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Father to father – Ramaphosa helps World Zionist president

NICOLA MILTZ

President Cyril Ramaphosa became personally involved in efforts to bring home the remains of slain South African-born Israeli soldier Captain Daniel Perez from Gaza – an intervention the Perez family believe spared them more months of anguish.

It was an extraordinary intervention that cut through the bitter divide between South Africa and Israel.

The Presidency publicly confirmed the government's role this week following a poignant meeting between Ramaphosa and Daniel's parents, Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez. Rabbi Perez, also born in South African, is president of the World Zionist Organization and executive chairperson of the World Mizrachi movement.

"President Cyril Ramaphosa has met the family of the late Captain Daniel Perez following the intervention of the South African government in facilitating the release of his remains by Hamas," the Presidency said on Monday, 10 August.

Exactly what Ramaphosa and the South African government did behind the scenes, whom they approached, and through which channels they worked remains undisclosed because of the sensitivity surrounding the process.

"Unfortunately, I can't give you the details of the process behind the scenes," Presidential Spokesperson Vincent Magwenya told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He did confirm that this case had personal significance for Ramaphosa. "The meeting was a very touching moment for the president," Magwenya said. "As a parent himself, he felt the pain the Perez [family] felt with the loss of their son, and he was grateful that, at the very least, the intervention of the government that he leads could help bring closure to this tragic situation."

Perez posted on Instagram: "Shelley and I met President Ramaphosa as South African parents in order to express our heartfelt gratitude to him and the South African government for the role they played behind the scenes in bringing our beloved son, Captain Daniel Perez, back to Israel for burial."

"Daniel," he stressed, was "a born and bred South African" who was killed on 7 October and whose body was taken into Gaza.

"Without their direct intervention, our son's body would in all likelihood have come back months later, causing us additional pain and suffering," Perez said. As it was, the family had waited two years for the return.

Sunday's encounter was the second time Perez and Ramaphosa had come face to face. Their first encounter took place in Washington in May 2025, shortly after Ramaphosa's White House meeting with United States President Donald Trump. Perez flew from Israel to meet Ramaphosa in Washington, and the two spent time together discussing Daniel's story and his family's anguish while his body remained in Gaza.

Perez told the *SA Jewish Report* that during both encounters, Ramaphosa displayed "warmth and openness" towards him and his family.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), which had been working quietly behind the scenes, helped to facilitate the first face-to-face meeting. For SAJBD National President Zev Krengel, it was part of a far broader effort that began in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks of 7 October.

"Even if we fundamentally disagree on ideological issues, we work with the democratically elected government of the day," he said. "Although we differ dramatically on key issues, channels of communication remain open."

Daniel Perez, 22, was born in Johannesburg and attended Yeshiva College before making aliya with his family. Jewish Israeli men and women are subject to conscription from age 18. Daniel went on to become an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) tank commander.

Photo courtesy GCIS

President Cyril Ramaphosa and Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez on Sunday

On 7 October, he was stationed at Nahal Oz military base when Hamas terrorists stormed southern Israel. He was killed in battle and his body taken into Gaza by Hamas.

For 163 days, his family clung to the hope that he might still be alive. It was only on 17 March 2024 that the IDF informed the Perez family, based on intelligence, that Daniel had been killed on 7 October.

His family held a funeral at Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem while continuing their campaign for the return of his body. Daniel's remains were finally returned to Israel two years after he was killed, allowing his family at last to lay him to rest.

What remained largely out of public view until now was the extent of the South African government's involvement in getting him home.

Krengel said the government played a significant role in efforts to secure the return of Daniel's remains, and that Ramaphosa had taken a personal interest in the case.

"The president took it seriously," Krengel said. "There was a commitment from the South African government to do what it could to bring Daniel back. Ramaphosa's involvement made a material difference."

The details of precisely how the return was achieved remain closely held.

Daniel's fate captured hearts and minds across the community, where the Perez family is well known; and his story increasingly resonated beyond communal boundaries.

His plight also reached Parliament. In May 2025, Patriotic Alliance Member of Parliament Ashley Sauls raised Daniel's case in the National Assembly, appealing for the government to become involved in efforts to

Continued on page 3>>

Rabbis tell Mamdani: this is not going well

GRACE GILSON – JTA

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani met a group of rabbis on Monday, 10 August, for a conversation that centred on concerns about the impact of his rhetoric on Jewish safety.

The meeting, which lasted roughly an hour, was initiated by Mamdani's Office to Combat Antisemitism amid heightened tensions between the mayor and some Jewish New Yorkers over his increasingly sharp criticism of Israel and its government.

"We were there in our own unique voices to say to the mayor, this is not going well. The rhetoric about Israel, about its leader, the different issues, it comes across not as criticising a policy or some moment, it comes across as vilifying Israel, which we said is causing Jews in New York and probably elsewhere not just to feel less safe, but really to be at risk," said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism and an attendee of Monday's meeting.

Mamdani, an avowed Israel critic, has faced mounting scrutiny in recent months from Jewish leaders, including for his recent comments referring to lobbying organisation AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) as "monsters" and calling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "war criminal" and the "architect of a horrific genocide against the Palestinian people".

Following Mamdani's attack on Netanyahu late last month, which came as he acknowledged he did not have the authority to arrest the Israeli leader, several critics of the mayor linked his rhetoric to a stabbing attack on two men, one of whom was visibly Jewish.

"No one was [at the meeting] trying to convince the mayor to change his views on Israel," said Rabbi Jonathan Leener, leader of the Modern Orthodox Prospect Heights Shul, in an emailed statement to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "But there were certainly moments of tension and passion, particularly as people tried to convey how isolated and vulnerable many Jewish New Yorkers feel right now, and the extent to which some believe his rhetoric has contributed to that sense of vulnerability."

Leener said he felt that the mayor was "genuinely engaging with us, acting in good faith, and listening carefully to our concerns, particularly our plea to help turn down the temperature".

"Ultimately, I will judge him and his administration by their actions and by the results they deliver around making Jewish New Yorkers feel safe," Leener added. "But I do applaud them for inviting us in, listening, and creating space for a candid and substantive conversation."

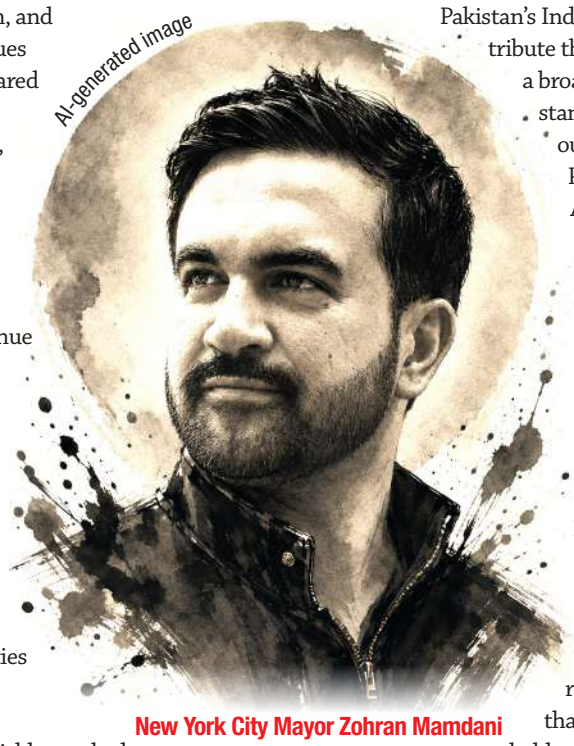
Rabbi Rachel Timoner, whose Reform Park Slope synagogue, Congregation Beth Elohim, hosted Mamdani for a meeting with congregants during the mayoral race, said that while she didn't know what the mayor's next move would be, she hoped the meeting would be a "breakthrough moment".

"The next time he criticises Israel, I would like to hear him in that moment simultaneously say, 'The Israeli government is not the same as Jewish New Yorkers. It is not acceptable ever to take out your anger at the Israeli government against the Jewish people of New York. And if you are hearing me in that way, you are mishearing me. You are misunderstanding me,'" Timoner said.

Phylisa Wisdom, the executive director of Mamdani's Office to Combat Antisemitism, told JTA in a statement on Monday that the group of rabbis included "several denominations, including Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative, and Modern Orthodox, as well as unaffiliated groups".

She said the meeting focused on "strategies to strengthen Jewish safety and belonging, maintain candid lines of communication, and collaborate on issues where we have shared values and goals".

"It was an open, positive and constructive conversation," Wisdom said. "Mayor Mamdani has and will continue to engage with Jewish life in New York City in order to meet the needs of our communities and reaffirm his commitment to the thriving of Jewish communities across the five boroughs."



New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani

The meeting quickly sparked criticism from Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz, the leader of the Modern Orthodox Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun on the Upper East Side, who was not invited to the meeting and said the mayor should have worked with the New York Board of Rabbis to co-ordinate the roundtable.

"He could have reached out to the organised rabbinic community, but he chose not to because he was trying to pick a group of people that he thought might be more congenial to his particular politics," Steinmetz told JTA.

Steinmetz, who has long been critical of Mamdani, said that while he had attended a meeting with the mayor previously, he believed the mayor was "absolutely insincere about caring about our concerns".

Hours after the meeting, Mamdani posted on X a series of images of himself celebrating Pakistan's Independence Day, a tribute that Leener said "reflects a broader pattern of double standards and the singling out of Israel", referring to Pakistan's expulsions of Afghans.

"Against that backdrop, I found it striking that the mayor felt comfortable publicly celebrating Pakistani Independence Day while choosing not to attend Israel's Independence Day celebration in June," Leener said. "The contrast reinforces a concern many of us raised in the meeting: that Israel is too often held to a different standard."

As New York's Jewish leaders look for signs that Monday's dialogue will translate into action, Jacobs said he hoped the mayor would prioritise conversations across the spectrum of New York Jewry.

"I hope that the mayor will prioritise, as he seems to do in other communities, to be in conversation, in dialogue, in relationship not just with the people who are broadly supportive, but also those of us who have been publicly critical, as I have been, and I know others have been as well," Jacobs said. "That's the obligation of leadership."

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What creates a community?

Torah Thought

Rabbi Motti Hadar
Pine Street Shul

What truly defines a strong Jewish community? What is the ultimate measure of a successful society? How do we know if we're investing where it matters most?

This week's *parsha*, Shoftim, opens with the command, "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates."

The command seems simple. Every city needs a reliable system of justice. But why does the Torah specify that it must be established "in all your gates"?

A gate is the place where private and public worlds meet. It is the point where people enter a city and where the life of the city flows outward. Placing judges and leaders at the gates ensures that the Torah's values shape every part of city life.

There is a broader message here about the Torah's vision for a Jewish community. Judaism is not intended to be lived only in the privacy of our homes or hearts. It must shape the places in which we live, the way we conduct our businesses, how we resolve disagreements, and how we care for one another.

Good intentions are not enough. Jewish life needs shuls, schools, welfare organisations, and places where people can learn, celebrate, and support one another. These institutions give permanence to the beliefs we cherish and allow them to be passed from one generation to the next.

The strength of a Jewish community cannot be measured only by the number of people who attend services or communal events. It is also measured by how many people understand that Jewish life is something they are responsible for helping to create.

It is easy to ask, "What does my community provide for me?" A stronger question is, "What am I helping to provide for my community?"

Each of us has something to contribute, through our time, abilities, or resources, or simply by helping another Jew feel welcome. Our institutions can remain strong only when ordinary people recognise that their involvement matters.

South African Jewry has earned a reputation far beyond our size for the strength of our shuls, schools, and welfare organisations. We are also known for the way we come together when it matters. When a need arises, people step forward. When one institution succeeds, the entire community is strengthened.

But this is not something we can take for granted. Each generation must care for the institutions it inherits and consider what it will leave behind. The unity for which South African Jewry is known is more than a feeling of togetherness. It can be seen in the way people show up, give generously, and look after one another.

I witnessed this during our recent campaign to help complete the new home of Pine Street Shul. It was profoundly moving to watch people donate, volunteer, get involved, and reach out to their friends and family encouraging them to participate. Many who had already contributed continued working to bring others on board. They understood that this was not someone else's project. It belonged to them too. The support we received went far beyond our own shul congregation to the entire South African Jewish community because we know that strong shuls are anchors for our entire community.

While a shul may be constructed from bricks and steel, what truly fills it with life are the people who enter its doors, take responsibility for one another, and ensure that there will always be a place for another Jew.

Shoftim reminds us that strong Jewish life does not happen by itself. It is created when each of us stands at the gate and asks, "What can I help build?"

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Lion cubs rescued in Israel find a home in SA

LEE TANKLE

Snatched from their mothers while they were still suckling, two lion cubs endured the cruelty of the illegal wildlife trade, one found tied by a painfully short rope, and both kept in private homes in Israel.

Now, thousands of kilometres away, they are beginning a new chapter, at the Animal Defenders International (ADI) Wildlife Sanctuary near Winburg in the Free State.

Ben Tzur on the day of rescue

Lions in transit

According to Tim Phillips, the vice-president and co-founder of ADI, the cubs, Ben Tzur and Ori had been confiscated by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority from private homes after being trafficked into the country. They were kept in unsuitable conditions. Ben Tzur tied on a very short rope in a yard in the West Bank, and Ori found in poor health inside a house in the city of Kfar Qasim.

"People take these animals and want them as status symbols, often posing with them on social media for likes and to monetise their feeds. Others just to show off. And it's an increasing problem because these animals can live for more than 20 years if they're properly cared for. They grow very big, very powerful, very dangerous, and very expensive to feed," Phillips said.

Lion cubs like these are flown across the Israel-Jordan border in drones in exchange for semi-automatic weapons, according to Dr Nicole Benjamin-Fink, the founder and director of Conservation Beyond Borders.

"Lion cubs who survive the journey will, on average, be traded three to four times before reaching sub-adulthood at around two years old. By then, they are too large to handle and are often kept in small cages. We cannot afford to ignore the increasingly alarming rate at which wildlife is being traded alongside illegal arms. This link is further intensified by ties to drugs and terror financing. One lion cub can be traded for up to $25 000 [R405 297]," she said. "Essentially, handlers raise these animals as pets and sell people the opportunity to take pictures with young, endangered lion cubs."

These lions were taken from their mothers while they were still suckling, so when the Israel Nature and Parks Authority rescued them 16 months ago, it was difficult to assess their physical and psychological condition. Some problems become apparent only as they grow older.

"We hope it's not too serious but not being nurtured properly when they're infants is a serious problem. It also damages these animals psychologically. Ori was very nervous, very human dependent, which has kind of damaged his instincts and things like that," he said.

"Ben Tzur has, in a way, looked after Ori like a big brother. So that's helped him. But these people who take these cubs away to handle, and deprive them of their mothers so young, they are doing terrible damage to these animals. They show themselves cuddling [the animals] on social media, and they're not friends, they're not loving those animals, they're depriving them and being cruel," he said.

