need for closure, Isaacson-Connelly said. Establishing the truth could also protect others if any criminal conduct were eventually uncovered.

She emphasised again that no conclusions could be drawn before forensic evidence was obtained. “We have to be very careful,” she said. “Unfortunately, the actual facts will only come by doing this.”

Isaacson-Connelly said the emotional toll on her family had been immense, with the absence of answers making it impossible to grieve properly. “It’s really difficult to get closure without this. We’re suffering from a lot of post-traumatic stress, a lot of trauma, a lot of sleepless nights.”

Her two younger brothers had also been deeply affected, particularly because the family had already experienced the loss of their father 20 years before.

“We didn’t expect it,” she said of Isaacson’s death. “It was a big shock. We’ve all taken a massive hit. It’s affected our work. It’s affected our life. It’s affected everything.”

Although she declined to discuss many aspects of the family’s investigation, on legal advice, Isaacson-Connelly said her brother had expressed concerns for his safety before his death. She also said there were issues surrounding security camera footage that the family had hoped would assist the investigation, but she

declined to elaborate further. “I can’t presume guilt without fact.”

Isaacson-Connelly said the family had been encouraged by expert opinion that forensic evidence could still be recovered months after burial. One of the criminal advocates assisting the family had previously been involved in a case in which a pathologist was still able to detect poison months after a death.

For Isaacson-Connelly, exhumation is about gaining certainty, whatever the findings may be. “If they don’t confirm our suspicions, then at least we can put

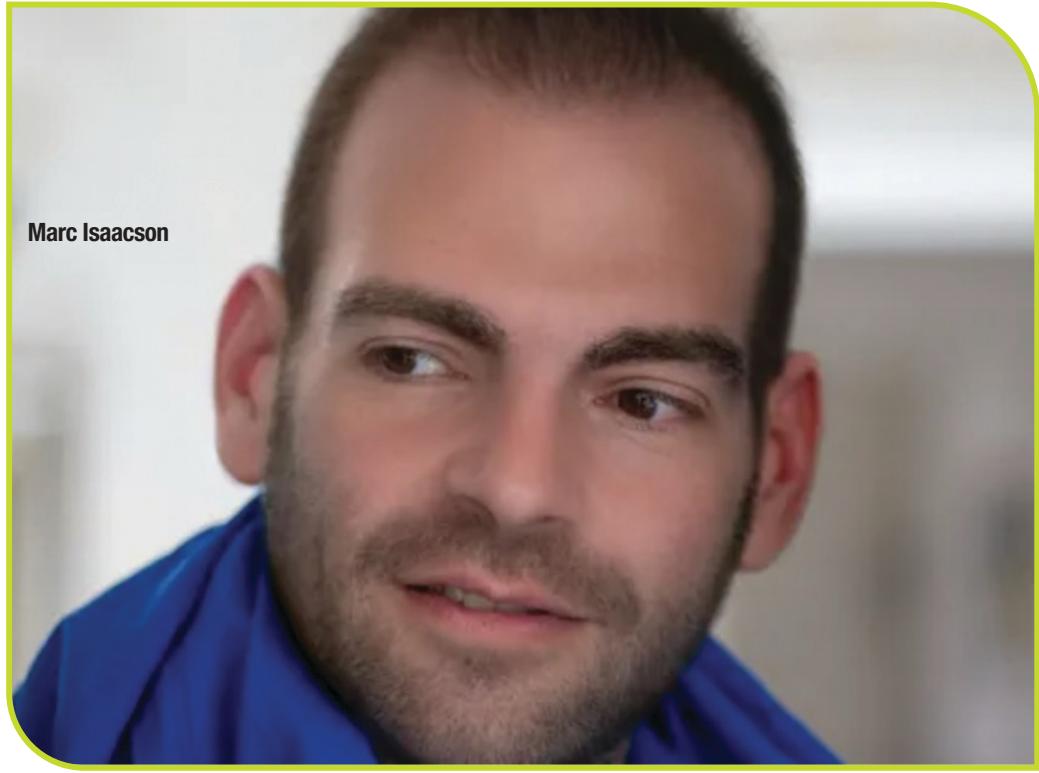
it to rest.” She said the family’s objective wasn’t to prove a particular theory, but to ensure that every possible avenue had been explored. “We just want the facts of what exactly happened.”

Isaacson-Connelly also believes the case raises broader questions about protecting vulnerable people. She said her brother had struggled with a gambling addiction and had moved away from the Jewish community because he had been embarrassed by the financial consequences.

She believes people experiencing addiction or mental health challenges can become isolated and more vulnerable to exploitation. “They can sometimes actually put themselves in further danger because they’re going into darker waters and people don’t know anything about them. People with mental illness are definitely much more vulnerable.”

Despite the months of uncertainty, Isaacson-Connelly said she remained grateful for the support the family had received. She praised CAP for assisting throughout the investigation and said the public response to the fundraising campaign had given her hope.

Within days of launching the appeal, she said, donations had begun arriving and media outlets in the United Kingdom had expressed interest in the family’s story. Now, she hopes the campaign will raise enough money to allow the legal process to begin before it is too late. “I believe it’s very important to get to the bottom of this, or to at least get a chance of justice,” she said. “And not just for us, but for anyone who may have to go through this.”



Marc Isaacson

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Jewish Report

Showing up is just the beginning

For me, commemorating Mandela Day this year was a wakeup call, an “aha moment”, when I came face to face with some of the most serious crises in this country that clearly aren’t being properly addressed by government. This weekend, I joined a group visiting Impilo, an extraordinary child-protection and adoption organisation in the heart of Johannesburg’s northeastern suburbs. I had for a long time been interested in what this nongovernmental organisation does for abandoned babies and children so I jumped at the chance to lend a hand there for a couple of hours.

When you hear of an organisation saving the lives of abandoned newborns, you don’t really imagine people diving into dumpsters to retrieve newborns in plastic bags. You don’t think about babies left for days in boxes off the beaten track, where no one can hear them screaming for help. As we were told, first responders need to be debriefed after their attempts to save newborn lives because they aren’t trained for this kind of trauma.

Do we ever hear about this? Maybe once in a blue moon. The truth is that an estimated 3 000 to 3 500 babies are abandoned every year in South Africa. Those aren’t the babies who are dropped off on the doorsteps of good Samaritans. No, they are dumped, and not just in rural areas and poor communities. They are also thrown away in our suburbs and backyards.

At any given time, Impilo is looking after 150 such children and giving them the best possible chance at a good healthy life. It finds a family either to take them in or foster them until an adoptive family is found here or abroad. Those are the ones they are able to save. For every three babies found alive, two are discovered already dead. Around 65% of the babies found are newborns and 90% are under the age of one year.

In Johannesburg alone, three to four babies are abandoned daily. That statistic alone should stop us in our tracks.

These aren’t numbers on a spreadsheet. They are babies and toddlers, often at the most fragile stage of their lives, who need to be found, medically assessed, protected, loved, and placed somewhere safe. Impilo puts children in temporary safe care while doing intensive social-work and child-protection processes, with the aim of getting each child into a permanent family environment as early as possible.

One of the hardest things to hear was that Impilo isn’t always able to help babies left at hospitals. We were told that government systems insist that they don’t need outside help. The result is unbearable: babies can remain in boxes in hospitals, waiting for an overburdened system to deal with them, while experienced organisations with the ability to help are kept at arm’s length. And those groups that can help, often land up closing due to lack of support.

This isn’t just an Impilo problem. It’s a South African problem. No one seems to know the true scale of baby abandonment in this country because many cases are never reported, and some babies are never found.

The law is meant to protect children, and the Children’s Act provides the framework for care, protection, foster care, and adoption. But the law on paper and the life of a baby in a hospital box aren’t the same thing. Delays in social-work follow-up, Children’s Court processes, and Home Affairs documentation can leave children in limbo. Hospitals are not homes. Babies cannot wait for bureaucracy to catch up with their needs.

What stayed with me most, though, was the reminder that we cannot make assumptions about mothers who abandon their children. It’s tempting to judge. But the reality is often devastating. Many of these mothers are children themselves. Some are as young as 13, pregnant after being raped, sometimes by a family member. They are expected to survive unimaginable trauma and then care for a baby when they are barely able to care for themselves.

That changes the conversation entirely. It shifts it from blame to compassion, from outrage to responsibility. It forces us to accept that this isn’t a crisis of abandoned babies; it is a national social crisis that is totally out of control. It is a total breakdown of our society. The root of this crisis is unemployment, poverty, rape, family breakdown, and lack of government support.