After being rescued, the cubs, along with four other rescued lions, spent a year at the Hai Park zoo in Kiryat Motzkin, northern Israel, where all six were housed together in a specially renovated enclosure.

However, as Ben Tzur and Ori grew older, wildlife experts became concerned that keeping several males together could eventually lead to aggression. They therefore decided to separate Ben Tzur and Ori from the three females and the remaining male and relocate them to the ADI Sanctuary. There, they will have more than a hectare to roam, explore, and grow in a more natural environment.

Ben Tzur and Ori were initially meant to be transported to South Africa in March, but due to war breaking out between Israel, Iran, and the United States, the departure was delayed.

On 2 August, the lions began their more than 50-hour journey to their new forever home.

"Because of the scarcity of flights, it was a pretty indirect route. We flew down to Cairo, where we spent more than two and a half hours changing cargo, and then flew up to Frankfurt, in the opposite direction to South Africa," said Phillips.

"In Frankfurt, we were on the ground for about 12 hours before taking the final flight to Johannesburg. So, from the time they were put into their crates, it was a good 50-hour relocation. But the lions travelled well."

Phillips said the lions arrived at the sanctuary on 5 August in pretty good condition because they had been treated well at the zoo.

"They're in quite good physical shape. They will build up a lot more muscle and body tone here because they've got almost three acres to run around in, so they're going to get more of a physical workout here than in a zoo. But they've been kept healthy, they've been looked after, and that probably helped with the whole transition," he said.

"They'll have a fuller, richer life at the sanctuary. They can't go into the wild – animals that have been through what they've been through. But we can give them something as close to nature as possible. They're surrounded by other lions, many of whom roared when they arrived. They're kind of communicating with their own kind again. They'll be able to run and play," he said.

Father to father – Ramaphosa helps World Zionist president

>>Continued from page 1

get him home.

Krengel said the SAJBD's involvement was largely through phone calls and engagement with South African officials. He travelled to Israel during this period, and held countless conversations as efforts continued.

The objective, he said, was never to create publicity. "It was about getting a successful result, not about headlines."

All of this was taking place during one of the most acrimonious periods in South Africa-Israel relations. South Africa had taken Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of "genocide" in Gaza, an allegation Israel vehemently rejects. Diplomatic relations between the two countries dropped to an all-time low, and neither country has an ambassador posted in the other.

Krengel said the SAJBD's relationship with the government during this period was therefore extremely complex. "We have been unbelievably disappointed with the government's stance on Israel, taking Israel to the ICJ and cutting diplomatic ties," he said.

Yet this had to be distinguished from the government's relationship with and responsibility towards its own Jewish citizens.

"At the end of the day, it is the government that protects the South African Jewish community, and the security cluster has been incredible," Krengel said.

The Presidency, meanwhile, placed its involvement in Daniel's case within its broader efforts to assist South Africans caught in conflicts abroad.

For Doron and Shelley Perez, Sunday's meeting was intensely personal.

The couple were able to sit with the president as parents whose son had finally been brought home, and to thank a man they believe helped make that happen.

"Amid geopolitical complexity and division, humanitarian considerations often shine through and ought to rise above all else," Perez said.

The meeting stemmed from "the profound spirit of both South African *ubuntu* and the Jewish value of *hakarat hatov*", expressing personal appreciation, he said.

For Krengel, the meeting showed that "even if there are profound differences of opinion, it is still about showing appreciation. It was the right thing to do."

He said this story is a reminder that reality is rarely that simple. "Very few things are black and white," he said. "Everything is grey."

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Israeli doctor keeps life-saving promise in Rwanda

CLAUDIA GROSS

When 11-day-old Angel needed an urgent heart procedure, an Israeli doctor kept a promise to a Rwandan cardiologist he had trained. Dr Sagi Assa flew more than 4 000km to Kigali to help Dr Gerard Misago perform a procedure never before carried out on a newborn in Rwanda.

The operation successfully opened Angel's severely narrowed pulmonary valve. It also marked a significant step towards Rwanda developing the expertise to treat children with complex heart conditions at home.

Newborn undergoes heart surgery with Israeli expertise

Angel was born with critical pulmonary valve stenosis, a congenital heart defect that restricts blood flow from the heart to the lungs. The baby was taken through several hospitals before reaching King Faisal Hospital in Kigali. There, doctors determined that an urgent catheter-based procedure was needed.

Known as balloon pulmonary valvuloplasty, the procedure uses a catheter to widen the narrowed valve without open-heart surgery. With Angel, the procedure was particularly challenging because of her age and size.

Assa, head of the Interventional Paediatric Cardiology Unit at Wolfson Medical Center in Israel, had trained Misago during his three years in Israel through Save a Child's Heart, an Israeli humanitarian organisation that treats children from developing countries while training medical professionals to establish sustainable cardiac services in their own countries.

Misago and his team presented Assa with Angel's case four days before he travelled to Rwanda.

The doctors considered the available treatment options and decided that a minimally invasive procedure was the best option.

"When Gerard was training in Israel at Wolfson Medical Center, I promised him that I and the Save a Child's Heart team would continue to support and mentor him after his return to Rwanda," Assa said. "Since this procedure had never been done in Rwanda before, I told Gerard I would come and assist him, since promises you make you have to keep."

The procedure required the medical team to work with extremely small blood vessels and navigate a catheter into the baby's heart. Assa said procedures on newborns are always challenging, high risk, and delicate. This was particularly true because it was the first time the procedure was being performed at the centre. "I wanted to ensure the safety of the baby while helping empower Dr Gerard as a future interventional cardiologist," Assa said.

Misago said he had trained with experienced mentors in Israel, gaining skills through hands-on experience. "I performed those procedures under direct supervision in Israel, so the time I spent there prepared me to lead and do that kind of procedure."

He led the operation in Rwanda, with Assa supporting him and Dr Christine Niyibogora providing paediatric cardiac anaesthesia.

Niyibogora also trained in Israel through Save a Child's Heart and said she gained both specialist clinical skills and the confidence to work as part of a multidisciplinary cardiac team.

"It taught me how to anticipate challenges, make critical decisions under pressure, and care for some of the most vulnerable patients," Niyibogora said. "Most importantly, it gave me skills that I brought back home to Rwanda and use to help build local capacity and improve access to life-saving cardiac care for children."

As the anaesthesiologist, Niyibogora had to keep Angel stable throughout the procedure. She explained that newborns have little physiological reserve. Small changes in oxygen saturation, blood pressure, heart rate, or body temperature can therefore become significant very quickly.

"The main challenge was maintaining the baby's stability throughout the procedure while the heart was being treated," she said. "It required meticulous preparation, continuous monitoring, and close communication with the interventional cardiology and intensive care teams." For Misago, having Assa present provided reassurance during a procedure that carried significant risks. "Dr Sagi is a very special doctor, humble and known by everyone in our team," he said. "Having him on our side, we were confident that the procedure would be successful."

The successful operation strengthened his belief in Rwanda's ability to manage similar cases. "From that first procedure, we are confident that we will be able to manage similar cases."

For Assa, seeing Misago lead the team was particularly meaningful after watching his development during training.

"Gerard is the first and only paediatric interventional cardiology specialist in Rwanda," he said. "For the past three years, we've seen his growth, professionally and personally. Seeing him manage a team and successfully completing a complicated procedure was heartwarming and what we all wished for."

Save a Child's Heart was established to provide paediatric cardiac care for children in countries where specialist treatment is limited. Its work also focuses on training local medical professionals. The organisation's Rwanda programme has included missions at King Faisal Hospital and fellowships for Rwandan medical professionals in Israel.

"Local teams need to be able to treat children in their own countries," Assa said, pointing out that it wasn't possible to send every child needing specialist care to Israel. "That is why one of our main goals is to train local doctors so they can return to their countries, treat as many children as possible, spread their knowledge, and make it accessible."

Assa described the procedure in Rwanda as the first of many steps towards that goal.

He said children who previously had no treatment option or who had to travel abroad to receive care could increasingly be treated in Rwanda.

Niyibogora said the same principle was important from an anaesthesia perspective. "The success of this procedure is an encouraging step for the future of paediatric cardiac care in Rwanda," she said. "It shows that, with the right training, expertise, teamwork, and resources, we can safely manage increasingly complex heart conditions in children here at home."

The most important outcome was not simply that one baby had been treated successfully, she said. "We are building local capacity so that more children can receive high-quality, life-saving cardiac care closer to their families."

For Misago, the experience has also strengthened his confidence in continuing to develop Rwanda's cardiac services. "A successful procedure for a novice increases self-esteem and confidence, and it pushes you forward," he said.

"I was pleased to have Dr Sagi by my side. I trust him very much, so if he believes in me, I can do many similar procedures."

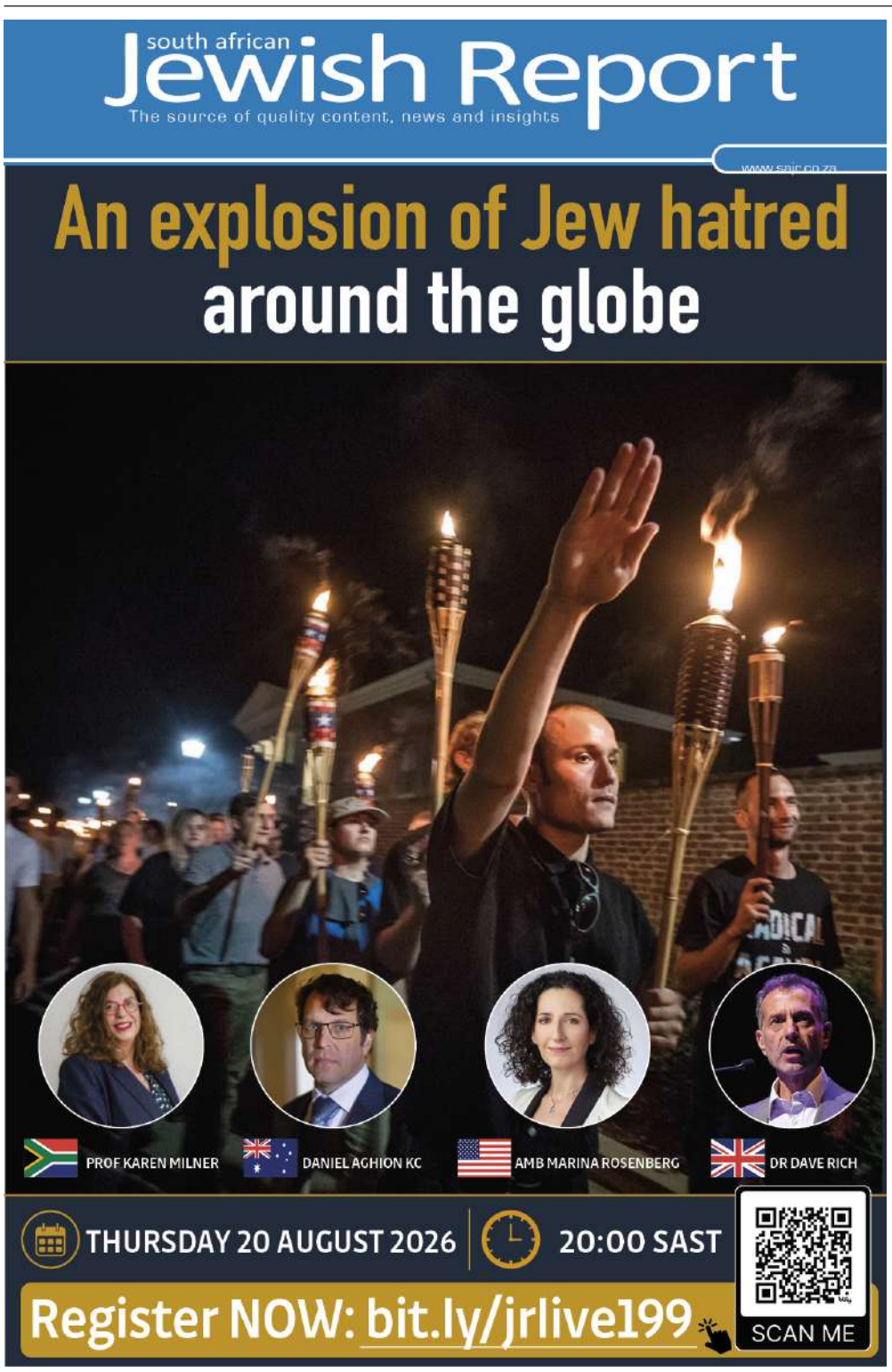
Niyibogora said the story should ultimately be seen as one of hope. "A diagnosis of serious congenital heart disease doesn't have to mean that there is no solution," she said. "With continued investment in training, infrastructure, and multidisciplinary collaboration, Rwanda can continue to strengthen its ability to care for children with complex heart conditions."

But for Assa, the most memorable thing about the mission was not the technical achievement.

It was seeing Angel's mother after the procedure. "The grateful eyes of Angel's mom," he said.

The operation gave one newborn access to treatment that might previously have required travelling outside Rwanda. It also demonstrated what years of training, mentorship, and co-operation can achieve.

For the doctors involved, the procedure was not the end of the journey. It was evidence that Rwanda's own specialists are increasingly equipped to continue it.



Judging the Achiever Awards – a reward in itself

GILANA LAB

For people who've built careers, businesses, and reputations, time is a valuable commodity. Yet members of the judging panel for the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards continue to set aside time each year to read, deliberate, and meet some of the most accomplished people in the community.

What draws them back is not only the prestige of being a judge. It is the opportunity to recognise achievement, discover people whose contributions may otherwise go unnoticed, and perhaps unexpectedly, learn something from those they are there to judge.

The 2025 judging panel for the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award

Entrepreneur Avi Mishan has served as a judge of the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award for several years. "Being a judge for the past few years is something that I find incredibly rewarding," he says. "I've always believed that when you give, you often get even more back." He's found that being exposed to entrepreneurs, seeing what they are building, and hearing the fresh perspectives they bring is both "inspiring and a learning experience".

Mishan says the close-knit nature of the community makes it particularly important to recognise and uplift people within it, while the awards have also given him the opportunity to form "meaningful relationships and friendships with fellow entrepreneurs". Ultimately, he says, it is a privilege to be part of something that celebrates the community while encouraging "its next generation of entrepreneurial talent".

For Dawn Nathan-Jones, the judging process brings a different kind of reward. A successful entrepreneur and former chief executive of Europcar, Nathan-Jones finds celebrating women whose achievements might otherwise go unnoticed particularly meaningful. "It is a privilege to have been a judge for the Jewish Achiever Awards for so many years, particularly in the Women in Leadership category," she says. She has encountered "truly inspiring and phenomenal women" making huge strides in their respective fields, alongside "so many unsung heroes whose enormous contributions often go unseen".

That makes choosing a winner far from straightforward. "It is never an easy task choosing the winners, with so many incredible nominees," she says, but every year the process uncovers "new gems within our community".

Geoff Rothschild brings decades of experience in the South African business and financial world to the judging process. A former chairperson of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, his motivation for judging is rooted in what recognition can inspire people to do next. He believes it is "critically important to encourage youth to achieve" and to acknowledge those who've had the initiative to build businesses, create jobs, and contribute to society. Hearing what people have done and what they are achieving, he says, is inspirational because it can encourage others "to go to greater heights".

Rothschild also sees the judging process as an opportunity to share his knowledge and experience. "If one can offer advice, if it's needed, it's just helpful," he

Continued on page 14>>

Cape SAJBD takes more 'Jew haters' to court

TALI FEINBERG

"Shame on you Jews and Nazionists [Nazi Zionists]. You caused the most suffering than any other nation. Shame on you, killers and murderers."

This was a statement made by Muslim Judicial Council of South Africa employee Nabeweya Lukie in June 2024. She is one of two South Africans that the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) is taking to the Equality Court for hateful online statements targeting Jews. It follows several cases that the Cape SAJBD launched in recent years, most of which are still ongoing.

The Cape SAJBD alleges in the court papers that between 2023 and 2025, Lukie published statements on Facebook that intend to convey that Jewish people or Zionists are evil, and they have a "cold-hearted, demonic nature, in which they take pride".

It says her posts also have the intended meaning that Jews and Zionists cause global suffering; are bloodthirsty and murderous; are sociopaths; that they kill babies; that they massacre unarmed civilians; that they are rapists; paedophiles; Nazis; criminals; thieves; dangerous; responsible for assassination; involved in organised crime and the slave trade; and are greedy; avaricious; and larcenous (have a tendency to steal).

The second case concerns Clement Arnoldus, who is employed by the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The Cape SAJBD alleges in court papers that in 2024 and 2025, Arnoldus published various statements on Facebook that intended to convey that Jews or Zionists are evil; rapists; paedophiles; sociopaths; dangerous; thieves; control the criminal justice system; greedy; liars; deserve to be killed; that the Holocaust was justified; and that Jewish-owned businesses should be boycotted.

"The Cape SAJBD does not take legal action lightly," says its executive director, Daniel Bloch. "Approaching the courts is always a last resort. In both matters, we were dealing with sustained, targeted, and public hate speech and antisemitism, rather than isolated, private commentary."

The court papers record several of Lukie's online posts.

"I always used to wonder what it was about Jews that made people throughout history despise them," was the introduction to one Facebook post that Lukie shared on 21 December 2023.

The post by one Jayne Gardener states, "I suddenly recognised that if Hitler had developed a Final Solution to the Jewish question, then there had to be a Jewish problem." She goes on to say that "Jewish claims about the Holocaust were in fact fraudulent".

In August 2024, Lukie wrote, "When peace-loving citizens and Muslims stand up, these Zionist won't find a place to hide. They are increasingly becoming the most despised nation, these merciless killers, the Jewish Zionists. Like they were despised in the past. We can all see why now. The mystery has been solved."

Also in August 2024, she wrote, "Massacres, genocide, bombing, burning, blood, and full support from the Jewish Rabbi Warren Goldstein et al. Their 'holy' scriptures promote killing and advocate for genocide. While they kill, their forked tongues accuse others of hate speech that could potentially lead to them being harmed. Hypocrites, Nazionists hiding behind the cloak of piety."

In September 2024, Lukie posted, "Imagine being the most hated people in world. Imagine having to steal land, homes, culture, but you can't steal the Palestinians' popularity and love that global citizens have for them. The most hated race through the centuries, Jews/Zionists."

In October 2024, she stated, "Jewish terrorism is at the core of global war and conflict."

In April 2025, Lukie wrote that "Israhell [Israel] and the Jews are behind assassination of world leaders; manipulation of media creation of lobby groups that control countries; and [is] the safest country for paedophiles. A truly sick and murderous people. Their crimes currently being witnessed is evidence of their cold-hearted and demonic nature, which they are proud of and clout about. Has the world witnessed any nation more evil?"

Around August 2025, Lukie posted an image of an Orthodox Jewish man saying, "I do something evil, but you're guilty because you found out, and that makes you an antisemite."

The court papers record several of Arnoldus's online posts.

"Stop supporting Jewish-owned shops and stop buying Jewish-owned products … never forget Jews are dangerous and desperate people will do anything. #Falseflag attack incoming soon in Sea Point," he wrote. A false flag attack is a covert operation designed to deceive the public by making a harmful act look like it was carried out by an opposing party.

Arnoldus said, "This so-called Star of David is the mark of the beast" and "all they do is steal, that's all Jews do".

In November 2024, he said, "Zionists are not Jewish people, they are Satanist pretending to be Jewish."

He described Israel as "a safe haven for Jewish paedophiles. Pedo capital Tel Aviv."

These are just some of Arnoldus's and Lukie's statements recorded in the court papers.

The Cape SAJBD says that their words constitute hate speech as prohibited by section 10 of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act.

It is asking the court to order both respondents to remove the statements from social media, to tender an unconditional apology to the South African Jewish community, and to donate to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre: R50 000 from Arnoldus and R100 000 from Lukie. The board also asks that the respondents be ordered to pay costs on an attorney and client scale.

Lukie has sent a replying affidavit. Arnoldus has not responded.

Bloch says the board prefers to engage in dialogue to to seek an appropriate resolution, including education and restorative engagement where there is a genuine willingness to acknowledge the harm caused. It was on this basis that the Cape SAJBD first wrote to both individuals and their employers about the hateful comments. It was only when there was no response that it approached the Equality Court for relief.

He says the Cape SAJBD has already successfully pursued a hate-speech matter, with the Equality Court finding emphatically that social media user Thomas Torr's conduct constituted hate speech.

"We have other matters before the courts, reflecting our commitment to using the legal avenues available, when necessary," says Bloch. Politician Mehmet Vefa Dag will be in court on 25 August and businessman Ali Chafekar on 12 October. Businesswoman Mariam Jakoet-Harris has filed a counter claim, and the case against her may be heard only in 2027.

"Our message to fellow South Africans is clear: disagreement, criticism, and robust debate are legitimate and necessary in a democracy. But targeted hatred against people because they are Jewish, or because of their identity, cannot be normalised," says Bloch.

To the Jewish community, "we encourage you to report incidents of antisemitism and hate speech to the Cape SAJBD. When individuals engage in persistent and deliberate hate speech and show no remorse or willingness to address their conduct, we will utilise the legal protections available to us."

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to Lukie and Arnoldus for comment, but they didn't respond.

south african Jewish Report

Humanity brings hope

I am feeling unusually positive about this country and our place in it this week.

So often when we speak about South Africa, the government, the ANC, and the Jewish community, the conversation is heavy. It is about hostility towards Israel, about the government's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and about a political climate in which many of us have felt unseen, unheard, and, at times, deeply alienated.

That is why there is something fundamentally uplifting and encouraging in knowing that President Cyril Ramaphosa was human enough to help another South African-born father in need, simply because he could.

He and the government somehow helped get the body of Captain Daniel Perez out of Gaza so he could be buried with dignity in Israel. For Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez, the return of his remains meant they could finally fulfil their parental duty and bury their beloved son.

Now, no matter how encouraged we may be that Ramaphosa made the effort, we need to be clear: the president's politics have not changed. He hasn't suddenly had an epiphany about "From the river to the sea," nor has the government's hostility towards Israel disappeared. What is encouraging is that he appears to have seen past the fact that Daniel was a South African *oleh* serving in the Israeli army, and recognised instead a young man, born here, whose family was desperate to bring him home.

The government recognised that as Daniel and his family were South Africans, its duty was to help. And its members found it in themselves to do this.

Perhaps they understood that every young person who takes on citizenship in Israel has no choice but to serve in the army. Perhaps Rabbi Perez managed to explain this to Ramaphosa, and if so, he did good for all of us. What really happened behind the scenes, we are likely never to know. And, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter much. What matters is that Ramaphosa found himself in a pivotal position to help, and he did not turn away.

He did not refuse to meet Rabbi Perez, who is now the president of the World Zionist Organization. In that, there is no question the two men have deep differences of opinion. However, father to father, Ramaphosa seems to have set aside hardened politics for as long as it took and recognised a man grieving for his son. For this, I believe we can be grateful. It is good to know that underneath all the disappointment we have experienced at the hands of Ramaphosa, he is still a man with a heart. He is still able, down to the wire, to set aside differences and do the right thing.

I accept that the president may be in for flak from his bullying and nasty anti-Israel cronies because they may be unable to see the human side of what he did. One hopes they can, but that is not what we've experienced over the years.

Interestingly, within the community, those I knew who had heard about this before we published the story were suspicious, even disbelieving. Many spoke of some kind of ulterior motive, although they couldn't quite say what it might be. Let's be honest, it feels as if we are too far down the road for Ramaphosa to have done this in the hope of gaining our votes for the ANC.

The silence surrounding this act of kindness also suggests the government didn't necessarily want the world to know it had helped the president of the World Zionist Organization. Instead, it took a social media post by Rabbi Perez, with a photograph of the two men together this week, to alert people to what had happened, and only then did others, including the Presidency, confirm it.

The second thing that lifted me this week was going into the Johannesburg city centre for Main Street Sunday. What a joy this was, and what a reminder of what Johannesburg can be when people refuse to give up on it.

Jozi My Jozi has done extraordinary work in helping to uplift and reimagine parts of our city. Main Street was closed to cars and opened to people, with music, food, art, children, families, cyclists, skaters, and ordinary South Africans hanging out together in the central business district.

I walked around, listened to local music, looked at local arts and crafts, and ate delicious food. But more than anything, I felt safe, welcomed, and part of something. For a few hours, the city centre felt like it belonged to all of us again.

And that is why I feel positive about South Africa this week. Not blindly positive. Not naïvely positive. I know too well that there is far too much corruption and ugliness in government, and we have serious problems that won't suddenly disappear. South Africans are tired, angry, and struggling. I know that the Jewish community has real fear and real reasons to feel vulnerable in the current political climate.

But I also know that South Africans themselves are, by and large, good, caring people. They want to live decent lives, raise their families, work, create, celebrate, and be safe. They want a country that works. They want leadership that serves rather than steals, builds rather than breaks, and unites rather than divides.

That is why this moment matters. We cannot afford to be blindly loyal, and we cannot afford to be permanently cynical. We have to be honest enough to call out what is broken, brave enough to demand better, and fair enough to recognise goodness when it appears. If the president can act with humanity towards a grieving Jewish family, and if ordinary South Africans can reclaim the streets of Jozi with music, food, security, pride, and warmth, then there is still something here worth fighting for.

South Africa will not be saved by slogans, nostalgia, or denial. It will be saved by people who refuse to give up on it, by leaders who choose service over self-interest, and by citizens who insist that this country can still live up to the promise we once showed the world. This week reminded me that hope is not foolish. It is necessary. And, sometimes, it is earned.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

Time for Zille to sit down to tea with Zuma

OPINION MICHAEL KRANSDORFF

After decades of one-party dominance, South Africa's political map is rapidly being redrawn. But the latest poll numbers from the Social Research Foundation (SRF) should worry the Democratic Alliance almost as much as it they are publicly cheering it.

The SRF's July polling puts the African National Congress at 34% nationally, down sharply from about 40% earlier this year. It's been dragged down by the Phala Phala scandal, the daily revelations before the Madlanga Commission, and rising anger over illegal migration. The DA sits at 27%, steadily expanding its ground from the 21.81% it won in the 2024 national election.

Remarkably, Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK), despite the instability within its ranks, is holding firm at 15%, while the Economic Freedom Fighters is down to 7%. That leaves a growing tail of smaller parties - the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), ActionSA, the Patriotic Alliance (PA), and Freedom Front Plus (FF Plus) among them.

The metros tell an even sharper story. In Johannesburg, the DA leads at 42% against an ANC crumbling to just 18%, but MK, at 13%, and ActionSA, at 10%, are both in the mix. In Tshwane, the DA is ahead at 43% to the ANC's 32%. In Durban, MK now leads outright at 33%, with the DA at 23% and the ANC below 20%.

Read those numbers properly and the message isn't "the DA is winning". It is that South Africa is fragmenting. The ANC's decline isn't producing a new majority party. It is producing a scramble of smaller parties, none of which can govern alone.

That makes coalition-building the real contest of South African politics. And it is something local opposition politicians remain remarkably amateurish at.

Israel – and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular – really has something to teach them. Bibi is the grandmaster of coalition politics. For most of the past two decades, Likud has managed to retain power with only about a quarter of the seats in the Knesset. Netanyahu's genius has not been winning outright majorities. It has been making sure that Likud is the indispensable anchor of a broader political bloc.

The strategic logic of building a broad centre-right bloc in South Africa is obvious. The obstacle isn't ideology. It is personality. The DA's Helen Zille, PA leader Gayton McKenzie, and ActionSA's Herman Mashaba appear to dislike each other more than they distrust the ANC.

This plays into the ANC's hands. We saw this clearly in the formation of the Government of National Unity. The ANC lost the election but won coalition negotiations by keeping the opposition divided and negotiating with them separately. That was when the opposition lost its leverage.

The simplest way to understand why is BATNA – the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement - a central concept of Harvard's legendary negotiation course. The party with the strongest credible alternative to a deal has the strongest hand at the table. While the ANC skilfully increased its possible paths to a majority, the DA ignored its former moonshot pact partners and put all its eggs in the ANC basket.

Mandy Wiener's must-read book, *The Deal,* shows in remarkable detail, through extensive research and interviews, how that weakness played out through the negotiation process. There is a revealing anecdote about then DA leader John Steenhuisen arriving at the president's residence with a bottle of red wine in a last-ditch effort to shift the tone and salvage the talks. Wiener's broader account is of a DA that had been outmanoeuvred, with limited alternatives – and a terrible BATNA.

The municipal elections in November are about to recreate that same dynamic at metro level. If the SRF numbers hold, the DA could end up the largest party in Johannesburg and Tshwane without a majority to lead in either, while finding itself locked out of Durban altogether despite finishing second. However, a coalition with ActionSA, IFP, FF Plus, and the PA would probably give the DA a majority in most Gauteng metros, particularly Johannesburg and Tshwane.

But if Zille and Mashaba cannot get there, the DA needs to think harder about its alternatives, however uncomfortable they may be.

And this is where politics gets interesting.

An alliance with MK may actually be the most effective way for the DA to manufacture real leverage. Imagine a confidence-and-supply arrangement in which the DA supports a minority MK administration in Durban, while, in exchange, MK supports minority DA administrations in Johannesburg and Tshwane.

It would be startling.

It would also be politically toxic for many DA supporters. The MK represents much of what the DA has spent years campaigning against, and any such arrangement would carry enormous political risk.

But that is precisely the point of a BATNA. Your best alternative to a negotiated agreement doesn't have to be your preferred outcome. It has to be a credible alternative to the deal on the table.

If an MK arrangement is genuinely available, suddenly the DA is no longer negotiating with the ANC from a position of necessity. It has another option. And that gives it leverage.

A disciplined minority government, propped up by a clear agreement, can be more stable than an unwieldy multi-party coalition that spends half its term threatening to collapse.