For the baby, the hope is that the system moves quickly: a place of safety, proper medical care, a Children’s Court inquiry, and then, where possible, reunification with family, foster care, or adoption. For the mother, the path is often far murkier. Legally, abandonment has criminal implications. Humanly, it may be the desperate act of someone who sees no safe alternative and no one to turn to.

As Jews, we speak about *tzedakah* (charity), *chesed* (kindness), and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). We know that every life has infinite value. We know that caring for the vulnerable is a core responsibility. And we know, from our own community, how much can be achieved when people show up with purpose. We have organisations, schools, shuls, businesses, professionals, donors, volunteers, and networks that can move quickly and generously when we understand the need.

For organisations like Impilo, that may mean raising funds, donating essential goods, offering professional expertise, helping to amplify their work, advocating for better systems, or simply refusing to let these babies and their mothers remain invisible. It may mean understanding that not every organisation needs our bodies in the room, but many need our voices, our networks, our wallets, and our staying power.

Impilo is just one organisation doing G-d’s work and saving lives. There are so many others that need a shoutout and our support. I haven’t even heard of most of them.

That was the gift of showing up for me. I left Impilo grateful for the people who do this work quietly and relentlessly, but also reminded of what we can and do do when we pay attention. We cannot fix every broken system, and we cannot carry every need ourselves. But we can learn, connect, support, advocate, and use the strength of our communal infrastructure to stand behind those who are already doing the work.

If Mandela Day is to mean anything beyond 67 minutes, it should remind us that showing up is only the beginning. The real test is whether we allow what we have seen to change what we do next, and whether we use the power of community to answer the need that is actually there.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Stop hijacking Madiba’s legacy, Mamdani

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSORFF



The beauty of Mandela Day is that it gives every generation the opportunity to claim Nelson Mandela. However, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani’s keynote address at the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s inaugural Global Leadership Forum on 15 July did something altogether different. It sought to remake Mandela in Mamdani’s own ideological image.

Mamdani recast Mandela as the patron saint of 21st century activist politics, a man whose defining legacy was uncompromising solidarity with fashionable causes, particularly the Palestinians. He transformed Mandela into a moral mascot for today’s politics of absolutism. The word “solidarity” echoes throughout Mamdani’s speech, culminating in his declaration that “solidarity is not just a value, it is a strategy”. According to Mamdani, Mandela’s enduring lesson is to stand defiantly with those deemed oppressed, reject compromise, and remain steadfast against political pressure especially when Jews are involved.

That is not the Madiba the South African Jewish community knew. Nor is it the Madiba the world came to admire.

Mandela didn’t become a global icon because he excelled at identifying victims and oppressors. He became one because he achieved what almost everyone thought impossible, persuading bitter enemies to build a future together. He believed that justice required engagement with those you disagreed with, recognising their humanity and finding sufficient common ground to build peace. While Madiba valued solidarity, engagement was his true strategy.



For Mamdani, Mandela’s famous 1990 Ted Koppel town hall interview, held shortly after Mandela’s release from prison, represents the defining expression of Mandela’s politics of universal solidarity – or rather, standing up to Jews and the West. Yet he fundamentally distorts the exchange. When challenged about his friendship with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Mandela did refuse to abandon him but did not respond with defiance or denunciation. Nor did he dismiss the concerns of the Jewish community.

Instead, he said, “If a Jewish leader has any doubts about our stand, I am prepared to address them, and to allay their concern. They are a very important community both in South Africa and the United States. I’m prepared to iron out any differences that might exist. But they must know what our stand is: Arafat is a comrade-in-arms, and we treat him as such.”

Mandela didn’t choose between principle and dialogue. He insisted on both.

True to his word, later that year he spent more than two hours meeting a delegation of American Jewish leaders in Geneva. As one participant recalled, Mandela told them, “If the test of my friendship with you is that I have to be an enemy of your enemy, then I cannot be your friend.”

Mamdani presents Mandela almost exclusively through the prism of Palestinian solidarity. But Mandela’s position was far more balanced – and far more courageous. He never abandoned his support for the Palestinians, yet neither did he abandon Israel or the South African Jewish community.

Speaking to South African Jews in 1993, Mandela declared, “We recognise the legitimacy of Zionism as a Jewish nationalism just as we recognise the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism. We insist on the right of the State of Israel to exist within secure borders, but with equal vigour support the Palestinian right to national self-determination.”

Nor was this an isolated sentiment. Mandela was never imprisoned by ideology. One of his defining strengths was his willingness to learn from anyone who had something to teach him. In *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela credited right-wing Zionist leader Menachem Begin’s *The Revolt* with helping him think through how a small movement without mountains or forests could wage an effective guerrilla campaign. One of his key advisers in building Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) was Arthur Goldreich, a veteran of the pre-state Israeli underground strike force, the Palmach, whose experience helped shape MK’s command structure. That structure borrowed its very terminology from Begin’s Irgun paramilitary organisation. At the very moment Mandela was creating the movement that would end apartheid, he was learning from Israelis.

That same pragmatism shaped his international relationships. Despite his close friendship with Arafat, Mandela maintained ties with Israel, met successive Israeli leaders, and visited Israel in 1999.

Contrast this with Mamdani’s approach. This year he became the first New York mayor in six decades to boycott the Israel Day Parade, a march that draws tens of thousands of Jewish New Yorkers and has always been attended by mayors of every political persuasion as an expression of solidarity with the

city’s Jewish community. And this week, he confirmed he is exploring whether to have Benjamin Netanyahu arrested should the Israeli prime minister attend the UN General Assembly in New York in September. Mamdani practises the politics of confrontation. Mandela practised the politics of engagement.

His relationship with South Africa’s Jewish community reflected exactly the same philosophy. He recognised the extraordinary contribution Jewish South Africans made to the struggle against apartheid and to the building of our democracy.

As chairperson of the Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF SA), I remain especially proud that President Mandela partnered with JNF to establish the first park in Mamelodi, recognising Israel’s internationally renowned expertise in forestry and environmental rehabilitation. That project captured the essence of Mandela’s leadership. He brought communities together around shared purpose because he instinctively looked for partners rather than ideological allies. He measured people by what they could contribute, not by which political tribe they belonged to.

Mandela understood something that Mamdani and his fellow activists still struggle to grasp. Peace is not achieved by shouting “genocide” or draping yourself in a keffiyeh to prove your own moral purity. Mandela didn’t ask, “Which side are you on?” He asked, “How do we build a future together?” That question is almost entirely absent from Mamdani’s speech.

The tragedy is that the Middle East doesn’t need more speeches celebrating solidarity with one side or the other. It needs leaders with Mandela’s rare willingness to engage across ideological divides, recognise the legitimate aspirations of both peoples, and make the painful compromises that peace actually demands.

Mandela’s legacy was never about choosing sides. It was about bringing sides together. One is the politics of protest. The other is the politics of peace. One wins applause. The other changes the world

• Michael Kransdorff is the chairperson of the JNF SA.

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Jews feel unsafe in Australian healthcare

CLAUDIA GROSS

Many patients and medical practitioners in Australia are hiding their Jewish identity amid an increasing number of reports of widespread antisemitism in the healthcare system.

The publication of an investigation by *The Australian* has gained international attention, including from Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which described the findings as "a deeply troubling picture" and urged the Australian government to confront antisemitism more forcefully. According to the report, Jewish healthcare workers have faced hostility from colleagues, while Jewish patients claim discrimination during treatment. The report also refers to antisemitic social media activity, workplace conduct, and allegations that some practitioners allowed political views to influence professional behaviour.

Several South African expats living in Australia told the *SA Jewish Report* they had become increasingly reluctant to reveal their Jewish identity while seeking or providing medical care.

Michael*, a surgeon who emigrated from Johannesburg to Melbourne almost 30 years ago, said the atmosphere had changed markedly during the past two years. "I've operated in this country for more than 25 years. I've never once thought about hiding my identity at work, until recently. Now I think twice about wearing my Magen David under my scrubs."

He had become more guarded after a private conversation about the Bondi Beach attack was shared allegedly without his permission in a hospital WhatsApp group. "I said I was frightened for my kids. Somehow that got twisted into 'Michael thinks all Muslims are terrorists'. I never said that. I never would."

He also recalled finding a sticker depicting a Star of David crossed out on the wall near a hospital staff tea room. "Nobody claimed responsibility. Nobody

investigated it seriously either."

Although disturbed by the incidents, Michael said he had chosen not to lodge a formal complaint because he feared the consequences for his career. "You learn very quickly that raising it makes you the problem, not the issue. I'm a surgeon. My reputation is my career. I didn't file anything. I just stopped talking about it at work."

Naomi*, a psychiatrist whose family moved from Cape Town to Sydney when she was 12, said a senior colleague had questioned whether she could remain objective when treating Muslim patients because she was Jewish. "He asked me, in front of another colleague, whether I could 'really be neutral' given 'everything going on'. I'd never brought my personal politics into a session in my life. He assumed I couldn't separate myself from my identity."

Naomi said the problem extended beyond personal interactions. "There's a Facebook group we all used for swapping shifts. After 7 October it turned into a battlefield. I left the group. Some of what was posted, cartoons and 'Zionist' used as an stand-in for something uglier, I reported screenshots to human resources. Nothing came of it."

She said she no longer spoke openly about aspects of her Jewish life. "I used to talk about my Friday-night dinners at work, casually, the way anyone talks about their weekend. Now I just say 'family dinner'. It's a small thing, but it isn't nothing."

A spokesperson for the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra), told the *SA Jewish Report*, the regulator and the National Boards for health professions were unequivocal, "There is no place for racism or discrimination in healthcare."

The spokesperson said racism and discrimination undermined trust, created fear and exclusion, and could discourage people from seeking medical care.

Melbourne breast cancer survivor Carol* told the *SA Jewish Report* she believed the attitude of a nurse had changed after he noticed the Star of David necklace she was wearing.

"I'd been seeing the same nurse for months. Lovely man, always chatting about his garden. Then one day he clocked my Star of David necklace, and something in him just shifted. I'm not imagining it. I felt it in the

room."

She recalled that an intravenous line took four attempts during the appointment. "Four attempts. Four. My arm was black and blue for two weeks. He'd never missed once before that day."

Carol acknowledged that it was impossible to know whether the experience was deliberate, but said it changed how she approached medical appointments. "Now when I go in for check-ups, I don't wear the necklace. I don't mention synagogue if they ask about my week. I shouldn't have to think about that when I'm the one who's sick."

Perth resident David* said he had overheard two nurses discussing "Zionists" while he was recovering from triple bypass surgery. "They didn't know I understood what they were saying. One of them made a comment about 'Zionists' getting 'special treatment' from the doctors. I was recovering from open heart surgery. I said nothing. I just lay there."

David later reported the incident to hospital management. "They were polite. They said they'd 'look into it'. I never heard anything again."

Sydney resident Sarah* said she had felt uncomfortable during labour after a midwife had asked her husband whether their surname was Jewish. She said the quality of her care deteriorated afterwards, although she acknowledged she couldn't prove the two were connected.

"After that comment, I felt like a burden every time I asked for pain relief. I was left for what felt like hours after giving birth. My son was crying next to me and I couldn't even sit up to comfort him."

"I'm not the only one. I've heard almost the same story from two other women in my mothers' group. Different hospitals, same feeling of being punished for who you are at the exact moment you're most vulnerable."

The interviewees stressed that many incidents were difficult to prove conclusively. However, they said the cumulative effect had left them feeling less secure in healthcare settings.

Ahpra said it is committed to protecting patients and the right of registered practitioners to participate in public debate.

Ahpra's spokesperson told the *SA Jewish Report* it would consider taking action when comments directed at members of a community on the basis

of their religion or faith became demeaning or discriminatory.

The spokesperson noted that senior leadership and staff responsible for investigating complaints relating to racism and discrimination had received specialised training from several organisations, including the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University. Ahpra continues to consult widely on anti-racism measures while ensuring an impartial and transparent approach to complaints, they said.



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For Michael, the greatest loss has been the confidence he once felt in the workplace. "I didn't come to work expecting everyone to agree with me," he said. "I just expected that being Jewish wouldn't matter. That's what has changed."

*Interviewees have requested anonymity for privacy and perceived security reasons.

Segregated pavements another step towards Tehran-like exclusion

OPINION

DR SHUKI FRIEDMAN



The Knesset is poised to pass a law permitting gender segregation in Israeli academic institutions. At the same time, it was announced that the city of Bnei Brak will introduce gender-segregated sidewalks. Anyone who sees these as two separate developments is missing the larger picture.

The Haredim, joined by the Haredi-nationalist wing of Religious Zionism, seek to remake the public sphere according to norms that have no origin or place in Jewish law. And if the High Court tries to stop them? As with draft evasion, we will find ourselves enacting yet more religious basic laws. Basic Law: Modesty, for example.

Partitions in synagogues, segregated weddings and celebrations, and separate beaches are nothing new. But until about three decades ago, there was no trace of gender segregation in other public spaces, not even in the most extreme Haredi communities. The practice gathered force as the Haredi community grew, and especially as its political power and ability to impose religiously extreme norms on the public sphere expanded.

It began in the 1990s, when the Jerusalem-based Haredi Community Council (Edah HaChareidis) called for gender segregation on bus lines. From

there, it spread into ever more areas of Israeli life. Today, gender segregation reaches almost every sphere of Haredi life – for now, chiefly in Haredi cities. But

only a matter of time.

The situation is alarming. Beyond the near-total segregation in religious education and other religious settings, it's spreading to universities, workplaces, buses, shops in Haredi neighbourhoods, clinics, cemeteries, billboards and advertisements, radio stations and newspapers, state ceremonies, performances, and public events. And now, of course, sidewalks.

As far as the Haredi extremists who now set the standard are concerned, women are best kept out of sight in public. Anyone who thinks this will stop at Bnei Brak's sidewalks has learned nothing from the past decade. First, it will spill into cities with large Haredi communities and workplaces employing Haredim. Then it will spread across the rest of Israel.

Israel is a Jewish State, and Jews must be free to live according to their beliefs. Jewish law (halacha) does indeed set boundaries of modesty

governing relations between men and women, and in certain settings such as synagogues and beaches, for example, separation is the accepted Orthodox standard. But blanket segregation in every conceivable space is utterly alien even to halacha.

More important, Israel isn't a religious state. Alongside its Jewish

ONCE SIDEWALKS ARE OFF-LIMITS TO HAREDI WOMEN, THEY WILL BE OFF-LIMITS TO ALL WOMEN.

character, it's a democracy. Excluding women from more spaces violates the foundational ideals on which Israel was built. In each of these settings, it gravely threatens women's equality and, in practice, enables their exclusion and erasure from communal life.

Haredi women are the first to be harmed, whether or not they accept their exclusion. They have no meaningful voice in their community. But as the practice spreads, women throughout Israeli society

will pay the price. Once sidewalks are off-limits to Haredi women, they will be off-limits to all women.

Certainly, these arrangements are subject to judicial review. For years, it was the High Court that curbed and challenged this phenomenon. But as Haredi political power grows, there's a danger that they will bypass the court as well.

Basic Law: Torah Study, passed by the Knesset last week to legitimise draft-dodging, will serve as the model. To legitimise gender segregation, they will enact Basic Law: Modesty as soon as they can. That would sound the death knell for life in Israel as we know it.

Israelis often warn that "Tehran is here". But unless we halt this headlong charge into the abyss of extremism and exclusion, even the hard-liners of Tehran's regime will envy the religious standards imposed upon Israel's public sphere. Preventing that requires firm rules of the game and protection of basic human rights from a majority that may become ever more extreme.

• *Dr Shuki Friedman is director general of the Jewish People Policy Institute and a senior lecturer in law at the Peres Academic Center.*



HOW TO NOMINATE

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the downward spiral of excluding women from every public space and pushing them behind partitions, literal or spatial, is

Historian warns authoritarianism is back

CLAUDIA GROSS

Authoritarian leaders are no longer united by ideology but by a shared determination to protect their power, wealth, and influence, warns Pulitzer Prize-winning American historian Anne Applebaum.

She spoke with Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) executive director Ann Bernstein during a CDE webinar on Monday 20 July.

The discussion explored Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the erosion of democratic institutions, the future of Europe, and the growing global influence of authoritarian governments.

Applebaum argued that democracies around the world have failed to appreciate how closely authoritarian governments cooperate while liberal democracies struggle to respond to new threats, ranging from disinformation to political interference.

A staff writer for *The Atlantic* and author of several books on totalitarianism and democracy, she said her interest in modern authoritarianism intensified when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.

"I watched the invasion of Crimea and thought, 'Oh my gosh, I know exactly what's happening,'" she said. "This is the same playbook that the Red Army used in Eastern Poland and Eastern Germany in 1944 and 1945."

The invasion demonstrated that many of the tactics she had studied as a historian were re-emerging in contemporary politics.

But modern authoritarian states differed from those of the 20th century because they were connected less by political ideology than by shared interests, she said.