If Zille wants to be mayor of Johannesburg, it may require her to sit down to tea with Jacob Zuma. That can't be more frightening than parasailing off a building.

It may sound like political heresy. But coalition politics, especially when you've alienated many of your natural partners, is not about talking to the people you like. The ANC understood that in 2024. The question is whether the DA will understand it before November.

If Zille can swallow her pride, sit down with Zuma, and build a credible alternative to the ANC, she may discover that the best way to get what she wants from the ANC is not with a bottle of wine but by proving she doesn't need the party.

In coalition politics, the party with somewhere else to go is the party with the power.

• *Michael Kransdorff is an international tax specialist and Harvard Kennedy School graduate. He writes in his personal capacity.*

Perez says genie of hatred is out the bottle

LEE TANKLE

"What's happened since 7 October is that something we may have known before but which was latent and not so clearly revealed, has become very apparent: just how vociferous, organised, and systematic the hatred of Israel is."

These are the words of Rabbi Doron Perez, the president of the World Zionist Organisation and executive chairperson of the World Mizrachi movement, on his recent visit to South Africa with the South African Zionist Federation, during which he took part in a week-long series of meetings, classes, and lectures with the Jewish community.

He and his wife, Shelley, also met President Cyril Ramaphosa to express their heartfelt gratitude for the role he and his government played behind the scenes in bringing their beloved son, Captain Daniel Perez, back to Israel from Gaza for burial.

"One would have thought that after the horrific events of 7 October, having Hamas terrorists invade Israel by surprise, including killing and taking our son hostage, there would have been some period of sympathy. Of the approximately 1 250 people killed on 7 October, only about 300 were soldiers or police officers. The other 900 were civilians: men, women, and children of all ages, from the nine or 10-month-old Ariel Bibas to people in their late 80s. People were burned, killed, raped, and tortured

"Yet by 8 October, already on campuses across the United States, a campaign had been unleashed to delegitimise Israel," he said. "It became so clear that anti-Zionism is not about this government policy or that government policy. It's not about settlements in the West Bank. If you're left-leaning, you might say that settlements in the West Bank are not helpful to peace. If you're right-leaning, you might say they are helpful because it is our land and they provide a defence.

"But even if you are someone who opposes the government's policy of expanding settlements, it became clear that the anti-Israel campaign is not about this or that settlement in Judea and Samaria, or the West Bank. So, what is it about? It's about the very existence of Israel."

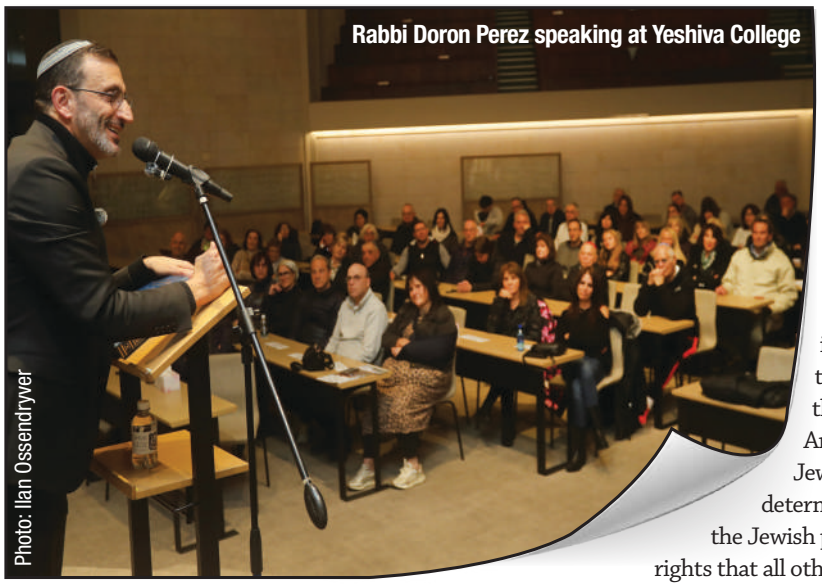

Rabbi Doron Perez speaking at Yeshiva College

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

For Perez, antisemitism and anti-Zionism are deeply intertwined, and he believes that over the past three years, "the genie of hatred has been let out of the bottle". He argues that antisemitism has changed colour.

"If you had gone back 90 years, there would have been antisemites in Germany holding up signs saying, 'Jews, get out of Germany. You don't belong here. Go back to Palestine.' Now the message is, 'Jews, get out of Palestine. Go back to Germany.'"

In other words, when we were stateless, we were persecuted for being stateless. Perez calls it the "yellow star of powerlessness", where we were seen as a wandering, anchorless people. Our enemies would say, "What a pathetic, stateless, wandering, anchorless people, the Jews. You don't belong. Go back to your land. This is not your land. You're a fifth column. Go back to Palestine. Go back to Israel."

"And now that we have a state, like all other countries, and now that, thankfully, it is successful, growing and thriving, antisemitism has changed colour. It's no longer the yellow star of powerlessness. It's the blue star, the Magen David of the Israeli flag and the Israeli army, representing power and sovereignty. We were hated for being powerless, and now we are hated for being powerful," he said.

Perez referred to Abba Eban, a South African-born Israeli diplomat and politician who served as Israel's foreign minister in the 1960s and 1970s. Eban explained that traditional antisemitism denies individual Jews the individual rights that they should have in their host countries. Anti-Zionism rejects Jewish national self-determination and denies the Jewish people the collective rights that all other nations have among the family of nations.

After 7 October, Perez and his family went 163 days not knowing if his son, Daniel, was alive in Gaza, and then a further 17 months waiting for his body for burial. But he says the hardest challenge came when Daniel was finally laid to rest, and the family was no longer a hostage family but a bereaved family.

"There's nothing more to do, there's nothing more to fight for, there's nothing more to bring back. It's just living with the loss. There's nothing more to do; he's been laid to rest, and we can move forward. But on the other hand, there's a certain finality to it: you now have to mourn, and there's nothing one can do. And that comes with so many challenges," he said.

To continue to fight antisemitism, Perez believes the Jewish world needs to become more unified.

"Whether you are part of a Reform temple in America, an ultra-Orthodox community in Williamsburg or a Jewish community in Melbourne, we face the same threats," he said. "When our enemies tell us that they don't care what type of Jew you are, that you are under threat simply because you are Jewish, then we have to recognise that we are part of the same family. That's not to say there aren't any differences. Of course there are, and I'm not saying we should whitewash those differences. They exist. But we have to understand that we are part of the same family. We may be the smallest nation in the world, but we are the biggest family.

"And families have to take responsibility for one another. When the family is under threat, we have to stand together. We can have our disagreements and all sorts of issues, but we have to get our act together," he said.

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South Africa from the viewpoint of an Australian

PERSONAL STORY

RABBI RALPH GENENDE

About 30 years ago, shortly after leaving South Africa for Australasia, I wrote a poem titled Homelands. In it, I explored my simultaneous sense of belonging to Africa and estrangement from it because of my Jewishness. I reflected, too, on how deeply I had come to feel part of this southern continent while remaining strongly connected to Australia and to the land of my ancestors, Israel. Here is an excerpt:

But it burns, Africa burns:
this is the flame of some
sharp Karoo night,
this is the ember of a
star-sated sky.
This coal bears my imprint,
yet it is not mine,
for I am the bastard son
of this cunning continent.
I carry my father's burden
(still heavy with the terror of a
cold Lithuanian night).
And, even now,
as I tread with love and unease
in this land of long dreaming,
sometimes I catch a glimpse of Jacob
wrestling his starry dark dreams
into his homeland.

I thought of this poem when I returned to South Africa this year to visit my ageing mother and family. Its themes of connection and identity, belonging, home, and the fragile uncertainty of being resonated particularly forcefully this time. South Africa is vastly different from the country in which I grew up. The dystopian order of apartheid has given way to a dysfunctional government marked by endemic corruption, crime, and violence. Potholes scar suburban streets, power outages are routine, and, in Johannesburg at least, the water system urgently needs repair. During the week I was there, water was cut off across large parts of the city. High unemployment and limited welfare are evident in the severe poverty of many suburbs, and in the vagrancy and rubbish lining the streets.

The Jewish community, too, has changed, shrinking dramatically and changing in character. It is both more frum and more fearful. The epicentre of Johannesburg Jewish life, Glenhazel, is patrolled by a highly efficient private armed force (CAP), a vigilant community security group (CSO), private guards, high walls, and electrified fences. Within its boundaries you can enjoy the beautiful Highveld winter, its azure skies, and a wide choice of excellent kosher restaurants. You can also access an astonishing range of shuls and shtieblach, learning centres, and schools. On Shabbat, the streets and shuls I attended were filled with energy and a strong sense of community and camaraderie. Despite its reduced numbers, it remains a highly organised community that serves its members with care, courage, and commitment. This is manifest not only in the burgeoning religious community led by the chief rabbi, but also in the leadership of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the vitality of Limmud South Africa.

The caring support is most evident in the work of the Johannesburg Chevrah Kadisha, founded in 1888 during the gold rush, and now the oldest and largest Jewish welfare organisation on the African continent. Like Jewish Care in Australia, it provides a wide range of essential services and support, including financial assistance to more than a thousand families in need. It offers school subsidies, student funding, loans, protected employment opportunities, residential accommodation, aged care, health support, counselling, and disability services. Its ethos, "no Jew is left behind", is especially admirable given the limited government assistance and the pervasive insecurity of life in South Africa.

The generous communal spirit of this still largely Litvak community, with its strong Chabad presence, is also reflected in the many chesed initiatives that support not only struggling members of the Jewish community, but also the wider society around them. Again and again, I encountered examples of what in Zulu is called ubuntu.

The philosophy of ubuntu centres on interconnectedness, compassion, and communal harmony. It is captured in the phrase "people become people through other people", or, as Nelson Mandela famously put it, the profound recognition that "I am because we are."I saw this at the home of a friend who opens her house each week to a large group of elderly Jewish women, offering them an engaging speaker and a splendid tea. I read about it in the SA Jewish Report, and in the work of Sue Krawitz, who established a baby saver box where mothers can safely place their babies as an alternative to unsafe abandonment, a vital initiative in a country facing a critical shortage of shelters for vulnerable mothers. I also witnessed it in the remarkable care shown by the black staff at the Jewish aged home, Sandringham Gardens. These predominantly Christian women, with hearts wider than the Limpopo River, largely belong to the Church of Zion, headquartered in a place called Moria.

Rabbi Ralph Genende and his mother on his visit to South Africa

They are also deeply supportive of Israel and of South Africa's Zionist community, as are an extraordinary number of tribes across Africa. Despite the toxic hostility of the South African government towards Israel, many South Africans who are aware of the small Jewish community in their midst remain broadly positive in their attitudes towards Jews and in their perception of Israel. This was evident in a study by the University of Cape Town's Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research several years ago. Anecdotal evidence and personal conversations suggest that this is still the case, despite the demonisation of Israel since 7 October.

Of course, the pandemic of antisemitism is present in South Africa, too, especially in Cape Town. This was evident during the Cape Town Marathon, where British fitness coach Yoel Levy – who runs dressed as Batman in memory of the murdered Israeli Bibas children – was harassed and threatened with antisemitic abuse both online and along the route. Even so, the South African Jewish community feels safer than we do in Australia and has not been subjected to the same barrage of pro-Palestinian protest and anti-Jewish rhetoric that we have experienced.

On a personal level, there is nothing quite like returning to a childhood home, reconnecting with family and old friends, and being welcomed into the cocoon of a warm and generous community. We remain tethered to the umbilical cord of childhood, no matter where we wander in the world. The connection we share as Jews – in our love, passion, and anxious concern for Israel – also binds us in our personal journeys. Africa still lives within me, alongside the fire I feel in this dreamtime country of Australia, even in this age of my people's existential loneliness.

- *Rabbi Ralph Genende OAM is interfaith and community liaison for AIJAC (Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council) and the rabbi of Kehilat Kesher (The Connecting Community).*

Building a Jewish future in Poland, mired in history

OPINION

LENA RUBENFELD

Over the past three weeks I've been fortunate to spend in Cape Town, conversations have repeatedly turned to what it means to be Jewish in Poland today: the legacy of the Holocaust, rising antisemitism, and whether I plan to stay.

I understand why. Those conversations remain essential. In Poland, history is never far away, and in recent years, it has often felt closer than many of us had hoped. The question that occupies me more these days, however, is different. How do you build a Jewish future in a place where the past is never silent?

For the past decade, I have helped build FestivALT, a Jewish arts and activism organisation based in Kraków. My days are far more likely to be spent working with artists, opening new cultural spaces, curating festivals, asking whether a souvenir can reshape a city's identity, than they are talking about memorials.

That usually surprises people.

For many outside Poland, Jewish life is still imagined almost entirely through the lens of history. Yet one of the most striking things about living in Poland today is that so much still feels open-ended. Questions of belonging, memory, and public life are not settled; they are actively negotiated.

In this, Poland and South Africa, despite their profoundly different histories, share something important. Both are relatively young democracies. South Africa has spent just over three decades building democratic institutions; Poland slightly longer, since 1989. Neither inherited settled answers about identity or whose stories should be told. Those conversations continue, in politics, around family tables, and inside cultural institutions.

That can be exhausting.

But it can also be an extraordinary source of creativity. When institutions are still being shaped, culture has room to experiment. Citizens still believe they can influence public life. Small organisations can have an outsized impact. Things that might seem impossible elsewhere sometimes become possible simply because no one has yet decided they cannot be done. I see that happening within Jewish life too.

Across Poland, people continue to rediscover Jewish family histories that had been hidden or left unspoken for generations. Others have always known they were Jewish but are only now finding the confidence to participate publicly. None of these stories looks the same, yet together they are quietly changing what Jewish life in Poland feels like, not by replacing older institutions, but by adding new voices to them.

Ten years ago, FestivALT began in a private apartment. Before there was a festival, there was simply a home: a place where artists gathered around a kitchen table to test ideas, imagine, and ask what contemporary Jewish culture in Poland might become. This year, after a decade of building festivals and public programmes, we found ourselves returning to that apartment.

In Kazimierz, the old Jewish district of Krakow

It is now HOIZ, Yiddish for "home". That return wasn't nostalgic. It was a reminder that before a public institution, there is a private act of opening your door. Before programming comes conversation. And perhaps that is the question I find myself thinking about most today. Not how we remember Jewish life. But how we make it worth choosing.

Jewish communities today often find themselves caught inside false binaries. Memory or the present. Tradition or experimentation. Religion or culture. Israel or the diaspora. Jewish life has always been richest when it could hold competing ideas in tension. The communities that inspire me are those that preserve memory while making new culture. That honour difficult histories without allowing those histories to become the only story they know how to tell.

Perhaps this is the greatest privilege of working in Jewish Poland today. Not that history has become easier. It hasn't. The echoes of the past remain loud. Antisemitism has not disappeared. Public debates continue to shift. The questions facing Jewish communities are not becoming less complicated. But alongside those realities, something else has become possible.