She argued that countries including Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea increasingly exchanged surveillance technology, policing methods, and online tactics designed to suppress dissent. They also exploited international financial systems to hide wealth and protect corrupt elites.

More fundamentally, she said, these governments shared a hostility to democratic values. "They understand that ideas like transparency, accountability, the rule of law, independent courts, independent media, and legal opposition are a direct threat to their forms of power."

Applebaum said anti-corruption campaigns often became the greatest threat to authoritarian governments because they challenged the financial systems that sustained those in power.

She cited Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's anti-corruption movement as one example. Hong Kong's democracy movement and Taiwan's democratic system also represented alternatives that authoritarian governments regarded as dangerous.

Bernstein asked whether Hungary's recent election result offered hope that illiberal governments could be defeated through democratic means. Applebaum distinguished between dictatorships and what she described as illiberal democracies, where elected governments gradually weaken democratic safeguards while maintaining the appearance of democratic rule.

She said former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán had spent years changing electoral rules, weakening independent media, and concentrating economic power among political allies. "The loss of transparency meant that the system became really profoundly corrupt."

Over time, she said, economic decline, failing public services, and growing public dissatisfaction had undermined the government's credibility despite its dominance of the media. "The clash between propaganda and reality became so manifest that even the powerful state propaganda wasn't enough."

Applebaum said Hungary's opposition campaign also demonstrated the value of direct engagement with voters. Rather than focusing on divisive cultural issues, opposition leader Péter Magyar had concentrated on economic concerns, transparency, and the rule of law, while travelling extensively to meet communities across the country. He became prime minister.

Turning to Ukraine, Applebaum rejected the argument that NATO expansion provoked Russia's invasion. She described the conflict as an imperial war driven by President Vladimir Putin's desire to rebuild Russian influence while crushing a neighbouring democracy that presented an alternative political model.

She said Ukraine's democratic movements, particularly the 2014 Maidan Revolution, embodied precisely the values authoritarian leaders feared. "The Russians expected it to be three weeks," she said of the invasion. "Instead, what happened was that the Ukrainians fought back."

Applebaum said Ukraine's resistance had transformed modern warfare through the use of drones, electronic warfare, and technological innovation. She also argued that Russia had successfully influenced opinion in parts of the Global South by portraying itself as an opponent of Western colonialism despite acting as an imperial power.

Asked about United States President Donald Trump's relationship with Putin, Applebaum suggested Trump's longstanding business interests in Russia and admiration for leaders who projected strength shaped his approach.

"I think it's possible that he genuinely believed that he was friends with Putin. He was just very surprised to learn that the Russians have a different set of interests bigger than him."

Applebaum said parts of the current United States administration no longer viewed America as the leader of the democratic world and saw less value in promoting democratic ideals internationally.

Looking ahead, she said Europe faced difficult choices but had opportunities to strengthen its security, economy, and technological capacity through increased defence investment.

Asked which democratic institutions were hardest to rebuild after periods of authoritarian rule, Applebaum identified the judiciary. "Once you've undermined the ethos and the independence of the judiciary, it's something that's very hard to put back into the system."

She expressed concern about the growing influence of technology companies over the information people consume and the spread of politically motivated disinformation. "The people who now actually control what everyone is able to see are people who are engineers in California who don't necessarily have the interests of democracy first in mind," she said.

Although some countries, including Brazil and member states of the European Union, had introduced measures to tackle online disinformation, Applebaum said no government had yet found a complete solution that protected both democracy and freedom of expression. She concluded that democracies needed to recognise how dramatically authoritarianism had evolved if they hoped to defend their institutions in the years ahead.



Anne Applebaum

A feast of Jewish flavours at Investec Jewish Achiever Awards

GILANA LAB

Jewish food is far more than nourishment. Every recipe tells a story, every spice hints at a different homeland, and every family table preserves traditions passed down through generations. Behind every dish lies a history of migration, resilience, adaptation, and an enduring commitment to Jewish identity.

It is this remarkable tapestry of cultures that inspired the theme of this year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards, "le Festival des Juifs (Festival of the Jews)".

Each year, the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards celebrate individuals whose leadership, innovation, and commitment have made a lasting contribution to South

thousands of kilometres away.

Although united by shared beliefs and practices, no two Jewish communities evolved in the same way.

The Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe developed customs shaped by long winters and local produce, creating hearty dishes that became staples of Shabbat and festival tables. In Spain, Jewish life flourished for centuries before the expulsion of 1492 scattered Sephardi communities across the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire, and with them recipes that continue to influence Jewish cuisine today.

In Ethiopia, the Beta Israel community preserved ancient Jewish traditions while largely isolated from the rest of the Jewish world. In India, communities such as the Bene Israel and Cochin Jews incorporated the vibrant flavours of the subcontinent into dishes that remained distinctly Jewish. The Jews of Kaifeng in China adapted to using local ingredients while maintaining their identity for centuries.

Jewish communities in Morocco and Persia became renowned for cuisines rich in fragrant spices, herbs, dried fruit, and vibrant flavours.

Each community developed its own customs, languages, music, and culinary traditions, shaped by the places they called home. Yet they celebrated the same festivals, said the same prayers, and continued passing on traditions from one generation to the next.

Food became one of the most visible expressions of continuity. Recipes travelled with families across borders and oceans, evolving as ingredients

changed but retaining the memories and meanings attached to them. A Shabbat table in Johannesburg may look very different from one in Casablanca, Mumbai, Vilnius, or Jerusalem, but all reflect the values of family, hospitality, gratitude, and connection.

South African Jewry, too, is part of the global story. While much of the community traces its roots to Lithuania and other parts of Eastern Europe, it has also been enriched by families whose heritages stretch across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. Many South African Jewish homes continue to prepare recipes handed down through generations, preserving not only flavours but memories of the communities from which they came.

That makes le Festival des Juifs a fitting theme for an evening celebrating achievement. The awards recognise individuals who are shaping the future of Jewish life in South Africa, while the theme honours the cultures, traditions, and communities that have shaped the Jewish people over centuries. Together,

they celebrate what the community has accomplished and the rich heritage that continues to inspire it.

More than a feast of cuisines, le Festival des Juifs is a celebration of identity, continuity, and the remarkable journey of a people whose heritage has been carried not only in books and traditions, but around family tables for generations. Every dish has a story. Every tradition has a journey. Together, they tell the enduring story of the Jewish people.



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African Jewish life and to society more broadly. This year's theme provides the perfect backdrop against which to do that, recognising that today's achievements are built on generations of tradition and heritage.

Throughout history, Jewish communities settled across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and, eventually, every inhabited continent. Wherever they went, they built communities, established schools and synagogues, contributed to the societies around them, and maintained the traditions that connected them to Jews

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The Matchmakers Network takes things to the next level

LEE TANKLE

Rather than waiting for a matchmaker to make you a match, you can match with a matchmaker to help you find your perfect match.

With more than 100 active matchmakers, The Matchmakers Network – the brainchild of Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and run through his office – is helping singles of all ages and levels of religious observance to meet their *besht* (soulmate).

So far, in around 10 months, it has produced one engagement and more than a dozen couples who are dating.

“Matches are happening all the time. People are constantly being introduced and meeting,”

says Tova Goldstein, executive director of The Matchmakers Network.

Since the launch in September, more than 300 people in the community have signed up to be matchmakers. They were trained by Aleeza Ben Shalom, the internationally renowned matchmaker and star of Netflix’s *Jewish Matchmaking*, at events in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

More than 100 active matchmakers are now part of the network, with more being trained.

One of the matchmakers, Janet Gelgor, says she joined as she had loved the idea of being

a matchmaker since she was a teenager.

“Since completing my online training with Aleeza Ben



your matchmaker,” she says. “No one needs to put themselves out there; no one has access; no one can scroll through the website and check out who’s there.”

The challenge for matchmakers is that making matches takes a lot of time. They must get to know a person and search for the right person for them, meeting with other

matchmakers.

However, the bigger challenge is to get as many single people into a room at once within the next year and onto the system so more matches can be made. Goldstein believes this is essential, especially because many singles believe there is no one to date in the community since it is so small.

“Jewish singles are finding it increasingly difficult to find partners in their close-knit communities,” says Gelgor. “I believe the network creates a safe, non-judgemental way for Jewish singles of all ages – whether secular, traditional, or observant – to connect with other Jewish singles across South Africa.”

How not to be seen out on a first date

LEE TANKLE

There are few things more awkward than a first date. Unless that first date is interrupted by your mother’s best friend, your cousin, and three family friends asking, “So, who’s this?”

In the Jewish community, where social circles frequently overlap, especially if you’re *frum*, some venues have earned an unofficial reputation as places to avoid when getting to know someone new.

Jayde Ronthal, a counsellor and unofficial matchmaker, says that for Johannesburg singles, kosher restaurants are usually right at the top.

assumes you’re dating that person. It just makes things so much more complicated. That’s why, in the Haredi world, relationships are generally kept quiet until a couple gets engaged. In the less Haredi community, people tend to keep things private until the relationship is serious and genuinely going somewhere.”

“And if you really don’t want to be spotted, avoid driving through the streets of Glenhazel. It can feel like every second car belongs to someone you know, and before you’ve even finished the date, half the community seems to know you were out,” says Ronthal.

An anonymous Johannesburg matchmaker believes going for coffee or a drink is perfect for a first date, not a meal or an activity because that puts too much pressure on things.

“It’s extremely important that the couple, especially for the first few dates, don’t go to the usual restaurants and coffee shops in the *shtetl* as everyone knows everyone and, within seconds,

everyone will be talking, and truly it’s none of anyone’s business,” she says.

“If the date goes well and it ends up being your person, that place will always carry a special place for you. And do you really want to be at Frangelicas with the whole community on a date with you?”

Online dating strategy guru Michaela Tobias says that over her more than 20 first dates she has been to possibly every suitable location in Johannesburg.

“Growing up in Jewish Joburg and keeping kosher, I always imagined those movie-style first dates – going out for dinner at a restaurant – but assumed they weren’t possible. Then I had a first date at Burger Park, and it was exactly what I’d always pictured. We had dinner, didn’t bump into anyone we knew, and it felt relaxed and natural. It was wonderful,” she says.

“Some people will only meet in a hotel lobby or busy coffee shop because it feels public. Others go completely the opposite direction. Personally, I think the answer is somewhere in the middle.”

An anonymous single man in his late 20s explained that when he had started dating through matchmakers, he was advised to plan dates where

Continued on page 12>>



AI-generated image

“You’re almost guaranteed to bump into someone you know, whether it’s family, friends, your rabbi, or your neighbour. Well-known hotels are another one, as they tend to be popular meeting spots and are often filled with familiar faces,” she says.

Tova Goldstein, therapist and executive director of The Matchmakers Network, says many people want more private first dates because the community is so small and people talk.

“The minute someone sees you on a date, it’s, ‘Did you see who so-and-so was with?’ Suddenly everyone is talking, there’s pressure, and people want all the details. It can be horrible. Then if the relationship doesn’t work out after just one date, you don’t want to go out again because everyone



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“Our goal is to have as many singles as possible in the system, so they feel supported by the community of matchmakers and know they haven’t been forgotten,” adds Goldstein. “In a small community, many people feel like they’ve already met everyone and that there’s no one left to date, but that’s not the case. We want to help people meet, give them hope, and increase their chances of finding a partner. Ultimately, we want to strengthen the Jewish community by helping more Jews marry Jews.”



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The social exclusion of singles

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

When you’re married or in a long-term relationship, your social life often revolves around gatherings such as couples’ dinners and Shabbat get-togethers. Should you and your partner split up, these dynamics can shift quite suddenly, changing existing friendships or necessitating the development of new singles’ circles.

“Before my ex and I got divorced, we often used to go to dinner parties and out for meals with a number of couples,” says Hannah Jacobson*. Yet, after her divorce, she noticed that she was no longer receiving invites from couples. “I pointed this out to other people who were divorced and they said, ‘Welcome to the club,’” she recalls. “They told me that it’s generally married women who feel threatened by divorced women. If you’re unattractive, maybe you have a better chance of being invited, but I wasn’t that bad I guess.”

Reflecting on this perceived threat, Jacobson says the irony is that her husband’s infidelity ended their marriage. “So, the last thing I would ever do is get involved with a married man because I know how hurtful that is.”

While Jacobson has now been divorced for several years and sometimes meets her married female friends for a morning coffee without their partners, the couples’ dinner dynamics have never changed. “It’s different with married family members, but otherwise I’m just very lucky to have a lot of great female friends who are single,” she says.

Jacobson believes that the exclusion of single women isn’t rooted in spite and is often subconscious. People don’t want an odd man – or woman – out when the rest of the crowd is made up of couples. The only time they’ll possibly invite you, she says, is with other single women, or a single man they’re trying to set you up with. “Being the only single person among couples doesn’t worry me at all though. I’m very happy in my own skin.”

Divorcee Mike Sacks* also says he’s heard that married women don’t want single females around their husbands. For men though, he says, the invitations often evaporate for different reasons. When he was married, Friday nights and Saturdays were dominated by Shabbat meals with other couples, but Sacks was never involved in making those plans. So as a single man, his weekends looked very different.

“Typically, even if you’re at shul every day, it’s not the men who do the inviting,” he says, “it’s their wives. He doesn’t think of it, and there’s no way she’s phoning me to invite me – married women don’t phone single men and ask them to

social events.”

While Sacks says he was formerly part of the religious community and is still a regular shulgoer, community members are generally partnered up. “It’s very hard to be *frum* and single above a certain age when others are married and have kids. I know many people who either haven’t been married or have gotten divorced and have decided that they can’t be religious anymore.”

Following his divorce, Sacks says he made friends with a group of singles. They would go out for drinks or dancing, which was more about having fun than trying to pick up dates, a stigma that often surrounds such environments, he says. While that doesn’t happen as regularly now, he still socialises with fellow singles at different events. “I’ve always had an eclectic bunch of friends,” he says, “but I’m also a solitary, thick-skinned guy who’s happy to go out on my own. But for some people that’s damn hard.”

This is true for Yael Silver*, who is scared to attend singles events alone after a bad divorce and a long illness. “Getting out of bed and going to a place where you know nobody, you ask, ‘What are they going to think of me? Who’s saying what behind your back?’ It becomes very hard when you’ve been so isolated.”

While Sacks is outgoing, he also goes through rough patches, he says. “There are times when it’s just lonely and it’s not easy.”

Loneliness is also a factor for single father of two David Klein*, who’s been divorced for more than 10 years. “I had a very hectic social life in my 20s, and I got married in my early 30s. During the marriage, most of our friends were the parents of the kids from the school. A lot of my single friends, or those I had before I was married, fell by the wayside.”

When Klein got divorced, he found himself being neglected by married friends. “I found very quickly that, especially as a divorced father, I was dumped by most of these people. I became persona non grata and I wasn’t included in any plans.” As their wives stayed close to Klein’s

ex, the husbands couldn’t socialise with him anymore. Even friends from his single days were now married so while some of these friendships endured, their lifestyles were different.

For a long time, his children, whom he saw every weekend, were Klein’s saving grace. The only other social life he had was through colleagues and work functions. Yet as his children got older, they no longer spent as much time with him. “For a year, it was very lonely and I was watching Netflix on the couch almost every weekend.”

Eventually Klein was introduced to Wholesome Spaces, a community organisation that helps people in their 30s and above to meet. “I made some good friendships in a short space of time through that group. Being a sociable guy is the one thing I have going for me.” He however worries about whether these friendships will endure, as he has experienced past rifts when fellow singles couple up. “That’s a fear I have, of growing old alone, the kids moving away, and not having anyone around,” he admits.

Michelle K Blumenau, whose husband passed away 14 years ago, says becoming a widow in her 40s was traumatic. “It took many years to come to terms with the changes that it brought. Some people were tremendously supportive of me. Then there were other ‘friends’ who disappeared. I found that shocking. Not only did I lose my husband, I lost people. I had naively thought that friendships carry through for a lifetime.”

After reading *Let Them* by Mel Robbins, Blumenau realised that with the loss of her husband, the energy had changed as she and her friends were no longer in the same stage of life. While it took great strength to rebuild a like-minded social circle, Blumenau made a conscious effort to find new single friends.

“I found a younger friendship circle as a result,” she says. “In a way, their lifestyle is more similar to the lifestyle I lead than that of my married friends. For instance, a few of us may holiday together and we go out for dinner several times a week, as living alone, I need more social contact.”

*Name has been changed due to social sensitivities.



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How not to be seen out on a first date

>>Continued from page 10

they couldn’t be seen by other Jews. While the reasons ranged from halachic considerations to relationship psychology, the common principle was that couples should keep their relationship private until they were ready to involve their families. As a result, they avoided Jewish neighbourhoods, and even the location and timing of dates were carefully planned to minimise the chance of being recognised.