We have enough confidence to experiment. Enough confidence to be self-critical. Enough confidence to ask difficult questions – not because we reject our traditions, but because we trust them enough to let them grow.

For me, choosing life today means something very practical. It means opening another door instead of closing one. Creating another artistic collaboration. Building another institution that welcomes curiosity instead of demanding certainty.

One example is Kultur-Lige, a growing network of more than 50 contemporary Jewish artists across Poland. It is less a movement than an invitation: a recognition that contemporary Jewish art deserves space, not only to preserve memory, but to ask new questions, respond to today's realities, and imagine futures that are recognisably Jewish without being confined by inherited expectations.

That, to me, is also what choosing life looks like. Not replacing memory. Building upon it. Not abandoning difficult conversations. Having enough confidence to make them richer. Not pretending the past is behind us. Refusing to let it become the only horizon ahead of us.

That is the Poland I hope to share during the coming Limmud and my visit to South Africa. Not because I think Poland has found the answers. Far from it. But because I suspect Jewish communities everywhere, including here, are wrestling with similar questions. How do we create Jewish life that people choose, not because they are afraid of losing it, but because they genuinely want to be part of it?

- *Lena Rubenfeld is a cultural activist and social entrepreneur passionate about creating spaces for difficult conversations. She is the co-founder and artistic director of FestivALT, a festival of contemporary Jewish culture in Kraków.*

She will be speaking at Limmud Cape Town, which will take place from 14 to 16 August, Limmud in Durban on Monday 17 August, and in Johannesburg from 21 to 23 August.

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Jews find purpose off the beaten track

CLAUDIA GROSS

For generations, Jews have been associated with professions such as medicine, law, accounting and business. Yet, beyond these stereotypes are people whose working lives look very different.

A game ranger tracking lions before sunrise, a hospitality manager whose workplace travels across Southern Africa by rail, and a forensic scientist searching for answers in a laboratory all demonstrate that Jewish identity and professional life can intersect in unexpected ways. Although their careers are markedly different, each says Jewish values shape the way they approach their work.

For Joshua*, 41, his workplace is the bush. He spends his days in the Greater Kruger region managing anti-poaching operations, monitoring wildlife, and educating visitors at a private game reserve.

Growing up in Johannesburg, he never imagined his career would involve sleeping under the stars for weeks at a time. He says many visitors are surprised when they discover their guide is Jewish. "People have a picture in their heads of what Jewish careers look like. Khaki shorts, dusty boots, and buffalo aren't usually part of it."

His days begin long before sunrise and rarely follow a predictable routine. "By lunchtime I've probably tracked rhino, repaired a fence, and explained elephant behaviour to tourists from three different continents."

Life in the outdoors has also changed the way he sees himself. "The bush strips away your ego remarkably quickly. Lions don't care about your degree. Elephants don't care about your surname."

For Joshua, conservation extends beyond protecting wildlife. "Conservation isn't just about saving animals. It's about protecting an entire ecosystem that future generations deserve to inherit."

He sees a strong connection between that responsibility and Jewish teachings. "Judaism teaches us we're caretakers rather than owners of the world. I can't think of a better description of what a ranger actually does."

Observing Shabbat takes on a unique character in the wilderness. "I've had Shabbat dinners beside campfires with hyenas calling in the distance. It's one of the most spiritual experiences I've ever had."

Rebecca*, 46, also works in a profession that rarely fits traditional expectations. As a luxury-train guest-experience manager, she oversees journeys across Southern Africa, juggling five-star hospitality with the practical challenges of running what she describes as a moving hotel.

"Most people commute to work. My office travels through vineyards, deserts, mountain passes, and game reserves."

Rebecca says excellent hospitality depends less on luxury and more on paying attention to people. "Luxury isn't about crystal glasses or expensive linen. It's about remembering that one guest mentioned their anniversary in passing three days earlier and surprising them with dinner under the stars."

Joshua's workplace, the bush

Behind every seamless journey is extensive planning and problem solving. "When you're responsible for a moving hotel, there are hundreds of things that can go wrong every day. The secret is making sure your guests never notice any of them."

Travelling has given her opportunities to celebrate Jewish traditions in unusual places. "I've celebrated Shabbat in the Namib Desert, watched the sun rise over the Karoo, and welcomed guests from more countries than I can count. Every journey reminds me how enormous and beautiful Southern Africa really is."

She believes hospitality reflects an important Jewish value. "Jewish tradition teaches hospitality as a *mitzvah*. In my career, hospitality has become both my profession and my way of expressing those values."

For Rebecca, conversations are often the most memorable part of the journey. "Some of the most meaningful conversations happen somewhere between stations, when people finally slow down enough to tell you their life story."

All three interviewees asked to remain anonymous because they are the only Jewish members of staff in their respective workplaces. Although none has experienced antisemitism from colleagues, they said they felt more vulnerable in the current climate and preferred not to be identified publicly.

Rebecca said she had also overheard guests making antisemitic remarks during train journeys. While the comments were not directed at her, she said they reinforced her decision to protect her identity.

Aaron*, 48, works in an entirely different environment. As a scientist specialising in forensic biology in Cape Town, he analyses crime-scene evidence that may help identify victims or suspects.

He says popular television dramas have created unrealistic ideas about his profession. "People imagine dramatic courtroom moments. Most of my job involves extraordinary patience, tiny pieces of evidence, and hours of meticulous laboratory work."

The emotional weight of the work is never far away. "Every sample on my desk belongs to someone's worst day. I never forget that."

Aaron says the purpose of forensic science is not to confirm assumptions but to establish facts. "Forensic science isn't about proving people guilty. It's about uncovering the truth, wherever that truth leads."

He believes this careful pursuit of evidence reflects Jewish values. "There's something profoundly Jewish about pursuing justice through evidence rather than assumption. We don't begin with answers. We begin with questions."

Although some investigations remain with him for years, he says resilience comes from continuing to do careful work despite difficult experiences. "If I've done my job properly, an innocent person may never be charged, a grieving family may finally receive answers, or a dangerous offender may no longer be able to harm someone else. That's an extraordinary responsibility."

Though their workplaces range from wildlife reserves to railway carriages and forensic laboratories, Joshua, Rebecca, and Aaron share a belief: Jewish identity is not defined by a particular profession, but by the values people bring to whatever work they choose.

**Interviewees have requested anonymity for privacy reasons*

Travelling comes with antisemitic baggage

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Two young South African women advised to hide their Judaism during a group tour in Ireland; a United States-based rabbi and his family confronted by an aggressive flight attendant en route to Cape Town. With increasing reports of Israeli and Jewish tourists facing verbal and sometimes physical attacks abroad, travel today demands heightened vigilance.

Channing Haefner, 24, and her friend, who travelled around Ireland on a Contiki tour in July, were afraid to express their Judaism while there. "Going in, we were aware that Ireland was quite antisemitic because it was around the time that they had banned all Israeli products from coming into the country," says Haefner. She therefore removed her Magen David necklace before she travelled and checked numerous times that it was safely hidden.

Pro-Palestinian artwork by Gazan artists on Belfast's International Wall

"The second we arrived in Ireland, it was very evident that this was not a place where Jewish people would be welcome," she says. "There were pro-Palestinian flags everywhere and many frightening murals, especially when we went to Northern Ireland, which has had its own history with the Troubles." This was a 30-year violent conflict between the Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists. This history has led to strong pro-Palestine sentiment.

In Derry and Belfast, well-known murals depicting that conflict are frequently updated with pro-Palestinian imagery. One of the images the young women saw during a mural sightseeing tour in Belfast was of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with Israel Defense Forces soldiers and blood all around him, Haefner recalls. "I'll never forget it. Then we saw the Peace Walls, which ironically have nothing to do with peace because everywhere it was written 'Free Palestine', 'Jews aren't welcome here'. They had an Israeli flag, and it was completely desecrated, vandalised with the most disgusting things."

The experience was exacerbated by the attitude of their Irish tour guide. "She took it upon herself to spread her own agenda in terms of what she believes is happening during the Israel-Palestine conflict," Haefner says. "It was blatantly antisemitic and anti-Israel, referring to Israel being genocidal and so on. It made us incredibly uncomfortable; we didn't feel safe enough to say we were Jewish – we were genuinely scared at certain points."

Their apprehension extended to interactions with fellow Contiki participants. A male friend they'd made on the tour advised them not to reveal that they were Jewish. "He warned us not to tell a specific Australian woman that we were Jewish as she was very pro-Palestine. Apparently, on an earlier leg of the trip that we missed, there was another Jewish girl, and the Australian woman went for her through verbal abuse, especially around Israel's conduct."

Following other members of the tour on Instagram, the two were unsettled to see that nine out of 10 were posting for Palestine and were passionate about the conflict.

"While we knew there would be issues, we weren't expecting it to be so in your face or to the extent that it was. We don't ever want to lie about who we are, but it was something that we were unfortunately forced to do." Asked at one point if she followed a specific religion, Haefner said, "Not really."

"I feel like if we'd said we were Jewish, it would have completely flipped everything on its head," she says. "We're two girls in our 20s and we didn't really know how to navigate this specifically within a group setting like this. So, it was quite intense."

After the trip, Haefner laid a formal complaint with Contiki about the blatant one-sidedness of the mural tour and their significant discomfort. While she received an apology, she worries that anti-Zionist and antisemitic rhetoric are still spread on such tours to people unfamiliar with the nuances of the Israel conflict.

Those who openly express their Judaism have also recently encountered antisemitism during their travels. While davening on a recent flight from New Jersey to Cape Town, Rabbi Uriel Vigler and members of his extended family encountered an aggressive flight attendant. Born in Zimbabwe and partially raised in South Africa, Vigler, now the director of the Chabad Israel Center of the Upper East Side of Manhattan, was flying to South Africa for two family *simchas*.

The 15-hour flight on a US-run airline meant that the family would have to stand up to do their daily prayers onboard. "We're always mindful that we are guests on the aircraft and try to be as unobtrusive as possible," he wrote, sharing their experience on Facebook. "We've done this on countless flights over many years without incident. This time, it was entirely different."

The moment they started evening prayers, the flight attendant began shouting at them aggressively to move. "He did this repeatedly, frightening our children and shocking us all," Vigler said. "Later that evening, my brother fell asleep and his legs drifted slightly in the aisle, something we've all done. But instead of waking him with a polite request, the attendant slapped his legs to wake him."

Shortly afterwards, Vigler's 12-year-old niece was returning to her seat after using the restroom, and as the attendant passed, he shoved her aside. "Her mother witnessed the entire incident and was left stunned. We lodged formal complaints with other members of the crew, but nothing changed."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Vigler said that one of the other flight attendants, in fact, laid *tefillin* on the flight too, but that didn't curb his colleague's behaviour. The next morning, the aggressive attendant again shouted at Vigler's family while they prayed quietly. "He then repeatedly ordered my nephew, who was standing quietly at his own seat in the middle of the Amidah - the most important prayer - to sit down."

Vigler asked the attendant to stop shouting, but this made him more aggressive. "So, I took out my phone and began recording the interaction, which only further angered him. Thank G-d, we arrived in Cape Town safely and celebrated our family's joyous occasions together."

Vigler hopes the airline conveys the importance of respectful prayer to the attendant, "so the next group of Jews on his flight aren't subjected to the same treatment we were". He says he has never had such an experience before. "I don't feel vulnerable at all; I feel strong and proud as a Jew."

KZN pastor awarded for unwavering support of Israel

CLAUDIA GROSS

For more than a decade, Pastor Jenny Pillay has travelled across Africa and beyond with one goal: to get Christians to understand why they should stand with Israel and the Jewish people.

Her work recently earned her recognition from the KwaZulu-Natal Zionist Council (KNZC) and South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) KwaZulu-Natal, which presented her with an award.

Although based in Park Rynie on the South Coast, Pillay's advocacy has taken her to churches, conferences, and meetings in numerous countries. She says many of the people she encounters know little about Israel beyond what they see in mainstream media. "I am a pastor and I advocate for Israel and bring the correct narrative," she says. "I do conferences internationally in quite a number of countries in Africa, as well as in India."

Since the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October and the war that followed, Pillay has focused much of her teaching on explaining the events that led to the conflict, and why she believes Christians should support Israel publicly. "People don't know the truth. When I do conferences, I teach churches and Christians why we should stand with Israel."

King Buyelekhaya Zwelibanzi Dalindyebo KaSabata and Pastor Jenny Pillay

At one conference in Cameroon, with representatives from 17 African nations, many attendees told her they'd never heard Israel's perspective before. "I brought the truth about 7 October, what really happened. People don't know the truth because they're listening only to one side."

She says participants often ask where they can find more information and recommends alternative news sources that she believes provide broader coverage of Israel. The conversations sometimes lead people to reconsider their opinions.

She recalls meeting a pastor in Cameroon who'd worked closely with a Jewish colleague helping people make aliya. But after 7 October, the pastor distanced himself because he believed reports that Israel was deliberately targeting children. "After he heard me speak, he realised they had been fed lies," she says.

Beyond conferences, Pillay maintains a network of WhatsApp groups through which she shares updates about Israel with Christians in about 21 countries. She says the groups also encourage members to pray for Israel, its citizens, and its soldiers. "I raise prayer warriors," she says. "I show Christians that it is our responsibility to stand with the Jewish people and pray for them."

Her work also focuses on Christian teachings about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Pillay says she addresses long-standing misconceptions that she believes have contributed to divisions between Christians and Jews. "I take them through scripture," she says. "They become horrified because everyone had this mindset that Jews killed Jesus, but it isn't true. It was the Romans."

Her advocacy has brought her into contact with traditional leaders in South Africa. She was invited to meet AbaThembu King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo to discuss Israel and the relationship between Christians and the Jewish people.

"He wanted me to come back and teach him about Israel and our relationship with Israel," she says. "He was looking for church teachings, but it didn't know how to explain the relationship with the Jewish people."

The recent award came as a surprise, Pillay says. The inscription recognises her "commitment, love, generosity, and support for Israel and the Jewish people within KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa".

She says the recognition reflects a long-standing relationship with local Jewish organisations that have supported her work by providing Israeli flags for conferences and public events. "I hand out Israel flags wherever I speak. They've been supportive, and I send them photographs to show them what we're doing."

Pillay has visited Israel several times, including after the outbreak of the current war. Her first trip was in 2013, when she travelled with Bridges for Peace to study and meet Israeli leaders. "It was different to what you understand when you hear about Israel," she says. "From the first day, I fell in love with Israel."

She returned shortly after the war began and again while the conflict continued. During one visit, she experienced missile attacks and sought shelter alongside Israelis. She says what struck her most was the calm response of those around her. "The resilience of the people is amazing. Nobody was panicking."

On another occasion, she witnessed a missile being intercepted after following local residents into a building when warnings appeared on their mobile phones. "We wanted to see what we were praying about," she says. "I saw one of the missiles being intercepted."