“In the time since, I have been on many first dates and have found this to be the preference of my dates as well,” he said. “Only one woman I went out with didn’t mind being seen on a date with me inside the Jewish area. Some dates said they were introverted and felt less shy in a distant venue. Some dates were embarrassed and concerned that a passerby would spread gossip – and then her community would know she was dating. And some dates felt obliged to comply with everything the matchmaker and *shadchans* instructed us to do.”

One of his ideal date spots is a hotel lobby. However, that isn’t very viable in South Africa. “A couple cannot just go to a hotel lobby like in Israel. Johannesburg isn’t Jerusalem. Because of crime and other factors, there are few hotels that allow walk-ins to sit in their lobby. Going to these runs the risk of seeing other dating couples with the same intent. Some dates have been okay with this, others not,” he says.

“If hotel lobbies aren’t viable, then non-kosher restaurants

and cafés are next. This raises obvious *kashrus* concerns. Another concern is *chillul Hashem* (desecrating G-d). Some dates I have taken to non-kosher restaurants because of privacy concerns have refused to order a cold drink or a beverage,” he says. “I have often felt that this is a potential *chillul Hashem* because there is a social expectation for both people to order something from the menu. To navigate this, I always order a Coke for myself and a table water. That way the restaurant doesn’t feel resentment over the loss of a table that could go to dining customers.”

Tobias believes that hotel lobbies and bars aren’t automatically the best option, nor is driving an hour away to somewhere more secluded. If it’s planned well, a first date in a more private setting can be really special, she says. “Private doesn’t have to mean isolated. It just means somewhere you can actually get to know each other without feeling like you’re on display.”

However, the venue doesn’t matter half as much as the person sitting in front of you.

“The perfect location can’t create chemistry that isn’t there, and an ordinary coffee shop can feel magical if you’re with the right person,” Tobias says. “A thoughtfully chosen setting can certainly enhance a first date, but it’s never the reason a date becomes memorable. The company is.”

Herzlia gamers enabled to compete around Shabbos

LEE TANKLE

For most teenagers, gaming is a hobby. For a small group of Herzlia High School pupils, it's become a serious competitive pursuit. And the organisation behind the ACG School Showdown last weekend made it possible for them to compete while still observing Shabbat.

On 16 and 17 July, Daniel Rozowsky in Grade 8, Adam Harris in Grade 9, Nathan Bloch in Grade 8, and Joshua Gamaroff in Grade 10 represented their school at the showdown at GrandWest Casino and Entertainment

World in Cape Town. This esports competition showcases teamwork, strategy, and quick thinking, as much as lightning-fast reflexes.

The four Herzlia pupils competed in both Fortnite and FIFA EA Sports FC (Electronic Arts Football Club) and delivered an outstanding performance, with Gamaroff finishing second nationally in FIFA after a closely contested final on the main stage. Herzlia's Fortnite team placed 12th overall with 105 points, surpassing their own expectations.

Because one of the days they were competing was a Friday, their teacher Kerry-Ann van der Merwe, the United Herzlia Schools head of innovation, organised for the boys to play from home.

"I told them about Shabbat and the children needing to get home on time, and that we had to factor in travelling home and traffic. We didn't want the children getting home late and families not having enough time to prepare for Shabbat," she said.

On Friday afternoon, the pupils left the tournament and Van der Merwe stayed at the venue to facilitate the process. She obtained the game



Competing at the ACG School Showdown

code, sent it to the team via Google Chat, and they used it to log in and rejoin the match from home.

The fact that they didn't play throughout the tournament because of Shabbat didn't affect how they were scored. Points were awarded per round, for how many players they eliminated, and then when they finished the game or got knocked out, as a team.

"It was fun. I was proud of the boys for being as flexible as they were, but also steadfast in that we had Shabbat to observe and make sure that was adhered to," said Van der Merwe. "The league was extremely understanding and supportive, and I admire them for that. It was wonderful that they could make a plan to accommodate our children so

they could still participate, and complete their rounds from home."

Having practised since the beginning of the year in their respective games, the team were excited to compete at national level and represent their school. All the players had started gaming when they were younger, playing at home before esports was introduced at school. They were thrilled by the opportunity to play with their friends and compete.

After playing in weekly matches for the first two school terms, Gamaroff finished in the top two of the school online league of EA Sports FC (2026). The Fortnite team, made up of Harris, Bloch, and Rozowsky, were promoted to the premier division of the ACG school league.

For Harris, the captain of the Fortnite team, being able to compete against other schools was important for them to gauge how they work as a team.

Bloch explained that being able to compete with

other teams enhanced the experience. "It's fun sitting by the computer on a call, but it's more fun at a big event where everyone is also playing, so we can meet our opponents and understand what we're up against," he said.

Gamaroff also liked going to gaming events. "When you play, especially in my game, you get to interact with a lot of like-minded people who understand it, and you learn from one another. That's why I enjoy playing in person, especially against professional players. It's always good to compete against someone better than you because that's how you improve. If I know I'm going to beat someone easily, I'm not really being challenged. Being surrounded by people who share the same passion and are all trying to get better makes it a really rewarding experience."

"Beyond the game itself, what I love about esports is how it breaks down social walls. It gives kids from all walks of life, who might never normally cross paths, a chance to connect over a shared passion, feel genuinely valued, and build a supportive community together," said Van der Merwe.



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Composer Zaidel-Rudolph tells the story behind the music

CLAUDIA GROSS

For decades Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph has composed music that has been performed in some of the world's most prestigious concert halls. She helped shape South Africa's national anthem, represented Africa at a United Nations concert, and balanced an international career with raising a family. Now, she has brought that extraordinary journey together in a memoir.

Sound Me Out: A Lifetime of Music and Memories traces Zaidel-Rudolph's life from her childhood as a musical prodigy to becoming one of South Africa's most celebrated composers. Rather than focusing only on her compositions, the book explores the experiences, relationships, and moments that shaped both her life and her music.

"I can really look in a rear-view mirror now," she told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I've lived a very exciting and stimulating and wonderful music life. I couldn't have wished for anything more inspiring and exhilarating." She says the decision to write the book came from a desire to preserve those memories while they remained vivid.

"Initially I thought it was mainly for my family and friends, but when I started writing, I realised there was so much that I could communicate to the general community as well as the music community."

She was determined that the memoir shouldn't become a technical account of her career. "I didn't want the book to be a textbook on music," she says. "I wanted to record my life, not only in music, but how I managed to combine a very active personal life as a wife, mother, grandmother, and now great-grandmother with a career that took me all over the world."

That career included performances and festivals

across North America, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Her compositions have been performed internationally, while her contribution to South African musical life has earned widespread recognition. Yet none of it would have been documented so accurately without an unexpected archivist.

From the age of five, Zaidel-Rudolph started playing piano at exam and Eisteddfod level. Around the same time her mother started preserving newspaper clippings, concert programmes, examination reports, reviews, and photographs. Those records eventually grew into an archive spanning more than 70 years.

"I don't think I could have written the book with the correct dates and venues and places if she hadn't filed absolutely everything," says Zaidel-Rudolph. "She kept every newspaper cutting and every review from the time I was a little girl."

After her mother's death in 2010, Zaidel-Rudolph continued adding to the archive herself. It became the foundation of the memoir and allowed her to recreate decades of performances, overseas tours, collaborations, and milestones with remarkable detail.

Although she initially approached professional biographers to write her story, she eventually realised that no one else could truly capture the emotional journey behind her music. "How could somebody else know my feelings, my interactions with audiences, colleagues, orchestras, and friends? I realised I had to do it myself." However, she credits her publisher at UJ Press, Wikus van Zyl, as being "an absolute angel" throughout the process.

Over about 20 months, she typed the entire manuscript, despite never having learned to type formally. "I had to apply my piano fingers to a computer keyboard," she laughs.

For Zaidel-Rudolph, writing a memoir ultimately became another act of creation. "The excitement of producing a new work is like giving birth to a child," she says. "You go through the labour pains of writing, and

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Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph

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Parents of baby with genetic disorder raise funds and awareness

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

A baby boy filled with love and laughter, Sacha Ariel Bass, now 15 months, has Niemann-Pick disease type A, a rare, genetic disorder with a life expectancy of between one and three to four years. To ensure other families avoid this devastating prognosis, his parents, Daniel and Samantha Bass, are raising funds for Malka Ella's genetic testing and counselling service, renamed Ariel Genetics in Sacha's honour.

Born slightly early in April last year, Sacha was initially healthy. "Then from around four to five months, he started getting colds and flu," Samantha recalls. "He got really sick and dehydrated and was admitted to hospital in September." On discovering he had a significantly enlarged liver and spleen, the doctor began extensive testing for possible viruses.

Without clear answers, Sacha was transferred to the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre. "They told us that they would have to test by elimination, ruling out various cancers through biopsies," says Samantha. They also tested for metabolic disorders. Sacha ultimately underwent four anaesthetics and spent almost two weeks in hospital.

The hospital sent his blood overseas for genetic testing, which revealed that he has a metabolic disorder. Yet because there are so many variants of such conditions, it took a further two months to determine which one it was. "Some of these disorders have treatments, and others don't and we were left hanging," Samantha recalls.

Finally, on Samantha's birthday at the end of November, Sacha's results revealed Niemann-Pick disease type A. "It was heartbreaking and not what we were expecting at all," Samantha says.

Niemann-Pick disease is a group of rare, inherited metabolic disorders in which harmful amounts of fats in cells known as lipids build up in the spleen, liver, lungs, bone marrow, and brain. A child can have type A, B, or C. Type A is the most severe form as it is neurodegenerative and progresses quickly, which is why it has such a low life expectancy. It is reportedly most prevalent in people with Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry.

As an autosomal recessive genetic disorder, Niemann-Pick disease can be inherited only when both parents carry the gene mutation. Not all children born to such a couple will be affected, as is evident with the Basses' healthy firstborn son, Jackson.

"If both parents carry the Niemann-Pick gene mutation, they have a 25% chance of having a child who has the condition," explains Suzanne Sackstein, a founder of Jewish fertility fund Malka Ella. "They also have a 25% chance of having a child who isn't affected at all, and a 50% chance of giving birth to a child with carrier status." As a carrier, the child will be healthy, but should their future partner be a carrier too, they will then be at risk of their children having the condition.

Heartbroken at their son's unexpected diagnosis, the Basses leaned on and continue to draw support from family, friends, and community. "During the

entire diagnosis period, we were living in the hospital and people helped with everything from food to shopping, nothing was too much to ask. It's not even just your close friends, everyone rallies around. It makes you think what a wonderful group of people we have here."

Three-year-old Jackson – who shares a special bond with Sacha – also gives his parents strength. "He still has to be taken to school, to soccer, to grannies and so on, and so he's the glue in the family without even realising it," say the couple. "He keeps us going."

Once they got over the initial shock of Sacha's diagnosis, the Basses decided

giving him the best possible life. "He's got so much love around him and he's a happy kid," says his father.

"You can see how super special Sacha is, the way he smiles and engages with people – he's so aware," adds Samantha. "For someone

who's so affected and limited in his capabilities, like not being verbal, he can communicate so well. It's bizarre because while he may not be reaching his milestones, he's growing and developing every day."

Nevertheless, when Sacha gets sick, it hits him harder than other babies. He recently had a peg, essentially a pipe that goes into his stomach to facilitate feeding, inserted as he cannot eat solid food.

"You go through phases of grief and anger because all of this could have been avoided if we had just known about genetic testing," Samantha says. "When we got married, we ticked all the boxes in terms of lessons and so on, but no one told us we should be



Samantha and Daniel Bass with Sacha and Jackson

doing Ashkenazi panels, we were only told to test for Tay-Sachs." Through their journey and to honour Sacha, the Basses have therefore connected with Malka Ella to raise funds for genetic testing and counselling in the community – and most importantly, to spread awareness.

Now rebranded as Ariel Genetics, after Sacha's middle and Hebrew name, the offering was started by Malka Ella to ensure the birth of healthy Jewish children, Sackstein says. For those who cannot afford it, Ariel Genetics subsidises or fully funds genetic carrier screening for 106 autosomal recessive conditions, including Niemann-Pick disease. With testing processed overseas, this costs

approximately R9 000 and helps people understand their risk of passing on inherited genetic conditions. If both partners carry the same disorder, Malka Ella also helps fund genetic in-vitro fertilisation, where only embryos unaffected by the condition are implanted.

With Daniel set to run the Jeppe Marathon in Sacha's honour in September, the Basses have raised more than R160 000 of their R360 000 target, all in aid of Ariel Genetics. Their friends in the music industry also performed in a fundraising concert on Mandela Day.

"We know the pain and suffering that this condition has caused us," Daniel says. "So, by raising funds and awareness, we're not only honouring Sacha's life and creating a legacy for him but also preventing this pain and suffering for other families. Even if it's just one or two families who don't have to go through this, he will have fulfilled a special purpose just by being here."

that, without a cure, their focus would be on keeping him as content and healthy as possible. They strive to stay in the moment with him, ensuring they're

Kaplan recognised by his cricketing peers

GILANA LAB

When cricketer Gavin Kaplan made the difficult decision to leave Western Province for Boland two years ago, he was searching for one thing: opportunity. On the night of Thursday 16 July, that gamble paid off in spectacular fashion.

This Jewish batsman was named the Cricket South Africa (CSA) Men's Domestic Players' Player of the Season after a stellar campaign in which he finished as the leading run scorer in South Africa's four-day domestic competition.

The award is one of the highest honours in domestic cricket because it is recognition from fellow players.

Cricket commentator and broadcaster Barney Girnun says the accolade is particularly meaningful. "It was voted on by his peers. That makes it hugely significant. Presented at the CSA Awards, where all the Proteas were present, he was voted the best local player."

Girnun says Kaplan's rise since leaving Cape Town for Paarl has been remarkable. "He went from Western Province to Boland and since he's done that his career has really gone to another level. He was the leading run scorer in the

four-day game in South Africa this year and has had a fantastic season."

Girnun says Kaplan's success extends beyond the cricket field. "If there was a Jewish Sportsman of the Year in South Africa, he'd win it now for what he's done," he says.

For Kaplan, the greatest reward isn't the trophy itself but knowing it came from the players he competes against every week. "It's really special to know that your peers and the people that see you every day and play against you on a daily or weekly basis think that you're worthy

this is pretty cool."

The honour caps a journey that, at times, required patience. At Western Province, Kaplan found opportunities hard to come by. "There was a lot of competition for places, and I was in and out of the team. Well, more out of the team, to be honest.

I was struggling to actually get game time."

Moving to Boland changed everything. "My game has really moved forward positively, and I think that's from playing more games and being exposed more," he says. "The best place to learn and improve is during games, and if you're playing all the games in the season, your game is going to move forward if you're doing the right things."

Looking back, Kaplan hopes this season will prove to be a turning point. "Hopefully it'll be a season that I look back on that really kick-started my career," he



Gavin Kaplan

of the award," he says. "It's always nice to get recognition from fellow players. To actually get recognised for an award like



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says. "It was definitely a season that I'm proud of and that I'll look back on and cherish."

Even after receiving one of domestic cricket's biggest honours, Kaplan remains grounded. His focus is on continuing to improve. "I've never really been a big one for goals," he says. "It's always been about pushing myself to see how good I can get. If my best is South Africa A, then great. If my best is the Proteas, then that's also great. If it's Boland, then that's also great. It's just about doing everything I can to become the best version of myself."

Changing tyres isn't for everyone

Around a week before I got married, my father decided it was time for an intervention. Not the "Sit down, son, let's talk about your obsession with Holocaust literature" kind. More the practical kind. In his mind, he would have failed as a father if he hadn't taught me how to change a tyre before I became someone's husband.

So, early one Sunday morning, I found myself standing in the driveway as he methodically removed a perfectly healthy tyre and replaced it with ... the exact same perfectly healthy tyre. Chatting away instructively as he did so. My role in all of this was simple. Watch, learn, and absorb.

Spoiler alert: I didn't.

Some years later, while driving to a remote mine somewhere in North West province with my business partner, a born-and-bred New Yorker, we suffered a blowout. I pulled over beneath a road sign that cheerfully informed us we were in a "Hijack hotspot". We sat in silence for about five minutes. Eventually he turned to me and said, "I've just realised, if I don't get out and change the tyre, we're going to be here forever." He was an exceptionally bright man. Sometimes, though, it took him a few minutes to read the room. The tyre got changed. But not by me.

There are simply some things I will never learn to do. I will probably never rewire a plug. And frankly, I think that it's in everyone's best interests. If I ever attempted it, there would be a great chance that people would probably die. I also won't become an expert at sewing, laying tiles, or making perfect sushi rice.

Others can't tie a tie, reverse a trailer, or keep a pot plant alive. And that's perfectly fine. Some skills are essential. Everyone needs to learn to swim. Everyone needs to know basic first aid. And everyone needs to know how to block someone on WhatsApp.

Beyond that, life has always worked because we're different. Judaism has always understood this. In the desert, every tribe had a different role. The Mishkan wasn't built by one extraordinary person but by ordinary people, each contributing a different skill.