Pillay says she has encountered little hostility over her support for Israel in South Africa. She recalled one incident on Durban's beachfront shortly after 7 October when a passer-by shouted insults at a pro-Israel gathering. "We didn't bother about him," she says. "We've got a good group of people that stand together for Israel."

Pillay believes her role is not only to speak about current events but to encourage stronger relationships between Christians and Jews. She says her message is rooted in her understanding of the Bible and a belief that Christians have a responsibility to support Jewish people.

The award from SAFI KwaZulu-Natal recognises years of work that has taken place largely out of the public spotlight. For Pillay, however, the recognition is secondary to what she hopes her ministry will achieve. She wants Christians to better understand Israel, challenge misconceptions, and build lasting friendships with Jewish communities.

Asked if she had a message for South Africa's Jewish community, Pillay says she wants them to know they have support beyond what they may see publicly. "We believe in you, and we believe what you say is the truth," she says.

She acknowledges that many supporters are not always visible. "It's not the loud voices that we hear," she says. "There are a lot of people on the ground that stand with Israel and support the Jewish people."

Her final message is one of reassurance. "The Jewish people are not alone. We are standing with them."

Israel confronts addiction crisis in shadow of war

CLAUDIA GROSS

When South African-born Israeli reservist Eyal* returned home after weeks of fighting in Gaza, the war refused to leave him. His body was back in Modi'in, but his mind remained on the battlefield. Sleep was elusive, his heightened alertness never switching off.

Eventually, ketamine became the only thing that quietened the noise. "Nobody joins the army thinking they'll end up doing ketamine," he says. "It happens because people are exhausted. You come home after weeks in combat, and your brain refuses to slow down."

Nearly three years after 7 October, mental health professionals, addiction specialists, and government officials are warning that Israel is confronting another consequence of the war. Alongside the physical destruction and emotional trauma is a sharp increase in the use of alcohol, prescription medications, and illicit drugs as thousands of Israelis struggle to cope.

The warning comes as Israel's Defence Ministry reports an unprecedented increase in psychological injuries among soldiers. About 85 000 soldiers are now receiving treatment for psychological disorders, up from about 62 000 before the attacks. Officials estimate that one in three soldiers experiences psychological difficulties linked to the events of 7 October and the war that followed.

The scale of the challenge has placed pressure on the mental health system. According to Defence Ministry officials, some therapists are responsible for as many as 750 patients, making timely treatment increasingly difficult.

The problem extends well beyond soldiers.

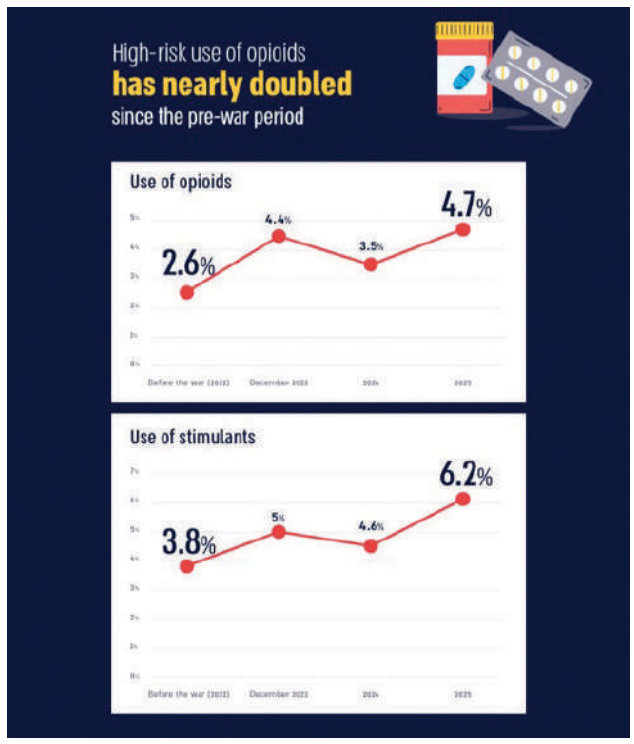
The Israel Center on Addiction (ICA) says symptoms of trauma and substance use have risen simultaneously since October 2023. ICA Chief Executive Inbal Dor Kerbel warns that substance use has risen dramatically. "One in four Israelis is at risk of increased use. Trauma and addiction are not separate phenomena. They feed each other. They go hand in hand," she said.

Officials fear that without intervention, today's coping mechanism could become tomorrow's addiction.

A separate ICA epidemiological study found that although post-traumatic stress symptoms have eased somewhat since the immediate aftermath of the attacks, substance use has remained stubbornly high. Some forms of drug use have continued to increase. The study found that opioid use almost doubled between 2022 and 2025, while the use of tranquillisers and sleeping medication rose to 10%. Stimulant use nearly tripled during the same period.

Researchers say younger adults are particularly vulnerable. Almost 30% of Israelis aged 18 to 34 now report risky substance use. Among people experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, the proportion rises to more than half. The increase often reflects months of accumulated fear, grief, repeated reserve duty, missile attacks, bereavement, and uncertainty.

Talia*, a 28-year-old software engineer from Tel Aviv whose parents made aliya from Cape Town, says she has watched social norms change rapidly. "My parents always told me South Africans were resilient. Israelis are too. Sometimes I think we're resilient to a fault."



She says ketamine use has become increasingly common among young professionals. "Before the war, we'd open a bottle of wine. Now someone brings ketamine and nobody reacts. It's become part of social life in a way that would've shocked us a few years ago."

She worries that growing awareness of ketamine's legitimate medical use has created dangerous misunderstandings. "People hear that it's used medically for depression and convince themselves what they're buying online is basically the same thing. It isn't."

She says many people who appear successful are struggling privately. "Everyone's still going to work, getting promotions, and posting holiday photos. You don't see the panic attacks or the drugs that some people rely on to get through the week."

Research conducted among survivors of the Nova music festival found that excessive drinking rather than prior psychedelic drug use was associated with severe post-traumatic stress symptoms after the attack. Researchers concluded that people who turned to alcohol after the massacre experienced greater psychological distress, reinforcing concern that self-medicating trauma can ultimately make recovery more difficult.

The ICA encourages people to use healthy coping mechanisms such as maintaining routines, exercising, limiting exposure to distressing news, staying connected to loved ones, and seeking professional help instead of consuming alcohol or drugs.

For 23-year-old Shira*, whose Johannesburg-born parents made aliya before she was born, professional help proved to be the turning point. After completing her military service during the war, she returned to university expecting life to resume.

"I thought once I took off the uniform, I'd leave everything behind. Instead, it came home with me. I'd sit in lectures thinking about missile alerts instead of what the professor was saying." Friends introduced her to ketamine at a party. "For the first hour, I finally felt calm. Afterwards, I realised I'd started looking for chemical relief instead of learning how to cope."

She has since begun therapy and joined a 12-step programme. "The hardest part isn't admitting that you need help. It's admitting that the thing you've been using to survive might actually be making everything worse."

Israeli health officials say preparation for the eventual end of the war began almost immediately after fighting started. The Health Ministry has expanded mental health services, while all four health funds now operate clinics that treat people for addiction and mental illnesses. Officials expect another wave of patients to seek help after reserve soldiers complete their service.

Mental health professionals report that more soldiers are now willing to seek help than during previous conflicts.

Michael*, a Cape Town-born emergency paramedic in Jerusalem, believes that shift is essential. "I've spent my career helping other people through trauma. I wasn't prepared for how much of it I'd carry home myself."

He's watched psychological injuries accumulate among colleagues who continue reporting for duty every day. "People imagine that burnout looks dramatic. Usually, it looks like someone still showing up to work every day while quietly falling apart."

Although he has never used illicit drugs himself, he says he understands why people do. "Some people reach for alcohol. Others get prescription medication. Some end up experimenting with ketamine because someone tells them it helps them forget for a few hours."

For Eyal, the lessons have come at a personal cost. And although he is now receiving psychological treatment, he believes many reservists are still suffering in silence. "We're trained to keep functioning. That mindset helps in battle, but afterwards it stops people from asking for help."

Michael fears that the country's greatest challenge may still lie ahead. "The missiles eventually stop," he says. "The trauma doesn't. That's the part we'll still be dealing with years from now."

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

Mina Lopato Nursery School blows out 65 candles

GILANA LAB

There's something about Mina Lopato Nursery School that seems to stay with people. Mention the school to someone in Johannesburg and more often than not, a story follows. Perhaps they went there themselves, their children, or their parents did. Decades later, many still remember the teachers who welcomed them through its doors.

That sense of history was celebrated on 6 August, when past pupils, parents, and staff gathered to mark 65 years since the school's foundation stone was laid.

For principal Marissa Koffler, the anniversary was a reminder of just how many lives the school has touched. "Every time I mention that I'm the principal of Mina Lopato, someone will say, 'Oh, I went there, my parents went there, or my grandparents went there.' It's got a lot of history," she said.

The school began at the Emmarentia Shul and moved to Greenside Shul 55 years later. In 2024, Koffler was contacted about the school's original foundation stone. "The foundation stone had been removed [in Emmarentia] and they asked, 'Do we want it?' I said, 'Definitely.'"

Isaac Lopato, who founded the school and named it after his late wife, Mina, had laid the foundation in 1961. When one of the parents realised that 2026 would mark 65 years since it was laid, the idea of a reunion began to take shape.

"We weren't sure what it was going to be like because obviously a nursery school reunion is very different from a high school reunion," Koffler said.

The response exceeded expectations. "It was actually really amazing," she said. "We got in touch with a lot of people and many of those who couldn't make it sent beautiful messages and donations."

Felicity Klawansky, who spent 25 years teaching at Mina Lopato before retiring at the end of 2025, was at the celebration and saw the emotional response first-hand. "I was just mind-boggled by it because I was seeing people from 20 years ago who had come to this evening," she said. "It was just with such delight and smiles and happiness to see each other from a nursery school. It was really a special evening."

The event also launched the Mina Lopato Alumni Foundation, giving former pupils, parents, and others connected to the school a way to remain involved.

"The aim of this celebration/reunion was twofold," Koffler said. "Number one, to bring people back to celebrate the start of the school, the laying of the foundation stone, and the impact that it's made on people's lives and the community."

The other aim is to look ahead. "We essentially want to launch the next 65 years," she said.

That future is already taking shape. The school, which caters for children from 12 months to six years old, has undergone a number of upgrades this year, including a new Curiosity Cabin in the older children's playground.

"It's not your usual jungle gym," Koffler said. "It's something connected to our ethos and the way that we teach." The Reggio-inspired space allows children to work with tools, microscopes, and other materials, developing creativity and problem-solving skills. "Children are so stuck to screens these days and they don't have the opportunity to think and problem solve," Koffler said. "This comes with a whole curriculum, and it actually gets them to think out of the box and to problem solve and invent."

Principal of Mina Lopato, Marissa Koffler

But while the school continues to evolve, Koffler believes its greatest strength is something that cannot be renovated. "This celebration reinforces the idea that there is something so unique about Mina Lopato in that it gives such a sense of family and community," she said.

That sense of family is something Klawansky experienced throughout her years at the school. Although she never formally studied nursery-school teaching, she came to the profession with years of experience working with young children. "When I came back to South Africa I had only experience, many years of experience, but not any qualification," she said. "So I really could work only as a playschool teacher."

What began out of necessity became her passion. "I loved that age group," she said. "I loved that time of receiving children from the parents, being the first port of call in a nursery school, and just starting them on their road to their nursery school years."

For Klawansky, the job was also about building relationships with families. "You're looking after very, very small, very young, often first children in a family," she said. "Building that trust with the family, with the mother, who's going to leave her child with you for those many hours of every day, is a big thing."

That relationship extends beyond the classroom. Mina Lopato is a Jewish school, but one that has always welcomed families from different backgrounds. "It's a unique school because it's a Jewish school," Koffler said. "We do all of the Jewish learning and the *chaggim* and everything. We celebrate it all. But at the same time, it's always attracted diversity.

"Anyone can come," she said. "Anyone who enters these doors and signs up is embraced, loved, and is part of the family."

Klawansky remembers that inclusivity as a defining aspect of the school. "There were always black kids there, Indian kids , Muslim kids," she said. "We promoted it as inclusive and accommodating everybody."

For Koffler, that openness has allowed Mina Lopato to remain relevant for 65 years. "We don't just embrace the children, we embrace the family as a whole," she said. "They really just feel so held, so supported. It's so personal."

Klawansky has found it difficult to stay away. "I've been retired for about seven months. I can't keep away. I like popping in to visit every other week. It's just a lovely space."

For Koffler, the legacy of Mina Lopato can ultimately be summed up in one word. "Love."

A nursery school is often the first school a child attends and the first time a parent entrusts their child to others. Koffler believes it should be somewhere families feel safe. "You want it to feel like home. You want it to feel like it's a family place, that when you walk through the doors, you can leave all your troubles behind.

"And we've got you, we're holding you, and we've got your kids."

After 65 years, Mina Lopato is not simply celebrating how long it's existed, but the generations of families who made it what it is.

Optimism and impact the Gore principles of success

GILANA LAB

Adrian Gore has spent more than three decades building Discovery into one of South Africa's most prominent companies. But the question that's continued to interest him is not how to build a successful business. It is why only some people make an extraordinary impact.

That question sits at the heart of Gore's new book, *The Four Principles*, which he discussed with CNN business correspondent and *Quest Means Business* anchor Richard Quest.

The book grew out of his long-standing fascination with people and performance at Discovery, a company he describes as having been built organically rather than through capital and acquisitions. "We built it life by life, person by person," he said. "The fundamental issue in our business has been the quality of people, the ability to bring out the best in them … and ultimately perform exceptionally well."

That focus eventually led Gore to a broader question. "Why is it that some people, regardless of capabilities or talents, can scale everything, whereas others with interesting capabilities, privileges, and education, often live a more benign life?"

His answer is rooted in the idea that human beings are operating with an evolutionary miscoding. "We evolved with scarcity of resources and food. Physical threats. We lived short, brutal lives, beaten by animals, falling off cliffs. Now, we find ourselves in a world of abundance. We don't have physical threats. Our threats are systemic, the threats of failure of systems, education systems, governance, democracy, healthcare systems."

The problem, Gore argued, is that human beings have not had enough time to adapt. "It's been too short a time for us to recode." From this idea came four principles that form the basis of his book: disciplined optimism; focused urgency; declared goals; and the Pareto tail.

The first, disciplined optimism, is not about pretending everything is fine. "It's not glass half full," he said emphatically. "Success and impact are not about avoiding the negative; they are about seeking opportunities, finding opportunities, and executing on them." He believes people are naturally more affected by negative information, meaning that opportunities can disappear beneath an instinctive focus on what might go wrong.

He linked this to psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's work on prospect theory and loss aversion, explaining that "the pain of a loss is much more, much worse for us than a gain of the same magnitude". You can't get over that issue, Gore said. "What you can do is be aware of it and be disciplined in your optimism."