Today, that lesson feels more relevant than ever.

There was a time when defending Jewish identity felt like a specialist skill. Something for rabbis, diplomats, communal leaders, or the person in the

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



family who actually enjoys arguing on Facebook. The events of 7 October changed that. Whether

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we like it or not, every Jew is now an ambassador. Not because we all have to speak at rallies or write opinion pieces, but because sooner or later every one of us will be asked a question, hear a comment, or find ourselves in a conversation that will ask us to speak up. And whereas we don't need to become an expert on the Middle East, we do need to know enough to explain who we are, what we believe, and why it matters.

There are still plenty of things I have no intention of learning. Changing a tyre remains high on that list. Standing up for being Jewish isn't. Some skills are optional. That one no longer is.

----- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies -----

In service of human rights

Last Friday, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) had a rare and important opportunity. We sat down with the heads and commissioners of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), an institution with which we share a long and storied history. The SAHRC and the SAJBD have worked together on a number of significant cases over the years, none more so than the Masuku hate speech matter, which the commission took all the way to the Constitutional Court on our behalf.

We requested the meeting after the Embassy of Iran in South Africa published a cartoon that was, quite simply, antisemitic. There was nothing subtle about it. As part of our engagement, I delivered a presentation on the history and origins of antisemitic tropes and conspiracies, tracing how this hatred has shifted and reinvented itself across the centuries, and how those same constructs remain active today. A person who isn't Jewish, without the context of our history or our inbuilt sensitivities, may not immediately grasp why a particular image or phrase cuts so deep.

What struck me was how genuinely open the commissioners were to hearing us. They listened to our community's concerns, and they went further, asking that the presentation be shared among the commissioners and possibly built into some of their own resource material.

South Africa has low levels of antisemitism, and keeping it that way is central to our work. Our safety as a community isn't an accident. It rests in large part on our Constitution and on the bodies created to give that Constitution force, the SAHRC chief among them. When those institutions do their job, all of us are safer.

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



Last week also brought Mandela Day, and here too, as it does every year, our community showed up.

In Johannesburg, the Board was proud to partner with the remarkable Maharishi Institute to serve the inner city. Together we helped provide more than 5 000 meals and we learned about the institute's extraordinary work under its Jewish chief executive and founder, Dr Taddy Blecher. Through education and holistic support, the Maharishi Institute is changing lives and building a future for a part of our city too often written off. As Jews we are guided by the value of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world through acts of service and compassion. Watching communities come together in that spirit was a reminder of what is possible.

In Cape Town, the Board marked the occasion in support of Home of Hope. The organisation gives a loving and safe home, specialised care, education, and life skills to almost 50 children and young people, many from severely disadvantaged backgrounds and many living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. The Board's professional staff, lay leadership, and colleagues from across several Jewish community organisations took part in the packing and preparation. Our colleagues said that the event touched them profoundly, and that it has started a strong connection between the two organisations involved.

Mandela Day isn't one day of service. It's a legacy, and it asks each of us to keep making a difference.

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

Composer Zaidel-Rudolph tells the story behind the music

>>>Continued from page 13

eventually you have the finished product."

In the memoir, she explores how family life shaped her creative voice. She believes becoming a mother transformed her compositions, making them more emotional and instinctive than the cerebral works of her earlier years. "I would be changing a baby's nappy while musical ideas were racing through my mind."

Her identity as a South African Jewish woman also became a defining influence on her work. Zaidel-Rudolph says those different parts of her identity never competed with one another. Instead, they blended naturally in her compositions.

"Jewishness has always been part of my DNA. A lot of my music has been inspired by Jewish themes." At the same time, she drew inspiration from the country around her, including African musical traditions. "I love the environment that I live in.

"The source of my inspiration has always been a combination of African music and Jewish music. In my own psyche, they blend very well together." She believes that combination has given her music its distinctive voice. "I think the combination of being a white Jewish woman composer has brought a uniqueness to my music."

In one of the chapters in the memoir, she revisits one of the best-known times of her career, her role in creating South Africa's post-apartheid national anthem.

She recalls receiving a fax from President Nelson Mandela's office in 1995 inviting her to join a committee tasked with creating a single national anthem for the new democratic South Africa. The committee included

linguists, academics, religious leaders, and public figures. Zaidel-Rudolph was the only full-time composer.

Mandela wanted an anthem that was shorter than the combined versions of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* and *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*, which together were considered too long for public occasions. "The job fell to me," she says. "I had to cut sections, remove repeats, stitch everything together, and produce a bridge between the two melodies."

She recalls discussions about ensuring the anthem was inclusive of South Africans from different faiths. "Being Jewish, I felt we couldn't really write about the Christian Trinity. The anthem needed to be more neutral while still referring to G-d."

Despite the anthem's prominence, Zaidel-Rudolph says her proudest achievements remain her orchestral compositions. Among them is *At the End of the Rainbow*, which was selected for a United Nations concert celebrating women composers from around the world. She was the only one representing Africa.

"That was pretty much a highlight. It was performed in New York, and I had to wake up at 03:00 to hear it because of the time difference." She also remembers hearing her piano concerto, *Pendulum*, performed by the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra as another unforgettable moment.

• Sound Me Out: A Lifetime of Music and Memories will be launched at the University of Johannesburg on 13 August. Journalist Gillian Anstey and composer Professor Hendrik Hofmeyr will interview Zaidel-Rudolph at the event.

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Lipschitz is running on plenty

GILANA LAB

For Adam Lipschitz, one of the fastest marathon runners in South African history, organising road races isn't just about getting runners across a finish line. It's about making the sport faster, more exciting, and more accessible to everyone.

The Durban runner, race organiser, and founder of the Social Runners Club believes South African road running has room for a fresh approach. From designing what he hopes will become one of the country's fastest courses to creating a running club without the traditional obligations, his aim is to encourage more people to embrace the sport.

"I've always wanted to get as many people involved in running as I can," says the 32-year-old. "I know what running has done for me."

Lipschitz's latest race has been designed with speed in mind. The World Athletics-certified course means performances can be used for international qualification, including Olympic qualifying times, making it one of only a handful of officially measured courses in South Africa.

"I'm trying to make it the fastest race in the country," he says. "I've run all over the world, so I know what a fast course looks like. The time of year, the weather, the course, everything works perfectly for fast times." The race, starting at Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium, has

been scheduled six weeks after the Comrades Marathon, allowing runners to recover but still take advantage of the fitness they've built.

Adding another incentive, Lipschitz has put up a R100 000 bonus for anyone who breaks the course record. "I actually want someone to break it. I know it's going to hit my pocket, but long-term marketing is far more beneficial."

While the possibility of attracting elite local and international athletes is exciting, Lipschitz is equally focused on making race day enjoyable for everyday runners. "A lot of these races are getting very boring. They're just the same old weekend race," he says. "I'm making them more unique, with more vibes, more entertainment. Hopefully, if someone starts with the 5km, they'll come back for the 10km."

That philosophy also shaped the creation of the Social Runners Club. Having competed from a young age and represented South Africa at school level, Lipschitz decided there was room for a club that appealed to runners looking for flexibility rather than obligation.

"It's a no-frills club. You don't have to rock up to time trials. You don't have to come and marshal races or attend meetings. Get your licence for the year and do what you want," he says.

The formula has proved successful. In just three years, the club has grown to more than 570 members, with runners not only in Durban but also in Johannesburg

and Cape Town. Lipschitz hopes to expand formally into both cities in 2027.

"We've got a young vibe and a young crew. Not everyone wants to be forced to go to group runs after work. That's where our club does well." Running, he says, has always been more than competition. "I use it as my meditation. Some people do yoga. I enjoy running. It's my alone time in my own space."

He believes the sport helps navigate life's challenges. "I think a lot of people have used running to get away from their own personal drama. The more people who run and the more people who understand running, I think it's a good thing for life."

That passion has inspired him to give back to the running community. This year, Lipschitz funded 20 Comrades Marathon entries, worth R24 000, for runners who needed financial assistance. He hopes sponsors will join the initiative to help even more athletes reach the starting line. "If you know someone who needs a bit more help, maybe your worker, your colleague, or



Adam Lipschitz

someone who just needs that little bit of assistance, we're going to help them."

His support often extends beyond organised initiatives. He has helped a petrol attendant who worked night shifts before running qualifying marathons, and runners who train despite having limited financial means. "It's those sorts of people who just need a little bit more assistance. That's what I'm trying to recreate."

For Lipschitz, every race, every new club member, and every opportunity to support another runner serves the same purpose. "I just want more people running."

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