For Gore, this principle has had practical consequences in South Africa. During the electricity crisis, he and a group of business leaders decided the private sector could help the government with execution. "The loadshedding was absolutely horrendous, and it was a real concern that the group would fail," he said. The response was to bring the chief executives of large corporates together and get them to sign a pledge stating, "I believe in the potential of the country and I'm committed to help." "It sounds kind of fluffy," Gore admitted, "but it changed the entire dynamic."

The second principle, focused urgency, concerns the way people use time. Gore argues that people often fail to appreciate how quickly the most productive periods of their lives pass.

The third, declared goals, is based partly on loss aversion. Gore said people are often more motivated by what they stand to lose than by what they might gain. "Goals are a fundamental thing," he said. "The declared goal creates this invisible hand of loss aversion that drives the hard work."

The final principle, the Pareto tail, is about identifying the relatively small number of decisions and opportunities that can have a disproportionately large impact. Gore illustrated it with one of Discovery's most significant innovations, Vitality.

Discovery had been presented with what appeared to be a straightforward cross-selling opportunity: sell health insurance to members of a rapidly growing gym chain. But the team was "obsessed with the idea of making people healthy".

"We suddenly flipped the thing around," Gore recalled. "The key issue was, what if basically when you joined Discovery, the gyms were free? That was the Pareto moment." Members could earn points and status through healthy behaviour, eventually gaining free access to gyms.

Quest noted that Vitality had since become something of an obsession, with people going to extraordinary lengths to earn rewards. Gore admitted that the team could not have predicted just how far the idea would go. "Did we really have the foresight about how to apply it to life insurance, health insurance, the idea of shared value that we could take globally? No, we didn't."

Richard Quest and Adrian Gore at the launch

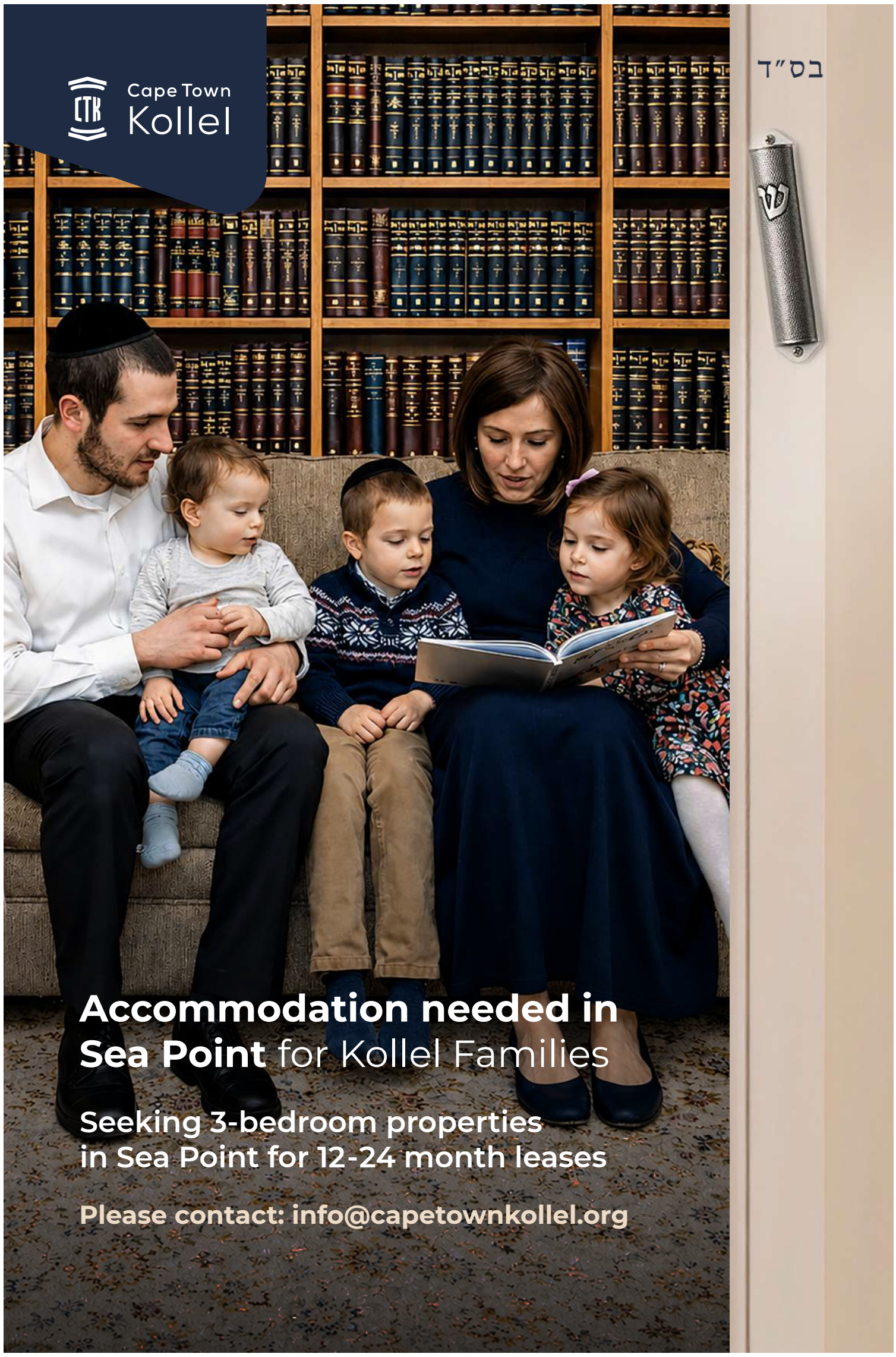
Asked which of the four principles mattered most, Gore initially hesitated, eventually describing optimism as a powerful force. "It is a gateway," he said.

"There's an arrogant belief that pessimism is sophisticated," he said. "Optimism, perceiving positive, is reckless and naive. And as I try and show in the book, it's quite the opposite way round. We code for negative, and that's primitive. Sophistication is about avoiding it." That philosophy extends to his understanding of success itself. Gore argues that failure is often romanticised as a great teacher, while success is overlooked. "In the book I talk about success being a better teacher than failure."

Ultimately, however, Gore does not define success as wealth, status, or even business growth. "It's about impact," he said. "Impact is success."

And though he has spent years putting these principles into practice at Discovery, he does not claim to have mastered them. "I'm no specialist at them. And I wouldn't pretend to tell you I'm always living them."

What matters, he said, is recognising when he is not applying them. For Gore, that awareness is ultimately about refusing to become passive in the face of problems, whether in business, in South Africa, or in his own life. "I'm not uncomfortable trying to make an impact," he said. "I'm striving for it."



Komorowsky's heart, soul, and DNA in 'Sarajevo'

***Aimee Mica Komorowsky** wrote and stars in Sarajevo, the theatrical production that won four Naledi Awards and is on show once again at Theatre on the Square. The SA Jewish Report caught up with her between performances.*

Who and what inspired you to write *Sarajevo*, and when did you do it?

I started writing *Sarajevo* in 2014. The original version was actually called *Cheers to Sarajevo*, and I co-wrote it with a Croatian woman. When she left the project, I went back to the script and almost completely dismantled it. And I think that was when I actually discovered what the play was supposed to be.

I stopped being interested in writing about sides and became interested in people. What happens to ordinary human beings when the world around them starts demanding that they choose a side? What happens when the person you are suddenly supposed to hate is the person you grew up with?

I didn't want to write about heroes and villains. I wanted to write about human beings who make choices. Sometimes courageous choices, sometimes terrible ones. Because the men who commit atrocities don't arrive from another planet. They are somebody's friend, somebody's uncle, somebody's brother, somebody's father, somebody's son.

My connection to the former Yugoslavia goes back much further. When I won the South African Karate Championships, the World Cup was held in Yugoslavia, and travelling there exposed me to a place where the consequences of the wars of the 1990s were still very present. I also experienced something deeply personal and traumatic there that was connected, indirectly, to the legacy of the Bosnian conflict. I think that experience stayed somewhere inside me for years.

Eventually, writing became the way I tried to understand it.

Does the script relate to your life at all? If so, in what way?

Very much so. There are parts of my own trauma woven into the emotional DNA of the play, particularly experiences connected to my time in the former Yugoslavia. But there is another layer that is perhaps even deeper: my own inherited memory as the descendant of Holocaust survivors.

I grew up understanding that history doesn't necessarily end when the event ends. Trauma has this extraordinary ability to travel through families. You inherit stories, silences, fears, and memories of things you never physically experienced yourself.

So although Sarajevo is about Bosnia, I recognise something incredibly familiar in it - the moment when neighbours become enemies, when identity suddenly becomes dangerous, when people are reduced to labels rather than human beings.

I think that's why I've never really been able to leave this play alone. Somewhere underneath it, I'm constantly asking the same question: how does an ordinary society reach the point where ordinary people become capable of extraordinary cruelty and what would I have done?

You have both a theatre and writing background. Tell us more about it.

Before *Sarajevo*, I had never actually written for theatre. My writing background was primarily film and television. So naturally, I decided that my first play should be an intimate psychological drama set during the Bosnian War. Very sensible!

And because I came from screenwriting, I wrote the original script almost like a film. It was incredibly visual. I thought in cuts, close-ups, silences, changes of focus, and cinematic rhythm – and then had to discover how to translate that language onto a stage where you can't simply yell "cut" and move the camera. But I think that accident ultimately became part of the play's identity. *Sarajevo* still has something very cinematic about it. The audience almost becomes the camera. Their attention moves from one person to another; they witness moments they perhaps shouldn't be witnessing.

In this case, you also star in *Sarajevo*. Why?

Well, the glamorous answer would be that it was an enormous artistic calling.

The less glamorous answer is that I was an actress in a culturally deprived city waiting for somebody to give me work and eventually I thought, "Well, this is ridiculous. I'll make my own."

And Mirela became a character I couldn't simply hand over and walk away from. I had lived with her for too long. I knew her contradictions, her humour, her fear, her sexuality, her rage, and her silences. Writing her and then stepping inside her are two completely different experiences. Sometimes the actress in me is furious with the writer in me! But that's also part of what keeps the role alive.

How has this show grown or changed since you first performed it?

Almost beyond recognition. The original *Cheers to Sarajevo* was much more political and much more interested in sides. Over the years, I stripped that away and allowed the human relationships to become the politics of the play.

And that is one of the things I love most about theatre: it is never really finished. A film is captured and preserved. Theatre breathes. It responds to different actors, different directors, different audiences, and even to the world outside the theatre.

Every new company discovers something I didn't know was there. A character suddenly becomes more sympathetic. A silence becomes more important than a page of dialogue. A scene I thought I understood 10 years ago suddenly means something completely different.

What did winning four Naledi Theatre Awards mean to you?

Honestly, the recognition meant everything.

You spend years carrying a piece of work that people don't necessarily understand. You rewrite it, defend it, finance it, rehearse it, doubt it, and occasionally wonder why on earth you are still doing this to yourself.

Then suddenly your peers say, "We see it."

That was incredibly emotional.

And what made the four awards particularly meaningful was that *Sarajevo* has always been a collective endeavour. Theatre is never one person. There are actors, directors, designers, technicians, producers, and people working invisibly behind the scenes to make those two hours possible.

What is the significance of *Sarajevo* being performed again during Women's Month?

It's incredibly significant because women's bodies have so often become battlefields in war.

During the Bosnian War, sexual violence was used systematically against women. Rape camps and detention sites became part of a deliberate campaign of terror, humiliation, and displacement, and the international prosecutions that followed helped establish an important legal recognition of sexual violence as a war crime and crime against humanity.

But when we talk about those women, I don't want us to talk about them only as victims.

Women survive. Women rebuild families. They testify. They remember. They raise children. They carry communities after the men with guns have gone. There is an extraordinary strength in that.

And Women's Month gives us an opportunity to talk about women's agency, survival, and the enormous courage required to speak after somebody has tried to silence you.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on a novel that I intend eventually to adapt for the stage, and developing a series called *A Horse Named Hitler*, which draws from my great grandparents' and grandparents' history and their journey to South Africa.

But before any of that, I still have unfinished business with *Sarajevo*.

The dream now is Edinburgh and Toronto. And ultimately, Sarajevo itself.

Taking this play to Sarajevo has always been the destination for me. After all these years of carrying this city in a script, researching it, imagining it, questioning it, and performing it thousands of kilometres away, I want to bring the story back to the place whose name it carries.

Only then will some part of the journey feel complete.

Meeting our classroom heroine on Women's Day

GABRIEL SPIRA AND BRETT MAUNDER

When we left for the Union Buildings on the morning of Women's Day, 9 August, we had no clue we were about to meet the youngest Nobel Prize laureate and feminist inspiration.

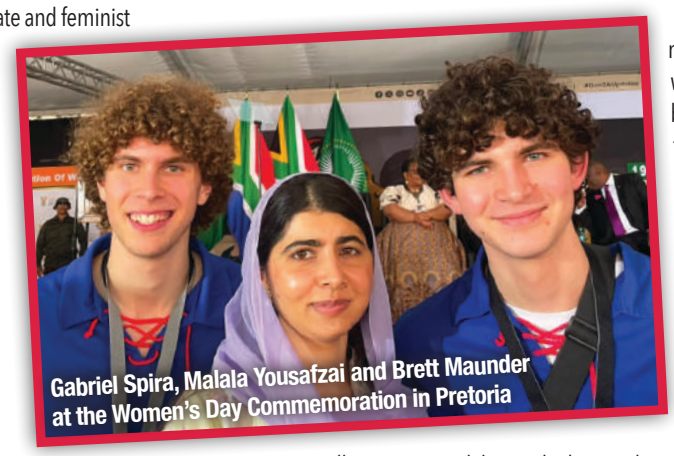
We had the opportunity to go with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and represent Habonim Dror and our Jewish community at the national Women's Day commemoration in Pretoria. The SAJBD women welcomed us with open arms and took great care of us, providing plentiful snacks, as every Jewish mommy would.

We were privileged to sit just metres from President Cyril Ramaphosa and guest speakers including Sophie Williams-De Bruyn, 88, the last living leader of the 1956 Women's March; Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, deputy minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities; and the phenomenal visiting international youth icon, Pakistani education activist Malala Yousafzai.

Hearing these esteemed women address the nation and call for accountability for the epidemic of gender-based violence was deeply inspiring to us both.

After the president's lengthy address, we went to meet Malala, a classroom heroine of ours, although there were some obstacles in our way. Once we reached the first row and had introduced ourselves to her, we were chased away by the oncoming female military march.

Luckily, we were rescued by Letsike, who pulled us into the seats next to her and proceeded to ask about us and our movement. On hearing that we represented a Jewish youth movement, she expressed the belief that we should all be united in our diversity, which struck us deeply.


Gabriel Spira, Malala Yousafzai and Brett Maunder at the Women's Day Commemoration in Pretoria

Once the military march had passed, we were warmly greeted by Dr Tshepo Motsepe, the first lady. She showed a genuine interest in us, asking all about Habonim Dror, what we represent and stand for, and about us as individuals, including what school we attend.

Finally, meeting Malala was the biggest honour. Being 17, the same age she was when she won the Nobel Peace Prize and made history as a feminist icon, truly empowered us. The fact that she could make a difference then, and continues to do so now, shows us that even at our age we can make a real impact in the world.

Meeting these incredible women, from Malala to the women from the SAJBD, reminded us that every woman has the power to make a difference. Even though they have only one official day a year, we should celebrate and be grateful for the women in our lives every day.

• *Gabriel Spira and Brett Maunder are members of Habonim Dror and matric pupils at Redhill School.*

Judging the Achiever Awards – a reward in itself

>>Continued from page 4

says. His philosophy is simple: "Encourage the achievers and let them build to greater heights".

The Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award offers Jade Kirkel a particularly personal perspective on the value of recognising young talent. Kirkel helped build the Sorbet brand before going on to establish her own venture, giving her a background that combines entrepreneurship, creativity, and brand building. Over the past few years judging the Rising Star category, she says she's had "the privilege of sitting in a room with some of the most exciting emerging changemakers in our community".

For Kirkel, the young people she encounters represent far more than individual achievements. "Show me the young people of a community and I'll show you its future," she says. The creation of the award, she believes, reflects an important understanding that "our legacy is not only about what we leave the next generation, but what we ignite within them". The judges have "marvelled at [nominees'] stories, laughed with them, cried with them, and journeyed alongside them", while the young people have challenged and inspired them and, more than once, left them wondering whether they are doing nearly enough themselves. For Kirkel, sitting on the panel is therefore "far more than judging an award". It is "a glimpse into the future" and one that leaves her "incredibly hopeful about what I see".

For these judges, making time for the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards is therefore not simply about giving up hours in already busy lives. It is about giving recognition where it's deserved, encouraging people to continue reaching higher, and creating an opportunity to see the strength, talent, and potential within the community.

The 2026 Investec Jewish Achiever Awards will take place on 1 November, bringing the community together to celebrate this year's outstanding achievers. Bookings are now open.

S'nothing like a snow day

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

It was never going to snow in Johannesburg. I knew this because nothing kills the possibility of snow quite like half the city staring out the window waiting for it to fall.

There are certain immutable laws of the universe. A watched pot never boils. The queue you're standing in is always the slowest. The lane you leave immediately starts moving. And if millions of Johannesburg residents spend three days refreshing weather apps and forwarding satellite images from "a friend whose cousin knows Simon Gear", the snow simply isn't going to arrive.

For a brief, glorious moment, however, Johannesburg lost its collective mind. And the excitement made me think about something else.

What if it had? What would we have done? Would we have looked out of the office window, smiled, taken a photograph for Instagram, and then gone back to our spreadsheet?

Or would we have done something completely irrational? Phoned the school and said, "The children won't be in this afternoon. We're going chasing snow." Would you have cancelled the meeting, packed a flask of coffee, thrown everyone into the car, and driven south until the grass turned white?

Because that's the sort of thing children remember.

They remember madness. They remember getting home from school to find the suitcases already packed. They remember ice cream in winter. They remember taking the long way home because somebody spotted giraffes. They remember the day the grown-ups unexpectedly stopped behaving like grown-ups.

It sometimes feels that adulthood is simply the gradual replacement of spontaneity with calendar invitations. When everything has to be scheduled. We've become frighteningly good at protecting routine. School attendance. Gym sessions. Meetings. Homework. Swimming lessons. Soccer practice. Another birthday party at Bounce, where all the adults pretend they're having fun while secretly checking how much battery is left on their phones.

Judaism, interestingly, has never been entirely comfortable with uninterrupted routine. Our calendar keeps barging into ordinary life, demanding that we stop what we're doing and build a sukkah. Stay up late. Dress up. Eat matzah. Dance with Torah scrolls. Ask questions. Cancel ordinary life for something extraordinary.

Our festivals remind us that memories matter more than momentum, that life isn't measured only by the days that run according to plan. It's measured by the days that don't.

Maybe that's why the possibility of snow captivated us. It wasn't really about frozen water falling from the sky. Rather, it was about permission to abandon the ordinary, to be slightly irresponsible, to create the kind of day that gets retold for the next 30 years.

"Remember when dad took us out of school because it snowed?"

Except, of course, it didn't. Which raises an even more important question. Why are we waiting for snow? Why does something extraordinary have to happen before we allow ourselves to do something extraordinary?

Why not leave work early one afternoon just to watch the sunset? Why not take the grandchildren on a completely unnecessary road trip? Why not decide that today is the day everyone eats dessert before lunch?

Children don't need perfect parents. They need stories. They need moments that become family folklore. They won't remember whether you insisted they never miss a day of school, but they will remember that one Wednesday when you packed everyone into the car, chased the snow, got hopelessly lost, drank terrible coffee from a garage somewhere near Harrismith, and laughed all the way home.

And if there wasn't actually any snow? Even better. Because the best family stories have never depended on the destination. Only on somebody deciding that today was worth remembering.

One day your children won't remember what you did for a living. But they'll remember the day you chased the snow.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Engaging through thick and thin

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

This weekend, we witnessed a momentous moment for our community. Rabbi Doron and Mrs Shelly Perez met President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Union Buildings to express their appreciation for the government's tireless efforts to facilitate the return of their son Daniel's body, allowing him to be brought home to Israel and laid to rest with dignity.

Daniel was one of our own. He and his family were born and raised among us, and they have remained an important part of our community. His death, and the prolonged holding of his body in captivity, was a tragedy and a pain we all felt personally.

Behind the scenes, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies was integrally involved in efforts to facilitate Daniel's return, working closely with the relevant stakeholders throughout the process.

We deliberately chose not to speak publicly about our involvement at the time. In matters as sensitive as this, public intervention could have compromised the very outcome we were working towards. Our priority was always to achieve a result for the family.

This is one of the many ways in which the Board represents our community. Much of this work happens quietly, through engagement, advocacy, and relationship-building with government and other stakeholders. It may not always be visible, but maintaining these channels of communication is an essential part of our mandate.

And this is precisely why showing up matters.

Relationships are built over time, and our ability to advocate effectively, especially in moments of crisis, depends on being present, participating, and maintaining meaningful connections across government and South African society. Representation is not only about speaking out when we disagree; it is about being at the table, so that when our community needs help, there are people who know us, understand our concerns, and are willing to engage.

While we may at times strongly disagree with government policies and decisions, we must also practise *hakarat hatov*, recognising and expressing gratitude where it is due, as was modelled by the Perezes on Sunday. In this instance, we acknowledge the commitment shown by the government in assisting the Perez family.

That same principle was evident this weekend at the 70th anniversary commemoration of National Women's Day at the Union Buildings, where our communal leadership once again joined fellow South Africans to commemorate the women of 1956.

We heard a powerful address from Sophie De Bruyn, one of the last surviving leaders of the historic Women's March, sharing not only her memories of that defining day, but her reflections on South Africa today.

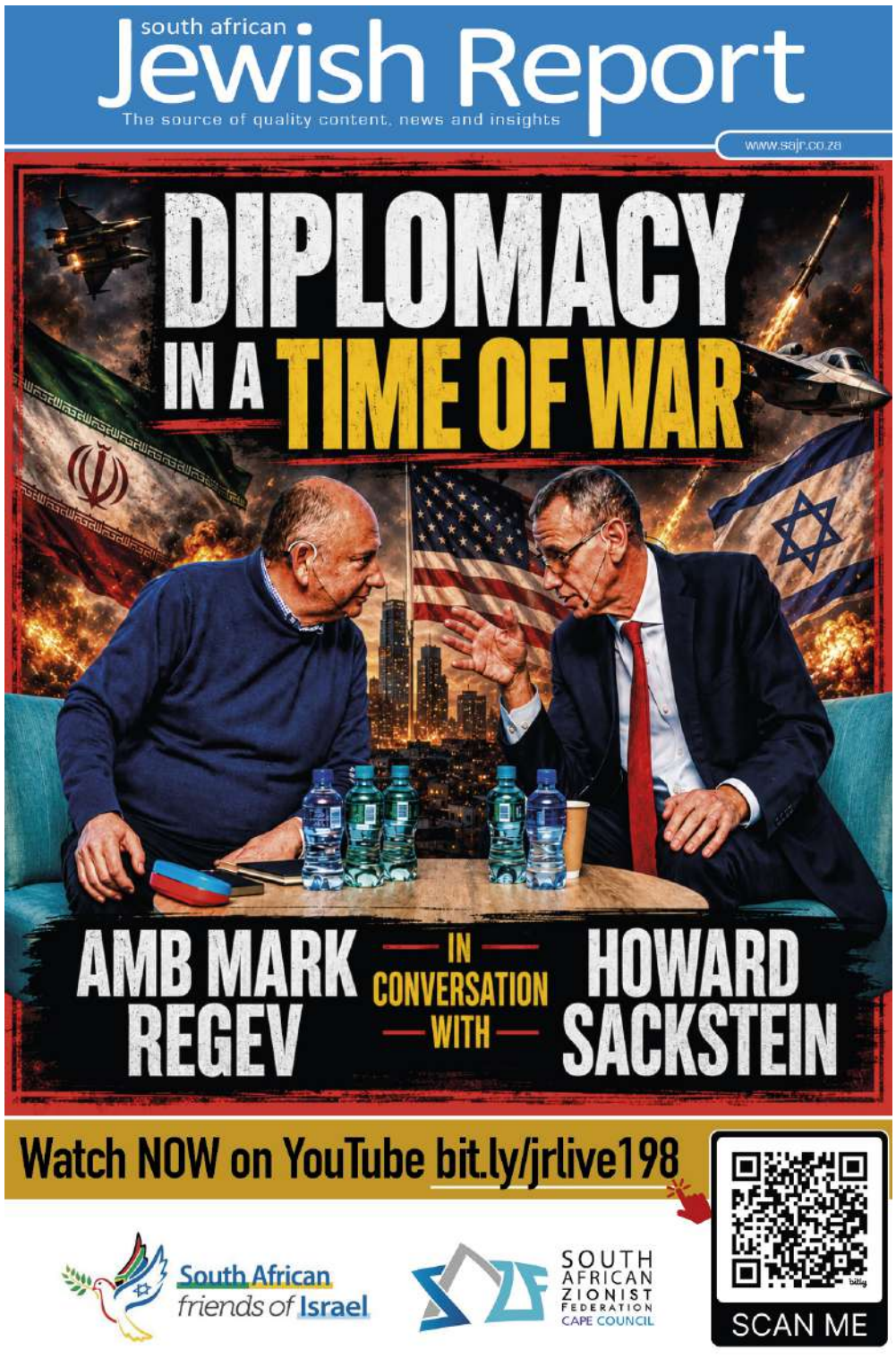
We also had the opportunity to engage with Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, whose advocacy for girls' education and women's rights has inspired millions around the world. We introduced ourselves as representatives of the Jewish community, and she warmly welcomed the conversation.

These forums provide a valuable opportunity for our communal leaders to engage with government ministers, public figures, and fellow citizens. Our delegations are consistently received with warmth, and every interaction helps to strengthen the relationships that are so important to our community.

Though helping a Jewish family bring their son home and standing alongside fellow South Africans to commemorate one of the defining moments in our country's history may seem like very different moments, they are connected by the same principle: we cannot advocate for our community from the sidelines. We must be present.

We need to be part of the fabric of South African society in moments of crisis and in moments of celebration, when we need to advocate, and when we need to listen, when we agree, and when we disagree.

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



Lightning strikes twice, albeit four years apart

LEE TANKLE

A hole-in-one is rare enough, but for father and son, Mandy and Shaul Yachad, to have achieved this feat on the same hole at the same golf course on the same day four years apart is a one-in-a-144-million chance.

They each aced the ninth hole at Houghton Golf Club, using the same club, their 9 iron, turning what would've already been a memorable golfing achievement into an extraordinary coincidence. Shaul made his hole-in-one on 31 July 2022, while his father, Mandy, made his on 31 July 2026.

Mandy, a former Proteas cricketer, rarely plays golf on a Friday because of Shabbat, but he decided to join a four-ball game that morning. The only time he's managed a hole-in-one was 28 years before at Killarney.

"I think the pin placement on Houghton's ninth hole was pretty much the same as when Shaul got his hole-in-one. It was back right or back middle, and I hit a 9 iron.

Shaul Yachad after achieving his hole-in-one

I knew I'd hit a good shot, and one of my playing partners said that it got in the hole. I saw it bounce on the green, but I didn't actually see it go into the hole. My eyesight isn't great from that distance, but a caddy near the green started waving his hands, so I knew it had gone in," he said.

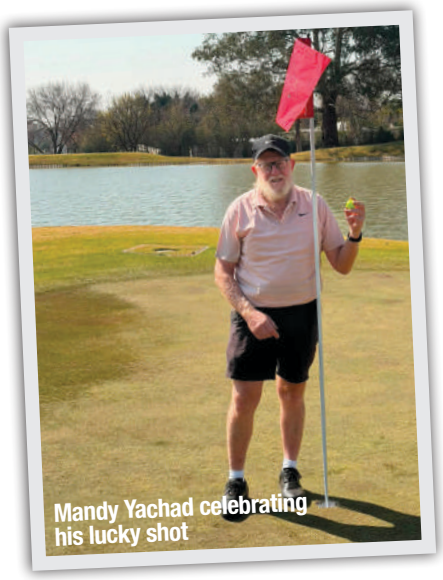
As he walked down to the green, he messaged Shaul to tell him he'd made a hole-in-one, because he knew he had done it on the same hole some time ago. After they finished the hole, Shaul sent him a picture of his hole-in-one certificate. Mandy looked at it and realised it was dated 31 July 2022, exactly four years earlier, on the same hole, using the same club.

For Shaul, the hole-in-one four years ago had been equally unexpected.

"It wasn't something that I had ever given much thought to. It's not something you really aim for; you kind of just try and keep your ball out of the water and see what happens," he said. "So I was absolutely over the moon. And now that I know I've done it, I keep trying to do it, but I think it just gets harder."

They both said getting a hole-in-one isn't determined only by skill and hitting a good shot. Shaul described it as "95% *mazel* and 5% a lot of *mazel*".

"There are certain holes-in-one where the golfer completely misses the shot, it runs along the ground and, with no obstructions between the tee and the green, somehow goes into the hole. But I'd say the majority of holes-in-one come from really good shots. There's still a lot of luck involved, though. If you're hitting from 140m or 150m and have to land the ball in a hole that small, there's obviously an element of luck," said Mandy


Mandy Yachad celebrating his lucky shot

"I think both our shots were decent because, if you know Houghton's ninth hole, there's water in front. You can't just hit a bad shot and expect it to work out. You have to hit a good shot, but there's still a lot of luck involved," he said.

Making the hole-in-one was itself an achievement, but it was made even more special by doing so on the same date.

"Although I had got a hole-in-one before, you don't really expect it. It's something you'd love to have. So, to get a second one was amazing in and of itself. But the fact that it happened on the same day, on the same hole, at the same course, with the same club, it's beyond nature," Mandy said.

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